

# The Episteme of Body and the Problem of Environment Concerning the Early Protestant Medical Mission in Korea

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## I. Raising Questions

Descriptions on human being, made from either historical or cultural perspectives, are almost concentrated on the ontological meaning of man. This is not so much different even if those perspectives include realistic problems of living. For example, neither materialistic historicism nor its theory of culture is different from idealistic perspectives. In that, the former is also seeking for ontological meaning of man. If any difference, it is not the final goal but the way of approach to it.

However, the descriptions of human being in relation to the environment much more realistically concentrates on his/her living conditions than his/her ontological meaning. Recognizing the inevitable situations of humanness in which he/she exists is more necessary. In other words, the questions on human being raised with the environmental problems are different from other existing questions in that those questions put priority not on human mind but on human body.

In this context, this thesis, focusing on human body, examines how a traditional view of environment can be related to a sustainable development.

Yet, a body-view is not to be reduced to a purely narrative concept. Body is born, grows, ages, gets ill and dies. This is an inevitable reality of human body before/after its conceptualization. At the same time, body is the experiencing subject that experiences the reality. The process of experience is

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an absolute reality in themselves, and it becomes a single unit composed of a series of processes. Therefore the reality of body can be an object of recognition. But the subject of that reality is nothing but the body itself. As body exists, that reality comes into a phenomenon. Body is the body-self and the phenomenon-self. In other words, body is the biological basis of human being, the field of cognition and mental activities and the complications of all kind of processes and relations of existence.

But a body-view is not automatically given. In an ordinary life, the body would not be the object of inquiry. Only when the body stops to be a body because of physical, social or environmental causes, the questions on it are arisen. Illness might be an example. Illness is a concrete, direct and universal phenomenon upon which the question on a body rests. Nothing makes the questions on body more real. Hence, a body-view is caused by the questions on body including disease and cure.

Considering the fact just seen above, it is no wonder that the soteriological tradition, or religion, of every culture has included its own body-view with the explanations and understanding of disease and cure. Therefore, our purpose to examine the environmental problems we are facing, requires answers to such questions as followings; what is the traditional understanding of disease and cure? Have the traditional views changed? If any change, why? and how? How are the changes related to the present environmental problems? If the relations are so important as to require serious considerations, what the traditional body-view can contribute to solve the present environmental issues?

These questions, in the context of this work, can be simplified as followings; (1)What is the traditional Korean body-view including the understanding disease and cure? (2)Why and how have it changed with the modernization? (3)What problems have the change raised? (4)What should be the solutions for the problems in Korean religious culture?

From this point of views, the environmental crisis, a traditional body-view, so called modernization, and the protestant medical mission etc. should be concerned systematically utilizing such conceptions as episteme, disease, curing, folk belief, medicine, science, mechanical, organic, holistic etc.

## II. Disease and Cure — Traditional Understanding in Korea

The concrete performance of the most archaic soteriology in Korean culture is actualized through a ritual called *Kut*(굿), which is conducted by *Mudang*(무당). Practically *Kut* is to resell disasters and call for blessings. And its ideal is realized through the mediation of *Mudang*, who utilizes the deifications of the maximized forces required in the reality of life.

Disease belongs to disaster and curing to blessing. *Kut*, therefore, has the functions of not only protecting but also curing disease. *Mudang* is in charge of those functions. *Chihyung-kut*(curing *Kut*) has many different names according to the sort of disease and the symptoms of the patients.

If it is to be found out what symbolism the procedures of curing *Kut* have and represent, the most archaic understanding of disease and cure can be read, and then what the traditional body-view is also can be conjectured. Curing *Kut* is basically composed of releasing the anger of gods, comforting gods, invoking to more powerful gods, and offering sacrifices in/on behalf of the patients. In addition, curing *Kut* includes the normalization and recovery of retortion of relations between god and human being, between one and others, between the living and the dead, between the place and time, the violation of taboo and the defilement.

From the above descriptions, it is possible to designate two facts; one, the fact that disease is caused by the distortion of relationship; the other, the fact that the relationship is meant fundamentally by the cosmological category including divinities, nature and human being. Correspondingly the cure is the restoration and retrieval of relationship. In other words, this is to secure and confirm one's position within the holistic universe. Illness, therefore, is the rupture of the relations between the body and the cosmic order. And curing is the harmony of body which is originated from the recovering of those relationship. In conclusion, a body is a plaza where the cosmic order appears concretely. This body-view is radically different from the biological episteme of body.

In addition to the folk belief soteriology, the traditional Korean medicine

also reveals the archaic body-view and understanding of disease and cure. The Korean medicine was based upon *Hang ti nei ching*(黃帝內經), which is the ancient classic of the Chinese medicine. The presupposition of the *nei ching* is that human being is in harmony(corresponding) with the cosmos(heaven and earth). The metaphysical basis of the harmony is *Yin* and *Yang*. A body, then, is the synthesis completed with *Yin* and *Yang*. Disease is nothing but the destruction of the harmony, and the curing is the recovering of the synthesis.

This Chinese tradition has been transmitted through out the whole history of Korean culture adding modified theoretical explanations and practical healing by Korean medicine. According to *Tong Eui Po Kam*(東醫寶鑑 1596), which is written by Huh Chun(許浚), human body is comprised of spirit(精), vitality(氣) and elation(神). These three components should be unified in a body, and if not the body is taken ill. For the curing of disease, therefore, he advises to cultivate one's own mind than to depend on physical remedy. Another well known Korean medicine was developed by Lee Che-ma(李濟馬) who wrote *Tong Eui Su Se Po Won*(東醫壽世保元 1894). He classified *Yin* and *Yang* which constitutes body more in detail into heaven-human being and human nature-destiny. According to him, disease is an unstable settlement of tranquility and exasperation. A body, to the extent that it implies cosmological order, is not a body. It is a cosmos, nature, spirit and mind. This body-view is fundamentally different from the modern biological one.

As far as body is concerned, the two traditions, i.e. folk belief and medicine, do not have conflict with each other. If it is to be categorized into two different representations of a ritualistic performance of healing and a logical explanations of theoretical foundation, it can be said that both traditions not only share the same body and disease-cure view but also have mutual compensative functions. As body is cosmos, a holistic being, and as those conceptual realities are condensed into body, the traditional body-view is based upon the cosmological structure. And the both traditions share together the fact that disease and cure are defection and recovering of the totality of body.

### III. Impact and Peripherization — The Impact of Protestant Medical Mission vs Traditional Body-View

With the so-called the Opening of the Harbours in 1882, Korea came into the period of grave change. The change resulted in the lost of national sovereignty. In the cultural aspect, the traditional culture got to be exposed to a new way of life which is called modernization. The destruction of traditional society was inevitable.

These changes were resulted in a transformation of the episteme about realities. A body-view, including the understanding of disease-cure, was not an exception. In Korea, it was the Protestant which directly led the process of change in the episteme of body. The Protestant, in the course of expanding its missionary projects, unfolded a new soteriology, introduced and practiced the western medicine, and transplanted the western modernity. These distinctions are merely conceptual ones in order to make it possible to describe the situation. In fact, however, the Protestant medical mission was at the center of the scene.

The Protestant medical mission began with the Korea-America Treaty in 1882. In the treaty, there was no passage allowing the freedom of missionary work. Missionary works, therefore, indirectly started by both medical service and educational work. It is natural that medical service was selected as a preceding missionary method in that it could be regarded generally as a benevolent work. Their medical service, however, in its practical field, had to collide with the traditional view of disease and cure. The missionaries' medical service, accompanied with disparagement and harsh denial of the tradition, was a destructive shock for the Korean people.

Missionaries blamed curing *Kut* of *Mudang*, even without either considering the healing effects of it or reflecting the cultural values of it. It was because *Kut* seem to them to be based upon a wicked soteriology. Upon the episteme of the western modernity, missionaries stigmatized the traditional folk believes as animism, fetishism, nature worship, shamanism, ancestor worship and satanism related to a primitive, premodern, ignorant, fallible and evil

superstition.

However, missionaries regarded partly that, in a sense, Korean medicine could be said to be a real medicine somewhat related to disease and cure. They realized, with much suspicion, that Korean medicine sometimes cured some sorts of diseases, especially on the native and internal ones. But in the light of the western medicine, Korean traditional medicine was no more than a non-rational, non-scientific, and non-systematic healing art. Though it was surely based upon long time experiences, it was merely non-proved experiences lacking empirical verification. That is why Korean medicine was regarded as a "ridiculous, useless and absurd thing." Naturally doctors who practiced Korean medicine were called as "quacks."

It is interesting that missionaries' critical judgement on the traditional healing systems, such as curing ritual or Korean medicine, were not caused by the religious discourse of Protestantism but by the episteme of the western modernity. It can be confirmed if the missionaries' personal confession of their experience of Korea during their stays are scrutinized. In their eyes, Korea was a poor, dirty, stinking, unsanitary country which was filled with all kind of diseases. And their conclusion was clear that it was because Korea was "not civilized, not westernized and not modernized."

Protestant medical missionaries never have showed serious concern on the traditional understanding of disease and cure. They never tried to understand the traditional episteme on body. What they wanted was only the success of evangelical tasks through medical service. But, at the same time, missionary works implied the honest motives to "cultivate this poor and diseaseful country to a rich and healthy one." It is in these terms that the evangelization and modernization may be integrated without any conflict. Through hospital-centered medical service, medical education, and participation in anti-epidemic policy of government, western medicine was gradually and successfully settled as a modernized, effective and superior medicine overcoming traditional medical culture. As a result, all these phenomena were recognized as proofs showing the exclusive superiority of Christianity over the other soteriologies.

Traditional society reacted toward the impact of the Protestant medical service in two different ways. First, among those who had experienced the

real effects of curing destroyed not only the traditional view on disease and cure but also the body-view itself. It finally resulted in the acceptance of a new soteriology. The success of Protestant mission was deeply related to the effect of the medical mission. But there was another reaction of those who had tried to civilize Korean society with a new trend of culture. They carefully separated the missionaries' medical work into two different aspects; the medical and the evangelical. Rejecting the evangelical aspect, they tried to simply accept the medical aspect. However, the acceptance of western medicine was impossible without the dissolution of traditional medicine. And it means that the traditional body-view and its episteme which are implied in the traditional soteriology were gradually, but distinctively lost its influences from the traditional society. As a result, both the body-view which regards body as a concrete field of harmonious relations in the cosmological order and the view which regards disease and cure as a defection and a recover of those relations became a peripherized episteme.

#### IV. Dilemmas — Concerned Problems

It is interesting that, as the environmental problem rises as a global issue possessed by everybody and every nation, the traditional episteme of body, including the traditional understanding of disease and cure, attracts more attention of people in Korea. In addition, since modern medicine has discovered the fact that pollutions of air, of water, and of earth, deadly affecting on human bodies, can be causes of many sorts of diseases, it is recognized that the cure of them cannot be done not only by conquering pathogenic microorganisms but also by stabilizing the entire body. All these facts call for a critical reflection upon the basis of the modern medicine, which was caused, at the first stage of its implantation into Korea, by Protestant medical mission.

The modernity as a child of the western culture has a materialistic and mechanical understanding of body. This western episteme of body generated

the mechanical understanding of body in the western medicine. The western modernity is based on the dichotomy of subject/object, culture/nature, mind/material, soul/body, self/other, and the mechanical episteme of body and disease-curing is a product of the modernity which assigns body to the material area, i.e. to the natural science. In the western medicine a cell is a basic unit of body, and therefore it is the cause of disease. It is usually said that the cause of an disease is the deterministic mechanical character of cells. The western medicine, trying to conquer diseases in terms of scientific methods such as anatomy and physiology, at last, found itself as a modern science. Now body became a mere thing which can be measured and controlled.

This procedure may be called "materialization of body." And as a result of it, the possible ways to investigate diseases and to find curing methods were opened. Knowledge on the functions of cells and many biological units made it possible to develop both pharmacological cures and surgical operations. The more medical techniques is highly developing, the more curing came to rely on those techniques. Through this process, however, the materialized body was objectified as a mere thing. And this means that body has been separated from any transcendental or cosmological categories.

The transformation of the episteme of body, which was a result of introduction of the western medicine through Protestant medical mission, particularly in Korea, brought about three dilemmas; First, because the negative attitude toward the traditional view on disease and cure was not confined to their curing techniques but included the rejection of the traditional soteriology itself, the introduction of the western medicine was necessarily accompanied by the destruction of the traditional soteriology. In fact, nevertheless, the western medicine showed its ability to cure surgical diseases and remove epidemics. Therefore the subjects who accepted the western medicine were inevitably exposed to ones' dilemma of identity; Second, the Protestant missionaries who introduced the western medicine did not construct their own body-view based upon their religious soteriology, but put the principles of the western modernity in the opposite of the traditional body-view. They constructed a dual system, "Body to science and soul to religion." But this dualistic attitude was not compatible with the Christian



doctrine itself. Its understanding on the causes of disease and its evangelical messages about the miracles of healing could not but conflict with the scientific discourse of the modernity. Therefore the medical service which has been selected as the best and the most urgent method of mission made the Protestant fall into the dilemma of religiosity; Third, more fundamental dilemma was originated from the environmental crisis of the modern world. The new recognition that the environmental crisis is a result of the deconstruction of the holistic understanding about the reality requires a positive reflection on the traditional cosmology, theology and anthropology. The fact tells us that it is necessary to reevaluate the transformation of episteme, the unfolding of the modern culture and the peripherized traditional values. But it can be neither a retrospection nor a return. It is to reflect our historical and, of course, modern experiences in the light of a new possibility, and it is to expect a creative future which will appear through that reflection. This work gives birth to the dilemma of episteme because it requires a question on the existing culture with the expectation for the unimaginable future. It can be an epistemological work without epistemological criteria.

These three dilemmas, of course, were not necessarily the result of the Protestant medical mission only. It must not be overlooked that the great waves of modernization were occurred during that period. But the Protestant medical mission was more than a wave among them. It was fundamentally the problem of not only the technology but also of the soteriology.

## V. Creative Horizon — Searching for a Way of Solution

In Korea, as we have just seen in the above dilemmas, it is not easy to overcome the environmental problems in the context of religious culture, especially if we want to solve the innate problems of environment, or if we are to keep the sustainable development. It is because of the paradigmatic complicatedness of the problem itself. Therefore before suggesting a concrete

method of overcome and solution, we must first clarify the dilemmas we have just depicted.

We, in this moment, can point out several situational conditions as the positive ethos helping to overcome those problems. Now there is a positive reappraisal upon the traditional cultures, increasing inter-religious dialogues, worries about one's own health, and anxieties about the pollution of nature. Related to these phenomena more people get interested in both the traditional ideas of healing and the traditional medicine. And the scientific and medical efforts to integrate the western medicine and the eastern one are now being realized. These inclinations has been already unfolding with many concrete and positive results.

What we are to give attention to is the Protestant(Christianity), as a waterway of the modernity. We will here propose two issues as the Protestant tasks.

First, the Protestant should secure its position neither as the western nor as the modern but rather as a religion in Korean religious culture. The Protestant should keep in mind that, in spite of its urgent concerns and efforts to solve the environmental problems, its attitudes are easily to be regarded as a western and modern ones. Even though many people have said about the traditional attitudes toward the nature and the holistic understanding of body, the Protestant has never showed any interest in them. Rather the Protestant has been and still is a vanguard of the modernization and a leader of the developmental norm since the early modern period. It has offered the idea of "the western=the development=the Christianity" as the developmental norm. Now, however, the Protestant should find itself in the Korean religious culture, and speak of its problems, its recognitions, and its solutions upon that position. It must begin with the concrete issues, for example, how the Christian monotheistic soteriology can be with the cosmological soteriology of the traditional culture and with the humanistic soteriology of the Buddhism and the Confucianism. In that harmony the Christian discourse of body including the problems of the nature, the human, and the disease-curing may at last be accepted into the Korean society. If these efforts are to be realized, the Protestant may be able to be free from the modern dichotomy of body/soul and logically harmonize its concern for

the environment and its soteriology.

Second, the Protestant should not make the environmental problems stale ones but rather should normalize them as ethical practices. If somebody insists on that the Christian effort "to preserve the order of the Creation" the only and the unique soteriology of those environmental problems left to us, it is not an ethical paradigm actualized in the universal field of life, but rather is no more than a group ethos shared only by a specific tradition and community. For example, if somebody overlooks the efforts of the modern science to synthesize the western and the eastern in its epistemological level, and if somebody overlooks the fact that those efforts are originated from the acceptance of the traditional episteme on things and beings themselves, he/she is, we should keep this in mind, unfolding an autistic logic.

## VI. Sustaining Questions

We have surveyed how the traditional episteme of body had changed, what problems had the results of the change brought forth, and what is the task for us to overcome those problems. But the solution of the problem is not confined to the role of Christianity. What is more important is a new self-recognition of the religious culture itself and a sensitivity to the reality. We chose the Protestant medical mission in Korea only as a paradigmatic example. The conclusion of our research, therefore, leaves us following issues as our tasks. That is, in the modern environmental crisis how the religious culture contribute to solve the problems.

More concretely, we may raise questions as followings; If religious culture is to speak about the environmental problems, is it to change the whole episteme of things or beings? Or is it just to make the matters of the problems more normative ones? Or is it to show and practice a realistic solution of the raised problems?

I'd like to say that I have, from the beginning, expected our searching to shed lights on such final questions. Even though it has not been communicable enough.

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