Concepts of the Self and the Individual in Japanese and Western Cultures

A Transpersonal Study (I)

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Introduction

This paper is based on an inquiry from my own experiences. I have made a number of round trips between Japan and English-speaking countries. In addition, I lived in England for several years. The culture shock I experienced not only included superficial differences in food, climate, and customs, but also a difference in my sense of self, which was deeply challenged. When I lived in my native country, Japan, I was rarely conscious of my own sense of self. After traveling abroad extensively, I realized that there were cross-cultural differences in the notions of self.

What I felt experimentally is that each culture has its own notion of the self and the quest for identity varies greatly according to the cultures. I even felt that there could be many different modes of consciousness, and the self would be one of the modes of consciousness. Accordingly, there could be various levels of the self, and consciousness as an individual could be one of the sub-categories of the self.

Because of such fundamental differences, in the process of deep interaction with different cultures, my own sense of self was greatly challenged. At the same time, while traveling through different cultures, I was given the chance to objectively look at my own identity, which was socio-culturally formed in my home country and original culture.

Cross-cultural traveling enables us to experience different modes of consciousness. Depending upon the depth of the experiences, it could allow us to transform our own mode of consciousness. Thus, this paper is based on my own experiences of cultural traveling.

I encountered many cultural travelers on my own journey. I met people who had left their home countries for long periods of time due to an international marriage, employment, a new opportunity, or a challenge. Some individuals were born and/or raised outside their own

home country because their parents accepted employment in another country. For example, a friend of mine with Japanese parents was born in England and educated mostly in the United States. After coming of age, she returned to Japan to obtain employment and marry. She often confessed to confusion regarding her cultural identity. She stated, "My personality is English, is American, is Japanese... Three conflicting selves co-exist inside of myself.... This is beyond my capacity!" At one point, she stated that she needed to return to England—her "home," the starting point of her journey—to discover her fragile sense of identity.

Another traveler alienated from his own original home and culture was a Japanese male professor who was born in Japan and went to the United States when he was a high school student. He lived in the United States until he received his master's degree. He earned his Ph. D. from a British university, and he settled in England where he married an Italian woman. He told me, "I am hardly conscious of my Japanese identity, or I should say, I have never thought that I am Japanese. I communicate with my wife and children in English. I rather feel myself 'European'." I asked him what his identity was. He replied, "Being a Buddhist is very important for my identity." According to him, he had no sense of identity based on a particular country or a geographical place. Instead, he depended upon a religious belief for his identity.

A third traveler was an English man who married a Japanese woman. He stressed that his cultural identity was Japanese rather than English. He valued Japanese culture and language as important assets that should be conveyed to his children. He stated that the issue of cultural identity was and would continue to be important to him.

These encounters led me to make an inquiry about cultural identity and notions of the self and the individual. Of course, I experienced the

dynamism of the notion of the self in the process of visiting 16 countries. Thus, this paper is highly experimental. In this paper, I explore the cultural notions of the self and the individual from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology and transpersonal psychology.

Analytical psychology findings suggest that every culture has its own mode of consciousness, which is symbolically reflected in the imagery of its cultural products, including mythologies and folk tales. For example, Kawai (1976) stated that consciousness is controlled by the ego and thus can be expressed by language, whereas unconsciousness cannot be grasped by the ego or expressed by language. However, he pointed out that the mental dynamics between consciousness and unconsciousness can be expressed by imagery. Thus, personal imagery can be found in dreams, and cultural imagery can be found in myths, legends, and folk tales.

Transpersonal psychology may include Jungian analytical psychology, or is sometimes seen as related but separate. As the next section explains, transpersonal psychology is defined as the psychology that intends to transcend the personal level of the self. Also, transpersonal psychology studies various levels of consciousness, including altered states of consciousness. Ken Wilber, the author of *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, was one in particular who explored the varieties of consciousness. I intend to refer to his theories in this paper.

Therefore, in this paper I examine the notions of the self and the individual from the perspective of transpersonal psychology. The various theories of the self are introduced and discussed. I intend to explore a variety of concepts of the self and the individual in Japanese and Western cultures and consider the tasks of development for these different cultures.

Section 1 reviews the significance of transpersonal psychology as

an academic discipline bridging Eastern and Western cultures. It describes the significance of transpersonal psychology as an alternative to the traditional cross-cultural communication theories proposed by E. T. Hall, an American anthropologist, and others. In addition, Section 1 briefly describes the methods of this paper.

Section 2 examines the dynamics in contemporary Japanese culture from the perspective of analytical psychology. It analyses the tension between the Japanese concept of traditional conformity and the Japanese concept of individualism, which is heavily influenced by the West. It also includes references to maternal and paternal principles as cultural dynamics. This section suggests that while the maternal principle continues to be a fundamental part of Japanese culture, individualism (supported by the paternal principle) is receiving increased attention.

Sections 3 and 4 introduce two important Western theories of the self. Section 3 focuses on Ken Wilber's life cycle theory (1977, 1979), with its three levels of consciousness: pre-personal, personal and transpersonal. Wilber's theory is used as a map to explore cultural consciousness, which is carefully examined in the following sections.

Section 4 introduces Erich Neumann's theory of the self, which he proposed in *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1949). This section attempts to suggest that the path between Wilber's pre-personal and personal levels of consciousness would correspond to mythological stages in the evolution of consciousness from the *uroboros* through the *Great Mother* to the *hero myth*: I intend to suggest that the pre-personal level corresponds to the *uroboros*, the process between pre-personal and personal to the *Great Mother*, and the personal level to the *hero myth*, respectively.

This section also focuses on the characteristics of identity formation in Western cultures, which are symbolically represented in the *hero*

myth. It proposes that the Western concept of the self is related to Wilber's personal level of consciousness.

Section 5 presents cross-cultural differences in the concept of the self by introducing some studies of Japanese Jungian analysts and mythologists. With special reference to the notion of boundary, this section illustrates the differences between the Japanese concept of self and that found in the West. According to Neumann's theory, the Western concept of the self has a clear dualistic boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness, while the Japanese concept of the self is characterized by an interpenetrative, anti-dualistic notion of boundary. Thus, this section compares cross-cultural differences with regard to notions of the self.

Section 6 focuses on the significance of the transpersonal level of the self for Western culture. As sections 3 and 4 suggest, the Western concept of the self corresponds to Wilber's personal level of consciousness.

Based on this premise, in section 6, I suggest that Western cultures need a transpersonal level of consciousness for the purpose of healing or becoming whole. In this section I also discuss the etymology of words, including *individual* and *heal*, and propose that the transpersonal movement in the West provides the mechanism for healing and becoming whole.

Section 7 presents a short ethnographical study of John Lennon. It compares his personal mythology with the *hero myth.* In this section I intend to illustrate Lennon's journey to retrieve his lost connection with the maternal in order to heal himself.

Section 8 examines the relationship between Wilber's life cycle theory and the Buddhist theory of the self. Specifically, this section discusses the similarity between these two theories in terms of the cyclic

notion of time. Moreover, this section highlights the difference between the cyclic notion of time and the linear notion of time observed in the *hero myth.*

Section 9 presents the Ten Ox-herding Pictures in Zen Buddhism as a cyclic model of a journey. This section compares the notion of the self in the Ox-herding Pictures with that in the *hero myth.* It also discusses how these pictures reflect Japanese and Western cultures, respectively.

Finally, I offer a conclusion. I suggest developmental tasks for both cultures from the perspective of transpersonal psychology. Specifically, I point out that many individuals in the West have already achieved a personal level of consciousness, and some of them are interested in working on achieving a transpersonal level of consciousness. Conversely, in Japan, many individuals have already achieved a transpersonal level of consciousness, and are interested in working on achieving a personal level of consciousness. This paper ends by concluding that each culture has developed a different mode of consciousness of the self, and that the interaction between the personal and transpersonal levels of consciousness is occurring in both Japan and the West. This present paper, part Ⅰ, covers sections 1 and 2. Part Ⅱ (sections 3, 4, 5) and part Ⅲ (sections 6, 7, 8, 9) are forthcoming.

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1. Review of Transpersonal Psychology and Its Cross-Cultural Significance

This section briefly reviews the significance of transpersonal psychology and explains why I chose to consider the problems presented in this paper from that perspective.

The first academic discipline I majored in at the graduate school of

London University was communication studies, which was originally proposed for the most part by E. T. Hall, an American anthropologist. In this sense, communication studies is an academic field designed to aid people in English-speaking countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, to understand other cultures. As a Japanese person studying communication studies in London, I often found it difficult to become accustomed to the theories of communication because the theoretical concepts could not be precisely translated into Japanese, and these concepts were not always applicable across cultures.

The vocabulary of communication studies was invented within the framework of an English-speaking culture. As a result, Japanese people consider these concepts and terminologies to be *borrowed* from overseas. For example, Hall (1976) stated that it is difficult for Americans to understand the Japanese when they are first encountered because much of Japanese culture, people, and communication style seem to be ambiguous and inconsistent. However, Hall added that Americans come to learn that the Japanese are consistent and logical if Americans know Japanese culture well enough. Hall (1976) explained that this difficulty in understanding Japanese culture is due to the differences in the culturally embedded program.

Yamada (1988), a Japanese psychologist, pointed out that there are basically two methods of expressing oneself in intercultural communication. One method is to explain one's culture by adapting the framework and theories invented by other cultures. Another method is to attempt to create one's own theory and model to describe one's culture by closely observing that culture instead of by depending upon any foreign theories borrowed from overseas.

I kept asking myself the same question: Is there a method to describe Japanese culture using our own words, within the depth of

Japanese culture, instead of using borrowed terminologies from the West? Then I came to know the academic discipline called *transpersonal psychology*. In this paper, I attend to the concepts of transpersonal psychology as a bridge between Japanese and Western cultures.

This paper describes the concept of the self and the individual in Japanese and Western cultures by applying the theories of Jungian analytical psychology and transpersonal psychology. Jungian analytical psychology, posits that the unconscious reveals itself in the conscious mind as archetypal images, such as mythologies, folk tales, and dreams. Mythologies and folk tales are born within the depth of the cultures. Thus, if we wish to develop our own terms to describe our culture, we should start with the imagery in mythologies and folk tales. Moreover, as the following section discussing Neumann's theory of the self demonstrates, analytical psychology has established the methods to analyze the relationship between culture and consciousness. This is why I chose analytical psychology and transpersonal psychology, as the theoretical background for this paper.

Transpersonal studies include larger academic disciplines, such as transpersonal psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, ecology, and educational studies. It is one of the newest academic fields, and it has begun to spread gradually in Japan since the Ninth International Conference in Transpersonal Studies occurred in 1985, which took place in Kyoto, Japan.

What does *transpersonal* mean? The prefix *trans* means to transcend or to cross; thus, transpersonal means to transcend the personal level of the self or to cross the boundary of the personal level of identity. Occasionally, people who confuse *trans* with *trance* misunderstand transpersonal psychology to be something dangerous. When this happens, we should remember the original meaning of transpersonal as a

crossing of borders between the self and others. This definition can even be expanded to include a crossing of borders between nationalities and cultures.

Transpersonal psychology is referred to as the *fourth psychology*. Behaviorism is considered the first stream; Freudian the second and the third is humanistic psychology proposed by Maslow, Rogers, Gendlin, and others. Transpersonal psychology, the fourth stream, is the newest stream in psychology. Its contributors include Jung, Asagioli, Maslow, Grof, and Wilber.

We should note that the transpersonal movement, which includes transpersonal psychology, was born and developed mainly in the state of California in the United States. Nishihira (1997) pointed out that it is significant for transpersonal psychology that California is located the same distance from both Asia and Europe. This geographical condition, according to Nishihira (1997), explains why transpersonal psychology has been influenced by both Eastern philosophy and Western psychology.

Transpersonal psychology involves studying transpersonal experiences in which people experience identity without boundaries, or their sense of self beyond the personal, by transcending their personal level of identity. In order to experience this transpersonal level of identity, people interested in transpersonal psychology have been seeking out the values and wisdom offered by non-Western cultures. Examples include the sweat lodges of Native Americans, the Tibetan Buddhist concept of death, meditation, the I Ching, and yoga.

Transpersonal psychology has been useful to psychotherapists. For example, Grof's holotropic breathwork is considered a transpersonal psychotherapy. Holotropic, which means to be holistic-oriented, combines a breathing method with arousing music to heal the client at the

unconscious level. This form of therapy was created with special reference to indigenous wisdom, whose ritual is mostly based on the combination of breathing and music.

This section has briefly reviewed transpersonal psychology and suggested its significance from a cross-cultural perspective. The following sections introduce and discuss the various theories of the self and the individual both in the West and in Japan. To begin this discussion, the next section analyzes the dynamics in contemporary Japanese culture in terms of the conflict between the concepts of individualism and conformity.

2. Japanese Culture and the Conflict Between Individualism and Conformity

This section focuses on the dynamics in contemporary Japanese culture, which are pivotal when considering the concept of the self and the individual both in Japanese and Western cultures. It is said that Japan adapted Western culture sooner than other Asian countries and that it became one of the developed countries much more quickly than other Asian nations. It is also often pointed out that individualism influenced by the West and traditional Japanese conformity coexist within contemporary Japanese culture.

In my opinion, this coexistence is filled with conflict for most Japanese. Examples of this conflict can be found in fashion trends displayed by younger Japanese. Dyed blond hair and loosely fitted socks are currently immensely popular among them. When these trends initially appeared, they were considered unique, and they allowed younger Japanese to express their individuality. However, over time, these fashion trends became so popular that uniqueness and individuality were completely lost. Thus, the conscious claim for individuality ap-

pears to have been replaced by an unconscious desire for conformity.

Primary school students and mobile phones are another example of the conflict between individuality and conformity. In Japan, generally children are so closely united with their parents that they are supposed to use home telephones, when needed. However, these days it is getting more and more popular to have mobile phones for Japanese children from a very young age.

Such children claim to desire independence from their parents. However, according to my observation, they often express their insecure feelings and are afraid of being excluded by their peers without frequent communication by mobile phones. I believe they unconsciously desire to be in strong conformity with their peers.

There are recently coined terms in Japan, such as *freeter* and *parasite singles*, which also illustrate the conflict between individuality and conformity in Japanese culture. *Freeter*, a shortened term for *free arbeiter* (from the German word *arbeiter*), refers to a part-time worker who refuses to be employed on the full-time contract. *Parasite single* is a person who lives at home with his or her parents even though he or she is old enough to live independently. Those individuals who choose to be either *freeters* or *parasite singles* might have an unconscious desire to be free from the conventional social systems and beliefs to which traditional Japanese people belong, including the institutions of employment and marriage. On the other hand, their choice to be free from these social systems and beliefs might reveal their weakness and inability to commit themselves to any responsible human relationships in society.

The concept of lifetime employment with Japanese companies provides yet another example of the conflict between a culture based on conformity and the push toward individualism. Traditionally, the Japanese have found security by working for companies that treated

them like family. Being treated like family was one reflection of a conformity-oriented culture. However, in Japan, this myth of lifetime employment has recently collapsed, and many Japanese are now being asked to learn to live more independently. Thus, conformity is being greatly challenged, and individualism is becoming increasingly important.

Kawai (1976 b), the first Japanese Jungian analyst, spoke of the Japanese maternal and paternal principles as cultural dynamics. The maternal and paternal principles in this context do not refer to the qualities belonging to actual mothers and fathers. Instead, they refer to principles working as psychological dynamics within individuals, regardless of gender. The maternal principle is to embrace and to nourish, as a mother nourishes her children. The paternal principle is to divide, as a father asks his children to become independent from their mother (i. e., he divides them from unity with their maternal attachment).

Kawai (1976 b) stated that the characteristics of a particular culture and society are likely to be produced by the balance and conflict between the maternal and paternal principles. According to Kawai, the maternal principle is dominant in conformity-oriented cultures, such as many Asian cultures, including Japan. The paternal principle, on the other hand, is dominant in individualism-oriented cultures and Christian cultures that believe in one God as *Father*.

As for Japanese culture and the maternal and paternal principles, at first glance it appears that the maternal principle has historically been dominant. However, this discounts the power of fathers, who were strong and influential during the pre-World War II reign of the patriarchal social system. Kawai (1982 b) pointed out that the cultural dynamics between the maternal and paternal principles during this pre-war period were fairly balanced due to the presence of a strong patriarchy,

which offset the presence of a strong maternal principle. For example, there was a saying that, "The Japanese are afraid of earthquakes, thunder, fire, and fathers."

Today, however, when Japanese students are asked what they fear, few mention their fathers. For the younger generation Japanese, the powerful and authoritative father figure of the past has been replaced by the image of a friendly, kind, and gentle father. In the 1960's in Japan, there was a popular television program entitled, *The Giant Star*, which was a story about a boy who aspired to become a star baseball player. This program featured a father figure called *Mr. Ittetsu Hoshi*. Mr. Hoshi was a strict and powerful father who severely disciplined his son. Mr. Hoshi continually said to his son, "Do not dry your tears, and be willing to suffer from blood and sweat, until you succeed as a professional baseball player!" That program was immensely popular in Japan. Today, however, a severe, strong father such as Mr. Hoshi is not acceptable to the younger generation in Japan because the strong paternal principle is not welcome any longer in contemporary Japanese culture.

However, the strong maternal principle is still dominant in Japan. A Japanese male cultural sociologist, Itoh (1996, p. 111), who proposed *Men's Studies* as a new academic discipline and stressed the significance of men's feminism, stated that, "there are three mothers in Japan." He meant that the first mother is a biological, literal mother, and the second mother is one's wife (for a Japanese husband, it is not unusual to call his wife *mother* after having children), and the third mother is a proprietress of a bar. Itoh commented,

> I wonder if "proprietress of a bar" is a valid occupation in countries other than Japan. Of course, I know that in most countries there are bars in which women serve drinks. However, I think it is rare out-

> side of Japan for professional females who work in bars to play the roles of fantasy lovers, mothers and even counselors. A proprietress of a bar in Japan, who is called "mother," is supposed to play the role of a mother for male drinkers by taking care of them, sometimes scolding them, and even helping them to heal as a counselor would. Perhaps Japanese males are dependent on maternal figures, like the proprietress of a bar, because of the cultural wounds they have received both from society and from their families. This may be the reason why the occupation called proprietress of a bar exists as a third mother in Japan. (1996, p.112)

I agree with Itoh's suggestion that we can observe a symbolic maternal figure and the maternal principle in a proprietress of a bar in Japan who is kindly taking good care of men.

In summary, contemporary Japanese culture has been strongly influenced by Western culture and its individualism-oriented cultural dynamics. As a result, Japanese culture has focused increasingly on individualism. At the same time, at the unconscious level, the conformity-oriented cultural dynamics based on the maternal principle have persisted. The presence of pressure to both conform and individuate has created intense conflict for many Japanese. There have been a number of reports from clinical psychologists that this intense conflict has caused numerous individuals to withdraw from society and exhibit other neurotic symptoms. For the most part, this happens when an individual wishes to claim his or her individuality, but he or she is also afraid of the independence and responsibility that comes with this individuality. This individual is likely to become isolated from society. It is my belief that Japan, as a society, needs to become more aware of this conflict and proceed cautiously when dealing with individuals who are caught in it.

This section focused on the cultural dynamics in contemporary Japan in terms of the concept of the individual from the perspective of analytical psychology. The next two sections examine the notions of the self and the individual from a Western perspective. Specifically, they consider the theories of Wilber and Neumann.

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