

Original

Analysis of the medical care of Masaoka Shiki, as seen in “Gyoga Manroku”

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Abstract

Masaoka Shiki published “*Bokuju Itteki* (A drop of Indian ink)”, “*Gyoga Manroku* (Stay notes while lying on my back)”, and “*Byosho Rokushaku* (A six-foot sickbed)” over a period of 7 years, while he was bedridden with tuberculosis. During this time, his mother and sister took care of him devotedly at home. This short communication aims to analyze Shiki’s medical care in the Meiji era, by examining the medical conditions described in his works. I have identified five points about his care. First, he wanted to write despite the uncomfortable physical and mental state caused by his illness. He also wanted to eat, which might have been the source of his vitality. The pain caused by his illness had not been properly controlled, and his family provided good care for him. He also had the financial support for a long recuperation. Descriptions of the care provided by his mother and his sister were very limited in his work, and, this communication was limited to the medical treatment described by Shiki himself. —It will be necessary to further examine the medical care from multiple perspectives in the future.

Key words: Home care. Masaoka Shiki. *Bokuju Itteki*. *Gyoga Manroku*. *Byosho Rokushaku*.

Introduction

I am not an expert on literature.

What attracted my attention to Masaoka Shiki was the TV drama “*Saka no Ue no Kumo*” (*Clouds over the slope*), broadcast by NHK several years ago, and based on a novel by Ryotaro Shiba.

The story was set in the Meiji era and depicted the adolescence of the Akiyama brothers and Masaoka Shiki, prominent figures from Matsuyama City in the Shikoku region.

One surprising aspect of TV drama was that the profile of Shiki and that of the actor who played him in his sickbed looked almost the same.

Shiki, a great poet of the era, described in detail in his works such as “*Bokuju Itteki*” (*A drop of Indian ink*), — “*Gyoga Manroku*” (*Stray notes while lying on my back*), and — “*Byosho Rokushaku*” — (*A six-foot sickbed*) how he fought against his illness for 7 years while continuing to write until a few days before his death.

One of the most intriguing points for me was the devoted care Shiki’s family gave him to help him continue his literary activities.¹⁾

In an era when there was no such concept as

home care, family members almost always women took care of sick relation at home.

In the case of Shiki, his mother and sister, Ritsu were the ones to look after him remain at his side until his death.

I have reviewed Shiki’s works to understand how he spent his years of illness and his views on his care.

I. Shiki’s descriptions of his physical and mental condition

When did Shiki contract tuberculosis? According to documents from the Shikian archive foundation, he was on a ship to Jinzhou and Lu Shun as a war correspondent in the First Sino-Japanese war when he coughed up blood in April 1895, and subsequently spent nearly 4 months in hospital.

In February 1896, when the poet was 29, he wrote. “My left waist swells and I have become unable to walk due to a strong pain.”²⁾

Around this time, he apparently started to have trouble continuing with his normal activities.

For example, using a rickshaw to attend a poetry group meeting.

In *“Byosho Rokushaku,”* Shiki wrote about his life from May 1902, 6 years after he contracted the disease, until 2 days before his death.

At the beginning of the essay, he described his physical condition: “A sickbed of six feet — this is my whole world. Even this six-foot bed is too wide for me. If I stretch my hand a little, I can touch the tatami mat, but I can’t stretch my legs beyond the end of the futon for relaxing. In worse times, I suffer extreme pains and can’t move at all.”³⁾

Later, on June 19, he wrote: “My body is in pain, I feel weak and can’t move much. My brain is often in a haze. I feel dizzy and can’t read books and newspapers”.

Inflammation caused by the tuberculosis bacteria spread from his lung to cause pains in his back, buttocks, side⁵⁾ and gums, giving Shiki pains night and day.⁶⁾

Parts of his body where pus accumulated, including his belly, waist, buttocks and gums, were cut open for pus removal and cleaned using cotton.⁷⁾

It took about an hour each day to replace the bandages on his belly, waist and buttocks.

A numbing agent was applied but the acute pain from the disease caused Shiki to shout cry, and he wrote, “The pain is indescribable. I would feel at ease if I went totally insane but it is impossible...”⁷⁾ and “Now the numbing agent has partly lost its effectiveness.”⁸⁾

As the disease advanced, his pain became too much for the agent to subdue.

In June 1902, Shiki’s physical and mental conditions was apparently so bad that he could hardly write.

From his descriptions, such as: “If I stretch my hand a little, I can touch the tatami mat” and “can’t move much,” it must have been hard for him even to change his body position himself during this period.

Tuberculosis also deprived him of stability in body and mind.

But he maintained his desire to write, overcoming his physical and mental conditions.

II. Special meals for Shiki

When someone is ill, the act of eating supports their life and fuels their motivation.

It is a source of vitality for a patient.

Shiki provided information about his meals his literature.

“Gyoga Manroku” includes a description of his daily life along with fragments of haiku and

sketches.

He provided considerable detail about his food, for example: “Three bowls of rice gruel, fish boiled in soy sauce, pickled plum and a pear for breakfast, five shaku (about 0.09 liters) of milk with cocoa and several in between, and two bowls of rice gruel, 18 grilled sardines, vinegared sardines, cabbage and a pear for dinner”⁹⁾

The Masaoka family’s food expenses accounted for about half of their total income.

Such food items as sliced raw fish, eel, loach, Western dishes and tsukudani (fish and vegetables boiled with soy sauce) were often mentioned.¹⁰⁾

Shiki described soaking tsukudani and raw fish in soy sauce and putting them on gruel.

He apparently preferred fish to meat.

The line “My mother and sister who always eat pickles in a corner of the kitchen...”¹¹⁾ reveals that Shiki’s meals were different from theirs.

The poet struggled to eat because of his physical condition, describing a situation where his “gums are always discharging pus night and day, and I have to use the teeth on the right to chew. The left teeth are not usable because it causes much pain. The pain is so terrible that I can’t bite firmly.”¹²⁾

His body “has holes in the belly, back and buttocks like a honeycomb...”¹³⁾, “the pain in the subilium is so intense, it is unbearable.”¹⁴⁾ and “It causes pain in the part when I cough, and causes another when I cry.”¹⁵⁾

He also wrote that his meals were “not tasty.”¹⁶⁾ Shiki said little about the position he used to eat.

Given his difficulty in rolling over, I suspect from experience that he could eat whatever he could hold without assistance, but must have required the help of his mother or sister for some meals.

When people are sick, they generally want to do whatever is beneficial to their health.

It was therefore natural for Shiki to eat nutritious food that would give him vigor.

I imagine that his mother and sister did not hesitate to use half of their income on Shiki’s meals, especially he was the breadwinner despite his illness.

They also attended to Shiki’s requests and cooked his favorite foods while eating only pickles themselves.

They paid attention to Shiki’s teeth and physical condition and served him special meals, mainly using rice gruel.

Given the poet’s bedridden condition, pain

throughout the body, and worsening oral condition as the disease progressed, the daily meals seem to reflect the family's strong desire to keep him alive and apparently motivated him to continue living.

III. Shiki's view of his nursing care

Shiki wrote about his experience of being nursed and the necessity for nursing education on July 16 and 17, 1902, in "Byosho Rokushaku." His comments include.

"A patient's issues of joy and sorrow are also their family's issues. They are issues on how to care a patient. When a patient is in severe pain or feels lonely due to their illness, the quality of caring has a large effect on them;"¹⁵⁾

"Especially when the patient feels lonely and insecure, they will almost forget about the illness whenever those on their side take good care of the patient, or understand and react to the patient's feelings appropriately;"¹⁷⁾

"But when those in charge of caring, or women in the family, are a bad nurse, the patient has to get irritated, angry or yell at them..."¹⁷⁾

"In addition to patient's care, family members have to do all chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and needlework. So it is impossible for them to attend the patient all day..."¹⁷⁾

"Even when a family member is beside the patient, if he or she doesn't apply all kinds of wisdom for comfort, the patient gets bored. My family doesn't have such wisdom..."¹⁷⁾ and "Women's education is important to train them for nursing..."¹⁷⁾

Shiki thought that family mattered when it comes to a comfortable environment for a patient.

In other words, caregivers have a direct impact on the life of a patient at home.

Family issues are among the challenges for today's home care, and therefore the poet's opinion resonates.

This is a fundamental problem.

What the poet desired from nursing was an end to loneliness and for his caregivers to learn how to support him mentally.

He apparently asked the family to give him mental stability.

Unlike daily tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and needlework, home nursing is only necessary to respond to a family crisis or particular situation.

Shiki suggested that women had to be educated so that they could handle such a family matter as well as everyday care.

Far in advance of his time, Shiki raised today's key nursing issues, such as "patient-oriented nursing," "mental care" and "nurse education."

Treating nursing issues as a home problem reflects the times in which Shiki lived, and is natural given that home nursing prevailed then.

Considering that women did not play major roles in society, and had limited education, Shiki's thinking on the necessity of nursing education was progressive.

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