

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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## Hiya

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 12, no. 3 (1964): 424–438

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

# Hiya

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JAIME C. BULATAO

**A** STUDENT of the psychology of Filipino people is bound sooner or later to meet with a phenomenon which in Tagalog is called *hiyâ* (Cebuano, *ulao*; Hiligaynon, *huya*; Iloko, *bain*; Kapangpangan, *dine*; Pangasinan, *baeng*). Although the word is usually translated into English as "shame"<sup>1</sup>, a two-day workshop in Iloilo, attended by Peace Corps volunteers and Filipino normal school teachers, unanimously agreed that the word comes closer to "shyness", "timidity", "embarrassment", and "sensitivity" rather than "shame". In order to understand the phenomenon better, it may be best to start off with some illustrations.

1. A three-year old girl is told by her mother to greet a guest. Instead, the little girl turns away from the guest and buries her face in her mother's knees. The mother strokes her head and says to the guest, "Nahihiyâ pala ang aking anak. Ay sús!"

2. A Peace Corps volunteer enters a class of eight-year olds. After the initial excitement has died down, the volunteer tries to engage individual children in question and answer. The children slide down on their seats and hide behind their desks. Some of the watching children put both hands over their mouths.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Robert B. Fox, "The Filipino Concept of Self-Esteem", *Area Handbook of the Philippines* (Chicago: Human Relations Area Files, 1956), I, 430-436.

3. A college boy is talking to his teacher in the teacher's lounge. The bell for class rings unnoticed by the teacher. Though the boy knows that he will be late for class, he does not tell the teacher but waits for him to make the first move. When asked later why he acted the way he did, he answers "I was ashamed to you."

4. Two men are drinking tuba in a *sari-sari* store. One of them jokingly pulls up the back of other one's undershirt and rubs the back with his palm. The other pulls out a knife and kills him. Later, the lawyer in court justifies the killing by saying, "Napahiyâ siya e."

5. A ten-year old girl is asked to sing in front of a group. At the end of the song she is vigorously applauded. She sits down, digs her fingers into her cheeks and her knuckles into her eyes as if wanting to cry. After a minute, when the attention has shifted from her, she returns to normal.

6. In a group discussion, half the participants say not a word. Later in private, when asked why, they give various answers. "Nahihiyâ ako sa kanila e. Big shot silang lahat," "Wala naman akong masasabi pa, at nasabi na nila e," "Baka I might say a foolish thing yet."

7. A girl graduate-school student is surreptitiously eating peanuts in class. The bag of peanuts happens to fall from the desk and the peanuts are scattered all over the floor. She puts her hands over her mouth while the other students look at her with amusement. Unable to stand it, she leaves the room and never returns to school again.

8. In a TV amateur show, a young man, while being questioned by a toastmistress previous to his act, speaks in a low indistinct voice, swallows his saliva, never answers more than he has to, although always in complete sentences. But once he gets into his act, he swings his lips, rolls his eyes, clucks his tongue, and snaps his fingers in perfect imitation of Elvis Presley.

9. A shy young man of 20 is interviewed for an hour in front of the assembled group of Peace Corps Volunteers and

normal school teachers. At the end of the interview he is asked how he feels. "I do not feel very good," he says. "Why not?" he is asked. "Because now you know that I am different." "What do you mean, different?" "I mean, that now you know that I am different from you."

From the illustrations given, one might draw a few observations leading to a definition of *hiyâ*.

a. *Hiyâ* is a painful emotion. It is something like fear or a sense of inadequacy and anxiety in an uncontrolled and threatening situation. It is a feeling that one lacks social resources and one has to look around for the support of friends.

b. *Hiyâ* is not felt except in a face-to-face encounter, actual or proximate, with another person. Hence comes the frequent English Filipinism, "I am ashamed to you", which is a transliteration of the Tagalog "Nahihiyâ ako sa iyo." *Hiyâ* seems necessarily to involve a relationship with another whose opinion is important.

c. This other member of the relationship is perceived as an authority figure, whose approval, like that of a parent, is supportive and lends a feeling of worth. His disapproval, like a father's or a mother's frown, arouses anxieties about one's self-worth. Often an audience or the community at large can take over such an authority figure's characteristics, inflating or deflating one's evaluation of oneself.

d. *Hiyâ* has much to do with a need to conform with the expectation of an authority figure or with society, which is a surrogate of the authority figure. One must not be "different." There is a deep need to be part of a group, to be hidden in it, to be accepted by it.

e. What makes *hiyâ* so soul-shaking is the fact that the threatening danger is not to a mere segment of the personality, but to the ego itself. "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his ego?" What is being questioned is the worth of the self. Under no circumstances, then, must the authority figure be allowed to explicate the ego's lack of resources, thereby further depleting

those resources and leaving one an abandoned orphan, unaccepted and unacceptable.

f. The immediate effect of *hiyâ* is a tendency to flee the anxiety-creating situation. The example of the child burying his face in his mother's knees is the prototypic model of later expressions of *hiyâ*. The averted face or the hand over one's face may be attempts to ward off the intruding stimulus. Sliding down behind the desk may be the attempt to hide or get away.

g. While the "escape" tendency is prominent in younger children, the "freeze" tendency is more prominent among adults. Hence the silence of the shy person in the group, or the fear of reminding the authority figure of something that should be done. Even the hand placed over the mouth is probably a symbolic gesture inhibiting the cry that could call attention to oneself.

h. Sometimes a reaction to one's "frozen" feelings may be a "bahala na" rush into an Elvis Presley routine. Probably a more common reaction is, while freezing inside, to put on the appearance of ritualized pleasantness. This is the Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR) response.

i. The expression, "I am ashamed to you", of the college boy hesitating to tell his teacher that the bell has rung for class indicates that the word "shame" is used by the Filipino differently from the way an American might use it. The Filipino's "I am ashamed to you" is quite different from the American's "I am ashamed of myself," even though they may both use the same English term. Semantically, the painful emotion of *hiyâ* is probably closer to "embarrassment" than to "shame."

j. Guilt, the consciousness that one has done moral wrong, is outside the concept of *hiyâ*. Even, as in illustration 7 when the girl is revealed as having done a socially unacceptable act by eating peanuts in class, the *hiyâ* is not over the wrong done but its revelation.

k. *Hiyâ* itself, is socio-syntonic, i.e. it is not only accepted by Philippine society but is positively taught by it. It is of

interest that in the Peace Corps workshop on *hiyâ*, the American Peace Corps volunteers looked on *hiyâ* as a problem while the Filipino teachers took it as the most natural thing in the world.

We come, then, to a tentative definition. *Hiyâ* may be defined as a painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation which is perceived as dangerous to one's ego. It is a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed, unprotected, and unaccepted. It is a fear of abandonment, of "loss of soul", a loss not only of one's possessions or even of one's life, but of something perceived as more valuable than life itself, namely the ego, the self.

#### WALANG HIYA

A confirmation of this view of *hiyâ* as an anxious need for group acceptance may come from a similar analysis of what seems to be the opposite of *hiyâ*, namely *walang hiyâ*. Examples of *walang hiyâ* may help clarify the concept.

1. A high government official fills the jobs around him with his relatives and political supporters. Reading the news, a woman exclaims, "Talagang walang *hiyâ* siya."

2. A group of college boys are gathered around a cafeteria table. One of them gets up, buys himself a coke, and returns to the table. He is greeted with the remark, "Walang *niyâ* ka naman", the implication being that he should have bought cokes for everyone else.

3. At a Rotary meeting, a guest is asked by the waiter to pay his bill. The guest says that he is a guest, points out his host at a nearby table, and asks the waiter to see him about the matter. The waiter tells him to go himself. The guest explodes, calling the waiter and the Rotary "walang *hiyâ*" for making a guest pay bills.

4. A young man, playing billiards, hits a billiard ball which just fails to make proper contact. He shouts at the billiard ball, "Walang *hiyâ* ito."

5. A young man at a party is talking to his companions when a stunningly beautiful girl appears at the door. The young man exclaims "Walang hiyâ, ang ganda noon."

6. A group of students are playing basketball. One of them makes a particularly brilliant shot. A teammate says to him "Walang hiyâ, ang galing mo pala."

7. A jeepney driver speeds close past a couple of pedestrians trying to cross the street. One of them, an elderly lady says, "Walang hiyâ ang mga taong ito."

8. A boy agrees to pass by his girl friend to take her to the movies. He fails to show up for his appointment. The next time she sees him, she says "Walang hiyâ ka. Bakit ka nag Indian?"

9. The students of a certain military school roam the city's streets in search of victims from school of the upper social strata to beat up and maul. They are called "walang hiyâ" by students of these schools.

10. A group of Peace Corps volunteers attend a party, some wearing chinelas, others wearing shirts without ties. A Filipino man on one side says to a companion: "Talagang walang hiyâ naman ang mga Amerikanong ito." Another says, "Why do they wear chinelas naman. Parang they do not respect the gathering."

A couple of observations may help towards the understanding of the above examples.

a. Walang hiyâ, when seriously applied, is a term of opprobrium and is usually applied to another with a certain amount of heat. It stigmatizes immoral, or at least unconventional behavior, when the person violates social expectations.

b. However, it is not applied seriously unless the behavior in question involves a crassness and insensibility to the feelings of others. In this sense it may have a somewhat similar meaning to such expressions as "having a thick skin", being "abusado", "walang pakikisama", "bastos". etc.

c. Often when used as an exclamation, it loses much of its literal, abusive connotations, in the same way as "damn", or "hell", or "lintik" have lost theirs. Nevertheless, even so, it connotes something that is beyond social expectation. Shouting "walang hiyâ" to a wayward billiard ball is telling it that it does not live up to what was expected of it. Exclaiming "Walang hiyâ" to a girl's outstanding beauty or to a basketball player's outstanding performance may be the expressions of one's disturbed, semiconscious need to have all things conform to a group norm and of one's anxiety when an individual breaks through the solidarity of the group.

Walang hiyâ then means a recklessness regarding the social expectations of society, an inconsideration for the feelings of others, an absence of sensitivity to the censures of authority or society. It would thus be the opposite of hiyâ as defined, since it is a lack of the painful emotion that should arise in one's relation to an authority figure or to society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation that should have been perceived as dangerous to one's ego. It is a lack of anxious care for society's acceptance. Walang hiyâ, by truism, is the absence of hiyâ or at least of the actual behavioral inhibitions which should follow upon hiyâ.

#### TOWARD A THEORY OF HIYÂ

Having thus reached a tentative definition of hiyâ and seen its expression in various ages as well as its absence, one comes to the question of its psychological causes. What are the dynamics of hiyâ? What is there in the configuration of a personality or of its present relation that predisposes one to such a reaction? We come now to the realm of theory, for the formation of which there is need of developing various concepts. For the present we limit ourselves to one key concept, the unindividuated ego.

"Individuation" occurs when one thing exists in itself as distinct from another. The child in the womb is but little to be differentiated from the mother. It lives the mother's life, eats the mother's food, breathes her air, is carried about

with her. It cannot yet say "I". In the psychoanalytic phrase, it lacks an "ego."

The "ego" comes into being when, sometime after the child is born, he begins to distinguish an unchanging "self" from an "other" which is here now and is gone in a while, a world which is warm now and cold later, which is lighted up now and is dark later. The "ego" is individuated from all the rest of creation.

But the individuation is never really completed. Although that child may, physically, be cut off from the rest of the world so that he can say "Physically, I exist up to my skin and no further"; nevertheless, psychologically he remains a diffuse part of a greater whole. The "ako" remains linked to the "kami." Schachtel<sup>2</sup> gives this embeddedness of the ego in the small group the name, "secondary egocentricity", because the ego as it were is diffused over a small group and depends on it, much as the embryo, in the stage of primary egocentricity, depended upon the mother.

A homely example may illustrate this concept of individuation. A hard-boiled egg is clearly individuated from another hard-boiled egg. At the other extreme, scrambled eggs lose all their identity in the pan. In between, a batch of fried eggs, while retaining a certain distinctness in that each yolk remains separate from other yolks, nevertheless are so joined to one another by their whites that one can hardly tell where one egg ends and another begins. So is it with individuals living in groups.

The degree of individuation of the individual from his primary group will differ in different cultures. There is a continuum running, from "embeddedness" on one end to "individuation" on the other end. On the one extreme, the individual will bury his individual self within the group, will totally accept its norms, will follow its traditions, and even when he is a leader will look on himself as patriarch, containing the group within himself, as much bound by the group's

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Schachtel, *Metamorphosis, on the development of effect perception, attention, memory*. N.Y., Basic Books, 1959. 344 p.

traditions as the group itself, and in fact more so since he has to enforce their tradition. On the other extreme is the individual, who by his reflection into and awareness of his own relations with his group has objectified such relationships. Unlike the moth that is stimulus-bound to the source of light, the individual person is aware of the pull upon him and of his power to resist or to give way.

His thinking is "allocentric", objective. He experiences others in their manifold relations to himself. He is open to them, allows them to reveal themselves to him as they wish to be revealed. He does not feel obliged to impose a set of blind categories upon their mutual relationships, to judge them by traditional, tribal norms as though these were absolutes. Thus, he is problem-oriented rather than tradition-bound. He dares to be "innovational"<sup>3</sup>, because he dares to be himself. If he is a leader, he will look on his group not as "followers" but as individualized members of a team, whose activities he has to coordinate rather than initiate.

Such an individual must be carefully distinguished from the sociopath, the juvenile delinquent, the true walang hiyâ. The mature, individuated person is capable of feeling hiyâ, but has transcended it. He has sensitivity for others' feelings and opinions, has respect for society's conventions, but precisely because of awareness of the pushes and pulls of his true motivations is rendered independent of them in great part and can go against convention when necessary. On the other hand, the sociopath is independent of society's domination because he has never acquired a sensitivity to others's needs. He has never entered into positive relationship with the authority figure and cannot feel the painful emotion of hiyâ because he has no love to lose. While suffering the immaturity of "embeddedness" in his family group, he has never experienced its supportive, nurturant influence. Much less has he acquired a mature individuation. At best he can find embeddedness within a group of peers, his "barkada", which then exercises

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<sup>3</sup> The terminology in Everett Hagen's: *On the Theory of Social Change*. Dorsey: Homewood, Ill. 1962.

over him a tyrannical rule and imposes a code of conventions as binding as society's, only much more violent. His, nevertheless, is still an unindividuated ego, fusing as it does with his group, which differs from the normal group in its relationships to society at large.

#### BEHAVIOR OF THE UNINDIVIDUATED EGO

In the normal case, however, what is the effect of the lack of individuation upon a person's behavior? How does an unindividuated ego reach out to the world?

Schachtel<sup>4</sup> compares the reactions of the unindividuated adult, characterized by "secondary egocentricity" and embedded within his group, with the reactions of the infant, characterized by "primary egocentricity" and embedded in the relationship with the mother. Most stimuli coming from outside this relationship are seen as disturbances of embeddedness, and the infant's reaction to them takes the form of fear and of avoidance of a full encounter with the stimulus. The adult, too, caught in secondary embeddedness, repeats the same auto-centric reaction, taking anything new or strange as a disturbance of his embeddedness. He has a need to preserve the existing pattern of his particular culture, of his particular group, of his own personal way of life.

A person embedded in his own social group will seek his security in the familiar. (Note that the word "familiar" is related to the word "family", as if to say that one who is bound to a close family system is also bound to the familiar.) Such an unindividuated person will feel great anxiety as soon as he feels the familiar supports withdrawn and he is thrown to the task of solving a problem as an individual, rather than as a group. He thus tends to flee a social situation where he is forced to stand out as an individual and face a stranger in full encounter. He is "nahihiyâ." As a 70-year old man, who had worked well but never brilliantly in many movements, once said: It is better never to be in the forefront of any movement; "baka ka mapana", lest one be shot through with an arrow.

<sup>4</sup> Schachtel, *Op. Cit.*

If he is a young child, he will bury his face in the familiar, namely his mother. If mother is unavailable, he will still turn away, he will make himself as small as possible, hiding behind a desk or a chair; or else, he will block off the intruding stimulus by holding his hand over his face. If he is a little older he finds that holding his hands over his mouth will do, while keeping his eyes wide on the alert for further danger.

If he is an adult and no longer can hold his hand over his mouth, he will try to avoid the individual encounter by not showing up at all. He will send a third party to make "paki-usap" for him. Where escape is impossible, he will try to put much psychological distance between himself and the stranger, saying "po", smiling, and putting on a pleasant appearance in order not to arouse hostility in the other. He may keep as quiet as possible, which is the adult's way of making himself small. In a conference, he may whisper to a friend nearby, rather than expose his ideas to ridicule in front of the big group. All of this time he will reproach himself for feeling so inferior. If he is educated and can use bigger words, he will ask himself how he ever acquired such an "inferiority complex", will blame colonial powers for imposing upon him a "colonial mentality"; will blame his fellow countrymen for being good imitators and having nothing good of their own.

Among even the more sophisticated ones of such a culture, the same sensitivity and extreme feeling of inferiority will force them to put on a front behind which they can hide. Hence comes the preoccupation with "face" and with appearance, with *palabas* and with "good PR." Hence, come at times the charge appearing in articles in the Sunday magazines that Philippine society is a "fake" society, where appearances are very deceiving. Hence, too, rise the pleasure of unmasking one's fellow citizens in a political rally, the clamor for the "bomba". The cry rises from an ego overburdened with a mask that it must continually wear, and from which it can obtain temporary release by tearing off the other's mask. One takes pot-shots at the tyrant of another country but one dares not shoot at one's own tyrant for fear of the revolution that might follow.

A great deal of energy is directed to preserving one's mask. In the adult, the mask takes the place of the chair behind which the child used to hide, or of the hands that one used to cover one's face. It is the source of security, the defense against anxiety, the claim to one's acceptance by society. When the mask is pierced and the unindividuated ego is exposed for what it is, disaster has struck. The person has been *napahiyâ*. A hostile unmasking by another is thus the unforgiveable sin. Since the ego has been shown to be unacceptable, it reacts by cutting off relations and by denying ties to this particular bit of society. Henceforth, the ego will never be at ease in the presence of such a blunt and overfrank unmasker. The pattern of relationship is changed and will never again be the same.

To the question, then, that was asked: "What configuration of personality predisposes one readily to react with *hiyâ*?", a suggested answer is: the unindividuated ego. Because its security is found not within itself but within the group to which it is bound, it dares not let go of that group's approval. Furthermore, it dares not assert itself independently of the group for fear that it will fail and thus incur the group's "We told you so." It will be sensitive to what people in authority have to say about it. It will be shy and timid. It will be "mahiyain".

That such a configuration of personality exists in the Philippines is confirmed in a small way by a psychometric study<sup>5</sup> comparing American college boys and girls with Filipino college boys and girls on the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. The experimental group consisted of 100 college men and 130 college women in Manila, and of 180 college men and 180 college women in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. The control group consisted of the 760 college men and 749 college women of the U.S. standardization group.

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<sup>5</sup> Jaime Bulatao, S.J., "Personal Preference of Filipino Students", paper read at the annual convention of the Psychological Association of the Philippines, January 1964.

The profile of the Filipino (in test language with its interpretation) was as follows:

- Low Exhibitionism: Retiringness within the group.
- Low Autonomy: Dependency
- High Succorance, High Nurturance: Value for close emotional ties
- Low Affiliation: Fear of face-to-face relations with strangers
- High Abasement, High Dominance: Preference for a system of strong personal controls, authoritarianism
- Low Heterosexuality: Strong social taboos on public manifestations of sex.
- High Aggression: Suppressed, hostile needs, probably resulting from prohibitions and controls.
- Low Change, High Order: Need for a highly structured, traditional environment.

A similar need pattern emerged in a study of TAT stories<sup>6</sup> as well as in another study of the hero in Tagalog short stories.<sup>7</sup>

How does such a configuration arise? In line with the whole new movement of seeking personality's roots in culture, one looks to child-rearing practices and attitudes as a main factor in forming personality. It may be suggested that an unindividuated mother tends to establish relations with her child in terms of identification and tight control rather than in terms of "objective" relationships. Precisely because she is unindividuated and seeking to merge into her small group, she tends to create and maintain a situation where the child remains an extension of her self rather than as a being, independent in his own right. She tends to identify with her child rather than to look on him as "other".

<sup>6</sup> Jaime Bulatao, S.J., "The Manileño's Mainsprings", *Four Readings in Philippine Values*, Frank Lynch, S.J., comp. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Abraham L. Felipe, "A Thematic Appreciation Analysis of Popular Tagalog Short Stories", unpublished M.A. thesis, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1961.

That such attitudes are found in Philippine mothers is suggested by data gathered by Guthrie,<sup>8</sup> which he sums up thus:

The Philippine mother, more than her American counterpart, wants her child to look to her for support. She wants to know what is going on in her child's mind so that she can help and advise him. At the same time she is very ambitious for her child. She wants him to learn things early. So it is not a case of control for the sake of convenience but rather control because she knows better than the child and can help him if he tells her everything. In this role she may feel she does not get enough support from her husband. There is also danger that her children will not show enough respect for all that she does for them. It is almost as if she had a contract with them. She will give support, protection and advice; they give her respect, loyalty and obedience.

#### CRITIQUE OF HIYA

If *hiyâ*, then, is the anxiety that comes when one's ego is threatened with loss of group support, one can see how the group itself will demand that an individual should have *hiyâ* under certain social circumstances. *Hiyâ* is the inner form of respect due to the group, to one's elders and one's betters. It is the inner acknowledgment that one belongs to a group and has membership duties to it. One also can see how a society like ours will abhor the man who is "walang *hiyâ*", since he tears apart the very thing which keeps the status quo, its proper line of respect, its conventions and its rules.

Seen this way, *hiyâ* is at once a principle of unity within the culture<sup>9</sup> as well as a distance-setting mechanism between individuals of that culture<sup>10</sup>. Even if *hiyâ* should be looked upon as an inferior form of morality, it has "something of value", is a system which, if taken away suddenly, will leave only chaos in its place.

Is *hiyâ* a virtue or a vice? There is a beauty about *hiyâ*, something like its namesake the sensitive *mahiyain* plant, which

<sup>8</sup> George M. Guthrie, *The Filipino Child and Philippine Society* (Manila: Philippine Normal College Press, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Fox, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Frank Lynch, S.J., "Social Acceptance", *Four Readings*.

when touched closes itself. Perhaps the answer is to say that it is a virtue, but that too much of it makes it a vice. But what is too much? In a static culture *hiyâ* makes for peace and order, for the maintenance of tradition, for the support of the existing order of authority. In a changing culture, an equal degree of *hiyâ* in a nation may hinder social progress, by hindering communication, by imposing conformity with tradition, by inhibiting entrepreneurship.

A further possible answer may consist in distinguishing the immature form of *walang hiyâ*, the sociopath, the juvenile delinquent, the neurotic who takes to unconventional behavior to attract attention to himself (and who is really exercising reaction formation against his own shyness), all these on the one hand and the properly individuated and mature individual on the other. The latter has passed beyond the egocentric mode of looking at the world into the more mature allocentric mode. In a changing culture, there is need of such persons who will be the innovators, respecting tradition yet capable of breaking with it and leading the culture to social and economic progress.

To sum up, *hiyâ* may be defined as a painful emotion arising from a relationship with an authority figure or with society, inhibiting self-assertion in a situation perceived as dangerous to one's ego. *Walang hiyâ* is the absence of this inhibition, such that the finer feelings of others are given offense. *Hiyâ* is conceived as rooted in the unindividuated ego, which depends upon its primary group as its normal mode of operation rather than upon its individual self. In the present state of affairs, until new, perhaps more interior, controls are developed, the culture has need of *hiyâ* to keep the culture from suddenly breaking apart. Meanwhile, there is need of a third type of individual who transcends the level of *hiyâ*, and is a mature, individuated person, sensitive to the feelings of others yet autonomous in his own right.