Research on the Physicians of the Western School in the Etchu Takaoka Region

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The state of the preservation of materials used in surveys on the medical history of the former province of Etchu (whole of present-day Toyama Prefecture) differs strikingly from the eastern and western parts of the area, especially between the two central regions of Toyama and Takaoka. Consequently, the purposes of the investigation described here I have adopted an opposing perspective whereby I have attempted to deduce the legacies and activities of people from Etchu of that period from student's records remaining in various regions throughout Japan. The findings reveal that people from Etchu had an overwhelming Kansai (Osaka and Kyoto) oriented tendency and, moreover, the fact that more people from the western part of the Etchu province compared to its eastern part went to other provinces in order to study medicine.

In the course of this study I investigated the area around Takaoka in which there remain a great many materials. In the beginning of the 17th century, Lord Maeda of the Kaga feudal domain deliberately opened up the town as tactics to make peace with the Bakufu after the cessation of hostilities, and many of the physicians and the low-level officials who were forced to live there were former warriors who possessed documents pertaining to their forebears.

These physicians formed an association (Shinno-ko) starting in 1711 that transcended the branches of medicine to which they belonged. They worked hard to improve their medical skills, and as a result the seeking of a second opinion became a matter of course, and though these activities had their ups and downs they continued right through to the Meiji Period.

The interest in Western medicine in Takaoka began with the Nagasaki family, and by the moving of Takamine Koan (1813) they sought to restore medical services to the area, and this role was taken on by Nagasaki Kosai and passed on to the nephews of the Sado family.

Evidence of this acceptance of Western medicine was proved by the introduction of the method of cow-pox vaccinations and the existence of a statue of Hippocrates. Although the vaccinia virus was brought without delay by Tsuboi Shinryo from Edo to the elder Sado brother Mitsuyoshi in Takaoka on January 5, 1850, and the Toyama domain physician Yokochi Genjo received a culture from Kasahara Ryosaku in Fukui slightly later on January 24, they were plagued by defects in the vaccinia virus from that time on. All three samples of the latter statue were stored at three physician's residences in Takaoka.

The well preserved materials pertaining to both the Nagasaki and Sado families have been conducive to a
study that it still in progress. Preliminary findings indicate that the Nagasaki family had a preference for Chinese studies and its collection consisted of exclusive materials translated into Japanese as they appeared to avoid documents written in the European languages, and ostensibly maintained a household that was “Japanese in spirit but Western in learning”. The Sado family who were half a step behind came to be familiar with and were influenced by daring Dutch writings, and while we may well be amazed by the medical materials in Dutch they collected (which have been catalogued), we may conjecture that this was a manifestation of a shift in the times.