

Review Article

Diagnosis and treatment principle in Sasang medicine: original symptom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this review was to demonstrate the definition of the original symptom (OS) and how it works in medical procedures as to the Sasang medicine based on the Jema Lee's *Donguisusebowon (Longevity and Life Preservation in Eastern Medicine)*. OS is defined as the sum of all clinical information featured by an individual's intrinsic characteristics as Sasangin and health state prior to onset. It is the key factor in the clinical application of Sasang medicine including the diagnosis of constitutional type and Sasang symptomatology because the imbalance of metabolic functions of each Sasangin originates from that. The working principles of the OS and Sasang symptomatology can be summarized as follows. First, clinical information regarding cold or heat intolerance determines the cold or heat pattern of Sasang symptomatology. Another is the present worsening of the severity of Sasang symptomatology by one level as compared with that in the past. Symptoms prior to the onset worsen to a higher level of severity after any disorder breaks out. Finally, the treatment strategy and progress of each Sasangin are determined following the characteristics of the OS. Theoretical and clinical studies should be conducted to show the specific criteria for the diagnosis of Sasang symptomatology in the future.

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1. Introduction

Sasang medicine (SM) is a personalized medicine dividing human beings into four constitutional types, based on their physiological and pathological characteristics,^{1,2} and presents a holistic approach based on the philosophical theory of four Virtues in Confucianism and clinical experiences in

traditional Korean medicine.^{2,3} Each of Sasangin or a constitutional type—that is, *Taeyangin* (Tae-Yang type), *Taeumin* (Tae-Eum type), *Soyangin* (So-Yang type), or *Soeumin* (So-Eum type)—has its typical imbalance in the function of internal organ systems, and it accounts for the type-specific unique characteristics of energy–fluid or water–food metabolism.²

Original symptom (OS) was introduced by Jema Lee⁴ in his book, *Donguisusebowon (Longevity and Life Preservation in*

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Eastern Medicine), and it has been a key concept addressing the features of the innate symptoms of each constitutional type when compared with other tailored theories of complementary and alternative medicine.⁵ OS has physical and psychological symptoms that are useful for diagnosing constitutional types and their typical symptoms.

The possible roles of the OS in SM have been investigated through several clinical studies. For example, the symptoms (heat/cold preference, sleep sensitivity, appetite or digestive conditions, water-drinking tendencies, sweating, urination, or defecation^{6–10}), appearance (body shape,^{10–12} body index mass,^{13,14} voice,^{10,15} or skin status,^{16,17}) and psychiatric characteristics^{5,18–20} showed statistical significance to differentiate between constitutional types. However, how this OS fundamentally works in SM has not been well known.

The purpose of this review was to demonstrate the definition of OS and how it works in medical procedures as to the SM based on Jema Lee's work, *Donguisusebowon (Longevity and Life Preservation in Eastern Medicine)*.

2. Definition of original symptoms

The Chinese letter 素 [sù] in *Donguisusebowon*⁴ means inborn element. Jema Lee⁴ reported a few brief cases in his book, and the reports started with the following expression: a patient originally had symptoms A, B, and C even before he became sick. This group of symptoms is called the OS. He suggested that each constitutional type has its own innate tendencies physically and mentally in SM.^{1–3} Sometimes, researchers prefer the term “ordinary symptom” to “original symptom.”^{21,22} However, the word “ordinary” might not be sufficient to embrace the intrinsic concept of OS. The meaning of “innate” or “original” other than “plain” is more appropriate because OS comes from the imbalance in the function of the inner organ system.

Extensively, OS is defined as the sum of clinical information featured by an individual's intrinsic characteristics as *Sasangin* and health status prior to the onset—that is, OS consists of every single symptom prior to the onset. This occurs because each constitutional type has its own imbalance in metabolic functions or the type-specific unique characteristics of energy–fluid or water–food metabolism, and the uniqueness originates from the innate variation of function in the internal organ systems.^{1–3}

Original illness is sometimes distinguished from the OS to emphasize the ill status of *Sasangin*.²³ However, OS is comprehensively used to refer to both ill and good conditions in SM.

Time is a key factor to understand OS appropriately. The physiological symptoms of OS can differ from the pathological symptoms in *Sasangin*. In *Sasangin*, a person who had a few symptoms but did not require any treatments in the past, can become ill and show completely different symptoms at present. Physiological OS is the sum of clinical symptoms that do not need to be treated, whereas pathological OS is the sum of clinical symptoms that need to be treated. The latter is also called original illness. Generally, “original symptom” can be used to refer extensively to both physiological or pathological symptoms.

This meaning of OS is illustrated in Fig. 1.

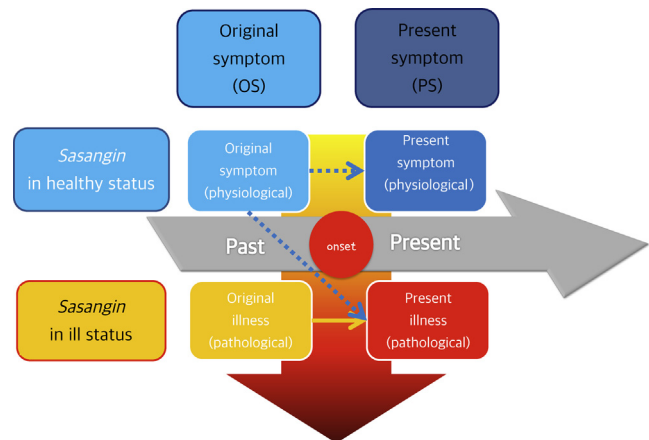


Fig. 1 – Original symptom means the sum of clinical information featured by an individual's intrinsic characteristics as *Sasangin* and health status prior to the onset. *Sasangin* can be either in good or ill status throughout life. Original illness can specifically be used to refer to the pathological status prior to the onset. However, original symptom extensively expresses both physiological or pathological symptoms in *Sasangin* medicine. OS, original symptom; PS, present symptom.

3. Diagnostic principles of *Sasangin* and *Sasangin* symptomatology: original symptoms

3.1. Diagnosis of *Sasangin* based on OS

Clinical procedures (Fig. 2) in SM start with the collection of a patient's clinical information. Based on the information, *Sasangin* diagnosis is the first step. In addition to appearance (facial features or body shape) or vocal features, OS is useful in identifying which of the following constitutional types—Tae-Yang, So-Yang, Tae-Eum, and So-Eum—should be applied, because every single symptom can indicate a functional imbalance of the internal organ system. For example, the functional condition of water–food metabolism can be evaluated from evacuation habits. Sweating and urination tendency are the best parameters to measure hyperactivity or hypoactivity of energy–fluid metabolism. The quality of sleep can be a good indicator of the psychiatric status in each constitutional type.

The key attribute is that the OS should be inherent. Practitioners should identify the earliest symptoms when they examine or evaluate a patient, as the present symptoms can differ from the past symptoms. From the obtained OS information, the relative hyperactivity and hypoactivity of metabolic functions in the four organ systems and then the constitutional type can be determined.² For example, a woman used to have no appetite and difficulty in digesting food. In addition, she had much gas in the bowels. However, she might not have any issues that needed to be treated in the digestive system; she just felt uncomfortable from time to time. These symptoms can be interpreted as follows: the food-intake function is hypoactive, whereas the food-discharge function is hyperactive.³ Putting these interpretations together, her

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