

**Japanese Culture Reception and Assimilation:
Moving Away from the Way—Loss of *Dō* Principles
by Japanese Immigrant Descendants**

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Considering the principles of “*dō*” (Way), from bushidō (“the Way of the Warrior”), I have chosen as my main object of discussion arguments that reveal reasons for the changes in values such as honesty and education originally brought by Japanese immigrants. I will also make an attempt to justify the interest and non-interest in the Japanese language and culture among descendants in two communities in the State of São Paulo, Brazil.

Without disregarding the importance of geographical and political factors, I will take as hypothesis the “*dō*” principles to justify the purpose of the theme itself. The gradual loss of those principles is, to my understanding, one of the reasons for which there is a lack of interest on the part of the Japanese descendants in the continuance of their ancestors’ teachings, be it on the linguistic or cultural scope.

According to Sakai (1979), to the Japanese immigrants, “to promote Japanese culture in Brazil is to diffuse and cultivate Japan’s positive points and those characteristic values of Japanese people, such as honesty, devotion to work and high interest in education” (in Wawzyniak, 2008). This is so because for the Japanese immigrant the affirmation of her/his cultural values was regarded as a reference point, and keeping his/her marks of original identity was regarded as important, based on assumption of a temporary stay, for “if she/he returns to Japan, taking these daughters and sons who don’t know how to read nor speak Japanese, she/he would have to face the problem of communication between parents and daughters and sons and of these children with relatives and friends. And above all, it would be a shame for a Nipponese subject,” according to Mori (1992). However, although the defense of those values in the construction of an image by the immigrants themselves may seem stereotyped sometimes, in fact it is seated in elements received by the immigrants themselves from their cultural settlement.

Japanese culture, although highly hybrid, can be said to have its basic pillars derived from Chinese Buddhism and Confucianism transported to ancient Japan. It cannot be forgotten, however, that those pillars are strongly impregnated by the Taoist philosophy over which basis the whole cultural Chinese edifice, and later the Japanese, was initially constructed.

In this context, it is rather pertinent to trace such marks in the common cultural elements cultivated by the first generation of immigrants who settled down in Brazil and that ended up being transmitted to their descendants.

We can say that this idea of definitive settlement came about mainly between 1942 and 1952, and was determined chiefly by the outcome of the Second World War, during which the migration from Japan to Brazil ceased. It was the moment in which “loyalty to the country and the emperor

was now more turned to the adoptive country, country of the children and grandchildren; the initial plan was substituted, almost unconsciously, by the definitive stay. At last, the sense of existence had changed," according to Saito (1980).

Since then, her/his children, according to her/his environment circumstances, started to learn either only the Portuguese language or both Portuguese and Japanese.

In the view of the Japanese immigrants, education was the way for upward social mobility and achievement of a space in which Japanese cultural features could be diffused. The school itself was a sacred space.

A distinctive feature in Japanese immigrants was a nationalist sentiment based on precepts of Buddhism combined with autochthonous Shintoism and Confucianism originally from the continent. This contributes to the formation of a Nipponese mentality with values such as filial devotion, or the sentiment of duty and gratitude to parents and ancestors (*kō*), the sentiment of loyalty to the emperor (*chū*), and the sentiment of justice, of being just to everyone, without inequalities (*gui*).

We can note the influence of those values in the Japanese people's psychology, in which respect to the superior in a humble manner is a product of this sentiment of *kō* and *chū*, of gratitude and loyalty. In addition to these, the exaltation of sensibility, purity, honesty, and honor in which self interest has little importance is also constant, as ideally exemplified by the samurai, warriors who would commit suicide if they perpetrated some dishonor. The loyalty of the Japanese may be influenced by the legacy of this sentiment of samurai honor.

In Japan, Buddhism would reach its height mainly in the Heian era (794–1185), significantly influencing Japanese culture in the arts, in painting, in literature.

In the so debated *bushidō*, the warriors' precept of honor will be strengthened with the arising of Zen, as one of the branches of Exoteric (teaching to the public) Buddhism, Tendai or Lotus School, brought from China by monk Saichō, who proposed several means to follow the Buddhist path to reach enlightenment.

In addition to Zen, another Buddhist lineage existent at that time, also brought from China by monk Kukai, is the Esoteric (teaching in the most restricted and closed place) Buddhism, Shingon or School of Mysteries.

In Japan, Zen has strongly influenced both spiritual and daily people's life in general. With a more significant introduction in the thirteenth century, the Kamakura era, it has influenced the whole way of the warriors and their followers based on its essence and moral principles.

On the other hand, the other Buddhist schools were attracted by other social castes, in which Tendai attended the imperial family, Shingon, the nobility, and Pure Land, the people (Handa, 1991).

To Handa (1991), Zen does not propose to fight against fatality, nor to accept it. But acting (or not acting) here and now is important in Zen. This was the main hook that the samurai warriors rescued from Zen to themselves. "To die" for the samurai was to forget the ego—the attachment to things, including oneself. On "dying" he was freeing himself from the passions that bound them to the world of illusions.

We can say that the new phase of the Zen warrior class in search of a new ideal, of the true goal of the warrior path, has happened due to the end of the Warring States period, which lasted

more than a hundred years of wars among the *daimyo* (feudal lords) to obtain control over the archipelago.

This impasse was resolved in 1600 in the Battle of Sekigahara, between the two factions which divided Japan, the Eastern Army, leaded by Ishida Mitsunari and the Osaka clan, and the Western Army, whose Edo clan chief, Tokugawa Ieyasu, was the winner, establishing the Tokugawa regime (1603–1868). The country, unified by Tokugawa's centralized power, passed on to adopt an isolationist politics, cutting away contact with the outside.

The era of Tokugawa supremacy was a period without great rebellions and battles, with many samurai enriching with the ascendance of bureaucratic posts. Others became corrupt, forgetting principles such as honor, loyalty, courage, gratitude, politeness, virtue and sincerity valued by the *bushidō*, the Way of the Warrior, the samurai ethics code.

On the other hand, the samurai who fought on the side of the Osaka faction were destitute of their lords for they were suppressed by shogun's order, becoming wandering samurai, *rōnin*.

According to Kishikawa (2004), in the decade following Sekigahara, many of those *rōnin* went on to attend or even establish schools (*dōjō*) to teach specific styles of martial arts, thus appearing a frightening quantity of diversified styles which got lost with time. While many *rōnin* went to the side of violence or banditism, other *rōnin* such as Miyamoto Musashi, who fought on the losing side in Sekigahara, isolated himself to perfect his sword handling strategy. He later won more than 30 duels, being considered the greatest samurai of all time. He left the treatise in which he transmitted his knowledge on the use of strategy, *A Book of Five Rings*, in which he highlights among his teachings that "he who dominates a path, comes to see it in all paths."

To better understand the essence of *bushidō*, clan Nabeshima's vassal Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659–1719), born 60 years after the Battle of Sekigahara, sought to honor the samurai tradition and defended elevated values of courage and discipline which more and more lost sense in a society dominated by bureaucracy and greediness.

Yamamoto Tsunetomo also left records of those values and principles to be respected by the samurai in the book *Hagakure*, a word that can mean hidden by leaves or hidden leaves.

The decline and official extinction of the samurai class occurred when the power returned to the hands of emperor Meiji.

According to Gonçalves (2004), the *bushidō* concept of Way is much wider than that of religion. The Way in the East (*marga* in Sanskrit, *tao* in Chinese, *michi* or *dō* in Japanese) comprehends religious, philosophical, artistic and even scientific components. The Eastern Way is all that.

Lao Tse, regarded as founder of Taoism, born in 571 B.C.E. in the province of Chu in Ancient China, tells us in his first proposition that the tao (Way) that can be enunciated (*tao*) is not the Perennial Tao. In other words: the Way that can be discoursed about is not the True Way.

The *tao* is presented as being the origin from which arise the forces *yin* and *yang*. From those arise the Heaven, Earth and Humanity triad and from it every form of existence.

The *tao* is the teaching of the law of nature itself. On practicing those teachings one can acquire longevity with health and arrive to the state of enlightenment and spiritual elevation. Taoism began attracting adepts from all levels of society almost in the end of the Han era (206 B.C.E. to 220

c.e.). Rejecting all the rigid norms and the accepted standards, Taoists proclaimed the virtue of individuality and depreciated all forms of compulsion, distortion and artificiality. They promised eternal life not through efforts but through understanding of the secret processes of nature.

In other words, taking as basis the Tao ideogram (道, fig. 1), the little dash on the left (丶) of the (一) part represents *yin* energy and that on the right (丶) represents *yang* energy. The (一) dash means uniting *yin* and *yang*. The (自) has derived from (𡗗), which represents the great universe, the upper horizontal dash being *yang* (heaven) and the lower, *yin* (earth). The (道) means way. The small dash above (丶) is the (𡗗) great universe. Thus, the energy of the great universe—*yin* and *yang*—must be taken to the body navel as a starting point for the Way of eternity without limits.

In sum, to practice the tao is to be in harmony with nature, it is to come upon the union of nature with the universe, which the Taoist refers as Union of Heaven, Earth and Man, as we can exemplify with the *Jin* ideogram (fig. 2), of compassion, according to the principles of *dō*, Way.

From the point of view of the *Tao*, the dash on the left is the human being (亻) and the two horizontal dashes on its right (二), Heaven (upper dash) and Earth (lower dash). Here is the meeting of the human being with the *yin* and *yang* energy of the universe, reaching the stage of emptiness, of serenity, giving rise to the true sentiment of compassion, of solidarity. And this is the true sentiment of gratitude to his master and to his neighbor which must be passed on as one of the basic principles of *bushidō* honor conduct.

However, this conduct seems to have been distanced or to be distancing among the new generations, as for instance, among relatives of Japanese descendants.

Would there have been in the new generations a distancing from the family values and from the relation with nature? Was it such a rupture that marked a departure from the basic elements of traditional Japanese culture and an approximation towards Brazilian culture?

Another question to be made would be if this rupture has occurred only among Japanese immigrants and their descendants or if it is a mark of the transition from an agrarian society to an industrialized society.



Fig. 1 Tao Ideogram.

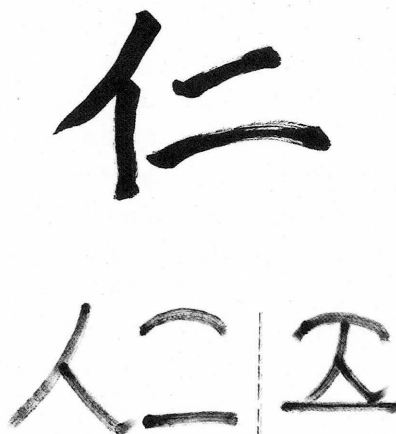


Fig. 2 Jin Ideogram.

Taking as basis the essential foundations of *dō*, Way, focus of my inquiry, to try to justify this rupture present mainly among those of the new generation, we have supported as data gathering some items from the corpus questionnaire of the Three Alianças [Alliances] (1st, 2nd and 3rd), located in the countryside of São Paulo state, in the town of Mirandópolis and of Vila Ipelândia/Fukuhaku Mura, in the city of Suzano, São Paulo. This research was realized as part of a conjoint project of Japanese researchers from Osaka University, Japan, and Brazilian researchers from University of São Paulo, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro and from Unicamp, São Paulo, named “Researches on Languages Spoken in the Nikkei Communities of Brazil,” developed in 2003.

For instance, as case study, we analyse the issue of learning Japanese language among informers from the two interviewed communities, Vila Ipelândia or Fukuhaku Mura and Vila Aliança (1st, 2nd and 3rd Alliances), in the questions 1–4.

The data show that despite the Japanese, specifically from Aliança and Fukuhaku Mura, be leaving aside the Japanese language, contradictorily they think important the learning and use of the language. In the case of the third generation of those two communities, wouldn’t they be disengaging from the nature, from the essence of *dō*, towards the way of individualism? This would mark the rupture with the idea of collectivity (both western [solidarity] and eastern), and the forsaking of traditional values.

Question 1: As a child, have you learned Japanese language in school?

FUKUHAKU-MURA			ALIANÇA		
2 nd gen. (41 informants)	Yes	26	2 nd gen. (42 informants).	Yes	25
	No	15		No	17
3 rd gen. (28 informants)	Yes	28	3 rd gen. (28 informants)	Yes	28
	No	---		No	---

Question 2: As a child, in what language did you talk?

FUKUHAKU-MURA			ALIANÇA		
2 nd gen. (41 informants)	Jap: 17		2 nd gen. (42 informants)	Jap: 27	
	+Jap: 9			+Jap: 7	
	Port + Jap: 6			Port + Jap: 5	
	+Port: 5			+Port: 2	
3 rd gen. (28 informants)	Port: 4		3 rd gen. (28 informants)	Port: 1	
	Jap: 5			Jap: 2	
	+Jap: 1			+Jap: 4	
	Port + Jap: 8			Port + Jap: 10	
	+Port: 9			+Port: 8	
	Port: 4			Port: 4	
	N: 1				

Question 3: Do you think it necessary that the youth learn the Japanese language?

FUKUHAKU-MURA			ALIANÇA		
	I agree	25		I agree	32
2 nd gen. (41 informants)			2 nd gen. (42 informants)		
	I do not agree	4		I do not agree	10
	I do not know	12		I do not know	
3 rd gen. (28 informants)	I agree	18		I agree	16
	I do not agree	1	3 rd gen. (28 informants)	I do not agree	1
	I do not know	9		I do not know	11

Question 4: As a *nikkei*, do you think it obvious to know how to speak Japanese?

FUKUHAKU-MURA			ALIANÇA		
	I agree	28		I agree	31
2 nd gen. (41 informants)			2 nd gen. (42 informants)		
	I do not agree	11		I do not agree	7
	I do not know	2		I do not know	4
3 rd gen. (28 informants)	I agree	14		I agree	15
	I do not agree	11	3 rd gen. (28 informants)	I do not agree	9
	I do not know	2		I do not know	4

Is the departure from *dō* (Way) something specific of the third generation of Japanese descendants or is it a more universal phenomenon deriving from globalization and, consequently, from the loss of traditional and cultural values? Is Japanese culture itself in Japan being affected by this phenomenon?

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