This book is about psychoanalysis in Japan, but the issues it explores have direct relevance to the way we understand ourselves now, whether we are inside or outside Japan. It is a pathway into psychoanalysis and, at the same time, a pathway into Japan. The book draws on interviews, meetings and discussions with analysts – not only psychoanalysts – from different theoretical traditions and connects the ideas that have been adapted and developed from outside Japan with indigenous systems of thought, showing what they owe to elements of Japanese culture. Distinctive patterns of child-rearing, local conceptions of self in relation to others and culturally-bound possibilities for reflection and change raise questions about the place of psychoanalysis there, and here.

The cultural resources Freud drew upon are not accidental or tangential to psychoanalysis but necessary to it and this makes every analysis into a specific kind of cultural practice. Psychoanalysis developed at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe as a form of intense self-exploration in which one person speaks to another about themselves in a peculiar, highly-charged relationship which itself comes to re-enact what they are speaking about. As they speak, the patient, or analysand – who is the one who is really doing the analysing – has to deal not only with the presence of the analyst but with the fact that hitherto private tangled experience is thereby being made public. The stuff of who they are appears in language in the analysis and in that process the analysand together with the analyst untangles the symptoms that led them to find another to speak to about their distress. Psychoanalysis is a talking cure; a cure which requires that there be some sense that things are unconscious to us, pushed out of awareness and kept at bay because they disturb and threaten to undermine
what we think will make us happy. Freud homed in on what was most disturbing, especially upon sexuality as the most intimate core of who we are and around which we construct hosts of fantasies about how we might love others and find satisfaction in that love.

Already, in this most simple cluster of assumptions about the self there are complex culturally-specific images put to work about what is inside and outside us, what forms of motivation are primary and how they push to the surface, and what speaking about ourselves might cover over or reveal. While there is, of course, a focus on things Japanese in this book – at least, the things that can be rendered intelligible to outsiders – we must not forget that psychoanalysis itself is quite a bizarre way of understanding people and striking up relationships with them. Psychoanalysis exaggerates to a level of unbearable horror the ideas that people would least like to entertain about themselves, and the assumptions it makes about human nature should not be taken for granted. In this book psychoanalysis sometimes seems to operate as a window upon Japan, but we will also see how stepping into another culture enables us to find a new window upon psychoanalysis. To ask why there is psychoanalysis in Japan, then, is also to arrive at a way of unravelling the context in which psychoanalytic practitioners work.

When I started writing the book I imagined that the motif of ‘Japanalsand’ might be useful to highlight the way in which analytic work is undertaken by the person who makes a demand for analysis. It is the analysand who makes the most searching interpretations, and transforms themselves in the process. In much the same way, I thought, ‘Japan’ in this book would be our analysand; it would figure as a culture that has made a demand for psychoanalysis and has worked through some of the consequences. So, the different chapters do focus on the way Japan has absorbed analytic ideas and produced its own particular interpretations of itself.

However, at the same time we need to approach this question reflexively and turn it around so that the ‘Japanalsand’ is also the reader of this book, you, gazing into this other culture, a culture that has avidly consumed representations of itself as it has internalized psychoanalytic ideas. The reader as analysand will thus find something that disturbs taken-for-granted assumptions about the Western self and its limits. In that process, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that the motif of ‘Japanalyst’ becomes more salient as Japan comes to function in the position of analyst to force those outside the culture to make sense of who they have become. And why should the same