

The Japanese psyche – major motifs in the fairy tales of Japan

KAWAI, Hayao. São Paulo: Paulus, 2007. 278 p.

Ludmila da Silva Pires*

Abstract

This article is a review of the book *The Japanese psyche – major motifs in the fairy tales of Japan*, written by Hayao Kawai. After a brief contextualization about the author and his work, which aimed to transform analytical psychology in a body of thought and practice that could grasp the Japanese mind, there is a critical analysis of the Kawai's work and his theoretical formulation. ■

Keywords: analytical psychology, Japanese fairy tales, Hayao Kawai, Japanese culture.

As the first Jungian psychologist in Japan, Hayao Kawai (河合隼雄, 1928-2007) greatly influenced the field of clinical psychology and Japanese's cultural and religious studies. He introduced the concept of sandplay in Japanese psychology, as well as actively participated in the Erano Circle in 1982. One of his best-known books, *The Japanese psyche – major motifs in the fairy tales of*

Japan, is proposed to examine Japanese mind through an interpretation of Nipponese fairy tales, and make comparisons with their western counterparts. The book describes, throughout its nine chapters, Kawai's efforts to transform analytical psychology into a body of thought and practice that could grasp the Japanese mind, based on an eastern psyche structure, not just being a simple transposition of western psychological concepts and practices to Japan.

In this book, the author's proposal is to provide an understanding between Japanese people and the "people of the West", both in their similarities, but also in their distinctive properties. Considering folklore and mythology as sources of understanding the depths of the human mind, Kawai makes use of the 昔話 (*Mukashi Banashi*) – the "Ancient Tales", which compose the Nipponese folklore, products of Japanese imagination. Thereafter, it underlines the importance of the female figure in the field of Japanese psyche – covering a variety of characters like the goddess-sun Amaterasu, the queen Pimiko,

to the powerful female shamans of Shinto shrines (KAWAI, 2007, p. 11-12).

In the introduction, Kawai presents his justification for choosing these stories in his book. His approach is based on the strength of these folkloric female figures, describing how these can be considered as representatives of a Japanese ego. To base his comparisons and the development of his thought, the author refers to James Hillman's work and his archetypal psychology, and the ego's development theory by Erich Neumann. However, he goes further to highlight the peculiarities of Japanese stories, creating a rich and deep understanding of Nipponese culture and personality. Furthermore, it proposes a kind of developmental point of view of an ego which could be suitable to Japanese psyche.

The first chapter, called "The forbidden room", is dedicated to study the story "The nightingale's home" (ウグイスの里, *Uguisu No Sato*), a tale that clearly moves between consciousness and unconscious spaces. The main issues addressed by Kawai are a transgression of a

* Degree in psychology by Faculty of Administrative Studies of Minas Gerais (2014). Professional practices in the areas of public policies, developing projects in the third sector and in the psychologist's ethical code. Currently, teaches courses of oriental body practices and work as a project coordinator at the NGO *Espaço Mãos Dadas*.
Email: <pires.ludmila1@gmail.com>.

prohibition that is not punished and the presence of primordial nothingness, a common concept in the eastern narratives. The author also introduces two key elements for understanding the Nipponese stories: 恨み (*Urami*), which represents the resentment and 哀れ (*aware*), a kind of mild sadness without hope, a sense of *pathos* of the Japanese tales. Thus, he reveals that “nothing and sadness” compounds the core of Japanese culture (KAWAI, 2007, p. 39-44).

The tale chosen by the author allows to clarify what is the primordial nothingness or absolute nothingness, an instance commonly present in the Zen Buddhist writings as well as in the philosophical works of the Kyoto School. According to Kawai, the presence of nothingness or empty is not a synonymous that nothing happened in a story, but simply “the nothing was what happened” (KAWAI, 2007, p. 41-42). Therefore, nothingness is not negativity, but something that is beyond the positive and negative aspects, beyond the words and expresses within itself in a potentiality. In the first chapter of *The Japanese psyche*, in particular, it is possible to notice a cultural distinction raised by Kawai, which was also discussed by philosophers, psychologists and other authors of eastern thought.

The philosopher Nishida Kitaro, for example, the cultural difference between East and West is widely based on the idea that the foundation of reality to the West is the Self, thus, the form. On the other hand, to the eastern, is *nothingness*, the formless (KITARO apud HESIG, 2013, p. 101). It implies on the shape of eastern and western thoughts, which were identified by Jung in terms of psychological characteristics and psychical attitudes as completely different. In general, western man is extroverted, that is, one who is guided from the outside world, through objective conditions. Oppositely, the thought of the introvert type, predominant in East, would be one who is oriented to subjective elements (JUNG, 2011, p. 17-18). According to Jung, “The West is always seeking uplift, but the East seeks a sinking or deepening” (JUNG 2011, p. 113). Kawai sustains his work through this distinction, that allows to continue on his definition and construction of a Nipponese’s ego image.

In the second chapter, entitled “The woman who eats nothing” describes the negative side of the woman and the maternity. As well as a stepmother who appears in fairy tales to emphasize the negative aspects of motherhood, the 山乳母 (*Yama-Uba*) – a figure of Japanese folklore and a kind of

devouring woman – emerges in this chapter as a representation of the devourer aspect of the great mother, from where everything is born and to where everything returns. Subsequently, the subsequent chapters of *The Japanese psyche* present a series of female figures derived from Japanese imagination, such as non-human wives, persistent, insistent and determined women, and others.

The stories chosen by the author intend to demonstrate the extreme force of attraction that unconscious plays in Japanese psyche. Thus, he suggests that the eyes through which the Japanese see the world and reality are located in the unconscious, and not on the surface of consciousness. It is called to have “half-closed eyes” (KAWAI, 2007, p. 187-191).

Throughout his work, the author points out that one of the characteristics of the Japanese people is the lack of a clear distinction between inner and outer worlds, which means, between conscious and unconscious fields. This feature, according to Kawai, can be represented through figures like 襖 (*fusuma*) or 障子 (*shouji*), respectively the “sliding window” and the thin “paper door”, symbols commonly presents in everyday life and in the eastern culture which metaphorically indicate a greater permeability between conscious and unconscious.

It becomes clear that Kawai in the course of his work outlines these details in order to create an ego profile that not only stands out from the western model, but also points out some typical cultural characteristics of Japanese people. Therefore, he makes use of numerous comparisons and metaphors, beyond the comparisons between western and eastern folk tales, in order to support his theory. It is noteworthy that the author introduces a new point of view about consciousness and the eastern ego, although it seems to forget or ignore important concepts of Jungian psychology, as the inner feminine figure-of the masculine ego: the anima.

Specifically in the ninth chapter, called “The determined woman”, Kawai systematizes what is his feminine figure of ego, which he comes to nominate as “determined woman”. This female figure, which has striking characteristics of passivity and strength to face the difficulties, would be the one who best reflects the Japanese ego; it is more connected with the general way of life of men and women in Japanese society (KAWAI, 2007, p. 173). It is a consciousness that seeks totality, to take back what was cut or deleted. Then, she accepts whatever comes, even imperfection or internal contradictions. It is a diverse

and multifaceted ego, which can include the totality (KAWAI, 2007, p. 238).

As Jung and his followers pointed out, folklore and mythology are a rich source of understanding the human mind, its symbols and its nuances (HENDERSON apud JUNG, 2008, p.137). Thus, it was developed a method of analysis of the folkloric and mythic material, which reveals, little by little, the elements and dynamics of the psyche. Kawai use this method, but he innovates it by bringing a specific analysis of the Japanese folklore and its cultural diversity, and emphasizes the strength of the female figure as a major player in the ego’s development process. It is worth considering that several female figures included in Kawai’s book do not make a sequential stage of ego development, but appear supposedly as multiple layers of a totality.

In general, the book is an invitation to explore the Japanese stories, myths and the culture richness of the East, through the perspective of analytical psychology. A comprehensive work which encourages the readers to immerse themselves in the complexity of Japanese thought. Moreover, the *Japanese psyche* is a portrait and historical component of one of the first steps of Jungian psychology on Japanese land. ■

A psique japonesa – grandes temas dos contos de fadas japoneses

Resumo

O presente artigo propõe-se a analisar criticamente o livro A psique japonesa – grandes temas dos contos de fadas japoneses, escrito pelo psicólogo analítico japonês Hayao Kawai. Após uma contextualização do autor e de sua obra, que objetivou transformar a psicologia analítica em um corpo de pensamento e práxis que pudesse se apropriar da mente japonesa, realiza-se um breve exame crítico da obra do psicólogo japonês e de sua formulação teórica. ■

Palavras-chave: psicologia analítica, contos de fadas japoneses, Hayao Kawai, cultura japonesa.

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