Rangaku Scholars in the City Edo: Study of the “Ika Jinmeiroku” of the Early 18th Century

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This paper sheds light on the “medical” environment that had arisen in the huge city of Edo based on trends in the adoption of Western medicine using the physician’s register titled “Ika Jinmeiroku” that was published in 1819 and 1820.

In the first section I examine the composition and features of the register, as well as the purpose behind its publication. Physicians’ registers during that period were primarily the most convenient means through which urban dwellers could select a physician. This publication also functioned as a conduit for promoting and advertising home remedies that were sold by physicians. Although from the 1770s Western medicine became popular as a system of learning, judging by this publication alone further time was needed for it to gain currency in clinical situations. Although medicines not requiring a prescription and methods of treatment that originated in Western medicine were also covered in its pages, their number is extremely small.

In the second section I compare the student records of famous Rangaku scholars in various fields on the basis of the data on the 2,000 physicians recorded in the register and study common themes found in these materials. In this instance I have limited my study to five student records from varying periods (Habu Genseki, Hanaoka Seishu, Otsuki Gentaku, Itoh Genboku, Tsuboi Shindo) and present the exhaustive findings of this study. When conducting this comparative work I took account of the nature of such registers from the perspective of their function as historical materials and used numerous materials to formulate my conclusions.

The data described in section two is basic research for explicating the actual situation of the “medical” environment in Edo. In other words, a social foundation was beginning to be fostered on which physicians who had been educated in Western medicine were able to practice medicine around the Bunsei period (1818-1830). The major contention arrived in the course of this study is the unique quality of the “medical” environment that was a special social condition found in Edo at that time. First of all, there is the predominance of physicians working for feudal domains. Due to the number of these feudal domain physicians, they did in fact obtain residences outside the feudal domain manors and dispensed medical treatment within the towns. As shown above, it is through making a close examination of the unique social structure and physicians in this huge city that we are able to characterize in greater detail the characteristics of the “medical” environment and the background to the acceptance of Western medicine.