

Review Article

Morality and longevity in the viewpoint of Sasang medicine

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of morality and health of humans are discussed from the viewpoint of *Sasang* medicine, as described by Je-Ma Lee in his books *Donguisusebowon* and *Gyeokchigo*. *Sasang* medicine suggests that human beings exist with qualities of “heavenly loom,” “humanly affair,” and “nature and conduct in following parts.” In addition, *Sasang* medicine classifies people into the following four *Sasang* types: Tae-Yang, So-Yang, Tae-Eum, and So-Eum. This classification is based on the following traits: benevolence–righteousness–propriety–wisdom, manifestations of sorrow–anger–joy–pleasure (*Seong* and *Jeong*), and largeness and smallness of lung–spleen–liver–kidney. Human diseases are always caused by the excessive mind action of sorrow–anger–joy–pleasure. Mind action affects the body unilaterally and makes it ill. According to *Sasang* medicine, both good health and illness in human beings originate from morality. Therefore, realizing and acting in accordance with the right moral behavior are essential to lead a healthy life.

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1. Introduction

Health and longevity have been an old and fundamental concern in human history. The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹ The primary questions of this review begin with this definition. How are physical, mental, and social well-being related and also how are the mental and social health related to morality and longevity of human beings?

About these fundamental questions, *Sasang* medicine suggests that moral individuals are the healthy ones, as also suggested by the Confucian view. Je-Ma Lee (also known as *Dongmu*, 1837–1900 AD) proposed the Confucian view of human beings in his book *Gyeokchigo* and the medical view of human beings in his another book *Donguisusebowon*. *Sasang* medicine has been created based on *Sasang* philosophy. In *Sasang* constitutional medicine, the relationship among morality, longevity, and health is discussed from both a medical and philosophical point of view.

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We herein review the morality and health of human beings based on the viewpoint of *Sasang* medicine by analyzing the Confucian relation of the moral law, human health, and life span demonstrated in the books *Gyeokchigo* and *Donguisusebowon*.

2. Discussion

2.1. Definition of human being in Theories on Nature and Conduct

Dongmu thought all human beings have the nature of four virtues, namely, benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom (Confucianism). He mentioned that these four virtues are the core theme of human beings, and classified human beings into one of the following two categories: *noble* and *humble*.²

2.1.1. Structure of the existence in human being

In the “Theories on Nature and Conduct” chapter of the book *Donguisusebowon*, Dongmu reinterpreted the structure human beings live with. He described that human beings stand externally and internally with heavenly loom, humanly affair, and nature and conduct in following parts. The former two

components can be translated into a series of environmental relations, that is, time–space and various relationships with the others, respectively (Figure 1).³

Each part of the human body works subjectively to communicate with the objective elements. The sensory organs receive the heavenly loom and use the mind to value good, whereas the internal organs work with the mind to scorn evil. People try to realize nature with their anterior regions, while they act (or conduct themselves) with their posterior regions. According to the *Good Nature Principle*, human beings are actually born with nature and conduct in following parts, which are supposed to be good. Therefore, people are meant to act based on their morality by realizing and acting in accordance with nature and conduct in following parts, or the four virtues. However, an inattentive and indolent mind keeps them from realizing and acting in moral ways, respectively.

Thus, it can be said that human beings can realize morality and act properly only if they control their inattentive and indolent mind by fostering good nature, that is, by preserving the mind and following the good conduct. Anybody can be a saint but not everybody can be a saint. It depends on how one controls the interrupting minds.³

The aforementioned structure of human being described is illustrated in Figure 2 and summarized in Table 1.



Figure 1 – Structure of human existence in Sasang medicine.

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