
Insights into Therapeutic Potentials of Arts in Japan

日本における芸術の治療的可能性に関する考察

Minatsu ARIGA | 有賀 三夏

近年、現代日本は、ストレス感情の情緒的暴発が若者に限らず年長者にも広がりを見せ、社会問題となるほどに病んでいる。各種の心理療法が今ほど必要とされてきている時代はない。本稿で扱うアートセラピーとは、創作活動によって人間が潜在的にもつ創造力を喚起させることで、自由な自己表現を通して精神的な癒しを深め心身を治癒し、知能の活性化を図る心理療法である。日本では芸術文化によって「癒やされる(ヒーリング)」という考え方はあるものの、能動的に「治療する(セラピー)」習慣はあまりない。そこで、日本で育まれた文化や伝統に基づく日本人特有の「和」を尊ぶ精神と社会環境との融合を図りつつ、日本に対応する芸術療法の可能性について考察する。

さらに本稿では、欧米型 Art Therapy と日本固有の Healing Art 融合型、Healing Art Therapy の新概念・理論を提唱し、それを PATH (Promotion: 促進, Art: 芸術, Treatment: 手当て, Healing: 癒し) Therapy と命名した。その臨床実践例も紹介する。

今日、生活が便利になるにつれて一個人が日々の生活の中で何かを創造する機会が漸減してきている。芸術療法は人間が人間らしさを取り戻し、これからの時代を豊かに生きていくための強力な方法論となることが期待される。

Keywords:

Art Therapy, Healing Art, Japanese culture, Emotion

Introduction

In this paper, I first describe how art has traditionally been utilized for the purpose of healing in Japan with its unique cultural background. I also address some current challenges in Japanese society. I then explain the significance and potential of art therapy in Japan. Currently there are two ways that art is used for healing purposes in Japan: therapy using art (art therapy) and visual art that can have healing effects on people (healing art). While healing art is presently more well-known and accepted in Japan, aspects of art therapy have the potential to be of great benefit to the Japanese people. Considering the cultural milieu of Japan, it may be that a new discipline combining western art therapy and Japanese healing arts, which I call “Healing Art Therapy,” may be the most effective approach to creative arts healing in Japan. Finally, I will share some of my work bridging art therapy and healing arts and address future perspectives and challenges of art therapy in Japan.

Art, Emotions and Therapy in Japan

In Japan, art permeates many aspects of the culture. For example, there are famed ancient cities such as Kyoto and Nara where beautiful temples and gardens are prevalent. Japan also has a lengthy history of traditional industrial art. Despite this history, people of Japan are in great need of therapeutic creative expression. In Japan it has been considered to be very important that people are always in harmony with others based upon consensus (“wa”

in Japanese) (Bezruchka, 2005). In compliance with the “wa” concept of harmony, it has been considered to be a virtue in Japanese society that people do not express emotions such as anger to other people (Weiten, 2010, p.425). Accordingly, children have repeatedly been instructed (at both school and home) not to express their emotions/feelings. Thus, in many cases people do not express obvious stress to the point that they can no longer control their emotions, resulting in the phenomenon “Kireru” (Muthu, 2006, p.10). The term “Kireru” in Japanese speaks to an overwhelming, often unexpected sudden emotional explosion initiated by a depressed person, resulting in horrific damage to life and property (Benesse Educational Research Center, 1998).

Today in Japan adults are experiencing a variety of serious social problems in their daily lives. Stressors in the social environment, both culturally and interpersonally, increase anxious feelings among the populous, resulting in negative social consequences, such as stress and depression that devolve into extreme anger; social withdrawal, truancy, even death from overwork (A.Kaneyama, personal communication, March 30, 2010). These consequences are leading the Japanese people to begin to focus on healing.

Potentials of Art in Therapy: Healing Art and Art Therapy

Historically, various psychotherapies have been developed in Japan some of which are summarized as arts therapy. A wide range of techniques have been utilized in arts therapy including paintings/drawings, music, poetry (eg., haiku, tanka or poems), ceramics, collage, miniature gardens, dancing and many other modalities (Iimori, 2011). In Japan, when art materials are utilized in a psychotherapy session it is called “art therapy,” which is quite similar to the concept of art therapy in western countries. Thus, in a broad sense, art therapy could be classified as a sub-category of overall arts in therapy. Unlike in the United States, art therapy has not yet been well recognized among the public in Japan. Although currently there are no universities or institutes that offer an official/certified license for art therapy in Japan, some educational organizations have initiated their own independent licens-

ing systems. Examples include certification issued by the Japanese Society of Psychopathology of Expression & Arts Therapy (The Japanese Society of Psychopathology of Expression & Arts Therapy, 2010) and the Japan Clinical Art Association (Japan Clinical Art Association, 2011). People in Japan have often confused the term “art therapy” with the more familiar term “healing art”. Although the overall goal of these practices might be similar, there is a clear distinction in the definition of these two healing modalities.

Healing Art

Healing art can be understood as art specifically designed to help people feel refreshed and relaxed (Joshi University of Art and Design, 2007, p.4). The aim of healing art is to increase feelings of positivity and calmness. To achieve this goal, artists create original artworks for patients/clients who need healing. For example, healing artists create a variety of artworks in hospitals using various shapes and colors to help patients feel better.

In addition to artwork designed for healing, Japan is surrounded by a variety of aesthetic objects including mountains (eg., Mt. Fuji), oceans, lakes, historical cities (eg., Kyoto) and gardens. Any and all of these can potentially serve as visual objects to be used for healing purposes. By observing these natural objects, people may experience a sense of relief or unity, which may lead to “healing.”

To better understand the concept of “healing art” in Japan and its emphasis on the importance of aesthetics in healing; let us consider Mt. Fuji as an example. Almost all Japanese people feel peaceful when they gaze at Mt. Fuji. Mt. Fuji is the highest (3776 meters) and arguably the most beautiful mountain in Japan. Its gentle slopes are characteristic of stability and, therefore, it is considered to be a symbol of the nation. In general, the gentle slopes give people the impression of a peaceful, stable mind. Similarly to observing the flag of a person’s homeland, people may experience feelings of solidarity and healing when viewing other national symbols, such as Mt. Fuji. People may experience healing through the visual image of magnificent beauty as well as through the spiritual symbolism of the mountain. It is important to note

that such a magnificent and powerful symbol is easily recognized and remains ingrained in people's awareness even when not being viewed. The concept that Mt. Fuji is always with a person per se may offer a sense of relief and resilience. This may be, in part, why people seek to view Mt. Fuji when, for example, they feel deeply depressed and desperate.

Mt Fuji is characterized by its beautiful combination of colors, white (the snow covered top) and blue (the color of slopes). From an artistic point of view, the combination of white and blue represents the image of "purity." The combination of white and blue appears to be stable throughout time, although the proportion of white verses blue may change according to the seasons. This stability may foster a feeling of healing and relaxation in people.

The features described above, including shape and color, are likely to play an important role in offering people feelings of relief and healing when observing Mt Fuji. Similarly, when hospitalized patients observe shapes and colors in healing art murals painted by visual artists, they may experience the same type of well-being.

The most notable advantage of healing art is that it can easily be applied not only to individuals but also to groups because many people can observe a single artwork at once. In healing art, the healing takes a passive form, in which the person feels healed by observing a lake, garden, historical site, or artwork with no need to actively create art.

Considering the unique cultural background in Japan, it is easier to understand the potential therapeutic value of healing art. However, it is not yet certain if healing art might be utilized for therapeutic purposes.

The major limitation of healing art is that it generally does not rouse so-called inherent, intrinsic healing power that has been shown to heal people in various situations with distresses, diseases or disorders. Inherent/intrinsic healing power can be induced when patients/clients are positively and actively involved in the process of creating art (Eva, 1988; International Expressive Art Therapy Association, 2009).

People in Japan generally prefer to receive therapy in a passive way and they often are not willing to be involved actively in therapy due to, at least in part, the unique cultural background of Japan.

Art Therapy

It appears that there is no single definition for "art therapy" commonly used in the world at this time. In western countries, certain definitions have been established for art therapy by official organizations in the field, such as AATA in the US (American Art Therapy Association, 2010) or BAAT in England (British Association of Art Therapists, 2010). It is not clear whether there is an established definition for art therapy in Japan at this time. People may follow their own definitions, which is complicated but conceivable considering that art therapy has yet to be well accepted in Japan.

There is another issue from the patient/client point of view commonly observed in Japan that may further hinder the promotion of art therapy. In many cases people in Japan hesitate to explain their emotions/feelings to therapists or medical professionals even at advanced stages of diagnosis or illness. This potential problem might also be due to the cultural climate in Japan in which it has historically been considered a virtue for people not to express their emotions/feelings in compliance with the general "wa" rule governing Japanese society. Also there is still a stigma about being diagnosed with certain psychological disorders and even the terms "therapy" or "counseling." Therefore people in Japan do not readily accept necessary psychotherapies, which may also result in a further delay in the promotion of art therapy. For the reasons outlined above, it might be true that Japanese people are not comfortable or well-versed in expressing their emotions verbally. As has been well illustrated in the United States and Britain, art serves as an excellent tool to help people express their complex emotions/feelings without the necessity of words.

An Integrated "Healing Art Therapy" Practice in Japan

Even if certain therapeutic effects might be expected for healing art, the most fundamental difference between the passive healing art experience and active art therapy process is perhaps found in the way in which clients are or are not involved in creating art works. Generally speaking, in healing art practices, clients are passive observers. In art

therapy, on the other hand, clients are actively involved in creating their own artworks. Considering the cultural milieu of Japan, a new discipline combining western art therapy and Japanese healing art, called “Healing Art Therapy,” may be the most effective approach to creative healing therapy in Japan. To examine this hypothesis, a series of theories and techniques were experimented with in healing art therapy sessions in Japan. In each case, particular clients appropriate for participating in the creative arts were chosen from each site. Sessions held at each site included aspects of both art therapy and healing art (Table 1).

The following case study describes a healing art therapy session at a senior center in Japan. The project undertaken, “Treasure Box of Golden Dreams” (Case#1, Table 1), offers an example of how the integration of healing art and art therapy can lead to an enhancement in therapeutic effectiveness.

Given the uniqueness and novelty of involving aspects of both art therapy and healing art, the project was introduced to participants utilizing the author’s term “PATH” (Promotion, Art, Treatment and Healing) rather than the concept “healing art therapy.”

Table1. Summary of case studies of Healing Art Therapy (PATH) performed in Japan

Type of Institutes	Participants	Therapy Techniques used*	Findings
“Study Title”			
1. Senior Club “Treasure Box of Golden Dream” (Figure1a,1b)	10 seniors with minor dementia	Creating treasure boxes (use of objects which are likely to support satisfaction/fullness of patients)	Therapy reminded participants of their happy feelings at their golden times
1. School for Children with Disabilities 2. “Shiny Sculpture” (Figure2a,2b)	10 students with autism, down syndrome, developmental retardations, others	Creating sculpture (use of aluminum foil which is shiny, easy to handle and likely to support fullness/satisfaction of clients)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students managed to concentrate on their performances •Students tried to explain about their works in words to others •Continued communication with others •Understanding not to eat/swallow art materials through bitter taste of aluminum foil
1.3. Nursing Home “Let’s clip by clothespins decorated with your colors” (Figure3)	15 seniors, ages 60-90 with various forms/degrees of cognitive disorders	Decorating clothespins (happy feelings through confirmation/understanding colors/shapes of their preferences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Several seniors joined the session spontaneously for time being •Participants became eloquence •Communication with others

* Techniques included aspects of both Art Therapy (and Healing Art). Examples shown in the Table are those of representative features for each element.



Figure1a-Treasure Box 1.



Figure1b-Treasure Box 2.

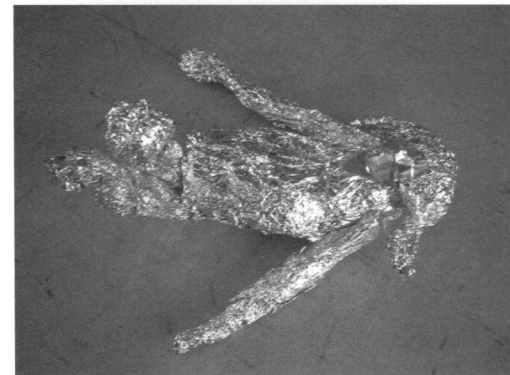


Figure2a-Shiny Sculpture1.



Figure2a-Shiny Sculpture2.



Figure3-Let's clip.

Case Example

The PATH project entitled “Treasure Box of Golden Dreams” was facilitated at a senior center for 10 participants with minor dementia.

Ready-made boxes of different colors were prepared for participants in advance. This offered a sense of control and choice in the selection of the box of their preference. Participants engaged in the creative process of decorating a treasure box with additional embellishments of different colors and shapes, also of their choosing.

Elements of Healing Art

There were two major elements of healing art in this creative process.

The first element included imagining “treasures” participants/clients wanted to keep in their completed one-of-a-kind boxes. At the beginning of the PATH session, participants were told they would be making treasure boxes in which they could keep personal treasures. When asked what treasures they might place in their boxes, there were a variety of answers. One participant said that she wanted to keep the engagement ring she received from her husband, which reminded her of the many happy memories they had shared together.

Another element of healing art in the PATH process

was obtained through visual memories. After participants had selected the boxes and embellishments of their choice, they were invited to participate in conversation regarding why they selected specific colors and decorations. The question seemed to trigger happy memories, possibly related to the particular color(s) chosen. This also seemed to increase feelings of satisfaction through the creative art work, indicating that combining healing art and art therapy resulted in more effective therapeutic tools.

In summary, the treasure boxes, decorated with particular colors of the participants’ choice, together with imagining the important treasures they wanted to keep in their boxes, led to feelings of increased well-being, which is a typical feature of healing art.

Interactions between Art Therapy and Healing Art

The embellishments for the treasure boxes were provided by the facilitator (not by patients/clients themselves), which can be viewed as an aspect of healing art because participants received support in a passive way. However, they were able to choose some of the objects of their preference. In general, these objects were provided to rouse participant interest in the art making tasks indicated in the session. When selecting the embellishments, the facilitator attempted to ensure that the objects contained a variety of characteristics, such as cute, beautiful or delicate. These are features which are generally known to suit preferences of Japanese people (Figure 1a,1b). By providing specific, intentional art supplies, the facilitator enabled patients to complete their art making process without major difficulties, stressors and/or hesitation. More specifically, the support offered by the facilitator helped patients participate in the session more actively and encouraged them to realize their intrinsic motivation for completing the creative task imposed in the art session.

The case study is a representative example of aspects of healing art and art therapy successfully combined to stimulate patients/clients to utilize self-expression as a way to promote well-being and healing.

As described above, these findings appear to largely be consistent with the hypothesis that combining healing art

and art therapy result in more effective therapeutic tools. However, it has been well demonstrated that art therapy alone also has therapeutic effects. Although it is not yet known if healing art alone could serve as a therapeutic tool, it might well be the case. Due to a lack of studies showing if/how art therapy and healing art by themselves would work with the same population, further studies are necessary to confirm the theory that a combination of art therapy and healing art is the most effective way to approach creative therapies in Japan. It is also necessary to establish standardized criteria to evaluate the so-called “therapeutic effects/efficacy” of the PATH method.

Another important finding worth mentioning is that many of the participants/clients in the case study kept their artwork after the session. The artworks continued to serve as a useful tool to heal the participants long after the actual session was over. These may have been typical features of healing art; effects that cannot be obtained from art therapy alone.

Even participants who chose not to engage in the therapeutic art at the beginning later began to participate spontaneously. Some of the participants, who had not been able to express their feelings/emotions due to their disorders and/or disabilities, became eloquent through the therapy session.

Implications

In general, participants were observed to have enjoyed the creative art session overall. This included not only the art creation per se but also interactions with the instructor/facilitator and others (including other participants and caregivers).

As described above, there were two major elements of healing art in this case study. Through active imagination and visual perception of colors participants were able to successfully retrieve their happy “golden” memories. In other words, typical outcomes obtained through healing art (eg., reconciliation of their happy golden memories) not only made them happy but also encouraged them to concentrate more on the creative process of art making. This, in turn, resulted in the augmentation of feeling satisfaction in the process of the creating art.

The example highlighted in the case study illustrates

how the integration of healing art and art therapy can produce enhanced therapeutic effects. These findings indicate that combining healing art and art therapy lead to more effective therapeutic tools than utilizing each of them alone.

General Discussion

The findings described above are encouraging and consistent with the hypothesis that a new discipline combining western art therapy and Japanese healing art may be the most effective approach to establishing an arts-based healing theory in Japan.

It should be noted that the art sessions were performed effectively in a group setting where Japanese people could utilize a unique cultural spirit of “wa” (harmony). It was observed that even participants who did not immediately engage in the creative therapy at the beginning began participating in the therapy spontaneously at some point during the session. Some of the participants who had not been able to express their feelings due to their disorders and/or disabilities, became more talkative and expressive through the group process. These findings may indicate that the unique spirit of “wa” in Japan exerted a positive effect on the success of the PATH art session with Japanese people.

Future Perspectives and Challenges of Art Therapy in Japan

One of the most intriguing questions to research in the future is whether the PATH method might serve as a useful healing and/or preventive tool for individuals who suffer or are likely to suffer from “Kieru” syndrome. It should be noted that although certain participants indeed exhibited encouraging and positive responses to the PATH method there were also participants who did not show positive responses to the same treatment. Further research is necessary to explain these varied responses to the therapy. These differences may depend on the backgrounds of each participant, the nature and degree of their disorders and disabilities, age, gender and the overall

performance abilities of therapist/facilitator. Further studies are needed to explore this hypothesis.

It is likely that, as in western countries, art therapy has the potential to play an important role in various fields in Japan, including medical, education and general welfare. To achieve this goal in Japan, however, there are a number of hurdles to be cleared including establishment of an appropriate educational system for art therapists. In spite of the challenges, however, there is an encouraging future that will hopefully include a growing appreciation of art therapy in Japan. The unique Japanese cultural spirit of "wa" is a concept that may have impeded the recognition of art as an effective therapeutic tool because Japanese people often prefer to recognize concepts as a group, in contrast to the more western focus on individualism. However, taken in context, "wa" might also prove to be an advantage for the success of art therapy among Japanese people. Specifically, for example, Japanese clients might complete their therapeutic art sessions more effectively in a group setting, rather than individually. The motivation of a group setting might harbor unique advantages among Japanese clients, where individuals might actually utilize "wa" and the energy felt among the group to overcome any hesitation in their initiation of expression. As has already been implicated in the initial stages of the new form of art therapy and healing art (PATH) in Japan, if art therapy can be utilized on a larger scale (as in a group therapy setting) without losing the benefits already proven on an individual level, it might thus be even more effective in Japan than in western countries. Of course, it must be considered that there may be negative effects as well. For example, some people might feel undo pressure to engage in the art tasks if sessions are performed in a group setting.

Conclusion

Japanese people currently undergo many daily stressors in a culture that encourages the suppression of emotion. Violent crimes, especially amongst young people, have continued to escalate, which may be based upon the current rigidity of the culture. Kireru has become an all too commonplace occurrence in a country that does not encourage its citizens to express stress and frustration in

a healthy way. For this reason, Japan is in great need of creative expression. The disciplines of art therapy and healing art are two ways to encourage wellness in the Japanese society at large. While healing art is considered a new discipline in Japan, the idea of creating aesthetically healing environments is part of the tapestry of Japanese history and culture and is, therefore, more readily accepted than art therapy. Art therapy, although relatively unknown and misunderstood in Japan, has the potential to offer vast benefits for the people and society if presented in a culturally attuned way. The experience of facilitating art therapy and healing art workshops using the PATH method in Japan highlighted the healing power of artistic expression and the potential benefit of art therapy for the Japanese people.

Considering that the Japanese people are more likely to accept the discipline of healing art over art therapy, it may be that combining the two fields to create healing art therapy may be the most useful way to encourage creative expression in Japan.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Shoichi Fukayama, whose comments and suggestions were immeasurably valuable throughout the course of my study. Also, I sincerely thank Ann Walker (Art Therapist, MA) for her critical reading of and suggestions on this manuscript. I am also deeply indebted to her enthusiastic encouragement throughout the highs and lows of my engagement in the project described in this article.

[References]

- American Art Therapy Association, Inc. (2010). Art Therapy: Definition of the Profession. Retrieved October 29, 2007, from <http://www.arttherapy.org/aamembership.html>
- Benesse Educational Research Center. (1998). Kireru mukatsuku. Monogurafu chugakusei no sekai, 61. Tokyo: Benesse Corporation. Retrieved February 1, 2011, from <http://www.childresearch.net/RE-SOURCE/DATA/MONO/PSYCHOLOGY/ANGER/index.html>
- Bezruchka, S. (2005, Feb.). "Wa" or harmony in Japan. Retrieved February 1, 2011, from http://mailman2.u.washington.edu/pipermail/pophealth/2005_Febru-

ary/001048.html/

- British Association of Art Therapists. (2010). What is Art Therapy? Retrieved May 30, 2011, from http://www.baat.org/art_therapy.html
- Eva, M. C (1988). Kunsttherapie in der Praxis. Stuttgart: Verlag Ura-chhavs.
- Iimori, M. (Eds.). (2011). Geijutsu Ryouhou [Arts Therapy]. Japan: Nihon Hyoron-sha.
- International Art Therapy organization (2009). What is Art Therapy? Retrieved March 30, 2011, from <http://www.internationalarttherapy.org/whatisarttherapy.html>
- Japan Clinical Art Association (2011). Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved February 1, 2011, from <http://www.arttherapy.gr.jp>
- Joshibi University of Art and Design (2007). The Record of 2007 healing Art Project. Joshibi University of Art and Design. Tokyo Japan, Department of healing Art Project.
- Muthu, R. (2006). Social Development in Japan: A Focus on Social Welfare Issues. Journal of Societal & Social Policy. 5, 1-20.
- The Japanese Society of Psychopathology of Expression & Arts Therapy. (2010). Outline. Retrieved May 31, 2011, from <http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jspa/index.html>
- Weiten, W. (2010). Psychology: Themes and Variations. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[Author]

Minatsu ARIGA

有賀 三夏

Center for Liberal Arts

教養教育センター

Part-time lecturer / Researcher

非常勤講師/研究員