

What the sick should know — image and expression of the body in a health manual of the early nineteenth century Japan

Introduction

1. *Yōjō*: the art of nurturing life

In East Asian medical culture *yōjō* 養生 (nurturing life) was established as a genre of medicine, which aimed at achieving a higher and more sophisticated way of life through maintaining the body healthy: it is called the art of *yōjō*.¹ In Japan the Edo period (1603~1867) saw an outburst of interest in health, and a large scale health market had grown up to meet the resultant demand. Combined with the development of print culture and increased literacy, countless number of books on health and medicine were published. *Yōjō* arose as a phenomenon that became many people's daily concern, and crossed social class lines. Texts of this genre are usually written in simple sentences, aimed as much as at non-medical people as at medical professionals. *Yōjō* texts are manuals of popular practical medicine, often containing materials on such topics as hygiene, dietetics, basic physiology, nursing, medicine, first aid, and simple remedies.² Due to the nature of such health manuals, the contents are often interwoven with medical theory and such elements as customs and folklore. Authors intended to write books with a broad popular appeal, and so they suited their style and content to a mass audience, and tried to make them relevant to the everyday lives of their reader.³

¹ The importance of accomplishing the “art (*jutsu* 術)” of *yōjō* is time to time emphasised in many *yōjō* texts of the Edo time, including *Yōjōkun* (first published in 1713), the most famous and influential text of the genre, *Yōjōkun*, p. 36.

² Kabayama Koichi, ‘Yōjōron no bunka (The culture of *yōjō* theory)’ in Hayashiya Tatsusaburo (1976) ed., *Kasei bunka no kenkyū* (A study of the culture of the Kasei period), pp. 435-471.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

2. *Byōka suchi*: annotated text

The publication of *yōjō* texts in Japan peaked around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The text of our concern *Byōka suchi* 病家須知, was written by Hirano Jusei 平野重誠, and published between 1832 and 1835. It not only presents detailed discussions about home medicine, providing the practical knowledge of health maintenance and remedies for disease. But this work is also a good example to see how people perceived and took care of their body in the end of the Edo period. Taking the traditional idea of *yōjō* as its basis, *Byōka suchi* particularly emphasises such matters as *ki* 氣 (*qi*) repletion around the abdomen, massage, and the significance of daily habits that mould the healthy body by the day.

3. Aims of study

Through the analysis of *Byōka suchi*, my final aim lies in elucidating the reality of how the body of the Edo people was subjectively viewed, experienced, and felt within the framework of *ki* medicine. Such references found in *yōjō* texts as massage methods or breath-regulation always bear excellent testimony to show the created image of the body and bodily experience.⁴

⁴ For instance, recent studies of the cultural representation of touch present a very interesting prospect in pursuing the reality of the body, in which sexuality is essentially involved. Gilman, Sander, “Touch, sexuality and disease”, in Bynum, W. F. and Porter, Roy eds (1993), *Medicine and the five senses*, pp. 198-224. Ueyama, Takahiro, 感覚の治療と欲望の市場 (tactile treatment and the market for desire), in Ishiduka, Hisao and Suzuki, Akihiro eds (2002), *Shintai ibunkaron* (Medical cultures of the body), pp. 259-288. In relation to the Edo medicine, on the other hand, scholarly investigations of such as stiff shoulders and abdominal palpation are very suggestive of the palpable existence of *ki*. For instance, Kuriyama, Shigehisa (1994), “肩こり考 (On stiff shoulders)”, in Kuriyama, Shigehisa and Yamada, Keiji eds., *Rekisho no naka no yamai to igaku* (Diseases and medicine in history), pp. 37-62, Shirasugi, Etsuo, “疝気と江戸時代のひとびとの身体経験 (Senki and the bodily experience of the Edo people)”, in *ibid.*, pp. 63-92, and Liao, Yuqun, “初期腹診書の性格 (The characteristic of the early texts of abdominal palpation)”, in *ibid.*, pp.343-370.

As one of the initial approaches to answer these questions, an attempt will be made to try the close reading of various expressions of the “body” found in the annotated text, to which the main part of this paper is devoted. It reveals the effects of the author’s unique verbalisation of body images in different contexts, and how author’s medical view is shared by the audience. Firstly, I would like to show how the text can be translated from Japanese to English, paying particular attention to the differences in connotative sense of the words in each sentence. Before the analysis of the annotated text, however, brief accounts of the understanding of the body in East Asian medical tradition and the writing system in the Edo literature may be helpful.

4. The body

Firstly traditional Chinese medicine explains the structure and makeup of the human body by *qi* as a vital constituent.⁵ Focusing on such *qi* operation as the vital sign of sustaining life, Ishida (1995) maintains that this framework embraces double views of the human body. The one perceives the body as a “flowing (流)” entity which is formed by the circulation of *qi* inside and around of the person. This leads to another view which regards the human body as a static stage where *qi* function takes place (場).⁶ In this prospect, such as *zangfu* (藏腑 internal organs) and *mai* (脉 vessels), though they are the products of *qi* themselves, are merely given a secondary role as a place where *qi* indwells and operates. Although it is not my intention to take this idea as a

⁵ As referred in *Zhuangzi* (莊子 Warring States) the dissolution of *qi* means death: “人之生、氣之聚也、聚則爲生、散則爲死” (*Zhuangzi*, chapter 22 知北遊. *Huangti neijing Lingsu* (黃帝內經靈樞) also describes the congealing and dispersing of *qi* which take place in *wu zang*, five intestines by every ten years (*Huangti neijing Lingsu* (黃帝內經靈樞), 天年篇, p. 126).

⁶ Ishida, Hidemi (1995), He names the former as ‘flowing body (流れる体)’, while the latter as ‘the body as a stage (場としての体)’ *Kokoro to karada*, p. 162-164, *Chūgoku igaku shisōshi*, pp. 132-134, pp. 155-159.

priori, I would like to bear this notion in mind in analysing *Byōka suchi*. It is because the author uses a variety of expressions for the word “body”, which seems to be correlated with the compound images of the body as above.

Secondly let us ponder the terminology of “body” in Japanese. The commonest term for the body in contemporary Japanese is *karada* 体. Plus, *mi* 身 and *shintai* 身体 are often used to refer to the body as well. Yet in using *mi* and *shintai* a certain precaution is needed, since there is a gap between two in connotative sense. This issue has attracted a lot of recent scholarly interest among the history of medicine and the cultural study of the body, so that suffice it here to introduce the general overview.⁷ Roughly speaking, *shintai* 身体 is often represented by the physical mechanism of the body, which is sometimes regarded as akin to Cartesian view of the human body.

In contrast, *mi* does not always refer to the physical structure of the body, but often indicates “one’s own self”.⁸ In other words *mi* connotes some intimacy to the self, even including characteristics, rather than such physical constituents as flesh, bone, blood and so on.

4. *Ateji*: Arbitrarily used substitute characters

As mentioned above, we notice that the character 身 has two ways of reading; *shin* and *mi*. Unlike in China, Japanese language does not employ one-to-one correspondence system in pronouncing Chinese characters. Almost all of the Chinese characters used in Japan can be read at least in two ways.⁹ Japanese *kana* alphabet is a

⁷ Kitazawa, Kazutoshi (2000), “*Kenko*” *no nihon-shi*, pp. 124-153.

⁸ 類聚名義抄 身: *mi* (み the body), *ware* (われ myself), *mukuro* (むくろ (dead) body), *katachi* (かたち figure), *shin* (しん Chinese derived pronunciation).

⁹ One is the Chinese derived reading (*on-yomi* 音読み), and the other is reading in Japanese pronunciation (*kun-yomi* 訓読み). The former basically originates to the meaning and pronunciation that of China proper (e.g. *Shin* for 身). The latter, on the other hand, when Chinese

phonogram, and by the end of the Edo period most of the popular writings were written in both Chinese characters (sometimes printing the Japanese reading alongside) and Japanese *kana* alphabet.

So called *ateji* (当て字) system takes advantage of the loose relationship between Chinese characters and Japanese reading. It can be defined as thus: “a Chinese character used as a phonetic symbol rather than for its meaning, or an arbitrarily used substitute character”.¹⁰ Its usage peaked around the end of the Edo period to the early Meiji era.¹¹ Considerable patterns are found in various types of writings; some have regular patterns and others are applied at random.¹² Although there are a number of effects made by using substitute characters, here we have listed the points that seem relevant to our analysis of the text:

1. One word can give double meanings both from Chinese character and the Japanese reading, which evoke the reader broader imagination and implication.¹³

characters were imported from mainland they were matched with Japanese indigenous words for their meaning (e.g. *Mi* for 身).

¹⁰ *New College Japanese-English Dictionary*, 4th edition (C) Kenkyusha Ltd. 1933, 1995, 1998.

¹¹ The precise reason for the widespread of arbitrary usage of Chinese characters are yet unknown. However the study of Motoori Norinaga, a famous scholar of Japanese classic literature of the late Edo period by Koyasu (2000) seems very suggestive. Accordingly in the early nineteenth century, Motoori maintained that Japanese literature had its origin in oral tradition. In so doing Japanese phonetic language was regarded as *a priori*, and Chinese characters as a mere tool for writing. (Koyasu (2000), *Hōhō to shite no Edo* (the Edo period as a method), pp. 251-262).

¹² Arao, Sadahide (1987), “Chinese characters and terminology in translated Chinese popular novels (白話小説翻訳本の漢字とことば)”, in Sato, Kiyoji, et.al (1987), *Kinsei no kanji to kotoba*, vol. 7, pp. 239-259.

¹³ Analysing the language in Edo poems, Akabane (1987) shows the examples of which originally written in Chinese characters, but written in Japanese alphabet on purpose. By deriving the word from Chinese characters, it consequently evokes double meanings from phonetic spelling. “俳諧の用字 (the usage of letters in poem), Sato, Kiyoji, et.al (1987), vol. 7, pp. 139-141.

2. Some Japanese words can be interpreted in different ways depending on the context. By “getting these words dressed” with substitute Chinese characters, the meaning of the word are to be clarified suited each context.
3. Invented synonyms, which are made of arbitrarily applied different Chinese characters, enable authors to avoid the repetition of using same words.¹⁴

5. The images of the body

Now let us delineate the bodily images found in *Byōka suchi*. The author took the full advantage of arbitrarily used substitute Chinese characters that enabled him to broaden the verbalisation of his medical view. For example, first of all, let us have a look of one sentence in chapter 1. It argues the harm of improper-eating.

また ^{karada}體の大熱したるときに寒冷物を多食ば ^{karada}運輸の ^{guai}機関を ^{yamai}阻て宿病を動ことあり (Eating a lot of cold food when your body is very heated, it will obstruct the function of the body, and sometimes disease arises).¹⁵

In this sentence, there are two words which are read as *karada*, the “body”.

Glancing over the whole text, ^{karada}身體 and ^{karada}體 are the two most frequently used Chinese characters to indicate the body in general. Yet the latter, ^{karada}運輸 deserves further examination.

The term 運輸 is usually read as *un-yu* in Japanese, meaning “transportation”. However the author makes the audience to read this word as *karada*, “the body”. In so

¹⁴ Tajima, Yu, “意読的表記から字音的表記へ (From interpretative description to phonetic description)”, in Maeda, Tomiyoshi ed (1992), *Kokugo bungakushi no kenkyū*, pp. 251-269.

¹⁵ *Byōka suchi*, chapter 1, p. 10.

doing it emphasises the image of the body as “*ki*-transporting entity”. Here we may be able to recall Ishida (1995)’s view of the “flowing”, i.e., moving body, which seems akin to the idea of “transportation”. Thus this arbitrarily used word 運輸 becomes endowed with double meanings; ^{body [transportation]} 運 輸 . The former is obtained from Japanese pronunciation, and the latter from the original and literal meaning of the Chinese characters.

In the same way, 宿病 is simply read as *yamai*, meaning “disease”. However “disease” is usually written as 病 alone. By adding the Chinese character 宿 (*yado* or *shuku*), which literally means “dwelling”, and perhaps “chronic” in this context, the reader can evoke the idea that disease could be difficult and long-suffering. Hence this word could be interpreted as ^{[long-suffering] disease} 宿 病 . Taking these points into consideration, let us interpret the sentence again. The words in brackets are drawn from the original or added meaning of Chinese characters, and the italicised words from Japanese pronunciation:

Eating a lot of cold food when your body is very heated, it will obstruct the (ki-transporting) function of the *body*, and sometimes (long-suffering) *disease* arises.

The idea of associating “transportation (運輸 *unyu*) with bodily image seems to weigh heavily in author’s mind. Here presents another two examples of 運輸. The one appears in the discussion that disharmonised mind gradually brings disorder to the body (. . . 漸に飲食の消化を礙、^{konare} 気血の運輸 ^{c h i} 遅慢なるが故に . . .). In this context, 運輸 (transportation) is read as *meguri*, which means “circulation”. *Meguri* is usually

written as 廻り^{meguri} or 巡り^{meguri}. Since the subject of this sentence is *chi* (literally blood, but here it appears to indicate all kinds of bodily fluid), it is obvious that 運輸 indicates the circulation or the transportation of bodily fluid which is represented by the name of *ki* (*qi*) and *chi* (blood).¹⁶ 消化^{konare} is the most common word for digestion. Yet there is the other example of 運輸, which is given the reading of *konare*, meaning digestion. This time the author talks of the man of whose mind is harmonised, and the body is composed (. . . 過喜暴怒の氣血を鼓動こともなく、抑鬱られて、憂愁驚怖、困迫疲憊の腸胃の運輸を礙、昇陽の機関を遮ることもあらねば . . .). These two different expressions for “digestion” seem suggestive that the author perceives the process of digestion from two standpoints. On the one hand, it is a process by which “food” is to be dissolved (消化^{konare}). On the other hand, from the viewpoint of the body, digestion is regarded as a conveying process of taken food and drink (運輸^{konare}). As seen from famous 飲食養生鑑, this metaphor of transportation for digestion was probably a very well-known one in the Edo medical context.

Furthermore, there are two more points which merit attention. Firstly in contrast to 氣血 as “bodily fluid” in the context of digestion, this time the term 氣血^{kiketsu}, could be understood as emotion or feeling. Stirring of emotion and the condition of *ki* in person, of course, correlate each other. Secondly it is assumed that 腸胃^{hara}, again, indicates a stage where digestive operation of *ki* takes place, rather than “the bowels and the

¹⁶ 氣血：氣爲衛、血爲榮、上焦開発、宣五穀味、薰膚充身澤毛若霧露之漑、謂之氣（和漢三才図会、十一経絡）。

stomach” in anatomical sense. The emphasis appears to lie more in the transporting flow of *ki* around the digestive organs.¹⁷

Next we shall see the body image in its relation to the mind. Sentences below argue how easily even the mind of virtue can be lured by worldly desires:

われと吾心を欺得べからざるものなれども、眼耳鼻舌身といふ隔礙^{mi}がありて、喫ねば死被ねば寒ゆといふこの軀殻^{karada}を保たれば、假令大徳の人なりとも、この慾なしとはいふべからず。かの眼耳鼻舌身は、もと心の使役にしてその命を待ものなれども、眼には美色、耳には淫聲、鼻には芬芳、口には飲健啖、體^{karada}には輕暖の欲を具て、厭足ことを知ず・・・。

Mi's denotation is the body. In this context, however, it seems that the term is connotative of sensuousness. Rather than the general notion of the body, it is more likely to be understood as the sensory aspect of the body, such as “flesh”. *Mi* here belongs the physical part of the body, which is destined with the desire as an obstacle to pursuing the honesty in mind: beautiful colour to the eyes, luring sound to the ears, pleasant fragrance to the nose, lavish food and drink to the mouth, and the light and warm sensation to the body (more likely skin or flesh).

On the other hand, as the Chinese character 殼 (literally means shell) stresses, *karada* here is interpreted as a shell-like container, which keeps with the eyes, the ears,

¹⁷ 腹 (hara): 所以容囊五臟之者也 (倭名類聚抄)。

the nose, the tongue, and the flesh as physical features. The use of 軀殼^{karada} is time to time seen in referring to the body's relative position to the mind.

(識神は)ただしばらくは此軀殼^{karada}に寄寓^{yadori}て、元氣を主^{tsukasadori}宰^{tsukasadori}て、大氣を吸呼しめ・・・ (...the spirit is just temporarily indwelling in this physical shell of the body, governs the vital force, and makes one to breathe the air...).

Here contrasted with the body 軀殼^{karada} as an empty container, stress lies in the existence of indwelling spirit, which is above the physical body. Although this paper limits itself to focus on the views of the body at the moment, the terminology for the mind or the spirit, and its relation to the body await further examination.

Conclusion

To conclude, we have examined a few examples of the expressions for “the body” in different contexts in *Byōka suchi*. Even though various words are given the reading as *karada*, the most general term for the body in Japanese, their connotative sense often differs. It largely attributes to the visual effects brought by arbitrarily used Chinese characters, by which the word comes to embrace double meanings. In so doing, the author seems to succeed to reflect his medical view of the body in well-chosen Chinese characters, while keeping the reading of sentences simple. In other words, arbitrarily used Chinese characters play a role to bridge the gap between the medical knowledge of professionals and ordinary non-medical readership.

Regarding his view of the body, which attributes to the traditional physiology of *ki*, the body seems to be perceived in compound ways. The association of the idea of “transportation” with the body repeatedly appears. It suggests that human body is regarded as a flowing entity, which is sustained by the movement of *ki*. In this prospect, there is another image of the body which presents a static place where *ki* operation takes place. The latter image is also often used in order to make contrast the body with the indwelling spirit, which is above the physical body.

The annotated text provides the rich pictures of how people took care of their body through daily *yōjō* practices, such as massage or breath-regulation. They are very suggestive of how bodily image was created and their sensation or emotion, which is also based on *ki* theory, was experienced. Therefore further investigation will be continued to elucidate the subjective view of the Edo people through the close analysis of *Byōka suchi*.

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