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ABOVE THE OCEAN

Series of letters from Master Phan-Hoang

Trời dài đất rộng, đi thật, sống thật, ghi vội, gửi về...

Cánh Thư Phan-Hoàng
ĐẦU SÓNG NGỌN GIÓ

Thư Số 12: Thăm Đền Tsurugaoka

Letter 12 :

VISITING THE SHINTO SHRINE TSURUGAOKA

LETTER 12

(DRAFT)

(continued from Letter 11)

The shrine Tsurugaoka is a vast domain. It was built in the 12th century by the founder of the Kamakura Shogunate to worship Hachiman, a deity considered as a God of War. This shrine is one of the three most important shrines in Japan. It is not just the shrine which is interesting, there are a number of things to see, to admire, to enjoy in this large park: the sub-shrines, the big Gate *torii*, the Archery-Lane, the *Genpei* pond, and many spots for “ambulant restaurants” where adults and children eat traditional foods in an exceptional joyful ambiance. One group of four men asked me to join and they offered me the sake. I like this park and these people very much. The main building, the shrine, is very impressive by its size, its architectural beauty, its solemn ceremonies and by all these people coming in and out making respectful bows and saying their secret petitions to the deity of the shrine. They all look very polite and peaceful. However I don't know how many of them were aware that they were bowing towards a God of War although I am convinced that today most of Japanese people are conscious of the damaging consequences of the World War II to their country and many of educated people I met were anxiously talking about the prospect of a future military conflict with China. In my inner soul, I secretly hope, when standing in front of this beautiful shrine looking at these nice people bowing lowly, that they are, in fact, asking the venerated Hachiman to give them prosperity, to avoid war on Japan and, to make peace on earth. I sincerely believe that the God of War could also help the God of Peace. Like with guns: one would better make peace with good talk while having a good gun at hand!

I am visiting this shrine, happy being here. At this moment, I care more about what I am feeling, right now, rather than what I had read about Shinto before coming here. Three tourists holding a guide book are passing by, just close to me. They glance at an open page in the book then look at the shrine, pause for some pictures, then turn to the next page and go to the next building. I find this





amusing; I fish my camera out of my pocket and take a picture of them when they are taking pictures. A nice young girl, standing nearby, notices what I am doing and she cannot hide her smile. Seizing this opportunity, I ask her, while extending my camera, to take a picture of me in front of the shrine, I show her the little button on my Sony and say: Just press here. A bit shy, she awkwardly takes the camera and presses on the button, then she realizes that the back of the camera is directed towards me, that means the lenses are directed towards her face! That is not the first time it happened to me.

(to be continued on Letter 13)



Charles Phan-Hoang,
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