Practicing Jungian Analysis in East Asia

A Western Perspective

Marta Tibaldi

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Just a premise

One day, during one of my visits to East Asia suddenly I thought: this is my lottery win! Why did I think to a lottery win? Because... because, this is the story I want to tell you today.

In my life one of my biggest wishes was always to work abroad, in another culture, speaking another language. There was a time when I thought my ideal place would be Germany – I loved their language and their way of living – and by then it did not occur to me that I could work outside Europe. My thoughts and wishes were kept within my Western reality. Many years later, when I realized that probably I would never have gone to work outside Italy, a colleague asked me: “Would you like to go to China?”

“Would I like to go to China?” “Of course I would!” I answered immediately. That answer represented the first step of my journey to East Asia, the one that also brought me here today.

I decided to start my reflection about my Western way of practicing Jungian analysis in East Asia from this memory, because it represents the true starting point of my relationship with you, dearest colleagues. Dearest, indeed: as a matter of fact the more I come to East Asia, the more I appreciate you and your culture, feeling increasingly familiar with you. When I say “familiar” I intend the feeling of a deep connection. In this regard I want to tell you an anecdote from my childhood.

When I was a child, my mother used to call me Pen-Li, a name she invented that sounded somehow Chinese to our Western ears. She called me like that because she thought there was

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1 The colleague was Dr. Eva Pattis, former Liaison Person for the Hong Kong Developing Group.
something Chinese about me. Why? I do not know, but as far as I remember, this something Chinese has been sounding in my infant consciousness since then. Now I am here, fulfilling perhaps that my being “Chinese” somewhere inside of me? I do not know, but I am sure that this inner attitude towards you represented over time a meaningful and positive prerequisite of my practicing analysis in East Asia.

And now let’s focus on three aspects of it.

Naturally my reflections could go much further than those I will be presenting here, but, as Lao-Tzu says, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” 2. My reflections wish to outline then three aspects of my professional commitment towards you and hopefully the expression of a reciprocal relationship in the spirit of respect, friendship and cooperation.

First step, first theme of reflection:

“Chinese” and “Western” inside ourselves

Working with Italian students and reflecting on some current aspects towards Chinese in our country, I realized that by a certain time – I could say since their presence grew massively - there has been an increase of collective injury against them, often not supported at all by any knowledge of the real “Chinese” and of their culture nor by any boost to inquiry.

Nowadays the image of “Chinese” seems to constellate, at least in a certain Italian collective imaginary, an irrational negative reaction, based more on the unconscious fear of the unknown then on real elements. Although on the one hand “Chinese” are assimilated to the many immigrants who arrive in Italy from all over the world, on the other they are experienced as more different than others – for example a leitmotiv of complaint regards they be a “closed” community. They are perceived then as more incomprehensible and frightening than others and that seems to be one of the reasons why the image of “Chinese” tends to gather on itself large unconscious layers of psychic personal and collective shadow.

As you know within the Jungian analytical psychology the notion of “shadow” refers to all those unrecognized aspects of personality and collectivity, which tend to be thrown out. The more your cultural shadows parts are unconscious the more they are projected outside, on the next. In Jungian analysis “coming to terms with the shadow” means to develop an awareness of those personal and cultural stimuli that are likely to produce your shadow projections, moving towards their integration.

When you withdraw personal and cultural shadow projections, the possibility of a dialogue, confrontation and awareness opens up either in the inner or in the outer world. Therefore approaching analytically the Western personal and cultural image of “Chinese inside” can

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2 Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching, chapter 64.
reveal itself as a real treasure to be discovered and a prerequisite that is necessary for the analysts who wants to practice analysis in East Asia.

In a seminar I held in Hong Kong I addressed this issue extensively, reflecting not only on the cultural bias that we Western may have towards “Chinese” but, on the reverse, also on the image that you Eastern may have of us “Western”. As an example, it looks to my Western eyes as if, while we are trying to take distance from you, as carriers of our unknown and frightening parts, you seem to be running after us, in a sort of idealized mood, with a certain lack of critical stance towards us. “Chinese” and “Western” seem then to be overcharged unconscious images and when we start recognizing that they are emotional unaware images acting inside ourselves, we begin to come to terms with them, withdrawing prejudices and projections: an inescapable premise to practice analysis as Western in East Asia.

To move from theory to practice and in order to show what I am saying, I want to tell you an active imagination by an Italian student, in response to my enquiry to discuss her image of “Chinese inside” in a training seminar. My request arose from the need to verify the unconscious aspects of this emotional experience among students.

Let’s see what happened. First of all, the student decided to write her experience of active imatination in third person, using my technique of Double Objectivation. Double Objectification is a technique I developed over time aimed at approaching your psychic experiences from a more detached position. After having written down your dreams, spontaneous images, active imaginations etc. in first person, they are objectified a second time in third person. I will present this technique in practice in the workshop on Deep writing at the end of week here in Taipei.

Going back to the student’s experience, her choice to write it in third person is already a hint of her need to take distance from images experienced as too intense and dangerous.

This is the student’s active imagination:

The student writes: “The student sees a first image from the movie Farewell My sweet Concubine, a 1993 Chinese drama film directed by Chen Kaige. [In the direct form you would have had this sentence: I see a first image from the movie Farewell My sweet Concubine]:

The patient remembers this movie sequence: [I remember this movie sequence]

“A very poor woman carries her little son in an acting school, but the owner refuses the child because of a birth defect, a superfluous finger, which makes him monstrous and abnormal. The mother brings the child around the corner, gets a sharp knife and cuts off the extra finger. Then she signs the contract with his thumb print in blood and leaves after giving him her robe.

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4 I presented this technique in Hong Kong in the seminar “The technique of Double Objectivation. Making the Ego ad the Ego style visible”, Hong Kong, May 2012.
Seeing this image, the student thinks it is too superficial and so she decides to wait for another image.

Then it appears the image of Mao Zedong, but it fades out immediately, because the student considers it again too superficial: “Maybe I’m wrong to make these judgments” – thinks the patient – “but that’s it!”

[…] Then the student sees a white sheet, stained in a really deep blue ink. The student associates it to an image she saw in the movie The Last Emperor, a movie by the Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci. She realizes that the sheet reminded the image of the little Emperor, […] when he forced his scribe to drink some dark ink. The scribe did it because he wanted to show the Emperor his blind obedience, also if he knew that he would have died, as it happened. The student comments: “It seems that a part of my unconscious is linked to cruelty, violence, blind obedience, meaninglessness, sadism and masochism, pleasure of the deadly game.”

In the same night, the student had this dream: “She was at the top of a staircase in a very large and ancient building, like Palazzo Massimo in Rome. She saw the stairs from above. Then appeared the image of the great sage Athenagoras. This seems to be a compensation dream” – comments the student – “in which my unconscious is sharing me the image of my positive old wise Man.”

Of course you could dwell on this material analytically and there would be much to comment, but this is not the aim of my reflection now. For my purpose here I only what to notice how much the student’s image of the Chinese inside is loaded with negative and frightening emotions and how on the contrary the Greek image of Athenagoras is positively associated with wisdom.

Hence what I want to stress, coming back to our inner attitude towards Eastern patients, is this: as the anthropologists in their work are asked to observe the culture and population in front of them without any preconceived position and leaving behind their shoulders, as far as possible, any form of ethnocentrism, also Western Jungian analysts wanting to practice in East Asia need to approach Eastern patients and culture with, so to speak, “an innocent eye” and “an open heart”, cleaning up the images they may have of that culture and clients from any projection and prejudice related to their image of “Chinese inside”.

With a gaze of conscious innocence, heart in hand, emptying our mind, welcoming.

5 Palazzo Massimo alle Terme in Rome is a nineteenth-century palace in Neo-Renaissance style and houses one of the world’s most important collections of classical art.
6 Athenagoras of Athens was a philosopher who converted to Christianity in the second century.
Second step, second theme of reflection:

Language as a meeting point

When we practice analysis in East Asia we use a working language, usually English.

As you know, I am Italian native speaker, I am not bilingual and moreover I learned English as an adult. This means that I process my English mainly at a conscious level. Having not an automatic mastery of the language, I happen to have difficulties and hardships and I am in constant need to focus the words, looking as far as possible to use them in the right way.

This linguistic awareness made me think about the different verbal relationships we can build with our clients, when we use a foreign language as meeting point. For example we can find ourselves in different situation as follows:

An English not native speaking analyst practices with an English not native speaking analysand

or

A native English analyst practices with a not native English speaker analysand.

Of course we could have also other matches, for example, a native or not native English analyst practicing with a not native English speaker but bilingual (as it happens in Hong Kong).

The first match is the one that interest me the most, either because it reflects my personal situation, or because both analyst and analysand are reciprocally engaged in creating a linguistic meeting point. In their analytical relationship they are asked to be the most precise possible, reflecting continuously on what they wish to communicate. Analyst and patient use English as a bridge and are engaged in building together a linguistic meeting and melting space. Foreign language becomes a stimulus towards consciousness and encounter (at least at the linguistic level).

The linguistic stance is more complicated – but also very challenging – when the analyst is not native English and the analysand not even speaks English and needs a translator. I remember a very intriguing session – it was here in Taipei – in which I Italian was speaking English, the patient was Taiwanese and was speaking Mandarin, the translator was Taiwanese and translated Mandarin into English. The situation was rather paradoxical and at that time it brought to my mind the image of an Italian child’s game from my childhood called “Wireless phone” (no wireless phone existed back then, so the name was very futuristic!). I explain it shortly:

The children sit in a circle. One child goes first to think of a word or a phrase, which should hand the child’s ear which is located to its right. The last of the group say aloud. Normally the last of the group says a world or a phrase that is completely different from the initial.
The amusement comes from the unexpected linguistic result that can be totally different from what the first child said.

In that session I had the impression that we all were in a sort of Wireless Phone game: everybody was saying something but none of us knew exactly if we really got what the other meant to say. Here a careful attention to the emotions in the field and the transference-countertransference movements can be orientating and of great help.

A Native English analyst practices with a not native English speaker analysand.

In this relationship, it is easy to notice that there is an asymmetry between the analyst and the analysand. The analyst masters the language in which they talk, while the analysand uses a language that it is not theirs. Here the analyst should speak to the patient with a continuous focus and awareness of the words they use in order to rebalance, as far as possible, the linguistic gap among them and they had to remember, as Hillman notices, that when you speak your native language often you do it automatically and unconsciously.  

Practicing analysis in different culture and in different language then compels us to be constantly aware of the “weight” of the words we are using. As you know the first definition given of psychoanalysis was “talking cure” but, as Paul Kugler writes, “talking cure” does not mean only a therapy that cures through words, but also that we analysts need to cure the words we use in our practice in order to make them full and effective. This is why James Hillman invited also on his death’s bed to “find the right words” because “Finding the right words is fantastic. It is so important […] Words are like pillows: if put correctly they ease the pain”.  

Taking a lead from them, and following the interest I always had on this matter, in a paper I wrote I presented a clinical proposal for Eastern patients who cannot have regular sessions over time; a proposal that I provisionally called, in honor of James Hillman, The right words Therapy. It is an approach aimed at making each single session a complete session in itself. It comes from the full attention to the words that are used by both the patient and the analyst. By ‘sticking to’ the dreams or to deep images that the client brings into the session, the analyst finds with the patient

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8 S. Freud, Studies on Hysteria (1892-95), CW, 1. - .  
9 In therapeutic analysis the treatment of a patient’s complex is accomplished through the talking cure. However, not only is the patient unconscious of the role the language plays in the personality, but the therapist as well is often unaware of the subtle effects his words have on the patient P. Kugler, The Alchemy of Discourse. An Archetypal Approach to Language, New York: Associated University Press, 1982  
10 These are the words Hillman said, in one of the last interviews he gave before dying, to Silvia Ronchey, an Italian professor and journalist, in “Addio a Hillman, così si muore da filosofo antico” [Farewell to Hillman, this is an old philosopher’s way of dying] (Ronchey, 2011).  
‘the right words’ which bring together the experience of the session and expresses it metaphorically.  

The right words therapy helps the client to reflect clearly on the problem they worked out in that single session with the analyst, and it helps to express the essence of the session itself, and provides the therapist and patient with an easy and clear link with which and through which they can reconnect to their previous session in the sessions that follow, irrespective of the distant in space and time between the sessions.

A short clinical example of the use of “the right words”:

A patient tells me that for some months he is having a recurrent dream: he dreams he has a denture in his mouth. In reality this denture is redundant, because in his mouth he has all his natural teeth. In order to overcome the problem, the dreamer swallows his dentures but this action makes him feel suffocated and he wakes up full of anxiety.

Awaken he tries to interpret his dream rationally – “I need to swallow this and this, etc.” - without sticking with unconscious images and what they are telling per se, that is the fact that he has got a redundant denture [we do not know why] that should not stand in his mouth and that swallowing turns out to be the wrong solution. Working on the information coming from the images, we find these right words expressing the dream’s message: “Spit your denture!”

When we speak loud these words the dreamer can “look through” the images of his dream and he experiences emotionally that he has got “too many teeth in his mouth” (literal meaning) and he has “to spit them out of the mouth” (symbolic meaning).

From the viewpoint of literal and symbolic meaning, The right words therapy is a way of responding to the invitation of Jung to take the images literally [in this case “there is a redundant denture in the mouth” ] but treating them symbolically [ “what does it mean for the patient having a redundant denture in his mouth?” ], as we keep in mind his invitation to strive always “to transform knowledge in life”.  

Third step, third theme of reflection:

Personal-Impersonal indirect approach

Practicing analysis within a different culture represents a challenge on different levels. One of them is to recognize, to differentiate and to integrate in a symbolic and shared narrative what belongs to the client’s personal history and what belongs to their journey as human being who is confronted with pivotal events of life. As a matter of fact all of us as human beings, either the Western analyst or the Eastern clients, are confronted with the same central facts of existence,

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12 When I say metaphorically I am referring to that way to know, to understand, to have vision through analogies. See below my “Third step, third theme of reflection”.

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such as birth, growth, separation, illness, death etc. but in every part of the world we interpret our being human beings in many cultural ways and many different images.\footnote{In this regard I remembered my surprise when I knew that, for example, while we Western tend to process our emotional experience of “poor visibility” through images of darkness, that is as lack of light, in the East Asia instead are more likely to appear images of fog or smoke. The emotional underlying experience is the same but its representation is different.}

In order to understand each other and to give a symbolic expression to our personal and cultural stories as analysts practicing in a foreign country we need to turn carefully either to our common deep emotional experiences as human beings or to the different cultural images through which we and our clients process them, “looking through” them metaphorically, as Jung and Hillman taught us, and finding imaginal and shared narratives to tell them reciprocally.

When I say “metaphorically” I am referring to that way of knowing, of understanding, of seeing through analogies, that recognizes the similarities deep below the cultural differences and yet integrates both of them in a narrative whose symbols are mutually understood. I am speaking then of analogical thinking, that is the process you put in action when you compare and use the information belonging to one domain to have insight in another domain, the so called “problem”.\footnote{See M. Tibaldi, “Le parole che curano: il potere archetipico del linguaggio”, in Caro Hillman... Venticinque scambi epistolari con James Hillman, (eds. R. Mondo, L. Turinese), Torino: Boringheri, 2004, pp. 141-147.}

In this perspective one of the analytical challenges that comes with practicing in East Asia is to develop cross-cultural metaphorical words and narratives to tell our stories and those of our clients, using consciously our evolutionary most advanced conquest: that is our being «human speakers», which testify individual and archetypal experiences verbally.\footnote{S. Shamdasani, Liber Novus. The Red Book of C.G. Jung, in C.G. Jung, The Red Book. Liber Novus. A Reader-s Edition, ed. and with an Introduction by S. Shamdasani, quot., p. 51}

Speaking in terms of analogies, you know that in Jungian analysis spontaneous images bridge different domains, bringing information from one to the other naturally. In analogy with what images do spontaneously, the challenge of the analytic practice in a foreign culture is, among others, to link in an intentional, active and metaphorical way the different domains we are dealing with at the time - conscious and unconscious, individual and archetypal, but also East and West and our being Eastern and Western - giving an answer to the challenges coming from these (apparent) dualities and integrating them in a shared imaginal narrative. This is in fact the “hermeneutic treatment of creative fantasies”, that third way that Jung indicates in his Red Book: “This resulted in a synthesis of the individual with the collective psyche, which revealed the individual lifeline”.\footnote{In this regard I remembered my surprise when I knew that, for example, while we Western tend to process our emotional experience of “poor visibility” through images of darkness, that is as lack of light, in the East Asia instead are more likely to appear images of fog or smoke. The emotional underlying experience is the same but its representation is different.}
Practically speaking this means to me, when I practice Jungian analysis in East Asia, to go in search, through active confrontation with images\(^\text{17}\) of “the poetic basis of mind”, that common denominator to the human beings, whatever culture they belong to, but also, as Hillman reminds us, of the images through which that experience is always constructed. In this sense “an essential work of therapy is to become conscious of the fictions in which the patient is cast and to re-write or ghost-write, collaboratively, the story by re-telling it in a more profound and authentic style.” \(^\text{18}\) Then practicing analysis in East Asia means to me either to go in search of the essential archetypal experiences of life, or of the way of telling and retelling their stories through reciprocal and co-constructed stories.

But I need to add also something else. With East Asian patients, which have the habits to be more indirect in their psychological, relational and social behavior, the approach cannot be so direct as we are used to have with Western clients. Considering the strategies of meaning in China and in Greece the sinologist Francois Jullien\(^\text{19}\) underlines how for Western it is normal to approach the world “from the front”, while the Chinese approach it “across”. Jullien argues that Chinese, in politics and in poetry, to the direct comparison prefer an oblique and indirect approach. In this sense in China strategies of knowledge and meaning take place in an indirect way, following a style that differs widely from the Western.\(^\text{20}\)

Analytically speaking, I noticed the same need of indirect approach in Eastern patients, for example, when their dreams images represent their need “to wake up” from dream itself, because of its overwhelming emotional contents and the conflictual experiences with cultural sensitive issues such as “face-saving”.\(^\text{21}\) That’s why I often propose to Eastern patients and trainees my two techniques of “deep writing” aimed at approaching the unconscious material in an indirect way properly (Double Objectivation and Personal-Impersonal Deep Writing).

Both of them are intended to confront the unconscious material moving from the personal to the archetypal level, from the individual to the collective, from culture they belong to the comparison with different cultural view, getting closer and moving away from dreams, spontaneous mages, active imagination etc. in order to let emerge individual, cultural and archetypal layers and integrate them in a metaphorical narrative.

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\(^\text{18}\) See J. Hillman, Healing Fiction, quot.
\(^\text{21}\) As Hu Wenzhong, Cornelius N. Grove and Zhuang Enping write in xxx: “The difference in Chinese and Western concepts of face is that face [...] has a greater social significance for Chinese. In the United States concern for face exists but remains largely out of most people’s awareness. In the People’s Republic, everyone is conscious of face all the time. An oft repeated Chinese proverb puts it thus: <A person needs face as a tree needs bark>. Unlike the United States, in Italy the notion of “face” leads to a paradoxical result: our cultural problem it is not so much about losing face, but rather to being cheeky (“faceless”).
I will present them both in theory and practice in the oncoming workshop I will be holding at the end of next week here in Taipei.

**Conclusion**

As I tried to show, it can be said, without fear of contradiction, that practicing Jungian analysis with East Asian patients is a challenge for Western analysts under many respects, especially when you do not want it to turn it into an experience of cultural exportation and colonization. In fact, practicing analysis in East Asia compels us to focus our attention either to the “dominants” of analysis, in whatever context and culture we do it, or on the cultural specificities we face in the places where we are, sewing together these different levels of meaning and understanding and expressing them through metaphorical words.

The Jungian model of the psyche and its focus on the dynamics between ego and self, with all pairs of opposites that follow, help to hold together the intrinsic human experience of being “one” and “two” at the same time, or, using an Eastern metaphor, the principles of *yin* and *yang* and the eternal transformation of things.\(^{22}\)

When I say “being one” and “being two”, I am referring to what Jung wrote in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* about his being two persons at the same time: “One was the son of my parents, who went to school and was less intelligent, attentive, hard-working, decent, and clean than many other boys. The other was grown-up-old, in fact skeptical, mistrustful, remote from the world of men, but close to nature, the earth, the sun, the moon, the weather, all living creatures, and above all close to the night, to dreams, and to whatever ‘God’ worked directly in him.” \(^{23}\)

Thanks to his experience of confrontation with personality n. 1 and personality n. 2, that is with historical and cultural aspects of his personality as well as with the archetypal layers of himself through images and words, he lead us to the method of the analytical process as confrontation between couples of opposites and their symbolical synthesis, that can be successfully declined either in West and East, although in respect of cultural differences.

Metaphors as Ego-Self axis or the realization of Self, as well as the psyche as a self-regulating system help us either Western or Eastern to be oriented in the experience of subjectivity and objectivity in life. Actual scientific evidences confirm Jung’s and Chinese’s insights about life and the perception of being a duality, striving for unity, and neurosciences of subjective experience offer a model to explain them also scientifically. I refer in particular to the theory of dual-aspect monism by Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{22}\) See *Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi)*, (trans. and ed. by A. S. Sabbadini), Milano: Urra, 2012.


Briefly summarizing it, their elegant theory suggests that "we are made up of only one type of matter (which justifies the name of monism), but proposes in addition that the issue is actually perceived in two different ways (which is why it is a monism perceptually dual). […] These two things are in fact the same thing – in fact in reality there is only me – but since I am also the thing that I am looking at, I perceive myself simultaneously by two different points of view. […] If we accept that the mind-body problem is reduced to a mere question of point of view, a problem of observational perspective, and that the distinction between one’s self and one’s body (between mind and matter) is merely an artifact of perception, the same complexity of the “complex problem” dissolves".  

As we know, in 1959, after he read Richard Wilhelm’s text of the Golden Flower, Jung interrupted his work on Liber Novus and painted the Yellow Castle. He wrote to Wilhelm that: “Fate appears to have given us the role of two bridge pillars which carry the bridge between East and West”. Jung “knew”, as he said often, that the aim of the analytical process and individuation was to become a “whole”, by integrating the (apparent) duality we experience in the inner but also in the outer world. Hence Jung knew, long before Solms’ and Turnbull’s theory, that the problem of duality – whatever pair of opposites it might be referring, including the apparent opposite cultures of East and West – is, if we want to borrow the words of Solms and Turnbull, a “mere question of point of view, a problem of observational perspective” and then “the same complexity of the “complex problem” dissolves”.  

In this spirit of Jung and Wilhelm, of Western and Eastern wisdom, and in the attempt to honor the legacy of them, I want to conclude my presentation with an image, the one that is leading me in my practice of Jungian analysis in East Asia: 

the common and co-constructed search of our cross-cultural “Golden Flower”.  

Thank you.  

Taipei, October 2013

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25 M. Solms, O. Turnbull, The Brain and the inner World, tr. It. Il cervello e il mondo interno. Introduzione alle neuroscienze dell’esperienza soggettiva, Milano: Cortina, 2004, p. 64 (my translation). Reading these words I could not help but recalling again the words that Shakespeare makes him say to magician Prospero in The Tempest- “we are made of the stuff of dreams/and our little life is rounded by a sleep” - and to Zuanghzi’s dreams to be a butterfly. Wanting to summarize their deep Western and Eastern wisdom, you could say, condensing the words of both that “we are of made of the same stuff of dreams and this is the transformation of thing”.

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**Filmography**

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