

Pioneer of Clinical Psychology in Japan

The Broad Achievement of Hayao Kawai



Prof. Kawai at the bank of the Rhine river in Switzerland during his time studying at the C. G. Jung Institut (1963)

At the beginning of his academic career, Kawai studied mathematics in Kyoto University's Faculty of Science. He soon realized, however, that he was not cut out for a scholarly career in mathematics, and, as he enjoyed teaching children, he decided instead to teach mathematics as a subject in high school. Through counseling his students as a high-school teacher, he began to realize his interest in learning about human beings. This led him to take up the study of psychology while maintaining his career as a high-school teacher. At that time, the field of psychology was focused on experimental or behavioral psychology, and placed much weight on objective data obtained by

experiments. Kawai was not satisfied with that approach, and began to study the Rorschach test as a means of gaining more insight into human psychology.

One day, Kawai found a possible error in a book on the Rorschach test written by Bruno Klopfer, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and a leading authority on projective techniques. Kawai sent a letter to Klopfer to inquire about it. Klopfer acknowledged his mistake, remarking that Kawai was the first person to notice it. This was the beginning of a relationship between the two scholars that ultimately led to Kawai studying under Klopfer at the UCLA on a Fulbright Scholarship. Influenced by Klopfer, who had a detailed knowledge of analytical psychology, Kawai also gradually became interested in that area. Klopfer arranged for Kawai to undergo training analysis under the Jungian analyst, Joseph Marvin Spiegelman.

In those days, it was rare for Japanese scholars to study abroad, and his experience in the US had a great impact on Kawai. His childhood during the prewar and wartime periods, when the majority of Japanese people leaned towards militarism, had instilled in Kawai a feeling of resistance against the illogicality and ambiguity of many Japanese at that time. He acknowledged himself as a rationalist and a lover of things Western: he loved Western philosophy, dramas, stories, music, and movies. The thoroughly rational thinking that he encountered in the US, however, gave him a strong cultural shock, and

Hayao Kawai (1928-2007) is a Jungian psychotherapist, clinical psychologist, and the most influential figure in the history of clinical psychology at Kyoto University, and also in Japan.



Prof. Bruno Klopfer, a leading researcher in the field of Rorschach tests, whom Prof. Kawai studied under.

made him ponder over his identity as a Japanese. The experience left Kawai feeling torn between the two cultures.

Around that time, he had a dream, which he related to Spiegelman in a training analysis session. In the dream, he picked up a Hungarian coin, and was surprised to find that it was embossed with the image of a Xian, an immortal being from Chinese religious lore, who has achieved divinity through devotion to Taoist practices and teachings. At first, Kawai could not understand what this dream meant, but through talking to his analyst, he identified the association of Hungary as being a Western country affected significantly by Eastern culture. Upon hearing this, Spiegelman suggested that the dream meant that Kawai would gain something important from a fusion of Eastern and Western cultures. Just as this dream suggested, Kawai went on to develop his thought by drawing on the knowledge and culture of both the East and the West.

After studying in the USA, on the recommendation of Klopfer and Spiegelman, Kawai spent three years training to be a Jungian analyst at the C. G. Jung Institut in Zurich. He graduated as the first Japanese to become a certified Jungian analyst. In 1965, he returned to Japan and began to energetically promote the concepts and techniques of analytical psychology. He was employed by

Kyoto University's Graduate School and Faculty of Education in 1972.

When Kawai returned to Japan, the country's clinical psychology was at an early stage in its development, and almost all counseling was based on Rogerian concepts and techniques. Although the predominant therapeutic technic in analytical psychology is dream analysis, Kawai was afraid that it would be seen as unscientific and suspicious if he introduced this technique first, and so he began his diffusion of analytical psychology in Japan by introducing "sandplay therapy." Sandplay therapy is a therapeutic technique in which the client places miniature models in a sand box, freely playing with the sand box and the miniatures as the therapist watches on.

Kawai thought that it would be more persuasive to show the visible therapeutic effects of sandplay therapy, rather than therapy pertaining to invisible stuff of dreams. He also intuitively thought that this technique, which does not rely on words and appeals directly to the senses, would be suitable for Japan, with its traditions of assigning souls even to inanimate objects, and cultural traditions like *nihon teien* (Japanese landscape gardens) and *kado* (the Japanese art of flower arrangement). Therefore, instead of translating the original German term *Sandspielttherapie* (sandplay therapy) directly, Kawai used the Japanese term *hakoniwa*, which refers to a traditional form of play in Japan involving the creation of a small landscape by arranging various miniatures in a small shallow box.



Prof. Kawai in the waiting room of analyst Dr. Joseph Marvin Spiegelman (1960)



Sandplay therapy, pioneered by Prof. Kawai, spread to become a well established psychotherapy practice throughout Japan (The Asahi Shimbun)

As he had anticipated, *hakoniwa* therapy was very well received, and sandplay therapy has now spread and become an established psychotherapy practice in Japan. This is evidenced by the fact that the Japan Association of Sandplay Therapy now has over 2000 members. The practice has continued to progress steadily, and the accumulated study results produced by Japanese sandplay therapy have garnered international praise. Honoring Japan's contribution to the development of sandplay therapy, Dora M. Kalf, who was the inventor of the technique, even suggested that *hakoniwa* be adopted as its international name.

With sandplay therapy, analytical psychology gained wide acceptance in Japan. Moreover, it can be said that Kawai was not just spreading analytical psychology, but also clinical psychology and psychotherapy. Until then, the common attitude in Japan was that mental troubles and worries were not to be spoken of, and external help should not be sought. It was considered normal for those who suffered from such problems to bear them by themselves, and it was therefore difficult for people to seek professional help. Through Kawai's activities, however, psychotherapy and its effectiveness became widely known. In making psychotherapy and counseling more accessible, he made a great contribution to Japanese society.

During this period, Kawai was also making

efforts to establish an education and licensing system for psychotherapists in Japan, including the establishment in 1980 of the Psychological Educational Counseling Center, which was affiliated with Kyoto University's Graduate School of Education. The center was the first domestic fee-charging counseling center in a Japanese academic institution, and it also doubled as a training facility for undergraduate students. Kawai also played a leading role in establishing the Foundation of the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologists in 1988, and the Japanese Society of Certified Clinical Psychologists in 1989.

By the time he retired from Kyoto University in 1992, Kawai had educated an impressive number of clinical psychologists, and his students have

spread throughout Japan and educated subsequent generations in turn. It is no exaggeration to say that he built the foundation for clinical psychology and psychotherapy in Japan.

Kawai's intention was not to simply introduce Western psychology to Japan, as he did by introducing techniques such as sandplay therapy. His personal experience gave him a keen understanding of the cultural and psychological differences between Westerners and Japanese, and he believed that western clinical psychology and psychotherapy, which were based on explicitly on verbal expressions, could not be effectively applied to Japanese people without modification. He therefore aimed to develop a form of psychology



Prof. Kawai delivers a lecture to commemorate his appointment as an adviser to the Picture Book and Children's Literature Research Center (1992)

and psychotherapy that did not necessarily rely on words, and was more applicable to Japanese people.

The key feature of his approach to psychotherapy is considered to be the therapist's role as "the stage for the drama," rather than "a player," and thereby offering a transformative "container" for clients. He sometimes expressed this in the paradoxical phrase, "trying as hard as possible to do nothing." This approach does not mean that the therapist does nothing, but rather waits, with confidence in the self-curing power of the client (or their psyche). It is based on the belief that if one can trust the client and do nothing, rather than nothing—or something detrimental—occurring, something meaningful will occur and a creative process should begin.

Kawai was, first and foremost, a practicing psychotherapist, but his enthusiasm and fascination with what occurs during psychotherapy led him to be very proactive in widely publicizing the fruits of his psychotherapy experiences. He wrote many books aimed at a general readership on various subjects, including educational problems, child-raising, children's literature, as well as clinical psychology. He was also active in communicating with scholars in other fields. He interacted with philosophers, mathematicians, brain scientists, scholars of Japanese literature, novel writers, and picture book writers, among others. He influenced a great many people—by either directly meeting with them, through teaching, or indirectly through his works. The broad scope of his activities, going far beyond the narrow academic field of clinical psychology, was acknowledged when he was appointed director of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies from 1995 to 2001. He also served three terms as chief of the Agency for Cultural Affairs from 2002 to 2007.

Among his varied output, his writing on Japanese culture, which draws extensively from his studies of Japanese myths and folk tales, is highly appreciated for its critical and creative viewpoints. A particularly valuable component of these works is his theory of "the center-empty structure" as the "deep structure" of Japan.



This theory describes the way in which various contradictory opposites, such as the masculine and feminine principles, function around an empty center while maintaining balance, and without being integrated into the center principle because of such "center-emptiness."

Kawai obtained this idea from his analysis of the structure of Japanese myth, which has several triads of gods, one of which does almost nothing and is little mentioned. The theory is not only applicable to Japanese culture, but can also be effectively applied to thinking about the human psychic structure in general. As far as we can tell, Kawai may have been attempting to express the core theory of psychotherapy through developing this center-empty structure theory.

Kawai spent his lifetime energetically exploring culture in general, questing for the human psyche. It can be said that he bridged various fields: between the West and Japan, between psychotherapy and society, between clinical psychology and other fields of science and the humanities. Inheriting Kawai's passion, the clinical psychology scholars of Kyoto University continue to study human psychology in order to develop and deepen the theory of psychotherapy.

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