

A Study on the Use of Animal Symbols for Healing of the Korean Traditional Medicine - Focusing on “*Donguibogam*(東醫寶鑑)”

Nang Ye Kim*

* *Humanitas College, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Republic of Korea*

ABSTRACT

Animal symbols exert a profound influence on humans. This can be likened to homeopathic magic, with its source tied to the symbol. It has been believed that consuming an animal or crafting items from its parts would imbue humans with the creature's powers, thereby enhancing its symbolic significance over time. An animal can have various symbolic meanings, and among them, those related to healing have been adopted as folk remedies. Therefore, in this study, we would like to examine an example in which animals were used in folk therapy as a symbol of healing in traditional Korean medicine through “*Donguibogam*(東醫寶鑑)”. In this context, ‘healing’ not only pertains to direct cures but also encompasses the use of amulets to fend off afflictions and bolster one's immunity. By looking at animals that have traditionally been used in folk remedies, it is possible to reaffirm the role of animals as healing symbols and to find ways to effectively use animal symbols to enhance the healing effect in the future by recognizing their value.

Keywords Korean Traditional Medicine, folk remedies, animal, symbol, healing

INTRODUCTION

Symbols are used in various ways in our daily lives. In various systems of symbols, animal symbols, in particular, have a very strong influence on humans. Since ancient times, humans have worshipped animals and eaten them in the hope that the special abilities of animals will be transferred to humans. People crafted clothes from animal hides to harness their power or designed garments from bird feathers, hoping to emulate a bird's ability to soar through the skies. This can be likened to a form of sympathetic magic, often referred to as homeopathic magic. Similarity is based on the principle that similarity occurs, and the result is similar to the cause.

This homeopathic magic is rooted in symbolism. One animal has various symbolic meanings, not just one symbol, and among the symbolic meanings, the meaning related to healing is used as folk remedies.

Folk remedies are a traditional indigenous knowledge and has value as a kind of ‘construction of collective intelligence’ that has been collectively verified for a long time (Bak, Gyeong-Yong, 2012). For example, tigers have various circular symbols such as “power”, “dignity”, and “*byeoksa*(辟邪, ward off demons)” and among them, “power” connected to healing is thought to be able to heal the weak and painful parts of a person because it delivers the healing power of the tiger bones, leather, and teeth.

An example of animals being used in folk remedies as a symbol of healing in traditional Korean medicine can be confirmed through “*Donguibogam*(東醫寶鑑)”.

“*Donguibogam*” is an oriental medicine book written by *Heo Jun*(1539-1615), a collection of medical books from China and Korea, and began to be compiled under the order of King *Seonjo* in 1597 and completed in the 2nd year of King *Gwanghaegun*(1610), and the first edition was published in 25 volumes in the 5th year of King *Gwanghaegun*(1613).

“*Donguibogam*” ‘*Tangaekpyeon*(湯液篇)’ Volume 1 consists of ‘*Tangaekbeomnye*(湯液序例, a guide of Korean traditional medicine)’, ‘*Subu*(水部, Water)’, ‘*Tobu*(土部, Soil)’, ‘*Gokbu*(穀部, Grain)’, ‘*Inbu*(人部,

*Correspondence: Nang Ye Kim

E-mail: nangye@khu.ac.kr

Received May 10, 2023; Accepted Aug 17, 2023; Published Aug 31, 2023

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5667/CellMed.2023.011>

©2023 by CellMed Orthocellular Medicine Pharmaceutical Association

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC license.

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>)

Human Ingredients)', 'Geumbu(禽部, Avian radical)', and 'Subu(獸部, Animal radical)', of which animals are presented in 'Geumbu' and 'Subu'. First of all, 107 species of flying animals such as chickens, geese, and ducks are recorded in 'Geumbu', and 236 species of wild animals such as dragons, musk deer, and calculus bovis are presented in 'Subu'. Through the "Donguibogam" records, we can understand the ways animals were utilized in medicine during that period.

This study, therefore, aims to examine how animal symbols were used to heal people in traditional Korean medicine focusing on "Donguibogam". Healing during this period wasn't just about direct treatment of diseases but also encompassed the use of "amulets" as preventative measures against ailments, aiding self-healing and bolstering immunity.

Undoubtedly, "Donguibogam" is hailed, even in contemporary times, as a premier oriental medical text in the East. In addition, it was compiled to suit the climate of Joseon and the constitution of Koreans. This compilation was based on expert knowledge derived from extensive clinical experience and by synthesizing medical literature from both China and Joseon of that era. Therefore, it may be unreasonable to assume that the meaning of the symbol of an animal whose effect has not been medically proven had a direct effect. However, when first introducing an animal as a medicinal component, its symbolic representation is often elucidated through analogy. This representation is then either adopted or dismissed based on accumulated clinical experiences.

In other words, the medical value of the animal medicine recorded in "Donguibogam" was actually confirmed, but the value of the animal symbol used as a symbol of healing can be confirmed in that the animal symbol had a certain effect.

By studying animals that have been traditionally used in folk remedies, we can not only reaffirm their significance as symbols of healing but also appreciate their value and seek ways to amplify their therapeutic effects in the future.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Among the numerous animals mentioned in "Donguibogam", representative examples used in folk remedies include the following. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on those particularly related to the healing symbol, omitting less relevant parts.

1. Avian radical(禽部)

Among the flying animals presented in Avian radical, the owl is the best example of the power of homeopathic magic. Owls represent "night" and represent "darkness", "death" in Eastern culture. Owls are actually nocturnal animals that are active at night and are good at finding and eating food even in dark places. In this habit of owls, "Owl's Eye" is recorded as a medicinal material in "Donguibogam". The "Owl's Eye" category mentions that 'there is no poison.' And, 'If you swallow it, you can see things even at night,' is also recorded. This signifies a belief that consuming the "Owl's Eye" could bestow humans with the owl's night vision.

In the East, the owl's symbolic meaning doesn't encompass "healing." However, being a symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology, the owl is also viewed as a "lucky" emblem, a notion familiar to contemporary society. Therefore, owls have potential as future healing symbols related to the "eye".

2. Animal radical(獸部)

In the Animal radical(獸部), we will look at examples of representative animals such as cows, bears, deer, tigers, rabbits, etc., where various parts such as meat, bones, blood, and hair are used as medicines.

1) Cows

Cows hold significant importance in agricultural societies. As symbols of "richness" and "power", they are considered sacred and are often used in sky sacrifices. Accordingly, each part of the cow was used as a symbol of healing that strengthened people as follows.

① Meat: It strengthen the spleen and stomach, and stops vomiting or diarrhea. It treats diabetes, strengthens the musculature, and strengthens the waist and legs.

② Brain: It is mainly used for dizziness with diabetes and strokes.

③ Teeth: It is mainly used for epilepsy in children.

④ Earwax: It is mainly used for snake bites or moth larva stings.

⑤ Viscera: It is mainly used in the five viscera diseases of a person. The liver brightens the eyes and treats dysentery. The heart is used to treat memory loss due to weakness. The Spleen cures hemorrhoids. The lung treats coughing. The kidney supports the kidney.

⑥ Stomach: It reinforces the five viscera, protects spleen and stomach, and quakes thirst.

⑦ Bovis Omasum: It relieves alcohol poisoning and dysentery.

⑧ Gallbladder: It brightens eyes and quench thirst.

⑨ Nose: It quenches thirst and makes milk come out well.

⑩ Hominis Saliva: It stops vomiting. It cures a 'Yul Guyk' that is can't swallow food then vomiting.

⑪ Chewed Weed in the Mouth: It is used for 'Yul Guyk'.

⑫ Bone: Primarily used for various types of blood loss. For medicinal use, the bone is burned to retain its medicinal properties.

⑬ Penis: It is typically used when someone is unable to have a child.

⑭ Urina: It is mainly used for diabetes, jaundice, oedema, swollen legs and difficulty urinating disease.

⑮ Feces: It is mainly used for oedema and acute indigestion. Apply it to the door of a house or burn it to ward off evil spirits. Burned ashes are mainly used for mouth diseases that do not cure for a long time.

2) Bear

Bear is a divine being that also appears in 'Dangun mythology' and symbolizes "patience". The bear's habit of standing on two feet like a person also symbolizes the "power to transform into a person." Bears were also considered sacred animals, so even their soles were used as precious food and medicinal materials.

① Oil: It cures stroke, strengthens the heart, and kills tuberculosis germs. It eliminates freckles on the face, sores, head sores, and greying and balding of the hair.

② Meat: It is mainly used for paralysis of the musculature due to stroke.

③ Gallbladder: It is primarily used for fever and jaundice, kills parasites, and treats malignant boils. When applied to the eye, it treats eye diseases and certain forms of blindness.

④ Brain: It cures baldness, dandruff and hair loss. Also, cures all kinds of deafness.

⑤ Bone: It is mainly used for rheumatoid arthritis and suddenly convulsion of children.

⑥ Blood: It cures the suddenly convulsion of children.

⑦ Sole of a Foot: Eating the bear's paw is believed to prevent colds. The bear's paw is one of the eight delicacies. It's a rare food and was highly valued by ancient people. According to folklore, when a bear reaches 500 years old, it can transform into a fox or a wildcat.

3) Deer

Deer is counted among the ten symbols of longevity, and is a symbol of "forever life" and "regeneration". In particular, it is also a symbol of "life force" and "revival" because the antlers of deer grow in spring and fall in the spring of the following year and rise again. These deer were used not only to strengthen physical health but also to strengthen mental health, that is, energy.

① Cervi Parvum Cornu: It treats weight loss due to weakness and fatigue, and pain all over the body, waist, or backbone. It strengthens weak and cold kidneys, and alleviates weak legs and knees. It treats essence leakage from dream encounters with spirits, as well as metrorrhagia, metrostaxis, and reddish leukorrhea discharges in women, and helps in the development of a healthy fetus. Cut the new horns that just sprouted in May, and dry them over fire; the ones that look like a little branch are of the best quality. Must not smell it. There are small worms in the Cervi Parvum Cornu, so inhaling the smell lets the worm penetrate inside the body and harm the person.

② Horn: It removed the stagnant blood and it also cures broken bones and sore back and spine. Deer lives a thousand years, and at the age of 500, their fur turns white. Deer's horns become harder as they get older, so it's better to put them in medicine. When incorporated into medicine, naturally shed parts are not used.

③ Bone: It is mainly used for weak and tiredness of body and mind. It cures stroke and reinforces the weakness. It prevents visions of ghosts and unwanted entities.

④ Marrow: It boosts the stamina to have children.

⑤ Blood: It alleviates backaches and strengthens the weary body and mind. Also, cures the vomiting blood.

⑥ Meat: It reinforces the weak and tiredness of body and mind, and strengths the five viscera. It stimulates vigor and harmonizes blood veins. Deer meat is used for ancestral rites because its properties are particularly clean. Deer bodies are the best of all wild animals because they are all beneficial to humans. It is recommended to eat it

with slice the meat, boil, or steam. People on medication should not take it. This is because deer always eat grass that relieves poison, weakening the medicinal effect.

⑦ Head: It quenches thirst and it eliminates to see the unwanted things in dreams.

⑧ Kidneys: It reinforces the kidney and boosts the stamina.

⑨ Hoof: It is mainly used for painful legs and knees.

⑩ Sinew: It is mainly used for weakness and it connects the broken tendon.

4) Tiger

Tigers were believed to be gods, especially mountain gods, who had the power to defeat ghosts. The tiger is a sacred animal that symbolizes power and also served as a guardian deity. The powerful healing power of tigers was thought to be contained in tiny parts, such as whiskers, toenails, and teeth, even poop, and it is not clear if they actually had a medical effect, but it seems that they could have been obtained from the belief that they would. In particular, it can be seen that the healing power of an animal called a tiger is so strong that it believes that just sleeping on it will cure malaria.

① bone: The bones that are used for medicine are the skull and bone of the shin. Tigers live for 1000 years. They turn white when they are 500 years old.

② Skull: It eliminate evil spirits and ghosts, It stops the palpitations with surprise. It cures malaria and it eliminate poison of dog bites. And If someone hang it on top of the door, can kick out ghosts.

③ Shin: If someone put it in water, boil it for a long time, and take a bath in that water, it will get rid of inflammation in its joints.

④ Meat: It helps the stamina and mainly used for nausea and vomiting. It cures malaria and defeats 36 ghosts. When a person enters the mountains after consuming tiger meat, tigers become fearful upon seeing them.

⑤ Oil: It mainly used for dog bites.

⑥ Beard: It cures a toothache. Put it in a cavity.

⑦ Nose: It mainly used for epilepsy and convulsion in children

⑧ Claw: It defeat the bad 'Doggaebi'. Hanging it on a child's arm repels evil spirits.

⑨ Teeth: It mainly used for glans penis infection and abscess of back.

⑩ Skin: It is primarily used to treat malaria. It is believed that if one lays on tiger skin and sleeps, they will recover.

⑪ Gallbladder: It mainly used for convulsion in children and dysentery.

⑫ Feces: It mainly used for incurable boils.

⑬ Eyeball: It mainly used for epilepsy and convulsion. It defeats the bad and calms the mind. It cures the malaria and crying by suddenly stomachache of child.

5) Rabbit

In legend, rabbits are depicted as animals living on the moon, creating immortal medicines. Therefore, it is connected to the moon and women, and symbolizes "long life" and "fecundity". Therefore, when used as a medicinal material, it appears to play a role in helping childbirth mainly in relation to "birth." On the other hand, 'white rabbit' is combined with white color symbols and is used as a symbol with stronger healing power. In 'Yin and Yang Five Elements(陰陽五行)', white is a color symbol connected to gold, autumn, and west.

① Skull of Rabbit: It is usually used for difficulties in child delivery, failure to discharge the placenta, and the fatal sickness due to the undischarged and coagulated blood residues caused by child delivery ascending toward the heart. Rabbit is considered a high-quality food. Despite having six to seven orifices, it is believed that rabbits deliver their young through their mouths. The reason why eating rabbit is forbidden during pregnancy is to prevent the baby from getting a harelip, and it is also related to the rabbit's nature of delivering its young through the mouth.

② Meat: It quenches thirsty and reinforces the stomach. The white rabbit has completely received golden energy, so it is better to put it in medicine. Rabbits live a thousand years, and their fur turns white at the age of 500.

③ Brain: It is mainly used for splitting hands and feet due to frostbite. Also, it's easy to give birth.

④ Liver: It's brighten eyes. It reinforces the weak and tiredness of body and mind.

⑤ Hair: Burnt ashes of rabbit hair are mainly used for poor oral healing.

⑥ Feces: It cures the boils and hemorrhoids.

As discussed, symbols of animals with healing properties have been utilized in diverse manners.

Treatments derive from various animal parts, including meat, bones, blood, teeth, hair, and feces. From this, we can deduce that traditional folk remedies using animal-derived medicines and symbols of healing may seem ineffective from a modern medical standpoint. The therapeutic potential of animal symbols remains acknowledged in contemporary times. Incorporating these healing symbols into the development of health foods, new medicines, and health-focused local festivals could further amplify their healing efficacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Not applicable

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicting financial interests.

REFERENCES

- 1 Nang-Ye Kim. The World through symbols. Changbiedu. 2023.
- 2 Bak, Gyeong-Yong. A Folk Therapy as A Traditional Knowledge Through The Context of Life History: The Mechanism of Discontinuation, Change and Continuation, *The Journal of Korean Historical-forklife* 38. 2012;223-262.
- 3 Dictionary of Korean Myths and Symbols(1), Dong-A Publishing & Printing Co., Ltd. 1992.
- 4 Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, The Academy of Korean Studies.
(<https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr>)
- 5 Korean Medicine Classics DB, Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine
(<https://mediclassics.kr>)