Female Psychosomatic Disorders in Korea—
Unique Medical Entities with Its Cultural Background

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It is ten times more difficult to treat a woman than a man because
They have more desires.
They feel diseases twice more keenly.
They have deeper love and hate, worry and jealousy.

—Jun Hur, Dong-ui-bo-gam, 1613—

Korea like other countries in the Far East has been under strong influence of Buddhism and Confucianism for almost two thousand years. As a consequence, its culture, lifestyle as well as its national sentiment have been somewhat different from the countries of the other part of the world. But what is more peculiar is that there are special states or even diseases so unique and only in Korea. These usually have something to do with psychosomatic problems and mainly relate or affect to women. Three subjects, Taekyo, Sanhujori and Hwapyung will be discussed.

Many Korean women follow a 'cultural prescription' of rituals and practices that guide their safety during the childbearing years. Taekyo is a kind of prenatal training giving to the mother-to-be. It was known to be from ancient China but became rather unique tradition in Korea. There are many do's and don'ts during pregnancy but most of those seem to be quite logical even in the sense of modern medicine. Jun Hur wrote in 1613 in his voluminous medical textbook, Dong-ui-bo-gam not to have coitus during pregnancy. He also advised to avoid sex under following instances: 1. Two days (Pyung and Chung day) out of 10 days. 2. New noon and full moon. 3. Big wind, rain or mist. 4. Very cold or hot day. 5. In case of thunder, earthquake or eclipse. 6. Under the sun, moon or star. 7. Near fireplace. 8. Near cemetery, temple or well.

Taekyo was once thought to be just tradition or superstition but with knowing better modern medical knowledge, many Korean doctors start to believe it is a science as well. Recent research proves the intrauterine environment is as important as genetic factors of the human beings.

Sanhujori is Korean way of special care after childbirth. It covers the cares of both body and mind. It is not only medical paradigm but cultural and traditional one too. Its practices include 1. Augmenting heat. 2. Confinement. 3. Special food. 4. Protecting body from harmful situation. 5. Harmonious washing. 6. Helper's help. Doing sanhujori well means prevention of diseases for the rest of her life and not doing well may end up unhappy adaptation followed by postchildbirth diseases at any time in her life. They believed that childbirth is process of imbalance of yin and yang and sanhujori is to put them back in balance. In this practice, parturients must have goo rest at least for 21 days. Visitors are usually restricted in this postpartum period.
Hwapyung is one of the diseases known to be present only in Korea. It is a kind of psychosomatic disease probably occurring from strong stressful incident and mainly affects women. When one's stressful situation such as anger, hate, sadness remains as a lasting regret, somatization easily occurs and become a disease. Its causes include conflicts with spouse or husband's family, overwork, poverty, joblessness, failed business, prolonged illness, sudden death of family member, dissatisfaction to politics and many others. Symptoms are anxiety, neurosis, feeling annoyed, showing temper easily, impatience, being irritated, difficult to concentrate, no confidence to everything, loss of short term memory, indigestion, loss of appetite, constipation, flatulence, dry mouth, palpitation, hot flush, sweating, stammering, cold hand, tremor, joint pain, headache, fainting, weakness, dislike to move or speak, loss of weight, etc. For treatment patient should be individualized according to his or her causes of Hwapyung, character, constitutional factors, stress and ability. Removal of etiologic factor and giving confidence, of course, are utmost important but treating concomitant physical problem such as hypertension, headache, gastrointestinal disorder, etc. should not be forgotten.