

EXPERIENCE AND KI 氣 IN GICHEON, PSYCHO-PHYSICAL PRACTICE OF CONTEMPORARY KOREA

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Название статьи: Психо-физические практики современной Кореи: КиЧон, Ки 氣 и опыт

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Резюме: Цель данного исследования состоит в изучении опыта адептов КиЧон, современной психо-физической практики связанной с Ки (жизненной энергией), и сравнении его с официальной КиЧон идеологией. В этом контексте рассматривается опыт ки в теле, и опыт телестности через ки. В статье сделана попытка выявить особое осознание телестности, лежащее в основе концепции ки, которая охватывает одновременно моральный, эмоциональный, интеллектуальный, физический, социальный и космический планы бытия. В ходе исследования выдвинута гипотеза о том что понятие ки является средством для артикуляции и классификации ощущений, чувств и впечатлений.

Ключевые слова: Ки, КиЧон, психо-физический, телестность, самосовершенствование, Корея, жизненная энергия, сознание, восприятие

Introduction

The present research is an anthropological study of GiCheon (氣天 *kich'ŏn*), one of the *ki*-related psycho-physical practices in contemporary Korea. I attempt to clarify to which degree the actual experiences of the adepts correspond to the theoretical structures in official GiCheon ideology. This study aims at understanding what perception of reality stands behind the notion of *ki* (provisionally to be defined as “life energy”), and whether it can refine our awareness of mind-body and subject-object problematics.

Psycho-physical education is a vital feature of East-Asian way of life. The purpose of a psycho-physical discipline is rearing a person in accordance with culturally defined prescriptions. [1, c. 1] This goal is achieved by different methods of the conscious and systematic re-

organization of psychic processes, involving corporeal practices. Such methods include breathing and meditation, as well as martial arts, sexual techniques and medical practices, and relate to (psycho)therapeutic, prophylactic, moral and religious ventures.

This study centers on GiCheon, a school of internal alchemy in the terminology of Don Baker [2, c. 508]¹. GiCheon is one of the oldest and most influential of 20th century Korean mind-body practices, related to Kuksul², Dahn world³, and Haidong Gumdo⁴. As a modern self-cultivation practice, GiCheon manifests itself in the form of a martial art, dance, healing-meditative discipline, magic and mysticism. The current study approaches GiCheon as a healing practice.

Similarly to Chinese psycho-physical practices, GiCheon adepts believe that the starting point of the human being is *tanjŏn* (丹田, cinnabar field), the lumbar and pelvis area of the body. GiCheon teachers maintain that the embryo stems from the belly – the cells building first in the mother’s womb are those that later form the belly of the fetus. According to GiCheon philosophy, the goal of practice is the accumulation of *ki* in *tanjŏn* and circulating it within the body→family→society→cosmos. This is achieved by performing *yŏkkŭn* (易筋). *Yŏkkŭn* is the principle of utmost twist in the joints carried out in static and dynamic positions of GiCheon. Application of *yŏkkŭn* to wrists, elbows, waist, knees and ankles is supposed to alter

¹ Inner alchemy indicates breathing, meditative and corporeal practices aiming at prolonging life or becoming immortal. In outer alchemy substances such as gold, silver, cinnabar, mercury, lead, realgar and orpiment are transformed into the Elixir of Immortality. Both types of practices are often connected to Daoism. [Kim Daeyeol 2000]

² *Kuksul* (國術 National Martial Art). In the early 1970s, the first GiCheon teacher Pak Taeyang trained and taught together with Sŏ In-hyŏk, the leader of Kuksul. The relationship between the two was very close and they called each other “brothers”. Later Sŏ In-hyŏk moved to the US with his students.

³ Dahn World, originally called *tanhak sŏnwŏn* (丹學禪院 Zen Institute of Tan Studies) is a psycho-physical practice that started in the 1980s and later turned into an international organization. Four of the seven founding members of Dahn World were GiCheon practitioners; instructors of *tanhak sŏnwŏn* used to attend GiCheon studios and practiced GiCheon there in the 1980s. Today Dahn World counts more than one million followers.

⁴ Haidong Gumdo (海東劍道 *haedong kŏmdo* Haedong Sword Art) was created in the 1980s by Kim Chŏng-ho and Na Han-il, two students of the first GiCheon teacher Pak Taeyang, on the basis of GiCheon sword art. Today Haidong Gumdo also claims over one million practitioners.

tissues and bones, thus stimulating *ki* circulation and inducing physical, spiritual and moral progress.

Within GiCheon the notion and experience of *ki* are central. The trainees do not always employ the word *ki* while putting their experience in words, but the instructors do interpret it via *ki*. In this research I attempt to understand the embodied experiences of the practitioners and to see how they correlate with *ki* understanding in GiCheon books and with the notions of the authorized GiCheon instructors. In this context I am going to look at experiencing *ki* in the body, and experiencing the body through *ki*. Here the notion of the body, too, needs to be considered.

In the early years of social and cultural anthropology, the body was considered an implicit, taken-for-granted background feature of social life. But since the 1970s it has become an explicit topic of ethnographic concern, requiring attention because of its cultural and historical mutability. At present in anthropology and the humanities the body is seen as an opportunity for rethinking various aspects of culture and self [3, c. 172]. It is no longer considered as a natural self-contained entity with mechanically functioning internal organs, but as a contingent formation of space, time and materiality, to be comprehended as an assemblage of practices, discourses and images [4, c. 4].

In traditional western thought superiority of the intentional mind over the intentionless body has often been assumed. Although the validity of such a mind-body dichotomy has been questioned, as embedded in spoken languages, this dichotomy continues to inform our ways of thinking. It alienates “us” from our body: it is the mind thinking of the body rather than the body perceiving itself. However, East-Asian psycho-physical culture implies a different bodily sensibility and trains adepts to “listen” within their bodies [5, c. 22, 26]. One of the manifestations of this bodily awareness lies in concepts of *ki*, which simultaneously embrace moral, emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and cosmic planes of being.

This study builds on the paradigm of embodiment developed by Thomas Csordas. It is based on the philosophical theory of Merleau-Ponty, according to which the consciousness is grounded in perception, which starts in the body [6]. As a methodological standpoint, embodiment understands bodily experience as the existential ground of culture and self. The principal characteristic of this methodological orientation is the collapse of dualities between mind and body, subject

and object. Our bodily existence, or embodiment, has a range of potential experiential modalities [7, с. 59, 219, 261], the ways or the modes to perceive and classify culturally conditioned sensations, emotions and impressions. This paper suggests that the notion of *ki* is a medium through which different experiential modalities are arranged and articulated. In line with the paradigm of embodiment elaborated by Thomas Csordas, the present study suggests that the notion of *ki* collapses the duality of mind-body and subject-object.

For this research, I employ the method of “experiencing participation” [8, с. 134]⁵. I have closely observed the practice and teaching of GiCheon for twelve years from the inside as a participant and instructor, and from September 2010 to April 2011 interviewed about 60 trainees and trainers in South Korea. I also make use of GiCheon texts, published in the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 [9, 10, 11].

What is *ki*?

The character *ki* is commonly translated as energy, spirit, vigor, vitality, stamina or will-power. In philosophical translations from Chinese it was rendered into English as “the vivifying principle or aura of Chinese cosmogony”, breath, vapor, air, steam, gas, ether, vital fluid, force, influence, vital force, vital energy, material force, configurative energy, temper, manner, demeanor, feelings, passion-nature, weather, life-giving principle, matter-energy, subtle spirits, vital energizing field [12, с. 1].

Ki is a part of many words and expressions in modern Korean. *Kiga makhida* (기가 막히다), literally “*Ki* is blocked”, means being stunned, startled. *Kiga chugotta* (기가 죽었다), literally “*Ki* died”, stands for losing courage, becoming dispirited. It is close in meaning to *kiga ppajyotta* (기가 빠졌다), literally “*Ki* drained”, or “*Ki* sunk”, which implies a decrease in courage. *Kiga ch'ada* (기가 차다), literally “*Ki* is full”, conveys the feeling of “this is more than I can bear”. *Kiga nŏmch'inda* (기가 넘친다), literally “*Ki* overflows, runs over” means being over-confident. *Kiga saratta* (기가 살았다), literally “*Ki* came to life” indicates acting with boldness (in a negative sense). *Kiga seda*

⁵ Thomas Ots calls for a reconsideration of anthropological epistemological tools by going beyond participant observation toward “experiencing participation”. He himself entered a Qigong group as a follower rather than as anthropologist. According to Thomas Ots, a “thick description” of the rich phenomenology of the body is needed, which makes it necessary for the researcher to experience and perceive the “lived-body”.

(기가 세다), literally “Ki is strong”, indicates a strong will. *Kirül ssüda* (기를 쓰다), literally “to use Ki”, is an expression for a zealous effort. *Kirül p’yöda* (기를 펴다), literally, “to unfold the Ki”, stands for acting with freedom and courage.

When asked, GiCheon adherents define *ki* as “circulation and movement”, “natural life energy”, “the invisible life force of the body”, “the invisible power that can be known by feeling”, “the feeling of increasing strength”, “the strength to endure”, “the flow that we can feel”, “the fundamental prime mover of the universe”, and “cosmic energy”. They also explain that *ki* is “in the narrow sense the wave-like vibrations of the body and in the broad sense everything in the universe”, or “the strength we are endowed with at birth and the strength we develop throughout our lifetime”. The value of the *ki* concept increases when adepts connect it to such famous Confucian thinkers as Hwadam Sö Kyöng-tök (花潭 徐敬德 1489-1546), whose work is regarded one of the cornerstones in the development of *ki* philosophy in Korea [13]. The more colloquial references to *ki* are an indication that at some level notions of *ki*, although not necessarily the same as the ancient concepts, still are relevant to contemporary Koreans.

GiCheon practice as described in official texts

GiCheon texts do not define *ki*, yet they do employ this term often. According to official ideology, the training strengthens the immune system and heals illnesses. It is supposed to improve blood and *ki* circulation, contribute to better functioning of the organs and limbs, and to brighten the spirit. [9, c. 27] Besides, as the level of practice deepens, the exchange between the inside *ki* and the outside *ki* intensifies. [9, c. 153] The training should be carried out not for the personal interests, but for *taeüi* (大義 great righteousness) realized in one’s body. *Taeüi* is interpreted as “keeping the spirit of the nation and maintaining the ancestral roots” [9, c. 28].

GiCheon exercises are usually accompanied by pain. The instructors liken this pain to the pain of a drug-addict deprived of the drugs in the process of addiction recovery: the harmful cravings of the body and mind are confronted, and modified. This process is compared to the art of a blacksmith, when the metal is heated and formed anew. The literature says that pain places the body and mind in a state of emergency, thus prompting the mobilization of life forces. If we do not refuse pain but embrace it, we can overcome it, say the books. The

practitioners are instructed to see where and how the pain originates, and when and how it disappears.

According to the texts, the practice helps to objectify life experiences, and consider small events in a larger context. When performing the positions, the practitioners should ask themselves “How should I live?”, positioning the question not just in the head but in the whole body; to learn not to get attached to the past nor fear the future, but to apply themselves to the present. The author of the book says that during his morning practice, he sees in his mind the previous day. He learns to behave in the way that does not damage his *ki*, live with awe to all life, throw away obstinacy and be humble [9, c. 2, 26, 254-255, 261-262].

GiCheon texts depict an “ideal” GiCheon person as a Korean national, deeply connected to her or his Korean roots in ancient past. This person is cultivating herself for the purpose of personal health, advancement, and enlightenment, while simultaneously contributing to the development of the industrialized South Korea and aspiring to the unification of North and South. This ideal practitioner is a leader of the nation and of humanity, strong in body and mind, capable of bringing world harmony and peace by solving such problems as environmental crisis and pollution [9, c. 10, 28, 30, 38, 39, 68, 83, 242; 14, c. 143-145].

Experiences reported by adepts themselves

Csordas utilizes the paradigm of embodiment for the analysis of folk healing [7, c. 57]⁶. For the purpose of understanding therapeutic processes across healing traditions, he suggests examining the patients’ understanding of their problems, their experience of the healing process and the manner in which they integrate the results into their lives [7, c. 2, 170]. The present study follows this framework. While relating the narratives of the adepts, I classify them into *understanding*, *experience* and *integration* accordingly.

For describing the experiences of the trainees, I focus on the interview with Ms. Sin⁷, who articulated clearly what other adepts

⁶ The book by Thomas Csordas *Body / Meaning / Healing* is a study of religious healing. But the author says: “Yet if the experience of disease and of the holy raise some of the same existential questions, and hence are not entirely distinct, there may well be a religious dimension in all forms of healing. In that case, a hermeneutic approach is indicated not only for analysis of overtly religious and folk therapies, but for conventional biomedical healing as well.”

⁷ Interview of 08.12.2012, Pusan, South Korea.

reported as well. Occasionally I refer to data from other interviewees. Ms. Sin has practiced GiCheon for one year. She is in her 40s, previously worked in a trading company, and at the time of an interview was taking temporary rest from work.

As a Korean speaker, Ms. Sin knew about the concept of *ki* even before she studied the GiCheon system. But *ki*-related issues were never the focus of her interest:

Before, I thought that ki was something unreal, non-existing, something that people talk about without sufficient reason. But now I think ki is real. Now I think every person has ki. Also there is ki in nature. I do not know what it is, but it seems that it exists.

Let us consider the first element, Ms. Sin's understanding of her problems. Like many others, Ms. Sin started GiCheon in order to resolve the difficulties pertaining to stress:

[I started practicing GiCheon because] I wanted to be healthy. My body and mind were very tired; I had stress. I wanted to improve [my condition]. I was not at all sure GiCheon would help me. I did yoga, but it was boring.

Now we are passing to the second category: how did Ms. Sin experience the healing process?

... From the beginning I felt pain in my shoulders, near my neck... Then in my back, knees, ankles, joints. After that I had a refreshing feeling in my muscles, like after applying the medical paste against muscle pain. When we apply this paste, we have a refreshing feeling. ... Last year my left elbow hurt. [When I was practicing a static GiCheon position] suddenly from an elbow a refreshing feeling started spreading, from the point that was hurt in the past. ... Recently, after moving much and practicing dynamic positions my body became hot... I had this feeling in my legs, as if I do not have legs. Very light, as if my legs had disappeared. ... And arms also. I was not holding my arms with an effort, I felt that they were hanging there by themselves. Sometimes I felt sleepy, I felt tired and wanted to sleep. ... I felt numb in the hands; sometimes three left fingers went numb. It was as if the blood did not circulate there. Or the fingers got very cold. ... First I felt pain in my back, legs shoulders. After that I felt anger and annoyance. Like tickling. Strong tickling. Like itching. ... Sometimes I get angry, I think: "why do I do it?"... Once I had a very good feeling. While doing it [the position] I suddenly thought about very happy events. ... Sometimes, it is funny, when the music was on, I wanted to dance, to the music.

Here Ms. Sin recounts feelings of pain, refreshing feeling,

sensations of heat and cold, extreme lightness in arms and legs, numbness and sleepiness. Sometimes she felt anger and itching/ticking, or thought about happy events and wanted to dance.

Now let us pass to third category: the manner in which Ms. Sin integrated the results of the practice into her life. The distinction between the second category – experiencing the healing – and the third category is not explicit. Articulating the way the experience is integrated necessarily involves the narration and interpretation of the experience itself.

As the physical strength grows, ... I feel softness in my body, as if my bones are moving. ... I felt that my muscles were a bit stiff and hurt. But recently [my muscles] became soft and warm. My hands and feet are cold, and I am sensitive to cold. ... But [after starting GiCheon] there were times when I did not feel cold at all. Now I am less sensitive to cold. And now I sweat easily. Before I did not sweat much. ... And my skin became softer, better. And I have the feeling of lightness. The body became much lighter. And I sleep well now... [After starting GiCheon] very quickly I felt that my physical strength had grown. For example, before I could climb the mountain till the half only, after doing GiCheon for a few months, I could climb till the summit. My external strength has increased.

Ms. Sin reports growing physical strength, sensations of softness and warmth, sweating easily, and sleeping better.

In the middle [while I was practicing], I felt many temporary things [that later disappeared]: I could not sleep, or was not at all hungry, or I was very hungry, or very sleepy. The amplitude of the changes, of the ups and downs in the bodily sensations, has increased. And in the mind-heart, the same thing. In the beginning, when I started GiCheon, I always felt very good. I felt joyful and had a bright mood. Other people said that my personality became much brighter than before. Later, I sometimes felt in the mind-heart similar [things I felt] in the body. After feeling very bright, I sometimes felt very gloomy. The rise and fall of emotions became very sharp. ... Usually, as we live in society, we have to regulate our emotions, not to show what we like or dislike. We have to keep up an appropriate appearance. But the amplitude of my emotions became very large, to the degree that I could not manage my emotions sometimes.

The amplitude of the physical and emotional sensations has expanded to a degree Ms. Sin was not able to manage. This process narrated by Ms. Sin has similarities with the transformative

developments in pregnancy, when unforeseen changes in physical and mental-emotional state often confuse the person.

I became more relaxed in the mind-heart. I do not try to do things right now, immediately. I can wait until the right time to do things comes, and prepare. I am not hasty. Although it is not a perfectly calm mind, I can wait with tranquility. And something like trust. If I want something, I have confidence that I can achieve it. This is because the body follows [me when I want to do something]. For example [if I plan] not to sleep at night but study for a few days, or whatever. I have thoughts like “I can do it!”.

Ms. Sin became more relaxed and self-confident. She connects that also to her growing physical strength.

[After beginning GiCheon] ... my ability to accept grew. Before that, although I did not express it, I had different thoughts in the mind-heart. Sometimes when we say “OK” on the outside, actually inside we feel “not at all OK”... [You should say “OK”] without connection to how you feel inside. There is this standard, Koreans have it. ...

... [As a result of GiCheon practice] my heart was getting larger⁸. And when something was OK, I said “OK”. And when it was not OK, I said “not OK”. ... In Korea the position of a woman is a bit different of that of a man... At home I have to be a “good-natured daughter”. In my communication with other people, instead of checking myself and keeping silent, now, as I became much healthier, I tell them what I have to tell, and I can help them more, and I treat them better. I became calmer. When people feel hardship in the body, they become annoyed, without knowing it ... So my relationships with close people, with my family, became more harmonious... As I became more relaxed ... instead of putting up with others and staying silent, I can accept and understand other people, talk with them a bit more. After listening to another person ... I can find out what she wants, right? If I can do for her what she wants, I do that. If not, then not. Then the relationship, instead of being ambiguous, becomes a bit clearer. ... Making peace is easier [if you talk] ... This talk does not turn into a dispute, but the space is created for listening to each other and agreeing with each other.

Ms. Sin remarks that as a result of GiCheon practice her

⁸ Maūmi k'ōjinda (마음이 커진다), literally “the heart becomes larger”, means being emotionally available, capable of connecting to others, not being engrossed with oneself.

relationships with the surrounding have improved. She could express herself better and talk instead of holding back or keeping silent. Her ability to listen to others and accept them also grew. She connects these developments to becoming healthier, composed and self-possessed. Ms. Sin links physical health directly with the ability to interact with others: if one is unwell, she is easily annoyed, therefore her communication skills deteriorate.

Comparing the experiences of the adepts with GiCheon ideology⁹

Now, let us reflect on the experiences of Ms. Sin and others in the context of GiCheon theory, and see how well the reality matches the ideal.

Starting with motivation, the incentive of many trainees including Ms. Sin was purely personal. Ms. Sin did not show any interest in “keeping the spirit of the nation or maintaining the ancestral roots”.

Ms. Sin did not use the character *ki* while relating her experiences. Her sensations and comments were interpreted via the notion of *ki* by GiCheon instructors: feeling cold was interpreted as bad *ki* getting out; feeling warm and hot was interpreted as *ki* moving fast and without hindrance. This is not the case with all the interviews. Other adepts mention *ki* when discussing the sensations of pain, refreshing/cool feeling, heat and cold, lightness and numbness. Among the trainees, those who allude to *ki* are often the representatives of lower social/educational class. They are less sensitive to the fact that evocation of *ki*, shamanism and *kisaeng* (妓生, female artist and entertainer) sometimes attributed to pre-industrialized Korea are not considered “good taste” in educated society.

When talking about the phenomena which include feeling itching/ticking, angry, annoyed or happy, desire to dance, growing amplitude of the physical and emotional sensations, the teachers compare their appearance to a bottle which is suddenly being shaken. When the bottle vibrates, the liquid and its components inside are stirred. The dregs come up from the bottom, the layers shift. Here the bottle is an analogy for the body, and the liquid – a symbol of *ki*. When *ki* is activated through GiCheon exercises, various and unexpected

⁹ Here I have reconstructed GiCheon theory on the basis of information learned from GiCheon teachers and on the basis of my own practice.

phenomena occur, including those specified by Ms. Sin. However, if we compare the sensations described by Ms. Sin and other trainees to official GiCheon texts, we see that the actual experiences of the practitioners are much more physical and concrete. There are many details for which the texts do not account.

The increasing amplitude of emotions reported by Ms. Sin goes in two directions. One direction is becoming brighter, and the other is becoming gloomier at times. Only the former is referred to in GiCheon texts. Growing strength and better health reported by Ms. Sin are generally in line with GiCheon theory related in the books. Here as well we see that the accounts of the adherents are more explicit and “lively” than book narrations.

Ms. Sin reported feelings of softness and warmth, sweating easily, feeling of lightness, better sleep. GiCheon teachers hold that improved *ki* flow causes the sweat, tears, emotions, words and actions to “show” with greater ease. Sweat and tears surface faster; emotions are revealed more clearly; words are said and actions are performed with greater straightforwardness and simplicity. The notion of better *ki* flow is likewise associated by GiCheon trainers with warmth and softness of the skin, muscles and the whole body, with a mild and flexible attitude toward life, toward others and toward oneself.

The improving relationship with the family was also interpreted by the instructors as intensified exchange between inside *ki* (the *ki* of Ms. Sin) and outside *ki* (*ki* of her family members), thus implying deeper contact. When adepts comment on their better perception of the nature, this too is defined by the trainers as intensified exchange between inner *ki* (the *ki* of the trainees) and outer *ki* (*ki* of the nature).

Ms. Sin talked about her more efficient functioning within the family resulting from her improved health, and a consequent ability to better act out her social role as a daughter and a woman. Other GiCheon adepts talk about better connecting to nature and perceiving themselves as part of a cosmos. This is notable, as GiCheon books often develop the personal self-cultivation into the direction of “building the Korean nation”. Analyzing GiCheon experiences according to Confucian model of “improving” mind-heart, body, family, nation and cosmos, which unfold into each other according to a successive pattern¹⁰, we notice that the textbooks emphasize the

¹⁰ This model is documented in the *Great Learning*, one of the four books of Confucian canon. Contemporary Korean society functions very much according to Confucian

individual→nation joint, which they are trying to depict directly, without the medium of the family. The adepts, on the other hand, talk more about the individual→family link, or the individual→cosmos joint, without referring to the nation. Ms. Sin, for example, did not express any concern for the development of the industrialized South Korea or unification of North and South. Similarly to many other practitioners, she did not show any inclination to lead the nation and humanity, bring world harmony or take care of environmental crisis and pollution.

Although instructed to do so in GiCheon texts, Ms. Sin did not question herself where and how does the pain originate or how it ceases. When performing the positions, she did not ask herself “How should I live?”. In her interview, she did not talk about seeing in her mind the previous day, or behaving in the way that does not harm her *ki*, living with awe to all life, disposing of obstinacy and developing humbleness. Nevertheless, her interview demonstrates that she did change the way she lives, to a certain degree. Her feelings in the body and her relationships with others became more relaxed and harmonious, which may be interpreted in line with not damaging herself (or her *ki*). Ms. Sin did not mention obstinacy or humbleness, but talked about her enhanced ability to express herself and understand others. The way she started treating her family was indeed more efficient and better for the family members, even though it did not amount to the “awe to all life”.

Ms. Sin did not refer to not attaching herself to the past or giving her full attention to the present, the points alluded to in GiCheon publications. Still, as a result of GiCheon practice she became more tranquil and self-assured. Her feeling capable of achieving whatever she chooses to pursue indeed corresponds with “not fearing the future” brought up in GiCheon texts.

Overall, some parts of the reported by the trainees do correspond with the textbooks. The spirits become brighter and there is noticeable health improvement. However there are many details for which the texts do not account. The texts provide only vague and general *models* according to which the impressions may be classified and interpreted. The writings do not probe deeply into the nature of the GiCheon experience, nor provide an analytical grid for understanding it. There is a significant gap between the experience as depicted in the texts and as related by real practitioners in the interviews.

norms, and Confucian patterns of thinking are often prevalent.

The national element, declared strongly in the books, is not completely absent in the accounts of the adherents. There are some who started GiCheon because it is “Korean”. Some representatives of the older generation connect their GiCheon motivation to the childhood fairy tales about mythical heroes who possessed extraordinary powers. But generally the nationalistic character of the texts does not agree with the mood of most GiCheon practitioners. Their motivation is personal; they aspire to their individual goals.

Conclusion

The paradigm of embodiment advanced by Thomas Csordas is based on the philosophical theory of Merleau-Ponty. According to Merleau-Ponty, the source of our knowledge of the world is our consciousness, and the consciousness starts in perception. And the perception starts in the body. The body is the tool through which and by the use of which we perceive. The living body is the perceiving subject and the perceived object at the same time [6]. It is from the body that we venture out into the world. GiCheon experiences, strong, new and unknown at the first stages of practice, force the trainees back into their bodies. They compel the adepts to find words for adequately describing these experiences. Here, GiCheon instructors suggest to them the notion of *ki*. Some adepts pick it up and use this word; others do not. Whatever way of expression they choose, though, their narrations relate to mind and body in clusters, not mind separately and body separately. These clusters also contain the progressive advancement from the body to the family (body→family or individual→family), demonstrating how the sensations of warmth and smoothness, for example, start in the body and continue toward the family. It is to these clusters of sensations, feelings, impressions I refer, when talking about experiential modalities.

The purpose of this study is to compare the experiences of the adepts with official GiCheon ideology, and to show that the notion of *ki* can collapse the dualities of mind-body and subject-object. This paper suggests that the concept of *ki* is a medium, by which various experiential modalities are categorized and expressed. “Smooth and effortless passage”, for example, is such experiential modality. “Smooth passage of *ki*” relates equally to the mind (tranquility), the body (smooth skin, smooth movements), self and Other (family, or nature); the step-by-step progressive movement from the self to the Other and the communication between the two is smooth. The interaction between me and the Other is defined in GiCheon ideology as the interpenetration

of inner and outer *ki*. From the point of view of *ki*, there is no subject and object. There is only the working of *ki*.

This way of description and classification gives rise to questions related to mind-body and subject-object connection and distinction. It further forces us to question the nature, extent and validity of mind-body and subject-object categories.

“Smooth passage of *ki*” is also “fast emergence” of the sweat and tears (that surface in the body), emotional reactions (that are revealed in the mind), words and actions (pronounced and accomplished with greater ease). The inquiry into this perceptual framework can elaborate our mind-body-individual distinction and connection. Is there direct link between the ability to sweat easily and cry easily? Are they related to the ability to talk directly and act straight away? If yes, why and how are those connected?

“Warm and soft” in the narrations of the trainees is another example. It is the warmth and softness of the skin and muscles, mild and flexible attitude toward oneself, others and toward life in general. It relates to the body, the mind, the personal characteristics of the individual and her power to interact with others. It also involves better ability to withstand cold temperature. When narrating this feeling of “warm and soft” the trainees bring up its various meanings and aspects together as a cluster. The questions that arise here are, for example: does feeling warm in the body draw us toward treating others with more “warmth” or kindness? Does the temperature of the room we are in while talking cause us to speak in a “warmer” way?

Another experiential modality is feeling angry and annoyed, together with itching/ticking. This holistic experience of GiCheon trainees relates both to mind and body, and forces us to reconsider mind-body dichotomy. Is it itching/ticking that causes anger and annoyance? How do we feel anger and annoyance in the body? Is it different from itching/ticking? What is the difference?

“Growing strength” specified by the adepts likewise poses mind-body related questions. It is also the physical strength to climb a mountain, and the inner conviction, self-assurance of “I can do it!”. In the interviews, GiCheon adepts often linked their self-confidence with growing physical strength¹¹. The experience of “growing strength”

¹¹ I learned from the adepts of older generations that the past school examination system in South Korea involved giving an “overall mark” to each student. It included school exams results as well as health data and physical criteria (the ability to run fast,

described in this way compels us to question the connection between the “physical” strength and self-assurance. Does the former always lead to the later? To which degree, how and why is self-confidence based on physical strength?

GiCheon adepts relate their experience in clusters. The study of the way this experience is articulated and classified forces us to inquire further into the mind-body and subject-object problematics. It leaves open a vast space for future anthropological investigation.

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