

# INTESTINAL TREMATODES INFECTING HUMANS IN KOREA

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**Abstract.** Sixteen species of intestinal trematodes have been recovered from humans in Korea. They include 10 species of the family Heterophyidae (*Metagonimus yokogawai*, *M. takahashii*, *Heterophyes nocens*, *H. heterophyes*, *H. dispar*, *Heterophyopsis continua*, *Pygidiopsis summa*, *Stellantchasmus falcatus*, *Centrocestus armatus*, and *Stictodora fuscatum*); one species of Diplostomidae (*Fibricola seoulensis*); three species of Echinostomatidae (*Echinostoma hortense*, *E. cinetorchis*, and *Echinochasmus japonicus*); one species of Plagiorchiidae (*Plagiorchis* sp.), and one species of Gymnophallidae (*Gymnophalloides* sp.).

Biological and epidemiological studies have shown that all of these species are endemic to Korea except *H. heterophyes* and *H. dispar*, which were imported from the Middle East, and *Plagiorchis* sp., which has not been found in Korea. Several fresh water fish were found carrying metacercarial stages of *M. yokogawai*, *M. takahashii*, *C. armatus*, *E. hortense*, *E. cinetorchis* and *E. japonicus*. Brackish water fish were found to be the second intermediate host of *H. nocens*, *H. continua*, *P. summa*, *S. falcatus*, and/or *S. fuscatum*. Terrestrial snakes were the second intermediate (or paratenic) host of *F. seoulensis*. Among these intestinal flukes, *M. yokogawai* is the most common one in Korea.

## INTRODUCTION

Among the trematodes infecting the human host, the liver fluke (*Clonorchis sinensis*) and the lung fluke (*Paragonimus westermani*), transmitted by crabs or crayfish, are important parasites because of their relatively high prevalence and wide geographical distribution in Korea. Recently, however, trematodes infecting the intestinal tract of animals and man (intestinal flukes) have become important, because they cause food-borne parasitic zoonoses. There are 16 species that belong to five families (Table 1). This paper reviews the biological and epidemiological aspects of intestinal trematodes affecting humans in Korea.

## FAMILY HETEROPHYIDAE

*Metagonimus yokogawai* (Katsurada, 1912) Katsurada, 1912

This is the most common species of intestinal trematode reported in Korea. The presence of human infection with this fluke was suggested earlier in Korea by the recovery of eggs from fecal examinations, but the identification of adult worms was not made until 1971 (Seo *et al*,

1971). Streams in eastern and southern coastal areas, where sweetfish (*Plecoglossus altivelis*) are found, are known to be the endemic foci of metagonimiasis. The overall egg positive rate of riverside people was estimated at 4.8% (Seo *et al*, 1981c). The Sumjin, Tamjin, and Boseong Rivers, and Geoje Island are highly endemic areas where the villagers have 10-20% egg positive rates (Chai *et al*, 1977; Seo *et al*, 1981c).

Morphologically, this species is distinguished from *M. takahashii* by the location and arrangement of two testes and size of the eggs (Saito, 1984). Fresh water snails, *Semisulcospira coreana* and *S. libertina*, are the first intermediate host of *M. yokogawai*. Second intermediate hosts include the sweetfish, the dace (*Tribolodon taczanowskii*) (Choi *et al*, 1966), and the perch (*Lateolabrax japonicus*) (Ahn, 1983). Dogs, rats, and cats are reported natural final hosts, but their significance as a source of human infection has not been clarified.

The intestinal histopathology was studied in rats, cats or dogs (Chai, 1979; Kang *et al*, 1983), with the pathology characterized by villous atrophy and crypt hyperplasia, and with variable degrees of inflammatory cell infiltrations. Experi-

Table 1  
Intestinal flukes infecting humans in Korea

| Family species                  | Second IH                                   | Egg size (µm)   | Adult size (mm)    |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Heterophyidae</b>            |   |                 |                    |
| <i>Metagonimus yokogawai</i>    | fresh water fish<br>(sweet fish)            | 28-30 × 16-17   | 1.0-2.0 × 0.4-0.6  |
| <i>M.takahashii</i>             | fresh water fish<br>(carps)                 | 32-36 × 18-23   | 0.8-1.5 × 0.4-0.7  |
| <i>Heterophyes nocens</i>       | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts, gobies)   | 25-28 × 14-16   | 0.9-1.6 × 0.5-0.8  |
| <i>H.heterophyes*</i>           | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts)           | 28-30 × 15-17   | 1.0-1.7 × 0.3-0.4  |
| <i>H.dispar*</i>                | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts)           | 19-25 × 13-15   | 1.0-1.7 × 0.5-0.6  |
| <i>Heterophyopsis continua</i>  | brackish water fish<br>(perches, gobies)    | 25-27 × 14-16   | 2.7-2.8 × 0.5-0.6  |
| <i>Pygidiopsis summa</i>        | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts, gobies)   | 19-26 × 12-14   | 0.5-0.8 × 0.3-0.4  |
| <i>Stellantchasmus faloatus</i> | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts)           | 22-23 × 11-12   | 0.4-0.7 × 0.3-0.4  |
| <i>Centrocestus armatus</i>     | fresh water fish<br>(carps)                 | 28-32 × 16-17   | 0.4-0.6 × 0.2-0.3  |
| <i>Stictodora fuscatum</i>      | brackish water fish<br>(mulletts)           | 34-38 × 20-23   | 0.9-1.0 × 0.3-0.4  |
| <b>Diplostomidae</b>            |   |                 |                    |
| <i>Fibricola seoulensis</i>     | tadpoles and frogs<br>terrestrial snakes    | 81-102 × 51-63  | 0.8-1.2 × 0.4-0.5  |
| <b>Echinostomatidae</b>         |   |                 |                    |
| <i>Echinostoma hortense</i>     | fresh water fish<br>(loaches, carps)        | 105-128 × 43-68 | 8.2-14.0 × 0.9-1.6 |
| <i>E.cinetorchis</i>            | fresh water fish<br>(loaches, large snails) | 95-105 × 60-68  | 8.6-15.0 × 2.0-2.4 |
| <i>Echinochasmus japonicus</i>  | fresh water fish<br>(carps)                 | 85 × 56         | 0.5-1.0 × 0.3      |
| <b>Plagiorchiidae</b>           |   |                 |                    |
| <i>Plagiorchis sp.</i>          | fresh water fish<br>(?)                     | 32-38 × 20-24   | 2.9-3.0 × 0.8-1.0  |
| <b>Gymnophallidae</b>           |   |                 |                    |
| <i>Gymnophalloides sp.</i>      | marine bivalves<br>(oyster)                 | 20-25 × 12-14   | 0.4-0.5 × 0.2-0.3  |

\* Cases were imported from Africa and Middle East.

mental immunosuppression of the host can prolong the survival time of the parasite in the host intestine (Chai *et al*, 1984b).

The most frequent complaints from humans were abdominal pain, diarrhea and lethargy (Cho

*et al*, 1984). The diagnosis is usually based on recovery of eggs in feces; however, eggs may be absent in light infections with less than 100 worms. The ELISA serological test may be helpful for such cases (Chai *et al*, 1989). The

drug of choice is praziquantel, a single oral dose of 10–20 mg/kg, which gave an efficacy of 95–100% (Rim *et al.*, 1978). Bithionol and niclosamide are also of therapeutic value.

*Metagonimus takahashii* Suzuki, 1930

This species differs from *M. yokogawai* in the position of the anterior testis (more separation from posterior one), distribution of vitelline follicles (more posterior and more abundant), and larger size of eggs (32–36 µm) (Saito, 1984). However, because of the presence of an intermediate type, *Metagonimus* Miyata type (Saito, 1984), the validity of this needs further clarification. *M. takahashii* has been reported from Japan and Korea.

The presence of this species in Korea was first reported by Chun (1960a) who recovered adult worms from experimentally infected rabbits fed metacercariae obtained from crucian carps. Human infections were reported in 1985 and 1988 (Ahn and Ryang, 1988), however, they were not based on a detailed morphological diagnosis of worms.

Unlike *M. yokogawai*, *M. takahashii* (and/or *Metagonimus* Miyata type) is distributed along small streams in inland areas of Korea. The snail host is *S. coreana* or *Koreanomelanus nodifila* (Cho *et al.*, 1984), and the fish host is *Carrasius carrasius* (Chun, 1960a), *Cyprinus carpio*, *Pseudorasbora parva*, or *Zacco platypus* (for Miyata type). There have been few reports on reservoir hosts.

*Heterophyes nocens* Onji and Nishio, 1916

This species is morphologically close to *H. heterophyes*, which is prevalent in Egypt and the Middle East, but it differs by the morphology of genital sucker, especially the number of rodlets on the gonotyl: 50–62 in *H. nocens* and 70–85 in *H. heterophyes*. This species has been reported from Korea and Japan.

In Korea, the metacercariae were first found in 1978–1979 (Seo *et al.*, 1980b) from mullets (*Mugil cephalus*) captured in three southern coastal areas. Before 1990, human infections with this fluke were verified in 13 persons from scattered areas (Seo *et al.*, 1981a; Chai *et al.*, 1984a, 1985b; Sohn *et al.*, 1989). In April 1990,

a highly endemic area of *H. nocens* infection was discovered from a southwestern coastal island, where as many as 42% of the population was found infected (to be published).

The first intermediate host is suspected to be a brackish water snail. The second intermediate host is brackish water fish, such as mullets or gobies (*Acanthogobius flavimanus*) (Seo *et al.*, 1981b). Domestic cats were found naturally infected (Eom *et al.*, 1985).

*Heterophyopsis continua* (Onji and Nishio, 1916) Yamaguti, 1958

This species, first found in cats experimentally fed mullets (*Mugil cephalus*) harboring metacercariae, and is now known to be distributed in Korea, Japan and China (Seo *et al.*, 1984b).

The presence of *H. continua* in Korea was first verified by Chun (1960b) who observed metacercariae in the flesh of perch and gobies. Two cases of human infection in Korea were reported by Seo *et al.* (1984b); two additional cases were described by Hong and Han (1989). The first intermediate host is not known in Korea. The second intermediate hosts are perch, gobies, shad (*Clupanodon punctatus*) (Chun 1960b), and sweetfish (Cho and Kim, 1985). Domestic cats were reported to be naturally infected (Eom *et al.*, 1985). Dogs (Seo *et al.*, 1984b) and chicks (Hong *et al.*, 1990) have been experimentally infected.

*Pygidiopsis summa* Onji and Nishio, 1916

This species was first found in Japan in dogs fed mullets harboring metacercariae, and it is now known to be distributed in Korea. *P. summa* is differentiated from *P. genata* in the morphology of the ventral sucker, genital apparatus, and ceca (Chai *et al.*, 1986).

The presence of *P. summa* in Korea was first described by Chun (1963), who observed metacercariae from the gill and muscle of mullets. Human infection was first reported from 8 persons living in a salt farm village who ate raw mullets (Seo *et al.*, 1981a).

The first intermediate host is *Cerithidea* (= *Tympanotonus*) sp. (unpublished data). The second intermediate hosts are mullets and gobies

(Seo *et al*, 1981b). Natural infection of domestic cats was reported (Eom *et al*, 1985). In experimental rats and mice, the middle intestine is most frequently infected, and like *M. yokogawai*, the worms cause severe villous atrophy and crypt hyperplasia with inflammation of the mucosa (Seo *et al*, 1986).

*Stellantchasmus falcatus* Onji and Nishio, 1916

Human infections with *S. falcatus* have been reported from several Asian-Pacific countries, including Korea (Seo *et al*, 1984a; Hong *et al*, 1986). The life cycle was studied in Hawaii; the first intermediate host is *Stenomelania newcombi* or *Thiara granifera* (Noda, 1959) and the second intermediate host is the mullet (Chai and Sohn, 1988). In Korea, the snail host is not yet known.

*Centrocestus armatus* (Tanabe, 1922)

This fluke was first described by Tanabe (1922) from dogs, cats, rabbits, rats, and mice, fed cyprinoid fish harboring metacercariae. An experimental infection was reported in Japan (Tanabe, 1922) and a natural infection was found in Korea (Hong *et al*, 1988).

The first intermediate host is *Semisulcospira* sp. in Japan (Takahashi, 1929). Fresh water fish, such as *Zacco platypus*, *Rhodeus ocellatus*, *Gobius similis*, *Pseudorasbora parva*, *Pelteobagrus fulvidraco*, and several other species, were reported to harbor the metacercariae of *C. armatus* in Korea (Lee *et al*, 1984 a, b). A recent field survey on metacercarial infection of fish hosts (Hong *et al*, 1989b) showed that *Z. platypus* and *Z. temminckii* caught in the large rivers of south Korea were heavily infected.

*Stictodora fuscatum* Onji and Nishio, 1916

This species was originally described by Onji and Nishio (1916) from cats fed infected mullets (*M. cephalus*) in Japan. Human infection with *Stictodora* sp. was reported from a young Korean fond of eating raw mullets or gobies (Chai *et al*, 1988).

FAMILY DIPLOSTOMIDAE

*Fibricola seoulensis* Seo, Rim and Lee, 1964

This species was first described by Seo *et al*,

(1964) from the small intestine of house rats captured in Seoul and are now known to be distributed almost all over the country (Seo, 1990). Before 1982, *F. seoulensis* failed to draw medical attention. In 1982, a human suffering from acute abdominal pain and fever (Seo *et al*, 1982) had eaten raw snake 7 days prior to admission to the hospital. Later, the snakes, *Rhabdophis* (= *Natrix*) *tigrina*, were found to carry metacercariae (Hong *et al*, 1982). Twenty-five additional human infections were found among soldiers eating snakes during survival training (Hong *et al*, 1984; 1986).

Life cycle studies revealed that the first intermediate host is a fresh water snail, *Hippeutis cantori*, and the second intermediate hosts are tadpoles and frogs (Seo *et al*, 1988). The terrestrial snake, *R. tigrina*, is regarded as a paratenic host. Mice, rats, Guinea pigs, and chicks were susceptible to experimental infection (Seo, 1990). In experimental animals, the duodenum is the most favorite site of the worms, and villous atrophy and crypt hyperplasia are the two major histopathological features of the mucosa (Lee *et al*, 1985).

The diagnosis of fibricoliasis is based upon recovery of eggs; however, the eggs should be differentiated from those of Echinostomatidae or Fasciolidae. Treatment is successful with a single dose of praziquantel, 10-20 mg/kg (Hong *et al*, 1984).

FAMILY ECHINOSTOMATIDAE

*Echinostoma hortense* Asada, 1926

This species was first described by Asada (1926) from the small intestine of house rats in Japan. The presence of *E. hortense* in Korea was reported by Park (1938) from rats in Seoul and human infection was reported by Seo *et al* (1983). A total of 77 egg or worm-proven cases were reported (Lee *et al*, 1988b). Cheongsong-gun, an island area in the southeastern part of Korea, was found to be highly endemic for human echinostomiasis, with an infection rate of 22.4% in the villagers (Lee *et al*, 1988b).

The first intermediate hosts in Korea are fresh water snails, such as *Lymnaea pervia* and *Radix auricularia coreana* (Ahn and Kang, 1988). Fish

hosts are *Misgurnus anguillicaudatus* (Chai *et al.*, 1985a), *M. mizolepis*, *Odontobutis obsura interrupta*, *Morocco oxycephalus*, *Squalidus coreanus* (Lee *et al.*, 1988b). Rats and dogs are natural final hosts (Cho *et al.*, 1984).

*Echinostoma cinetorchis* Ando and Ozaki, 1923

This species was described by Ando and Ozaki (1923) from rats in Japan, and has been reported from rats in Korea (Seo *et al.*, 1964). Human infections are reported from Japan (Kawahara and Yamamoto, 1933); four cases have been reported from Korea (Seo *et al.*, 1980a; Ryang *et al.*, 1986; Lee *et al.*, 1988a).

Life cycle studies in Korea (Seo *et al.*, 1984c; Lee *et al.*, 1990) showed that *Hippeutis cantori*, a fresh water snail, can serve as the first as well as the second intermediate host. Other fresh water snails, such as *Radix auricularia coreanus*, *Physa acuta*, and *Cipangopaludina* sp., or fresh water fish, such as *Misgurnus anguillicaudatus* can carry the metacercarial stage. Rats and dogs were found to be a natural final host (Cho *et al.*, 1984). Albino rats were highly susceptible to experimental infection with this fluke.

*Echinochasmus japonicus* Tanabe, 1926

This species was first described by Tanabe (1926) from the small intestine of experimentally infected dogs, cats, rats, mice, and birds with metacercariae from fresh water fish. Recently, natural human infections were reported in Korea (Seo *et al.*, 1985).

The existence of this fluke in Korea was suggested when metacercariae were found in fresh water fish (Chun, 1964; Lee *et al.*, 1984a, b), and later the successful recovery of adult worms from experimental mice was reported by Chai *et al.* (1985c). The first intermediate host in Korea is *Parafossarulus manchouricus* (Lee *et al.*, 1984a, b), and 18 species of fresh water fish, including *Pseudorasbora parva*, *Hypomesus olidus* and *Gnathopogon strigatus* (Lee *et al.*, 1984a, b) are second intermediate hosts. Natural infections are reported in chickens (unpublished) and ducks (Eom and Rim, 1984).

FAMILY PLAGIORCHIIDAE

*Plagiorchis* sp.

Three specimens of *Plagiorchis* sp. were recovered from a man after treatment with praziquantel (Hong *et al.*, 1989a). The patient recalled eating raw fresh water fish. The specific diagnosis of worms has been made.

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