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Philosophical Practice and Humanities Therapy in Korea

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Abstract

Aristotle contended that all human beings sought happiness and that happiness was not pleasure, honor, or wealth, but an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. It is obvious that we cannot achieve happiness without resolving the paradox of mental poverty in the midst of material plenty. Korea has confronted this kind of paradox, and contemporary philosophical practice in Korea takes its shape in curing the philosophical diseases of mind caused by it. This paper has two purposes. First, I shall discuss both the social and academic contexts that led to the development of philosophical practice and humanities therapy in Korea. Second, I shall present a brief report of my impressions of the 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice which was held in Leusden, the Netherlands from 11th August to 14th August 2010.¹

Keywords: philosophical practice, paradox of mental poverty, humanities therapy, philosophical disease, International Conference on Philosophical Practice, Gross National Happiness, Korean Society of Philosophical Practice, Humanities Therapy Group

Introduction

In 'The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,' John M. Keynes invented the term 'the paradox of poverty in the midst of potential plenty' (1936), which meant the problem that a wealthy Capitalistic society will have in maintaining full employments because of the large gap between income and consumption. The International Health Conference in June 1946 adopted a now-well-known definition of health as the Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, according to which health was a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO 2006). On 7th May 1959 at Cambridge University, C. P. Snow delivered a very impressive lecture on the Two Cultures, the culture of the literary intellectuals and the culture of the natural scientists, in which he claimed to find profound mutual suspicion and incomprehension between the two cultures which in turn had damaging consequences for the prospects of applying technology to the alleviation of the world's problems. These three monumental events were important and interrelated. They captured the essence of growing ominous phenomena in contemporary societies: the demolition of any balance between income and consumption patterns in the economy(Keynes), between the mental and the physical aspects of human well being (WHO), and between humanistic and natural scientific explanations (Snow).

The paradox which Keynes described was the paradox of material poverty in the midst of material plenty. No society has resolved that problem successfully, but we have become to encounter a more serious poverty than it. We can express it in Keynesian jargon as the paradox of mental poverty in the midst of material plenty. This new paradox is essentially philosophical in that we can resolve it by a philosophical way of changing our minds, not by a scientific way of changing objects and events in the world. As Lou Marinoff (Marinoff 1999) puts it, we can solve or cure the problem by Plato, not by Prozac. Our contemporaries have more material goods than ever but suffer from many kinds of pains or diseases of mind. The history of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) shows this: DSM-1 (1952) classified 106 kinds of mental disorders but its latest version, DSM-IV (1994), contains as many as 297 kinds. Alas! Could Confucius or Aristotle have foreseen this situation?

Let's accept Aristotle's view that all human beings seek happiness and that happiness is not pleasure, honor, or wealth, but an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. Then, it is obvious that we cannot achieve happiness without resolving the paradox of mental poverty in the midst of material plenty. We can see a lot of philosophical attempts to resolve it. A paradigmatic example is Earl Shorris' Clement Course (Shorris 1995), which teaches the disadvantaged humanities like philosophy and literature. Shorris is said to have taken his cue from a female prisoner who said what the poor and the less privileged lacked the most was a spiritual life, not the material. Korea has also confronted this paradox, and contemporary research on philosophical practice in Korea takes its shape and characteristics from attempts at solving and curing the philosophical pains or diseases of mind.

This paper has two purposes. First, I shall present background information about philosophical practice and humanities therapy in Korea, focusing on both social and academic contributions to their development. Second, I shall present a brief of my impressions of the 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice (X. ICPP) which was held in Leusden, the Netherlands, from 11th August to 14th August 2010.

South Korea's Social Environment

South Korea is typical among nations in the world that are suffering acutely from philosophical disease. There are two principal social factors for that. One is the gap between the two cultures Snow identified. South Korea ranks at or near the top of developed countries in terms of access to information and technology, and many Korean people are enjoying IT products such as high-speed internet service and on-line games. The development of science and technology itself is ethically neutral, and in most cases problems arise only when we are alienated from science and technology which we have produced. However, many Korean people have experienced some difficulties of discriminating the real from the virtual and the natural from the artificial. The other important factor is the military tension between the South and the North of Korea. Since the Korean War (1950-1953) there has been a continuous military tension between South and North Korea and many army divisions are deployed in both sides of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The military confrontation has exerted a bad influence on the mental health of Korean people.

Here are some indices for the imbalance between the mental and the material. First, according to the World Bank (World Bank 2010), South Korea held the 15th rank in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Second, while a 2009 data of OECD (OECD 2009) reported that the average life expectancy at birth of the 30 OECD countries was 79.1 years, the expectancy of South Korea was 79.4 years. Yet, in suicide rate, South Korea ranks 1st for its suicide rate, which amounted to 21.5 per in 100,000 (the average suicide rate of the OECD countries was 12.6). Third, South Korea held lower ranks in various indices of well-being and happiness. These include Gross National Happiness (GNH), which has nine dimensions such as psychological well-being, health, education, time use and balance, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standard (E. Giovannini and J. Hall 2008, p. 7).

These quantitative data confirm the paradox of mental poverty in the midst of material plenty in South Korea. In fact, as the following diagram shows, greater ranks of GDP don't lead to greater ranks of GNH, and the GNH ranks of top GDP countries were very low. For example, USA was ranked 1st in GDP but was ranked 25th in GNH, and Japan was ranked 2nd in GDP but was ranked 90th in GNH. By contrast, the rankings of Bhutan were 169th and 8th respectively.

Table 1: Comparison of GDP and GNH

Country	GDP - GNH	Country	GDP - GNH
USA	1 - 25	Switzerland	19 - 2
Japan	2 - 90	Sweden	22 - 7
China	3 - 82	Austria	23 - 3
Germany	4 - 35	Denmark	30 - 1
France	5 - 62	Finland	34 - 6
UK	6 - 41	Iceland	38 - 4
South Korea	15 - 102	Bhutan	169 - 8

Why do many people in materially affluent conditions feel unhappy? Why do some people in the socially comfortable condition commit suicide? WHO provided some answer to the questions in its definition of human health, which contends that happiness has not only a physical dimension but also a mental dimension and a social dimension. Our life has all the three dimensions, but under the influence of a materialistic world-view we often have ignored the mental and social dimensions of life. The Darwinian theory of evolution contends that all creatures, including human beings, have evolved through the physical and biological process of adaptation to varying environments. But the Darwinian paradigm can be applied beyond the physical and biological domain to the mental and the social one such that we can define human happiness or well-being as a state of biological, mental, and social homeostasis in response to environmental complexities.

Using the two factors mentioned above to understand this complexity, we can say contemporary Korean society began to lose the equilibrium between the humanities and sciences, and hence the equilibrium mental and the material. In particular, this led to a social atmosphere in which the idea that humanities such as philosophy were useless to high-tech societies was rampant. A group of Korean literary intellectuals reacted strongly against this atmosphere, and started to take intellectual actions to appeal to individual, social, and governmental interest. On 15th September 2006, 121 professors of Korea University made an announcement about the Crisis of Humanities in Korea. In the announcement they pointed out that although the humanities are cultural assets that should transcend the times, Korea faced a crossroads in which the foundations—and existence—of the humanities was threatened by blind faith in the logic and efficiency of indiscriminate markets. Especially because of its commercialization, university research and education were focused exclusively on quantitative evaluation and the development of commercial products. The professors confessed that (i) they didn't take kindly to the structural changes producing this social situation, (ii) they were negligent in developing interdisciplinary research methodologies that could explain the complication, multi-dimensional problems of social reality, and (iii) they weren't eager to improve the humanities' stature. They argued that in the rapid current of globalization we needed the spirit of the humanities more than ever in order to prevent the advance of science and technology from severing the social principles of morality and life. And they urged Korean society to challenge the harsh environment that threatened the survival of humanities and to respect the autonomy and self-motivated development of humanities.

Many responses followed this announcement and there were considerable disputes about its motive and validity. The most important response came from the South Korean government. In 2007 the Korean Research Foundation (KRF), which has since been re-organized as the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) in 2010, began the Humanities Korea Project with thirty million US dollars in its annual budget. So far, 41 projects, including the Humanities Therapy Project of Kangwon National University (KNU), have been selected and supported by the NRF.

Academic Activities

In the previous section we saw the social environment in which philosophical practice and humanities therapy began to bud and spread their branches into Korean academic society. That social environment was an indirect factor which helped to establish philosophical practice and humanities therapy. This section will examine more direct academic activities and contributions of individuals, groups, and societies to those activities.

Before discussing the activities of individuals, it is necessary to point out that Korean philosophy has a long history going back to the 1st century BCE, and which includes many branches such as Buddhist philosophy, Confucianism, and Taoism. With regard to philosophical practice, Korean Confucian scholars had acrimonious disputes about the nature of the universe and the human mind, starting with the great philosophers Yi Hwang and Yi Yi in the 16th century, and continuing between their two schools. Because there is not room to explain Korean Confucianism or the disputes here, I shall simply mention the important fact that Confucianism includes a theory of self-cultivation which emphasizes self-regulation by following the nature of universe and human mind. Hereafter, I shall discuss only contemporary activities of Korean philosophers.

There are individual scholars who first felt our contemporary pains and saw the need for smoothing and curing them. I call them the first Korean generation of philosophical practice, for they were the first to use keywords such as 'pain,' 'philosophical practice,' or 'clinical philosophy' to describe their work.

Bong-Ho Son was a professor in Seoul National University and retired in 2003. Professor Son had an especially strong interest in pain, and his theory of philosophical practice is based on the ideas of Christianity and phenomenology. He has written many articles including the "Phenomenology of Pain" (1992), as well as a book entitled *Suffering Man* (1995), which described pain as a primitive experience and subjective experience.

Young-Jin Kim was a professor in Inha University until his retirement in 2009. Professor Kim focused on R. M. Hare's theory of ethics and since 1997 has written many articles about philosophical practice. In his book, Clinical Philosophy: Diagnosis and Prescription (Kim 1993), he classifies human diseases into three types: physical disease, neuropsychosis, and philosophical disease. According to him, philosophical disease has the following characteristics: (i) it doesn't rely on injection and medicine, (ii) it is value-based, and (iii) it tends to impact family, society, and nation beyond the person who is suffering from the disease. Typical examples of philosophical disease are diseases from ignorance and prejudice, diseases from conceptual confusions and logical fallacies, and group diseases such as fanaticism, Fascism, and group egotism. Clinical philosophy is defined as a discipline to diagnose and prescribe cures for philosophical diseases. (In 1998 Osaka University in Japan opened an official course in clinical philosophy at its Graduate School of Letters.)

Ja Kyoung Han is a professor in Ewha Women's University. Professor Han studied Kant and Buddhism, so her major contributions to the establishment of philosophical practice come through her scholarship of comparative philosophy. She wrote an article that compared Husserl's notion of transcendental subjectivity with the Yogacara Buddhist notion of alaya-vijnana (1996), as well as the book, *A Philosophical Foundation of Meditation* (2008) in which she examined four types of meditation (Yoga of India, Buddhist meditation, Taoist meditation, Confucian meditation) and two types of Western psychotherapy (cognitive therapy and meditation therapy), comparing the oriental meditations with the western psychotherapies.

The second Korean generation of philosophical practice has more various academic backgrounds such as Korean philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, and recent analytic philosophy. Here are some key members of the 2nd Korean generation along with examples of their main interests within philosophical practice:

- Seung-Hwan Lee: Confucian foundations of philosophical practice
- Kwon Jong Yoo: Confucian model of mind
- Jyung Hyun Kim: Nietzsche's philosophy of life and healing
- Suk Soo Kim: Philosophical theory of pain
- Soung-Suk Nho: Philosophical foundations of counseling

In addition to philosophers who have worked as individuals, two research groups have made contributions in establishing the academic consensus for accepting philosophical practice as a discipline in Korea. The first group started in 2005 and its research theme was Clinical phenomenology. The group was supported by KRF for two years (from 2004 to 2005) and the result of its research was published under the title, *Philosophical Prospects for Mental Therapy* (2008), which covered very extensive subjects of philosophical practice as follows.

- Young Phil Kim: Phenomenological therapy
- Ju Wan Kim: Philosophical foundations of poetry's mental therapeutic function
- Suk Su Kim: Philosophy, pain, and therapy
- In Sup Sin: Merleau-Ponty's life, community, and the future of mental therapy
- Jong Wang Lee: Foundation of mental therapy from the viewpoint of philosophy of mind
- Gangwha Lee: A cinema therapeutic approach to mental therapy
- Soon Hyang Whang: Post-structural approaches to mental therapy
- Young Phil Kim and Junghee Park: Phenomenological foundations of mental therapy
- Soo-Dong Cho: Implications of Zen practice to mental therapy
- Byung Suk Chung: Mental therapeutic implications of Itching

- Yun Su Jang: Mental therapeutic significance of Zhuangzi's philosophy
- Chang Whan Ha: Philosophical therapeutic implications of the Idea of Gyeong
- Youngsook Jeon: Implications of the idea of Avatamska to family therapy
- Soo-Dong Cho and Ji Sung Choi: Wonhyo's concepts of eka-ras, vipa-yan and the transpersonal

The second research group is the Philosophical Practice Study Group, which started its activity in 2007 and later became the Korean Society of Philosophical Practice (KSPP). Its main activity consists in (i) promoting the idea of philosophical practice to Korean societies of philosophy and to some related disciplines such as psychology, literature, history, and arts, (ii) holding monthly meetings, in which they read *Philosophical Counseling* (Raabe 2000), *Plato, not Prozac* (Marinoff 1999), *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lahav et al., eds.1995), *Philosophische Praxis* (Achenbach 1987), *Philosophical Practice* (Schuster 1999) in that order, and are now reading *Zur Sache der Philosophischen Praxis* (Lindseth 2005). The study group remains as a branch of KSPP. Here are the list of its members and their major interests in philosophical practice.

- Eunmi Park: Critical thinking model of philosophical practice
- Gap-Yim Jung: Wang Yang-Ming's theory of philosophical practice
- Hee Bong Choi: Foundations of philosophical practice
- Jinnam Yi: Foundations of philosophical practice
- Jinoh Lee: Jaspers' mental pathology
- Keung-Ja Hong: Jaspers' philosophical anthropology
- Kiljoo Lee: Foundations of philosophical practice
- Nam Hee Park: Hermeneutics
- Soo-Bae Kim: Foundations of philosophical practice
- Sun Hie Kim: Analytic theory of philosophical practice
- Sun-Hye Kim: Nietzsche's theory of therapy
- Sung-Jin Kim: Foundations of philosophical practice
- Young E. Rhee: Models of embodied mind for philosophical practice
- Young Ran Chang: Foundations of philosophical practice

There are also two societies which are intimately related to philosophical practice in Korea. One is the Korea Society of Philosophical Practice (KSPP) which was established 20th June 2009 and has seventy-six members. (The homepage of KSPP is at http://www.philoounseling.net.) KSPP's academic activities include annual conferences, workshops, and symposia. KSPP published the first issue of its journal, *Philosophical Practice and Counseling*, on 26th September 2010, and now is preparing to publish the Korean Series of Philosophical Practice and to deliver a certificate program for philosophical counselors.

The other is the Korean Society of Humanities Therapy (KSHT) which was established 21th July 2009. (The homepage of KSHT is at http://www.humantherapy.org.) The KSHT was organized by the Humanities Therapy Group (HTG) in Kangwon National University, so I shall explain its activities in the following section on humanities theorapy.

The Humanities Therapy Group

The Humanities Therapy Group (HTG) started its activity on 1st November 2007. The group has been supported with a budget of seven million five hundred US dollars by NRF for ten years. The HTG gave the definition of humanities therapy as follows:

Humanities Therapy is a theoretic and practical activity, aiming for the health of mind and happiness of life as the realization of the spirit of Humanities, applying a novel interdisciplinary method that integrates the curative contents and effects of humanities and its related fields, and not only preventing but also healing mental and physical suffering of an individual or a group. (Humanities Therapy Series I, 2009, pp. 17-24)

The HTG consists of five fields and fourteen researchers as follows:

- Philosophy: Three professors (Young E. Rhee: Cognitive embodiment model; Sun-Hye Kim: Viewpoint therapy; Yun Do Lee: Self-cultivation)
- Literature: Four professors
- Language: Two professors
- History: Three professors
- Arts: Two professors (Cinema, Drama)

The HTG research program has three research stages. The first stage (2007-10) aimed to establish the foundations of humanities therapy by developing its basic theories and models. The second stage (2010-13) is to construct the educational system to support humanities therapy. The third stage (2013-17) is to develop the content of humanities therapy and build a clinical system.

The main academic activities of HTG consist of four categories: (i) holding colloquia, workshops, and seminars, (ii) holding annual conferences and international conferences, (iii) publishing the Humanities Therapy Series, and (iv) publishing the international journal, Journal of Humanities Therapy. (The first issue was published 31th December 2010.)

The HTG has been doing clinical activities in order to gather empirical data for developing the theoretical foundations of humanities therapy. Through the clinical activities researchers have acquired empirical data necessary for constructing theories and models of humanities therapy, and will be able to test theories and models by using those data after constructing theories and models. The HTG's clinical activities work with the following institutions and groups: Prisons; the Korean Army; rehabilitation hospitals; multi-cultural families; North Korean refugees; after school programs for students from poor families.

To date, the HTG has held International Conferences on Humanities Therapy twice (HT2009, HT2010). (The homepage of the International Conference on Humanities Therapy and the Journal of Humanities Therapy is at http://www.ht21c.org.) The theme of HT2009 was Humanities and Therapy in contemporary Society, and there were twelve presentations as follows:

- Lou Marinoff (USA): Theory and practice of philosophical counseling
- Kathleen Adams (USA), Journal therapy as a pathway to healing and growth
- Ye Shu Xian (China): The healing power of ecstasy
- Min-Yong Lee (Korea): Storytelling as therapy
- Richard Forestier (Belgium): Conceptual and methodological foundations in the university educations of the discipline of art-therapy in France
- Agnès F. Forestier (France): Art-therapy in dominant calligraphy in a decorative hand: General presentation and case study
- Midori Iijima (Japan): Art as an unwritten historiography: Latin American struggle for justice
- Peter Raabe (Canada): Mental illness, shame, and philosophy
- Narifumi Nakaoka (Japan): Listen, wait, and move in therapeutic activities
- Young E. Rhee (Korea): Embodied theory of philosophical counseling
- Nicolas Queloz (Switzerland): Role of human sciences in dealing with youth crime: Some contributions of criminology
- Brooke Hallowell (USA): Interdisciplinary approaches to learning about and treating acquired neurogenic communication disorders in adults.

The theme of HT2010 was Life, Happiness and Humanities Therapy, and there were fourteen presentations as follows:

- Bernard Li (Taiwan): Philosophical counseling as humanistic medicine: An introduction to the basic principles
- Zoltán Kövecses (Hungary): The conceptualization of happiness and life
- John Fox (USA): Poetry, community & the flourishing heart: Poetry therapy as a catalyst for resilience and connection
- Sherry Reiter (USA): In the orchard of contentment: Planting the seeds of poetry therapy
- Keon-Sang Yu (Korea): Yeats's later poetry from the perspective of humanities therapy: An acceptance and overcoming of aging
- Der-Heuy Yee, Wei-Lun Lee, and An-Bang Yu (Taiwan): Body praxis in the clinical humanities
- K. L. Sharma (India): Quest for happiness: Suggestive counseling
- Shu-Ju Yu (Taiwan): A virtue ethics approach to philosophical counseling
- Sungmi Jung (Korea): Multi-culturalism and humanities therapy

- Yun-Do Lee (Korea): Confucian theory of self-cultivation and humanities therapy
- Susanna Bardsley (France): Moving, speaking and imagining, from passivity to action: Drama therapy work for adults with psychiatric disorders.
- Nathalie Berthomier (France): Art-therapy in France: An original profession, a legislative and administrative presentation
- Shlomit Schuster (Israel): Life, happiness, and desert reflections
- Lakkil Chung (Korea): Narcissism and humanities therapy

The HTG will host the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice (XI. ICPP) in cooperation with Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan and Osaka University in Japan.

The 10th International Conference on Philosophical Practice

I took part in the 10th ICPP and was involved in inviting the 11th conference successfully to Korea. During the period of the 10th ICPP I received a strong impression of both the organization and of the Netherlands, and I am now thinking some of the participants will be helpful for organizing the 11th International Conference on Philosophical Practice. So, let me express my impression of the conference briefly. First, the conference hotel (ISVW) was beautiful and an ideal place for practicing philosophy. I liked it more after I had learned its history from a staff of the conference. I couldn't read its homepage because it was written only in Dutch, but it is the era of the internet. I hope that the conference hotel will prepare an English page soon, so many people can access its contents, including its great historical background.

Second, the 10th ICPP was very practical. Because the theme of the conference was Experience in Philosophical Practice, the 'practical' feel can be understood as natural. Before leaving for Amsterdam I anticipated that the Master classes would be theoretical, in the sense that they would be talks about theories for guiding and interpreting philosophical practices, and that workshops would be practical. I was wrong, and on the first day I was a bit disappointed, but soon I became to enjoy the Dutch style of practicality which animated the conference. I am still reflecting on the middle way between theoria and praxis in the case of philosophical practice.

Third, there were few participants from Asian countries at the 10th ICPP. I know that Japan, China, and India have their societies or groups of philosophical practice, but the representatives of those organizations didn't attend the conference. One possible reason is that the conference was filled with Western content. There were only a few contributions dealing with the Asiatic contents such as Confucian or Buddhist philosophical practice. To be an international conference it is necessary to attract many people in the whole world as far as possible and to deal with various cultural aspects of philosophical practice such as Asiatic or Hispanic contents.

Concluding remarks

This paper presented the background conditions of philosophical practice in Korea. The contemporary philosophical practice in Korea has only a three-year history, but as we have seen, Korea has some fertile soil in which philosophical practice and humanities therapy can continue to grow. However, philosophical practice in Korea is also facing some problems such as establishing the identity of philosophical practice in the Confucian or Buddhist environment and developing clinical methods for practicing philoso-

phy. In the case of humanities therapy, first of all, we have to develop interdisciplinary methods for practicing humanities therapy by combining related methods from various disciplines. Next, we have to search for various ideas of humanities therapy, learn how to integrate them into philosophical practice, and then to disseminate them to people in the world who are interested in healing the diseases of mind.

Notes

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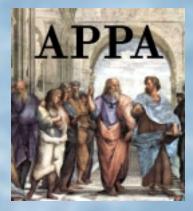
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Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

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