

Clinical Art Therapy in South Korea: Education, Therapy and Research

韩国的临床医学艺术治疗：教育、 治疗和研究

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1. What is the current state of the creative and expressive arts in the fields of education, therapy and research in your country today?

The origin of using art as a diversional activity in Korea dates back to 1960, when a group of mental health experts and occupational therapists tried this new approach with their patients. In 1982, a group of psychiatrists founded the Korean Clinical Art Association, as a subordinate organization of the psychiatric community of South Korea (including music, painting and dancing). This marked the beginning of the therapies using art activities. This was followed by rapid industrialization and urbanization, which fueled the public's interest in arts therapies. Many individuals and organizations were interested in the potential of this new field and engaged in activities of their own designs. However, the lack of a systematic basis or program took its toll, causing them to go through a process of trial and error.

In 2005, many doctors, dentists, oriental medicine practitioners, counsellors, artists, social workers, as well as experts and leading academic figures joined forces and established the Korean Academy of Clinical Art Therapy (KACAT). This was under the leadership of Professor Seil Jeon, and Professor Seonhyun Kim, which altogether marked the birth of art therapy as a consolidated medical discipline. In 2008, under the leadership of Professor Seonhyun Kim in Seoul, Beijing-Seoul-Tokyo (BESETO) Clinical Art Therapy was founded for the development of art therapy in Asia. In 2016, the organization celebrated its 8th anniversary. Additionally, in 2014, the World Congress of Art Therapy (WCAT), in which the characteristics and research trends of art therapy in more than 20 countries of the world were presented, was held in South Korea. Professor Senhyun Kim was appointed as the founding chair of this organization.

In 2015, the Korean Trauma Association was founded. Since then, this organization has been engaged in research regarding the establishment of a well-organized system for safety education in preparation for a possible disaster, strict management, the management of trauma for the victims and areas suffering from disasters and local resilience.

Clinical art therapy has been established as a discipline of medicine through close cooperation between therapeutic experts. As a result, the art therapy clinic was established in Cha Medical School/Cha Hospital and began its practice in earnest, which drew the attention of the public. For the first time among medical schools in South Korea, in 2005, Cha Medical School opened its master's course for clinical art therapy,

which was followed by the establishment of the doctoral course in 2009 and the undergraduate major in 2014. This provided a foothold for the students to become healthcare professionals. Professor Seonhyun Kim has been appointed as the Senior Professor of the School, while practicing in the clinic.

2. Are the arts used in a specialized or multidisciplinary way?

In South Korea, the field of clinical art therapy is a sub-division of integrated medicine. In Asian medical practice, one is considered healthy if the bio-energy in the body has achieved a balance between yin and yang. If the balance collapses, health is lost and a person is usually viewed as either healthy or unhealthy. The focus of medicine is fixed on health, which can be maintained through diet and “body preservation.” In Western medicine, the state of a person is either ill or not-ill. The focus of medicine is on the illness. The entire field of Western medicine hinges on what the illness is, how it is caused, how it is found, and how it is removed. Therefore, between Asian medical practice, where people are divided into healthy or unhealthy, and Western medicine, where the state of the person is with or without illness, a problematic gray zone of “not healthy but without illness” remains.

Supplementary alternative medicine is the new pioneer of this gray zone, which addresses unhealthiness. As the special committee of WHO recommends, the definition of “true health” now includes the “spiritual” factor, further widening the domain of unhealthiness. This, in turn, is expanding the scope of roles for the arts therapies as well.

3. Do they draw on the traditions of your own country or are they primarily under Western influence?

Both the West and East have their tradition of art as therapy. However, it is in the West that art therapy has been studied seriously and for a longer period of time. Art therapy in South Korea has been advancing as well, ever since the country was introduced to this concept. However, many elements of art therapy, which have been studied in accordance with Western cultural and medical characteristics, have been causing issues while being introduced to Asia. However, due to progress in the art therapy field in Asia, the issues have been mitigated, and now the region is ready to take a leading role in the world, in the field of art therapy. The medical sciences of the West and Asia are both dealing with human diseases, and they have a lot in common. The ultimate goals of removing the illness which causes the pain and protecting health are the same. There are only minor differences in their understanding of health, in why diseases occur, how a person can regain health, as well as approaches in diagnosis and treatment. The medicine of the new era should be a comprehensive one, with considerations that go beyond the walls of different cultures and which addresses physical, mental, social, psychological and spiritual health. In this regard, art therapy, evaluates the subjects comprehensively, taking these states of health into consideration.

The fields of therapies, education, and research that are based on art have shown great progress. Many elements of art therapy have been utilized in clinical contexts, with their roots based in traditional medicines. It can be said that clinical art therapy has great

potential to play an important role in the progress of the world's medical science. In spite of cultural differences, there are many similarities and overlapping elements between Western and Asian medicine. Sometimes, elements are found in both, yet emphasized differently, which can make it difficult to draw a clear line between them.

Art therapy, which is closely related to all of the physical, mental, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects, can significantly contribute to the progress of Asian and Western medicines, as it embraces both the Western and Asian medical sciences.

4. What are the major problems you encounter in using the arts in education or therapy?

There are different types of medicine, which are commonly called Western, Asian and alternative. In the West, where medicine exists as a single, unified system, any medicine other than Western medicine, is considered an "alternative." For this reason, Asian medicine has been considered to be part of such an alternative medicine. However, in South Korea, medicines other than the Western and Asian medicines are considered as the alternative medicines. There are around 200 different sub-categories that may fall into this "alternative" category, including about 50 which are most widely known. In the therapeutic aspect, art therapy is in use in various areas, such as rehabilitation, cancer, mental health, post-natal depression, PTSD, and emotional problems. The psychological and emotional needs and demands which can be addressed in this therapy are increasing in Korean society. Clinical art therapy practitioners are making efforts with regard to meeting the changing national systemic needs and issues.

5. How do you see the future development of arts-based education, therapy and research in your country?

Art therapy used to be thought of as a product of the West. However, as this therapy is being tried in the clinical contexts in Asia, there are studies in progress in South Korea, and many are also in the field of the alternative medicines. We now have an opportunity in which the experts and representatives of more than 20 countries of the world can get together and share their knowledge. Clinical art therapy is rapidly expanding in terms of its scope of application in Western medicine, while Asian medicine is also embracing this approach from many different angles.

The fields of therapies, education, and research based on art have shown a great progress. Many elements of art therapy have been utilized in clinical contexts with their roots in traditional medicines. It can be said that clinical art therapy has a great potential to play an important role in the progress of the world's medical science.

About the author

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