Seishu Hanaoka (1760 – 1835)

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Figure 1: The portrait of Seishu Hanaoka.
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Seishu Hanaoka (Figure 1) was a Japanese pioneer in surgery and anesthesia. His great achievements in medicine are remarkable when the historical context in Japan is considered: he was the first doctor in the world to succeed in performing surgery under general anesthesia, about 200 years ago.\textsuperscript{1,3} In those days, the Japanese government closed the country from contact with most European nations and people obtained little information from outside. Seishu did not even live in the capital or any other big city; he was a doctor in a private clinic in the countryside. As in other far-eastern Asian countries distant from Europe, medicine in Japan was greatly influenced by China. Seishu learned western style surgery, which had been introduced by Dutch doctors, although Japanese
surgeons of his time only dealt with minor surgeries such as suturing wounds and excising abscesses. Seishu felt the need for strong anesthesia in order to perform major operations and independently studied the medicinal efficacy of herbs for 20 years. He finally developed a general anesthesia drug and succeeded in performing a breast cancer resection under general anesthesia in October 13, 1805. Surprisingly, his success preceded the well-known ether anesthesia by Morton at the Massachusetts General Hospital in the United States by 41 years. In total, according to his medical records, he treated 147 breast cancer patients. After establishing general anesthesia, he performed not only breast cancer operations, but also a wide variety of other surgeries such as orthopedic, urological, ophthalmic, and obstetric and gynecological. Furthermore, Seishu was passionate about medical education and trained over 1000 young physicians.

REFERENCES