

## ***The concept of Ki – some theoretical considerations regarding to Japanese Spirit***<sup>1</sup>

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In my master's research, I evaluated Japanese fencing as a device of Japaneseness, i.e., a device that sought to "make Japanese" - being descendants or not. In this 'manufacturing' process, the *Kendo* focused three plans intimately connected: "spirit" [Ki], sword and body. While development of the previous research, my doctoral project seeks to collect data through reports of life of Kendo practitioners and analysis of documents that deal with the concept of *Ki* - energy - and with ethnographic fieldwork and through interviews in Japan and Brazil. The concept of *Ki* is presented as an important way of understanding the Japanese Culture in practice, in closest relationship with a culturally Japanese idiosyncratic notion of love. The notion of *Ki* shows great potentialities - theoretical and analytical - for studies of kinship-relationship and Japanese family including cultural recognition processes, still not duly evaluated by an anthropological point of view.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Kinship, Japanese Culture, Ki-Energy.

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### **About here and there - or about Japan and Brazil...**

I began this research in 2006, when an event of Brazilian Kendo Federation in a Japanese Colony, inside of Santa Catarina State, the south of Brazil. In those days, of course, would never dream visiting Japan and study a concept here. Nevertheless, I did the masters research about Kendo in Brazil, and after meditating properly on the master's research and the possibilities, I decided to study the concept of ki 「気」 by a seemingly trivial reason from anthropological point of view, i.e., people with whom I developed the work and people who has become my conviviality friends, they assigned enough attention to this concept, reflecting, and researching your senses and meanings. Now, the key question, I think, is what this concept can tell, first, about himself, and then about Japanese Culture in Japan and Brazil and, perhaps, beyond.

In this work, I retrace my steps and reflect on what led me to write a paper about the notion of ki and, at first, this work is the beginning of a nomadic archeology of this notion. About this *nomad science*, or metallurgical, it can be performed in small regions, progressively going from the small and jagged to the large. Ultimately, the great usually is easy to be perceived; the small, in turn, requires a closer look. This archeology to the broad term 'Japanese Culture' goes a long way and I hope it goes through, at least in part on my doctoral thesis. The other part and any shortcomings, I hope, serve as encouragement and challenge to other researchers.

The Ki 「気」 can be defined as vital energy, will, spirit - and is a concept that can be found in everything, from the smallest living creature until what is culturally defined as a human being. The Japanese don't pay too much attention to this concept and do not think so much about whether undermine their possibilities. All that is alive have ki. This, most often, was given as evidence. In this article, in short, I'll present the hypothesis of my PhD Research relating to some data collected in the fieldwork on a theoretical synthesis and, at the end, a conclusion that has only the interest of serving as a *plateau* for my thesis. Therefore, this is not a text that closes itself and is full of gaps. Much of the data collected in Japan will be analyzed during the year 2014, in Brazil.

I have been living two years in Japan. These two years, obviously, are not sufficient for a satisfactory understanding of Japanese Culture, by its overflows, complex and [im]planned connections with other cultures; folds and multiplicities. Regardless, with a sense of humbleness resulting from difficulties along the way, the two years of research opened my eyes to a somewhat broader understanding of *ki* - object of this research - and a series of socio-anthropological operations in practice, and problems and solutions that only native practices can offer and make themselves understood. Said this, what we do in a small sense is a nomadic science, very close to primitive metallurgy, in the sense that the paths taken here could be different, but still, achieve similar results.

### **About the reseach - how it happened?**

I used the following materials: bibliographic, structured forms, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations in training, and the method of articulation was *ethnography*. Regarding the first, we have performed a bibliographical search about the Ki in Japan with the basic reference for the beginning the book of Ogawa Chutaro [1901-1992]: Kendo Kouwa. Other books and articles has been worked out together with field research and events in Kendo and Iaido, following the advices of the Japanese professors.

The structured forms, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, articulated under the general theme of the research were conducted in Japan, with Kendo practitioners of all possible nationalities, beyond the Japanese, although informal conversations and the forms had better acceptance since requiring less time to collect responses and are more straightforward and fast. The questionnaires were applied in events and trainings of Kendo or sending via facebook or email. About the data, I count about 20 forms [more interviews] of Japanese practitioners, 60 practitioners around the world and 50 Brazilians. Summary data are listed in an **appendix** at the end of this text, although all open questions are absent in this summary.

About *fieldwork*, performing it under the logic of *dense insertion* (Lourenção: 2010a, P. 46-64), assuming an ethnographic context, (Favret-Saada 2005), (Viveiros Castro: 1992, 2002b) to capture information in *dojo* 「道場」 and other places where

occur the training of Kendo in Japan and Brazil<sup>3</sup>, where I had conversations with practitioners through the method of appointment of native contacts, effecting a stable network through known points along the development of the fieldwork.

The fieldwork was conducted in Brazil [2007-2011 and 2014] and Japan [2012-2013]. At this place, I have realized ethnography in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Kanagawa Ken and centrally in Ibaraki ken. In these places I come collecting data and reports of practitioners, and making contacts with police since identified a particularly intense development about the topic of this research, i.e., the notion of 'Ki'<sup>4</sup> with the Japanese police, though he collected stories and field information from practitioners from another countries who have been living in Japan.

At first, the field research was planned with the goal of capturing data with Japanese police in Tokyo but facing difficulties to access the headquarters of the Metropolitan police and, after this, the police members didn't answer, I got access to police in Kanagawa ken, a privileged contact with the ex-Police Chief of Hadano shi, who currently working at the Police General Headquarters in Yokohama shi [Kanagawa] who became my informant in the research, opening many opportunities for conversations and data collection, as well a retired Police Officer from Tokyo, 8th Dan of Kendo, who was the coach in that elite police division, which I have been talking and practicing. I've been performing field research and notes on everything related to Japanese Culture, and centrally about my research object. The basic questionnaire for research [diagnosis with quantitative and qualitative variables, and a small structured interview] is in use and their application has been bringing interesting information. On qualitative data, formulated questions which put on the central question of being Japanese, become Japanese through Kendo, and questions based on the notion of 「気」。

### **About the fieldwork and research**

The Fieldwork is happening by ethnography through the practice of martial arts and conversations with practitioners and people who have interest in the concept of Ki, in the practice of kendo, iaido and kyudo. I've been reading things and related

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<sup>3</sup> For further references on the development of field research in these spaces see Lourenção (2010a, p. 16-104).

<sup>4</sup> For further information, and the relationship between police force and Kendo in Japan since the nineteenth century, from historiographic point of view, see Lourenção (2010a, p. 241-259).

concepts such as Kokoro [心] and seishin [精神] and others. All these concepts are part of a holistic conception of human being for Japanese that although focus anatomically in defined parts, in precise moments in training, they all seek to frame sections into something bigger, that we call human being or *ningen* 「人間」。 This notion of *human being* is important to Japanese people, once in every speech inside of kendo and iaido this word appears. Here we have an opening to think Japanese Morality, their manufacture and reflection on their effectiveness, from the social point of view, considering the space of the body as a matrix, the starting and ending point. About the ties and trust established with some practitioners apparently will be more lasting than the research time. For example, Professor T. honored me borrowing a sword so I could practice and all practitioners treat me with deference and respect. This example indicates that they have consideration to me, and the same teacher told me on another occasion that he wanted to keep a good memory and wished to give me a good memory and experience. In fact, a good experience about Japan and about the value of these rituals is possible, and a friendship and mutual respect. It is absolutely unnecessary to point out how much I shall - spiritually speaking – to these people.

### **Hierarchy**

*The heavier is a branch of rice, more it bows.*

The hierarchy in Kendo is different when seen from another point of view. The hierarchy of Dan is just indicative of a field of differential attitudes in terms of relationship with another<sup>5</sup>. When the accumulation of grade occurs, there is a relative obligation to be more humble towards the learners and to the so-called community. They say that the more one climbs, should be more responsible, because the increment of insignia is synonymous of 'knowledge' and that responsibility is typically Japanese. Mr. I. illustrates this through the metaphor of the branch of rice: "How much heavier is a branch of rice, more it bows".

### **Some words about the hierarchy and entering into the Japanese house**

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<sup>5</sup>"Another, is nobody, neither subject nor object, but a structure or relationship that determines the occupation of the relative positions of subject and object by specific characters and their alternation: another means to me to the other self and other I for me. "Another is the relational expression of a possible world (Viveiros de Castro, 2002b, p. 118).

The hierarchy in Kendo is presented as a geometrically variable calculation (Latour, 1994 P 84-87); (Viveiros de Castro, 2002a, 401-455) resulting in contact with another above, below, or lateral, with an algebra of Dan inversely proportional to social distance into the ethnographic context. Calculate the relative approach, and secondly because of the dominance of traditional and activation knowledge in evaluative coordinates, like humbleness and respect, for example. What we call this to designate as a *geometry of Japaneseness* – see below – through which 'values' acquire density through updates. But it is important to note that these 'values' are not points but lines of variable 'density'.

The duality of hierarchical key opens up problems by using Dumont, because the calculation is not only from above, below or beside or on whether an idea encompasses reverses or is present in a reciprocal (Lanna, 1998, Especially p. 12 and Viveiros de Castro, 2002a, p. 427-431) compared to the contrary. The calculation takes varying degrees of closeness and distance in relation to the idea and practice of *japaneseness*. That said, the 'hierarchy' as a principle to a second approach can be thought of Kendo in one of its effects, such as systemic aggregation of 'difference', multiplying differences in infinitesimal levels with updating given a three-dimensional framework. That we understand as three-dimensional hierarchical principle. Well, now, let us analyze some constituent elements of the philosophy of Kendo.

### About the Ki

気を入れて下さい。

*‘The purpose of Kendo is to forge the body and mind, which essentially means cultivating Ki. The refinement of energy leads to growth as a human being’*, according to the Japanese Kendo practitioners. Firstly, there is no real equivalent for *ki* in Portuguese, neither in English. The Japanese word for this is 気, which *a priori* can be translated as 'energy'. Often uses this word in Japan about many things, including relation to natural phenomena, the condition of human relationships, and even about the state of body and mind. However, "ki" itself is not a physical entity, according to Ooya [2007]. Varied experiences have the general designation of 'Ki', depending on each context. For example, T. Sensei, in one training, told me while I performed an

exercise: 「気を入れて下さい」 what means, 'put 'ki' into exercise'. In short, do with energy or concentration that he was meant.

From a broad sense, the *Ki* can be described as follows:

1-Source of all things; 2-Vital force, Spirit, Vitality, 3-Element to describe the movement and state of mind; 4 - Even if you can not be seen, can be sensed or detected. 5 - Has a special relationship with the breathing, as the graphic sign of the Japanese word itself indicates, an out of steam from a pot of rice - 気. Thus the meaning of the word *ki*, depending upon its contextual usage, can vary from 'energy' (objective, statically perceived) to 'the feeling for the state of energetic arousal' (subjective, statically perceived) and to 'the feeling of energy thrusting forward towards, and sustaining action' (subjective, dynamically perceived). *Ki* is difficult to understand precisely, but can be basically described as an "*invisible and without shape of vital energy or vitality that is widely revealed in the state and movement of the mind*" [Ooya: 2007].

This hypothesis seems to me the main core. The issue of vital energy has a pronounced body and moral dimension. And more. The concept of *House* has an important connotation in this case, since this is a metaphor for the notion of corporeality to the Japanese, whereby correlated to *Ki* concepts have concrete existence, and, it seems, the concept of *Ki* as a Japanese spirit can be used as a mode of constitution of kinship. Just a comment about the *House* - the arrangements for training take place in that spaces where we have the guidance of Sensei – 道場. These Senseis treat their students as "children", sometimes. There is a dimension of kinship, even if fictional, about it.

The native speech in general indicates that for practicing Kendo is necessary to discipline the 'spirit' before the body. The term reference is the 気, and now it is defined as 'spirit', sometimes taken as 'vital energy'. According to this second definition, all living beings possess this 'vital energy' and the uniqueness of Kendo presents the attention for become bigger, both in training and in the discussions of native theories.

The concept of *Ki* operates in terms of strength or weakness of the body taking into account the native theories and approaches this definition made by Moeran (1984, P. 254 ); (Frager & Rohlen: 1976, p. 270). It is also seen as a power that animates the body and allows the action, carrying in its development intentionality or

'vitality', according to Kumagai (1988). In short, this term - *Ki* - is used in instances where there is a relationship. Crossing swords, cleaning the dojo's floor, in conversations, in keeping your word and inside of every action even if not practiced in relation to Kendo. In Japan, when performs an action that can be classified as carrying 'energy', people refer to this as using 'Ki'. In a ritual of tea 「茶道」, in a section of calligraphy 「書道」, in a bodily movement greetings a newcomer when it makes a move that door itself felt and 'feeling', people say this is full of 'Ki'. And besides, this becomes a qualifying operator from which all practitioners of Japanese arts – and not practitioners also - are to a greater or lesser way, classified. During the field research, I noticed that component as a determinant to talk about how to recognize a person can be granted as 'Japaneseness' (Lourenção: 2010, 2011).

The *Ki* and other definitions of 'spirit' are not particular characteristics of Kendo. In contrast, seem to be in a wide range for different Japanese contexts as pointed out by some Japanese researchers who worked with Japanese Cultural plans, arguing that such notions as keys to understanding Japanese cultural uniqueness. But that's not all.

### **A Few words about Kendo as a moral model – *Japaneseness***

A formulation about the concept of 'Japaneseness' as it became known in the academic literature came from Tsuda (2000a, b, 2003a, b) - Japaneseness - while linking an ethics based on an ethnic delimitation, in the studies on the situation of Japanese-Brazilians as ethnic minority in Japan.

Reordering the concept according to my research data, I argue the Kendo as a Japaneseness device, which focused on the center of its operation in determining the ethical substance, i.e. the way in which this practice constituted aspects of operation in 'spirit', especially regards as moral conduct. In this sense, Kendo operated twice in the body and 'spirit' as elements of the disciplinary field. The moral indications were the fringes where one could update the search for a "wisdom of the self", which turned constantly to Japan - ideal - as the center of this process. Second, a mode of subjection that is placed on how practitioners were related to this class of knowing and recognize the related obligation to put it into practice. The respect, exemplary conduct, the right heart are some of the elements of varying intensity through which became manifest for themselves and for others. Third, there was a general operation



and continued working regarding to ethics. How to behave, how to thanks, as asking permission and so on are some manifestations. And finally, a way of being, characteristic of the moral subject. In short, moral action involves a relationship with reality in which it takes place and a relationship with the code to which it relates and also a relationship with himself, a constitution for themselves. Sure there are compromises and/or loopholes, but the core, the matrix, is Japan as an ideal and presupposes a process of subjectivation that for conceptual point of view, I appointed as 'Japaneseness', disconnecting the implications of ethnic minorities and this stuffs (Lourenção 2010a, 2011).

### **And the love?**

*[...]the moment I was awoken to the idea that the source of 武道 is the spirit of divine love and protection for everything, I couldn't stop the tears flowing down my cheeks. Since that awakening, I have come to consider the whole World to be my home. I feel the sun, the moon and the stars are all mine. My desire for status, honour and worldly possessions has completely disappeared. I realised that Budo is not about destroying other human beings with one's strength or weapons or annihilating the World, by force of arms. True Budo is channelling the universal energy to protect World Peace, to engender all things fittingly, nurture them and save them from harm. In other words, Budo training is to protect all things, and nurture the power of unconditional divine love within. Morihei Sensei*

**Love is the key to balance the Ki.** The Ki, being the point of increasing the physical forces must be countered by culture, and in this sense, love, culturally understood, emerges as the equilibrium point in this equation. But that love is about? How to understand this sentiment culturally reflected?

### **About the conclusion, the equilibrium**

*So, who is the ideal japanese, or the main idea about? Sensei: Well, I think the real japanese was who lived during the war. Acctually I'm researching this. I'm son of two cultures, so, I need to search about the real Japanese Spirit. That is my research now. Ooboki Sensei [大保木先生], Akihabara.*

In sum, from the perspective of the Japanese, the *ki* articulates impulse as the fluidness of the apprehending self moving visibly towards affirmation through the social act. The important thing to keep is, the exchange of Ki, or the 「気が合う」

necessarily involves a form of conduit that allows for a direct sensory mode of exchange of affects. This is different of feelings mediating by through the mind, in the westerns thoughts. Significantly, there is no word for 'mind' in the Japanese language in common usage. There is, however, a concept that is larger than (and includes) the mind called kokoro 「心」. Since the referential sphere of *kokoro* subsumes the micro-sphere of the mind, this means that the Japanese model explicitly accounts for the exchange of certain elementary affects. A process that can by pass the mind while at the same time pass through kokoro. In other words, a balance between Heart and Mind, Energy and Love, Nature and Culture.

*And, at the end, my thesis is what follows: in sum, the love is the balance, the equilibrium of Ki; the search about the balance between Love and Ki is, maybe, the becoming or devir of Japanese martial arts, particularly Kendo and Iaido.*