

SUGIYAMA Waichi (1610-1694)

SUGIYAMA Waichi, who is famous as the originator of the unique Japanese acupuncture insertion method known as “Guide Tube Acupuncture Insertion Technique”, was born as the legitimate son of a samurai family in Tsu, Iseno-kuni, Japan in 1610. His father, SUGIYAMA Gon-emon Shigemasa, was a vassal of TŌDŌ IZUMINOKAMI Takatora.

Waichi contracted smallpox when he was very young and lost his sight. In order to establish himself in acupuncture he entered into study with the blind acupuncturist YAMASE Takuichi in Edo. However after some years of study it became apparent that his ability to memorize was not good and his technique showed little improvement, leading to his dismissal from the master.

According to legend, on his way home, filled with dejection, he got the idea for the guide tube acupuncture insertion technique when he grabbed a tube filled with pine needles as he stumbled and fell over a big rock called Gagyū-ishi which looked like a lying cow. This happened after a self-imposed rigorous fast induced mental state of spiritual ecstasy in Enoshima.

Afterwards he went to Kyoto where he learned, under the guidance of IRIE Hōmei, the secrets of the IRIE style acupuncture. He won fame after returning to Edo and became known by the shogun family. In 1685 he cured the 5th generation Shogun Tsunayoshi of a chronic disease. Later, Waichi served as the court physician to the shogun until his death in 1694.

Figure 1

Portrait of Waichi

“Ika-sentestu-shōzō-shū”

by FUJINAMI Koichi (“医家先哲肖像集”)



Waichi Reformed “Tōdōza” (Japanese guild for blind people) as its chief officer “Sōkengyō”

During the Edo period, the blind were forced to join a mutual aid society known as “Tōdōza”. They didn’t have freedom of choice of occupation. Only playing Japanese lute and music were their sole ways of supporting themselves. This was a period plagued by troubles related to a money lending business that some of them started with money set aside to pay taxes. Shogun Tsunayoshi appointed Waichi to the highest post “Sōkenkō” in the “Tōdōza”. Waichi rigorously reformed the organization’s regulations and established a new one called “Shin-shikimoku” (新式目).

Figure 2

Statue of Waichi
The collection of Ejima
Sugiyama Shrine



The acupuncture therapy institute, Shin-chi-gakumon-jo (鍼治学問所), “Sugiyama-ryū-sanbu-sho” (杉山流三部書) and “Sugiyama-shinden-ryū” (杉山真伝流)

The path was opened by Waichi for the visually impaired to support themselves and gave high priority to technical training of acupuncture, moxibustion and Anma (Japanese massage.) He established on his estate the acupuncture therapy institute, Shin-chi-gakumon-jo, the world’s first school for the visually impaired. The textbooks used were “Sugiyama-san-bu-syo” (杉山流三部書).

Many among the capable students served as medical officers to the shogunate and the prefectural government. At a time when local doctors were scarce, these trained acupuncturists made a great contribution to the medical care for citizens. We see a glimpse of the practice of acupuncture and moxibustion treatment of the day in “Sugiyama-shinden-ryū”, and can also find a complete explanation of guide tube acupuncture insertion technique in the book.

Figure 3

“Sugiyama-shinden-ryū”
 (“杉山真伝流”)

The collection of
Sugiyama-kenkō-itoku-kenshōkai



Worshipped as the God of Acupuncture in the Ejima Sugiyama Shrine

Ejima Sugiyama Shrine is located on a piece of land in Chitose, Sumida Ward, Tokyo which Waichi received from Shōgun Tsunayoshi. Tsunayoshi had established a shrine which was dedicated to the goddess Benzaiten on this land as he felt pity for Waichi, who even after he grew old, never failed to make a monthly pilgrimage to Enoshima. Even to this day Waichi is the deity the shrine is dedicated to and local citizens recognize him as the god of acupuncture.

Figure 4

Ejima Sugiyama Shrine



**OURA Jikan
Iyashinomichi Kyokai**