

## Foreword

### *My Dream: A National Research Institute for East Asian Medicine in Japan*

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When I attend international conferences held in East Asia on the topic of traditional medicine, I frequently have the opportunity to meet researchers from countries such as Korea, China, and Viet Nam, who are affiliated with government-sponsored institutes for the study of traditional medicine. They are employed as national civil servants to research, teach, and practice traditional East Asian medicine, including acupuncture and herbal medicine. In Japan we have professors at our national universities who are conducting research in acupuncture and Kampo, but such research into traditional medicine is not their primary work. And although a small amount of scientific research is supported by national funding, Japan does not have a national research institute specifically dedicated to traditional medicine. A few prefectural hospitals have established institutes for the study of traditional medicine, and for a time those institutes received significant levels of support, but this support has dwindled with the recent economic downturn and with changes in the prefectural administration that issued the original proposals.

More than 100 years ago, the Japanese government introduced Western medicine as the mainstream medical paradigm in Japan. Medical treatment in Japan has certainly made great strides as a result of teaching and research in Western medicine based on modern science. However, today people are searching for an integrated approach to medicine that will go beyond the limitations of conventional Western medicine. Japan is completely ignoring the important role that traditional East Asian medicine has to play in this integrated approach. According to our survey on the use of acupuncture by the Japanese populace, only 7% of Japanese people currently receive acupuncture therapy in a given year. Today there is little national consciousness of Japanese traditional medicine or desire to support the traditional medical paradigm, either among the Japanese people or in the Japanese government.

One important reason for this lack of awareness of traditional medicine is the legal separation in Japan between providers of Western medicine and providers of East Asian medicine (acupuncturists). If more rigorous research can provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of acupuncture for specific conditions, then it should be possible to approach those conditions within the context of an integrated medical system, regardless of whether the treatment provider is utilizing Western or East Asian therapeutic methods. However, without economic and staffing support from the outset, it will be difficult to either obtain or validate such evidence.

When I attend international conferences and listen to the presentations of the researchers from nationally supported institutes of traditional medicine across East Asia, I cannot help but envy them. However, even though there are no such national research institutes in Japan at present, traditional medicine is still continuing in this country, thanks to the dedication of individual clinicians and researchers and the support of enthusiastic fans (patients) and private businesses (Kampo makers and acupuncture equipment manufacturers). We must maintain our dream of one day having a national Institute of East Asian Medicine that will spur traditional medical research and practical applications. We also need to provide even stronger encouragement for the activities of current supporters, and to appeal for more consideration of the needs in this important area.

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