

Koreanizing Chinese Medicine?: Problems and Possibilities in Representing Korean Medicine in a Global Setting

Panel Proposal

This panel explores how the “Koreanness” of Korean medicine has been expressed and modified from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. During this time, indigenous medical learning moved from defining itself in relation to a Chinese tradition, to a confrontation with biomedicine in the context of colonialism and modern economic development, and ultimately to a repositioning as an aspect of national heritage in the post-colonial setting of independence after World War II. Instead of viewing Korean medicine as a nationally identified constellation of ideas and practices, papers in this panel draw on multiple cross-cultural and cross-linguistic flows that have shaped the boundaries of Korean medicine.

Although recent scholarship problematizes nation-centered units of analysis in describing traditional medicine in East Asia, this is not the most productive approach in grasping the complexities of the history of Korean medicine. Whereas Koreans’ pre-modern understanding of nature and body is often analyzed in the conceptual framework of “Little China’s borrowing and similitude,” indigenous narratives aiming to overcome colonial historiography focus on “Korean uniqueness and creativity” without fully elaborating Korea’s place in a broader context of East Asian medicine. Criticizing both Sino-centric and nationalist approaches, this panel seeks to reveal dynamic processes in the margins. By examining changing modes of creating and negotiating “Koreanness” within medicine, this panel asks how the linguistic, clinical, and institutional ground of Korean medicine has been (re)defined along with Koreans’ will to maintain their cultural, regional, and national identities

Individual Papers

“Visualizing Korean Medicine: Similarities and Differences in Managing Life and Death during the Chosŏn Dynasty (□□, 1392-1910)”

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This paper presents the plural foundations of Korean medicine that enriched its intrinsic eclecticism from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. By comparing the textual, institutional, and popular frameworks of Korean medicine, this article argues that while Taoism dominates the contents of orthodox medicine, Neo-Confucianism sets the rules for medical education, and Buddhism and Shamanism govern the conventions of folk healing in Chosŏn Korea. A variety of images, ranging from Buddhist folk paintings to a Confucian illustration of the body for educational purposes, reveal these dynamics in Korean medicine, which were deeply associated with the everyday routines of pre-modern Koreans. Furthermore, given this milieu, this article asks whether there was any common ground with these seemingly different attributes of Korean medicine.

“Circulating Adam Schall’s *Hundreds of Signs Testifying God’s Providence* (□□□□):
Korean Response to the Jesuit Translation of the Western Body”

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Examining elements of pluralism across the Sino-Korean border, this paper traces how Korean scholars interpreted Adam Schall’s *Hundreds of Signs Testifying God’s Providence* (□□□□), a Jesuit translation of Leonard Lessius’s (1554-1623) *De providentia numinis* (1617) into literary Chinese. Relying on Aristotelian natural philosophy and Galenic physiology, Schall structured his translation with the aim of appealing to the scholarly elite of China. How then did Korean scholars, who shared Chinese as a textual language but worked in a different geo-political situation, respond to the Sino-Western practice of translation? Yi Ik (□ □ 1681-1763) added comments on the Galenic medicine based on his Neo-Confucian framework, and Yi Kyu-gyōng (□□□ 1788-?), while writing articles for his encyclopedic collection, used Schall’s translation to elaborate his comparison between Eastern and Western medicine. Compared to Chinese contemporaries, did the Korean (mis)understanding of the Western body reveal any cultural or ethnic particularity?

“Eastern Medicine On Their Own Terms: Founding the Tradition of Korean Medicine in the
Seventeenth Century”

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This paper compares seventeenth-century innovations in Korean medicine with the Chinese turn toward a regionally differentiated understanding of the body. While the Chinese desire to control epidemics (*wenbing*) facilitated the southern divergence of medicine in China, the Korean longing to delve further into orthodox medicine resulted in Hō Chun’s (□□ 1546-1615) synthesis of Chinese medicine with its claim as Eastern medicine, *Precious Mirror of Eastern Medicine* (□□□□ 1610 *Precious Mirror* hereafter). As a classic of Korean medicine, *Precious Mirror* has received more scholarly and popular attention than any other pre-modern medical text. Given this context, this article focuses on experiential and textual conditions that constructed *Precious Mirror* as a unique and unprecedented foundation for Korean medicine.

“Herbs of Our Own Kingdom: Layers of the “Local” in the *Materia Medica* of the Chosōn
Dynasty”

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Previous scholarship takes up the rise of “local botanicals” (□□) against its Chinese counterpart as a gauge to measure the degree of independence and the extent of

indigenization of Korean medicine during the Chosŏn Dynasty. This study, hence, begins by scrutinizing this as one of the foundational elements of a Korean tradition in medicine. While analyzing major texts of local botanicals published during the Chosŏn Dynasty, this paper claims that the classificatory arrangement used to map the local on botanicals often overlapped, and was not organized into a clear set of categories. Considering the traffic of herbal medicine across political and geographical boundaries and the extreme diversity of botanical names, shapes, and attributes, texts on local botanicals cannot be said to show clearly what belongs to “us” or “them.” Instead, correcting the names of botanicals, textualizing the folk names of certain species, and publishing a series of books focusing on local botanicals reflect the Chosŏn Dynasty’s socio-cultural needs to imprint the “local” on *materia medica* to manifest Koreans’ own cultural identity. By revealing the changing definitions of “local” in botanical classification, this article aims to view “local botanicals” not as evidence of Korean uniqueness but as a culturally devised tool for assimilation at the margins.