

# Japanese Ways of Psychotherapy

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## Abstract

While Western psychotherapists confront and discuss issues thoroughly, their Japanese counterparts simply wait for patients to spontaneously open up. Japanese psychotherapists may therefore seem relatively passive, yet we are nevertheless wholeheartedly committed in the constellation. The East-West difference may be attributed to differing relationships with nature. Japanese do not see themselves as distinct from nature. Eschewing causal thinking, that is without laying blame, we Japanese act as 'rain-makers', aiming to collaboratively restore harmony in the constellation. In this sense, the Japanese approach may be said to be based on a theory of synchronicity, which in turn may stem from our religious backdrop of Buddhism. We believe that 'everything originates from the same source' and we are therefore very tolerant. I believe that individuation is a process of dynamic dialogue between ego and Self, between conscious and unconscious, the union of the opposites. Taking the figure of Aion to correspond to this process in an 'ego-centric' way and 'satori' (represented by the Zen circle) to correspond in a 'Self-centric' way, then the former Western Way and the latter Japanese Way are not mutually exclusive but coexist sequentially.

**Key words** : Japanese Ways of Psychotherapy, union of opposites, satori, ego-centric, Self-centric

## 1. Introduction

My studies in Switzerland of Western psychotherapy, particularly Jungian psychology, threw my Japanese identity into sharp relief. One might say that my Western studies amounted to an initiation experience: only by understanding 'Western Ways', could I truly reflect upon 'Japanese Ways', and compare the two in terms of psychotherapeutic practice.

Historically, as will be shown later, Japan has imported and imitated Western Ways and

gradually adapted and assimilated them. I do not believe that Western and Japanese Ways are mutually exclusive. However, neither are they easily integrated. I should like to consider the differences and similarities between Western and Japanese Ways and to make their respective advantages mutually available in our practice.

## **2. Japanese characteristics**

### **(1) Geography**

Japan is an island in the temperate zones. As such it has four distinct seasons and rich nature in the form of woods, forests, mountains, rivers and fields. Forestry resources along with high humidity and frequent earthquakes have given rise to wooden houses with thin walls both within and without. Consequently, Japanese are aware of the voices and movement of neighbors and kin. This makes us sensitive to our lack of privacy and also very perceptive.

### **(2) History, Culture**

As an island, Japan has been somewhat protected from continental invaders but has been receptive to new technology, culture and religion, initially from the Asian continent and subsequently from the West too.

During the Edo period (1603-1868), Japan was closed to international trading for more than two hundred and fifty years. In this time it was secluded and 'incubated' such that it grew self-reliant on its limited resources. This may be the origin of recent Japanese technological prowess.

Historically, the majority of Japanese had been engaged in agriculture. In a small country, most of which is forests and mountains, they had to work together and cooperate in small fields. As a result, Japanese like to be homogeneous and to behave harmoniously as a group rather than aspiring to be assertive or independent like Westerners.

In the Meiji period, following the end of the Edo seclusion, Japan was afraid of being invaded and occupied by Western Imperialism, as China had been. As a result, Japan became eager to adopt and imitate Western technology and culture (including Western psychology).

### **(3) Religion**

Japan has two main religions, indigenous Shinto, and Buddhism from China and Korea. The

two were melded syncretically into Shinbutsu Shugō, a mixture of gods and Buddha.

In a Shinto shrine there are no statues and no idolatry, but rather, a mirror and a sword. A torii gate marks the threshold between the secular and the sacred where people (including emperors, and legendary heroes and villains) were enshrined, both out of respect and to contain any curses and scourges.

A Buddhist temple, on the other hand, features statues, that is, idolatry. Buddhists respect everything (mountains, rivers, grasses and trees) in the belief that everything contains life. We are prohibited from killing animals, even insects. Not only animals, but also plants, might have lives inside them. We are prohibited from throwing away even one grain of rice out of respect for the farmer's great effort in harvesting it. From these ethics we learn that we are one with nature, not separate from it, and should therefore be tolerant of all things. We might be more tolerant of each other because we believe that we are connected to each other at our very base (*engi*) (Izutsu,1980).

Both shrines and temples contain plentiful nature - trees, forests and mountains - in their sacred space. We are close to nature. We retain a kind of animism inside ourselves. In Shinbutsu Shugō, mentioned above, our ancestors cut trees and carved statues of Buddha both in and out of the tree. They respected the spirit of the tree and worshipped it by carving the statue. This is also an example of animism.

According to Kawai (1996b), the Japanese occupy a position between 'natural' societies (such as the Arctic peoples or Papua-New Guinean tribes) and 'developed', or less nature-oriented, Christian/Western societies. The ancient values of nature and animism remain in the modern Japanese mentality: we Japanese retain animism as our inner nature. Animism may be said to relate to projection, projective identification and participation mystique (Lévy-Brühl) in that Japanese are highly perceptive, as mentioned above. In psychotherapy sessions, we are skilled at perceiving clients' emotions, thinking, feeling and intuition non-verbally through this 'animism'. We listen well and accept our clients because we empathize and sympathize with them well through such 'animism'.

### 3. Japanese Ways of Psychotherapy

At the risk of seeming to exaggerate, I should like to emphasize the contrast between Japanese and Western Ways. We Japanese psychotherapists do not dare to confront, interpret and discuss thoroughly, as our Western counterparts are wont to do, but instead we listen well and accept our client without tough arguing. We respect and accept clients' ways as they are because we recognize our existence as a transient stream, that is, as a passing by. We do not dare or presume to disturb the stream.

As in the Japanese tea ceremony, we accommodate our clients with sincere hospitality and acceptance, and a supportive attitude, because we recognize that we meet 'for this time only, never again' in our transient life. The Japanese tea-room is small since warriors were provided no space to use their swords. Thus they could enjoy the tea, safe in each other's company. The confrontation in Western psychotherapy might be likened to the use of a sword in a session.

Japanese Ways might furthermore be likened to the 'just sitting' and *koan* of Zen Buddhism. Kawai (1996a) noted: "I have felt that my work as a psychotherapist is somewhat similar to Zen." Zen in Japan is represented by *Soto* and *Rinzai* schools. Both focus on *zazen* (Zen sitting-meditation), although Soto stresses 'just sitting', while Rinzai favors interviews and koans given by a mature teacher. When I sit with a client in a therapy session, I am sometimes reminded of the motto, 'just sitting', appreciated by the Soto monks – not caught up in 'treatment' or 'solution' but simply sitting. By this I mean that such times have simply happened, although I was not, and am not, aiming for them. According to a client's situation, we may talk about daily life, but sometimes it happens to be close to the situation of 'just sitting.' This seems appropriate.

Speaking of koans, clients' complaints may be said to be similar to koans, at least for the therapist. One of the famous koans is: "Bringing both hands together quickly produces a clap. What is the sound with one hand?" It is obvious that the answer cannot be arrived at by rational thinking. It seems as though a koan is given to create an opportunity to allow the whole person to relate to deeper consciousness, instead of relying on superficial consciousness. Let us consider this, using the example of a symptom that a client complains about. It is not possible to resolve this symptom by rational thinking. Then the therapist asks for the client's free associations or for the client to focus on dreams. This means giving up looking for a solution

from superficial consciousness but searching for answer from one's depths. Thus, both koan and symptom function similarly.

However, in some mild cases of hysteria, the client's complex or conflict in the unconscious becomes readily conscious and thus comes to resolution. If we look at this according to the koan and Buddhist ideas, the client was given the koan (symptom) and abandoned it in the middle, not reaching the depths of the psyche but turning back, helped by the therapist. That is to say, the therapist's effort actually took away the rare opportunity for a *satori* experience.

I like to think this way at times: when a client suffers a symptom, it is meaningful to resolve it, but also to not resolve it. It all depends on following the person's process of individuation. I cannot help but become very cautious in a psychotherapy session. Of course, the conscious appeal at the beginning is to resolve the symptom quickly, but I am facing the total being of the client and need to be cautious. My attitude needs to be flexible, otherwise I may not see the way the individuation process wants to go. One's consciousness has to be as mobile as possible in order to move freely between surface and depth. Then one can see the direction to go with the client.

In addition, we are accustomed to 'wait' and respect the constellation and be open to 'synchronicity' practically. Kawai clarifies the practical meaning of 'synchronicity' as follows(1985):

"When we psychotherapists meet troubled clients, the clients and their families both are afraid of being blamed as a bad guy or try to lay the blame on others (except themselves) and then establish a rigid relationship falling apart. And we can see some 'educator' or 'therapist' who says something to promote such laying the blame on others. At this time, if we all become free from causal thinking, the family relationship has changed and we get a broader point of view and it becomes easier for us to find a path to recovery.

When we treat a problem of family and human relationship, we are eager to find out 'the cause' and often lay the blame on others, by simply adopting causal thinking. For example, the mother might be looked upon as a source of evil. But, when we see the total phenomenon as an archetypal constellation, we come to understand that no-one in particular is 'the cause' and that all things are connected to each other, as in Buddhism outlined above. By being aware (conscious) of such a constellation, the therapist commits himself into the total constellation and then the situation begins to change, that is to say, we would rather like to collaborate on 'what shall we

do now and in the future?’ than ‘whom shall we blame?’ Then we might come upon the path of resolution.”

Unlike Western psychotherapists, Japanese psychotherapists do not confront and discuss thoroughly in sessions. We listen acceptingly to the client, that is, we wait. We wait for the client himself to become flexible and spontaneous, and at the same time, we wait for the change in the constellation through our commitment there. We commit ourselves in the constellation, the client decides to come to us, and this might influence the client’s surroundings. The client might be an identified patient, IP (so called in family therapy) and the process of struggle has begun. There may be pressure or a high threshold for a client to come to a psychotherapist. The client has a high motivation to go beyond the pressure and the high threshold. Those around the client, a husband or wife, a parent or child, might have a chance to reflect on their relationship with the client, so they might also commit themselves in the constellation. Thus, the change of the constellation will begin, instead of causal thinking as to who might be the culprit. This is why we will wait for the change of the constellation.

I believe that this attitude might originate in synchronicity theory and be related to Jung’s rain-maker in the sense that we wait for the change of the constellation by committing ourselves wholeheartedly. We **wait** for the client to be flexible and spontaneous and, at the same time, commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the constellation, instead of instigating tough, thorough confrontations. We wait for the constellation’s change and transformation. We wait like the rain-maker (Jung,1963) until harmony (balance) is restored. In this sense we engage in ‘non-action’ and allow things to happen in the psyche. We tolerate, rather than intervene, and allow nature to take its course. In this sense we are at one with nature, and the constellation may be likened to the cosmos.

#### **4. Western Ways of Psychotherapy**

Western psychotherapists confront, interpret and discuss thoroughly in sessions in order to gain insight and work through. Such a methodology may be said to originate in Western culture, specifically in hunting. In hunting, humans must fight with animals. I believe that the fundamental concept of Jungian psychology, the ‘union of opposites’, relates to such combat. Japanese Ways, on the other hand, might be said to originate in agriculture.

In psychotherapy the 'union of opposites' means union of (dynamic dialogue between) ego and Self, (between) Conscious and Unconscious, being aware of shadow and complex problems and, to use religious terms, union of good and evil, light and dark. I believe that Western Ways might originate in this dualism which in turn may come from Christianity, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism (see the author's paper, 2008).

Jung identifies the figure of Aion (see below, quoted from Jung, 1956) as himself. Aion has the head of a lion and is coiled by a serpent. The winged lion and the serpent may represent heaven and earth respectively. The lion is warm blooded and the serpent is cold blooded. "The lion is July, the fiery heat of summer, and the serpent represents the darkness and the coolness of earth, so it is the Yang and the Yin. Aion is the god of **the union of the opposites.**" (Jung, 1928-1930). I believe that the figure of Aion symbolizes Western Ways as the union of the opposites.



The Mithraic god Aion  
Roman, 2nd-3rd century

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## 5. Discussion

Jung emphasizes the importance of active imagination. I think this is the dialogue between Conscious and Unconscious, that is, Jungians aim at the union of the opposites.

The late Japanese Zen master, Prof. Hisamatsu conversed with Jung on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1958. Prof. Hisamatsu said that *satori*, enlightenment attained by Zen meditation, is different from the 'insight' of Jungian psychology and pointed out that Jungians cannot help repeating the incompatible fights (inner struggles) eternally as long as they (Jungians) are based on this Western dualism (the union of the opposites): "after learning the truth he becomes afflicted with another suffering" (Hisamatsu, 1958). Similarly, Yuasa (1989) states: "As long as we are based on this Western dualism, we cannot help repeating the incompatible fights eternally."

As mentioned above, we Japanese are tolerant and not separated from nature. I think Westerners are separated from nature and are wont to fight. Kawai compared Japanese fairy tales and Western fairy tales, and concluded that, "Westerners dare to be independent from nature and try to separate from nature, and then they manage to accomplish the task of redemption again. It is a Western model. It is great but cursed. We Japanese have different fairy tales which do not have a happy ending but have sorrowful feelings, so called, *awáre*." (Kawai,1996b)

Hisamatsu's student, Dr. Kato, says active imaginations are meaningful as long as they activate ultimate concern for Ultimate Reality although they are not Ultimate Reality themselves. He says (Kato 1989) "in spite of their demonic character, these states are considered to be meritorious, that is, conducive to practice, because they strengthen the practitioner's capacity to concentrate on his own ultimate question and its answer. They are considered to be valuable though they are not themselves ultimate." Jung contradicts as follows, "The Indian's goal is not moral perfection, but the condition of *nirvāṇa*. He wishes to free himself from nature; in keeping with this aim, he seeks in meditation the condition of imagelessness and emptiness. I, on the other hand, wish to persist in the state of lively contemplation of nature and of the psychic images. I want to be freed neither from human beings, nor from myself, nor from nature; for all these appear to me like divinity unfolded – and what more could I wish for? To me the supreme meaning of Being can consist only in the fact that it is, not that it is not or is no longer." (Jung 1989)



It is my belief that the contradictions do not exclude each other but rather coexist sequentially. Let us look at Ten Oxherding Pictures (see below Fig. 1-10) since they contain the empty circle (Fig. 8) which represents *satori* (enlightenment) in Japanese Ways and is very different from the figure of Aion in Western Ways. In these Pictures we can see the process (Fig. 1-8) of attaining *satori* (Fig. 8) and afterwards (Figs. 9-10).

The aim of taming and herding the ox is accomplished by the 6<sup>th</sup> Picture. The symptoms might disappear and be resolved there. The task of coming to terms with the ox: his own instinct, Shadow and Unconscious is accomplished, that is, the union of the opposites. He might gain insight as in Figs. 7 and 8.

Although this process, I think, might correspond to Aion as mentioned above, *satori* is expressed as a picture of a circle as in Fig. 8. The Ox is Forgotten, Leaving the Man Alone (Fig. 7) and then the Ox and the Man Both are Gone out of Sight (Fig.8).

In psychotherapy sessions we gain insight and work through it. By working through the insight, we assimilate it and are equipped with it. Then we mature and grow. Zen Buddhists distinguish between instant enlightenment and gradual enlightenment. I believe that insight corresponds to instant enlightenment and working through corresponds to gradual enlightenment.

As regards Figs. 9 and 10, after gaining insight, the man continues to work through, going back to the city, daily life, and meeting a boy again: Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source (Fig. 9): "Here the empty circle of picture number eight, the empty circle of *satori*, is filled with a scene of nature, that is, to see reality in its is-ness, as it is." (Rhyner, 1992). Entering the City with Bliss-bestowing Hands (Fig. 10): This process might correspond to gradual enlightenment. The man matures, becomes old and wise and meets a boy. The boy in turn starts to seek the ox. This is an ending and at the same time a beginning. The process circulates and recommences in a new dimension.

I believe that Western Ways of psychotherapy might represent this model of the union of the opposites, a process of attaining insight and instant enlightenment (up to Figs. 6, 7, 8). This process might be considered 'ego-centric' because of the ox, that is suffering which ego has brought as conflict.

I believe that Japanese Ways also require this process but rather emphasize gradual enlightenment (Figs. 9 and 10) which might be considered 'Self-centric'. By passing through the 'ego-centric' process (up to Fig. 6), we may then pass through the next 'Self-centric' steps (Figs. 7-10) that are characteristic of Japanese Ways. Clearly, both Western and Japanese Ways are necessary and the two are not mutually exclusive. It might be said that only by working through Western Ways, could we follow our Japanese Ways of Psychotherapy.

Individuation is a process from an 'ego-centric' to 'Self-centric' perspective as stated by Miyuki (1994): "The essential feature of *satori* does not consist in ego-transcendence or ego-negation, but rather in a life-long process which demands that the ego makes ceaseless efforts toward the integration of the unconscious contents. The ego thus enriched and strengthened through the assimilation of the unconscious is freed from 'egocentric' ways of functioning, which are conditioned by the darkness of ignorance and passion. Consequently, the ego can attain an attitude which allows it to function in an 'ex-centric' manner in perfect union with, and in the service of, the Self. This state can be designated as 'Self-centric'. Lin chi calls it 'the total action of the total being,' or the Self realizing itself in its totality."

It is my belief that we Japanese psychotherapists wait and let the things happen in the constellation in a 'Self-centric' way. I mentioned above that as long as sessions are based on Western dualism, they cannot but eternally repeat the incompatible fights. By shifting from the 'ego-centric' to the 'Self-centric' way, one might become more tolerant and weaken the nuance of fight, and thereby become more flexible and spontaneous. I think that Japanese Ways are valuable in this sense.

Through the above discourse, I hope that all our practices might be more fruitful, flexible, spontaneous and enriched.

## 6. Closing Remarks

Finally, I should like to refer to the Axiom of Maria Prophetissa (Jung, 1953):

"One becomes Two,

Two becomes Three,

And out of the third comes the One as the fourth."

This axiom symbolizes, I believe, the process of our Ways of psychotherapy. One may be

considered 'ego'. 'Ego' brings conflict as Two, a conflict between Conscious and Unconscious. The union of the opposites (Conscious and Unconscious) works as the transcendent function and brings a third element as Three, and it then becomes the total unity, that is, One/four as 'Self'. This is an end and, at the same time, a starting point in a different dimension. Here we see similarity with Ten Oxherding Pictures. This is the essence of psychotherapy in both Japanese Ways and Western Ways. They are not mutually exclusive but rather coexist sequentially, the difference being the point of emphasis in the process, from an 'ego-centric' to a 'Self-centric' perspective.

**Fig. 1~10, Ten Oxherding Pictures** : Reproduced from Kawai's book (1996a) by permission of Texas A&M University Press.



*Fig. 1. Searching for the Ox*



*Fig. 2. Seeing the Traces*



*Fig. 3. Seeing the Ox*

Fig. 4. Catching the Ox



Fig. 5. Herding the Ox



Fig. 6. Coming Home on the Ox's Back



Fig. 7. The Ox Forgotten, Leaving the Man Alone



Fig. 8. *The Ox and the Man Both Gone out of Sight*



Fig. 9. *Returning to the Origin, Back to the Source*

Fig. 10. *Entering the City with Bliss-bestowing Hands.*



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