

Editorial

Oriental Medicine and Nature

Oriental Medicine developed over 2000 years ago when human beings lived their lives under greater influence from natural surroundings and the environment than we experience in the modern age. It was an age when people were just beginning to construct bigger megalopolises and these social surroundings began to have significant influences on peoples' minds and bodies; as a result humans began to develop heretofore illness reflecting their new lifestyles. This illness presented new therapeutic requirements and objectives. In other words, considering health and disease, those ancient days were arguably a period when people began to search beyond simply making some balance between their lifestyle and nature's constant change. The newly developing social environment demanded a larger perspective or vision capable of supporting healthy sustainable social development. And then, of course, the scale of urbanization began to accelerate and human history became the story of our alternating struggles between overcoming nature's challenging forces but also destroying nature in our efforts to control her (it).

The natural and social environments 2000 years ago provided the basis for Oriental Medicine. The original classic of Oriental medicine *Suwen (Plain Questions)* includes descriptions of natural and social changes and thoughts on how humans might be or live in harmony with those changes. Although written 2000 years ago, this classic book points out the potential problems humans might encounter in the course of their lives and includes discourses on how setting a desirable framework for our mind, attitudes as well as lifestyle can help navigate these constant challenges. *Plain Questions* further compares people of that period with those of the distant past. People had already begun to lead their lives largely separated from the natural rhythms their ancestors had adhered to. Patterns of jealousy, unreasonable exertion in efforts to reach "success", satisfy desires or ambitions had become increasingly apparent causing mental stress, psychosomatic illness, autonomic imbalance and various other symptoms. These symptoms could only be relieved by the therapies of acupuncture, moxibustion, massage or herbal medicine (Kampo). The text warned that people should not try to satisfy their personal and social desires beyond what is reasonably necessary, avoiding competition. Instead, learning to live their lives by rising above the trivia of life and thus remaining calm and selfless might provide more social and personal sustainability and satisfaction.

As described above, while the body and mind of an individual and the way society could be are questioned in this classic text, a more important viewpoint from Oriental medical theory is that the medicine is deeply rooted in the concept of spontaneous remission or the natural healing ability of the human body. Although this expression may be construed to mean cure *by* acupuncture or moxibustion, instead the understanding was that the human body, stimulated by these modalities naturally and easily heal itself. Healing does occur by inserting the needle or performing the moxa. This critical point is what widens the gap between Oriental and Western Medicines, their theories, philosophies and practices. When these two medicines are compared, without considering the origin or construction of both, the opinions tend to be unilateral. In short, from the perspective of Oriental medicine, the expression "medical cure" can only be used with a grain of salt, a sense of hesitancy as oriental medicine is based on the understanding that humans heal themselves. And if medicine does not cure, medical practitioners might feel a bit more humility toward the human body. They might assume an attitude of asking or speaking to the body in order to understand what kind of stimulation or treatment best suits the body's condition. Instead of an attitude of "I will cure you", it would certainly be good if both the practitioner developed a mutual attitude about the process of creating a body that can heal itself. It will then be time reconsider the relationships between illness, treatment and healing.

Shuichi Katai, Ph.D., L.Ac., Professor
Department of Acupuncture and Moxibustion
Tsukuba University of Technology, Ibaraki, Japan