

Institutionalizing Traditional East Asian Medicine within National Medical Systems in China, Korea, and Japan

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1. Aim

This paper aims to investigate how the traditional East Asian medicine, composed of herbal remedies, acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion, and massage, is institutionalized in three contemporary East Asian societies.

2. Data & Methods

This paper uses policy documents as the main source of data. The analysis focuses on the following aspects against which the nature of the institutionalization of the traditional medicine in each country is specified: the medical education and licensing of practitioners of traditional medicine, their legal rights and legitimated scope of practice vis-a-vis those of mainstream medical doctors, and the extent to which service provision of traditional medicine is being sanctioned and covered by the national health insurance system.

3. Results and Conclusion

Main findings are as follows: firstly, whereas China and Korea recognizes and institutionalizes the independent presence of medical schools of traditional medicine on their own, Japan does not. The cross-learning of biomedicine (at traditional medical schools in China and Korea; not so obvious in Japan) and traditional medicine (at biomedical schools in China and Japan; not so existent in Korea) is uniquely organized in these countries. Secondly, partly correlated with this first aspect, cross-practice of biomedicine by the practitioners of traditional medicine is unconditionally instituted in China, whereas that is institutionally prohibited in Korea where the professional category of traditional medical doctor is recognized at an equivalent level with biomedical doctors. In Japan, this high level of recognition is not established; instead, practitioner of traditional medicine are given only a secondary status as technical specialists. Lastly, the national health insurance system in each of these countries sanction traditional medicine as legitimate and publicly fundable medical services to different degrees. China has incorporated traditional medicine in the insurance system more comprehensively than Korea or Japan.