The Medicine and Social Activities of Village Physicians of the Western School at the End of the Edo Era: the Legacy of Seike Kataniwa

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This paper examines the medical activities and social activities of Seike Kataniwa, a village physician in Yashiro village in the Uwajima feudal domain (Yawatahama City, Ehime Prefecture).

Kataniwa was born into a family of Shinto priests working at Yasaka Jinja shrine in Yashiro village in 1814. After studying medicine with Ninomiya Shunshou, a physician in Kataniwa's native Yawatahama-honmachi, Kataniwa headed for Nagasaki in 1848 where he became engaged in an intensive study of Western medicine under the tutelage of Narabayashi Souken. Afterward, he spent from 1850 until the time of his death in 1877 working as a regional physician in Yawatahama and Yashiro village. During the period at the end of the Edo Era when Kataniwa was practicing medicine, conditions were being established in the Yawatahama region that enabled patients to receive treatment from a number of physicians if they so desired. As one of them, Kataniwa applied himself to medicine and sought effective medicines under the motto "medicinal remedies are the foundation of the art of medicine" and in 1852 when the Uwajima feudal domain started vaccinations he and other village physicians fulfilled a supporting role in the adoption of vaccinations over the entire territory of the feudal domain.

Kataniwa had also studied Kokugaku and classical poetry following the Motoori Norinaga school and between 1853 and 1873 he opened a private school and was active in spreading around the region the knowledge that he himself had learned through activities such as teaching approximately 300 students from the local area. His most notable activity was building a private library known as Oji Bunko in the grounds of Yasaka Jinja shrine. In 1859 he completed a two-roomed tile-roofed building where he housed more than a thousand books from a variety of fields spanning Chinese studies, Japanese studies (Kokugaku), and Western medicine. Although Oji Bunko consisted mainly of Kataniwa's own collection of books, a great many books were donated through the network of local village officials and the region's intellectuals, and these books were made available throughout the region.

Research conducted into physicians practicing Western medicine in rural villages to date has mainly concentrated on their medicine. However, as shown by the example of Kataniwa, the activities of these physicians were not limited to medicine as it has become clear that they played a social role in which they put back into their local regions the knowledge they had acquired. The fact that Kataniwa had learned Kokugaku as a Shinto priest, became a physician and learned Western medicine indicates that for Kataniwa traditional Japanese studies and Western medicine were compatible. This compatibility is similar to the spirit demonstrated in the concept of a university in 1873 when steps were being taken to establish a university that combined the three spheres of learning, Chinese studies, Japanese studies and Western studies, albeit with a concentration on Japanese studies.