

Assembling the Traditional Tibetan Medicine: geopolitical cultures through a historical lens

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Abstract

In the eighth century (728 CE), Tibetan King Trisong Deutsen (756-97) invited nine traditional doctors from neighboring regions of India, Kashmir, Tang, Persia, Drugu, East Turkestan, Mongolia, Dolpo and Nepal for his medical treatment, that later assembled into the first International Medical Symposium in Samye, the original capital of Tibet. Based on the output of the conference and further development, the book entitled “The Four Medical Tantras” published in twelfth century, marked the formation of Tibetan medical theory, and is generally studied in whole or part by practitioners of their medical training, serving as the manifestation of the school of Tibetan medicine. At that time, Tibet was the major cultural, political, and military force in Central and Inner Asia, and medicine was indeed a major object of domination. The Tibetan medicine is the science or art of healing assembled with a wide variety of medicinal and aromatic plants, animal part, minerals, and the knowledge on their medical functions, Buddhist practices on healing, *Amchis*, monks from eighth century. The establishment of the Tibetan medicine, and its maintain and dissemination, required continuous labouring to channel the network, cultural, political and economic, and in return, conditioned by them. The web of ever-changing trading paths that have been sensitive to geopolitical tensions, regulative systems on border control and economic calculations. Here, we argue how the territorial of Tibetan medicine extended through networks, medicinal, Buddhism, war and trade. We explore the tentative reflections on the identity, assembling and disassembling of Tibetan medicine an assemblage of heterogeneous components, encountered ecological, economic, trading, technological, political, ritual, religious, social, medical and knowledge systems, as well as from localized currents of tradition filtered through individual agency and daily practice, following multiple trajectories over different historical periods and via widely varying routes.

Keywords: Tibetan medicine, Assemblage, network, geopolitical culture, Medicinal and Aromatic Plants

Bio

Arjun Chapagain

Mr. Chapagain holds masters degree in Botany from Tribhuvan University, Nepal with couple of years experience in Natural resources, green economy, Himalayan livelihood, Forest Rights, resource, trade and market assessment of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs). Currently, he is doing PhD research at City University of Hong Kong on trade, trajectory and policies in Belt and Road countries, in particular medicinal and aromatic plants.

Linda Che-lan Li

Linda Li, Professor at Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong, stresses the role of collaboration as well as conflict in understanding politics and public policy. A specialist in intergovernmental relations and Chinese government reforms, her award-winning piece published in *Political Studies* back in 1997 advocates an alternative analytical framework to enable observers to take note, and work towards, the occurrence of collaboration and compromise, amidst a general context of mutual distrust and conflict. Trained in political science and sociology, her works have straddled the politics of central-local relations in China, government reforms, rural public finance, equity education, civil society coalitions, and cross-border relations to explore the dynamics of institutional and agency change processes.

June Wang

She received her PhD from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong and have been working as Associate Professor at Department of Public Policy, City University of Hong Kong. Her main research interest focuses on urban transformation in Chinese cities, particularly on gentrification and culture-led urban regeneration. Recently, she has been working on neoliberalization in developmental states, starting from the case of Singapore. Before joining the academic field, she worked as architect and urban planner in Shanghai for couples of years.