

Guest Editor's Foreword

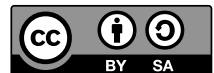
Luka CULIBERG*

The Japanese have another cult: the religion of the Samurai. Most of the officers belong to this caste. This religion is codified in the code of honour called Bushido. It is the soul of the Japanese Army, and it causes that fanaticism which the Japanese soldier exhibits on the battlefield. This code is the cause of so many suicides of Japanese soldiers on the battlefield, because they believe they would be dishonoured if they were to be taken prisoner.¹

This is how a Slovene daily newspaper *Edinost* (*Unity*), published in Trieste, described the notion of *bushidō* to the Slovene language readers while reporting on the progress of the Russo-Japanese War in its December 1st issue of 1904. The sympathies of Slovene press at the time were firmly on the Russian side on the conflict, and the Japanese were not described in favourable terms. This mysterious “code of honour” was derided as a “cult” and was recognised as a cause of Japan’s militant fanaticism and later on its imperialism.

At approximately the same time, the U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt was allegedly purchasing numerous copies of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, a book written in English by Nitobe Inazō, to distribute among his friends. Though Japanese victory over Russia was received with mixed sentiments in the United States due to the ever growing fear of the “Yellow Peril”, Nitobe’s *Bushido* nevertheless managed to draw enough enthusiasm so that within a decade there appeared nine more editions in English in both the United States and Britain, as well as seven translations into other languages, as William M. Bodiford points out in his paper in the present issue.

* Luka CULIBERG, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.
luka.culiberg[at]ff.uni-lj.si



1 »Še en kult imajo Japonci: vero Samurajev. Tej kasti pripada večina oficirjev. Ta vera je določena v častnem kodeksu Bušido. Ta je duša japonske armade in povzroča tisti fanatizem, ki ga kaže japonski vojak na bojišču. V tem kodeksu je vzrok tolikim samomorom japonskih vojakov na bojišču, ker menijo, da bi bili onečaščeni, če bi jih sovražnik ujel.« *Edinost*, vol. 29, no. 333, December 1st, 1904, p. 2.

The oscillation between fascination and derision directed toward *bushidō* in the last hundred or so years, both in Japan and abroad, is just one characteristic aspect of this ambiguous “samurai code of honour”. Ever since the notion of *bushidō* took the centre stage in the discourse on Japanese culture and national character in the Meiji period (1868–1912), various thinkers imbued the notion with the whole gamut of ideological interpretations, seeing in it everything from ultimate evidence of Japanese uniqueness on one end, to recognising in *bushidō* the symbol of Japanese civilized status by virtue of the universality of its ethical postulations on the other. Moreover, this vague and elusive idea of “samurai honour” continues to function as an empty shell for whatever ideological content wishes to occupy its place.

The aim of the present issue of the *Asian Studies* journal is thus to approach the notion of *bushidō* from as many aspects as possible in order to further unveil some of the mystery informing this notion. The seed that bore fruit in the form of present issue was planted back in the summer of 2017, when The National Museum of Slovenia featured an exhibition, titled *The Paths of the Samurai*, displaying samurai warrior equipment and related paraphernalia. Among the numerous events accompanying the exhibition, the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Ljubljana, in cooperation with the National Museum, hosted a symposium with the aim to rethink, discuss and further elucidate the tenets that underlie the notion of the so-called “way of the samurai”. The majority of contributions in the present issue are based on papers presented at that symposium. At this point I would first like to express our gratitude to all who came to Ljubljana from abroad to share their valuable insights on the subject; and second, I would like to thank everyone who submitted their contributions, thus making this journal issue possible. I am more than convinced that the final result will serve as a valuable resource not just for the scholars of Japanese history, but for a much wider readership interested in the workings of ideology in general.

This is all the more so because this ambiguous and popular notion of *bushidō* seems to have drawn until recently only very limited interest among historians and other scholars focusing on Japan (see Bodiford in the present issue), and only very few academic works have been dedicated to the topic.² Conversely, it is precisely this “samurai honour” which has the power to fascinate the wider public, giving free reign to the popular imagination.

Bushidō, written in Japanese as 武士道, and usually translated into English as “the way of the warrior”, is a word which was practically non-existent until the late

2 One recent notable exception is the book *Inventing the Way of the Samurai* (2014, Oxford University Press) by Oleg Benesch, who unfortunately could not participate at the symposium, however his work is often referenced in numerous articles in the present issue.

19th century. *Bushi* was a general term denoting the samurai or the warriors, while *dō* is a Daoist concept of “the Way”. There has never been any “Bible of *bushidō*”, any written code, but there had been isolated texts in the 17th and 18th centuries referring to the idea, most notably by Yamaga Sokō, Yamamoto Tsunetomo and Daidōji Yūzan. However, even though texts by these authors are read nowadays as part of the *bushidō* canon, they were not widely influential in their own time. For example, Yamamoto’s *Hagakure* was limited to a very small readership of a few local samurai of the Nabeshima clan in a manuscript form. It had been completely unknown to the general samurai population, and was published for the first time only in the 20th century when the samurai were already a thing of the past. Such texts had therefore extremely limited effect until the early 20th century when they were “discovered” and adopted as the part of new martial ideology of the Imperial Japanese Army.

The authors writing about *bushidō* during the Edo period (1600–1868) were either producing nostalgic accounts about the samurai of old when the country was still at war, or, conversely, trying to establish and legitimize “the new way of the warrior” suitable for the times of Tokugawa peace. Though members of the samurai class still defined themselves as “warriors” during the Edo period, the majority of them did not witness any serious armed conflict. Moreover, while the samurai had fought battles and wars during the previous centuries, their primary goal was to survive and prevail. In those times martial skills, tactics and cunning mattered most. When the circumstances transformed them from fighters into administrators of the state, the focus switched to the idea of the samurai ruling by the virtue of their moral example. The idea of samurai *honour* thus came to the fore. Yet honour is a much more elusive notion than practical martial skills.

Only a few months before Tokugawa Ieyasu set the future course for the country and consequently established the new paradigm for the social role of the samurai class with his victory in the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, far away in London the earliest recorded performance of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1* took place. This story of medieval knights and their feuds features, among others, Sir John Falstaff, a fat, corrupt and drunk knight, who instead of a chivalrous expression of fealty to his liege lord feigns his own death in order to avoid combat. Moments before this “dishonourable” act, he lets the audience in on his thoughts about the notion of honour. After asking rhetorically, whether honour can set a broken leg, take away the grief of a wound or perform a surgery, Falstaff declares that honour is just “a word”, and that a word is nothing but air.

Honour, as Karl Friday observes in his article in the present issue, is indeed a knotty construct. According to Friday, honour represents a ubiquitous value in

the sense that a great many cultures entertain some sort of corresponding ideal, but the substance of honour—the specifics of what behaviours are and are not held to be “honourable”—are peculiar to individual times and places. Honour as an abstract concept represents qualities that are deemed respectable and worthy of admiration, but these qualities are culturally specific, as well as subject to intra-cultural negotiation.

For example, in an episode of the TV series *House*, the doctors treat a patient who had been charged with treason for exposing the details of the U.S. Army killing civilians. A discussion revolves around the issue whether his act of whistleblowing was honourable or treasonous. The soldier betrayed his country, because he believed that exposing the truth was honourable, and therefore he accepts the consequences—the charge of treason. However, the protagonist of the series, Dr. House, takes a position much closer to Sir John Falstaff. He believes that pleading guilty is not honourable, but stupid, and so, in a manner quite reminiscent of Shakespeare’s character, says: “What is honour? Dying for your country? Getting straight A’s? Killing your daughter because she had the audacity to get raped?”³

Dying for one’s country or exposing that country’s dark secrets, killing an enemy in battle or killing one’s daughter because she was “dishonoured” by getting raped, people hold diverse or even opposite views on what is honourable. Generally, however, people would sooner denounce a certain deed, e.g. killing one’s own daughter, as not being honourable at all, rather than questioning the idea of honour itself. The cynical approach to honour in the manner of Falstaff or Dr. House is certainly not the usual reaction. We still tend to praise this or that deed or person as “honourable”. Honour, as Falstaff observes, might be merely a word, thin air, something that won’t set a broken leg or perform surgery. What he doesn’t realize is that *words* as bearers of ideologies are nevertheless powerful, and throughout history a word such as honour has had very tangible and material consequences.

“Samurai honour”, as is generally understood nowadays, is an invented tradition from the time when the samurai themselves were already a thing of the past. But, as Andrew Horvat notes in his article, the effectiveness of ideologies does not depend on their historical accuracy. If samurai intellectuals during the Edo period were formulating their first ideas about *bushidō* in order to situate the samurai class firmly in its ruling position within the hierarchical structure of society, the *bushidō* of a Christian intellectual such as Nitobe Inazō, writing at the beginning of the 20th century, was something completely different. *Bushidō* in Nitobe’s version was no longer just an ethical code belonging to a small samurai elite, but was transformed into “the soul of Japan”, ingrained into the fabric of society as a whole

3 *House, Episode 15, Season 8.*

and forming its cultural and ethical foundation, analogous to Christianity in the West. Nitobe explicitly aligned *bushidō* with the European notion of “chivalry”.

If Nitobe’s attempt was to draw parallels between *bushidō*, chivalry and Christianity in order to show the world that Japan should be viewed as a civilization on par with the Christian colonial powers, thinkers like Inoue Tetsujirō saw in *bushidō* a marker of Japanese uniqueness, separating it from the rest of the world and positioning it above all others. The interpretations overseas were also dependent on the ideological contexts in which *bushidō* performed its perceived role. In the early 20th century, at the time when Japan was embarking on its colonial enterprise, there had been many negative assessments, as we have seen in the case of the Slovene newspaper, as well as positive ones, like the reception of Nitobe’s book in the U.S. Later on, particularly during the Pacific War, *bushidō* was identified worldwide as the cause of Japanese militarism and belligerent fanaticism. However, after the war and in the context of Japan’s incredible economic development, *bushidō* was reassessed and reinterpreted, this time as a convenient tool for explaining the Japanese work ethic and loyalty of employees to their employer.

Historical samurai did of course possess a certain concept of honour, but it was not codified or understood as *bushidō*. “Honour” was, just as is true for ideological notions today, a much more fluid and elusive idea, enabling a plurality of ideological interpretations. The ritual suicide of the 46 “loyal retainers”⁴ became the most iconic canonical narrative of samurai honour, yet the aforementioned author of the “*bushidō* classic” *Hagakure* as well as many other scholars at the time were actually extremely critical of the conduct of the so-called *Akō rōshi*. Was the vendetta of the 47 masterless samurai the epitome of *bushidō*, or, as Yamamoto would have it, were they completely lacking in it? Was Sasaki Takatsuna’s deception, when he tricked his rival Kajiwara Kagesue in his race to the battlefield across the river Uji, which Naama Eisenstein describes in her article, honourable? Was that *bushidō* or not? Even though historical samurai did not have a codified ethical manual, they certainly believed in the idea of honour. There were those samurai who would not hesitate to recognise modern *bushidō* as their ethical guide, as there were those who held views much closer to those of Sir John Falstaff, and there were all those in between. The present issue of *Asian Studies* offers important, revealing and fascinating research, studies and analyses, which will hopefully clarify many such mysteries surrounding this notion.

The issue is divided into four sections. The first section, *Defining Bushidō*, brings together articles dealing with the concept of *bushidō* itself. Karl Friday looks at *bushidō* and the samurai behaviour in historical context, discussing the notions of

4 There were 47 *rōnin* involved in the plot, but only 46 of them performed the ritual suicide.

honour and loyalty based on written sources, from the *Akō vendetta* through numerous other historical events and war stories, showing that *bushidō* was far from an unchangeable and enduring code of behaviour and illustrating the complexity of samurai thought and early modern ideals concerning honour and loyalty. William M. Bodiford takes the “perspective from overseas”, discussing lives and afterlives of the notion, which all together add to the construction of the *bushidō* narrative. He does not simply treat it as a term within this or that discourse, but is concerned with the many “lives” of *bushidō* as an interpretive concept, deriving its meaning from its relative position within theoretical frameworks, which are constantly shifting. In explaining the elusiveness of *bushidō*, Bodiford employs the term “traveling concepts”. Masaki Shiraishi, on the other hand, describes *bushidō* as a hybrid notion, constructed through the process of “transculturation”. He shows how since the Meiji Restoration it was necessary for the new modernized regime, in order to be maintained, to establish its legitimacy by relying on so-called cultural traditions. This ideological agony in the face of modernization is in Shiraishi’s view apparent in *bushidō*, which fluctuates between universalism and particularism. In the wave of Western modernization, it was not enough to hold fast to uniqueness of Japanese own cultural traditions. It was necessary to find universally valid criteria or values in Japanese culture.

The articles in the second section titled *Historical Backgrounds* approach *bushidō* in its historical manifestations and metamorphoses from the perspectives of archaeology, history and art history. Takamune Kawashima focuses on the archaeological remains and landscape around the Kashima Grand Shrine, where the oldest evidence of martial arts in Japan can be traced. This region, Hitachi-no-kuni, was the border between the centralized *ritsuryō* state and the regions that lay beyond its control in the early eighth century, and was thus an important location where battles against northern tribal groups took place. According to Kawashima, though Kashima itself was apparently not the place for weapon production, it was, in a sense, the birthplace of martial arts in Japan. Based on *shintō* beliefs the Kashima Grand Shrine took the initiative for warfare in the ideological and spiritual senses too, heralding the beginning of so-called samurai values. The second article by Maria Paola Culeddu takes us on a long journey in search of the earliest traces of “the way of the samurai” in ancient and premodern writings, from ancient chronicles of Japan, war tales, official laws, letters, to martial arts manuals and philosophical essays. By highlighting some of the *bushidō* values, Culeddu attempts to answer the questions as to how and why the representation of the *bushi* changed through history, acknowledging that the samurai were generally not represented as they actually were, but as historical circumstances imagined them to be. In the final article in this section, Naama Eisenstein, on the other hand, focuses on

visual representations of samurai behaviour. She takes the example of the famous episode from the Genpei War (1180–1185) as described in the *Heike monogatari*, and explores how the meaning of this commonly depicted episode changed over time. By analysing visual representations, she proposes possible explanations for the immense popularity of the story, which in our understanding is certainly not one of honour, but rather one of deception.

The third part, *Modern Transformations* features four articles focusing on modern echoes and representations of *bushidō*. Danny Orbach traces the *bakumatsu* “men of high spirit” or *shishi* and their ideology of “purity of the spirit” as a legitimate motive for illegal acts, and follows its transformation and application in judicial practice during the Taishō and Shōwa periods. He argues that the relative judicial leniency to right-wing terrorists in the early 1930s was interlinked with the deep-rooted ideology of subjectivism. This ideology, based on the mythologization of the *shishi*, had, according to Orbach, three main tenets: spontaneity, sincerity and pure motives, defined as an intention to serve the emperor, the country and the public good. In the second article of this section Nathan H. Ledbetter focuses on the production of *Military History of Japan (Nihon Senshi)* by the Imperial Japanese Army as an attempt to tie the new military institution to the samurai tradition—a process of inventing tradition, similar to the one of creating the modern *bushidō* ideology itself. The interpretations contained in *Nihon Senshi*, according to Ledbetter, influenced military thinkers and propagated a version of premodern military campaigns that placed regional military forces as national sources of pride. The third article, by Simona Lukminaitė, turns its attention to the development of modern education system and examines how *bushidō* and martial arts were employed in the education of women in the Meiji period. In its quest for recognition of Japan as a civilized and modern state, the Meiji government realized the role of women had to be redefined as well, and many intellectuals argued that women’s education was one of the shaping-factors to the physical and mental development of future generations. Women thus required an upbringing that would address this issue. Physical education was a means to, first of all, liberate women’s bodies by allowing physical and mental expression and confidence, in addition to assuring their health and thus ability to contribute to society. At the same time, it was understood as a means for moral and mental training that would ensure good character, especially in the case of martial arts that were seen as capable of balancing the overemphasis of Western learning in the education of women. Finally, Andrew Horvat searches for the legacy of “samurai values” and *bushidō* in contemporary Japanese journalism and higher education. This legacy, according to Horvat, is not necessarily rooted in actual samurai behaviour, but this in no way diminishes the power of ideological perception regarding samurai behaviour. For

example, the part of *bushidō* Horvat focuses on in his paper is the moral and ethical teachings emphasizing *jinkaku* or superior character, which Edo era educators hoped to inculcate into generations of peacetime “warriors-turned-bureaucrats”. The expected exemplary behaviour among modern day Japanese journalists working for Japan’s “serious press”, and the stress on the development of *jinkaku* in contemporary Japanese education are, according to Horvat, evidence enough that these values remain very much alive today.

The final section, *Alternative Approach*, features a paper by authors we could call “the practitioners” of modern *bushidō* in martial arts. The paper is written by G. Björn Christianson, Mikko Vilenius and Humitake Seki, the 19th generation headmaster or *shihanke* of the Kashima Shinryū, a Japanese *koryū* martial arts school. It presents a point of view which situates martial arts and *bushidō* firmly within Japanese mythology, focusing on a tale about the bestowal of a mythical sword *Futsunomitama-no-tsurugi* to the legendary first Emperor, Jinmu ten-nō. The article combines archaeological evidence with mythological narratives, taking them at face value, and proposes a theory of the development of a longer, outwards-curving sword configuration suitable for a style of two-handed usage which became part of the *kōmyō-ken* curriculum within Kashima Shinden Bujutsu, in which the authors recognise one of the earliest of the interactions between technology and technique that was driving the evolution of *bushidō* culture.

It is our hope that the present issue of *Asian Studies* will contribute to the recent revival of academic interest in *bushidō*, and that it will offer readers informative contents with many fascinating insights. I wish you an enjoyable reading.

Luka Culiberg, Guest Editor