

Capitalism and Medical service ~Based on Marx's opinion~

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Since prehistoric times, mankind has been forced to fight the sick. Among them, medical practice has historically existed as an indispensable part for the survival of society. In a capitalist society, medical practices are also subject to commodity trading, and they are sold as service goods called medical services. In Japan, the discussion on the sustainability of the national health insurance system which is the basis of the medical care system is activated including the appropriateness of the expansion of the free medical care part. Understanding the economic nature of medical services, even in the distant scenario, seems to be a prerequisite for discussion.

Medical services are designed primarily to eliminate negative factors for humans such as illness and injury. Medical services are also a service commodity required for total capital to conserve the labor power essential for the continuation of capitalistic mode of production, although they are desirable to avoid where possible, the "unproductive cost."

Medical services have the following characteristics: 1) individuality, 2) absence of inventory, 3) asymmetry information, 4) uncertainty, 5) irreversibility based on the invasiveness, 6) difficulty in determining the value. Other issues include externality, value goods, and public goods in relation to market mechanisms. These characteristics often cause so-called "market failures." On the other hand, in Japan, under the public health insurance system, medical services are provided to patients by "healthcare institutions" such as hospitals and clinics, and the "medical fee system" is implemented as a fixed pricing system for successful transactions of medical services. Currently, low-quality services are produced, which may be purchased unintentionally by consumers, and incentives such as physicians and nurses to enhance their skills are limited. Patients also have a poor sense of "buying" medical services compared with other personal services.

Now, the supply and demand of medical services must be limited by a variety of conditions. Medical services will be provided to the extent that each society can bear. The same is true under capitalism. How does capital treat and pay for medical services for repairs of labor power commodity? There is a conflict between the rationality of individual capital and the rationality of total capital. Consequently, national interventions, such as health insurance systems, could be implemented for the purchase

and sale of medical services.

Capital, on the other hand, penetrates all production sectors for profit-seeking purposes, but medical services are not exceptions. Healthcare is the point of capital investment, and commodified medical services are the means of earning profits. Medical service capital will receive most of the income as medical service fees. Therefore, the trend in remuneration, the level of average profit on the fixed price of an individual medical service, or the inclusion of any medical service in a score table, has a direct impact on capital behaviour.

Modern capitalism is at a stage called globalization, where dismantling of the Soviet Union is one milestone. Some believe that the impact of globalization is still small in the medical field because medical care has a domestic tendency. However, the TPP Agreement, which is scheduled to enter into force in 2019, will be just a trigger to stimulate the movement of people, goods, and money. It is necessary to also focus on the effect of the globalization on the medical service.

Finally, we need to look at how the development of medicine will impact medical services. Medical science is progressing every day in the fields of examination, diagnosis, and treatment, including advances in diagnostic technologies including various types of diagnostic imaging, expansion of online medical care, clinical use of AI, regenerative medicine by clinical application of ES cells or iPS cells, and treatment methods such as reproductive medicine. Such medical advances will inevitably lead to the alteration of medical services. In addition, as medical advances have been made, individual genetic information, medical history, life patterns, etc. are also computerized, and they are shifting to trade as commodities.

The relationship between capitalism and medical services should continue to be considered.