

Socioreligious Meaning of Healing Culture in Korea

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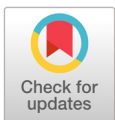
힐링문화의 종교사회학적 의미

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Abstract

While there is an affirmative evaluation in regard to healing boom (healing craze) that it has worked appropriately in our stressful, hard and tough social lives, consequently comforting many people, there is also criticism that healing is just one of many social trends, devoid of any truly curing functionality. Faced with this criticism, the religious community generally tends to embrace healing culture positively within the religious system. On the contrary to this, some scholars say there is a tendency whereby healing rather embraces religion. This trend, anyway, sees increasingly more people - especially the young generation - looking for new forms of healing such as meditation, yoga, breathing training as well as spirituality or religion. This phenomenon is worthy of our attention. Eventually this trend means casting an implicit doubt on the existing roles of religion, requiring sort of self-reflection and so the study believes the existing religious community needs to brace for new spiritual campaigns positively.

Keywords: Wellbeing, Healing, Meditation, Spirituality, Sociology of religion



OPEN ACCESS

Citation: Kim HR. 2018. Socioreligious Meaning of Healing Culture in Korea. Journal of Meditation based Psychological Counseling. <https://doi.org/10.12972/mpca.20180007>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12972/mpca.20180007>

Received: April 25, 2018

Revised: May 20, 2018

Accepted: May 23, 2018

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1. Introduction

Since long ago, we have been contacting the term of healing easily in our daily lives. Initially, healing has been used in medical circles along with treatment, and turning out as a cultural trend, it has been extended to diverse fields spanning philosophy, social culture, science of religion, liberal arts for its use. For this reason, the term seems to be considerably ambiguous, vague and also confusing (Kim Jea-young, 2015).

Lexical meaning of healing is to 'cure diseases or wounds, or comfort and make people recover from sorrows or worries and purify their mind' (Sisa English-Korean Dictionary). According to this, healing has a very extensive range of meanings: medical perspective from curing diseases or wounds; the aspect of psychic counselling from comforting people and making them recover from sorrows or worries; religious perspective from purification of mind. As such, the meaning of healing is used in so many contexts that it

sometimes turns out to be confusing. Bearing this in mind, the study would like to define healing here - a cultural phenomenon - as 'cure' that 'comforts' sour wounds or makes recover one's health.

As diverse is understanding of healing, so diverse approaches can be made, but this study does not seek to grasp the concept of healing, nor examine societal background of how it has emerged as a sociocultural keyword, nor its history from the aspect of liberal arts or philosophy. While the issue of curing basically belongs to the domain of health, for a long time in history, religion has paid attention to curing spiritual aspect of humans including their physical pains and mental wounds.

Today, the issue of healing has become a social phenomenon called healing culture. As religion can't have proper meaning without or out of the society, it's high time for the religious community to pay attention to the issue of healing. This study looks at criticism on healing culture from the sociocultural perspective and examines how the religious community has responded to this sociocultural phenomenon of healing as well as how relations between religion and healing could be established ideally.

2. Healing culture and critical views

In our society, healing boom started from 2010. In the beginning, there were many writings highlighting its necessity in step with the social trend but as time goes on, we see increasingly more critical points of view along with objective assessment of cultural phenomenon of healing. We need to examine this shifted view in detail above all in comparison with its existing accomplishments.

In the first place, there was an attempt to exactly analyze social phenomena of healing. It's a report of Samsung Economic Research Institute titled 'Background of Healing Culture and Directions for Development' (Lee Seung-cheol et al., 2013). This paper named four as below for the background of healing boom.

- Excessive stress coming from economic difficulties
- Crisis of being inconsiderate to others due to increase of one person household
- Increase of negative view towards society
- Increase of desires for psychological cure

The report argues that against this backdrop, healing, pushing wellbeing aside, emerged as a cultural code. It meant that, though healing was a social phenomenon, social problems were connected ultimately to individual's psychologic problems, and consequently healing culture prompted its boom. The report suggested three options to deal with this situation in the future.

- Build mental health system in close linkage with daily life
- Strengthen support for workers of the businesses in connection with healing
- Provide values arranged to understand the mind of consumers

As such, the report analyzed social phenomena of healing objectively and, after all, emphasized active roles of the businesses and government. Particularly, the paper compared the frequency of terms of wellbeing and healing among Japan, the United States and Korea.

Its graph showed how the term of wellbeing that had rapidly developed from 2004 was replaced by healing as of 2010 as a trend in Korea. In case of Japan, the term of healing expanded rapidly from 1992, culminating in 1998, whereas the term of wellbeing was hardly used. On the contrary, the US hardly used the term of healing and continued to use wellbeing instead, culminating in 2010.

As a merit of this report, it well demonstrated social phenomena using statistics focused on the keyword of healing. This is meaningful in that it considered healing as a social or cultural phenomenon. Above all, it provides useful information in tracing social phenomena and establishing strategy to respond to them.

By the elapse of time after 2010, critical views started to rise along with assessment of healing culture in a departure from the previous positive view that 'Korea needs healing'. There were critical views seen from the sociocultural perspective. Let's look at some of them.

Firstly, it's a critical view on healing programs of broadcasters. It's hard to deny that healing boom was triggered by the program like "Healing Camp, What a Joy" (SBS Jul 18, 2010 - Feb 1, 2016). Every broadcaster was fully engaged in spreading healing culture using various talk show programs. Indeed healing boom was led by these healing programs. These programs, inviting eminent celebrities, mainly comprised confession of sufferings and comforting. Viewers were to be comforted and encouraged for their own feelings through storytelling of talk show guests.

In regard to healing led by these broadcasting programs, "Healing, Is it Really a Good Way to Realize Happiness?" (Seo Gil-wan, 2013) defined healing as a 'curing narrative, teaching a comfort from a defeat'. Talk shows, moving psychological treatment site to a living room, allowed many people to take part in the talking therapy. In terms of business, broadcasters might have generated profits using a new form of entertainment programs related with healing. That said, these talk shows just made the audience 'illusioned' that they got the answer for certain substantial things and, assuming wounds and pains inevitably for self-development and self-realization, were urged to emphasize sufferings more than problem-solving ironically. As a result, the shows caused inconveniences to the audience by awkward comforting, which is certainly an adverse effect.

Secondly, it's a criticism on healing-related books. It argues that comfort and advice suggested in the books are all vain and that healing shown at TVs almost remains just a sort of 'advice' that is little helpful to those troubled people. The content of the book seems to be appealing but as soon as one puts it aside, nothing has changed at all in regard to realistic problems. It says our mental wounds should be cured by ourselves and never cured either by eating healing food or applying healing cosmetics. Thus, as healing is vain, it goes on, so is our country where healing-related self-developing books become best sellers and if healing is such, we had better get out of the healing as soon as possible, it argues (Seo Min, 2014).

Thirdly, there is a critical view on social meaning of the discourse of healing. "Self-governing Frame of Early Stage Healing Discourse and Effect of the Discourse" (Kim Eun-jun, 2015) argued that healing made individuals docile, who need comforting and deprived them of critical posture on the issues of the time and structural factors in society, leading to their depoliticization. While comfort and cure emerged as an alternative at the time when they are needed desperately, healing turned out to be another consumption in a huge order of neoliberalism, being off the point from the issue and not providing any concrete ways to implement.

These criticisms are meaningful themselves and tell us the need for more in-depth alternatives. However, it is too much to expect that TVs and books may solve the problem beyond comforting and advising. Entertainment programs are just one-time and popular healing-related books are not a professional one and so we must acknowledge a certain limit in materializing the significance of healing for problem-solving by curing. Along the way, the criticism that healing makes today's young generation obedient, depriving them of critical standpoint on the social issues seems to be going too far. The researcher believes the young don't need to change social structure or have political issues always in their mind like the old generations who pioneered the democratization campaigns. Now, we need to coolly look into the core of healing through criticism on healing boom.

3. Stance of religious community viewing healing culture

Then, what stance will the religious community have on healing culture. Here lies the problem of how to establish the relation between religion and healing. While the religious community is generally wary of broadcasting programs and commercialization of healing, it tends to embrace healing culture into the bosom of its religious system.

For instance, "Our Society's Healing Syndrome seen from the Standpoint of Catholic Churches" (Yoon Bin-ho, 2012) assesses Korean society needs curing and emphasizes that Christianity was a healing religion from the beginning. According to this, healing needed in the Korean society is considerably characterized by psychological cure and it is to understand, console, comfort people, that is, someone becomes my neighbor. Healing of Jesus is to be extended to the level of forgiving sins and salvation of soul beyond physical cure. That is said to be the mission of Christians.

Buddhist's view towards healing is similar. The Buddha was the performer of healing and is recognized as the model who suggested the ways of healing. According to "Healing Methods of the Buddha who never Avoids Problems" (Venerable Priest Beopin, 2013), our contemporaries all struggle in their lives and want to rest, be comforted and so look to mountain temples, get excited by mentor's lectures and participate in practising programs (like temple stay). Though healing is to be with others and comfort saying 'it's all right', the Buddha demands honest diagnosis on healing and precise prescriptions. It's because the reality of our lives, however painful or joyful, is the result of our own behavior and the wounds coming from it can't be cured by temporary cover-up or stitching. Therefore, an inappropriate comfort makes us weak and merely justifies the social structure in which avarice and monopoly are concealed deliberately. And before being comforted, we need to undergo a self-diagnosis rigidly.

The forum whereby we can have an inkling on Christians' stance about healing is 'Mind Caring at Fatigue Society - Response to Healing Boom in Korean Society from the Angle of Pastoral Theology' (Jeong Yeon-deuk, 2016). This forum firstly defines Korean society as a fatigue society. Fatigue triggered a healing boom and this eventually focused on the boost of competitiveness best suiting social demand. So, this can't be a healing in the truest meaning. And it suggests a community named Mind Caring that offers an authentic healing. Within this community, people can experience their own fatigue, have sympathetic approach to that of others at the same time and experience mutual caring between the community members.

View of the religious community towards healing is warm in the first place. It acknowledges the meaning of healing apparently, and positively embrace healing boom. While wary of dysfunction of healing culture, the religious community suggests specific alternatives as well as useful points of view. This stance is to maintain the existing religious traditions and also connect new spirituality to the inside of the system. Here, in establishing the relation between religion and healing, the religious community sees healing programs as part of religious activities or meditation or one of spirituality programs.

There are oppositions to this, though. They argue healing emphasizes salvation in this world (or awakening) rather one in the afterlife and healing replaces functions of religion. It is not that religion chooses healing, on the contrary the power called healing contains religion (Sim Bo-seon, Power named Healing, 2013). In other words, according to messages delivered by healing boom, healing or spirituality can't be any more the monopoly of religious organizations. It means that we are ushered in the era when other methods in our daily lives can replace traditional religious experiences, instead of always experiencing through religious organizations or religious rituals for rest and cure.

Here, new methods in our daily lives can be worked out bearing in mind the context of 'new spirituality campaign' like meditation, yoga, breathing training. In regard to this, there exists an obvious difference with the existing religious organizations. These organized and conservative bodies sometimes show worried viewpoint towards spirituality campaign.

Should new spirituality campaign simply have the nature of sports for all, there is no problem at all to churches. But should it go beyond sports for all, it may have a very adverse effect on the Christian faith (Park Young-ho, 2017).

Spirituality campaigns with individualized new tendency may cause a shrinking on the existing religious organizations. This worry exists not only in bureaucratized churches but in conservative temples. If this posture were to be expressed to the maximum, healing culture could be criticized and denied. It could be a cheap comfort, no more than a passing trend, sort of encouragement and merely a

neo-liberalistic profit pursuit. It could be considered to be an individual's day-to-day sports and a temporary comfort that doesn't contribute to problem-solving. This sort of posture mostly may be taken by conservative sociologists or the establishments of religious organizations. Needless to say, healing might go like that way as per their wishes.

That said, new young generations live their own spiritual lives in day-to-day living out of free and personal idiosyncrasy instead of regular attendance to a temple or church. Seen from this standpoint, healing culture can be considered a new religion or a spirituality campaign. Statistics in favor of this position is the decrease of religious people. Of course, this cannot be interpreted to be the direct cause of the new emergence of spirituality campaigns departing from the existing system. Nevertheless, from here, we can sense a move that seeks new methods faithful to subjective spiritual experience while reflecting and criticizing the existing forms of faith.

Seen from this position, healing culture can be understood as a new self-discovery and pilgrimage in search of the truth, denying to be included into the existing system or the world of vested rights. This process could be considered 'not a residing spirituality but one in search of the truth' (Jeon Myung-su, 2015). This truth-pursuing spirituality has been shown in a deeper way among people with individualism or Buddhist values. This is based on the teachings that all people, who have the nature of Buddha, spirituality, can be a Buddha. Oriental religion teaches that healing or awakening can be achieved through spiritual training like meditation in daily life - individual's space - rather than at specific religious places (temple or church).

There is no reason healing culture and new spirituality campaigns today may be necessarily in conflict with the existing religious spirituality. They are already accommodated and integrated sufficiently into the existing religious organizations on their way. And yet, it is obvious that we have to develop tailored healing programs in step with social change and prepare alternatives as well. The researcher considers the essence of religion as healing namely 'comfort' for pains of others and 'cure' by spiritual experience. Long before the landing of healing boom, religion itself has been playing a role of comfort and cure in the world and in the future too should conduct this role more faithfully. For healing boom as a cultural phenomenon might pass away and our fundamental problems still remain unchanged but we should never stop our pilgrimage towards spiritual awakening.

4. Conclusion

What does healing boom mean to us? How does religion establish relation with healing? We have examined two questions. While there is an affirmative assessment that healing boom has worked appropriately in our stressful, hard and tough social lives, consequently comforting many people, there is also criticism that healing is just one of many social trends, devoid of truly curing functionality.

Faced with this criticism, the religious community generally tends to embrace healing culture positively within the religious system. However, on the contrary to this, there is also view that healing may embrace religion. This trend sees increasingly more people - especially the young generation - looking for new forms of healing such as meditation, yoga, breathing training as well as spirituality or religion. This phenomenon is worthy of our attention. Eventually this trend means casting an implicit doubt on the existing roles of religion, requiring sort of self-reflection and so the study believes the existing religious community needs to brace for new spirituality campaigns positively.

초록

힐링 열풍은 스트레스 받고 힘들고 각박한 우리 사회적인 삶의 현장에서 적절하게 기능했고, 많은 이들이 위안을 받았다는 긍정적인 평가 있다. 반면에 힐링은 단지 트렌드일 뿐이고, 진정한 치유적인 기능을 갖질 못했다는 비판도 있다. 이런 비판에 직면하면서 대체로 종교계는 힐링문화를 적극적으로 종교체계내로 수용하는 경향이 있다. 그렇지만 반대로 힐링이 종교를 포섭하는 경향도 대

두된다는 시각도 있다. 이런 경향은 젊은 세대를 중심으로 개인주의적 성향을 가진 명상, 요가, 기수련과 같은 새로운 형태의 힐링, 영성 혹은 종교를 찾는 이들이 점차 늘어나고 있음은 주목해야할 현상이 아닌가 한다. 이런 경향은 기존 종교의 역할에 대한 회의나 반성의 의미를 가진 까닭에 기존 종교는 새로운 영성운동에 대한 적극적인 수용적 자세가 요구된다고 판단한다.

키워드

웰빙, 힐링, 명상, 영성, 종교사회학

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