

## Medical History in Japan

*Origin of Japanese Acupuncture: Waichi Sugiyama and his Text - Sugiyama Shindenryu (1)*

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Waichi Sugiyama built a unique monument to the development of Japanese acupuncture. The extensive acupuncture techniques performed by Sugiyama and his students were subsequently documented in his text, *Sugiyama Shindenryu*. I see today that there seems to be strong interest in alternative medicine in Europe and America, and in this article, I would like to contribute something by introducing the story of Waichi Sugiyama, his historical significance and his techniques.

### 1. Short biography of Waichi Sugiyama

Waichi Sugiyama was born the eldest son of a samurai family in Mie prefecture in 1610. His father, Shigemasa Sugiyama, was the vassal of Takatora Todou, a famous military commander of the Tokugawa shogunate. Although expected to inherit his father's position, it was unfortunate that Waichi was infected with smallpox as a child and was left blind. So when he was 18 he decided to make his career as an acupuncturist. He traveled to Edo (Tokyo) and became a student of a blind acupuncturist by the name of Takuichi Yamase. However, he was expelled from the Yamase school after a few years because of his poor memory and his slow development of the skills. Feeling dejected, he left Edo and was on his way home when he decided that he would do a ritual fast on the island Enoshima. Continuing his ascetic practices for some time he came to be quite faint. Then, on the last day of his fast, he stumbled over a stone in the road and fell. Lying there he noticed something in his hand. Examining it, he realized it was a pine needle inside the interior hollow of a small section of bamboo. Following this experience he went on to invent the guide tube and a thin needle with a tip shaped like a

pine needle (*matsuba*). This is said to be the origin of Japanese acupuncture with the feature of thinner needles and the use of a guide tube for painless insertion.

Later, Sugiyama went to Kyoto to study under Toyoaki Irie and learned the Irie style acupuncture as an inner chamber disciple, and was also exposed to the "Dashin\*" acupuncture technique. This style was also popular at that time in Kyoto. Sugiyama had gained confidence in his ability and so he returned to Edo. His fame spread as the "master of guide tube acupuncture." So much so that he came to be known by the Shogun himself.

In 1685, Sugiyama treated and cured a chronic disease of Tsunayoshi Tokugawa Shogun. He received 20 shares of monthly payment and a mansion as a reward. Thereafter he gained the favor of Tsunayoshi and became the doctor of the Shogun and was also designated as "Sokengyo", the highest official of the national organization, "Todoza," for the benefit of the blind. There is a famous story about this. One day the Shogun asked Sugiyama if there is anything that he desired. Sugiyama responded, "I would like some good eyes. He was then granted land called Honjo Hitotsume (One Eye Palace) and he built the place to honor "Benzaiten." Later, "Edo Soroku residence" (the Edo headquarters of Toudoza) and also his acupuncture school "Shinchi Gakumonjo" were built in this place. Today "Ejima Sugiyama Shrine" is in this location. Sugiyama died in his sleep May 20, 1694 at the age of 85. At his request, his body was buried in Enoshima.

Under the reign of the 5<sup>th</sup> Shogun Tsunayoshi Tokugawa in the Edo Genroku period, there was a flourishing of the Japanese cultural arts in many fields. It was during this time that Sugiyama's school began and prospered. Sugiyama established the school "Shinchi Gakumonjo" of acupuncture for the blind so as to provide a means for them to

achieve self-sufficiency. This school became his highest priority in later life. Sugiyama Sanbusho “Three-part Text of Sugiyama Style” was the general introductory text for students at Shinchi Gakumonjo. As the name suggests, it consisted of three parts; Ryouchi No Daigaisho (Important Points of Treatments), Senshin Sanyoshu (Principles of Acupuncture) and Igaku Setsuyoshu (Foundations of Clinical Medicine). The text provided a general introduction to the practice of clinical acupuncture but there were no descriptions of needle techniques, nor was there any mention of the use of the guide tube. These practices were transmitted directly from teacher to student.

The school “Shinchi Gakumonjo” was very successful and spread to 45 locations throughout Japan under the guidance of his top student and successor, Yasuichi Mishima. The school became the standard for acupuncture education in Japan and continued its legacy through the Edo era.

Even today, in modern Japan, acupuncture and massage training is provided for the blind, and “Kanshin acupuncture technique” that is to insert a needle through guide tube is now widely used. This fact is a direct result of the original efforts by Sugiyama.

\*Dashin technique: A Japanese unique acupuncture introduced by Zen monk Mubun and Isai Misono. The technique involves tapping the head of a thick pestle-shaped needle like Inri acupuncture needle with a small wooden mallet only for treatment of bad vibes on stomach. It is the beginning of the development of stomach diagnosis in Japan.

