Foreword

*Acupuncture and Moxibustion: Present and Future*

Nowadays at last, when I go to an academic meeting overseas, I no longer receive words of surprise that acupuncture and moxibustion (hereinafter referred to as acupuncture) also performed in Japan, or words of misconception that traditional Chinese acupuncture is practiced in Japan. However, it remains true that most acupuncture practices performed overseas are Chinese-style. The Chinese-style is the standard in the world, and the Japanese-style has necessarily given the impression of being a variation that has deviated from the mainstream. Korean-style acupuncture also exists. In a sense, it appears to fall in between the practices of China and Japan, as demonstrated by the thickness of acupuncture needles, which are thickest in order from the Chinese-style to the Korean and Japanese-styles.

Acupuncture practiced around the world has thus been divided into three style categories—Chinese, Japanese and Korean. However, this situation has begun to change in the 21st century. That is, a fourth style that could perhaps be called “Western-style acupuncture” is emerging. Western-style acupuncture? The term is probably unfamiliar to most people, but the practice of acupuncture that rapidly spread to countries outside of Asia since around the 1970s has taken root in the Western countries, and these countries are now striving to promote their style of acupuncture.

Acupuncture came to be accepted in the West in recent years, triggered by a report on acupuncture anesthesia. A sensational acupuncture boom ensued, but rather than simply ending as a boom, it led to scientific studies on the analgesic effect of acupuncture, which provided a certain degree of evidence that acupuncture increases β-endorphin and enkephalins. Furthermore, clinical studies were also conducted thereafter, and an accumulation of attempts was made to objectively evaluate the clinical effects of acupuncture through RCT and meta-analysis.

Actually, attempts to provide scientific proof of acupuncture have been made in Japan since the Meiji Era, firstly by physicians of Western medicine, and also by acupuncture practitioners after World War II. However, in the West, the recent movement to provide scientific evidence led by physicians of Western medicine as well as practitioners of acupuncture is advancing more speedily than the progress that has been made over a period of 150 years in Japan. This is the reason why Western-style acupuncture is now increasing its momentum.

This does not necessarily mean that acupuncture of the West is being performed solely from a scientific standpoint; this is in fact not so. Clinicians of acupuncture in the West include people who may be said to be at the opposite end of the scientific flow, such as naturalists, ecologists, and skeptics of science. There are more than a few people who questioned the views of Western civilization, and in the process of seeking the true essence of being human and pursuing a human-oriented approach to living, they encountered and committed themselves to Asian thoughts and philosophies and Oriental medicine. These people found profound meaning in expressing their newfound belief and lifestyle based on that belief in the clinical field of acupuncture, and came to be called practitioners of “natural acupuncture.”
In this sense, it can be said that these people possess a perspective that is not found in practitioners of orthodox acupuncture that is advocated as a national policy, as it is in China and South Korea. Following the modern institutionalization of acupuncture in China and South Korea in the 1950s to 1960s, United States, Canada, European countries, Nicaragua, Mongolia and Australia institutionalized Acupuncture or Oriental Medicine after 1990s. From this process, diverse methods of acupuncture will also appear.

“Natural acupuncture” is both similar and dissimilar in some respects with these various other styles of acupuncture. In the West, it draws a sharp contrast with acupuncture practiced by physicians of Western medicine. The unique perspective of “natural acupuncture” has been developed by people who recognized the negative aspects of a capitalist economy and were inspired to open up a new horizon.

Over a period of 2000 years, acupuncture evolved under the various influences of the times, and today, yet a new style of acupuncture is taking shape in the West.

What, then, is the situation with Japanese acupuncture? There is no doubt that Japanese acupuncture is backed by a long history and tradition. However, when considering the institutional status and social status of Japanese acupuncture today, it is difficult to say that its present status is built on a proper evaluation of its tradition. Neither can it be said that a framework has been established, that can receive the benefits of the latest science and IT technologies and social systems.

I have stated earlier that acupuncture has evolved under the various influences of the times, but what influences have the “times” had on acupuncture? In The West, acupuncture is a type of alternative medicine that has “newly” appeared, so from the standpoint of Western medicine, the issue lies in how it should be “integrated.” However, from the Japanese standpoint, acupuncture is a medical technique or medicine that has existed on this island country for more than 1,500 years. During the Edo Period, it was actively practiced as a national medicine in the context of Edo culture and civilization. In order for it to serve a certain role in today’s society, be regarded as an institution, and acknowledged in society, it is necessary to clarify and understand what types of modern contexts have had an influence on Japanese acupuncture.

When thinking about the status of Japanese acupuncture in today’s Japanese society, I tend to think that Japanese acupuncture is more than a bit similar to “natural acupuncture” in Western countries.

Hereafter, the further development of acupuncture in the world will likely produce various new variations of acupuncture in each country and bring the uniqueness of Japanese acupuncture into question. What is the uniqueness or the characteristics of Japanese acupuncture? The time has come to firmly communicate this to the world.

At the same time, we must realize that an acceptance of the global diversity of acupuncture must underlie. This means viewing Japanese acupuncture objectively, clarifying the similarities and differences among acupuncture around the world, and accepting the diversity that is revealed in that process. From there, a wealth of new possibilities of acupuncture shall emerge.

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