

Recognizing Korean Nursing Themes to Develop Korean Nursing Theories

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Abstract

Purpose: *The purpose of this study was to understand and explore the nature and types of Korean nursing so the theoretical foundation for Korean nursing could be established. Methods:* *In-depth interviews with semi-structured questionnaire were given to twelve respondents: professors and students of nursing school and nurse practitioners, and the qualitative data were collected from September 15th to November 15th of 2012. The in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant for about 2 hours and 30 minutes, and the places like the participants' labs or quiet cafes. The interviews were recorded upon the participants' agreement. Content analysis of qualitative based on Hsieh & Shannon's method was done. Any meaningful words, sentences and paragraphs were carefully scrutinized repeatedly to find any sub-topics and finally narrowing them down to four distinct themes. And the final data were analyzed and validated by two professors who were experts in qualitative analysis. Results:* *There were four major themes and eight sub-themes observed from the analysis. The four main themes were nursing with mothers' love, nursing with filial piety and caring, patient-centered nursing, and nursing based on tradition. Conclusions:* *The four main themes and eight sub themes reflect cultural perspectives and perceptions of Korean people and it provides strong foundation for Korean nursing theory. Therefore, in order to develop Korea's own creative and progressive nursing theories, Korean history, culture and socio-economy need to be considered and reflected while carefully combining the elements of western theories.*

Keywords: *Korean, Nursing, Qualitative research method*

1. Introduction

There has been so much effort made by Korean nursing scientists in order to help people perceive and recognize nursing as a field of science. In order for nursing to secure its scientific establishment status, these scientists believe that many well-explained theories for different nursing situations are needed.

However, most of the theories up until now were developed over 30 years since the late 1960s by North American nursing scholars [1]. Nursing was first introduced to Korea at the end of nineteenth century by a missionary, so the overall frame and theories of Korean nursing naturally have been heavily based on western culture and methods [2]. And the western ways of scientific approaches to the field have been directly applied and studied without any modifications so far [3].

There has been a recent effort to combine western medicine and oriental medicine in Korea, and the entire field of nursing seems to be affected by this notion as many nursing schools are focusing and offering courses such as alternative care methods, oriental medicine nursing and hospice nursing. Most of British nursing schools also

have been offering courses in order to increase knowledge in alternative medicine [4]. Because it is sometimes difficult to expect an effective treatment and therefore desired improvement with modern medical treatment and approaches, Korea has been adopting and combining different alternative methods such as acupuncture [5], three-week post partum care [6], relaxation methods [7] for cancer patients such as sleeping, breathing, dieting and exercising management, and other various examples of such effort can be easily observed in hospitals and hospices.

Despite all these efforts to recognize the importance of finding ways that suit Korean people, the strong establishment of Korean nursing theory is yet to come and scholars and professionals still tend to heavily depend on western theories and methods. There have been only a few criticisms and revisions of structural hierarchy of nursing theories, but there haven't been any major changes in the whole structure. Recently, because there have been lots of influences from pragmatism and phenomenology, a lot of inductive approaches have been made instead of deductive methods. Despite all these efforts and although the nursing field has undergone a drastic change along with the advancement of medical technology, the effort to develop and apply nursing theories hasn't been up to par, which means the nursing professionals failed to respond to this change[8].

The essence of nursing lies on studying principles necessary to preserve lives and minimize people's pain by understanding people better and promoting healthy life style [3]. Every country and its people have their own peculiar culture: different body type, geography, environment and social structure, and since nursing is also a product of their own culture and environment, it is necessary to understand as many details of the individual's upbringing and surrounding as possible. Therefore, it is also heavily necessary to examine whether the Korean nursing that's been used for the past hundred years is really applicable to Korean people. And the Korean nursing philosophy attained by this method needs to be compared and cross examined with the western nursing philosophy [9].

Only a handful of studies was conducted in the past, and some of them were conceptual analyses based on people, health, nursing and environment to develop Korean nursing theories [2, 3, 10, 11, 12], some theses utilizing philosophical approach to develop Korean nursing theories [13-17], and these were all conducted before the year 2000. There is only one study conducted after 2000.

Recent studies such as Exploring Theory Synthesis through an Analysis of Situation-specific Theories in Korea [8] and Eastern and Western Nursing through Analysis [18] are examples that attempt to re-establish Korean Nursing theories and conceptual analysis. These efforts are very necessary for an overall development of Korean nursing and will provide clearer purposes, better ways for the practitioners to communicate, and a stronger foundation for developing a unique identity for Korean nursing [19].

Therefore, the philosophical research methods of Korean traditional nursing needs to be cross-examined with those of western nursing in order to provide a basis for improving conceptual analysis and developing new theories of Korean nursing. So this study was conducted in hopes of providing a strong foundation and contribution to the overall re-evaluation and the growth of modern Korean nursing.

■ Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research relies on answering the question, "What is Korea nursing and why is it?" And through this process, we can examine subjective views on Korean nursing, so

that we can use the data in order to define some of its characteristics and lay the foundation for developing Korean nursing theories.

Some detailed purposes of this research are as following:

- 1) Find out subjective views on Korean nursing.
- 2) Examine the characteristics of different types of those subjective views.

2. Method

■ Study design

This was a qualitative study designed to explore the true meaning of Korean nursing through in-depth interviews with nursing professors, nursing students and nurse practitioners.

■ Content of Questionnaire

In-depth one on one interview was conducted in order to follow all the principles and guidelines necessary for the purpose of this research.

The detailed questions were as following:

Types	Questionnaire
Introduction question	Let's take a little time to introduce each other. Tell us about your job and what you do.
Start up question	What is nursing to you?
Transition question	Tell us about your experiences working in the hospital.
Main questions	What is Korean nursing to you and why do you think so? What do we need in order to develop Korean nursing? What is the focus of Korean nursing? Whom should the Korean nursing be for? What is some prerequisite knowledge needed to develop Korean nursing?
Wrap up questions	Let's summarize our discussion. Let us know if there is any question or anything else to be added.

■ Data Collection

It was necessary to choose the right interviewees who could provide the most relevant insights and information for this qualitative analysis [20]. Data were collected from September 15th to November 15th of 2012. E-mails explaining the purpose of study were sent to 20 nursing professors, 10 nursing students and 10 nurse practitioners, and 6 professors, 3 students and 3 nurse practitioners agreed to participate in this study. After each participant received a copy of written document that states the purpose of research and signed the agreement, the in-depth interviews were conducted for about 2 hours and 30 minutes per interviewee, and the questions were based on the semi-structured survey questionnaire. The interviews lasted only up to the point where no

more new and relevant statements related to the core meaning of Korean nursing were made. Places like the participants' labs or quiet cafes were chosen as interview places, and the interviews were recorded upon the participants' agreement. The total page numbers of collected data, including the notes taken at the interviews and all the re-typed recordings, came out to be eighty seven A4 pages.

■ **Data Analysis**

The focus of this study was to develop Korean nursing theories by analyzing data collected from nursing related professionals such as professors, clinical nurse practitioners and students majoring in nursing. In order to secure the validity of the result, all the collected data were scrutinized by two different groups of professionals. The content analysis method was used in order to accurately grasp the meaning data. Any meaningful words, sentences and paragraphs were carefully scrutinized repeatedly to find any sub-topics and finally narrowing them down to four distinct themes [21]. In order to further reinforce the validity and the relevancy of the analysis, repeated meetings were held by the researchers to cross-examine and carefully scrutinize the collected data. Finally, in order to verify the relevancy of the analyzed data, opinions from one participant and six PhD candidates were also taken into consider.

■ **Ethical Consideration**

The effort to protect the rights of participants was made throughout the course of the research. The researchers clearly explained the purpose, procedure, main questions of the research, as well as the duration of interviews. They also explained the reasons for writing down and recording all the data and the fact that all the collected data will be used only for this particular research and that they will be deleted once the study is over. Anyone who could no longer participate in the interview could quit anytime at will and the interviews were conducted in a way that the participants could freely share their experiences and opinions without any pressure. The fact that all the participants would remain anonymous for any of the statements made was also clearly explained and confirmed.

3. Results

■ **General Characteristics of Participants**

There were total 12 participants whose ages ranged from 22 to 58 years old. Six of them were Christians, finally the clinical experiences ranged from 4 to 12 years (Table 1).

Table 1. General Characteristics of Participants

Themes	Age(year)	Religion	Occupation	Education	Experience(year)
Theme 1 Nursing with mother's love	58	Christian	Professor	Doctorate	Clinical 10/Teaching25
	43	Christian	Professor	Doctorate	
	22	Christian	Student	Nursing major	Clinical 10/Teaching 5
	22	Buddhist	Student	Nursing major	
	22	Atheist	Student	Nursing major	

Theme 2 Filial piety and caring	41 52 48	Christian Christian Atheist	Professor Professor Nurse	Doctorate Master's Master's	Clinical 6/Teaching 10 Clinical 5/Teaching 5 Clinical 12
Theme 3 Patient-centered family nursing	36 40	Atheist Atheist	Nurse Nurse	Master's Master's	Clinical 8 Clinical 11
Theme 4 Nursing with based on the Korean tradition	27 41	Christian Buddhist	Professor Professor	Doctorate Doctorate	Clinical 4/Teaching 24 Clinical 9/Teaching 5

■ Themes

Four main themes of nursing were confirmed after the final analysis: nursing with mothers' love, nursing with filial piety, patient-centered nursing and tradition-based nursing. The eight sub-themes were care with dedication, unconditional love, grandma's touch, caring based on filial piety, one mind one thought, caring others before oneself, nursing of yin and yang and nursing together.

1) Theme 1: nursing with mothers' love

This theme of nursing that expresses mothers' genuine love and dedication is thought to represent one of the main characteristics of the Korean nursing. The participants seemed to link together the qualities of motherhood to the nature of nursing, and they also seemed to stress the importance of the maternity nursing.

(1) Care with Dedication

The Korean mothers' sacrificial love is thought to be the firm foundation of Korean nursing.

Out of all different kinds of love out there, I think nothing can surpass that of mothers. And I think the "mothers' love" is heavily implied in Korean nursing. So, this is not a kind of nursing that merely repeats the motions and routines, but rather, this is a kind of nursing that you treat your patients as your children; from the perspective of a mother that truly cares for her children and even shares their pain, both physical and mental that's intangible. I think that kind of nursing is what Korean nursing is all about.

(2) Unconditional Love

Mothers always don't want any reward but use their unconditional love to take care of their children and this brings all the family members closer together.

My mom used to wake up early in the morning to prepare our breakfast, but she never ate with us. She would eat once everyone's done eating. She was always doing something to take care of us. She would normally go to bed very late, especially when one of us was sick.

2) Theme 2: filial piety and caring

The second theme of nursing stresses the importance of the family line as well as the importance of the continuation of providing care from generation to generation, grandparents-parents-children. This structure provides a strong foundation for the sense of responsibility and duty derived from sharing and dedication.

(1) Grandmothers' Touch

Some participants were raised by their grandparents so they wanted to find the origin of Korean nursing from their grandmothers' "touch."

My grandma used to rub my belly or back whenever I was sick and then I would fall asleep fast on her lap. She used to be a big comfort for me. I miss her very much.

(2) Caring based on Filial Piety

Caring patients with a mindset of a child who wants his or her grandma to get better is thought to be one of the characteristics of Korean nursing.

The whole concept of the "Korean way of nursing" is a bit difficult for me to fully grasp but I'd have to guess that it comes from our family-centered tradition culture. Some patients remind me of my grandmother who passed away and it really makes me want to provide the best possible care I can provide.

3) Theme 3: patient-centered family nursing

Since a long time ago, Korean families have had a tendency to considered themselves as a small community of its own, and many families carried over this mentality and applied it to nursing where the entire family members are dedicated to taking care of any sick members. Any family that has a sick member was thought to be an unhealthy family as a whole, so naturally the focus of family nursing becomes patient-centered.

(1) One Mind, One Thought

If one member of a family gets sick, all the other members' focus shift to that person and it would greatly affect other members' daily life as well. They try to support each other physically, mentally and financially.

My father has been in and out of the hospital for the past 10 years because of his stroke. My mom, my older brother and my sister-in-law took turns taking care of him. I used to share funny stories when it was my turn. Of course we all shared the medical bills. Your parents are your parents forever even after you get married.

(2) Caring Others Before Oneself

If one of their family members get sick, especially if that member is one of their parents, other Korean family members would be more than willing to sacrifice their daily life to take care of the sick member.

Korean patients tend to be on the rather timid side where, instead of trying to take care of their own body, they want other people to take care of them. That's probably why when a

person gets sick, the whole family will likely to focus on that person and forget about their personal lives. Some families don't even celebrate holidays or even eat out when a member of their own gets sick.

4) Theme 4: nursing with based on the Korean tradition.

This type focuses on the knowledge of traditional ways of nursing handed down from the past, and it believes that the balance between the western nursing and eastern nursing upon the foundation of traditional Korean ideology is the key, as in the harmonious balance between yin and yang. It is heavily affected by many Asian philosophies such as shamanism, Taoism and Confucianism, and the main focus of nursing has been managing the chi in order to cultivate the overall balance and the well-being.

(1) Nursing of Yin and Yang

There is an on-going debate on Korean nursing's true identity, but it is thought to include a few Asian philosophies such as Yin and Yang.

Do we truly understand what the essence of nursing is? There is an on-going debate on whether nursing is a science or a form of an art. I don't have the answer but, regardless, I do believe that it is necessary to discuss and find out where the Korean nursing currently stands. I think the Korean nursing is the one in which our outlook on the world from our traditional view point is underlined.

(2) Nursing Together

Korean nursing is thought to have Korean traditional culture as a background and other elements from both western and eastern nursing built on it.

Some Korean nursing schools have been offering oriental nursing courses in hopes of developing a kind of nursing with eastern and western nursing elements harmoniously combined together. As it is not completely fair to say that western medicine represents Korea's entire medical field, it is also difficult to say that western nursing can entirely represent Korean nursing. I think it is very important to explore and find out what is really "our nursing." I think that's really Korean nursing scholars' job... I think we really need a kind of nursing that works for people who were born and grew up in Korean culture.

In times like this, I think the core meaning of Korean nursing has to stand in the same spectrum as Western nursing because that's what we've had for a long time. But I think it is very important to find the true identity of Korean nursing.

These four main themes of nursing successfully reflect the characteristics of Korean people and are the perceptions of people who are directly involved in the professional field of nursing.

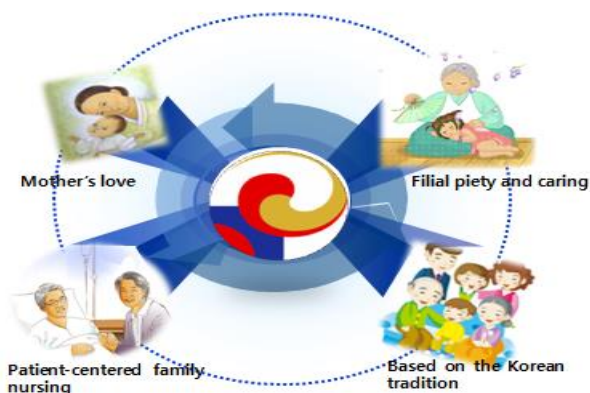


Figure 1. Four Main Themes of Korean Nursing

4. Discussion

It is not an easy task to find out the essence of Korean nursing in short. But finding out what works best for Korean people, establishing the most appropriate theories accordingly and finally identifying the true essence and putting into application seem to be the most important tasks for the Korean nurse practitioners. Some of the questions such as, “What really is Korean nursing and why do you think so?” were attempted to be answered by Korean nursing professors, students and other nursing professionals, and as a result, the “most Korean nursing” was thought out and agreed to be a kind of nursing that has traditional Korean culture as a foundation and a kind that provides a sincere care to the patients. So this study has concluded that “the most Korean way of nursing” can be described as caring for patients with true dedication as the Korean tradition as the main source. Especially the “nursing with mothers' dedication” and the “patient-centered nursing” produce an image of a desperate mother who cannot leave her sick child's side and pays attention to the child's littlest movements and the breathing patterns and the care takers who do not leave their patients even for seconds [12]. This really stresses the importance of the element of family-like nursing, and it shares commonalities with one study that stresses the importance of utilizing kind affection and faithfulness in nursing. But the potential downfall of this type would be the propensity that leads to the lack of self-care, since this sacrificial behavior of any individual is far from instinct but is rather culturally educated behavior [22]. Some ascribe this to the fact that, because Korea has a long history of getting invaded by other foreign nations, people have come to not trust their country and its government and think that the only ones that can really take care of them are their family members [23]. Also, Korean people tend to group themselves with their family members and other surrounding people that they think are important to them [24], so their overall self-image tend to be heavily affected by other people and rules of society instead of their own individualism [25, 26], (Kim, 2006; Han, Bang, 1993). Satisfying the need of self-care isn't entirely instinctual but often comes from the individual's cultural background and upbringing [22], so focusing too much on caring for others and failing to care for oneself can be one of the undesired characteristics of Korean nursing.

Also, from the previous studies of Korean nursing, the studies such as the elements of caring recognized by patients from the nurse-patient relationship [27], traditional caring on child birth [28], caring for elders in traditional society and its principles[29], caring for cancer

patients [30], conceptual analysis on caring [31] all share similarities with Watson's philosophy and theories that stress the importance of approaches that utilize more human and scientific perspectives, as well as the Korean social structure that stresses the continuation of family bond from generation to generation and the strong sense of duty to take care of the parents.

Although these studies tend to focus on acute phases of nursing and therefore different from this study, Korean nursing does share underlying principles with western nursing since the ones that are providing care use the highest form of ethical/moral ideals. Also, Korean nursing's recognizing the important of its surrounding environment shares similarities with Rogers' focus on "Humans and Field of Environment" [32].

Traditional way of nursing believes that diseases are caused by disharmony of yin and yang [3], just as the oriental medicine does, and it has its roots in the eastern philosophies and religious beliefs; therefore, looking into these fields will greatly aid in redefining the nature of Korean nursing.

Prior to twentieth century, eastern philosophical approach and the need of qualitative analysis were stressed in attempt to develop Korean nursing theories, and the clinical application and research of the theories and their relationships were heavily focused. Still, there are plenty of problems to be solved to improve the entire field of nursing with scientific pursuits. As long as Korea continues to encourage the theory development and produce more nurses with doctorate degrees, the overall outlook is expected to be bright.

Korea's nursing focuses heavily on the clinical practicality. But in order to have successful clinical practice, better theories and knowledge development is required, while understanding the characteristics of both western and Korean medicine and the overall trend of both fields.

Also, while trying to develop these new theories, the whole essence and philosophy of nursing have to be well reflected and have a clearer standard by which elements and knowledge would be recognized under certain conditions [18]. Moreover, the whole theory development has to have clearer and more concrete purposes and the changes of time and society have to be taken into consideration as well.

Finally, because both western and oriental medicine co-exist in Korea, it is necessary to come up with new theories that well reflect and combine principles of both fields.

Considering the fact that Korea has a long history of invasions by surrounding nations and interactions with foreign countries, Korea's history and its unique culture should be reflected when cross-examining the Korean nursing with western nursing.

As a result of examining and interviewing nursing professionals and students who were born and raised in Korea, there were many similarities found between western nursing theories and Korean nursing theories: in a nutshell, nursing can be defined as a systematic science of human interactions and specific activities of helping and providing professional cares for others.

Therefore, naturally, the concept of nursing exists throughout different stages of people's life cycle, from birth to death, in a form of caring and being cared by someone else. But Korean nursing seems to focus more on family-centeredness, and because of Korean people's tendency to seek others' attention and help instead of trying to manage their own sicknesses, the overall nature of Korean nursing can appear to be more dependant. So, in order for Korean nursing to be more independent, there seems to be a strong need for raising the awareness of "self-nursing" and the willingness in attitude to overcome one's own sicknesses instead of relying too much on other people's help.

5. Conclusion

This study was qualitative research method that in-depth interviews based on semi-structured questionnaire were given to twelve respondents: professors and students of nursing school and nurse practitioners. And it was conducted in hopes of providing the foundation for Korean nursing to be re-established with Korea's historical, cultural, and socio-economical reflections.

According to the result of in-depth interviews with the respondents, Korean nursing seems to have its base on mothers' love, filial piety and caring, patient-centered families and Korean tradition; however, there is no strong basis and effort to develop Korea's own unique nursing theories based on the characteristics of Korean people. Perhaps the main reasons behind this are the differences between the conceptual, theoretical models and what's actually applicable in the clinical practices, as well as the failure to recognize the importance of solidifying the Korean ways of nursing and blatantly applying what's already established in western nursing.

Therefore, instead of continuing to copy the western methods and forcing them to work, Korea needs to come up with its own unique and creative nursing theories that can be combined with the benefits of the western nursing theories. In order for this to happen, many practical researches and studies in the clinical setting need to be conducted, and the universities, hospitals and other related organizations should cooperate together to facilitate the process and establish a strong financial basis. Also, a strong interaction between the group of pioneers in nursing science and the new group is much needed in order to develop the best Korean nursing theories beyond all times and places. This will then provide Korean nursing an opportunity and foundation to stretch out further and stand on its own as a unique, global field of study.

This study only targeted a limited group of people currently involved in nursing, so there are some limitations to the data. However, a more comprehensive study that targets wider range of people, of different gender and age, with various cultural backgrounds is needed.

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