

THIS MANUSCRIPT WAS HANDED TO A WELLKNOWN NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING COMPANY IN TOKYO 6 WEEKS PRIOR TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD NOMA-DOJO, BUT DID NOT APPEAR IN PRINT.

BIT BY BIT - BULLDOZING THE SOUL OF JAPAN? BUSHIDO AND THE PROSPECTIVE DEMOLITION OF THE OLDEST FENCING-HALL IN TOKYO

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THE PLANNED DESTRUCTION OF THE KANTO'S LAST HISTORICAL FENCING-HALL HAS BECOME A MATTER OF INTERNATIONAL CONCERN. IT IS SYMPTOMATIC FOR YET ANOTHER ALARMING BREACH WITH JAPAN'S HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS. ONE ASPECT OF THIS CULTURE WAS BUSHIDO, INTERPRETED FOR AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE BY NITOBÉ INAZO IN 1900. JUST AS IDEALS OF CHIVALRY HAVE BEEN ABUSED DURING THE REIGN OF THE NAZI-REGIME IN GERMANY, TRAITS OF BUSHIDÔ HAVE BEEN ABUSED DURING THE PERIOD OF IMPERIALISTIC NATIONALISM. THIS FACT HOWEVER SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS A PRETEXT FOR IGNORING BUSHIDO'S PROSPECTS FOR A MORE CIVILIZED DEALING WITH ISSUES OF THE PRESENT. WHAT IS LEFT OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE/HUMANE TRAITS OF THIS CODE OF HONOUR IS MAINLY PRESERVED BY SOME EXPONENTS OF THE TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS (BUDO), WHO ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP THEIR ARTS FROM BECOMING MERE "FIGHTING SPORTS".

AS A MATTER OF FACT, BY FATHOMING BUSHIDO'S AND BUDO'S POTENTIAL FOR CRUCIAL AFFAIRS OF OUR TIMES, JAPAN COULD CONTRIBUTE DECISIVELY MORE TO A PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS AND E.G. TO THE ESTABLISHING OF INTERNATIONAL FAIR-TRADE STANDARDS THAN BY MEEKLY ABSORBING ONE WESTERN WAY OF LIFE. HAVING TO READ ADVERTISING-SLOGANS LIKE "YOU ARE WHAT YOU BUY" IN A COUNTRY THAT ONCE WAS A STRONGHOLD FOR A REFINED SENSE FOR AESTHETICS (WABI AND SABI) AND MANNERS IS A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE. IT IS THE DECLINE OF VALUES TOWARDS THE CRUSHING OF AN OPPONENT AT ANY COST THAT SOMETIMES ENDS IN SENSELESS VIOLENCE EVEN WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS. ON A LARGER SCALE THE SAME DECADENCE IS DETECTABLE IN MODERN WARFARE, WHERE THE LOSS OF

INNOCENT LIFE BECOMES ACCEPTABLE AS “COLLATERAL DAMAGE”.

NEVERTHELESS — ALSO REFERRING TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE - FUNDAMENTAL VIRTUES FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE LIKE TOLERANCE, RESPECT, POLITENESS, COMPASSION AND MODESTY STILL FLOURISH IN JAPAN WHEN COMPARED TO MOST OTHER COUNTRIES. SOMETIMES IT OCCURS TO ME THAT IN EUROPE MUCH OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE IS PRESERVED IN STONE. ON THE CONTRARY MUCH OF JAPAN’S UNIQUE CULTURAL HERITAGE APPEARS TO BE PRESERVED IN THE HEARTS OF HER PEOPLE. STILL, VIRTUES AND BELIEFS TEND TO GO INTO DECLINE, WHEN THEIR SYMBOLS ARE NO LONGER TREATED WITH RESPECT OR EVEN DESTROYED. THERE ARE TWO SYMBOLS FOR KENDÔ: THE SWORD ITSELF AND THE DÔJÔ, THE HALL OF THE WAY, TIGHTLY CONNECTED WITH ZEN-PHILOSOPHY. THE SWORD AS A SYMBOL NOT FOR THE TAKING, BUT FOR THE PRESERVING OF LIFE HAS LONG SINCE FADED FROM PUBLIC CONSCIENCE. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DÔJÔ AS A PLACE FOR REFINING ONE’S PERSONALITY IS STILL EMPHASIZED BY MANY TEACHERS OF THE MARTIAL ARTS (BUDO), BUT COULD NOT YET COUNTERBALANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OUTLINED BELOW.

THE ISSUE AT HAND HERE WILL SOON COME TO AN END. THE PERSONS IN CHARGE WILL EXPRESS REGRET AT ITS INEVITABILITY AND RETURN TO “BUSINESS AS USUAL”. IN TOKYO, WHERE THE BIG KANTÔ-EARTHQUAKE OF 1923 AND THE FIREBOMBING BY THE AMERICAN AIR-FORCE IN 1945 DESTROYED LARGE PARTS OF THE CITY, THE DEMOLITION OF THE LAST REMAINS OF THE CAPITAL’S PRE-WAR VISAGE IS APPARENTLY CONSIDERED A NEGLIGIBLE LOSS NOWADAYS, WHEN IT COMES TO CONFRONTING THE PRESSURE OF FINANCIAL NECESSITY.

THE FATE OF THE CULTURAL PROPERTY IN QUESTION HERE WILL BE SEALED BY THE END OF THIS MONTH BY BIG MACHINERY. SOON ANOTHER FACELESS STRUCTURE WILL OCCUPY ITS LOCATION IN UTTER DISREGARD OF THE PHILANTHROPIC IDEALS THAT THE FORMER BUILDING WAS FOUNDED UPON. THE SERIOUS AND VERY MUCH ALIVE PURSUIT OF THESE IDEALS CAN STILL BE HEARD AND SEEN EACH MORNING WITHIN ITS WALLS UNTIL THE 20TH OF OCTOBER. THE “NOMA-DÔJO” (OTOWA, NEAR GOKOKUJI) IS ONE OF THE LAST WOODEN-BUILT DÔJÔS (“HALL OF THE WAY”) FOR THE ANCIENT MARTIAL ART OF KENDÔ (THE WAY OF THE SWORD) IN JAPAN AND THE LAST ONE IN TOKYO AND ITS SURROUNDINGS. IT WAS BUILT IN 1925 BY NOMA SEIJI, THE FOUNDER OF THE KODANSHA-

PUBLISHING GROUP, TO WHICH THE GROUND AND THE BUILDING STILL BELONG TODAY. FROM AN ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE THE FENCING-HALL IS UNIQUE, AS E.G. ITS ROOF- AND FLOOR-CONSTRUCTION ARE UNPARALLELED. THE ENSEMBLE OF THE SURROUNDING GARDEN WITH ITS HEALTHY OLD CHERRY-TREES AND THE RESTRAINED ARCHITECTURE OF THE WOODEN BUILDING CALL TO MIND THE FOND DESCRIPTIONS OF PRE-MODERN JAPAN BY KOIZUMI YAKUMO (LAFCADIO HEARN, 1850-1904).

IN RECENT YEARS MORE AND MORE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD DECIDE TO EMBARK UPON THE JAPANESE WAY OF THE SWORD, KENDÔ. IN CONTRAST TO MODERN CONCEPTS OF SPORT, “WINNING” IS NOT THE FINAL OBJECTIVE OF THIS MARTIAL ART. THE TERM “ART” FOR AN ACTIVITY THAT HAS ITS ROOTS IN SWORD-COMBAT AS A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH, MAY APPEAR OUT OF PLACE AT A SUPERFICIAL GLANCE. AS PERHAPS EVEN SOME BUDÔ-PRACTITIONERS IN JAPAN ARE UNAWARE, JAPAN IS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD WHERE THE TECHNIQUES OF KILLING AN OPPONENT BY USING THE BOW, SPEAR, SWORD OR JUST BARE HANDS HAVE BEEN TRANSCENDED TO WAYS (道) OF EDUCATING ONE’S OWN PERSONALITY AS WELL AS THE OPPONENT’S. THIS MAY NOT BE DEEMED A VERY ORIGINAL OBSERVATION, BUT DESERVES MENTION AS THERE IS A TENDENCY IN MODERN KENDO TO FOCUS MORE AND MORE ON SPORTING COMPETITION. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE FORMER NOTION HOWEVER, THE POTENTIAL OF THE WAY OF THE SWORD FOR EDUCATION TOWARDS PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE DESERVES TO BE EXPLORED MORE THOROUGHLY. NOMA SEIJI’S PHILOSOPHY FOR THE FOUNDING OF NOMA-DOJO WAS LARGELY BASED ON A BENEVOLENT OPEN-MINDEDNESS, THAT CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED IN THE WORLD OF THE MARTIAL ARTS EVEN TODAY. THUS, THIS VERY MUCH ALIVE FENCING-HALL STANDS AS A MONUMENT FOR A TRULY CULTIVATED “WAY OF THE WARRIOR” (武士道) THAT COULD NEVER BE EXPERIENCED THE SAME WAY IN A MODERN BUILDING. THE READER CAN OBTAIN A CONCISE IMPRESSION OF NOMA-DÔJÔ AND AN ADMIRABLE INTERPRETATION OF THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR FROM THE MOVIE “AME AGARU”/”AFTER THE RAIN” (1998). AS WE FOREIGNERS ARE TAUGHT BY HIGHLY QUALIFIED JAPANESE EXPONENTS OF KENDÔ, A TRADITIONAL DÔJÔ IS NOT AN ORDINARY TRAINING HALL, BUT A PLACE WHERE THE EFFORTS OF

THE FORERUNNERS ON THE WAY OF THE SWORD CAN BE EXPERIENCED AND BECOME AN INSPIRATION FOR ONE'S OWN PROGRESS IN THIS LIFELONG PURSUIT. THE DÔJÔ IS THOUGHT TO POSSESS A PERSONALITY OF ITS OWN, A SOUL THAT IS ALSO REPRESENTED BY THE LITTLE SHINTÔ-SHRINE ABOVE THE TOKO-NO-MA. IT IS QUITE DISENCHANTING FOR FOREIGN PRACTITIONERS OF BUDÔ TO SEE THAT EVEN IN THE HOMETOWN OF THE MARTIAL ARTS THE RESPECT FOR DÔJÔ, FOR EXTRAORDINARY TEACHERS LIKE MOCHIDA SEIJI AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS IS SECONDARY WHEN IT COMES TO MATTERS OF BUSINESS.

FAITHFUL TO THE FOUNDER'S SPIRIT, THE PUBLICATIONS OF KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL LTD. PROVIDE INVALUABLE INSIGHTS NOT ONLY INTO E.G. THE MARTIAL ARTS, BUSHIDÔ AND THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF PRE-MODERN JAPAN, BUT ALSO INTO THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE TO FOREIGN READERS. TO THINK OF TEARING DOWN A SYMBOL FOR THE VERY VIRTUES AND CRAFTSMANSHIP ELABORATELY DESCRIBED IN THE COMPANY'S BOOKS, MUST HAVE BEEN VERY HARD ON THE MANAGEMENT. ESPECIALLY AS THIS ACT WILL BE UNDERSTOOD AS A FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION BY CUSTOMERS ALL OVER THE WORLD WHO ARE AWARE OF THE CULTURAL ASSET IN THE BACKYARD OF THE PUBLISHING COMPANY. IT IS AN UNDENIABLE MERIT THAT THIS TRADITIONAL DÔJÔ COULD BE PRESERVED BY KODANSHA LTD. UNTIL TODAY. BUT IS THERE ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DONE TO SAVE IF NOT THE LOCATION, THEN AT LEAST THE BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE? MR. PAUL MARTIN HAS INITIATED AN OFFICIAL PETITION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE NOMA-DÔJÔ WHICH IS ACCESSIBLE ONLINE ([HTTP://WWW.PETITIONONLINE.COM/SAVENOMA/PETITION.HTML](http://www.petitiononline.com/savenoma/petition.html)) AND HAS BEEN SIGNED BY MORE THAN 2000 PEOPLE WORLDWIDE. THIS PETITION WILL HARDLY CHANGE THE SITUATION THAT LED THE COMPANY TO ITS DECISION IN THE FIRST PLACE. OTHER PEOPLE, EXPERIENCED KENDOKA AMONG THEM, SAY "THERE IS NOTHING TO BE DONE ABOUT IT, THINGS CHANGE", THUS RENOUNCING THE INITIATIVE THAT IS TERMED SO CRUCIAL IN KENDÔ. POLITICIANS - NOT ONLY IN JAPAN - ARE VERY FOND OF THE PHRASE OF "BUILDING A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY". WHY NOT START BY PRESERVING WHAT IS LEFT OF THE WOODEN ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS OF PRE-WAR TOKYO TO TAKE A STEP FROM LIP SERVICE TO ACTION? TO PRESERVE THIS HISTORICALLY AND ARCHITECTURALLY SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL MONUMENT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS BY LOOKING FOR AN AGREEMENT WITH THE

OWNER WOULD BE AN ADMIRABLE PROOF OF SINCERITY. WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE. NONETHELESS, FOR NOW IT APPEARS ADVISABLE TO PREPARE FOR THE LOSS OF YET ANOTHER SYMBOL OF BUSHIDO AND THE NOBLE WAY OF THE LIFE-GIVING (KATSUJIN-KEN), NOT THE KILLING (SATSUJIN-KEN), SWORD IN JAPAN.