

Komazawa University 8th Special Symposium

Healing and Religion

March 15, 2016, Fukazawa Campus.

Key note Speaker: Hachiro Hasebe (Professor, Komazawa University)

Guest speakers:

(1) **Ryoichi Obitsu** (M.D., Ph.D., honorary chairman of Obitsu Sankei Hospital)

(2) **Kansho Mimatsu** (Reverend, priest of Gumyoji Temple)

Moderator: **Yutaka Kudo** (professor, Tokyo Denki University)

Coordinator: **Yuko Nishimura** (professor, Komazawa University)

1. Keynote speech: Ascetics and Their Religious Training

By Hachiro Hasebe

I have been researching the ascetic tradition of Japan used to heal people by detecting problems by patiently listening to them. I was surprised to see some cases of including the whole community in treating a patient. This must have been the practice in Japan for centuries until we started to use modern western medicine. Faced with the limitations of western medicine, we can look back and see how the religious intervention of the community works. So far, I have met many religious professionals such as *yuta* (local shaman priestesses), Buddhist temple priests, ascetics of folk Shinto in Okinawa and other rural regions of Japan. Buddhist world renunciators, ascetics who practice folk Shinto sometimes work as healers. They are from mixed origins but sometimes cross-cutting the borders of religious disciplines, the whole community gets involved in healing when someone becomes sick in the community.

When society becomes more complex, treatment is single-handedly managed by medical professionals and their agents and there is no field where the community can intervene. As western individualism predominates, the community recedes to the background and illness becomes an individual thing to be handled privately. Yet, although it has become almost invisible, the healing through religious discipline does exist and that is where medical anthropology is doing research.

In the San-In region of western Japan, on a small island, I observed such a case a few years ago. There are a few Buddhist temples of different sects, Shinto shrines, and even a Christian church and Japanese new religion there. But when someone gets sick, the religious disciplines come together and pray for the patient day and night. While the patient is in the hospital, they continue until he or she recovers, which means it may continue for weeks and months, praying just for one patient. The community believes that this unanimous action heals the patient as well as his/her family. It also persuades the family members (as well as the patient), even if he /she cannot get well or should leave this world, that the community did their best for him/her and the patient is ready to go.

This case of 'sharing the illness' by the community illustrates how the holistic medicine works and how such an approach is close to the traditional religious ideals of healing. This enormous involvement of the community works as an explanatory system which persuades the patient and his/her family to accept the outcome-whatever happens.

The role of the ascetic as a healer plays a key part in such a system. The healer is a patient and sympathetic counselor. He/she listens most of the time while patients narrate

stories from their childhood to the present, what issues trouble them at home and outside home, and what they think of the illness. The difference between such religious healers and the priests of regular religious disciplines is that the former listen to their clients' stories while the latter mostly talk and preach. I feel the difference is enormous as the first and foremost importance is placed on the patient. The healers are not high-handed. The healer tries to detect what is wrong, believing illness can be caused from multiple spheres of a patient's life. The healer listens carefully to the many issues involving the life experiences of the patient.

As a researcher, as I listened to the life histories of the healers, I came to realize that they themselves had undergone critical and devastating experiences which they overcame through religious discipline and penance.

Japanese Buddhism belongs to the Mahayana school which identifies action of service as the way to practice Buddhism. Healing others is considered to be a step forward in moving closer to Buddha. Thus, the healer, empathizing with and identifying with the patient, is practicing the Buddhist way of salvation. Today, we have two guests from different disciplines: one is a Buddhist priest, Reverend Mimat, who is from Japanese Tantric school Shingon; the school of great Kukai. The other is Dr. Obitsu, M.D. and a practitioner of holistic medicine. Although religion and medicine seem to be quite far apart, it is not so. When it becomes the part of healing and medical treatment, religion and medicine share a lot. But in what way? The two speakers will be able to answer our queries.

Thank you very much.

2) The Power of Prayer

Reverend Kansho Mimatsu, Gumyoji Temple, Yokohama.

(Before the lecture, a 7 minute-video was shown illustrating the tantric ritual of *goma* burning conducted in Rev. Mimatsu's temple.)

The temple, patronized by the first Shogunate of Minamoto, has been known since the 11th century as the “temple of victory.” Eastern samurais would come to this temple before they departed to a war; today the temple is popular for granting one's wishes and destroying illnesses and misfortunes. The famous evil-fighting *goma* burning rituals take place three times a month. Participants in this ritual are expected to attend sessions at least once a month for 6 months.

Questions were asked by Yuko Nishimura, the coordinator of the symposium.

Question: Why do we pray?

Mimatsu: That is because not only Buddhism but any religion teaches us that the core of religion is to pray. As prof. Hasebe mentioned, the law of Buddha says the benefits to self and to others are one and the same. So we pray for others and by doing this, we also benefit ourselves. When one is pursuing the goal of enlightenment, the path leads us to make others happy and peaceful. This is the teaching of Kukai, the enlightened master of Japanese Tantric Buddhism. That is one of the reasons why I started the study group called

community Circle of Sick and Ill people in 2013. Till then, I was searching for a practical way of helping patients through a Buddhist approach. I was invited to a gathering of cancer patients and families attached to Prefectural Cancer Medical Center in Kanagawa. After attending several meetings, the leader said to me, ‘we pray for ourselves. But you are the only one who can pray for others, for us, because your profession is Buddhist priest.’ That hit me very hard because I realized that as a priest, as a calling, I should pray for others whole heartedly and they wanted it very much.

To be able to pray for others, not for oneself, is what we priests can do. The true prayer has two sides: to pray for oneself and to pray for others. So I named my temple ‘The Temple of Prayer’ and posted it on the gate. I tried to make it a place where anyone can come and pray. People often misunderstand that temples are only for patrons who are hereditarily attached to the temple. That is not so. You can come and pray as you wish. I also participate in a research with Prof. Kazuo Murakami, Prof. Emeritus of Tsukuba University, who specializes in genes study. This gave me a lot of information about the power of prayer. The practical side of prayer is to strengthen your immune system and resist illness, and maintain health.

He conducted an experiment on how the increase of sugar level changes depending on the mood of the patients: when a patient listens to a boring story as his blood is taken, the blood sugar level goes up but it decreases when he listens to a funny and amusing story. Similar experiments are done while people are praying in *goma* rituals in my temple. When they pray in the ritual, the sugar level is much stable and lower than normal. Prof.

Murakami's research also mentions the possibility that there are some genes common among the ascetics that seem to be resistant to diseases and stressful situations. We call it the 'genes of ascetics'. We believe that prayer has power and we know this is true without any experiment, we know this by experience. Some say all we can do is to pray. This is wrong. We should say we pray, and that becomes our strength. When I talk to others, I talk about the power of prayer. Feel the power when you pray and feel how you are fulfilling yourself through prayer. If you continue, this power becomes part of you.

Question: What is the gene of ascetics? And what would be the current situation of Japanese society and its people in relation to prayer? You said the problem of current Japanese is lack of prayer in daily lives, that Japanese forgot how to pray.

Mimatsu: In any temple, there is a priest either a full timer or a part-timer. You may think prayer exists in the temple but that is not the only place we can pray. Prayer should be in daily lives. I feel the disappearance of prayer tradition among Japanese is very critical.

Question: What is the benefit of prayer? I hear that from the aspect of immunology, prayer is very powerful to strengthen body resistance.

Mimatsu: we belong to Shigon sect of Mahayana Buddhism. In this, we believe everyone has Buddha inside oneself. The purpose of prayer is to be aware of this Buddha. You pull out of your Budda-ness through prayer.

Question: Understand the point. Now do you think Japanese of today tend not to pray as much than before?

Mimatsu: I would not say ‘lacking’ the prayer. Japanese forgot how to pray, that is the problem. In our world of Buddhism, the master teaches the disciple how to pray and at home, we used to teach younger generation through grandma. However, nowadays, families which do not have home altar, nor shrine inside the house are increasing. This is the discontinuation of tradition. Also, as we say too much emphasis is on the so called scientific approach that we demand scientific explanation for everything that people tend to discard things which you cannot prove with scientific evidence. Prayer may be one of those. And that is the reason why people forgot how to pray.

3) Medical treatment and Religion – views from the holistic medicine

Ryoichi Obitsu, M.D., honorary chairman of Japan Holistic Medicine Association

I have been pursuing the path of holistic medicine more than 30 years. Although I am 80 at the moment, I may never reach the final stage of study my lifetime. But it is OK.

In the over half century since I became a medical doctor, I have had many patients with cancer. At one point, I realized that cancer is not only an illness of the physical body but it is created by complex factors: body, heart and life are all incorporated into this illness. That is why I decided to pursue a holistic path.

In English literature of holistic medicine, they use body, mind, and spirit to explain this relationship. However, from our point of view, life is not spirit but soul. One’s life depends on the soul which is the real spirit. When I consulted Karl Becker of Kyoto

University, he agreed with my understanding. In my understanding, the soul or spirit transcends time and space. This spirit exists in everyone's body and soul. Therefore, holistic medicine studies spirit; that is to say, we study not the life span limited by time and space but one that goes beyond this limit, the emptiness, the void, as Buddhistic teaching says. In other words, holistic medicine is the "soul study" of medicine. We live in diverse spheres which are defined by time and space. For example, I was brought up in a house which was situated close to a temple. That is why I feel close to Buddhism, particularly of the Jodo sect.

I also noticed the world outside of Japan through American and European pop culture in which I was immersed when I was young. After studying Japanese culture in my high school, I majored in medicine in Tokyo university medical school where I became a surgeon. At that time when I was operating many times, I realized there is a gap between organs in the chest as well as in the stomach. This gap between organs would create an important space which I later started to call the "space-of-life".

Modern medicine is based on science which is based on the accumulation of evidence. On the other hand, medical treatment on the frontline of curing patients is based not only on science, but also on the interactions between humans. If medical treatment is the frontline, then modern medicine is the logistics and back office support. In this field, even if you are tactically well equipped, success is not assured. You need a holistic view to see the situation. Like in a real battle, medical treatment is a field of time and space. Patients, their families, friends and medical professionals are creating this field of time and

space to try to help the patients to get out of an illness. How are these spheres placed? I will explain from a holistic point of view.

We live in a world of time and space and the natural world is composed of many phases of time and space. This has been discussed by many authorities of medicine such as Prof. Hiroshi Shimizu of Tokyo University, as well as Prof. Tomio Tada, one of the authorities on immune studies.

Humans also consist of many and diverse phases which start from elementary particles. The largest phase is the 'void.' The smaller ones are transcended by the higher phases which have the nature of a lower phase plus extra elements. If one tries to apply the quality of a lower phase to a higher phase, it does not show the expected results. For example, take a human with cancer. If doctors attack parts of organs (using methods such as chemotherapy) to treat the cancer, it often does not work, although western medicine is based on such an approach. In order to treat a cancer attacking a human, one should look at this illness holistically.

Let me explain the phase of consciousness now. I said medical treatment is the transaction which exists in the time and space and that is clear when we discuss the Buddhist view of consciousness. The superficial layer of consciousness belongs to the five senses. While western medicine analyzed them one by one to a certain extent, they failed to analyze the sixth consciousness in relation to the five, but which is discussed in Buddhism. This is what holistic medicine is all about since we deal with the function of heart, as consciousness, and also the concept of the void. This is where we should also

discuss the phase created by time and space. The five senses are not the sphere of time and space but they are about the visible world which consists of visible items. Prof. Shin-ichi Fukuoka maintains that life is something like a flow of molecules in which physical bodies are the stagnation floating in it.

If one thinks of bodies as a kind of form or a structure which blocks the floating molecules, this is understandable. Manas-vijnana or the mental consciousness, prompts one to stick to oneself that is trying to protect what you are against the outer world. In the world of immunology, it can be translatable as the immune system in human body which blocks the invasion of malignant outer elements. I think holistic medicine is less developed than immunology which is more advanced and shows similar understanding of Buddhist world view. Immunology separates self and non-self and maintains that immune system is not a simplistic system to separate self from non-self. Self as a locality expands with the immune system, if translated in immunology and it incorporates the 'other' within the body. Together with alaya-vijnana, or the clear consciousness, which forms the base of all existence, holistic medicine can be called the medicine of soul. Let me also discuss the 'void' briefly which is often discussed in Buddhism.

When I practice Japanese martial art of self-defense (jujutsu), I learn how to identify oneself with the void. I now understand the void as the goal one achieves at the time death. Our soul's homeland exists in the void: one came alone from the void and goes back to the void. All of us are travelers from the void and that is why our existence incorporates sadness as nothing is permanent and everything goes back to the void.

The most important thing in medical treatment, therefore, is to help the patient achieve the dignity of life when he or she leaves this world. We as medical specialists should support it as the mission.

The initiator of holistic medicine is Henri Bergson and he is succeeded by Georges Canguilhem, a French philosopher and physician who maintained that the holistic approach is to heal patients. I think their understanding about human dignity is the same as mine.

Michel Foucault, however, maintained that it was a mistake to have incorporated science in medical treatment as science and medical treatment are not often compatible. I do agree with him. Medical treatment is not science. Medicine is science but medical treatment is a compiled 'strategy' which is formulated for an individual patient to combat the illness, in which the patient and the medical practitioners should work together. Today's medicine focuses on hard 'evidence' all the time but that is not satisfactory to cure patients. You need intuition when treating them.

Questions taken from the floor

- A) I have some questions for Dr. Obitsu. Do you find similarities between the philosopher Kitaro Nishida's understanding of locality as an ever-expanding holistic relationships and the philosophy of holistic medicine? Is the void discussed in Buddhism the same as the void you are talking in the holistic medicine?

Obitsu: The void, viewed from physics, means the huge space which incorporates thousands of cosmos and Buddhism explains it the same way. And when you focus on the inner locality inside the body, this is also the part of environmental locality. As for environmental locality, this consists of many layers of hierarchy and the outermost locality is the void. Our life exists beyond such layers of hierarchy and so the location of our existence should be also the void. Therefore, I said we come from the void and go back to the void. Because of such existence, we are always a traveler of solitude. If we understand this, we can also understand what the medical treatment should be and what is human dignity. My idea is not yet complete and I should ask other peoples' opinions to further this concept.

B) I am so enlightened by today's messages as speakers talked about what I have been thinking on a day-to-day basis. Also, I wish I could meet a medical practitioner who could work with me to work on illness and that action would cure my illness. But in reality, we seldom come across such medical practitioners. Is there any way that we can meet such a person fairly easily?

Obitsu: It is unfortunate that many patients who come to my small hospital already have experienced sufferings and sadness because of the attitudes of doctors. I feel we should change this situation. But it takes time.

B) I understand. Maybe we need patience to meet such a doctor.

Obitsu: Both doctors and patients should try hard. Unfortunately, even my staff sometimes make our patients sad. But never give up. But I also would like patients to understand the

sadness of the medical staff as they sometimes feel certain situations are beyond their capacity to control.

C) I remember when I visited a hospital facility in Australia where patients of terminal illnesses are taken care of. There are some specialists of religion being invited to talk to the patients. I feel it is very important to talk with such people in order to sort out the understanding about life before death. Yet in medical hospitals, there are strict rules which do not allow any priests or professionals of religious discipline. Counseling has become more acceptable nowadays but it does not help as much as the religions do.

D) Also, I feel Buddhist organizations do not teach about death. While new religions keep on holding meetings and talk a lot, established Buddhism organizations do not. Only for funerals and ceremonial occasions do priests show up. Therefore, we should search our own way to face death. I feel hospitals and religious world should come closer now.

Obitsu: Sometimes, western hospices are very ‘dry’ and business-like. Thinking that some patients are dying, they do not do much to help them but let them die. On the other hand, Japanese terminal care is focused on easing pain too much. Whatever patients want to prolong their lives is another issue. But they do not let the patients give a try to survive. For example, I sometimes use Maruyama vaccine for terminal care if the patient wants to try. It is not proven that Maruyama vaccine helps to destroy cancer. But that is not the issue. He wants to show his will of survival until the end. Even if it does not, it is better for the patient to try to survive until the final breath.

Mimatsu: I used to go to a hospital for 3 years as a volunteer to attend the patients in terminal stage. Yet Japanese hospitals are very conservative and did not allow me to get dressed as a priest since they dislike the intervention of religion in any form. On the other hand, the medical staff are overworked-beyond their capacity. They have to listen to the stories of patients, and their families but their life experiences are not strong enough to hold such psychological burdens. I wish Japanese hospitals were ready to work with us since we can shoulder a lot for both of them. These days, people say Japanese are unreligious and atheists. I do not think so. There is definitely the traditional religious mind hidden deep underneath, which was nurtured by Buddhism and Shintoism of this culture. People pray at funerals, when they are in agony they pray. Some hospitals even allowed me to reveal my identity if the patient wanted me to. Therefore, I did talk to dying patients as a priest, as they wanted me to pray for them. They asked me if Buddha would excuse their bad deeds. I told them that if they pray, Buddha will definitely forgive them. I am now working on a project to start a hospital which incorporates western medicine with a holistic approach and religious care. Priests can work on relieving the grief-care, I believe.

Hasebe: I would also like to add a little. Hospitals do not like Buddhist priests to come to the hospital dressed in black as it looks ominous and some hospitals do not allow the religious amulet which was given to the patients to be taken to the hospital bed. However, there is certainly a strong need from patients for this. I hope we can incorporate a religious aspect in terminal care in modern hospitals as a way to allow the human dignity of the patients when they depart from this world. Now is the time to think about how we can

incorporate holistic medicine and religion as part of the modern medicine for patients and think about the 'healing.'

Kudo (moderator): It was a wonderful discussion and we appreciate you all coming to join this exiting discussion. Time passed so quickly and I do regret that we do not have time left. But we would certainly like to continue this symposium and discussion in future. Thank you very much.