

SHISEIKAN - POLAND: A REFLECTION

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(text written in 2008 for 35th Anniversary of the Shiseikan)

Situation of the Shiseikan at Meiji Shrine, and efforts undertaken there to invigorate the tradition of spiritual education make us to reflect on how we relate the metropolis (and a capital city for that matter) to the heritage of the ancient times. The problem is not a small one. Somehow we are used now to thinking that the metropolis and the center must be of the newest and most advanced features, in terms of technologies and global positioning of thought. While whatever is ancient and inherited from the archaic times, also based on the oral and direct transmission, is kept away in the countryside. Two major Shinto shrines: Izumo Taisha and Ise Shrine are placed in the countryside and are considered (at least abroad) the core of the shinto belief and practice. In Poland, the Cloister of Jasna Góra (Claremonte) where the image of Black Madonna is venerated, situated in Southern Poland, for centuries has been considered the rock of Polish religious practice. I have been wondering what sort of relationship can be kept between the modern “center” and the archaic “outskirts”. It seems to me that the reverse situating might be true: perhaps oral, invisible and intangible heritage constitute the hard bedrock of the visible product of the state. What is intangible sets up conditions of creating the material. I wonder now what role Shiseikan has been playing as a locus of the core of traditional thinking of the Japanese, within the metropolis, and the center of international exchange.

I was fortunate to be active amongst the people of Shiseikan, and receive tutelage of Inaba Sensei in the times when Shiseikan, and Meiji Shrine, were becoming really involved in the international co-operation. Working at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland for two successive terms (between 1994 and 1999 and between 2002 and 2006), I observed how more and more representatives of diverse countries: Heads of States and Governments, State Ministers, were paying respects to the name and spiritual emblem of the modern Japan - embodied in the Emperor Meiji. While being in touch with Shiseikan and the Meiji Shrine, I have never ceased to reflect on what is the *core* of tradition, and how we can talk about its intricacies. Is it possible to translate one culture on the forms of another culture and how to keep one’s identity while absorbing another’s form and patterns?

People of the olden days were wise enough to keep the innermost part of their traditions at a distance from the frontline of the social life. In ancient Greece, which was a foundation of the European civilization, the core of culture was nourished through the Mysteries of Eleusis, and they have never been revealed, kept as a secret forever. They were carried out at Eleusis, off Athens. In Japan there are “hidden” traditions – a secret transmission (*hiden*), which constitutes the essence of crafts and arts. They are hidden, which means they are not visible on the surface. Human body serves as a medium of this teaching here, and not a letter and scripture. This teaching belongs to the ancient paradigm of seeing the world in which body is not separated from the speech and process of ideation, but constitutes the matrix of speech in which words are renovated.

In my country, which I love deeply, we have never had a similar, our own tradition of secret teaching. In its stead we have a heritage of rich folk and religious customs. We also have a part of the material heritage of national culture that is placed *outside* of the country now, because of the historical process: wars, displacements, transfers, theft and suspension of sovereignty for a long time (about seven generations), emigration and expulsions. Therefore in our tradition there are certain fields that are “not here”. We have heritage which we do not possess. In a way, Polish people even now, when we think of ourselves utterly modern, keep for ourselves a field which is not central. For example, we are strongly attached to the Forefather’s Souls. It is strange, past possesses us. In many religious forms, and in many civil ceremonies we are quite pagan. For example, on important ceremonies of commemoration on national level, we have a rare custom of the “roll-call of the Dead”. It means that actual names of the soldiers and people killed for the country are being read aloud by the state leader or Marshal with his order: “*Come up for a roll call now!*”. In response, on behalf of those long dead, words resound from the mouths of the present squadron: “*Fallen on the Field of Glory!*”. Silence that accompanies this roll-call is awesome. I am extremely moved whenever I hear this, everyone is. This is our rite. The last time it happened was in 2007, in the first ever Commemoration of the Polish officers killed at the Woods of Katyń. Ten thousand names of the spirits were read and called to come, it took several long hours in cold November night.

This is our hidden self, stemming from the past. And the question now, that keeps my brains astir is, how to give form to the invisible? How to convey that we belong both to the present and to the past. We possess forms and forms possess us.

What I really appreciated (and I am still looking forward to it) is in the Shiseikan way is facing those political questions of present times, while being placed on a very sound foundation of experience growing on the rich ground of the past. The expression “political questions” has been used here on purpose. It seems to me that whenever one touches the field of heritage (what one received from one’s family and the country), one is immediately situating oneself in the domain of political thinking. Relation to heritage influences the action of ruling (i.e. introduction of the *rule* in the society). Do we want a rule that respects the heritage or perhaps we want a rule in which sets us free from the knowledge of the past? Do we want to live a life as divided inwardly (into past and present) or united?

Contemporary life gives us plenty of occasions to be fragmented and divided, because of the speed with which pieces of information and passions flow around. It is extremely difficult to keep ourselves one. Globalization and ease with which we can virtually communicate, cut us farther away from the one-ness – *almost real* takes place of the *real*. What are we to do?
