



Culture-bound syndrome and oriental medicine in Korea

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Abstract. This article introduces oriental medicine (traditional Korean medicine) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in Korea. Oriental medicine or traditional Chinese medicine belongs to conventional medical system in Korea and China, and is most world-widely spread as CAM. In particular, oriental medicine can have a major role as a model of integrative medicine on the basis of psychosomatic medicine. This article also introduces culture-bound syndrome in Asia which is based on psychosomatic aspect of oriental medicine. © 2006 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Oriental medicine in Korea—as conventional medicine

There are three types of medicines in Korea, western medicine, oriental medicine and alternative medicine. In western countries, oriental medicine is thought as alternative medicine. But in Korea, both western medicine and oriental medicine (traditional Korean medicine) are official conventional medicines. On 25th September 1951, when the Medical Service Act was legislated in Korea for the first time, oriental medicine began to gain support from the legal system. Now oriental medicine is the conventional medicine and has the same legal status as western medicine in Korea [1].

There are lots of similarities between two medical systems such as same educational period, similar practice course for speciality in the hospital. The college educational course

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Table 1
Two medical systems in Korea

Classification	Western medicine	Oriental medicine
Licensed doctors	75.295 (85%)	12.794 (15%)
Doctors in hospitals	29.158 (96%)	1.385 (4%)
Doctors in clinics and midwifery clinics	24.031 (75%)	8.075 (25%)
Medical schools (entrance quota)	41 (3.300)	11 (760)
General hospitals and hospital (beds)	1.045 (204.220)	154 (8.887)
Local clinics (beds)	24.491 (91.702) 73%	9.196 (698) 27%

Source: MOHW, Health Resources Division, 2001.

is composed of 2-year preparatory course and 4-year regular course. Only the students who finish 6-year oriental medical course in the university can be doctors after passing the National License Examinations. After graduation from the university, some of oriental medical doctors work for the hospital as interns for 1 year and residents for 3 years. Each resident specializes one part of eight issues: internal medicine, acupuncture and moxibustion, gynecology, pediatrics, neuropsychiatry, rehabilitation medicine, sasang constitutional medicine and ophthalmology, and otolaryngology and dermatology. After completing the training course in the hospital, they are required to pass the examination for specialists.

Table 1 explains two medical systems in Korea. Western medicine has been developed into a huge hospital weighted medicine, whereas oriental medicine has the tendency to become a clinic weighted medicine.

Although there have been some trials to unify these two medical systems since 1970, there has also been resistance to unification. Now cooperative medical treatment is the present solution rather than unification. So many hospitals in Korea have been expanding the cooperative medical treatment system such as East–west Stoke Center, Arthritis Center, Anti-aging Center, Pain Clinic, etc., in Kyunghee University hospital [2].

Recently, research trend of oriental medicine has been changing; more and more oriental medical doctors have standardization, evidence-based medicine, new-drug development with natural products and the development of new treatment methods with complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) under careful consideration, where bibliography study used to be the typical method of research of oriental medicine.

2. CAM in Korea

The “disease-oriented” western medicine classifies the human condition as “diseased and non-diseased” states. On the other hand, the “health-oriented” oriental medicine classifies the human condition as “healthy and unhealthy” states.

The oriental medicine is philosophical, subjective, holistic, defensive, experiential and function-weighted; while the western medicine is scientific, objective, analytic, offensive, experimental and anatomy-weighted.

From a view-point of medical character, the alternative medicines can be clarified as the western-medicine-related alternative medicine, the oriental-medicine-related alternative medicine and the western-oriental-connected alternative medicine.

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