

Symposium | CFI : [Symposium 20] How to make the real critical transculturel psychiatry in japan today

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[Symposium 20] How to make the real critical transculturel psychiatry in japan today

Moderator: Yasuo Miwaki (Jinai University)

[SY-20-03] Why Does Cultural Psychiatry Not Adopt an Emperor-Centered Ideology?: Healing and Politics in the History of Folk Psychotherapy in Early 20th-Century Japan

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Influenced by the New Left movement, modern psychiatry was criticized as colonialist by the anti-psychiatry movement from the late 1960s onward, subsequently leading to the development of cultural psychiatry through its focus on culture-bound syndromes. Under the premise that different cultures have distinct complexes of illness and healing practices, cultural psychiatry in its most simplified form has sought to extract cultural elements irreducible to Western modern medicine through anthropological or folkloristic approaches. However, it has long been pointed out by postcolonialism that such a binary approach itself is a product of modernism and colonialism. As exemplified by Gauri Viswanathan, recent postcolonial studies and anthropology have daringly focused on Orientalist phenomena such as the Theosophical Society and Buddhist modernism, precisely because they confront the limits of dichotomy while still seeking elements that do not fully assimilate into modernist-colonialist paradigms. In early 20th-century Japan, a folk therapeutic culture known as *seishin ryo-ho* (folk psychotherapy or mind-cure) emerged in a nested contact zone between Western modernity and the specific historical context of Japan. Stimulated by hypnosis and mesmerism imported alongside Western biomedicine, this culture reinterpreted and reconfigured indigenous traditions such as Buddhism, Shinto, and folk belief, while criticizing expensive mechanistic modern medicine and spreading across a wide social spectrum, including the intellectual middle class. As seen in *seishin ryo-ho* groups including Seicho-no-le and Tenohira-Ryoji (palm healing), which flourished during the 1930s, folk psychotherapies pursued the essence of Japanese identity, eventually converging on Japanese mythology and the modern Emperor (Tenno) system, aligning themselves with “proto-fascist” movements such as the National Polity Clarification Movement and wartime total mobilization. This paper elucidates this pre-WWII trajectory to critically examine how cultural psychiatry should analyze the interplay between medical culture and politics in contemporary Japan and what medical practices might emerge from this historical reflection.