

Reasons and Process of Forming the Culture-bound syndromes And Reasons for Why they would only perish naturally

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Abstract. Culture-bound syndrome, which is a umbrella term for various kind of syndromes that only occur under specific cultures, has been a less popular topic in recent years. However, it is very important to discuss because it will affect a wide range of people. This essay discusses the reasons that cause culture-bound syndromes, the cure to certain kinds of syndromes, and the mutual effect between the spread of culture and the generation of the culture-bound syndromes, eventually leading to the conclusion that though syndromes shown on individuals can be cured, culture-bound syndromes will only perish naturally as the culture that caused it disappears.

Keywords: Culture-bound syndromes, Spread of mythology and tradition.

1. Introduction

Cannibals have been a very attractive topic in pop culture. People are fascinated with giant monsters that chew on human flesh. Wendigo, a colossal monster that is often described as a Zombie Reindeer, is likely to be one of the most popular monsters among them. As Wendigo is growing more and more popular today, however, fewer and fewer people know about Wendigo psychosis, a kind of mental disorder that causes the patients to be intensively crave for human flesh. The Wendigo psychosis is considered to be a typical case of **Culture-bound Syndrome**. Culture-bound Syndrome is used to describe certain kinds of mental disorders that are connected to specific cultures and would not appear in others. For example, the Wendigo psychosis is a Culture -bound Syndrome that only occurs in the community of the Algonquins. The Culture-bound Syndrome is usually of little harm to the human body, there are no objective biochemical or structural alterations of body organs or functions. This essay will introduce the generation and possible cure of specific syndromes. Doing this will also discuss the relationship of the development of legends with specific syndromes, eventually concluding that the culture-bound syndromes cannot be eliminated artificially.

2. The reasons that cause Culture-bound syndromes

I have classified the reasons that cause Culture-bound Syndrome into mainly two kinds. The first one is caused by local people's beliefs and mythology. The second is those caused by unique traditions and habits of local people or by particular society forms.

2.1 Culture-bound syndromes caused by local belief and mythology

An example of the first kind would be the Wendigo psychosis mentioned before. According to the diary of a 19th centuries explorer, the patients were "so ravenous for human flesh that they pounce upon women, children, and even upon men, like veritable werewolves, and devour them voraciously, without being able to appease or glut their appetite." [1] The patients showed no actual changes in any organs, but they showed an unstoppable desire for human flesh. In the legends, people cursed by Wendigo would eventually turn into one. The locals believe that the patients of Wendigo psychosis were cursed by a Wendigo or somehow possessed by a Wendigo spirit. Cree folklore recommends treatment by "ingestion of fatty animal meats or drinking animal grease," Those treated in these ways might vomit ice sometimes. [2] There have been several famous cases of Wendigo psychosis, such as the case of a Plains Cree trapper from Alberta named Swift Runner, who murdered and consumed his

wife and children during the harsh winter.^[3] Furthermore, the case of Jack Fiddler, chief of Oji-Cree, who was also accused of murder and committed suicide after being arrested along with his brother Joseph. Both cases emerged in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The frequency of Wendigo psychosis has decreased a lot since the 20th century because the Algonquian people came into greater and greater contact with European ideologies and more sedentary, less rural lifestyles.^[4] The phenomenon shows that the Wendigo psychosis has a relationship with the traditional folklore and legends about Wendigo because it only emerged among people who believe in the legends. As the cases of Wendigo psychosis decreased to the degree that it almost disappeared, it is tough for anthropologists and psychiatrists to have further studies about them. Therefore, the actual reason that caused Wendigo psychosis remains uncertain today. Mostly it is believed to be caused by the cues that the patients give themselves. Although the 10th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) classifies "Wendigo" as a culture-specific disorder, it is still questioned by some scholars to be actually "a product of hostile accusations invented to justify the victim's ostracism or execution"^[5] Due to the cases of Wendigo psychosis mostly having emerged in a rather early period, the judicial system is not as similar today, most patients were executed in the same way of regular criminals in murder cases, so study done about Wendigo psychosis is very rare, and data about the patients are hard to collect as well.

2.2 Culture-bound syndromes caused by traditions and social forms

An example of the culture-bound syndromes caused by special social forms would be the so-called "Taijin kyofusho" (Japanese), a Japanese culture-specific syndrome. The term taijin kyofusho translates into the disorder (sho) of fear (kyofu) of interpersonal relations (taijin).^[6] In the case of TKS (short for taijin kyofusho), there have been more records, and more studies have been done about it. TKS is a special kind of social phobia based on fear and anxiety and the unique Japanese culture of shame. There are many causes of TKS. Most of them are connected with the inferiority complex of the patient. In most cases, it is related to the patient's dissatisfaction with their appearances. Some may consider themselves ugly. Some may think they have bad smells. Patients with TKS would experience shame, embarrassment, and fear while they try to communicate with others. As a result, most of the patients would choose to avoid confronting socialization, eventually causing them to be unable to maintain relationships with others and even to lose function as human beings in human society. The TKS are usually highly connected with the Japanese shame culture. There have been several studies done by Western scholars, such as the famous book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict. However, it is hard to understand the Japanese shame culture under western environment. The structure of Japanese society is very special, it has retained many traditions that would be considered to be old-fashioned in other societies, even today, the caste system is still critical in Japanese society in most cases. Japanese people always gain much pressure in their daily lives because they would always worry about being accused of avoiding regulations in work and daily life. There has been another concept invented by the Japanese people and went popular in China and Korea on the internet. It is social death. However, it is not the same meaning that is used in sociology. In this concept, social death means that one person would be extremely embarrassed after they have done something that is morally bad or something that would make everybody laugh at them. Understanding the concept of "social death" on the internet would allow us to understand the Japanese shame culture and TKS more. To the Japanese people, it is not acceptable to cause any trouble to the people surrounding. There has been a specific term for the troubles. It is called meiwaku. Meiwaku contains many things that one must not do. Sometimes, even being slow when doing paperwork at the bank is considered meiwaku. Japanese are usually very sensitive toward the concept, which means that most Japanese people would be highly sensitive when trying to socialize with people. It is now believed that the TKS developed mostly from high pressure. As the social forms changed and became very similar, the TKS spread to China and Korea as the three eastern Asia country today has similar frames of society, and the lives of people there are becoming more and more similar. The standard treatment of TKS is Morita therapy, created by Shoma Morita in the 1910s. The treatment for TKS is

usually doing mental guidance, which involves "patient isolation, enforced bed rest, diary writing, manual labor, and lectures on the importance of self-acceptance and positive endeavor." [7] However, in the 1930s, the therapy is improved, and it now involves more treatment that requires group treatment. Now, medical treatment is also considered to be useful. Milnacipran, a serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI), is currently used to treat taijin kyofusho and is efficacious for social anxiety disorder. [8]. These are examples of two different kinds of culture-bound syndromes caused by different reasons. It is clear that culture-bound syndrome contains a wide range of diseases, and each of them can be very different. Therefore, the study done on culture-bound syndrome is quite difficult because it requires the scholar to have a good realization of special cultural phenomena.

3. How cultures affect people's behavior, and the mutually effect of the Culture-bound syndromes and its related culture

Certain culture has certain traditions, therefore being in a particular culture would affect the actions of people. Culture and culture-bound syndrome helped each other to spread among people. Both mythology and traditions can do the same thing. Moreover, mythology is a vital part of the formation of culture. It is acceptable to say that mythologies always profoundly affect specific cultures. Because mythologies usually develop from a very early stage of human civilization, it reveals how people of different see and realize the world around them. In the later stage of the civilization, the mythologies would have a feedback effect on the formation of culture because the stories allow the later people to inherit the ways earlier people see the world. The Mojave (an Indian tribe) culture has a unique mythology story. In the story, the ancestor of the tribe committed suicide by offending his daughter and letting his daughter curse him. For this reason, the frequency of people committing suicide in this tribe is much higher than in other tribes. That is a typical example of culture affecting people's behavior. Mythology essentially decided the spirit of one nation, and the spirit decided the action and behavior of one nation. In a culture where the god or goddess of death or the world of the afterlife is highly valued, people of that culture would consider the ceremonies that honor the dead people very important, and they would be fearless about death. For example, in the ancient Egyptian culture, when Osiris, the god of death and ruler of the afterworld, was considered the most important god, the ancient Egyptians developed the habit of making complicated ceremonies to honor one person's death. This tradition continued even when Osiris's state was later replaced by other gods, eventually forming the tradition of making mummies and others. It is also interesting to have a look at the Viking culture. Vikings are known to be furious warriors who have little fear of death, their tradition mainly developed from the Norse mythology that the Vikings believe in. In mythology, Odin, the mighty god, has created a palace called Valhalla, a palace for the spirits of the bravest warrior to rest in their afterlife. It is said that the warriors would have a good feast every day, and they are accompanied by the most powerful and beautiful women, the Valkyries. It is said in the story that the Valkyries would only choose the best warriors on the battlefield, so entering the Valhalla would be a great honor for the warriors. Therefore, almost all of them would show no fear of dying on the battlefield. Mythologies and legends usually inspire such self-destruction tendency. Moreover, Wendigo psychosis, if we consider it a cultural phenomenon instead of a mental disease, is very similar to such a phenomenon. Furthermore, understanding that culture can affect one's behavior and mythologies might leave some cues to people would help us analyze the case of Wendigo psychosis. The case of Wendigo psychosis showed the mutual effect of the spread of mental disease and the spread and development of mythology. They boost the spread of each other. The mythology caused more people to develop the disease, and the patients' behavior made more people believe in the mythology of people transforming into Wendigo. The legends and the disease reinforced people's impression of each other. The exact process can be seen in the diseases caused by social traditions, like taijin kyofushou. At first, most people may not be aware of the culture-bound syndromes because culture-bound syndromes are usually connected with the pain people feel through culture. In the case of TKS, it would be the pressure and anxiety brought by socializing with others. Most people would not

develop syndromes though they may feel uncomfortable with the culture. After they witness the patients of that disease, they may start to feel like they have the same kind of syndromes as well. The process might be done by the psychological suggestion people give to themselves.

4. The results and the reasons

As the given case of TKS, it seems like culture-bound syndrome can be cured. However, a certain kind of culture-bound syndrome as a cultural phenomenon could not be artificially eliminated. It would perish naturally as the certain cultures that caused it to be forgotten or changed. First of all, the spread of culture-bound syndrome is hard to control. Culture-bound syndromes usually consider how people under different cultures react to pain and hurtful elements of their culture. They exist among communities, and might be developed from different individuals at the same time. Moreover, the process of the spread of mythology and tradition helping the spread of the syndromes can also prove it. The relationship between Wendigo psychosis and Wendigo mythologies, for example, has always been a popular topic among anthropologists. Some argue that the Wendigo mythology was created after the cannibal phenomenon occurred during the harsh winter. The creation of the Wendigo mythology was only to release the guilt of the people who ate their fellow humans when they had no food during winter. However, this theory could not explain that there have been other tribes who also live in cold and challenging environments and did not develop similar mythologies. I assume that Wendigo psychosis is a side effect of the Wendigo mythology, the syndromes developed after the mythology, for it would be a phenomenon of the Algonquins' reaction of being scared or feeling tremendous pressure by the Wendigo mythology. Some of the patients may have heard of the story in the earlier period of their life, and the story has left them under tremendous pressure they would feel. Maybe the fear would exist for a long time staying unconsciously, until one day, some experiences of them or the harsh environment around them make them realize this prolonged existed pressure and fear, the memory would occur to them, and they would develop a wrong realization towards themselves. The process can be completely randomized, and there is no way to trace whether someone might develop the culture-bound syndrome. People who live in the same community would experience the same culture, and generally, they would be left with similar impressions of stories or traditions. The condition that decides whether they would develop culture-bound syndromes would be personal and randomized. It might be decided by whether the individual is sensitive towards certain events. Sometimes the frequency of developing culture-bound syndrome is also determined by the personality of different individuals. The TKS would provide a perfect example. In conclusion, Culture-bound syndromes are constantly developed under-stimulated for different reasons. The impression and fear of mythology stories, the events that trigger anxiety, or the people's personalities make them uncomfortable with some cultures and traditions. Culture-bound syndromes would like randomly buried seeds. They are buried inside everyone's mind, for everyone would experience pressure brought by cultural phenomena and traditions, but it would only be triggered after the patients receive stimulation. Therefore, it is hard to make culture-bound syndromes disappear. Though individuals can be cured, the patients would continue to increase unless the culture that caused the culture-bound syndrome disappears. Like in the case of Wendigo psychosis, the Algonquins abandoned their traditional lifestyle and culture. Hardly anyone believes in the mythology of Wendigo anymore, so the Wendigo psychosis almost disappeared.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, the passage introduced the concept of culture-bound syndromes, people's reactions towards cultures that caused pressure and pain. Furthermore, the passage discusses the two kinds of reasons that caused the culture-bound syndromes. One is through beliefs and mythology, and social traditions cause the other. Two examples are the Wendigo psychosis and the taijin kyofushou. And the cure for specific culture-bound syndromes is also introduced. The purpose is to discuss the process

of cultures and culture-bound syndromes helping each other spread while reinforcing people's realization of each other. Therefore, the conclusion is that the phenomenon of culture-bound syndromes can only perish naturally. Studies done on the subject of different culture-bound syndromes are not rare. However, the study about the common things among culture-bound syndromes is not as usual. Maybe as the number of studies increases, the conclusion would be more precise.

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