

Dharma-based Person-Centered Approach in Japan

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Before I begin my presentation, I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to the members from abroad and also express my thanks to the organizers of this forum for giving me the opportunity to have this interactive session.

My presentation is based on my personal experiences as a professor of psychology and as a long-time leader of the “Shinshu counseling “ group. There are three reasons for this presentation.

First, within myself, Buddhism and PCA are inseparably connected with each other.

Second, at this opportunity I wish to introduce to this international forum, the Buddhist school to which I belong. In Japan, it is called Jodo Shinshu, or simply Shinshu. In English, it has been introduced as Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, Shin Buddhism or True Pure Land Buddhism. Jodo Shinshu is the most influential Buddhist school in Japan; it has the largest following and it is more deeply rooted in the spiritual life of Japanese people than Zen Buddhism, which is more widely known outside Japan.

Third, my sincere wish is to deepen the connection between Shinshu and PCA on the levels of theory and practice so that the “Shinshu counseling” may help create a new perspective on humanity and a new human relationship for the 21st century.

I shall discuss the following topics:

- 1) PCA and Japanese culture
- 2) Dharma-based Approach
- 3) Shinshu Counseling

1. PCA and Japanese culture

It has been about a half century since C. R. Rogers' theory on the client-centered therapy was introduced to Japan. Since then, his ideas, including those on the Person-Centered Approach and the Basic Encounter Groups that came afterwards, have been widely welcomed and accepted. Rogers' theory has been studied and applied not only in psychology, but in the fields of education, religion, social welfare, and

nursing among others. Perhaps no other Western theories of psychology have been as influential as Rogers' in Japan.

There were many factors involved in this: Rogers' energetic activities in research and teaching, his visit to Japan to meet and guide Japanese psychologists and therapists, young Japanese therapists and psychologists' study with him in the U.S. and speedy publication of Japanese translations of his new writings.

However, a more important factor was that his theory on therapy was simple and clear, easy to understand to anyone, and easy to test and reexperience. In addition, Rogers' viewpoint on humanity was "Oriental" and suited to the Japanese way of thinking. For example, it is often pointed out that he was influenced by the philosophy of Lao-tz and Chung-tz. We have often felt it during our clinical application of his therapy.

2. Dharma-based Person-Centered Approach

Of various traditions in Japan, Buddhism has been the most influential to Japanese spiritual life. Buddhism is a universal religion that was founded by Sakyamuni Buddha in India about 2500 years ago. It was philosophically deepened in the form of Mahayana Buddhism and was transmitted through the Chinese continent and Korean Peninsula to Japan in the fifth and sixth century after the common era. It ultimately developed into what may be called "Japanese Buddhism." The following are some of the well-known figures that contribute to this development: Prince Shoutoku (574-622), Kukai (774-835), Saicho (767-822), Honen (1133-1212), Shinran (1173-1262), Nichiren (1222-1282), Esai (1141-1215), Dogen (1200-1253), Ippen (1239-1289), Rennyo (1415-1499), and Ryokan (1178-1831).

An important development of Japanese Buddhism is that in Kamakura period (1192-1333), a new form of Buddhist schools called "Buddhism for the laity" came into existence. They all inherited Buddhist traditions from Sakyamuni Buddha but were different in form from traditional Buddhist schools. Among others, Honen first established the Japanese form of Pure Land Buddhism following the teaching of the Chinese Pure Land patriarch Shan-tao (613-682). Honen's disciple Shinran further clarified and propagated his master's teaching for saving every human being.

Shinran's teaching was later organized into a new school called Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land Buddhism or Shin Buddhism). In short, it is a path in which an "ordinary foolish person" can become a Buddha. Any person who believes in Amida Buddha's Primal Vow and recites the Buddha's Name (Namu Amida Butsu) attains birth in Amida's Pure Land and becomes a Buddha.

By “Dharma-based” I mean an approach based on the spirit of Jodo Shinshu. If this is the first time you heard about Jodo Shinshu, what I am saying may not make much sense, but it is only natural. At the time of Honen and Shinran, even Buddhist monks who devote their lives to studies and practices did not understand them and severely criticized them for deviating from the orthodox Buddhist tradition. Some monks even influenced the imperial government in Kyoto to persecute their new Buddhist movement.

Even millions of words are not enough to explain the historical and doctrinal features of Buddhism, so I will focus on its essence from the psychological viewpoint. First I will explain the characteristic features of Buddhism.

I believe the term “Buddha Dharma” better represents the religious system that is commonly called Buddhism. The reason is it is a way of life for all the humanity, not just an “ism,” which is a system of thought. Sakyamuni Buddha attained perfect awaking to the truth and reality of human suffering, and this awaking is called “wisdom.” Out of compassion for people, he decided to share his realization with them to emancipate them from suffering. Because it has come from the Buddha’s supreme awaking and contains the dynamic power of saving people based on his wisdom and compassion, I wish to call the Buddha’s teaching “Buddha Dharma.” Following the spirit exhibited by the Buddha, the Dharma-based Approach is intended to help individuals resolve their distress and agony. This I believe that the Buddha Dharma can closely relate to psychotherapy, counseling and other activities that are meant to help people in difficulty.

The Buddha Dharma points to the reality of human existence characterized by the term “suffering.” At the same time, it is a practical way leading people to resolve their suffering and to enter a realm of true peace. I feel that Buddhism should be understood as a system of psychotherapy to be conducted in the spiritual realm rather than a doctrinal or philosophical system.

Now I shall briefly explain the basic teaching of Buddhism.

- 1) Human existence is filled with suffering. (For a human being to live as a human being is suffering.) Not being able to do what one wants to do is the true nature of suffering. Buddhism enumerates “four major forms of suffering and eight forms of suffering.”
- 2) The fundamental cause for human suffering is “ego-attachment” deeply rooted in human ego. Ego-attachment makes a person desire that the world acts according to his wishes.
- 3) Therefore, in order to acquire true joy and ease and peace, one must carry

out certain “practices.”

The monks, who renounced the world to devote their entire lives to the learning and practicing of the Buddha’s teaching, formed the Buddhist Order (Sangha). The Sangha was revered and supported by lay followers of the Dharma. The Theravada Buddhism that still flourishes in Southeast Asia is closely observing this tradition.

However, in northern India about the first century ACE, a new Buddhist movement called Mahayana Buddhism emerged. They realized that it was the dynamic working of the Dharma (truth) itself that awakened Sakyamuni to the Dharma. They further became aware that it was of utmost important to wish and endeavor to attain emancipation from suffering together with everyone else on an equal basis, just as a large ship (mahayana) can take many people from one shore of a river to the other. Their ultimate realization was that the true spirit of the Buddha was manifested as Bodhisattvas who vowed to remain in this world if suffering until all human beings were emancipated from suffering and attained Buddhahood. This is preached in many of the Mahayana scriptures.

Any approach based on the spirit of the Buddha’s teaching, especially on that of Mahayana Buddhism, can be called a “Dharma-based Approach,” but that still lacks a clear-cut focus. Therefore, I consider the Dharma-based Approach based on Jodo Shinshu Buddhism as the most suitable for the present time and have been practicing it under the title “Shinshu-Counseling.”

3. Shinshu Counseling

I shall explain more about the Dharma-based Person-centered Approach (DPA), or Shinshu Counseling with the attached sheet with four figures. In these figures, normally complex human relations have been simplified into a direct and personal relationship in the counseling situation between A (helper, counselor, therapist) and B (helpee, client).

Figure 1 is a simplified illustration of the counseling relationship which C. Rogers recommended. A and B are in a person-to- person relationship. They face each other as equals and establish a personal relationship. They have deeper interactions as they carry out their counseling activity. When A calls himself/herself “I”, the client is “Thou,” but not “It.” Which would mean that the client had become objectified by the counselor’s desire to possess or to manipulate. This was explained by Martin Buber. The arrows indicate freedom of expression and communication on both sides.

On the other hand, Figure 2 shows a relationship in which consciously or unconsciously, A has come to take an authoritative and manipulative attitude toward B.

B feels threatened and consciously or unconsciously has become defensive. In this situation, B is obstructed from developing congruent awareness and giving congruent expression.

Figure 3 shows a relationship which I call “Buddhist Counseling.” In contrast with Figure 1 and Figure 2, underneath the X dimension in which A and B stand as individual persons, there is the Y dimension where the Dharma or Buddha-Dharma operates, and A dimension.

Humans live in the finite and relative world, limited by time and space. Human relations, too, evolve within this limitation, but with Buddhist awareness, A finds himself sustained in the infinite and absolute world, or in the world of the Buddha, which surpass time and space. In other words, A is internally illumined and protected by the Light of the Buddha. I wish to hurriedly add – in such a two-dimensional illustration, the Y dimension (the world of the Buddha), might look as if it physically existed in a relative relationship with the X dimension (the human world), but that is not the case. The world of the Buddha is the realm of absolute spiritual awaking, or enlightenment. Even though Line X and Line Y are drawn parallel to each other, they differ in nature. The differences in nature between X and Y dimensions are shown as follows:

X dimension	Y dimension
human beings	the Buddha (or Buddhas)
mundane	supra-mundane, transcendent
relative	absolute
finite	infinite, limitless, eternal
birth-and-death, transmigration	nirvana; non-birth, non-death
realm of thought and calculation	realm beyond thought and calculation
realm of words	realm beyond words
lost and blind	enlightened and awakened
knowledge	wisdom
falsity	truth
existence	emptiness (beyond existence and non –existence)

The solid lines that extend from A to Line Y symbolize A’s awareness that A is rooted in the realm of the Buddha. On the other hand, the dotted lines extending from B to Line Y indicate that B is not necessarily aware of or concerned with the Y dimension. In the eyes of A, both A and B are equally rooted in and sustained by the realm of the Buddha.

The fact that the Dharma-based Person-centered Approach (or Buddhist Counseling) operates on the basis of the “I and Thou” relationship for A and B and that DPA recognizes the importance of the “Core Conditions” laid down by C. Rogers makes it no different from the conventional way of counseling. The only difference is that in DPA, A conducts the counseling practice with the awareness of his being rooted in the realm of the Buddha and the Dharma.

4. Shinran's view on humanity and human relations

--its significance for the present world--

Figure 4 illustrates the kind of DPA which I have tentatively named “Shinshu Counseling” and have been developing for a number of years. As the naming indicates, this approach is based on Shinran's view on humanity and human relations.

In my understanding, very few personalities in Japanese history, or even in world history, have observed human nature and human spirituality as closely as Shinran. From the viewpoint of PCA, he made an existential, experiential, self-awareness-based, and person-to-person approach on the basis of his complete trust in Amida Buddha's Primal Vow.

Throughout his life, Shinran always had the sense of joy and gratitude for being born as a human being, having met Amida Buddha's Primal Vow and being made to live by the Power of the Vow (Other Power). That is because he had such an inconceivable experience of being saved by Other Power when he was unable to save himself by traditional self-power practices. He had become aware of his own obstinate ego-attachment, ignorance of truth, foolishness, and inborn evilness. After twenty years' diligent endeavor to attain Buddhahood in the prestigious monastery on Mt. Hiei outside of Kyoto, Shinran had found himself totally incapable of attaining his goal. He was not able to attain enlightenment by keeping precepts, studying scriptures, and carrying out different types of meditation. That meant to him that he was unable to liberate himself from transmigration (birth-and-death) for eons to come and that he was doomed to hell.

However, through the despair, or simultaneously with this despair, he met the teaching of Amida's Primal Vow and was saved from despair by entrusting himself to the Primal Vow. His teacher Honen had advised him that he should be saved by Amida by only reciting the Buddha's Name (Namo Amida Butsu). Reciting the Name simultaneously meant entrusting himself to Amida's Primal Vow, or having faith in Amida. Shinran also realized that the Primal Vow was intended to save such a “wretched and hopeless” person as he. For him it was the working of the Primal Vow

that made him realize his true state and rely on the Vow.

In short, Shinran's teaching amounts to this, that one is saved by faith in Amida's Primal Vow alone. The faith is twofold: that remote from the time of the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, no one can attain Buddhahood through the traditional self-power efforts and that the Primal Vow is to save such an "ordinary foolish person" who is incapable of carrying out religious practice and precepts, or performing any good acts to accumulate religious merit.

It seems to me that the spiritual world and the Buddha Dharma that Shinran opened up 800 years ago keeps casting new Light on the present age. Shinshu Counseling is an attempt to carry out the Person-centered Approach on this standpoint. Thank you for your kind attention.

translated by
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Fig. 2

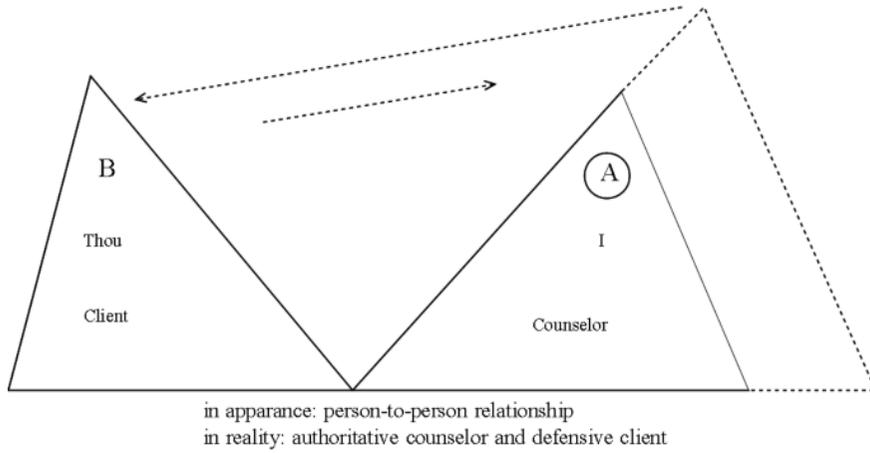


Fig. 1 Counseling relationship

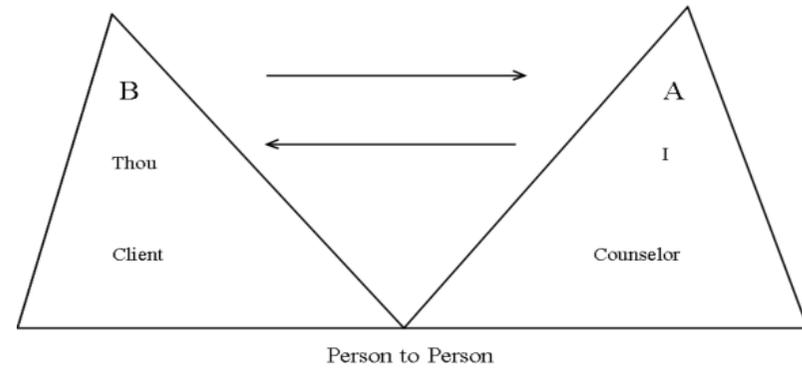


Fig. 3

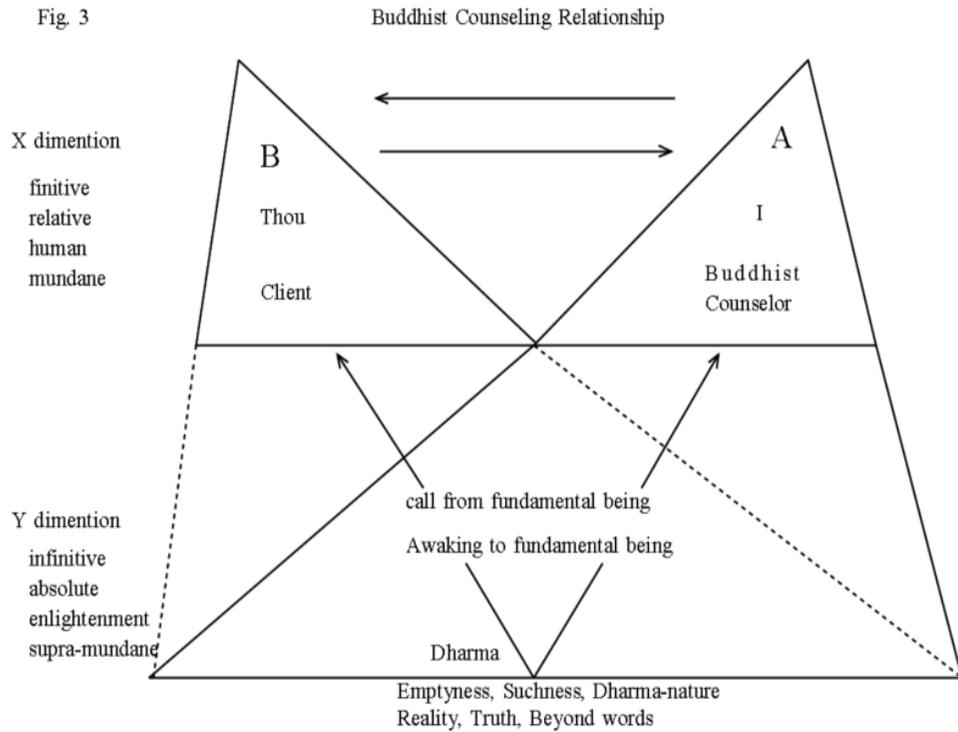


Fig. 4

