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Vietnamese Indigenous Healing's Implication for Vietnamese Women Counseling in Korea

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***Abstract*—**As the second largest group among international marriages in Korea, Vietnamese married immigrant women have been exposed to psychological crisis like divorce and family violence. The purpose of this study is to understand how to counsel those women from the perspective of indigenous healing as their own psychological problem-solving way. To this end, this study reviewed Vietnamese cultural literatures on their mentality as well as Vietnamese medical literatures on indigenous healing. The research results are as follows: First, cultural foundations that have formed Vietnamese mentality are Confucian value system, reserved communication, and religious pluralism. These cultural backgrounds play an important role in understanding their own therapeutic tradition. Second, Vietnamese indigenous healing considers cause of mental disease as a collapse of balance between mind and body and environment. Thus, indigenous treatment deals with psychological problems through a recovery of the balance from the holistic perspective. In fact, indigenous healing has been actively practiced in everyday place as well as hospital until today. The implications of Vietnamese indigenous healing for multicultural counseling in Korea are as follows: First, Korean counselors need to interactively understand their own assumptions on indigenous healing as well as counselees' own assumptions. Second, a variety of psychological intervention strategies can be drawn from Vietnamese indigenous healing. Third, indigenous healing needs to be integrated with modern techniques of counseling and psychotherapy, as both treatments are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

***Keywords*—**Indigenous healing, Vietnamese married immigrant women in Korea, multicultural counseling

I. Introduction

IT is noticeable that South-Korea has transformed to a pluralistic and multicultural society over the recent three decades. At the center of the demographic and cultural transformation of Korea are female married immigrants from foreign countries. According to Statistics Korea [1], there were totally 151,608 married immigrants in 2015, including 128,336 foreign-born women which account for 84.6% of total numbers. Since 2007, the Vietnamese immigrants have formed as the second largest immigrant group (26.9% in 2015) in Korea, which is the next to Chinese immigrants (38.8% in 2015). Accordingly, Chinese and Vietnamese married immigrant women have positively contributed to cultural and ethnic diversity of South-Korea. However, unfortunately, statistics also say that international marriages have been ending unhappily. Divorce rate of multicultural couples in Korea has drastically increased, as it has been almost 10% of total divorce numbers in Korea, especially 11.5% in 2011 and 8.2% in 2015 [2]. Another indicator says that foreign-born married immigrant women in Korea are exposed to a psychological crisis. Over 40% of counseling themes in 2015 were related to psychological issues such as family violence, sexual violence, marriage conflicts, and divorce, according to Danuri Call Center, which was established as the national telephone counseling service for multicultural family in Korea [3]. This rate is much higher than any other issue like employment, language, children education, and social welfare. The statistics also shows that Vietnam-born immigrants were the most frequent users of the counseling service in the same year. In this sense, it is certain that Vietnamese married immigrant women in Korea are one of the immigrant groups who desperately need psychotherapeutic intervention. In this case, counseling and psychotherapy have been generally applied to Vietnamese clients by Korean counselors with modern counseling training. However, those counseling and psychotherapeutic techniques generally have been formed and developed based on Western-European assumptions of mentality. Although those Western assumptions and techniques have been considerably helpful to healing Vietnamese clients, this study freshly focuses on Vietnamese assumptions of mentality and their own treatments.

Since the human history began, every society has its own explanation about physiological and psychological abnormality. And every culture has developed its culture-specific ways to deal with human problems and pain [4]. Counseling and psychotherapy are the most universal way to heal psychological problems in a modern world, especially in Western countries. However, indigenous ways of healing have existed and been utilized over thousands of years in non-Western world. Psychologists are witnessing a tremendous resurgence of interest among native people in their traditional ways and in the spiritual practices and beliefs of healing [5]. Accordingly, such terms as cross-cultural psychology, transcultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology have emerged along with revisit and reappraisal of indigenous healing [6]. Thus, if indigenous healing and its cultural background are fully reconsidered, multicultural counseling will be more enriched and effective. Thus, the purpose of this research is to understand how Vietnamese indigenous healing can help counseling Vietnamese women in Korea. This study responds to following two research questions: First, what is Vietnamese indigenous healing? Second, what implications does it provide for counseling Vietnamese married immigrant women in Korea?

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II. Research Method

This study uses a more inclusive concept, that is, indigenous healing rather than indigenous counseling or indigenous psychotherapy, although this study focuses on psychological diagnosis and treatment by Vietnamese. This is because there is no equivalent word in Asian languages which can replace counseling or psychotherapy used by western world [7], [8].

This study considers traditional medicine as an interchangeable definition with indigenous healing. Reference [9] defines traditional medicine as: "Traditional medicine is the total sum of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illnesses." Thus, as indigenous healing or traditional medicine can provide insights on diagnosis and treatment of psychological issues for Asians, this study considers indigenous healing as a core concept for counseling Vietnamese women.

The research method is a review of literatures across medical and non-medical areas. First, the researchers reviewed Vietnamese cultural literatures to explore Vietnamese indigenous mentality. Since there is no source which explains mentality itself in Vietnamese medical tradition, the researchers had to study Vietnamese mentality based on wider cultural texts. As well, this study assumes that Vietnamese culture has worked as a background which formed indigenous healing.

Second, the researchers reviewed Vietnamese medical literatures on Vietnamese indigenous healing. And this study accepted a three-part model as conceptual framework which deals with mental problem and distress. This framework was first developed by Das [10] and followed by Lee, et al. [11] for developing indigenous models of psychotherapy. The framework consists of following three parts: First, assumptions about the cause of psychological distress and behavioral deviance. Second, specific methods and procedures used in the treatment. Third, types of problems for which this kind of treatment is most sought.

Reference [11] investigated sixteen countries in non-Western continents, including Asia, Middle East, South-America, and Africa. Their research results are summarized as follows: First, non-Western assumptions about the cause of psychological distress and behavioral deviance are family dynamics, fate, and possession by evil spirits. Second, specific treatment methods used in non-Western world are kinship system like the extend family and elders, community, friendship network, spiritualism-religion, and traditional healers such as shamans and herbalists. Third, common types of problems for which non-Western people would seek psychological treatment are mental illness, substance abuse, and family violence or pressure.

III. Cultural Background of Vietnam

A. Confucian Value System

Vietnam has been culturally influenced over the centuries by many foreign countries, including China, Japan, France, and the United States. However, Vietnamese cultural values are based on the principles of Confucianism. Its core values are harmony, duty, honor, respect, education, allegiance to family [12]. First, in order to achieve harmony, Vietnamese people must observe moderation and avoid the extremes in verbal communication and daily life activities [12]. Second, duty and honor are ones of the highest cultural values [12]. It means that Vietnamese people seek not to break duty or bring shame to oneself and family in all circumstances, including physically or psychologically weakest moments. Third, respect in verbal and non-verbal communication is expected to show according to age, social status, or authoritative position [12]. Parents and ancestors at home, and elderly people, teachers, and authority figures outside the home should be respected. This is meaningful in therapeutic relationship between counselor and counselee. Fourth, as their literacy rate has been revealed as very high, scholars with higher education are at the top of social rank, followed by the farmer, artisan, trademan [12]. Fifth, family is the place to practice the above cultural values. Those values have been achieved within family hierarchical structure [12]. Father and elders and the oldest son are the most important persons as decision-makers. Allegiance to family extends beyond the immediate family to the extended family, beyond the living family, even to the dead family. Vietnamese women must be obedient to their own family's men, including father, husband, and grown-up sons [13].

B. Reserved Communication

Vietnamese language and manner are often reserved, non-responsive, non-assertive by American standards [12]. This is because core values in Vietnamese Confucian culture are moderation and harmony, honor or shame, duty and respect. Thus, superfluous and redundant verbal expressions are not encouraged to say. Hasty words and slips of tongue are considered as bad as hasty actions and behavioral mistakes. A proper use of verbal language is for achieving harmony and conveying respect. Vietnamese languages have honorific words as Korean language does so. Thus, social position of the opposite party is an important element in communication [12].

Non-verbal expressions are equally important. Those things are to reinforce verbal expressions. However, same gestures such as eye contact and smiling may be translated with completely different meanings [12].

In a word, Vietnamese way of communication tends to emphasize cultural stoicism, in which emotional expression is suppressed in favor of more socially accepted somatic substitutes [8].

C. Religious Pluralism

One of main characteristics of Vietnamese religions is diversity and open-mindedness to other religions [13]. Vietnamese Buddhism, called Theravada Buddhism, teaches

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that human is born in the endless cycle of samsara (i.e., reincarnation), experiencing sufferings as a result of one's craving. Thus, suppressing one's craving is the way to get rid of suffering and reach Nirvana (i.e., redemption) [12]. Confucianism has served as a social philosophy for relational harmony. Taoism does not exist with an organized institution, but it continues as a folk religion. Ba Dong as Taoistic shaman calls and comforts the spirits of the deceased in a ritual, called as Len Dong [13]. Cao Dai and Hoa Hao are native religions, incorporating teachings from several religions. Folk religions are based on shamanism and animism, that is to say, the worship of spirits, especially ancestor worship [13].

In summary, Vietnamese culture has been based on Confucian social norms for achieving relational harmony. Vietnam religions have provided eclectic alternatives on human problems and treatments. Everyday practice in Vietnamese words and deeds tends to emphasize self-control which suppresses one's emotional expressions. This cultural background has played an important role in the formation and understanding of Vietnamese indigenous healing.

IV. Indigenous Healing in Current Practice

Following Lee et al.'s three elements [11], this study investigates Vietnamese indigenous healing for mental health. The three elements are mental illness' causes, treatments, types of problems to which the treatments are applied. Each element will be explored as follows:

A. Causes of Mental Illness

There is no an elaborate and systemic taxonomy of mental phenomena in Asian culture. Likewise, psychiatric aspects of diseases and psychological elements of treatments were rarely mentioned or defined in Vietnamese traditional medical texts, while physical illness was discussed comprehensively in range and number [14]. The absence of descriptions on mental illness in Vietnamese traditional medical texts comes from the monism and holism on which Vietnamese indigenous healing was based [8], [14]. In other words, conceptional separation between physical and mental health was blurred in Vietnamese indigenous healing. In fact, the influence of Chinese traditional medicine cannot be ignored in the Vietnamese medical history. Key features of Chinese tradition medicine are necessary to be discovered for the deeper understanding of Vietnamese indigenous healing. The fundamental framework of Chinese medicine is as follows: Yin and Yang as biophysiological concept, and the five elements as cosmological concept [14], [15]. Based on monism of body and mind, Yin-Yang theory sheds light on every physiological and psychological diagnosis and treatment. Yin and Yang means cold and hot, interior and exterior, deficiency and excess respectively [15]. Health or illness, whether mental or physical, depends on the balance between Yin and Yang. Thus, filling the deficiency of Yin or eliminating the excessiveness of Yang is the key of Vietnam indigenous healing [14].

As another major framework, the-five-elements theory says that a person's major organs are related to one's cosmological environment [15], [16]. Each element is interdependent, and in an interactive cycle. Any disturbance of interrelationship between those elements causes bodily and mental illness. In addition, religious and spiritual causes need to be considered. Buddhism explains that karma (i.e., good or bad behaviors) in one's former life influences mental suffering in the present life. Animism explains that possession by evil spirits is one of major causes of mental illness [12]. Confucianism makes Vietnamese reluctant to express publicly one's emotion, and thus tends to make mental illness more chronic and severe [8].

In summary, causes of mental illness are not clearly defined by Vietnamese indigenous healing. However, those have been understood in terms of holism between body and mind, between human and environment, and of eclecticism from religions and folk beliefs. Thus, a wide range of causes mean a variety of indigenous treatment.

B. Treatments

Vietnamese indigenous healing is generally divided into two regions: Thuoc Nam and Thuoc Bac [15]. First, Thuoc Nam is a southern Vietnamese medicine which mainly deals with a variety of substances from plants and animals. Thus, it has been produced in various applications like dietary treatment and herbal medicine. It has been orally transmitted as a therapy within family rather than in professional institutions [14]. Thus, as it is accessible and affordable, it is used in a primary care as well as in a daily basis [16].

Second, Thuoc Bac is a northern Vietnamese medicine, which has been contacted and influenced by Chinese traditional medicine. It is mainly used for health enhancement and illness prevention. Since it is more professional than its counterpart Thouc Nam, traditional healers have been trained and provided with apprenticeship [16]. However, the two kinds of Vietnamese medicine were so intertwined that they cannot be strictly separated in treatment practices. Thus, common traditional treatments throughout southern and northern regions are as follows: herbs, packaged medicine, balm, acupuncture, acupressure or massage, steaming, pinching, coining, cupping, and moxibustion [12], [16]. These treatments are done mostly by stimulating skin or eating food and herbs. Those are effective to release mental stress by stimulating bodily pains and thus to recover the balance between body and mind.

Third, cosmological and spiritual considerations have been used in treatment [14]. Cosmological factors like one's birth-date and -year and -time, position of one's house or ancestor grave, facial or bodily appearance, and lines of palms have been known to influence one's fate and health. Spiritual factors like possession of evil spirits have been considered in ritual activities like exorcism. Thus, a variety of treatment options to release mental distress have been provided in Vietnam indigenous healing [14].

C. Types of Problems

Traditional medicine has been usually used in Vietnam. A Vietnamese national report says that about thirty percentages of Vietnamese population use indigenous treatment as a

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primary health care [17]. An international report says that almost eighty percentages of commune health stations provide traditional medicine services [18]. Traditional medicine is also considered affordable, accessible, and furthermore effective especially for chronic disease by Vietnamese [18].

Noticeably, the problem for which the traditional medicine is most frequently sought is neurological and psychological disease, according to a research [19]. This is congruent with Lee et al.'s result [11] that mental illness is one of the top problems for which indigenous healing is sought. Furthermore, acupuncture is the most frequently used in daily clinical practice, followed by massage or acupressure, and herbal medicine [19]. In this regard, mental illness is one of the top priority causes for which Vietnamese seeks traditional medicine. In other words, indigenous healing can be used as an effective channel or means to release psychological pains of Vietnamese immigrant married women in Korea.

V. Implication for Multicultural Counseling

As aforementioned, indigenous healing and its background can help counselor extend and deepen the understanding of counselee. Based on Vietnamese indigenous healing, this study offers implications for multicultural counseling in terms of interaction, strategy, and integration as follows:

First, Korean counselors need to be aware of Vietnamese clients' indigenous healing and its background. Counsellor's awareness should be interactive in the two ways: the one way is on counselor's own one and the other is about client.

Counsellor needs to be aware of one's own assumptions and beliefs about indigenous healing. If a counsellor assumes indigenous healing as unscientific and unhelpful and inferior, he or she may lose a way that counselees understand and heal their own mental problems. The idea that modern techniques of counseling and psychotherapy are superior may be a cultural prejudice. Furthermore, counsellor need to be aware of theories and practices in clients' indigenous healing, at least values and ideas embedded in indigenous healing. This is because the knowledge can immediately help counsellor understand client's worldview and response about mental problems.

Second, Korean counselors need to develop psychotherapeutic intervention strategies for Vietnamese clients. Interestingly, both of Korean and Vietnamese traditional medicine have been influenced by Chinese traditional medicine. Both of Korean and Vietnamese traditional healers are familiar with holistic and cosmological etiology which considers the imbalance between body and mind and environment as a cause of mental illness. And both of them have usually practiced traditional treatments like acupuncture, acupressure, moxibustion, and herbs. Thus, if Korean counselors know that Vietnamese indigenous healing is similar to their own indigenous healing, they can attempt to introduce and apply indigenous healing's theory and practice to counseling sessions. For example, if a northern-Vietnamese woman suffers from stomach ache, her somatic symptom can be understood to be derived from environmental change, according to the five elements theory from Chinese traditional medicine. And that symptom may be considered as an expression of chronic mental distress. And a woman from southern-Vietnam can be advised to use dietary treatment and herbal medicine from Thuoc Nam to release her psychological stress. In a word, a variety of intervention strategies and techniques can be considered and mixed from the perspective of Vietnamese indigenous healing, according to clients' personal information (i.e., age, gender, social position, religion, and birthplace).

Third, indigenous healing needs to be integrated with modern techniques of counseling and psychotherapy. Both of the methods have strengths and weaknesses respectively. Those ways are not mutually exclusive but interdependent or complementary. Thus, Korean counselors, who are trained in modern counseling education, need to appropriately utilize and introduce indigenous healing for helping Vietnamese clients. However, Korean counselors need to be aware of their own limitations in helping Vietnamese clients in terms of indigenous healing. Counselors cannot be familiar with all kinds of indigenous healing. Their roles as counsellors may not completely replace those roles as indigenous healers or authority figures in Vietnam. In this sense, counsellor can ask help from and cooperation with indigenous healers or authority figures from client's family and community. Family dynamics or family allegiance can never be ignored in diagnosis and treatment [11], [12]. When helping individual aspect of Vietnamese married immigrant women, counsellors need to consider clients' relational aspects with husband and family-in-law.

Consequently, this study takes note of Asian indigenous healing's role in multicultural counseling in Korea. Korea has more favorable conditions to psychologically understand and psycho-therapeutically help Vietnamese people than any other country. This is because that two countries share geographical, historical, and cultural common grounds [13]. Geographically, two nations are peninsulas which connect continent and Pacific Ocean. Historically, two countries have experienced colonialism, national war and division between democracy and communism. Culturally, two nations have been considerably influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism. However, two countries are different in many aspects. While Korea has kept ethnical homogeneousness and exclusive monoculture, Vietnamese has learned to coexist with 54 tribes in pluralistic cultures. The former is democratic county, while the latter is communistic state. As well, since South-Korea engaged in Vietnam War (1964-1973), many casualties among two nations were produced. Diplomatic relationship between two nations has been recovered over two decades. Vietnamese brides have come to get married with Korean bridegrooms, mainly due to economic dream and the deficiency of brides in rural areas in South-Korea. Those above commonalities and differences between Korea and Vietnam may effectively work as a bridge for mutual understanding and multicultural counseling.

VI. Conclusion

With the rapid growth of Vietnamese immigrant married

women in Korea and of their psychotherapeutic needs, this study take note of the importance of indigenous healing as their own psychological problem-solving way. And it explores the implications of Vietnamese indigenous healing for counseling those people in Korea. This research says that elaborate taxonomy of mental phenomena in Vietnamese medical texts is absent. Vietnamese have not seen themselves with modern framework of counseling and psychotherapy. However, they have considered their own mental problems and distress as the collapse of balance between body and mind and cosmos. Accordingly, psychological treatments start from the recovery of balance between them. The holistic perspective embedded in indigenous healing and Vietnamese culture can shed light on multicultural counseling in Korea.

Both Korea and Vietnam share common grounds in terms of culture and medicine. Those elements can be an important bridge to create rapport between Korean counselor and Vietnamese counselee. In a way that Korean counsellors have traditionally been aware and took care of their own emotional ego, they can basically understand and help Vietnamese counselee. However, this study concludes that if actively considering Vietnamese indigenous healing and its background, multicultural counselors will provide service with better quality for them.

For further study, first, integration between indigenous healing and general counselling needs to be explored. Second, an empirical study to measure how effective the indigenous healing's application to Vietnamese clients is in real counseling needs to be studied.

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