The cultural translation of the “Red Book” in Japan: from a pre-modern and postmodern perspective

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1. Translation of the “Red Book” and its cultural translation

The original title asked by the conference organizer was “Japanese translation of the Red Book”. I translated the Red Book from German, always referring to the English translation, noticing many errors in English versions. The translation was organized in a team, but to keep the style constant, I basically translated alone; other members checked my translation, with the exception of the long introduction translated by Yasuhiro Tanaka and the scrutinies in whose case I checked and corrected the first translation. I don’t want to repeat such a reckless enterprise any more. The Japanese translation was published in June 2010, half a year after the German and English editions, as the first translation to appear apart from the English one. You could imagine how hard the translation team worked with many sleepless nights. But the team felt responsible for the translation and the expectation among the reader was very high. The book was reprinted third times and, despite the expensive price, about 3,000 copies were sold. So it was quite successful.

In this presentation, I don’t speak about the concrete, linguistic translation, but would like to deal with cultural translation. How the Red Book can be read from Japanese, or in certain cases, East Asian point of view. The Red Book is surely rooted in the Western tradition. Without referring to and confrontation with the Western background, it is impossible to understand and evaluate this work rightly. But on the other hand, it is important to bring our subjective background to approach this work. In case of psychological reading the subjective factor plays an important role, which should be made conscious.

Moreover, if Jung stopped working on the Red Book after having read the “The Secret of the Golden Flower”, a Chinese text, it would also stimulating and creative to read the Red Book from a cross-cultural point of view.

My presentation here is based on my paper in the Journal of Analytical Psychology: The Red Book from a pre-modern perspective: the position of the ego, sacrifice and the dead. I changed a bit and added some new points.

2. Modern consciousness

Position of the ego

The Red Book is characterized by overwhelming, rich materials from the unconscious. It is striking to notice that most of symbolic materials Jung dealt with in his collected works appear in this book. But to be sincere, I was not impressed by the rich materials out of the unconscious, but the function of strong ego consciousness in this book. I will explain this in reference to several aspects.

In the first Book overwhelming images and visions are depicted. There was a famous initiating vision where the northern part of Europe was covered by a flood. After two weeks the vision returned. Jung
thought his ‘mind had gone crazy’ (p. 231). He expressed at various times the anxiety of becoming psychotic. But we have to mention that all these images and visions, however tremendous they might be, are very clearly seen and grasped. And the clearness of images must be due to a stable standpoint of the observing ego. That is why Jung could have images and visions which are not confused. This does not indicate a psychosis at all. The content could be extraordinary, but the syntactic structure is unshaken and still intact. This is why it is important to distinguish the syntactic aspect from the semantic.

The characteristic feature of schizophrenic thought consists not in its bizarre contents but in the mode of being seen, being observed, as schizophrenics often paint many eyes in their pictures—they feel observed. They do not have visions but rather acoustic hallucinations. This is not to be understood as a difference in sensory modes, between visual and acoustic, but as a difference in mode of being. German humanistic psychiatrist Zutt explained in his classic paper ‘Der Blick und die Stimme’ (the gaze and the voice) that the voice of the schizophrenics is the expression of being spoken to and seen instead of being (Zutt 1957). We can speak here about the loss of subjectivity: the other is overwhelming the subject and destroying its functioning. So Jung did not need to be worried about the onset of psychosis since he could keep the observing subject safe.

I would like to make a cultural side remark that there are very few reports of vision in Japanese history. There are some Buddhistic stories in ‘Nihon-Ryoiki’ (9th century) which have the features of visions, but they could be imitations of Indian or Chinese works. The lack of visions is due to the ambiguous differentiation of subject and object in the Japanese psyche and culture.

The second point has to do with the function of emotion. Jung was overwhelmed by the images, which produced strong emotions. These emotional reactions are also very often mentioned in the first Book. For example, at the beginning, Jung says, ‘From then on the anxiety toward the terrible event that stood directly before us kept coming back’ (p. 231). In the third chapter, ‘I follow, but it terrifies me’ (p. 235). At the beginning anxiety and fear are especially remarkable. The style and atmosphere are really dramatic.

Later the feeling of anger comes up, too. For example in Chapter 6: ‘But I was indignant at him and said, “How can I sink? I am unable to do this myself” ’ (p. 240) (‘Ich aber empörte mich gegen ihn und sprach’). In this chapter, the rage of the ego is strongly noticeable. The emotion has, so to speak, a dialectic function. It is of course caused by the surprising invasion of the unconscious and so proves the dominance of the unconscious. But on the other hand it underlines and reinforces the existence of the ego which is centered and highlighted due to the emotional reactions. You can have anxiety because you are aware of yourself and afraid of losing yourself. So anxiety strengthens the ego. Strong emotional reactions in the first book do not necessarily confirm the dominance of the unconscious but rather the existence of the ego as a solid reference point.

The stable position of the ego can also be noticed in the conversation with the soul or psychic other. In Chapter 3 of the first Book ‘On the Service of the Soul’, Jung says to his soul, ‘I should give myself completely into your hands’ (p. 235). There is a total devotion to the soul and self-abandonment. Nevertheless he continues, ‘but who are you?’ This question makes it clear that there is a position from where the question can be posed. The more important and overwhelming the soul is, the more significant the position of the ego who stands vis-à-vis to the soul. Jung never forgets the position of the ego.

The position of the ego is not only discernible in relation to the figures with whom it interacts: it is not
lost even in the utmost crisis. The experience of hell was surely terrible. Jung wrote: ‘No one knows what happened during the three days Christ was in Hell. I have experienced it’ (p. 243). But on the other hand Jung said: ‘He who journeys to Hell also becomes Hell; therefore do not forget from whence you come’ (p. 244). So he has never lost sight of the position of the ego. This was not a total loss.

Despite the overwhelming contents of visions and emotional reactions, then, the standpoint of the ego is never lost. This is a striking, formal characteristic of The Red Book, to which we have to pay more attention.

**Tragedy and comedy**

As we have seen, in the first Book the stable position of the ego is noticeable, despite and because of the overwhelming experiences and images. The more the ego suffers, the more it proves its existence. I suffer, therefore I am. We can call it proof of the ego via tragedy.

In the second book, Jung seems to gain more distance from the images. The images are no longer as threatening as they were in the first book. There is also a historical distance from the images. For example, when Ammonius tried to attack Jung, he could not reach him: ‘He jumps up incensed and wants to lunge at me. But I am far away in the twentieth century’ (p. 272). Similarly, in front of the powerful God, Izdubar, Jung knows quite clearly that he lives in the world of science where the ancient worldview is not valid anymore.

In the second book Jung is not overwhelmed by the images, but is even rather superior to them. For example, one of the lowly in Chapter 3 was a person who came out of prison and was very poor and weak. Jung had to pay for the dinner and the night’s accommodation. The God Izdubar, bull-man, collapses and sobs like a child after he was taught by Jung that he was not immortal. Philemon was not a powerful and spiritual person like Elijah in the first Book. And even Elijah is powerless in the second Book. After having heard that his serpent was stolen by Jung, Elijah tried to curse him. But Jung replied: ‘Your curse is powerless. Whoever possesses the serpent cannot be touched by curses’ (p. 324).

With such changes, the story is not serious and tragic anymore but rather comical. The freedom and confidence of the ego lead to comedy. Every story in the second Book is somehow comical. In the first Book Jung expressed a real concern about going mad. But in the second Book, Jung was sent to a psychiatric clinic in his dream. The conversation with the Professor evokes humorous feeling because there is no real danger.

In the medical consultation Jung said to the Professor: ‘But Professor, I’m not at all sick, I feel perfectly well’. The Professor answered: ‘Look, my dear. You don’t have any insight into your illness yet. The prognosis is naturally pretty bad, with at best limited recovery’ (p. 295).

So the ego manifests itself in the second Book via comedy. But it is important to notice that the ego insists on its existence throughout, whether by way of tragedy or comedy.

**Internalization**

Internalization is another key aspect of the formal point of view. Jung seems to be aware that he does not live in the pre-modern world. He confesses, for example, that he does not know how to pray to the sun: ‘I should not forget my morning prayer – but where has my morning prayer gone? Dear sun, I
have no prayer, since I do not know how one must address you’ (p. 271). He invented some afterwards. But the emphasis seemed to be laid on the loss of the prayer.

In this sense there is no God any more because God appears in a concrete prayer or ritual. Jung’s experience of the Elgonyi in Uganda is a good example. The indigenous people there praise the sun when it comes up, as described by an old man who said: ‘In the morning, when the sun comes up, we go out of the huts, spit into our hands, and hold them up to the sun’ (Jung 1963, p. 296). This old man could not explain the meaning of the ritual, but said: ‘We’ve always done it’. Then Jung had to realize that religious experience consists not in the symbolic meaning but in the pure performance carried out by the community. So without a ritual or prayer based on the tradition there is no God any more.

While the death and rebirth of the God were seriously and literally made a theme of the first Book, the rebirth of God was realized in the second Book as the internalization of God. After the God Izdubar had collapsed, Jung had to transport him. In order to carry him Jung made Izdubar into a mere fantasy. ‘I am basically convinced that Izdubar is hardly real in the ordinary sense, but is a fantasy’ (p. 282). Because the fantasy ‘takes up no space’ and Jung can ‘squeeze Izdubar into the size of an egg and put him in the pocket’, Jung can transport him easily. When Izdubar came out of the egg again, this was understood as the rebirth of God.

But for us it is more important to notice that the rebirth of God became possible by way of internalization. As Jung writes, God ‘did not pass away, but became a living fantasy’. ‘If we turn the God into fantasy, he is in us and is easy to bear’ (p. 283). The literal death and rebirth of God in the first Book is realized in the second Book more psychologically through the idea of internalization. This is the achievement of The Red Book. Due to this internalization, Jung could establish his psychology, which deals with God and rituals, as an inner reality. So the rebirth of God was for Jung not a literal rebirth, but rather the birth of psychology which is based on the idea of internalization and the reality of fantasy. In Psychological Types Jung says his famous motto which is quoted often by James Hillman: ‘The psyche creates reality every day. The only expression I can use for this activity is fantasy’ (Jung 1921, para. 78).

If I may make another cultural side remark, this clear-cut differentiation of inner and outer reality is also something foreign to Japanese culture. There is a long tradition in Japan of expressing the soul as a concrete thing or art for which Ikebana and Japanese gardens are typical examples. To put it precisely, in the art of the garden, the soul resides. That is why sandplay therapy is very popular in Japan (Kawai 2010). So the clear internalization is admirable, but for the Japanese psyche it remains a foreign achievement.

Intersection of the modern and the pre-modern

The Red Book consists of Jung’s spontaneous visions and imaginations. But I have the impression that many images are certainly extraordinary, but not so convincing. I would like to explain this impression. In the “Memories, dreams, reflections” (MDR) there was a famous description after Jung’s mother death. On his way back from his mother’s funeral Jung had a strange experience:

I went home immediately, and while I rode in the night train I had a feeling of great grief, but in my heart of hearts I could not be mournful, and this for a strange reason: during the entire journey I continually heart dance music, laughter, and jollity, as though a wedding were being celebrated.
From this experience, Jung concluded that death was not only sad end, but a wedding, a completion of union. But the question is, if this experience was really spontaneous. Giegerich pointed out that this vision could be influenced by Jung’s scholarly and habitual knowledge. For example there was the custom of All Souls’ Day which was a ritual celebrated by each family of the whole community. So although Jung’s joyful vision was strange and spontaneous, it could be stage-managed by him. The same could be said to the visions and imaginations in the Red Book. Although they look spontaneous, there is a suspect that they were produced by Jung based on his wide knowledge of myths, fairytales and rituals. So the images are not truly pre-modern, but are grasped and presented by the modern consciousness.

Such an enterprise to present archaic, pre-modern images personally was only possible and necessary because they were about to disappear. Sonu Shamdasani pointed out in his introduction that Jung’s Red Book was not peculiar at that time. Many writers tried to depict the full range of inner experience and psychologists left literally works exploring themselves. Writers and artists were interested in their inner experiences that were vestige of pre-modern culture.

This timing is probably quite global. In Japan, “The Legends of Tono” was published by Kunio Yanagita (1875-1962) in 1910. Kunio Yanagita was founder of Japanese folklore studies and lived almost the same lifetime as Jung, born in 1875 died in 1962. “The Legends of Tono” is a collection of 119 short tales from Tono region in Tohoku Japan and has become Japanese folklore and literature classic. But afterwards no similar work was possible. At that time there was a strong interest for otherworldly beings in the literature. I think people became interested in such stories because they were on the intersection of the pre-modern and the modern. Jung’s Red Book came into being on the intersection of the modern and the pre-modern, as the looking back the pre-modern.

3. Pre-modern world

As we have seen, the Red Book is more characterized by its modern consciousness than its so-called archaic contents. Moreover, the archaic contents could be not spontaneous but artificial. But there are pre-modern aspects which seem to be convincing in the Red Book. These are sacrifice and dead.

**Sacrifice**

Concerning sacrifice which involves the bodily sensation and image, Jung is no longer aloof from the vision. For example, the chapter ‘The Sacrificial Murder’ in the second Book is very impressive. Jung was compelled to eat a piece of liver from the dead girl. A woman who is supposed to be the soul of this girl asks Jung: ‘Step nearer and you will see that the body of the child has been cut open; take out the liver’. She asks further: ‘Take a piece of the liver, in place of the whole, and eat it’ (p. 290). Jung was reluctant and tried to avoid it, but finally he ate a piece of liver.

I kneel down on the stone, cut off a piece of the liver and put it in my mouth. My gorge rises – tears burst from my eyes – cold sweat covers my brow – a dull sweet taste of blood – I swallow with desperate efforts – it is impossible – once again and once again – I almost faint – it is done. The horror has been accomplished.

(p. 290)

I would like to mention one more scene of sacrifice. This is a scene of self-dismemberment which reminds me of the vision of Zosimos. Jung trampled upon himself using a winepress machine:
I have trodden the winepress alone and no one is with me. I have trodden myself down in my anger, and trampled upon myself in my fury. Hence my blood has spattered my clothes, and I have stained my robe.

For I have afforded myself a day of vengeance, and the year to redeem myself has come.

(p. 300, citing Isaiah 63:3 – 4)

These scenes are of course tremendous. But I have the impression that they are much more real for me and familiar. They remind me of many novels of the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. In his stories violent and cruel scenes are frequently described that could be connected with pre-modern cults and rituals (Kawai 2004). For example in *Kafka on the Shore* (2005 [2002]) the character Johnnie Walker, who may be the father of the protagonist, a boy named Kafka, must take out the heart of a cat and eat it, then cut off the head of the cat. This act is not only perverse and cruel, but evokes some ritualistic associations and meanings. The extraordinary popularity of Haruki Murakami’s books in Japan shows that such violent scenes can appeal to modern Japanese people, to the Japanese psyche. And not only in Japan but in the modern world in general, the numinous can probably no longer appear in either a ritual or through the symbolic, but in direct violence and sexuality. The numinous used to be mediated by rituals and symbols which were carried out by the community. But because rituals and symbols have lost their power in the community, the numinous can only appear directly through violence and sexuality which however have no clear meaning (Kawai 2006).

**Redemption of the dead**

Another important theme in *The Red Book* seems to me the redemption of the dead. The whole sermon of Philemon is devoted to the dead. But the dead have already been mentioned in several places. For example, Jung says in Chapter 15 of the second Book: ‘You will thus redeem all those roaming dead who strive to feed on the living’ (p. 296); and ‘For the dead need salvation. The number of the unredeemed dead has become greater than the number of living Christians; therefore it is time that we accept the dead’ (p. 297).

There is always a question of whether we are to understand the dead metaphorically and symbolically, or should take it as referring to the actual dead. And as the quotation suggests there are complicated matters concerning Christianity. But, as my approach here is based on the pre-modern point of view and especially the Japanese one, I shall skip all those aspects and try to see only from this point of view. My approach is legitimate because the dead in ‘Scrutinies’ give the impression that they are the real dead.

Now I would like to shed light on the theme of the dead and their redemption from the Japanese point of view. In the Japanese worldview the ancestors are gods who return to the world regularly. The equinoctial day in Spring and Autumn and the Bon festival in Summer are occasions on which the ancestors come back. It is striking how these festivals appear and play a decisive role in dreams, even if the dreamer does not pay much attention to those festivals. People live in touch with the dead, or the dead continue to live in touch with living people. It is a terrible thing if the dead cannot have contact with people in this world. That is why the treatment of soldiers killed during the Second World War has been a big issue in Japan. The same is to be said about the dead through natural disasters or accidents. Unredeemed dead are dangerous. They need devotion.

In the ‘Scrutinies’ the dead came back because they had not found redemption. This is a very precarious situation. It may have to do with the victims of the First World War. But the dead probably
could not find redemption because traditional religions and worldview are not valid anymore, at least in the Occident. Normally, at least in a pre-modern worldview, the dead need offering and prayers. But the dead here say: ‘Not your blood, but your light’. They do not need offerings. There is spiritual, intellectual and reflective need expressed from the side of the dead. So their redemption is the sermon of Philemon which is highly interesting. It starts with the phrase ‘Nothingness is the same as the fullness’ (p. 346).

I cannot go into the meaning of this sermon extensively here. But the sermon to the dead seems to suggest that our relationship to the dead, and probably to the unconscious, has changed. It is neither ritualistic nor symbolic any more, but reflective, mental, philosophical. In connection with sacrifice I pointed out that the numinous today can only appear in the direct mode of violence and sexuality. But the sermon of Philemon may suggest that we can find a new form of mediation instead of the ritualistic and symbolic one.

Philemon taught the dead in The Red Book. And in the Black Book Jung himself taught the dead. But Jung himself is already dead. So The Red Book has become the teaching of a dead, the dead Jung. Redemption would therefore be to understand his work on the reflective level and give it back to him.

4. Postmodern perspective

While translating the Red Book, I was often struck that many figures in this book were used now in comic and animation books and computer games. If you put one of those names in the “google”, you will find those cites connected with games and animation first, than far after them mythological explanations.

This means that such figures are now used totally out of context of the original mythological background. Sometimes the story behind the figure is still important, sometimes the name is simply taken and used.

This is the postmodern situation in which images are arbitrary. But does Jungian analysis have a bit postmodern tendency? We analyze and amplify a dream with the materials totally out of its own cultural context. A dream of a Swiss person is referred to a Chinese symbolism, for example.

Jung’s way of working with the Red Book was also quite postmodern. His images are mostly based on the Christian tradition, but other kinds of images from various cultures were used and cited. Egyptian myths and figures are such examples.

There is a loose series and continuation in the images and stories, but each night, each time Jung dived into one scene and communicated with figures in the imagination. This is also similar to a postmodern situation in which we dive into a site and meet various figures in the Internet, or we enter a virtual scene in a game.

While games and virtual reality tend to end with only killing time, Jung’s psychology and analysis seems to try to take advantage of using this postmodern method to transform the personality. In this sense with the disappearing pre-modern world, Jungian psychology could have still chance in the contemporary, globalized world.