

## Health as spiritual and virtuous harmony with compassion and vital energy

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### SUMMARY

Altruistic virtuous caring, possibly originated from religion and/or spirituality, is indispensable for holistic health through channeling vital energy with diet, exercise and meditation. This is a participant-observed medical anthropological research of a first generation Korean elderly immigrant health professional woman living in a four generational family. She had hypertension and was concerned about possible attack of stroke. Multi-religious, spiritual, and cosmological vital energy based on holistic Nature-oriented health beliefs and practices influenced by psychosocial, cultural and economic background, education, self-discipline and self-cultivation of individual, and group or family may create health. Self-care beliefs based on confidence in self-control of one's life style for oneself and others influence individual and group health practice. The holistic alternative health beliefs and practices were proved to be efficacious and beneficial by her self-evaluation, evaluation of significant others, biomedical professionals, and laboratory tests. That may have potential application for global health.

**Key words:** Korean elderly immigrant woman; Holistic self alternative and complementary health care; Natural care; Self-care; Multi-religious, spiritual and virtuous health beliefs and practices; Altruism, compassion and forgiveness; Cosmological vital energy

### INTRODUCTION

The free flow of vital energy is facilitated by through carrying out altruistic virtuous loving, forgiving and caring other people including deceitful, unreliable and irresponsible persons, inspired by religious or personal spirituality. Compassion, gratitude, hope, and wisdom along with meditation, diet and exercises are essential in maintaining and promoting holistic health in

spiritual, mental and physical transformation. Here spirituality may be coming from religion or other personally meaningful sources. Spirituality means transcendence over self and a discovery of the meaning and worth of others for their own sake.

The vital energy in the cosmos seems to initiate, energize, maintain and promote health enhanced by self-cultivation and meditation; environmental, interpersonal and socioeconomic resources; religious and spiritual support; endowed and acquired sound physical and mental health; and family and humanistic virtuous harmony for others. Multi-cultural, multi-religious, virtuous altruistic, cosmic and spiritual health care theoretical paradigm appears

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to be working. The paradigm for health prevention and promotion is eclectic and syncretic.

It is hypothesized that a holistically harmonious person would comprehend one's own health problems and solve them according to his or her health beliefs, practices, socio-cultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal, religious, spiritual, virtuous and Natural environmental context. In this hypothesis, *ki* is the vital energy that binds, nourishes, and accomplishes a unified energy system of spiritual, intra and interpersonal and bodily system.

### Theoretical background

#### Complimentary and alternative health care

In Asian medicine and in Western intellectual history, the ideas of vitalism and holism provide conceptual links for viewing these missing connections, and the new field of 'psycho-neuro-immunology' begins to suggest mechanisms for a mind-body connection.

Complimentary and alternative medicine constitutes primary health care for 80 percent of humans worldwide. A growing number of experts doubt that even the United States will be able to sustain their current system of high-cost, high-tech medicine indefinitely.

Examining the way immigration has impacted the US, Kleinman (2002) noted that the large influx of South American, Asian and African immigrants has changed and challenged the health care system. Many immigrants have limited access to health care due to prohibitive costs, lack of insurance and hours of health care availability. They are often dependent on complementary and alternative medicines. Kleinman (2002) made policy recommendations regarding biomedicine and complementary and alternative medicine.

Kleinman (2002) advocated funding for additional investigation into the effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicines and

regulation or standardized measures. He noted that central to the health and healthcare agenda are economic, cultural and societal issues that will have a growing role in our understanding and he strongly promoted ethnographic research in conjunction with epidemiological research to emphasize the real context in which illness happens and the best means of treatment.

#### Holism and spirituality

Health to illness is strength and comfort, to suffering, and distress. How loss of spirit results in physical symptoms as well as the inability to make decisions and function in everyday life. The pain of isolation, body and depression is associated with loss of health. Health and illness are reflections of alternatives in cultural, socio-psychological, political, financial, cognitive, philosophical, religious, spiritual, linguistic, aesthetic, pleasure holism (Desjarlais, 1992).

Duclow (2002) recognized that we are learning more humanistic ways to come to terms with sorrowful and even joyful life. Healing claims and practices have become more explicitly religious. Herbert Benson (1975) presented his relaxation response within the context of the meditative practices of world religions. More recently he has highlighted the faith factor in healing and remaining well, and proposed that we are wired for God (Benson, 1997). Jeff Levin (2001) has attempted to document links between prayer and healing.

#### Vital energy: harmony, altruism and meaningful fulfillment

Humans understand that believing or thinking is the origin of vital energy. If one believes or thinks convincingly, he or she tends to carry it out into action. Koreans believe that where the will is, there is energy; where energy is, there is blood; where blood is, there is vitality. The center of the cosmos is the mind, which creates the

body. The energy of the cosmos is our energy. The will of the cosmos is our will. Physical health and peace of mind are the roots of a high standard of self-cultivation. The cultivated person is free from anger and extreme frustration. Religion, education, philosophy, economics, sociology, medicine, arts and sports all come from one root. The real image of life should be understood to realize the full functioning of harmonious human-nature relationships (Lee, 1990). Vital energy has healing power (Charles, 2002).

Vital energy is facilitated by moral and virtuous power for health promotion. Gratitude is an emotional state and an attitude toward life that is a human strength in enhancing one's personal and social well-being (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). In the Hindu concept of *s'akti*, nature and culture are inextricably intertwined: *S'akti's* source is nature, but it becomes a moral power only when challenged with selfless, self-controlled service of others (Menon, 2002). Baumeister and Exline (2000) pointed out that self-control, as human strength is self-ability to alter to demonstrate socially beneficial behaviors by restraining own desire or pleasure.

#### **Nature of vital energy, meditation and holistic health**

It is only by *ki*, vital energy that humans live and breathe. *Ki* is owned and controlled by the mind. So that purifying mind is important. Emptying mind until it is free of negative emotions and thoughts. One way of meditation is through counting numbers slowly. Forgiving is one example of emptying mind by letting go. Then meaningfully fulfilled life is possible (Shin, 2002).

People who have damaged the meridian lines controlling the function of the heart through emotional imbalance likely feel intense pain in the center of the chest or at the elbows. Keeping

the meridian system free from emotional disturbances as well as strengthening it and it would be possible to lead a healthy and happy life (Shin, 2002).

It is recommended that when angry, one might want to try to stop thinking about what is making him angry. One can do this by meditating, sitting in quiet place, or listening to calming music. (Shin, 2002).

In the Far East Asian medical theory it is common belief that the body follows the mind and the mind in turn follows the spirit. In reverse, breathing influences not only the body but also the mind and one's emotions as well (Shin, 2002). *Danjon*, is the ocean of vital energy. *Danjon* is considered a source of one's life. A person who improves the power of his or her *danjon* to the fullest potential can stay healthy by healing and preventing diseases (Shin, 2002). Music relieves deep trauma. And this can alleviate chronic health problems, as deep-seated trauma is the source of illness (Shin, 2002).

It is hypothesized that a holistically harmonious person would comprehend one's own health problems and solve them according to his or her health beliefs, practices, socio-cultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal, religious, spiritual, virtuous, Natural and cosmological environmental context. In this hypothesis, *ki* is the energy that binds, nourishes, and accomplishes a unified energy system of spiritual, intra and interpersonal and bodily system.

## **METHODS AND RESULTS**

A case study was conducted with in-depth interview and participant observation during the home visits and other places for informant's holistic health activities. Kleinman (1988) states intensive case studies to show how each person's illness or health narrative explains his surroundings, both social and physical, so-called

ideological and material. Why a person is sick or healthy and what can be done for the particular individual.

Kleinman (1988) suggested the importance of narrative in developing more appropriate ways of living. An explanatory model (Kleinman, 1980) and semantic networks (Good & Good, 1981) were used to understand meaning and phenomena of daily life experience related to health and illness. The process of cultural construction (Yeung, Albert S. & Doris F. Chang, 2002) was included.

Informed consent was obtained by explaining a study of holistic health promotion and prevention. There were no particular time limitations for interview and participant observation. The informant willingly shared her health beliefs and practices. Purposefully, informally improvised spontaneous interviews and participant observations were conducted in Korean about her health beliefs and practices in physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, cognitive, religious, spiritual, and virtuous life experiences. Since she is an old adult, the reminiscence is used with memory aids with questions related to her childhood, education, work experience, marriage, children, parents-in-law, old age life, health prevention and promotion.

Her biomedical health assessment for her spontaneous Natural health practices was done based on the diagnostic and laboratory data of her emergency room visit in a teaching university hospital and annual physical examinations.

This particular informant was followed for about twenty years in participant- observation and interview at her home, church, neighborhood and community from half an hour to a few hours at a time. The major areas of inquiry were selected as questions such as:

What does health mean to you? What is happening to you in life when you are healthy? What makes you healthy? How does health

make you or the people feel around you? What is health to you? What do you mean by being healthy? How do you know that you are healthy or not? What is important in your life to be healthy? What is important to keep health? Is your health related to religion and/or spirituality? Does altruistic love play any role in your health prevention and promotion? What do you do to be healthy? Do you avoid anything to be healthy? How do your health beliefs influence you and why? How health practices work for you and why? These kinds of questions were asked in different wordings when the informant needed assistance to respond accurately for the research aims in her Korean socio-cultural context.

#### **The Korean-American woman**

The informant for this study is a married 65-year-old Korean immigrant woman who came to the United States in 1968. She remembers that she thanked her parents for her endowed excellent health and what they did for her holistically in her fine family with Korean traditional values, virtuous cultivation and discipline. She remembers that her natal home was not rich but she is from an aristocratic family. She is thankful to know that her ancestors governed their people compassionately and justly. They protected their people with human dignity, justice and respect. Numerous prime-ministers are from her family during Yi dynasty. One of her ancestors became the husband of one of the princesses. This kind of family history has been helping her to cultivate herself and do the best for the benefits of others. She was wise enough to be aware of and apply both traditional complementary and alternative, and the state of the art of self-health care.

#### **Health and family**

In Korea, living with in-laws is considered most

challenging interpersonal environment. She lives in a four generational family. Her relatives know that her daughter-in-law needs to have better attitude and responsibility. They have daily family Christian devotion. They have a family meeting as needed. An understanding and forgiving attitude exists strongly in her family. McCullough (2000) states that forgiving promotes continuity in interpersonal relationships by mending the inevitable injuries and transgressions that occur in social interaction. "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (I John :16). Love heals people--both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it. The informant generously expresses her compassion and gratitude to other people.

#### **Multi-religions, spirituality and compassion**

"He has discovered his God and can now begin to learn the ways of God in a very practical manner." It might be possible to prevent and promote health and wellbeing with religious faith and spirituality in harmony with the Nature and people with virtuous life. The informant is not only concerned about her own health but also her family, church and the whole global community.

#### **Bearing cross or karma: wisdom and peace keeping**

The informant personally examines her inner self objectively based on her standards of virtues such as compassion, kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, hope, wisdom, justice, and patience. She often asks herself, Have I been fair to others? Before she sees others' mistakes or wrongdoings, she does her own cross-examinations in her inner court. When one truly forgives others, with a great widely open mind like ocean that is when he or she really let go and forgive (Shin, 2002). It creates peace of mind and healthy body by being energized and harmonized by free flow

of vital energy within individuals and among people. John Templeton (1994) advised that if one does not have anything good to say, do not say anything at all.

Through her selfless self-cultivation and virtuous deeds for others, she triumphed with self-healing and health. She was rewarded with lower blood pressure from her hypertension. Her thoughtful deeds for others generate power for collective productivity and harmony. She volunteered to take care of her parents-in-law out of her filial piety, and most of all out of her own compassion. Her daughter-in-law has been irresponsible and it caused the informant an agony. The informant had to learn about forgiveness to heal her family and her injury in her daily life multi-religiously by reading scriptures, praying, attending, participating seminars and group discussions about forgiveness. Her levels of patience and tolerance have increased as she experienced the unexpected shocking and intolerable circumstances. She was able to forgive her daughter-in-law.

She had to worry about her whole family. She comforted her son, husband and daughter-in-law by saying, crisis is opportunity. The whole situation seems to be a great loss but it will turn around even to a greater gain. As Buddha said "The man who foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my most ungrudging love." The informant wished that she could be like Jesus and Buddha. Objectively she has been so at least in some degree.

The informant became a role model for her daughter-in-law and she carries out her own expected behaviors first instead of telling her what to do. The mother-in-law tried to find her daughter-in-law' strengths and encourage and reinforce them to her.

Although her daughter-in-law was irresponsible, unreliable, thoughtless and selfish, the mother-in-law was generous and did everything she

could for her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. She helped her daughter-in-law to be able to trust her and count on her for her improvement. The informant believed that her daughter-in-law will eventually turn out to be a mature person. She praised her daughter-in-law whenever she does well to the degree that her daughter-in-law has been saying to her mother-in-law, "You praise me even when I do not deserve praises." She apologized about her immature and thoughtless behaviors.

The informant always believes that ordinary people may have strengths and certain amount of good, weaknesses and even evil, which can be transformed into positive force. She also gives credit to other family members especially to her husband and son for their love, generosity, wise counsel for transforming their new family member to become a better citizen. The informant believes that if her family and she cannot transform her daughter-in-law to a trustworthy and responsible person, God can and will ultimately.

There are Korean idioms such as *chung ie o gan da* (Loving each other or one another. Literally speaking, Give and receive love), *onun chung ie gowaya ganun chung do gopda* (When one is loved, he or she loves back accordingly) or *Shin ie nan da* (Good spirited. Literally speaking, Gods and gods are springing up). She strongly believes that the order for creating harmony starts from self-cultivation of own body and mind, looking after family, country and the whole universe respectively.

#### **Natural holistic health beliefs and practices**

For about twenty years, the informant would not have had any annual physical examination for health prevention and promotion such as a mammogram by her own volition, if her employer did not require her to do so. She avoids biomedical treatment, except emergency

care but has been following recommendations of preventive diet with multivitamins, calcium and exercises. She believes and practices mainly complementary, alternative self-health prevention and promotion.

She elaborated on what, why and how she carries out her health practice cognitively, socio-economically, aesthetically, physically, psychologically, religiously and spiritually. Her major reason is that it is Nature oriented. She can perform deep breathing, exercises and meditation anytime and almost anywhere. The cost is free. It does not provide side-effects. She can use her own ideas based on her life long experience. She can adjust her health practice according to her circumstances. She believes that she can maintain or restore natural beauty and energy from the Nature and its ways of virtuous harmony in religious and spiritual providence.

#### **Vital energy and harmony**

For an open and peaceful mind, she meditates by reflecting on the 23rd Psalm and practices detachment from worldly desires taught by Buddhism and forgiveness from Christian teaching, "...there is forgiveness with thee." (Psalm 130:4). "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offerings for sin" (Hebrews 10:17-18). Also, she applies "Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us" from the Lord's Prayer in the Bible (New King James Version) (Matthews 6:5-15). The peace of mind in this practice contributes to health. Meditation, also, helped her in her forgiving process by letting go off completely (Shin, 2002).

She opens and clears her mind by getting rid of anger, betrayed feelings, conflicts, disappointments, frustrations, resentments, worries, and concerns with internal and external resolution by concentrating on her physical exercise,

classical music, positive thoughts, beautiful serene visual images, poetic feelings and thoughts, pleasant memories of people and appreciating Nature. Detachment, from worldly desires is done as much as possible, that could be related to internal as well as external. There could be many forms of detachment: mainly emotional, interpersonal, and material. When it comes to the interpersonal issues, she directly talks with the person when she feels it is absolutely necessary. When she feels that she has done her best but the problem is still lingering and there is no other way to do anything about it, she accepts as it is and she tries not to think about it. She prays that it can be done supernaturally like the serenity prayer in Niebuhr (1968): "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

The mind should be emptied fully of greediness, jealousy, hatefulness, selfishness, and misunderstandings, which are causing impurities in the vital energy. She digests rough emotional turmoil, exercises it off, ventilates verbally, prays, transforms and transcends. She believes that she should be filled with altruism, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, understanding, kindness, generosity, wisdom, hope and other virtues. Free flowing purities of vital energy exist so that the mind will be peaceful, joyful, and serene. She practices it as much as she can.

#### **Holistic health practice, compassion and mercy**

The informant believes that fresh vegetables, fruits, grains, plants, and raw fish contain living vital energy and humans can obtain vital energy by consuming them. Eaten foods become vital energy that spreads to the body organs (Kim, 1998). She stated that when it comes to people, young men and women possess more vital

energy than old persons. There are many examples of older men who are usually rich and powerful of having many women. One of the kings of the Baikje dynasty in Korea had three thousand royal maids in his palace, according to her folk history.

She connects the bridge between Buddhism (empty ugly feelings and thoughts from the mind; eliminate misunderstandings, misconceptions and misperceptions such as seeing through a dusted and rusted old mirror; detach self from worldly unnecessary desires, greed that produces anger, jealousy, anxiety, conflict, stress, guilt, and shame) and traditional East Asian medical theory (channel through impurities of body, mind, and interpersonal relationships). They make a unifying synthetic oneness of body, mind, and spirituality in humanity. Ideally, she wants to transform her own abused, rejected, victimized, suffering, sinful, and hateful self into a compassionate medium who could heal other miserable people based on her own experience. Objectively speaking, she is a model citizen. However, she scrutinizes herself rather severely as Christians believe that every human being is a sinner. She believes that her true health is the health of others, which makes her healthy. She considers her family and others' health as her health and vice versa.

The informant's overall initial aim for her choice of natural self-health was to normalize her hypertension by losing her weight and emptying her stress. She is practicing holistic health. Currently she focuses on her general overall health in her old age. She is well disciplined for her health practice with a vegetarian diet, aerobic exercises (stretching, flexing, breathing, hitting with her fist or foot on her body parts including palms and soles, and taking walks), religious, and spiritual meditation. She also reminisces about her life, relaxes by taking a shower, activates and concentrates her

mind by practicing piano, and to avoid unproductive, unnecessary and unpleasant thoughts or feelings. She reads the Bible and other spiritual and inspirational writings and reflects on them in terms of hope, love, faith, wisdom, forgiveness and other virtues. Her spiritual awareness is enhanced through appreciating music, talking with others, meditating and contemplating Nature anywhere it is serene and tranquil.

The informant as a Christian, applies Buddha's teaching in everyday life. She practices Buddhist principles for health without believing them as a religion but as a science and truth of the Nature, human nature and the cosmos. She was glad to find the book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs. A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* (Batchelor, 1997). She applies the health teaching of Buddhism. Buddha's truth about the anguish of parting with loved ones in our life journey is well known to Buddhists. The informant knows the truth about Nature and humans. She takes the parting as natural phenomena that once one comes and should go. She tries not to be too attached to anyone especially emotionally and possessively. It does not mean that she is indifferent, cold or uncaring. On the contrary, she is compassionate and merciful to people around her in her family, work, neighbors, friends, relatives, and people in her community. Her motto is, "When you have something honorable to do, do your best for others and leave but do not linger around, and do not expect anything from others for your own selfish gains." Altruism is essential in her life: Do something for others but do not expect anything in return. Do not do things to others for your own selfish reasons. Do not accumulate anything for yourself and for your future.

She believes and does her best based on what she learned from her parents that if someone

does his or her best with a sincere heart, the Heaven will help the person. She agrees with Gibran (1989) that children do not belong to their parents but to themselves. She learned that her own children, all other children and all other people belong to God. She does her best for her children and others but she tries not to expect from her children or from others in return. She encourages her children to do good for others who have needs but not to her. She sincerely hopes and prays that she does not become a burden to her children and others in her old age and sickness.

By being compassionate to others, she gets serendipity of smile, happiness, joy and health. It helps her to be healthy by feeling peace of mind and it helps her to create satisfactory and meaningful life. She had to have a physical examination for her work although she did not think it was necessary. The results are normal including tread mill test, tuberculosis test, blood tests for heart, urine tests and thyroid tests in 2003. She has been feeling wonderful. She started to take multivitamins, Vitamin E and calcium from year 2000. She has not taken any other medicine.

#### **Efficacy revealed in research**

She is glad when her health beliefs and practices from holistic sources are supported by research. Ornish (1990) found that heart disease could not only be relieved but also reversed when patients made significant changes in diet, exercise, and stress management.

Hypertension is well known in terms of stress. Kario (2001) particularly related hypertension to domestic stress between in-laws, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The informant could relate it to her situation because her four generational household and her work may have the potential to create stress if not prevented. People around her are amazed at her family because they



perceive that they seem to enjoy the harmony and peace in the informant's multigenerational family. She makes it happen that way based on her religious and spiritual philosophy, and altruistic, virtuous, and selfless actions. Her character, integrity and personality reflect it well. When she is good to others, she knows that she does herself good. She ultimately and genuinely works for others. She believes that her gained health is God's grace and serendipity but not her major aim.

#### **There were moments of doubts**

There were times she wondered whether she was doing the right thing or she herself was just stubborn in accepting even the wise counsel of taking biomedical treatment. Her biomedical education gave her conflicting messages as to whether or not she should take antihypertensive agents marketed by major drug companies. By not taking biomedical hypertensive agent, she was aware of taking risks of the danger of being struck down with the worst form of cardiovascular accident, stroke. She said: "At the beginning I was really worried about being struck down with stroke. I pounded the top of my head with my fist to open a channel for vital energy in possibly thick blood flow to prevent stroke. I ran out to take a walk when I felt like I was about to have a stroke perhaps because of the guilt of biomedical non-compliance. When I felt sort of stuffy and dull in my head, I did not like the feelings. Probably it was nothing but just my imagination. Then I was thinking, 'I should have taken the medicine advised and prescribed by numerous biomedical physicians since 1980s.' But I did not do that."

When she goes to the grocery store, she checks her blood pressure although she does not go there for the purpose to check her blood pressure. While she is shopping, and only if she remembers to measure her blood pressure, she

checks it. Recently she forgot to do even that and she was not worried about her blood pressure as she was used to. She says that means she is not really concerned about her blood pressure any longer.

#### **Recognition of triumph in holistic self-care with family, others and self**

She is glad that she kept her own unique culturally embedded health practice. She has been practicing her alternative healing ways for about twenty years. She, as well as her family, recognizes that it has been working for her. Her family admires her for her courage and success in her self-health care and they try to do that for themselves. She has been a good role model and a positive influence on health of her family and others.

She understands that her hypertension is originated from multi-factorial etiology such as daily stress at home and work, genetic inheritance, diet, intake of impurity, lack of exercise, lack of religious and spiritual faith, lack of self-cultivation, stress from lack of work productivity, lack of tolerance to interpersonal differences, lack of discipline, lack of compassion and harmony among people, and ignorance of truth. So when she practices her holistic health, she improves as a whole person with multiple ties, roles, and related responsibilities holistically. She exercises; meditates with a group of people or alone; improves her interpersonal relationships, on quality of work, spiritual meaning by leading compassionate and virtuous care for others; and continues to learn about science, truth, and wisdom about humane, Natural, cosmic and world phenomena.

The informant is truly grateful to her filial son who invited his parents, first of all, out of his love to live together, and to fill his only son's filial piety based on Korean traditional values and customs. She knows that there are not many

sons who do live with their parents even when parents need children's help.

Living in a four-generational family gives her purpose of life, worthy work, peace, grace, happiness, God's blessing, serenity, and tranquility to the informant. For this kind of meaning in her life, it requires sacrifice from everything for achieving a state of transcendence because it calls for a higher virtuous effort. She knows that keeping a healthy multigenerational family requires everything from every member of family. She considers that her four-generational family is harmonious and healthy. In Korea, influenced by Confucianism, there are no other greater virtues than filial piety (Pang, 1991). But the informant's ultimate reason in looking after her nearly 100 year-old parents-in-laws stems from her compassion for her fellow human beings. The informant is deeply immersed both in filial piety and spirituality. Of course spirituality and filial piety are similar from same vain and interchangeable with each other according to her. It gives her humanistic altruistic meaning to her life.

She heard *Sok eu ro sak in da* among Koreans (Pang, 2000). It means that one resolves anger, anxiety, conflict, distress, frustration, and mental agonies within the body and mind without any outward verbal and behavioral expressions. The main purpose is not to disturb others' feelings and thoughts, which are directly related to health and well being through meditation. Perhaps it is possible because elderly Koreans are known to use hardiness, patience and virtues based on personal self-cultivation, and religious and spiritual faith. The informant finally realized that the whole thing that she has been practicing has been meditation.

### Religions and health

The informant is originally from a Confucius

family so that she is rather strict about hierarchical seniority and gender relationships, etiquette, manners, and rituals for orderly interpersonal relationships and children's education. She teaches her family the proper traditional honorific language to use with decorum and embellishment.

She is delighted as well as fearful of the gods in Shamanism. She does not use a kitchen knife around the cooking oven or rice-cooker to avoid kitchen god's wrath. She believes that gods related to shamanism are everywhere. She feels that she wants to respect gods as much as possible instead of offending them. She appeases the gods rooted in her culturally although she professes as a Christian, monotheism (She hopes her God in Christianity forgives her). It helps her health because she believes that she does not offend any gods but appeases them and, in return, she will not be punished by the gods. She hopes to be blessed. She expects mutual respect in religion. Most of all, she respects all existences. This way, peace of mind is hers. It brings health to her and her family.

She understands Taoism as Nature and cosmology oriented natural and truthful phenomena and the ways for appropriate human conducts. Everything is being done for all human beings, animals and plants in the cosmos. Therefore, according to her understanding, one does not have to do anything but exists, respects, and appreciates the life as it is. One should convey unconditional and unlimited best regards and respect to others. Most of the time, she leaves things, situations and conditions as they are unless she clearly sees that human action is needed. Most of the time, all sorts of absurd life problems are clear up by themselves. She does not over do or rush to do it. This kind of belief and way of dealing with problems help her health and others by relaxing.

**Music**

Therapeutic music for spiritual and meditative effects results in harmony, peaceful mind, serenity, and tranquility: she loves classical, religious, traditional, folk, and ethnic music from all cultures. A great deal of spirituality comes from the music she listens to it especially in solitude and, it leads her to inner harmony in serenity. It is religious, spiritual, and meditative to her. Occasionally, she practices Beethoven's Moonlight sonata, Chopin's Impromptu, etc. on the piano. She also enjoys listening to music of Buddhism played especially by wooden bell and wind chime. It gives her special meditative feelings and thoughts. She understands the appreciation of music as meditation.

**Diet**

Buddhist monks live on vegetarian diet at monasteries in mountains made of grains, soy beans, other beans, and peas, cooked and raw vegetables including seaweed, lotus leaves, roots and seeds. When Buddhist devotees visit a Buddhist monastery, they eat the same vegetarian food as the monks.

The informant is very serious about strictly following her diet and regular exercise. When she is doing well with the diet and exercise as she planned, she feels joy, courage, and hope within her. She understands diet as original source for vital energy and exercise as moving meditation enhancing for vital energy.

The informant heard from someone that human beings were originally herbivorous. She said that cows eat only plants but they are strong. She thinks she could be strong with just a vegetarian diet. She remembers from her childhood that the Buddhist monks and nuns looked healthy and were full of energy, joy, and had rosy cheeks and healthy complexions.

Her husband believes what she does is right. He gradually practices the diet himself too.

Now, any dish with added salt is too salty for her. She eats natural food without adding salt as much as possible. She knows that some people eat turtle for longevity. One of her neighbors caught a turtle nearby creek, cooked, and ate it. Other neighbors ridiculed them. The informant knows that everybody has different health beliefs and practices. The informant did not care for turtle that way because she does not necessarily want to live a just long life. She wants to live reasonably in health and contentment. But when turtle soup was readily available, she ordered and ate it for two days in a row.

**Nature**

She is self-disciplined. She takes a walk in the rain, snow or sunshine. If she misses her walk during the day, she does it in the evening or even at night. Occasionally she enjoys in the moonlight. She loves to go to the creek behind her house to hear the sound of water flowing down the stream over rocks and look at the serene clear cool water. Sometimes she sees small fishes swimming around. She appreciates the harmonious, peaceful, and tranquil nature by listening to birds singing, the sound of wind, birds, leaves, bustling of autumn leaves. Hawks are flying over in the blue shiny sky in circles. It is the experience of bliss on the earth for her.

She jumps and crosses over the stream in the narrow part of the creek, and she crosses over by stepping on stones in the flowing shallow water or by walking and climbing over the fallen trees across the stream. She walks up, down, and around the stream in sunny days. Sometimes she sits on the fallen tree trunks. Again, she is in the heaven on the earth when she is by the creek in the woods. The creek reminds her of the 23rd Psalm in the Bible. She believes that she is fortunate to live in that

environment. She enjoys true solitude, serenity, tranquility, and freedom in the Nature. She always wanted to live by the stream of water. Her dream came true.

She loves to watch and hear Canadian geese in the nearby pond. They swim in the pond, walk on fields, fly in the sky as they sing, and glide into the pond. She appreciates sunrise and sunset as she strolls. She loves to watch the starry stream flowing in the wood on a fine sunshiny day from the windows of her room. She loves watching moonlight and starry skies. She feels that she is being expanded to her fullest when she does lower abdominal breathing as she looks on glorious sunrise.

She collected a small beautiful turtle shell perfectly intact without any flaw by the stream in the wood behind her house. She was so thrilled to find it, that it is displayed in her living room on a small mahogany stand on a big wooden dried mushroom. She appreciates it whenever she goes in the room and it delights her heart.

#### Exercise

She considers walking and other physical exercises as a meditation process of instilling acupressure for enhancing the flow of vital energy for its better effect of circulation and metabolism. She does aerobic stretching exercise once a day early in the morning or after dinner. She developed her own eclectic and syncretic exercise program adopted and modified from Asian and Western medical tradition especially from Korea, China, India, and her own creations. Her exercise program can change whenever she has better ideas. She adds them to her regimen. Some of them are from the traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and this syncretism. She believes that yoga comes from Hinduism or Buddhism.

Her aerobic exercise is for securing the

opening channels for vital energy flow in her body as microcosm connecting to and from the cosmos. For example, she presses hard on top of her head with the knuckles of her fist and in the middle of her forehead. A traditional Korean medical physician told her that this exercise would create an optimum blood flow in her whole body by dislodging any thick sticky blood or emboli. In this way, she can prevent a stroke based on her cognitive belief and practice through exercise, a moving meditation. She combs her hair at least with one hundred strokes a day. She was taught by her father about this.

She understands health in terms of vital energy being open and flowing in the body, all forms of communication, language, and environment, which all together create holistic health with God or non-religious spirituality, the Nature, people, and self. Even when it comes to a house structure, she opens all the doors as much as possible instead of shutting or locking them so that vital energy flows freely. She believes in geomancy, *pungsoo* in Korean as an established science, which is commonly understood as *fungshu* in America.

One day during her walk, she saw a group of three people who were doing *taichi* from China. She understands the physical movements as an effortless exercise for channeling vital energy. They were doing the exercise designed for aged people, which originated from Confucianism and Taoism according to her ancestors' practice. She joins the group whenever she can. Sometimes she cannot do that because of her responsibility of caring her grandchildren and work. She remembers that her own grandfather, as a Confucius scholar, whom deeply she respects, admires, and adores, did those exercises based on East Asian traditional medical principles. She believes that health is a Nature's providence of bio-humanistic, historical, environmental, religious

and spiritual influences.

### **Efficacy**

After her excellent biomedical health evaluation in a teaching university hospital without biomedical treatment, her son no longer advises his mother to take antihypertensive drugs. She has not had any major health problems. Her family recognized her effective health regimen after a long close participant observation of her health behaviors and health outcomes. She appreciates her harmonious family support and her peace of mind with her positive efficacy. The efficacy is not only evaluated by the informant but also by the family and other interested people as well as biomedical diagnosticians.

The informant's practice is cost-effective and time-effective because she does not have to cook much for vegetarian diet. She does not have to go to clinics in order not to waste time to see biomedical health providers. Also, it gives her peace of mind because she does not worry about the side effects of drugs or iatrogenic infection. She actively encourages her family members and others by demonstrating and sharing her experiences of health prevention and promotion. Her family members and colleagues are gradually recognizing why, what, and how her health practices are done and changing to her ways.

The informant's blood pressure was in the range of 170-190-200mmHg systolic from 1980s to 1990 on and off. Besides, her mother and her elder sister have history of hypertension. Her younger sister's systolic pressure was around 200mmHg and she has been on antihypertensive drugs for more than 10 years. Her younger brother had hypertension all his life and finally died of cardiovascular accident at his age of 40. Currently the informant's systolic blood pressure has been usually 135-150 mmHg and biomedical physicians recognize the efficacy of

her complementary and alternative self-care when they do her annual physical examination. Some of them joked, "Are you practicing Zen, on vegetarian diet and running about nine blocks? My wife would not do it." She usually takes a walk, if possible, before she goes to work, after she comes home from work and then takes a shower. These things help her to relieve her tension particularly in her head, eyes and whole body.

Heart disease history of siblings is vital. A study of nearly 8,500 healthy adults in Ohio found that people were 2.5 times to three times as likely to have coronary atherosclerosis, heart and artery disease if a brother or sister had already been diagnosed with heart disease (Washington Post 2004).

## **DISCUSSION**

The author believes that the informant's success story so far has been possible because, according to her perception, she has been equipped with safe knowledge, supportive and caring people, a conviction in her pluralistic health beliefs and practices, and a natural and peaceful environment similar to the Thoreau's Walden (Thoreau, 1966). She seems to be a wise person, easy to please and down to earth. She is equipped with her frame of mind to enjoy the Nature, her health beliefs and practices. She is such an individual who can pursue her necessary steps with confidence to reach her life goal. She has the outlet that she wants and needs for her holistic harmony.

She trusted the positive research results of the relationship in religion, spirituality and health (Koenig *et al.*, 2001) and Ornish (1990) who did research on diet and heart disease. If it is true that religious involvement is related to a greater well being, more social support, better coping, and less depression, then religious activities may

also be associated with better physical health (Koenig, 2002).

With regard to cardiovascular health, at least 16 studies have examined the relationship between religiousness and blood pressure. Nearly 90 % (14 of the 16) reported lower blood pressure among the more religious. This is especially true for diastolic blood pressures (Koenig *et al.*, 2001), and may help to explain scattered reports of a lower stroke rate (Colantonio *et al.*, 1992), and a lower death rate from coronary artery disease (Goldbourt *et al.*, 1993) among the more religious.

There is mounting evidence from the field of psychoneuroimmunology that positive emotions and social support are associated with better immune functioning and more robust cardiovascular health, and the corollary also appears to be true, i.e., that depression and social isolation worsen health and slow recovery from illness (McEwen, 1998).

It appears that the healer should carefully take a holistic, medical, and social history and work closely with client for a wise selection of various treatment modalities including holistic and spiritual self-care, and self-healing strategies in complementary alternative health care. An individual's health care profile and level of commitment seem to be vital.

### **Spirituality and holistic health**

Spirituality is the state of being harmonious with self, others, and Nature (Chiu, 2001). A spiritual faith is something that supports one's spirituality including inward and outward resources, enables an individual to cope with ill circumstances.

The informant understands Buddhism as truth, science and enlightenment about Nature that helps human beings to restore total health by directing worldly concerns toward truthful understanding of Nature, society, and self. She

found most of the religions that she has been exposed to, have been helpful to her in managing her health and life.

Partly because she believes that she does not have many risk factors in comparison with persons who have many of them such as smoking, drinking coffee or alcohol, not taking exercises, consuming high fat and red meat, poor management of constant high stress, and lack of exercise. Her health promotion and prevention have been successful. Thus, the health is related to the individual's religious, social, spiritual, holistic beliefs and practices.

### **Shame and guilt of working toward health**

She is embarrassed when she works for her health by taking a walk, exercising or following her diet because others might think she has already lived long enough and still trying to live longer. Long life is considered shameful for some old Korean adults. Probably there is possibility to burden own children and others. If a person is unusually concerned about her health in old age, she is considered a greedy and actually might not enjoy good health due to possible spiritual, emotional and physical injury from the obsession and compulsion for seeking health overwhelmingly, which is considered as shame and guilt. This belief is directly and indirectly from Buddhism and Taoism. They believe that it is graceful and virtuous to leave this world as they were born, naturally.

### **Out of routine: meaning of biomedical experience**

She felt some heavy and dull feelings on her left shoulder and upper back. She wanted to ignore them but she could not because she knows that she is a post-menopausal woman and she had history and possible present illness of high blood pressure. She did not take the biomedical antihypertensive agents that her physicians prescribed.

She went to an emergency room near her work for an electrocardiogram just to rule out a cardiovascular condition such as a heart attack that might be related to hypertension. She uses a biomedical modality when she thinks she needs it. She used it as a means of assessment but not as a means of healing, prevention, promotion, and treatment. She is a cosmopolitan who uses all the available multidisciplinary, multi-religious, spiritual and socio-cultural resources. She uses all the resources of medical diagnostics and health prevention and promotion: biomedical, folk, popular, traditional, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices.

### **Interpretation and analysis**

In order to understand her health beliefs and practices, one needs to review all her life history including positive and negative experiences such as war, poverty. At times, something as a possibly negative experience could be a positive experience retrospectively. What she eats now as a vegetarian what was eaten by her during the Korean War and Japanese occupation: barley, wheat, vegetables, potatoes etc. These were considered a poor man's diet then but now it is healthy diet. She went back to her native practice.

It is observed through the informant's health practice that reverse transformation of biomedical health care to Nature oriented self-health care is apparent by selecting and renewing process from multidisciplinary resources. She searched for and gathered what was useful to her health. The reinvention and remodeling of her self-health care might yield the best efficiency and efficacy for her health promotion. She applies what she believes for her health. In her case it is not related to an economic condition. She has medical insurance for biomedical treatment but most of the time she uses her complementary alternative self-health care

which does not require much money or medical insurance. Her practice is pluralistic and multidisciplinary. Her practices represent the possibility of global utilization because it is cultural, multi-religious, spiritual, pluralistic, and multidisciplinary. She is equipped with a courageous confidence and determination to take risks and change what she believes for health promotion and prevention.

In her case, biomedicine was used for a part of the diagnostic evaluation process. One health care system, the biomedicine, was used only for assessment and the complementary alternative medicine was used for major treatment, health promotion and prevention. Certain modalities were used partially for just testing efficacy and certain ones used fully in the care process. More than two modalities such as complementary alternative and biomedical tests were used together to complete the health care process.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This is a medical anthropological case study of an older Korean immigrant woman related to health prevention and promotion based on holism: physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, socioeconomic, cultural, cosmic, religious, and spiritual aspects. True holistic health care is accomplished collectively with multidisciplinary approaches. It develops from individual health to collective health through vital energetic harmony by means of good interpersonal communication and free flow of vital energy in the bodily system in religious and spiritual, environmental, psychosocial, and cultural aspects. Individual health status and his or her group health status influence each other.

Particularly, interpersonal dynamics play an indispensable role in creating health through problem solving along with other dimensions. The informant believes in her self-sustaining and

self-sufficient power and she uses it in a maximum way. She learned from her mother and brother that power is from within and one should believe in it and use it holistically. She also was taught that she should believe in herself. She remembers that own self is Buddha. The Buddha is within herself. This teaching has been an influencing force in her whole life especially for self-health prevention and promotion.

To gain health, a multidisciplinary effort is required. The essentials of true health are a sound body and mind, diet, exercise, compassionate and virtuous human relationships with not just the nearest and the dearest but also with others aided by mostly religion and spirituality in multi-religious practices. The synthesis of body, mind, fellow human beings, and Nature is an interacting cosmos of holism. It is a complementary alternative eclectic theoretical research practice model, which could be modified for and applied to people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Individual variability within elderly community should be in research agenda to embrace the cultural, ethnic, or personal diversities in ideals or capacities of elderly people (Luborsky, 1995). Individual competence and effort are equally important in health promotion and prevention. The aging process occurs over the entire life course (Ory, 1995). An individual develops his/her own complex health prevention and promotion strategies. It is an ever-changing process through one's whole life. Health promotion and prevention is the product of a complex interplay among sociological, cultural, behavioral, environmental, cosmological, medical and biological processes.

This paper points out that sound experiential research based on alternative and complementary health promotion and prevention is safe to practice. Lately no biomedical physicians insist

her to take biomedical antihypertensive medication. Complementary alternative healing process could be practiced in combination with biomedical modality. Biomedicine is not the only way toward health for people who appreciate and believe in other health principles based on various religious, spiritual, and other culturally similar and different holistic health care backgrounds such as cosmological vital energy, detachment and mercy in Buddhism, love in Christianity, various meaningful interpersonal relations according to orderly relationships in Confucianism, understanding and respecting gods in Shamanism, and non-doing in Taoism.

Holistic health is a harmonious combination of religious, spiritual, physical, mental, psychological, philosophical, interdisciplinary, virtuous, altruistic, and merciful human actions. Altruistic and virtuous everyday life is essential. Others are I and I am others. I and all others are connected is an important principle in Buddhism. If you are altruistic, it means you love yourself too. The results of positive uses of detachment are to get rid of anger, anxiety, distress etc. to have peace of mind without anguish and depression by removing truly non-essential desires. Aerobics and taking a walk, *danjeon*, *taichi*, *yoga*, gardening, meaningful work, and appreciating music are representative of religious, spiritual, physical, mental, social, psychological, emotional, and cognitive meditative prayerful works.

Fostering harmonious intrapersonal, interpersonal, transpersonal relationships for peace of self and others in a four-generation house has to be related to holism. It takes mental, physical, religious and spiritual discipline with compassionate transcendence. Health may mean feelings and thoughts of joy in responsible, dutiful and disciplined life with and for others in a religious and spiritual connection. A holistic wise life has been sufficient for her. Also, she could not think of anything better than that.



It is well known to tend to create animosity between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (Choi, 1983). However, there have been exceptions with harmonious and peaceful relationships. It is possible to have peaceful co-existence if one lives virtuous altruistic life with loving kindness, faith, hope, gratitude and forgiveness.

Health and well being are born by opening the mind and body, by emptying blockages and obstacles for flowing and interacting through vital energy, creating and exchanging ideas through open dialogue, and encouraging words within self and among others. Everybody needs all his available health and medical therapeutic modalities that are known, accessible, available to him or her medically, culturally, socially, physically, religiously and spiritually. This provides power for health. Koreans say, *Shin nan da*. It literally means that holy spirits overflow energetically and joyfully. People are feeling an omnipotent power in whatever they are doing. It means to them that wonderful things are happening. They rejoice. They are overjoyed. These phenomena naturally help people to be healthy holistically.

Although Micozzi (2001) alluded to the mainly high cost and high technology in biomedicine as chasing away clients to alternative health care, but there are exceptions. People seek alternative health care, even when they can afford biomedicine. Some of the reasons are health providers' lack of compassion as Micozzi (2001) pointed out, and concerns of no efficacy, iatrogenic factors, and fear of side effects.

The traditional ways may reflect a philosophy of health that in some ways is more meaningful and sophisticated than biomedicine has become. How traditional systems and biomedicine view the role of energy in the human organism is a prime example of this disparity. Ancient and indigenous medical systems think of the human body as having a kind of vital energy, the

balance of which is critical for health and the flow of which can be manipulated to maintain and restore health. In this way, medicine is not about the putting of things into the body but, rather, using outer resources to help mobilize the body's inner resources. The body heals itself and maintains its own health (Micozzi, 2001).

In traditional cultures, health practices and beliefs often cannot be separated from the spiritual concerns of the individual and the cosmological beliefs of the community at large. Most traditional healers attempt to restore a sense of balance between the individual and the community, on one hand, and between the individual and the cosmos, on the other (Micozzi, 2001). Clinical care for health is an art as well as a science. The health care provider should attempt to understand the expectations of clients. It is not so much medical or pharmacological but anthropological. Understanding the human system is a priority (Micozzi, 2001). It may be time to go back to Nature.

The conclusion of this case study is similar to what Micozzi alluded to, that one system of medicine alone could not provide a formula that will offer effective medical care for the entire human family (2001). Acupuncture may be considered to make use of a physiologic response of the body, but culturally encoded as the basis of empirical observations in Chinese medicine and explained by Chinese cosmology. The need of improvement in the humanistic relationship between client and health care provider has been reflected on. It is observed that a person, who was educated formally in biomedical tradition, uses alternative and complementary medicine. The informant's health behavior reflected a yearning and even realization of returned phenomena to Nature's way of living and care.

It is found that health needs to be understood from an entire life experience even from the

preconception to the death in a pluralistic and holistic health care. Health beliefs and practices reflect an individual, group or population's history, philosophy, value systems, ethics, attitudes, character, personality, and moral influences. One's whole life experience of growth and development is involved with one's and family's total phenomena of health, illnesses, and diseases. The holistic and multidisciplinary health care model studied above might well be applied to numerous people in the global community.

#### For further study

Although the efficacy of vital energy in complementary alternative care through vegetarian diet, exercise and virtuous deeds such as compassion and forgiveness based on becoming religious and spiritual, appeared to be effective objectively by the evaluation of biomedical laboratory methods, it is uncertain why, how and what truly attributed to the maintenance, promotion of health and prevention of diseases and illnesses such as hypertension. It could be Nature and vital energy themselves in regard to individual. After all, one can say, Nature did it. Then what is Nature anyway in a strict sense? What and how does Nature do work? Are not vegetarian diet, exercise, religion and spirituality Nature? Ultimately what the informant tried to be and do is one step closer to Nature than to biomedicine. Meditation plays a significant role because all aspects (for example, moderation and regulation in diet, exercise, work, interpersonal relationships, emotions and thoughts, music, other arts) of individuals' lives are meditation. All curing, healing, health prevention and promotion are through various kinds of meditation.

Further research is needed to explain how complementary alternative care works in multidisciplinary fashion with cosmology, religion,

spirituality, philosophy, idioms, language, arts, meditation and sciences especially ethno-medicine, anthropology, archeology, biomedicine, nursing, genetics, neurobiology, neurochemistry, biochemistry, immunology, physics etc. A global multidisciplinary effort of combined holistic experiential and experimental research is needed. According to ancient principles of Far East Asian medicine based on Taoism, healing is something that can only be understood when one has received healing oneself and has healed many others (Shin, 2002) rather mysterious way, that requires much research.

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