

Preface

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In the days when transportation and communication systems were not so developed as they are today, there were diversified cultures throughout the world. Meanwhile, however, the culture of an influential country in a given area overpowered the cultures of other countries, albeit on a scale less than global, and succeeded in making the different cultures identical. The development process of cultures from diversification to unification at one time and from unification to diversification at another may have contributed to the making of history.

We may be living in the period marked by a rising tendency towards unification. In the past we have been dominated by the cultures of countries which are strong militarily, politically, and economically and the same situation still continues to exist today. The culture known as “science” which has become the basis for producing such power has in and of itself become more global in nature than regional. For instance, philosophy is wisdom to trace the source of knowledge and its turnout ought to be applicable anywhere in the world. Today this is not the case, however. Though science used to be the European culture, the universality of science — for instance, the law of gravity is applicable at any place in the world — is replacing cultural diversification with the trend towards unification of the world’s cultures.

Psychology is not an exception. Psychology started out as science and its knowledge is considered universal. It may be true that Hermann Ebbinghaus’ forgetting curve is not regional. Generally speaking, any knowledge in the basic field of psychology is universal. What about the situation in the field of psychotherapy? With a variety of factors interrelated in a complex way, there is no simple way of explaining matters related to the universality of the theory and technique of psychotherapy as opposed to knowledge in the basic field. To take up some example cases, in Japan, Rogers’ client-centered therapy draws attention as the basis for psychotherapy and counseling in Japan and it is the most widely practiced method among the therapists. Behind this situation is the Japanese culture which exhorts the attitude of accepting others instead of self-assertiveness in our relationship with others. There is a saying “Be a good listener and a poor talker” in Japan. A good listener will win the respect of other people. It is behind this cultural background that Rogers’ counseling technique is the most popular. In contrast, psychotherapy focused on cognitive persuasion seems to be gaining wide acceptance in

western countries. This may show that each type of psychotherapy differs from another depending on the country's culture.

Psychotherapy has developed as a science in Western cultures and it is also beginning to be well accepted today in Japanese society. Until recently, however, religion has been playing a vital role in Eastern countries as a method of addressing psychological problems. In Japan Buddhism has been playing the role. The Buddha's thoughts and his method of leading people are considerably different from the teachings of Christianity, which attach importance to faith in the only God. The Buddha teaches the importance of self-reflection based on a philosophical outlook on the world (Buddhism), and it also teaches the method of addressing the problems of basic sufferings of mankind such as the difficulty of going on living, aging (fear of getting old), illness (fear of illness), and death (fear of death). What Buddha did was to probe thoroughly into the root causes of human sufferings and to come up with the method of addressing these problems. These characteristic qualities of Buddhism may naturally attract attention of psychotherapists in Western countries. The question is what they seek in Buddhism (in relation to psychotherapy). We may expect clarification of this point as the comparison study of these two progresses. It would not be productive just to point out the similarities between the two. We might expect them to clarify whether Buddhism has anything to offer by way of complementing Western psychotherapy. What always comes up as a problem when there is an attempt to incorporate Buddhism in psychotherapy is that the scientific psychotherapy demands demonstration of the therapeutic effect of Buddhism and its universality. There will be no simple answer for the question of whether Buddhism has such a quality. For instance, Zen meditation has been subjected to scientific tests for verification, but reliable data have yet to be obtained.

It is also necessary to think of the limits to the cultural distinctive qualities. For instance, Buddhism often contains physical training. In Western culture, however, the dualistic theory with regard to mind and body is predominant with the penchant for making light of the body and for making much of the mind. What sets Western culture apart from Eastern culture most vividly are matters related to ego or self. In Western countries, establishment of "self" is regarded as being of the greatest value. In contrast, Buddhist followers aim at non-self. It is practically impossible for Westerners to understand this Buddhist thought. Looking back on the past, we find that a conflict among different cultures very often gives birth to a new culture. It is a matter of our great interest to find out what kind of innovation is due from a conflict between psychotherapy as science and Buddhism. In this case, the focus will be on the question of what aspects of Buddhism will make psychotherapy innovative. Granted there are certain cultural limits, what is important will be to find out what aspects of Buddhism are universal and will be able to stand scientific verification.

It is very gratifying that some Western psychotherapists have begun to show interest in Buddhism. However, the hardest part has yet to come. First and foremost, it is important to understand Buddhism and then to clarify the similarities and dissimilarities between psychotherapy and Buddhism. If there is something that can be incorporated in psychotherapy, it will open the way for inventing a new type of psychotherapy. It will be a highly time-consuming project and the project has just gotten underway.