

## To Succeed in Oriental Medicine without a Manual

By *Bunzo Takamatsu*

For nearly ten years I had worked in a restaurant. Every single day I would cut vegetables, peel shrimps, and make tempura. It wasn't fun. The restaurant I worked at has become very successful but when I started working, the owners were working day and night, and did everything themselves. No one was officially trained to do restaurant business. Every day was a learning session. We all learned from our mistakes. I believe the reason for their success is:

- 1) They worked hard and had good helpers like myself.
- 2) American people are not so fastidious about what they are served. (They were easy to please.)

About six months after I started working there, a real chef came to work. He went to a cooking school. He was trained in well known restaurants in Japan and France. He was a real pro. We were all fascinated by his technique. He often told me, "Bunzo-san, it is very difficult to make a good craftsman in America."

According to him, very few Americans have enough patience to keep doing one thing. Especially in the field of cooking, the so-called vertical relationship between senior students and junior students is strict. The latter is absolutely subordinate to the former. There is no way for a champion of lateral relationships to put up with this kind of treatment.

I'd like to add another aspect I noticed. American people tend to rely too much on verbal communication. Generally speaking, they are better at verbal expressions. On the other hand, Japan is a country of Kototama (Word Spirit). The word itself has power. One has to be very careful about what they say. Verbosity is considered a vice. A man of few words is honored. My father used to tell me, "Three words a day should be enough for a man." He also detested any kind of excuses and justifications.

Naturally I became taciturn. I had to learn that in America being quiet is often considered being indifferent, or even dumb. Silence is not necessarily golden here. After over twenty years in America I still seem to have difficulty adjusting myself. I am beginning to understand the importance of explaining myself. But I also know that the extent to which one can explain verbally is

really limited.

I saw a TV program the other day titled "Look for a super craftsman!" In Japan they are beginning to have a shortage of craftsmen who are credited with Japanese high-level technology in automobiles, home appliances, etc.

The definition of a super craftsman is:

- 1) One who can surpass the precision a machine can create.
- 2) One who can check the finishing touch with his five senses.
- 3) One who has a unique method or perception that cannot be described in a blue print

If there is a lathe that can create a difference down to 1/100th of a millimeter, a super craftsman can make a difference to 1/1000th of a millimeter with the lathe. In other words he can exceed the performance of the machine. Unfortunately, the number of these super craftsmen is decreasing because many are elderly and successors are hard to come by. Nowadays, even in Japan, young people don't show much interest in work that is rather obscure and takes many years to master.

The Japanese government recently acknowledged them, officially, as super craftsmen and gave them credit. This was the first step of passing on this interest to the next generation. And some companies also started making an effort to pass these techniques on to the younger people. They video taped the masters' craft. They made the manual of the technique. Super craftsmen are all for it. However, it is not an easy task. One of the super craftsmen says, "If you can explain it by word, it's not a technique worth writing down anyway. The nitty gritty part is indescribable. Impossible to write about it. You just have to get it with your body." I suppose what he is saying is that you have to breathe the same air as the master for many years until you get it. As Lao-Tsu said, "*Tao that can be explained is not the real Tao.*"

It's an American illusion that a manual can be made about everything and everything can be explained by a manual. Because of that we can enjoy various modern inventions. But if everything were really made by the manual, it would be a sad world. And the world is going in that direction.

Even the world of medicine is not an exception. All the tests are done by machines and a doctor just checks the numbers. With the manual anyone probably can do the job. Only in the field of surgery, human touch still seems indispensable.

Then what about Oriental medicine? It is kind of "behind" in that sense. Oriental medical doctors still rely, in all the aspects

of medicine, on their five senses or even sixth one. "Manualization" or standardization is not in near sight. But this is good and bad. The good thing about "Manualization" is that you can expect a certain level of technique everywhere. On the other hand, the world of "non-manua" is uneven. It is not rare that a master can accurately diagnose a sick person at one glance, where it would take many tests and many days to come to the same diagnosis by modern medicine. I know some healers who can cure all kinds of sick people. Their works can only be called divine, or miraculous. The bad side of this world is that there is plenty of room for charlatans to exist. I wouldn't call myself a quack but I am not a master either. Or at least not yet. Actually I'm not even sure if I could become one. Since I never had a chance to breathe the same air as a master did for a certain number of years, I did most of my learning by actually treating patients and referring to manuals. It could be a Japanese illusion that you can be a master someday if you are apprenticed to a master. There is a master, like Nagano sensei, who really didn't have a particular teacher. However, they seem to be few.

Is it impossible for an ordinary guy like myself to become a super craftsman without having a master? I am in my middle forties with four small kids. It seems too late to become a student of some guru. At this stage I wonder what I can do to excel in this "non-manual" world

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## About the Cover

This is an illustration of *Shinkyu Gokuhiden* (Absolute Secrets of Acupuncture and Moxibustion), a Japanese acupuncture classic. Its author is believed to be Nagata Tokuhon (1513-1630) who travelled all over Japan to treat sick people and died at the age of 118 years. It shows where the paediatric moxibustion points are located on a boy. The points are located on left Ganshu (BL17) and right Pishu (BL20) which interestingly are not the same on each side. On a girl, the right and left is reversed: right Ganshu and left Pishu are applied.