

TOKYO LETTER

body" is learnt.

In both Tai Chi Ch'uan and Seitai one often hears the word "ki". This is an important word in Oriental medicine, martial arts and other fields, and is generally translated as energy, though I do not think that an exact translation exists in English. In any case, something finer than physical force is intended—perhaps "life energy" would be more appropriate. In Japanese the word "ki" forms part of the expressions "to pay attention" and "to take care." The word for "air" and the word for "weather" contain "ki" as well. In English there exist such vague words as "atmosphere" and "temperament," and there are old words such as "humor" and "ether" which convey something of the same feeling. All of these words have to do with emotions or with "something in the air," something sensed but not seen. So the idea of "ki" really should not be entirely strange to Westerners, even though it has not been particularly studied or developed in Western culture.

Breathing is also important. No breath, no life. In Tai Chi Ch'uan it is said that the breath is what connects the body and the mind (consciousness). In Seitai, it is said that we cannot look at body and mind separately, and in every case we work in coordination with the rhythm of the breath. This creates a special kind of communication.

Although explanation and theory do exist and are of value and interest, finally

the heart of the matter is in practice and experience. In this context I have been told that, "We can only reach the spirit through (practice of) form. Otherwise we are just talking."

In Japan both Eastern and Western approaches to health are well developed, while in the West generally orthodox medicine prevails. Regarding which is "better" there are various opinions, though essentially they differ so much in principle and intention that I think they need not interfere or compete with each other. On the contrary, a situation where a number of approaches are available provides people with the freedom and responsibility of choice. I think this is beginning to be appreciated by many people in the West who have experienced frustration with a one-sided approach.

A foreign friend was recently impressed by the agility of Japanese old people, remarking that even for young Westerners it is difficult to sit *seiza* (Japanese style) for any period of time. The case is the same with the Japanese toilet, many Westerners finding a squatting position difficult because of stiffness. Actually these are two good cultural habits which keep the legs and spine young and flexible, and it really requires no effort to learn them in childhood while the body is still soft. The practice of sleeping on the floor on a firm mat (*futon*) is also good for the back, and the custom of leaving shoes off while inside the house allows the feet

freedom of movement, encouraging good circulation.

Looking at the other side, members of this generation of Japanese are decidedly taller and heavier than their parents. Here can be seen the influence of diet. But it is already common knowledge that a rich diet is a cause of many chronic diseases, and health can be damaged as much or more by over abundance as by lack. If health depends so much on the daily use of the body, as I believe it does, then as Japanese people increasingly follow a Western way of life, they must expect to encounter the same health problems as Westerners. Maybe it is impossible, and in some cases even undesirable, for things to remain "as they were," but I truly hope that in the rush to become modern, those "leftover" customs which are beneficial for health don't disappear.

Personally I grew up in very modern and comfortable surroundings, but I came to feel that without physical and mental health the meaning of "living well" is lost. It will be a shame if the Japanese people throw away good and wholesome parts of their culture, because once a tradition is broken it is never easy to find the thread again. Though inevitably times will change, this age provides wonderful possibilities for members of different cultures to meet and learn from each other, and for individuals of East and West to help each other become more complete.

(Miriam Maisel)

BOOK REVIEW

By Tatsuya Komatsu
Senior Managing Director
Simul International, Inc.

Nippon: The Land and Its People

Gakuseisha Publishing Co., Ltd.;
352 pages; ¥1,200

This book was first compiled by Nippon Steel Corp. in 1978 as an educational tool for its employees. *Nippon: The Land and Its People* has been sought after ever since by many outside the company and treasured by the few who had the



good fortune to obtain it. Its publication for the general market is very much welcome, and it is no surprise that bookstores are finding it hard to keep this little volume in stock.

Although interest in Japan has boomed as the country has grown into the free world's second largest industrial power, knowledge about the Japanese and their society is surprisingly scant and often distorted. The country's geographical isolation and relatively recent development as a modern industrial democracy take some of the blame, but another major cause has been the Japanese people's own failure to explain themselves to their friends overseas.

Yasuo Aoto, who conceived of this book and was one of its principal authors,

TOKYO LETTER

talks in the afterword about his own home-stay experience in Salt Lake City. Conversation after dinner often turned to the differences between the two countries, and Aoto would have to perform the difficult task of explaining his country's history, culture, customs, political and economic systems across language and cultural boundaries.

Obviously, language alone is not enough. One also needs knowledge and information.

Nippon: The Land and Its People provides all of these. In both Japanese and English, the book admirably covers a wide spectrum of subjects—geography, history, political and economic systems, business and management, science and technology, even sightseeing routes. The choice of topics was based on questionnaires circulated among Nippon Steel employees and thus reflects the kinds of questions most likely to be asked of Japanese businessmen. The section on history, for example, gives particular attention to factors

behind Japan's rapid modernization in the early Meiji period. There are even explanations about small matters seldom understood by Japanese themselves—the origins of their national flag, for example.

Japanese businessmen are frequently called upon to explain the factors behind Japan's high industrial productivity, including decision-making, labor-management relations, QC circles and other intra-company activities aimed at increasing efficiency. The reader will find these topics neatly presented for easy reference. Japanese culture is given particularly thorough coverage, reflecting the authors' recognition that explaining culture is a most difficult and tricky task. I hope Japanese businessmen will gain from these pages the ability to talk about their own culture as one way to offset the image of the Japanese as "business-first" people.

Another valuable feature of this guide is that every passage is presented with Japanese and English on facing pages so that readers can easily find and compare

equivalent expressions. This combination of language and content can greatly facilitate understanding and help one express oneself when talking about these subjects.

Language and culture cannot be separated. The increasing willingness of foreign businessmen to learn Japanese is a welcome trend, and this book should prove a valuable aid.

The translation is accurate and readable overall, though a freer and more idiomatic "rewriting" in English would have made the book more interesting and increased its value as an English study tool. This minor criticism, however, does not detract from an otherwise excellent contribution to international communication.

Although *Nippon: The Land and Its People* is primarily written for Japanese, it makes valuable and useful reading for non-Japanese. The knowledge it provides about a country so often labelled "inscrutable" will greatly enhance their chances of success in whatever business they pursue in Japan.

"Hibiya Alfio" Spaghetti Restaurant

There are countless Chinese and French restaurants in Tokyo, and quite a few of them serve dishes equal or even superior in taste (and prices too!) to those of restaurants in the original country. In contrast, Tokyo has only a few Italian restaurants. Moreover, the number of dishes served at these restaurants are limited. They are usually spaghetti, pizza and other pasta dishes.

To our sorrow it is rare to find in Tokyo Italian restaurants like those in New York and Los Angeles which are unpretentious but have a refined sense and which serve plenty of fresh vegetable salad and a great variety of delicious pasta, meat and fish dishes.

Spaghetti is synonymous with Italian cuisine. Until five or six years ago, it was extremely difficult to eat delicious spaghetti in Tokyo. The variety available was limited to spaghetti Napolitan or spaghetti meat sauce.

Recently, however, it has become possible to have in Tokyo Italian food as deli-

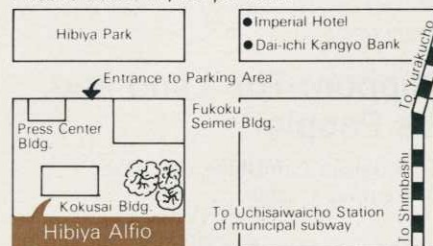


cious as or even better than restaurants in Italy. The choices, too, have expanded, ranging from vongole bianco to a great variety of spaghetti with basilico, mushrooms, shrimps, or pork saute.

For Italian food in Tokyo, we recommend "Hibiya Alfio" which is a sister restaurant of "Renown Milano." "Hibiya Alfio" is one of the 14 Alfio chain restaurants in Tokyo which established a technical tie-up with Alfio in Milan 10 years ago

with the aim of serving genuine Italian dishes at moderate prices. Alfio annually sends 10 or so of its staff to Italy for training. The restaurant is so popular that many people are seen standing in a queue at lunch time. Another chain restaurant, Mitsui Alfio, located on the first basement floor of Shinjuku Mitsui Building, is popular with foreign guests staying at Keio Plaza Hotel or Century Hyatt Hotel. (Yoshimichi Hori)

A great variety of spaghetti available.
Price is about ¥1,000 per dish.



Basement 2F, Hibiya City Kokusai Building
2-chome, Uchisaiwaicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
Phone: (03) 501-0791
Open from 11:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
(Last order taken at 9:30 p.m.)
Open throughout the year