

Panel 11: Globalisation, Hybridity and Continuity in Traditional Japanese Health Practices

Panel Organiser: Professor Nancy Stalker (University of Texas at Austin)

Japan is one of the wealthiest and most technically advanced societies in the world today, with a well-known public health insurance system that allows even its poorer citizens access to advanced medical technologies. This has resulted in Japan's having one of the longest life spans in the world for women and men. Yet the quest for long life is not simply a matter of up-to-date medical science, as many Japanese seek to relieve the stress of their daily lives by reconnecting with older healing traditions. "Low-tech" traditional health therapies and forms of medical treatment that predate Japan's rapid modernization in the nineteenth century continue to be widely popular, although many times in hybrid forms that blend indigenous ideas about health with modern notions about the body and scientific medical treatment. This interdisciplinary panel explores three such "alternative" health therapies, namely macrobiotic diets, traditional pregnancy and birthing practices, and Sino-Japanese traditional medicine (kampô). We will demonstrate that for Japanese in the twenty-first century, traditional medicine remains a key element of everyday life.

Participants and Abstracts

11.01 Kampô, Patent Drugs, and Women's Health in Modern Japan

Susan L. Burns, The University of Chicago

Beginning in the 1870s, the Japanese government began an aggressive program of promoting "Western medicine," while simultaneously seeking to disestablish Sino-Japanese medicine (kampô) and indigenous forms of treatment. As a result, the lively trade in kampô-based patent medicines quickly became an object of government regulation. A series of new laws restricted how traditional patent drugs were marketed and established heavy taxes for both producers and retailers. The intent of these laws was to bring an end to the trade in patent drugs and its attendant culture of self-medication in order to promote the assimilation of Western medicine.

Some kampô-based patent medicine, however, continued to be widely used, most notably those that addressed afflictions of the female body. Drugs with names such as Haha no inochi ("Mother's Life"), Jitsubosen ("Real Mother's Pills") and Chûjôtô ("Chûjô Infusion") promised relief for "menstrual stagnation," "cold disorder," "hysteria," and the disorders and discomforts of pregnancy and the post-partum period.

This paper will explore the reasons for the popularity of kampô-based patent drugs for women over the course of the twentieth century. All three of these drugs continue to be manufactured today, but their formulas have not been static. "Mother's Life" now includes vitamins and calcium, and "Chûjô Infusion" recently began to claim efficacy for the symptoms of menopause as well as pregnancy. My study interrogates the shifting boundaries of what is considered kampô and examines its significance for conceptions of female health.

11.02 Ties that Bind: Pregnancy and the persistence of tradition in contemporary Japan

Amanda Seaman, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Although Japan's total fertility rate (TFL) is one of the lowest in the industrialized world, it also has one of the world's lowest infant mortality rates, with a high percentage of premature babies saved by advanced medical technology. Japanese stores are filled with high-tech baby goods, such as strollers and ergonomically-designed baby seats. Despite these trappings of modern, post-industrial childbearing, however, many Japanese women also visit Buddhist temples and shrines during the fifth month of their pregnancies, on the so-called "day of the dog", in search not only of supernatural aid for their labors, but of traditional support for their growing bellies in the form of the *hara obi* or "belly band". In this paper, I explore the persistence of traditional practices and lore surrounding the health of mothers and their children, in a Japanese society seemingly dominated by more "Western" beliefs and attitudes in this arena. I trace the role of traditional pregnancy advice and practice in modern literature about pregnancy and childbirth (including pregnancy advice manuals and autobiographical *manga*) and in ritual sites such as Tokyo's Suitengu Shrine, which remains a key destination for many women who are, or hope to become, pregnant. As I will show, while much traditional advice about pregnancy has been recast in order to make it fit with changes in scientific and medical practice, this very recasting also indicates the deep social, cultural, and psychological influence which so-called "traditional medicine" continues to exert within the imputedly "post-modern" world of twenty-first century Japan.

11.03 Macrobiotics: The Globalization of a Japanese Local Diet

Nancy Stalker, University of Texas at Austin

Macrobiotics, a holistic dietary system that originates in Japan and claims to promote healing, is enjoying a surge of popularity, in part due to the advocacy of celebrities like Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow. Thousands of books in multiple languages are available on its cooking techniques, philosophy and relationship to healthy lifestyles; macrobiotic restaurants and grocery stores are now found in nearly every major urban center. How did a health regimen based on traditional Japanese foods, including brown rice, fermented soy products and sea vegetables, become a global phenomenon?

Sakurazawa Yukikazu, a.k.a. Georges Ohsawa, (1893 – 1966) first systematized macrobiotics in the 1940s. In the 1950s and 60s he and his disciples Michio Kushi and Herman Aihara popularized the teachings among intellectuals and countercultural audiences in Europe and the U.S. Furthermore, they established food companies, restaurants, publications and institutes abroad to propagate macrobiotic teachings.

This paper interrogates the relationship between Sakurazawa, macrobiotics and "the West," questioning how this conjunction was central to the development and eventual success of macrobiotics, both in terms of early formulations that contrasted Japanese and Western diets and of postwar Western approbation as a factor in gaining domestic legitimacy. It will further analyze and contrast how advocates in Japan and abroad have continually adapted macrobiotic principles and practices over the subsequent decades to meet the needs and circumstances of diverse and international audiences.

11.04 Transformations and Social Responses, 1927-2008 – Sustainability of Contemporary Japanese Traditional Medicine

By TANOJIRI Tetsuro

Japanese traditional medicine established as a composition of pharmacotherapy, physical technique and dietetic therapy in the mid-18th century suffered devastating damage due to the execution of the Medical Law (established in 1873) as an integral part Japan's modernization policies. The present situation of Japanese traditional medicine on the periphery of modern mainstream medicine is a counterculture community, whose practical way of being prevalingly changes in accordance with the social change. As a result, the fact that it is functioning as a traditional medical movement suggests its high level of sustainability.

The traditional medical movement of a physical technique, which is known as "Noguchi-Seitai" and whose system and theory were established in 1927, passed through transformation stages, one in 1956 and the other one in 1968. The movement achieved to have the specific feature of being a community emerging concomitantly with medical technique continuously alternating between a host and a guest, and the medical practice based on the psychosomatic transformations arising from the self-training by the medical practitioner and the patient. The transformation in 1956 occurred in response to the desire for health and spirituality of the middle class, who rose suddenly in the postwar period of social disorder and turmoil, and in 1968 in response to the desire for health and spirituality of the baby boom generation in the mass society.

These specific features and social responses can also be observed in the movement of pharmacotherapy such as Nippon – Kanpou, and dietetic therapy such as macrobiotic.

11.05 Kampo: a Racial Science/Business?

Kuo, Wen-Hua (Center for General Education/Department of Public Health
National Yang-Ming University, TAIWAN)

Kampo is the general term for traditional medicine in Japan. It is usually considered an insignificant deviation of Chinese medical thoughts, or an Edo legacy that has waned and been replaced by synthetic pharmaceuticals. Yet, these statements fail to explain why kampo drugs still are welcomed and popular today, without the state's sanction. Some kampo drugs remain available in proscriptive repertory; meanwhile, in the over-the-counter (OTC) drug market, where most products claim to have kampo components, the volume of consumption is quite large.

Departing from a naive cultural explanation that singles out Japan for its insistence on the uniqueness of its bodily composition, this paper tries to look at the role the state plays in shaping what STS literature calls "regulatory culture" and hope to achieve a historical understanding of kampo's regulation during the period of Japan's modernization. It will investigate what the Japanese state did in forming this medical tradition and what other traditions became without its support. Complicating our understanding that considers kampo as just a racial science or business, this study hopes to question the seemingly perfect marriage between the Japanese race and kampo, as well as science and business.