Encounter with the West—From My Life and Works

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ABSTRACT. This short essay grew out of remarks made by Dr. Rhi, the leading Jungian psychiatrist in Korea, to friends, colleagues, and students at the end of term in 1996 at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he had been a visiting professor. He shows briefly, succinctly, with that mixture of earnestness and diffidence which characterizes him as a person and as an analyst, what led him to psychiatry as a profession and how his Jungian convictions and understanding brought opposites into easy relationship for him. Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity come together here. East meets West in that wholeness which Rhi, like Jung before him, holds always before him as both goal and achievement.

When we speak or write of our life and works, we appear to be trying to sound important. This sort of thing can be done, after all, only by those who have accomplished much of their destined work and reached a high age. I do not merit such a description. Besides, the public presentation of one's memory of past achievements is always inclined to sentimental exaggeration and embellishment or the opposite, self-abasement. I cannot assure you that I will not fall prey to these dangers in this presentation of materials from "my life and works."

In spite of these dangers, I will undertake to introduce some reflections on my life and works, particularly as they touch on my encounters with Western culture and my discovery of the value of my Eastern cultural heritage, in the hope that some readers will not only be surprised by the facts of my acculturation process but will also be drawn to self-reflection as Westerners encountering Eastern culture and thought. As human beings we are all, Eastern or Western, rooted in a common primordial foundation and as individuals endowed, all of us, with a diversity of character, while we share in the individualization process a phase in which cultural interference rears up before us in terms of the East-West encounter.

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My own contact with the West came first in 1962, when I went to Switzerland to begin training analysis with the "Western" analysts at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich. The "West" had long been in place when I was born, in 1932, in a village in the Northwest region of the Korean peninsula. The West came to us in the form of Christianity. My grandmother was converted. My mother, whose family became devoutly Christian, graduated from a mission school in Seoul and was a faithful follower of my grandmother's Christian beliefs. The male side of my family was rather more reserved. The men were silent supporters of things Christian while at the same time preserving the Confucian value system, except for Chesa, ancestor worship, which was forbidden by the Church as a form of idolatry. On the whole, my family was an enlightened one in a time of enlightenment in Korea, between the late 1800s and early 1900s, establishing new private schools and a modern publishing company, teaching the youth of peasant families about new methods of agriculture and new ways of living. My father, who studied in Japan, was an idealist, an enthusiastic supporter of Pestalozzi's educational theory, and socially influential. My two highly intelligent aunts, who studied both in Japan and North America, became my ideal feminine figures; they seemed to me to be messengers from a remote land, from an altogether different sphere of life.

As a child, I went to Sunday school at the village church. Bible stories were never as interesting to me as *Gulliver's Travels*, whispered to me secretly by my sister during worship at home, or as the detective stories told us by the church deacon during breaks in instruction. The names of the saints—Jacob, Peter, John, etc.—seemed strange to me. Spiritually, like so many children everywhere, caught in the world of *participation mystique*, I sincerely believed in the reincarnation of my dead grandfather in the form of a withered flower in the garden of our private school and in the transformation of beautiful stones, wherever met, into what we call precious stones, gems. I kept a dream notebook and indulged myself in magical fantasies at the same time as I played war games with country boys. I didn't go to church after we moved to town, but not for any particular reason. No one was forced to go, but my mother's sorrow over the abandonment of church by her children was long-lasting.

In my youth, as in my childhood before it, I read constantly and with great pleasure—Shakespeare, Korean novels, a biography of Buddha, stories of Christians—whatever I could find in my father's beautiful library. This was the time of World War II. My brother, who had been studying Oriental history in Seoul, was forced into military service by the imperial Japanese regime and we worried much about him. I prayed that he would be able to return home, which he did, finally, after the end of the war. He later studied Indian philosophy and Buddhism in Europe and became a leading scholar in the field in Korea as well as abroad. After the death of my father, he became my spiritual support.

Before and after the Korean war, I endured hard times, feeling in particu-