

A Re-examination of *Amae* and Rebellion in the Growth and Development of Children

— Through assistance provided to infants and through self-reflection —

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It is not possible to bundle together every example of *amae* expressed by children and simply say, “This, in short, is *amae*.” We regard the act of a tired child snuggling up to an adult as *amae*, while that of another child who throws a tantrum in a store, demanding that their guardian buy him/her something, may also be described as *amae*. The *amae* that children demonstrate thus appears to carry multiple meanings. One such meaning is the aspect that is being described as *amae*. This, in other words, is when a person interacting with a child looks at the child’s expression and reads it as *amae*, thereby establishing the notion of *amae* as a tool for communication with the child.

I examined why *amae* is necessary in the growth and development of a child, and aimed to study how *amae* should be understood and supported.

The background to carrying out this study involves the changes in the living environment as seen in today’s society, along with the relationship between performance-based merit systems and *amae*. Changes in the living environment that have progressed after the period of high economic growth brought about major changes in Japan’s regional characteristics. As people’s ways of living became more comfortable, their links to their local community grew weaker. Material affluence not only oriented people more strongly toward money and the economy, but also promoted their commitment to merit-based systems. This is the form of contemporary society we have now reached. How, then, has it influenced *amae*?

I used my experience at sites of assistance as the starting point for my studies and took note of the five senses of infants who were being provided with assistance, in particular, sight, hearing, and touch. I looked back on my experience with three cases that I dealt with at a site of assistance and described the findings that came to me at that time. I also conducted examinations by including the insight that I have gained through confronting my own conflicts with my parents. As a result of conducting examinations from these angles, I came to the realization that *amae* and rebellion need to be considered from the perspective of lifelong growth and development. I therefore felt that I should also examine the meaning of *amae* and rebellion in the course of identity formation. Moreover, *amae* is not always accepted, but in some cases, its lack of acceptance by others gives it the potential to be transformed into an act called “rebellion”—this was an insight that I obtained through personal experience. I therefore decided to additionally investigate the element of ambivalence, a characteristic inherent to both *amae* and rebellion.

Through examinations such as these, I also stated that, although *amae* is internalized both in children and in people after adolescence, greater social pressure to become autonomous early on in life made it increasingly difficult to acknowledge *amae*.

Thinking about the relationship between *amae* and rejection as taken up in this study prompted the realization that these two factors are in an ambivalent relationship, and this helped bring about important meaning to the changes in my frame of mind. I hope that the results of this study, which examines the importance of *amae* and rebellion, will help in assisting children in the future.