

Editorial

An Aged Society and Traditional Medicine

Predicting what future society will be like requires a collection of data from various fields. Most important among them all is data on the demographic estimation of each country. Demographic estimation is essential to predicting the future of society, as it never lies, as long as there is no catastrophic disaster or war.

Today in the 21st century, Japan is daily renewing its own record in leading the world as an ultra-aged society with a declining birthrate and population. Until the 20th century, Japan was a young society with an increasing birthrate and population. Patients were also young, and required “efficient,” “curative medicine.” Modern Western medicine was thus the mainstream. In today’s ultra-aged society with a declining birthrate and population, however, a large proportion of patients are old. Given that people cannot escape the cycle of “birth-old age-illness-death,” these patients require “inefficient,” “watchful medicine,” and the focus of treatment must necessarily be placed on this type of medicine. To Japan today, the 21st century marks a century of “defeatist medicine,” which are irrelevant to the concepts and values of the previous century, already transcends the bounds of “medicine,” and cannot provide cures.

Nevertheless, ageing is an issue not only in Japan, but in other countries in Asia, as well. China will find itself in the same situation as today’s ageing population in Japan in twenty years. The South Korean population will hereafter age at an accelerated rate and even more rapidly than Japan. The ASEAN countries and India will also experience an ageing of society, and the Asian countries as a whole will grow old. This phenomenon is not only common to the Asian countries, but even to Western developed countries. In other words, all of humanity will grow old.

Until now, traditional medicine was practiced, researched, and evaluated from the perspective of “efficient,” “curative medicine” mainly of the West. However, it is hereafter necessary to practice, research, and evaluate traditional medicine from the perspective of “inefficient,” “watchful medicine.” Can traditional medicine respond to this shift? The true value of traditional medicine in an aged society will be questioned hereafter, and demonstrating this will provide evidence of the significance of traditional medicine in future society.

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