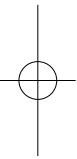




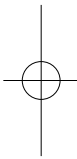
Book Review

Kim Taeu [Kim Taewoo] 김태우. 2021. 『한의학의 인류학: 몸-마음-자연을 연결하는 사유와 치유』 [An anthropology of Korean medicine clinics: Thought and healing connecting the body-mind-nature]. Paju: Dolbegae 돌베개. 224pp. ISBN 9788971994412 ₩12,600

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Kim Taeu's book *An anthropology of Korean medicine clinics: Thought and healing connecting the body-mind-nature* invites us to explore a novel understanding of our body through the lens of Korean medicine. The book is one of the few anthropological and sociological monographs devoted to the topic, and it is the only book that explains Korean medicine (or East Asian medicine) based on ontological inquiry. The book delves into the basis of the diverse manners of practice in Korean medicine. In other words, it explores what makes the perspective of Korean medicine most distinctive, mainly from Western biomedicine and its ontological basis. This is also what distinguishes the book from other anthropological and sociological works, which mainly focus on the transformation of Korean medicinal practice in neoliberal or hybrid environments. Many books have introduced Korean medicine's characteristics, especially from its theoretical or philosophical aspects. However, this book is arguably the first monograph eluci-



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dating the deep structure of Korean medicine's healing practice with anthropological observations from clinics that offer the service.

Most notably, the book actively engages Philippe Descola's (2013) classification of the four ontologies with anthropological findings. In this case, Korean medicine's ontology belongs to analogism, whereas Western biomedicine is based on naturalism. What Kim calls "dense networks of analogy" (125) in the book portray the universe filled with the 10,000 things (*manmul*) that could be analogically interpreted and therefore form endless epistemological and ontological webs. In other words, it is like the principle of *yinyang* being applied to men and women, heat and coldness, the head and the abdomen, and the heart and the kidneys. Here, the principle of *yinyang* is not just a framework to recognize the myriad of things but a network for us to be ontologically related to them. This ontological practice is not limited to the thought process but extends to the healing action, such as selecting appropriate acupressure points or medicinal herbs for treatment.

It is worth closely looking at the arrangement of chapter headings that are delicately devised and connected. Namely, as the first chapter's title, the author insists: "the truth about the body is not one." Then he adds subtitles to each subsequent chapter heading, explaining how he sees each of them relating to the body. Chapter 2, titled "Diagnosis," has the subtitle "knowing the body." Chapter 3, "Medical Terms," is "speaking of the body." Chapter 4, "Acupuncture," is "helping the body with its potential." And Chapter 5, "Medicines," is "being intertwined with beings outside the body." Hence, although the table of contents seems to follow the usual sequence of an introductory textbook on medical knowledge, it deliberately emphasizes that the topics are associated with ontological practice on the body.

In this regard, several characteristics of Korean medicine can be drawn. First, it emphasizes the *flow of qi* rather than focusing on the fixing of a lesion or disease entity. According to the author, the disease names in Korean medicine are about the appearances of deviated flows, and the symptoms are the body's responses to these (77). Following this thought, Korean medicine doctors do not have preconceptions or a "preceding framework" (98) ahead of a patient's complaint, which is usually seen in biomedical practice based on "standardized" or "normal" numerical values. Instead, they encounter and "follow" (*ibid.*) the phenomena expressed from a patient's body based on their criteria, which consider the relationship between the subject (*i.e.*, the Korean medicine doctor) and the object (*i.e.*, the patient)

as important. To put it simply, the author introduces an example of a Korean medicine clinic in which a Korean medicine doctor spends much more time listening to a patient's overall condition to collect relevant signs for pattern identification, compared to a biomedical clinic depending on a blood sugar level and other physical tests to judge a patient's condition.

In terms of treatment, the book explains that the practice of acupuncture posits self-flowing since it does not intervene with any material object. The channel system, which Korean medicine doctors employ, weaves manifestations of deviant flows and specific *zangfu* organs or other parts of the body together. A Korean medicine doctor can thereupon sort out which acupressure points could cause undulation of the flow and return the body to a balanced condition. On the other hand, treatment with herbal medicines or decoctions is the attempt to relate external things with the body to regulate the flow. The author makes a clear division between pharmaceuticals (*jeyak*) in biomedicine and prescriptions (*cheobang*) in Korean medicine (154). While the former is ready-made and mass-produced, the latter varies depending on a patient's condition. The book introduces an example of the method of addition and subtraction (*gagam*) in the prescribing practice. Although there are also ready-made recipes for famous prescriptions, Korean medicine doctors often add/subtract some herbs to/from them when treating a patient. This is because a patient's overall condition appears in various ways and keeps changing (158). Thus, acupuncture and herbal medicines are utilized to modulate the flow, which makes Korean medicine doctors look into the comprehensive manifestations of body conditions and intervene through the dense networks of the analogy. To support this, the book provides vivid and interesting conversations between Korean medicine doctors and patients, which the author observed in clinics.

Although this book will undoubtedly intrigue many readers who want to understand the logic of Korean medicine, it may encounter some criticism as it seems to be essentializing the principles of Korean medicine. However, as the author argues, understanding the underlying structure of the traditional practice, which is ingrained in the body of Korean medicine doctors as a social and cultural habit, is necessary to grasp the differences between Western biomedicine and the way of coexisting well with each other. Furthermore, it should be noted that contemporary Korean medicine clinics are where a different style of body and healing practice is enacted, as shown in the book. The Korean medicine clinic is different from the clinic that Michel Foucault investigated as the birthplace of biomedical practice.

It is where the East Asian ontology makes an appearance, and a different world emerges, intertwining with the living body. Therefore, it can play a role as a subversive ontological laboratory¹ which would raise another world of thought.

References

- Descola, Philippe. 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 1983. Give Me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World. In Karin D. Knorr-Cetina & Michael Mulkay, ed. *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*. London, Beverly Hills, and New Delhi. Sage Publications.

¹ This can be another approach to perceiving the world, similar to what Bruno Latour (1983: 141–169) demonstrated with a laboratory.