

When Traditional Medicine Met the World Health Organization

A Journal of Key Milestones in the Evolution of TM

in the 21st Century

By

Seung Hoon Choi

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Prologue

From August 2003, I served as the Regional Adviser for Traditional Medicine at the World Health Organization's Western Pacific Regional Office (WHO/WPRO) for five years. Although five years may seem brief, this period saw groundbreaking advancements in the field of traditional medicine at the global level.

During this time, we developed the International Standard Terminology (IST) for traditional medicine, which later evolved into the Traditional Medicine Chapter in ICD-11. This allowed Traditional East Asian Medicine to become the first and only traditional medicine integrated into the global mainstream medical system. Additionally, we achieved the unification of Acupuncture Point Locations (APL), which had varied between countries for centuries, leading to a comprehensive revision of acupuncture textbooks worldwide¹.

Building on the WHO Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) development guide for traditional medicine, countries like China, Japan, Korea, and others began actively developing their own clinical practice guidelines. This standardization greatly improved the level of clinical practice in traditional medicine. These accomplishments represent a quantum leap

¹ About 2,000 years ago, as acupuncture became systematized, 361 acupuncture points were designated on the human body. Since then, as acupuncture was used in China and neighboring countries, it inevitably led to discrepancies in the positioning of the same acupuncture points in different countries. In the late 20th century, as academic exchanges related to acupuncture became more active internationally, these differences were identified by experts from various countries, and there arose a demand for unification. However, due to national pride, the issue remained unresolved until I took office at the WHO and began the international standardization of Acupuncture Point Locations in earnest.

Over the course of three years, 11 expert meetings were held. For acupuncture experts from each country, the need for a unified positioning of acupuncture points was urgent. Although the WHO is not a specialized institution for traditional medicine, it holds unparalleled authority in the global healthcare field. These two factors interacted perfectly, leading to the creation of an international standard for APL, something that had been considered impossible. As a result, acupuncture textbooks worldwide were unified. While it is now taken for granted, at the time, the positions of 92 acupuncture points differed across countries.

The establishment of this international standard for APL was unprecedented in history and is a miraculous achievement that will likely never be repeated.

for traditional medicine—something even tens of thousands of scientific papers (SCI) could not achieve.

Moreover, these developments have had a significant influence on other traditional medical systems, such as Ayurveda and Unani, inspiring them to embark on a similar path. As a result, we can say that during those five years, we set a remarkable milestone in the history of global traditional medicine. This history was only possible through the platform provided by WHO, and we were fortunate to seize that opportunity.

With the inclusion of traditional medicine in ICD-11, an article headed with my name was published in *Nature* in 2018² and became one of the most popular topics of the year. However, despite these achievements, recognition in the academic community remained limited.

While preparing the keynote speech for ‘the 20th Joint Conference of IASTAM and ASHM’ in Taipei this past June, I discovered discrepancies in the referenced papers regarding WHO’s standardization of traditional medicine. Some papers claimed that the UN had requested WHO to use Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as a solution to address high health-care costs, and that I was appointed to work on its standardization. This is completely false. WHO never gave me any such directive or instruction. My long-standing vision to globalize traditional medicine, with standardization at its core, began when I joined WHO in 2003 and has since taken root and flourished.

The misunderstanding could have originated from my decision to remain silent after completing the standardization work and returning to Korea in 2008. I chose to live by the principle from Chapter 2 of Laozi’s *Tao Te Ching* (道德經): “Having accomplished, but not residing in it,”³ rather than boasting about such achievements. I have always thought that humility is a fundamental attitude that humans should have and that one should always live in such a manner. However, I now realize that humility alone is not always a virtue; it is also important to leave an accurate historical record. It is crucial not only to make history but to document it properly.

² David Cyranoski, Why Chinese medicine is heading for clinics around the world, 26 Sept. 2018, *Nature* (Vol. 561, Issue 7724)

³ “功成而弗居(老子《道德經》第二章)

As Alfred Hitchcock, the master of thriller films, once remarked, “Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.” The diary I kept during my journey to innovate in traditional medicine at WHO has now transformed into my drama.

I give thanks to the Lord, who was with me through both the challenges and the joys of this journey.

Summer 2024

Lexington, MA

Seung Hoon Choi

Chapter 1

Call to Serve at WHO

2003

May 6

Received a call from Professor Park Dong-seok, Director of the Kyung Hee University East-West Medical Research Institute (KHU-EWMRI), which serves as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO CCTM), requesting my consent for a nomination to WHO.

May 7

While hosting a seminar with graduate students at my home in Yangpyeong¹, I received another call from Professor Shin Min-gyu to confirm my consent for the WHO nomination. Then, Professor Chang Il-moo from the Seoul National University Natural Products Research Institute (SNU-NPRI), also a WHO CCTM, called and said, “You’ve been nominated by two different places. Let’s meet on May 10.”

May 10

At 10 a.m., I visited Professor Chang at SNU-NPRI. We discussed the background and process of the nomination, and I gave him a disk containing my CV.

May 12

At 10 a.m., Dr. Chen Ken (CK), the WHO/WPRO Regional Adviser for Traditional Medicine, called from Manila and asked detailed questions about my background. When he asked, “When can you come to Manila?” I responded, “After July.”

¹ Yangpyeong (楊平) is a 40-minute drive east of Seoul, and I have a country house there.

At 4 p.m., Professor Chang sent me the email exchanges with CK, in which CK emphasized, “This matter will remain confidential, and the position does not rotate among China, Japan, and Korea.” Professor Chang added, “We can’t trust the Chinese.”

May 28

In the afternoon, Vice President Lee Eung-sae of the Association of Korean Medicine (AKOM) called, sharing news from the WHO’s World Health Assembly (WHA). He mentioned hearing about a recommendation for CK’s successor and said that AKOM planned to post a job announcement in *AKOM News*.

May 29

I sent my CV to AKOM.

May 30

President Koh Byung-hee of the Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine (KIOM) called, encouraging me to consider working for WHO. I also spoke with Professor Chang.

June 9

Dr. Lee Eung-sae called, saying, “It will take a month or two.” Dean Ahn Kyoo-seok of Kyung Hee University College of Korean Medicine (KHU-CKM) informed me that two Chinese candidates had been shortlisted, and I was only included as a formality, with just my contact information listed.

June 10

Submitted three passport-sized photos to Ms. You Yoon-sook, who is in charge of international affairs at AKOM.

June 13

Had a meeting with Dr. George Slama, the WHO liaison officer based in Korea, at the Ministry of Health and Welfare (K-MOHW).

June 16–19

Participated in the ‘International Meeting on Global Atlas of Traditional Medicine’ held at the WHO Kobe Center in Japan, expecting that this experience would be useful for my future role at WHO. It was my first WHO meeting experience.

June 27

Received a call from Dr. Slama informing me of a meeting with Dr. Omi² (WHO/WPRO Regional Director) on June 28.

June 28

Had an unofficial interview with Dr. Omi at the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) located at SNU from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. The questions asked were:

“Why are you applying to WHO?”

“What is your view on traditional medicine, which relies on experience?”

“As a professor, how well can you adapt to life at WHO?”

“Why haven’t you been involved with WHO in the past five years?”

“How old are you?”

² Dr. Omi Shigeru, originally a researcher in immunology at Jichi Medical University in Japan, began working at WHO/WPRO in 1990 and served as the Regional Director (RD) for WPRO for 10 years starting in 1999. In 2006, he ran to succeed the late Lee Jong-wook as WHO Director-General but was defeated by Dr. Margaret Chan from Hong Kong. Recently, he has been serving as the president of the Japan Community Health Care Organization (JCHO) and is also the head of the Japanese government’s expert panel on the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the interview, I realized how little I knew about WHO. I immediately went to *Kyobo Books* in Gwanghwamun and bought a book titled *International Health* (國際保健學) by Dr. Han Sang-tae, a former WHO/WPRO Regional Director.

June 30

Had a phone call with Professor Chang, who forwarded me the emails exchanged with CK.

July 1

Professor Roh Byung-eui from Daegu Haany University (DHU) called to inform me that he had spoken with Dr. Slama and heard that I was considered a strong candidate. He assured me of future cooperation.

July 2

Professor Chae Young-moon from Yonsei University called, mentioning that he knew CK and Dr. Omi well, and that he had recommended Dr. Park Kwang-soo, a clinical pathology specialist in Kiribati, to WHO.

July 25

President Ahn Jae-gyu of AKOM and Vice President Lee Eung-sae met with Mr. Moon Kyung-tae, Deputy Minister for Planning and Management at K-MOHW, and spoke with Dr. Omi in Manila during the meeting. They were informed that the selection results would be announced the following week.

July 28

Received notification from Dr. Slama that I had been selected and discussed the next steps.

August 6

Underwent a medical examination at the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine of KHU Medical Center for WHO employment.

August 11

Farewell party with the faculty of the basic sciences at KHU-CKM.

August 12

Farewell party with the clinical faculty at KHU-CKM and had a meeting with President Choue Chung-won of KHU.

August 18

Visited DHU to meet with President Hwang Byung-tae and toured the conference rooms and guest rooms at Hyundai Hotel in Gyeongju, where the WHO meeting would be held from September 17–20.

August 19

Visited my mentor, Professor Moon Joon-jeon, and later attended a farewell party with the executive members of SKOM at the 'Gadeokdo' restaurant.

August 20

Farewell party with the Department of Pathology at KHU-CKM at Topaz Chinese Restaurant, 4th Floor, Ramada Renaissance Hotel.

August 21

Interviewed by Jeon Seong-ho from *AKOM News* and Oh Jin-ah from *Minjok Medicine*.

August 22

Went to the Philippine Embassy to correct visa details and received my flight ticket.

Had dinner with Mr. Moon Kyung-tae from K-MOHW, President Ahn Jae-gyu, and Vice President Lee Eung-sae from AKOM at the Japanese restaurant 'Ran (蘭),' where we discussed the selection process and future cooperation.

Chapter 2

Preparation and Mindset

Each year, I have conducted a reading and commentary of Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* with new students from KHU-CKM for 10 days starting in mid-June. As I embark on this new chapter at WHO, I find myself deeply reflecting on the timeless wisdom of Laozi. His teachings resonate profoundly with me, offering both personal and spiritual guidance as I prepare to confront the challenges and responsibilities that lie ahead.

The key concepts I focused on were:

Chapter 2: "Having accomplished, but not residing in it." (二章 功成而弗居)

Chapter 5: "The nature is not benevolent and partial." (五章 天地不仁)

Chapter 8: "Supreme goodness is like water." (八章 上善若水)

Chapter 9: "To withdraw after one's success is the way of heaven." (九章 功遂身退, 天之道也)

Chapter 60: "Governing a large country is like cooking a small fish." (十六章 治大國, 若烹小鮮)

Chapter 63: "More ease necessarily brings more difficulty. The sage, seeing difficulty, overcomes it, so nothing is difficult in the end." (六十三章 多易必多難. 聖人猶難之, 故終無難矣)

Chapter 68: "The master of employing others places himself beneath them." (六十八章 善用人者, 爲之下)

Chapter 70: "The sage wears coarse cloth, yet harbors jade within." (七十章 聖人被褐而懷玉)

Chapter 77: "The way of heaven reduces the excessive and augments the lacking. --- Who can have excess to give to the world?" (七十七章 天之道, 損有餘而補不足. --- 熟能有餘以奉天下)

Chapter 81: "True words aren't embellished --- The virtuous need not argue." (八十一章 信言不美 --- 善者不辯)

I reaffirmed the mindset I had long embraced as a Taoist Christian.

August 3

Whenever I became too comfortable with my current life or began indulging in worldly pleasures, the Lord always led me to change my path. As my professorship, which I had held for nearly 20 years, started to feel more like a career than a calling, and as I grew content with the worldly values it brought, the Lord has now guided me to leave the university and move to WHO. I believe this is so I can fully realize the calling He has given me and align the rest of my life accordingly. I am grateful to the Lord, who directs me away when I seek comfort and pleasure.

As I look ahead to the new, creative, and challenging life that lies before me, I reflect on the Lord's call for me. WHO is not a place for glory, pleasure, or pride, but a new stage where my true calling will unfold. I thank the Lord for granting me this understanding and this opportunity.

One day, when I return to the university, it will be when I have truly regained the right mindset, filled with hope and enthusiasm for the professorship. When that time comes, I will return, bearing fruits more valuable than the thousands of SCI papers that universities currently demand from professors.

Chapter 3

Diary: Five Years at WHO (2003–2008)

August 25, 2003 – First Day in Manila

After a relatively smooth three-and-a-half-hour flight, I arrived in Manila. The moment I stepped off the plane and exited the terminal, I was warmly greeted by Michael, a resident WHO staff member stationed at the airport. He kindly assisted with everything, from collecting my luggage to navigating immigration and customs. It was a pleasant surprise and left me feeling grateful for the unexpected hospitality.

Once I left the airport, I got into the car of Mr. Jeoffrey Bruno, another WHO staff member, who briefed me on basic safety precautions in Manila during the drive.

I soon settled into the Westin Philippine Plaza Hotel, which had a distinct tropical resort atmosphere. I was given a room with an ocean view—likely a special gesture. The view was stunning, though it felt almost indulgent to enjoy it alone.

At the WHO office, I coincidentally ran into Ms. Laila Bunoan, who would be my secretary. We exchanged warm greetings before I briefly met Dr. Ahn Dong-il³ in his office on the 4th floor of the main building. Shortly afterward, I met Mr. Shin Eui-gyun, a section chief from the K-MOHW, who had been dispatched to WHO for two years. We had lunch at a nearby Korean restaurant called ‘Seokchon,’ and afterward, we visited Ralph Anthony, a nearby apartment hotel, to check out a few rooms. The downside was that the hotel did not have a gym.

We returned to the WHO office, where I visited the office of former WHO/WPRO RD Dr. Han Sang-tae⁴, now an Honorary RD—a title given to him

³ A Regional Adviser in the field of tuberculosis, who graduated from the College of Medicine at KHU.

⁴ Dr. Han Sang-tae (1928–2020) began working at WHO/WPRO in 1967 and served as RD for 10 years starting from 1989. One of his greatest achievements during his terms in office was the eradication of poliomyelitis in the Western Pacific Region.

by his former competitor, current RD Dr. Omi, following the RD election five years ago. Despite being 75 years old, Dr. Han's voice was still full of energy. He generously shared invaluable advice from his experience for about an hour and a half: "Always think of yourself as nothing and serve others humbly," "Forget about what you did in Korea," "It will take about a year to truly understand WHO," "The English used here is as sophisticated as that of diplomats, so you must master it," "Work hard, but always give credit to others," and "Avoid saying 'In Korea, we do it this way,' but if necessary, say 'In some countries...' instead."



The lawn of WHO/WPRO. I am represented by a dot on the letter 'W'.

Afterward, I toured Room 3308, my future office, which had previously been used by CK, a long-standing figure at WHO after 13 years of service. The room had good lighting, and I liked the space.

After work, Mr. Shin and I visited the bar at the Manila Hotel, where General MacArthur had his office during World War II. We then had dinner at a nearby restaurant, enjoying the sound of the waves and the smell of the sea. The restaurant's deck was built right over the ocean, so the sea breeze blew strongly, and the air was so humid it made my skin feel sticky.

After his term, he was appointed as Honorary RD by his successor, Dr. Omi. Dr. Han is known for his leadership and for offering valuable guidance, especially encouraging humility and collaboration in the field of international public health.

Though I was exhausted from the early start in Korea, this was a day I would never forget.

August 26

It is my second night in Manila. At lunch today, I moved from the resort-like Westin Philippine Plaza Hotel to the more practical Manila Pavilion, which is closer to the WHO office. It is a convenient location, in a busy area, and it even has a gym, which should make daily life easier.

The day started at 8 a.m. with briefings, moving from one place to another within the office. I spent most of the time learning how to adapt to this new work environment. Laila, with her serious but constantly smiling face, looks like she will make an excellent secretary. She told me it takes her three hours just to commute to work. I was astonished. Six hours a day spent commuting—does that mean she is living with admirable diligence or simply enduring great hardship?

Mr. Shin reminded me several times, “Filipinos have a lot of pride.” Even if they do not openly express it, diplomacy is the default approach, and genuine care for others is highly valued. Pastor Kim’s sermon last Sunday about “Doing everything as unto the Lord” remains vivid in my mind.

I realize now how important it is to establish a routine here. It is the only way to be productive and achieve results. Each day, built with this kind of intention, will eventually contribute to something meaningful. I left a lot behind in Korea to take on this opportunity, so I have to face this challenge with unwavering determination.

August 28

I woke up at 6 a.m. and hurried to make it to work by 7.

I received my phone pin number and called Suon⁵. Later, my wife called, and we talked about how uneasy she feels moving from our familiar,

⁵ Suon is my daughter. She graduated from the Dept of Economics at SNU and received a master’s degree in politics from Yale. She is currently working as a research fellow at a government-funded research institute in Korea.

comfortable home to unfamiliar Bongcheon-dong⁶. It must be very similar to the sadness I felt when we sold our beloved apartment in Imun-dong⁷. Only time will ease these feelings, and soon, Manila will become our new place to settle and feel at home.

I had lunch with Laila, and we chatted about family and other things I was curious about. She seems to have a healthy sense of pride, a kind personality, and a strong work ethic. I realized that if we can reduce some of the extra tasks, she is handling—like blood safety and lab work—it would benefit both her and the traditional medicine field.

In the evening, I visited Mr. Shin's house in Alabang. It is a two-story home in a luxurious residential area, almost like a little paradise.

I need to exercise, but once again, I skipped it today.

August 30

Since it was Saturday and a day off, I went to the office dressed casually. Laila was already there, fully absorbed in her work. Her dedication, even on her day off, impressed me. She did not seem bothered to see me working in the office either. It felt like we had a shared sense of camaraderie.

I offered to have lunch with her, but she said, "I already brought a piece of pie from home."

August 31

Today is my first Sunday here, and it is also the last day of August.

I got up a bit later than usual, had a late breakfast, and thought about reading something religious. That is when I noticed the *Kim Yoon-sik's Collection of Prefaces* that I had brought with me. Mrs. Jeong Young-shim, whom I met a long time ago, had sent me the book through her husband, Professor

⁶ It is a neighborhood close to SNU.

⁷ It is a neighborhood close to Kyung Hee University (KHU). Our family moved here when I became a professor at KHU in 1988, and left when I started working at WHO in 2003.

Kim Ki-beom of SNU College of Engineering, who is also a friend of mine. Inside was a letter, along with a short message that had given her strength during her studies in the UK: “Bon voyage!” The letter also included a brief note saying, “I hope you always achieve beautiful accomplishments, fiercely and warmly.”

Today, rather than studying, I plan to simply rest and enjoy the day. Over the past few days, being alone here, I have found myself asking, “Why did I come here?” “Why did I leave behind so much to be here?” “Why did I choose this hardship?” “Did I really come here for the sake of globalizing traditional medicine, or was it something else?”

Since returning from a visiting professorship at Stanford University’s Department of Anesthesiology last year, I have felt a growing disillusionment with my career as a professor. It was not an issue with others or my relationships—it was more of an internal realization. I began to worry that I might become complacent, indulging in trivial comforts, and that troubled me. Outwardly, it may not have seemed like a problem, but I had started losing the sense of resolve I had back when I turned my life around as a student and dedicated myself to academic research.

The main reason I came here was to “find my cheese.” Although I do not have a clear picture of what the future holds, I believe the hard work I am doing here—different as it is from my academic pursuits—will influence the global medical community and ultimately benefit humanity. As I begin this new chapter, I still feel a sense of happiness. And because this path is one no one has taken before, even though it is challenging, it gives me the strength to keep going.

Winston Churchill once said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.” I, too, will take responsibility for this work, giving it my all while continuing to learn. And I will take my time with *Kim Yoon-sik’s Collection of Prefaces*, savoring it little by little whenever I have the chance.

September 2

Since last night, strong winds and rain have swept through as Typhoon Onyok passed, causing quite a commotion. The streets and sidewalks were

flooded on the way to the office, as the poor drainage turned the roads into rivers. I had to take a detour to finally get there. For the first time, I seriously felt the inconvenience of not having a car. The usually unseen three-wheeled pedicabs were happily speeding through the flooded streets, making it a busy morning for them. The typhoon did bring cooler weather, making it more comfortable despite the wind and heavy rain coming and going throughout the day.

In the morning, I began to feel the weight of my increasing workload. They say the office is at its busiest right now, preparing for the Regional Committee Meeting (RCM), the biggest event of the year. I was assigned to prepare Q&A materials on traditional medicine for Dr. Omi, RD. After that, I had a phone call with CK to prepare for the upcoming meeting in Beijing this October, followed by another call to Beijing and responding to an email from Dr. Zhang Xiaorui (ZX) in Geneva. The morning flew by.

Around 11:30 a.m., I moved from the Manila Pavilion to the Pearl Manila Hotel. The Pavilion was old, crowded with tourists, and noisy with various disturbances, so I decided to move, but the noise here was similar. The cost is slightly cheaper, but it is easy to see why. Anyway, I will stay here until I return to Korea on the 13th. Thanks to Mr. Shin's help, the move went smoothly. I feel blessed by God that wherever I go, there are always people helping me.

It is also enjoyable to chat with Mr. Shin during our time together. He knows all sorts of stories, like the distant relationship between Dr. Han Sang-tae and Dr. Lee Jong-wook, or how, during Dr. Lee's election for WHO DG, his wife's home country, Japan, offered no support. In fact, Japan secretly backed an African candidate, hoping to promote Dr. Omi for the next DG role.

I also read the meeting report online, written by Dr. Shen Zhixiang, Chief of the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) at the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (SATCM), who attended the 53rd WHA in May. It neatly summarizes China's stance and plans regarding WHO.

If there is any tangible result from this year's WHA in Geneva, it is that the Minister of K-MOHW arranged for me to be sent to Manila. However, just joining WHO does not mean everything will fall into place. If I am satisfied

with that alone, no real benefit will come. I need to calmly plan and prepare for the future.

September 7

Today is Sunday. Since I could not go to church, I spent some time reading the Bible and *Divine Calling*, a book Suon gave me.

I went to the airport to meet Mr. Kim Heon-ju and Ms. Lee You-young from K-MOHW's Department of International Cooperation, as well as Dr. Koh Eun-young from K-NIH, who are here for the RCM starting tomorrow. Although I have not been here long, I have already had quite a variety of experiences.

After returning to the hotel for a short rest and some exercise, I went to Manila Hotel to meet WHO DG Lee. He kindly offered to show me the room he was staying in, which had once served as General MacArthur's office and residence during the Pacific War. The suite had the atmosphere of a museum.

After leaving the hotel, I joined Mr. Kim and others for dinner at Mr. Shin's house, then returned to the hotel. Later, we gathered again in DG Lee's room at Manila Hotel. Present were Mr. Moon Kyung-tae from K-MOHW, Dr. Ahn Dong-il, and Mr. Kim's team. We shared stories about the past DG election and discussed various topics.

It became clear that DG Lee does not seem very supportive of traditional medicine. Perhaps this is because he left Korea before traditional medicine gained proper recognition. He also did not have fond memories of CK or ZX, sharing more frustrations about them than pleasant stories. When Mr. Moon used the term 'Western doctors,' DG Lee sharply responded, "A doctor is a doctor, what is a 'Western doctor'?" Hearing this, I began to understand why Dr. Han Sang-tae once said, "Dr. Lee Jong-wook lacks leadership and isn't fit to be DG."

A leader of an organization should be able to embrace all aspects of it. While there is nothing inherently wrong with speaking one's mind, it made me feel that his capacity as a leader was somewhat limited.

September 8

Today marks the opening of the 54th WHO/WPRO RCM. In a short period, I have already gained a lot of experience. This year, there is an RD election, but with Dr. Omi running unopposed, there is no tension in the air.

It is somewhat unusual to see Dr. Lee, now the DG of WHO in Geneva, attending this meeting. However, here at WPRO, it seems that RD Omi is treated with more respect than DG Lee. This might be because Dr. Lee is not particularly adept at navigating political situations.

Even so, the staff here, who once worked with Dr. Lee and witnessed his rise to DG, warmly welcome him. Their kindness is evident.

In the evening, we gathered for a farewell dinner for Mr. Moon with Dr. Ra Sung-sup from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). However, the rich food and beer did not sit well with me and upset my stomach. Perhaps it is just part of the experience of adjusting to this hot foreign country.

September 12

My stomach has recovered from yesterday's bout of diarrhea, so I have started eating again. I feel like I am going through my 'initiation' here in the Philippines. When I am alone, I must live with the mindset of a seeker. If I let my guard down even a little, I will lose focus.

Today marks the end of the RCM and the end of my three-week adaptation period. Tomorrow, I will return to Korea. In this relatively short time, I have been fortunate to meet key figures in my WHO journey, including Dr. Han Sang-tae, DG Dr. Lee, Mr. Moon from K-MOHW, and CK.

In the afternoon, I ran into Dr. Omi in the hallway. He was going around to each office, greeting everyone. Watching him hug the female staff members one by one did not seem inappropriate; in fact, it revealed a warm, human side to him.

After several delays, I finally had a two-hour meeting with CK. Even though we should have been closer, we had not had the chance to meet due to our busy schedules this past week. During our conversation, I was

able to grasp his core thoughts through the questions I had prepared. We resonate in many ways—we both come from academic backgrounds, have a strong sense of pride, and share a deep affection for traditional medicine. Although his knowledge is vast, his ability to measure and control his tone is a distinctly Chinese trait. Despite this, he has a strong Shao Yang personality⁸. I believe the best approach is to engage with him sincerely and without any ulterior motives. The success or failure of my work may very well depend on how closely I can collaborate with him.

I am tired after exercising for the first time in a while, but I know I still need to focus on building my network.

September 13

After three weeks, I am heading home.

Though it was not a long time, these weeks brought significant changes for me. I met my wife at the airport, and we went to our apartment in Bongcheon-dong. After staying in hotels in Manila, the apartment did not feel as small as before. Suon had a church event, so she came home late. My wife and I walked down to Bongcheon intersection for dinner.

September 14

I attended church service today for the first time in three weeks. It was good to see familiar faces. Since it is just after *Chuseok*⁹, not many people were there. The Filipino mango I brought to share was a big hit. I will have to bring more next time.

⁸ Shao Yang person (少陽人), according to Sasang Constitutional Medicine developed by Lee Je-ma, is characterized by the following personality traits: active and ambitious, assertive and bold, optimistic and social, and decisive yet sometimes impatient. They are effective in motivating others and driving projects forward with enthusiasm.

⁹ *Chuseok* (秋夕, Korean Harvest Festival) is one of the most important traditional holidays in Korea. It is a time for families to gather and celebrate the harvest, give thanks to their ancestors, and enjoy traditional food and games. Held on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month, it typically spans three days.

September 15

At 7:30 a.m., I had breakfast at the Ramada Renaissance Hotel with President Ahn Jae-kyu and VP Lee Eung-sae of AKOM. I emphasized, "Don't be satisfied just because you sent me to Manila. The role of AKOM is to support me in getting the work done there." In response, President Ahn said, "Since it's difficult to manage the budget this year, we'll establish a fund for international cooperation starting next year." I suggested the fund be around \$100,000 annually. The conversation felt somewhat uncomfortable, as if I were begging, rather than them proactively offering support. Even though I was not asking for personal gain, it did not leave a pleasant feeling.

On the surface, AKOM seems to support me, but it feels like they had someone else in mind for this role. I guess I was not exactly the person they wanted. What is really needed is genuine cooperation from the heart, but it seems the leadership finds me burdensome.

In the morning, the path to KHU felt unfamiliar. Perhaps my heart has already left. On the way back, I stopped by Asan Medical Center to attend the funeral of Director Shin Joon-shik's mother from Jaseng Korean Medicine Hospital, before heading back to Bongcheon-dong.

At 7 p.m., I met CK's team at Incheon Airport, and we flew to Daegu. Now the real work begins.

The night unfolds its beauty over Bomun Lake, as seen from my hotel room.

September 17

At exactly 9 a.m., 'The 2nd Consultation on Traditional and Modern Medicine: Harmonizing the Two Approaches' began smoothly. Even though this was the first meeting I have overseen, I did not feel too nervous.

As this is the first official event, I oversee, making a good first impression is crucial. Before coming to Manila, I aimed to embody the virtues of water¹⁰,

¹⁰ The phrase "上善若水" is often translated as "Supreme goodness is like water." This phrase comes from Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* and means that the greatest virtue resembles water, which benefits all things without striving for recognition. Water is humble, flowing to the lowest places, yet it is essential for life, adaptable, and powerful in its quiet strength, symbolizing the ideal way of living in harmony with the world.

and I need to keep that in mind at every moment. Although the attendees come from different countries, more than half are Chinese. Since most of them are close to CK, it is essential to maintain good relationships with the Chinese.



The person standing front and center is President Hwang Byung-tae of DHU, Dr. Umadevi from PNG, Dr. George Slama, and CK (far right).

September 19

It is the second day of the meeting. The session on herbal medicine did not seem to be progressing smoothly, and I considered canceling the sightseeing plans. However, as expected of experts, they managed to stay on schedule.

Although I have been to Bulguk Temple (佛國寺) before, it still gives me a special feeling each time. Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu¹¹ once visited and remarked, “There is no 25th Hour here.” After leaving Bulguk Temple, we headed to the museum, where I reunited with Suon and Dr. Choi Byung-il.

¹¹ Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu (1916–1992) was a Romanian writer and diplomat, best known for his 1949 novel ‘The 25th Hour.’ The title refers to a concept beyond normal time constraints, symbolizing a moment for reflection, evaluation, and searching for meaning amid chaos. The novel follows the difficult experiences of Johann Moritz, a Romanian peasant, during World War II as he endures the harsh and absurd nature of political and military power.

Dinner was hosted by Dr. Choi at 'Seokha,' a traditional Korean restaurant near Silla General Kim Yu-sin's tomb. Everyone enjoyed the food, drinks, and lively conversation, making it a festive conclusion to the event. Even on the bus ride back, the humor and excitement continued.

September 20

The meeting concluded successfully. While writing the final report will be the last task, I anticipate it will be above average in quality. During the closing ceremony, I presented CK with a replica of the Silla golden crown as a gesture of respect for my predecessor.

Now everyone is returning to their respective places, likely with a mix of satisfaction and lingering thoughts. President Hwang Byung-tae's experience, insight, and drive will surely be remembered. The Korean participants at this meeting must have realized how crucial English communication skills are at international conferences, even more so than knowledge or expertise.

At least in terms of event management and hospitality, I have heard it was more abundant and smoother than any other meeting.

In the evening, I canceled my dinner appointment with Mr. Moon Kyung-tae, had a meal near the apartment, and discussed building the WHO traditional medicine portal with Professors Shim Bum-sang and Park Kyung-mo at home. Although our current situation may feel difficult and frustrating, if we continue to encourage one another, we can turn the vision we share into reality.

September 21

I headed to Incheon Airport early in the morning. Dr. Slama and CK's team had already arrived just before us. Dr. Slama mentioned he had been concerned because he could not spot my wife and me. He is truly a man of kindness and courtesy.

When we landed in Manila, my wife remarked, "My first impression of the Philippines is that it feels somewhat similar to Taiwan." Perhaps part of

this is due to her lowered expectations, but she seemed quite content with the Tropicana Hotel, where we will be staying. Our previous experiences in Taiwan and Beijing seem to have helped us adjust here. The room is bigger than our apartment back in Bongcheon-dong, so it should be comfortable enough for a few months. I had chosen this place after quite a bit of searching. Once we unpacked, we went grocery shopping at the nearby Robinson Mall. It felt like we were setting up a new home—almost like newlyweds.

September 22

During lunch, I met my wife by the fountain at Robinson Mall, and we went to a *dim sum* Chinese restaurant on the second floor. Yesterday's lunch at TGI Fridays had taken too long, but today's meal was more enjoyable, with better timing. The *suan la tang*¹² was a bit much for just the two of us, but it was spicy, comforting, and tasted great. In the evening, I met up with my wife again after work, bought her a swimsuit, and then we returned to the hotel for a light jog and some swimming. It is nice to have some time for exercise and relaxation, away from the outside world.

September 24

The meetings continue.

In the morning, I was in the office, and in the afternoon, I participated in discussions with WR/CLO¹³s from various countries. The schedule is tight, but it is efficient and productive, providing a valuable opportunity to exchange diverse information about each country.

¹² *Suan la tang* (酸辣湯) is a classic Chinese soup known for its contrasting flavors—sourness from vinegar and spiciness from chili. It is a popular dish in Chinese cuisine, typically made with ingredients like *tofu*, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and sometimes pork or chicken. The soup is thickened with cornstarch and often garnished with green onions or cilantro. It is commonly enjoyed as a starter or part of a larger meal.

¹³ WR/CLO refers to the “WHO Representative/Country Liaison Officer.” This designation is used within the WHO for the senior official who represents the organization in a specific country or region. The WR/CLO acts as the main point of contact between the WHO and the host government, coordinating health-related activities, advising on public health matters, and overseeing the implementation of WHO programs in the country. This role is critical in facilitating collaboration between the WHO and national health authorities.

After work, I was exhausted, and resting seemed better than exercising. My wife had gone out to the mall and seemed to have strained a muscle on the inside of her thigh, so I gave her acupuncture. She felt better afterward, but we decided to rest for the night.

September 27

At the request of the WHO Golf Club, led by Dr. Santoso, I played golf at the Navy Golf Club starting at 9 a.m. I had not played in a year and a half since returning from the U.S., so I was a bit worried. Thankfully, I ended up with the same score as CK, 100. Considering how long it had been, I managed to save face. Since I was not very serious about golf even back in the U.S., not playing for a while did not seem to make much of a difference. The intense sun left my neck and arms sunburned. After the game, we all gathered for lunch and drinks.

After a short rest at the hotel, I went with Dr. Soe, the Director of our department, to his apartment. It was my first time visiting Makati. Although it was night and I could not see much, the atmosphere and the cars on the street were noticeably different from the older part of Manila where the office is located. No wonder my wife was excited when she visited Makati a few days ago with Dr. Ahn Dong-il's wife. Just 10 kilometers away from the office lies a completely different world.

Dr. Soe lives in a high-end apartment on the 12th floor, offering a nice night-time view of the city from three sides. My wife, along with CK, Dr. Nukuro and his wife, and Dr. Corinne Capuano, were also invited. It seemed like a special gesture, especially since I am only here on a short-term assignment. I was impressed by Dr. Soe's meticulous and sincere manners, and I really appreciated the invitation. His wife, who seems to be quite a bit younger, has a cute appearance and a strong-willed personality. She kindly showed us around the apartment. My wife seemed to have already decided this was the kind of place she would like to live in. Although the building is a bit old, the apartment feels stable and is in good condition. The meal was not overly fancy, and the way they naturally entertained us gave us a glimpse of a lifestyle we might adopt in the future.

It was a weekend where I finally felt like I could escape from work and enjoy a sense of freedom.

September 28

I went to Manila New Life Church with Dr. Ahn Dong-il. Whenever I venture abroad and find a new church to call my sanctuary, questions linger like whispered hymns: “What ambiance will embrace me?” “Who are the souls that gather?” “What sort of shepherd guides the flock?” It is always a mix of curiosity and concern since I cannot just go to any church. The service seemed to incorporate some Catholic elements. Although it is primarily Presbyterian, its non-denominational approach suited us well.

After lunch with Pastor Jeong Gi-hwan, we visited Dr. Ahn’s home with his wife. It is a quiet, two-story house in an old residential area, giving off a calm and settled vibe. My wife seemed a bit anxious, worrying that I might start leaning toward preferring a single-family home. After walking around the neighborhood sports ground, we visited the International School Manila (ISM), toured some newly built apartments nearby, and saw other apartments in Rockwell. We returned to Dr. Ahn’s neighborhood and enjoyed the afternoon rain with a cozy chat at Starbucks, talking about topics like body constitution. On the way back, we had dinner at a newly opened Chinese restaurant near the WHO office.

October 3

It is my birthday.

Yesterday, Dr. Omi invited all staff members with October birthdays to his office, where we cut a cake and sang birthday songs. Since I was the first one to have a birthday in October, I blew out the candles on behalf of everyone. It was the first time I experienced a birthday celebration at work, and I thought to myself, “This is one of life’s simple joys.”

In the morning, Dr. Soe asked to meet, so I went to his office. We briefly discussed the Korean government’s funding, then he said, “Let’s go to the next room.” When we entered the meeting room, about 30 colleagues from our department were gathered there. What a surprise! I thought yester-

day's celebration was the end of it, but the entire DHS¹⁴ staff had gathered to celebrate my birthday again. How can I repay such kindness? When asked to make a wish, I said, "I want to keep working here." In hindsight, I realized it would have been better to say, "I want to keep working with such wonderful people like all of you."

I have lived a life without much emphasis on style or leisure. Watching them, I found myself reflecting on what life is about. Someone once told me they live for their birthdays and Christmas, cherishing those two days each year. While I cannot live exactly like that, I should aim for something similar—celebrating and respecting myself and my beliefs.

Thanks to them, I had a heartwarming day. I realized I should also live with care, both for myself and for others, just like they do.

Dr. Soe suggested, "How about offering acupuncture treatments to the staff officially from now on?" Everyone seemed to welcome the idea. If I can contribute by serving them this way, and if the staff can experience traditional medicine firsthand through acupuncture, it could be a wonderful opportunity¹⁵.

In the morning, I received an email from Professor Tsutani Kiichiro¹⁶ (TK) from Tokyo University, saying he would attend the APL standardization meeting between China, Korea, and Japan at the end of October. As CK had been concerned, the tension seems to be slowly becoming a reality. Since TK expressed his willingness to participate, it would not be right to refuse. CK mentioned that he has no personal issues with TK, so it seems best to accept for now, though I may need to take some preventive measures beforehand. My fundamental approach should be to follow the WHO's mission and broader goals, setting aside any personal feelings.

¹⁴ Department of Health Sector Development

¹⁵ During the five years I worked there, about one-third of all staffs received acupuncture treatment from me.

¹⁶ From 1985, he served as the responsible officer of traditional medicine at WHO/WPRO for six years. After returning to Japan, he became a professor at the Tokyo University and continues to be involved in international activities related to traditional medicine in Japan.