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Title

Something borrowed, something new:tracing non-biomedical pasts,presents, and futures in global health at the World Health Organization

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Introduction



For Peeko the African Penguin, Acupuncture is Routine Care

Learn how our vet team works to incorporate acupuncture into specialized treatment plans for Peeko and other animals.

By [New England Aquarium](#) on Thursday, March 07, 2024

Introduction



World Health Organization (WHO) ✓

@WHO

#TraditionalMedicine is rooted in Indigenous knowledges & natural resources of communities. It has been an integral resource for health in households for centuries.

WHO works to strengthen the evidence base of traditional medicine, enhancing its safety & efficacy

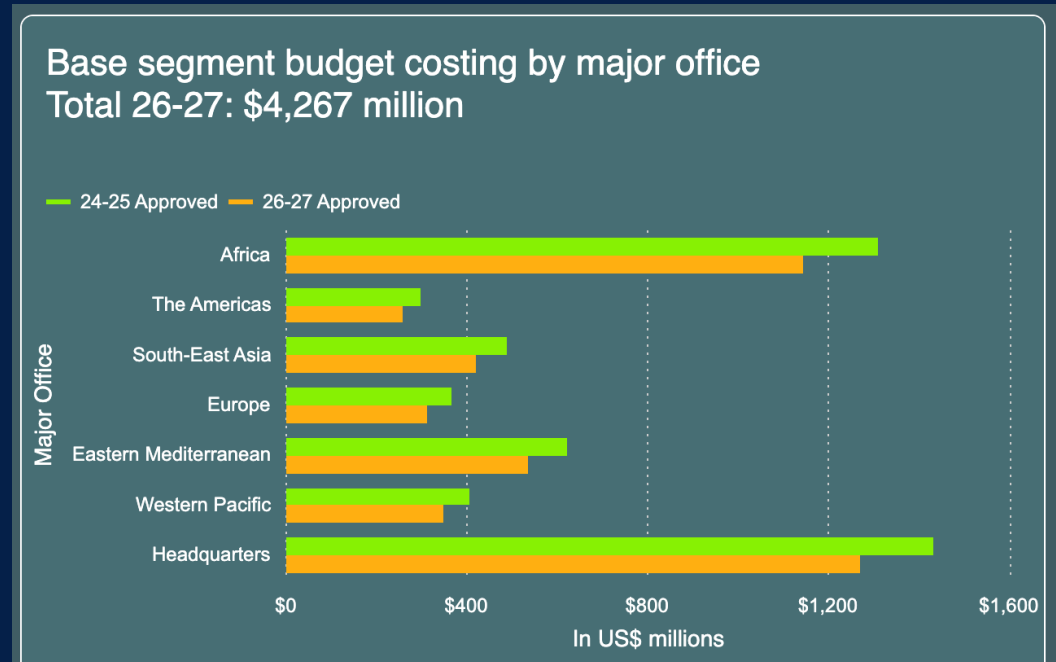
bit.ly/45JC61d

“the sum total of the **knowledge, skill, and practices** based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences **indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not**, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness”

Introduction

Why do we care?

- Why global health?
- Why the World Health Organization (WHO)?
- Why traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine (TCIM)?



Research questions and aims

Questions

1. Why would the WHO be motivated to integrate TCIM into its operation?
2. How, if at all, is it possible to integrate two ostensibly incompatible systems of health knowledge (biomedicine vs. TCIM) in global health policymaking?
3. What implications does the WHO's attitude towards TCIM carry for the field of global health and its practitioners?

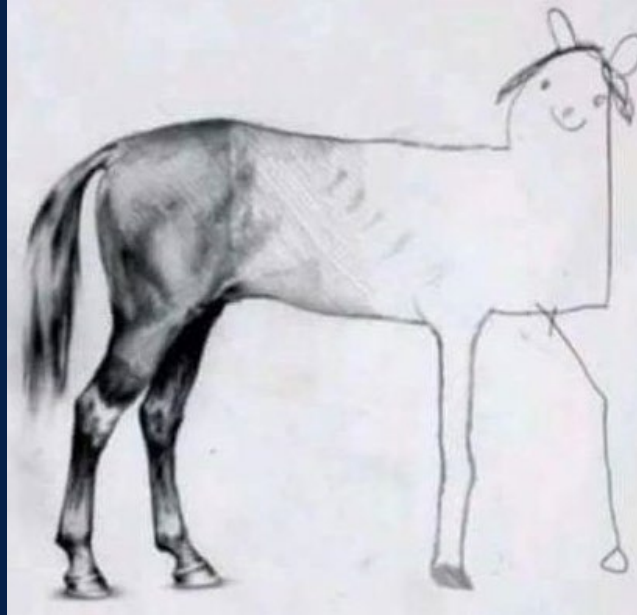
Aims

1. Trace whether and when the WHO acknowledges TCIM
2. If acknowledgement and integration exists, identify how (discourses, mechanisms, programmes) and why (reasoning, strategic objectives) it occurs
3. Determine the effects of the WHO's TCIM policymaking on the discipline, practice, and practitioners of global health

Research design

What I wanted to do vs. what I actually did

Large-scale
sentiment analysis
and periodization
of WHO's
organizational
attitude towards
TCIM over time



Proof of concept
corpus analysis
based on small-
scale sample of
publicly available
data online

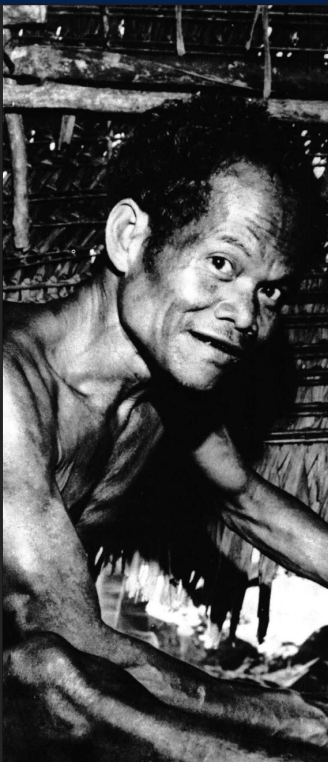
Finding the answer

Data source and methods



- A dataset of 298 documents on “traditional medicine” from the WHO’s Institutional Repository for Information Sharing (IRIS)
- Today, I’ll share:
 - One unexpected finding
 - Two initial motifs of interest
 - Three things I learned
 - Four future points of departure
 - A partridge in a pear tree

One unexpected finding: visual data!



Books, Publications and Films

“Herbal Medicine—fact or fiction?”

Since time immemorial, man has made use of plants and herbs to cure disease and heal injuries. In order to arouse public awareness of the existence and value of medicinal plants, a number of UN specialised agencies have joined together to co-produce a film on the subject.

The film opens in Mexico where we see Indians gathering a plant called barbasco, used for many years as a heart medicine but which is now being exploited for its contraceptive properties. For the vast majority of the rural world in developing countries, the only form of medical care that is available and trusted is the traditional healer, who often uses a combination of religion and herbs. Where one ends and the other begins is sometimes difficult to determine.

From Mexico, we move to Egypt and see something of the wide variety of medicinal plants that are sold in the herbal pharmacies there. Medicines made from plants are also available in developed parts of the world and much research is going on to determine exactly which constituents are responsible for the pharmacological activity observed.

We see in Africa however, as in other parts of the world, that the destruction of forests has caused the loss of many plant species which were used in herbal remedies. This can have a serious effect on the economy of countries who rely heavily on medicinal plants, since the cost of replacing them with chemical pharmaceuticals is high. In Vietnam, eighty per cent of the medicine used comes from plants and each village has its own green dispensary.

From Vietnam, the film moves on to India where the classic science of ayurvedic medicine is practised and

relies to a great extent on herbal medications. One often forgotten facet of these plants is that some of them are also very rich in natural vitamins. In India, vitamin A capsules made from plants are used to prevent xerophthalmia.

The last country that we visit in the film is China, where herbal medicine

In the Egyptian desert, a traditional healer seeks out the herbs that are valued for their healing properties. A still from the film “Herbal medicine—fact or fiction?”

Photo: WHO

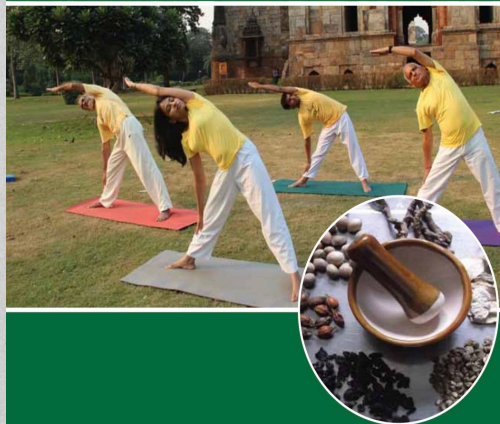


has been used for more than 4,000 years and is today combined successfully with modern medicine. We see a pharmaceutical factory that manufactures only herbally derived medicines and for many they are the medications of choice. As we complete our herbal tour of the world, we are left wondering what riches still remain to be uncovered.

The film “Herbal Medicine: fact or fiction?” is in 16 mm, colour, 27 minutes. It is available on sale in European countries from the World Health Organization, Geneva and, for the rest of the world, from UNICEF, New York.



Core and Reference Indicators for Monitoring Traditional and Complementary Medicine in South-East Asia



World Health Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR
South-East Asia



World Health Organization

WHO BENCHMARKS FOR THE TRAINING OF ACUPUNCTURE

Initial finding 1: time and location bound



Initial finding 1: time and location bound



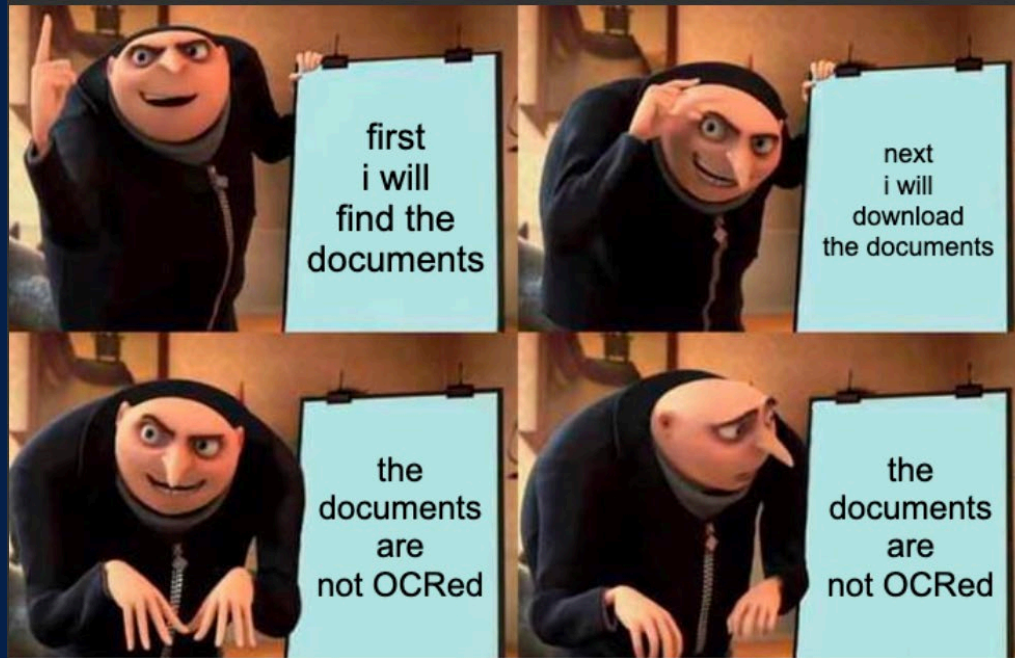
Initial finding 2: where does biomedicine appear?

- In a sample of 33 formal policy documents on TCIM ranging from 1979-2022, biomedic* appeared 37 times across 11 files, with the most common occurrences being:
 - Biomedical waste (10), Biomedical sciences (8), Biomedical research (5)
 - Only defined one time by “anatomy, physiology, pathology, diagnostics”
 - Often appeared with terms like scientific, technological, modern, standard

2.2 The main objectives of the traditional medicine programme are:

- (i) to foster a realistic approach to traditional medicine in order to improve health;
- (ii) to evaluate traditional medicine in the light of modern science so as to maximize useful and effective practices and discourage harmful ones;
- (iii) to promote the integration of proven valuable knowledge and skills in traditional medicine into the modern systems of medicine.

Initial finding 3: digital humanities methods



1. Good data is hard to find and even harder to make
2. But done is better than good! (there is a tension between precision and scale) [I am still learning this]
3. There's a delicate balance between skill acquisition and getting lost in the sauce [again, still learning this]

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Thank you! Questions?

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