



Ki: The Vital Force

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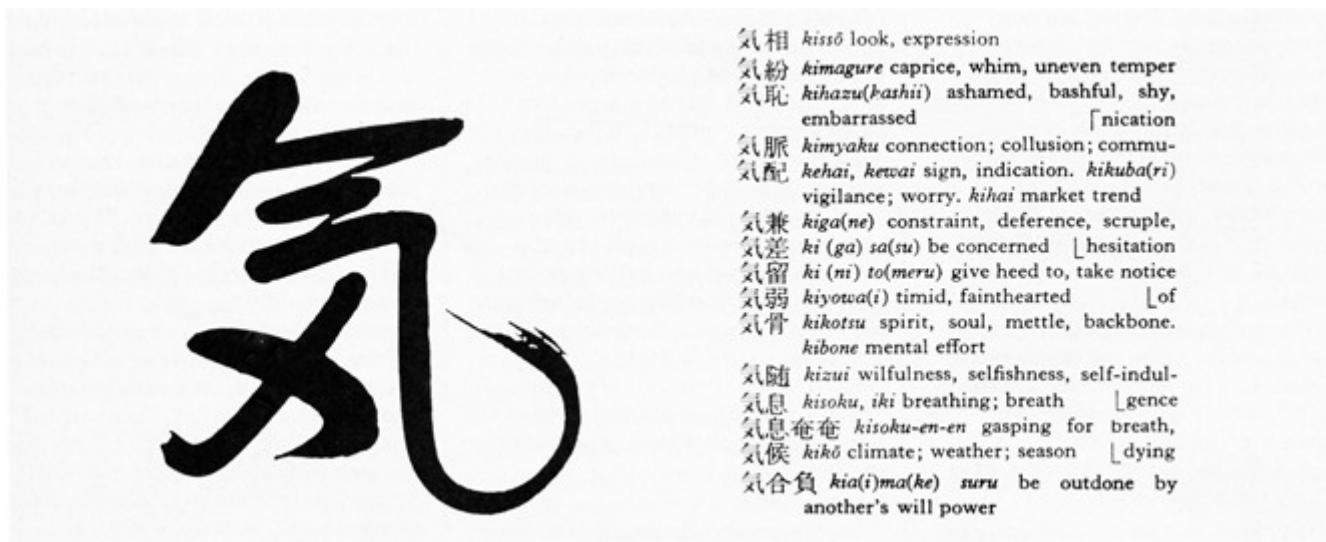


[I] began to suspect Japan was going to be a new experience when I first came across people waiting for six different “No Walk” signals to change in the middle of the night on a deserted street. I noticed a second time when an 85-lb. girl, an *aikido* student, threw me over her

Help

shoulder so hard and fast she dislocated joints in half my arm. A third revelation occurred two weeks later when the still impressive arm pain was turned down and switched off like the volume on a radio by an old man twirling a needle in the opposite wrist.

Those events mesmerized me and pretty well determined my course of study for the last 15 years — research primarily on corporate psychology, genius & mastery, and traditional Eastern medicine. In the Japanese context all three subjects turned out to be knotted together with a common vocabulary of *ki* terms and a shared reliance on ki phenomena to achieve their effects. Gradually you could see in the patterns of their usage all these little fingers pointing to both a large black hole in English, and a shadowy biosocial technology which clarifies many of this culture’s apparent mysteries and contradictions.



The concept of ki has gained some currency in the west, having migrated along with oriental medicine, especially acupuncture, and martial arts. But while ki is regularly invoked as an explanatory principle in these disciplines, few practitioners or writers, either Eastern or Western, spend much time intelligibly explaining ki itself. When Westerners try, they tend toward the vaguest of definitions, such as “mystic force”, “subtle psycho-somatic energy” or “vital power”. Some, equally unhelpful, compare ki to other elusive and unfamiliar concepts like “*prana*” or “*pneuma*”.

Westerners do lack a convenient single term for specifying ki phenomena, but we recognize their existence and effects with enough other expressions to discuss the concept quite lucidly. Before I relate ki to Western thought and to other “inscrutable” realities, a word on the word itself:

Although the concept and ideogram for ki (氣) originated in pre-Han Dynasty China, its modern Chinese usage has remained largely confined to medical and meteorological terms. After its introduction to Japan in the seventh century, however, the concept assumed a much wider significance and came to permeate colloquial speech. Recent dictionaries, for example, list over 600 common Japanese terms and expressions employing the ideogram, compared to about 80 in Chinese. I cite this semantic vigor to defend my use of ki, the Japanized pronunciation, rather than *ch'i* or *qi*, the more venerable Chinese readings.

CHINA: COSMIC PRINCIPLE

[A]s a working concept ki dates back at least 22 centuries in China to the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, which laid out the basic terms and energetic relationships that would inform oriental medicine (and Confucian statecraft) up into the present century. Etymologically, the ideogram is believed to depict energy raising the lid of a heated cooking pot. Adding the radical for water to the frame of the character makes the common ideogram for steam. But ki was not merely a primitive apprehension of invisible energy. It was conceived of as a patterned, directed power. Dr. Manfred Porkert defines ki in his text on Chinese medicine as, “configurational energy — i.e, energy of a definite direction in space, of a definite arrangement, quality, or structure.”¹ It is, in other words, an applied energy or power flow that bridges the traditional divide between pure energy and physical or social structure. (A parallel from modern physics is the concept of light as a flow of energy packets, which synthesized the wave/particle dilemma.)

Ki is perhaps best understood in terms of the relationships it empowers. A basic tenet of Chinese bio-social theory states that i (意) leads to ki, which in turn leads to *chi* (血). 意 means intent, desire or will, and chi corresponds in this formula to physical or behavioral structure. A crude psychological example might be: a desire to play the piano (i) leads to attentive exertion (ki) which forms the structured habits and reflexes (chi) needed for mastery. A social parallel: a policy (i) leads to a budget or application of resources (ki) which in turn generates a physical or organizational structure (chi). (These are Japanese pronunciations; chi should not be confused with the Chinese for ki. And by the way, all of these words rhyme with *mi*, as in the musical *do-re-mi*.)

Ki has always been associated with life processes. It was generated within the macrocosmic and microcosmic living systems that constituted Chinese reality. (Contemporary West
the controversial “Gaia Hypothesis” [that the earth constitutes a single living entity, --

modern conceptions of complex groups as “meta-organisms”, were considered self-evident in much early Chinese thought.)

Where there was life and growth there was ki. The Chinese were not at all animistic about such energy, however; they sought reasonable causal principles. Indeed the ideogram and its most common variants graphically suggest the conversion of heat to ki (oxidation, solar influence, fervor, etc.) or of food to ki (digestive metabolism).

Whatever its physical source, the resulting force was force at work within a system, usually a system that included or constituted man. Macrocosmically, for example, the ancients perceived vital forces at play in the atmosphere, forces which could affect not only the natural environment but also human psychosomatic functioning. Thus the dynamic variations of pressure, humidity, precipitation, temperature — in short, weather — represented qualitative expressions of the ki of heaven, or *tenkī*, as it is known in Japan. Likewise, they noted the psychosomatic influences of geographical features — low wetlands, high arid plains, mountains, beaches, etc. — which they interpreted in their geomancy as expressions of *chiki*, the ki of the earth. Because it could influence, or literally “flow into” and affect human beings, such environmental ki was holistically included in the study of disease and therapeutics. Man’s ki was thus inseparably linked — consciously or unconsciously—to the ki of his immediate natural environment.

In all these larger systems or fields of environmental force, man’s presence was always implicit, at least as a participant and reference. (The Chinese were of course not so anthropocentric as to believe the earth could not exist without man. But like a biologically persisting “brain-dead” body, the earth deprived of human consciousness seemed an unimaginably impoverished entity.) If man’s activities rarely—at least in those days — affected the quality and circulation of the planet’s vast natural energies, he at least came to recognize their importance and classify them for eventual use.

But it is within the more intimate confines of the human body and social groups that ki is most dramatically apparent, as a simple experiment may show. Select the tip of one of your fingers for contemplation (i). Next concentrate upon it quietly and totally for a few minutes — inducing ki. Now you will likely begin to notice increasing warmth and sensitivity in the finger as your attention enhances its circulation and neural acuity. (The effect is even more dramatic if the extremity chosen is erogenous.) The increased blood flow bears with it more oxygen and vital nutrients. Were you attending instead to a muscle that you were exercising,

nutrients would feed and accelerate the tissue's growth and structural development, yielding chi. (The "former 90-lb. weakling" crowd might recall that such exercises are the core and secret of Charles Atlas' "dynamic tension" bodybuilding regimes.)

In a similar manner, Chinese medicine calls upon the blood-borne resources of our immunological system. Using pressure, needles, heat, shocks, etc. it attracts the body's ki to weakened, distressed areas. This internal attention again serves two vital functions. It augments the flow of healing/ nutritive resources to the afflicted cellular community and materially assists its recovery. Secondly, it heightens the entire body's awareness of suffering among its cellular constituents, hopefully inducing its executive "head" toward corrective changes in behavior.

Within the healthy body the functioning of ki was felt to be as tangible and straightforward as any other physiological process. Bio-electrical meridians, or ki channels, rivered the body together with a flow of diverse cellular energies. As blood flow distributed informational hormones and physical nutrients, ki flow gathered and disbursed vitality and sensation. As a distributor, ki flow moved energy from tissues or organs in surplus to areas suffering temporary deficits.

(In this respect, ki is a medium of power sharing like the vibratory airfoil effect many species of waterfowl employ during long migratory flights. With precise spacing, angulation



shaped formations. This wave front receives power from the flock's strongest fliers, and transmits it to resting or weaker members as a lift-enhancing rhythmic wave.)

Since it could clearly affect and be affected by both the cells and the psyche of the body, ki operated at the psycho-somatic interface. Attending to it could both alter physiological processes (as in our finger), and raise subtle biological functions to awareness and conscious control. Recent biofeedback techniques employ sensitive prosthetic machinery to return this awareness and control to modern man. But one can imagine that in less drugged, hurried or media-distracted cultures, a good number of people might enjoy enough bodily sensitivity to achieve these effects unaided.

The Chinese also traced the workings of ki across the narrow divide between complex biological systems, like humans, and the complex social systems — nation-states, corporations, churches, etc. — that they spend their lives in. Heuristic comparisons of physical and social bodies, now deemed so racy and avant garde in Western management circles, were conventional wisdom two millenia ago in the East. Chinese of the time, of course, could not imagine the electronically integrated complexity of the social organisms we face today. But they spent a lot of centuries thinking about governance and the maintenance of order with the minimum of force. Such concerns inevitably drew their attention to biological systems, and to the human body in particular as a model of harmonious integration. Here is the Yellow Emperor on health and disease:

When the body's monarch is intelligent and enlightened, there is peace and contentment among his subjects; they can thus reproduce, bring up their offspring, pursue their diverse functions, and lead a long and happy life.

But when the monarch is not intelligent and enlightened, the twelve officials [the organs of the body] become afflicted and dangerous; the paths [of ki] are obstructed and blocked, and it no longer circulates warnings of local distress.²



氣運 *kiun* luck; tendency, opportunity
氣違 *kichiga(i)* insanity; mania, fanaticism;
lunatic; fanatic, enthusiast, fan
氣塞 *kifusa(gi)* gloom, depression
氣嵩 *kigasa* determination to win
氣節 *kisetsu* courage and integrity; weather
氣置 *ki (ga) o(kenai)* feel at home
氣勢 *kisei* energy, enthusiasm, spirit
氣樂 *kiraku* feeling at home, ease, comfort
氣構 *kigama(e)* anticipation, readiness
氣触 *kabu(reru)* have a skin eruption; be in-
fluenced by, become infected with
(communism). *kabure* skin eruption,
boils from poisonous plants; students
influenced by socialism or communism
氣詰 *kizuma(ri)* constraint, embarrassment
氣障 *ki(mi) sawa(ru)* offend; get offended.
kiza affectation. *kizawa(ri)* disagreeable
氣稟 *kihin* hereditary traits | feeling
氣持 *kimochi* feeling, mood.

JAPAN: SOCIAL ATTENTIVENESS

[I]n treating the physical body as a body politic, and vice versa, early Chinese thinking clearly prefigured modern “living systems” theories. It also foreshadowed Japan’s later fascination with the social or interpersonal implications of *ki*. What captured the Japanese imagination was not the internal function of *ki* but the fact that it operated in a system open and responsive to the environment, particularly the social environment. Focusing on the previously unarticulated psychology of *ki* as a form of attention, Japan began to develop its own rich vocabulary for *ki* dynamics in the psycho-social sphere.

One Japanese commentator traces the ideogram for *ki* back to earlier characters which “originally related to eating and represented both the energetic inner quality of man and the outer activity of demanding and reaching.”³ This harks back to the patterned force or directed energy which the ancient Chinese saw in *ki*. When this “demanding & reaching” are considered with reference to perception, we are clearly talking about something approaching our idea of attention. Recalling the derivation of “attention” from the Latin *ad tendere* — “to stretch towards”, we can begin to build an interesting case for the two concepts’ homology, if not identity.

Ki o tsukeru, for example, is the Japanese for “to attend to”. Literally it means “to fasten one’s *ki* upon (something or someone)”. *Ki* like attention is “paid out” and “attracted”. It can equally be focused or diffused as it stretches forth to fasten upon the environment. In a passable definition of “rapt attention”, Kiyoshi Hamano of Kyoto University writes of *kishoku* (literally, the *ki* of color or sensuality), that it “represents not only the concept of the appe-

nature, but also the direct fusion of people with it.” Hamano has studied ki from a psychoanalytic perspective and the following lines are excerpted from his work.⁴ Please try substituting the word “attention” each time he mentions ki —

- *Ki is thought to be something like radio waves between people, and the capacity for “tuning in” to others.*
- *Ki is regarded as psychic energy, and is closely related to the body.*
- *Ki is felt to extend of itself toward the other, as if it were some mysterious filament.*
- *Ki appears or turns up before a subject in relation to an object as if it were a knot connecting the two.*

He concludes: “Ideally ki can be viewed as: a) that which is perceived in relationships between a subject and the world around him; b) that which is perceived in relationships between people; & c) that which is perceived as identical with the subject’s own thoughts, feelings, or moods.

“Everything — things, persons, and events—can be moved into the field of ki... The place where it proceeds is what is called psychic reality.”

There is a surfeit of circumstantial evidence, but now that the analogy has been drawn, a disclaimer is in order: ki is *not* merely an Asian word for attention. In fact attention is a rather underdeveloped Western concept for a profound psycho-biological phenomenon that ki terminology far better represents. The remainder of this article concerns some aspects of ki or attention function that have rarely been pointed out in English.

The first of these has to do with Japanese perceptions of the role of ki as a current of psychosomatic vitality. As we noted above somatic ki does not circulate in a closed system. Through the operations of the psyche in particular, ki is incessantly reaching into and receiving from the world. Porkert writes that it “manifests itself and is spent in the psychic reactions in general and especially in the psychic reaction par excellence, the directed will.”¹

Such environmental expenditures of ki intimately affect the body’s energy balance. All this “stretching out” and “fastening” awareness to things, persons and objectives is a form of work, work that consumes energy. This psychosomatic energy — in Japanese *kiryoku*, literally ki power — has certain basic attributes:

- Like any energy it can neither be created nor destroyed, and thus is subject to the basic “whence and whither” conversion analyses of thermo-dynamics. It is highly correlated with physical vitality, resistance to disease, assertiveness, and sexual potency. Though

course in both sexes, these attributes led many in Asia to label it an extremely yang or masculine energy. In fact some of the more male-chauvinistic Japanese/English dictionaries define it simply as virility.

- Though constantly generated by healthy body tissue it can be dangerously exhausted by disease, physical exertion, stress, or, most interestingly, its unreciprocated discharge into the social environment.
- Conversely, its reserves can be enhanced by factors like contact with nature, meditation or sensual arousal, as well as the ki or attention “paid” to you by other individuals.



氣合術 *ki(a)i jutsu* hypnotism [power
 氣迫 *kihaku* soul; great energy, great mental
 氣抜 *ki (ga) nu(keru)* be discouraged. *ki(ga)-nu(keta)*, *ki(no)nu(keta)* insipid, stale.
kinu(ke) absentmindedness, dejection
 氣折 *ki(o)re* depression, dejection
 氣沈 *ki (ga) shizu(mu)* be discouraged
 氣分轉換 *kibun tenkan* mental diversion; change of environment
 氣立 *ki (ga) ta(tsu)* get excited, be aroused. *kida(te)* disposition, temperament
 氣失 *ki (o) ushima(u)* faint
 氣付 *ki (ga) tsu(ku)* be aware of, notice, realize. *ki (o) tsu(keru)* take care of, be careful, be attentive to, take note of; be on the lookout. *kizu(ku)* notice, perceive, find out, think of, get wind of. *kitsu(ke)* encouragement; restorative, stimulant, smelling salts; reviving. *ki(o)tsu(ke)* Attention! -*kitsuke*, -*kizuke* in care of
 氣付薬 *kizukegusuri* a stimulant

BALANCE OF ENERGY

[W]e can thus begin to see the outlines of the dynamic ki economy that many Japanese believe links physiological and social well-being.

Two useful analogies for discussing ki transactions can be drawn from fiscal accounting and electromagnetic theory. In the fiscal analogy ki or attention is treated as a currency that may be paid out, taken in, accumulated, squandered, invested, etc. Each healthy individual is thought to begin each day with a “subsistence allowance” of ki from the collective contributions of his physiological constituents. His net balance at any particular moment, however, is largely determined by the profitability of his subsequent transactions with the natural and social environment. A kind of double-entry bookkeeping can thus be imagined, balancing attention received against attention paid out. Social relations are occasions of vital trade, and far more is

at stake than mere ego massage. Not only does a regular ki surplus increase your energy, potency, and vital charisma, but running a deficit can impoverish your sex life and eventually your health.

Japanese students of ki whom I polled for an earlier study implicated chronic attentional deficits as a factor in problems as diverse as overeating, domestic violence, developmental retardation in orphanages, and the high death rate among widowed or retired men. A few also noted the prevalence of mental disorders among live-in daughters-in-law, the archetypical ki debtors of Japan. They suffer extraordinarily high rates of a neurotic neurasthenia said to afflict over half of the nation's 300,000 mental patients.

Conversely, in the upper attentional income brackets, consistent ki surpluses were cited as a factor in the uncommon longevity of judges, conductors, political & religious leaders, etc. "Good listeners" were deemed ki donors. Thus regular exposure to attentive, enthusiastic audiences could dramatically heighten the recipients' vitality. (This phenomenon is widely recognized by Western political and stage personalities. Hubert Humphrey often remarked that no matter how sick he was, if he could make it to a podium in front of a fired-up crowd he would come away cured.) Several respondents also noted that this ki-induced vitality powerfully charges the libido as well. One, only half-jokingly, blamed it for the promiscuity scandals now bedeviling many prominent political and religious figures.

In the electromagnetic analogy each individual is presumed to generate, store, transmit, and receive 'Ki' as a psychosomatic current or charge. Let us imagine a "watt" of psychic energy—the power, for example, the average person expends in 60 seconds of undivided conscious attention. Let us provisionally call this unit a psy-watt and further imagine it, ideally, as being projected from each attentive ego out onto the environment in a focused beam.

To better visualize this, consider the sensation of "being watched" that most people experience at one time or another. Many Japanese claim particular sensitivity to such probes of attention, and cite the subtle palpability of others' stares to explain the origin of common expressions like *chumoku sareru* — "to have eyes poured upon one".

This laser metaphor helps to envision many aspects of ki, but it is usually employed with regard to group attention. *Ninki*, literally the "ki of other people", is an important and positive concept in Japan. To have ninki is to enjoy popular favor, attendance, or "drawing power". But again the implications are wider than mere social approbation.

Anyone who has ventured near the stage front during a large and wild rock concert, for example, knows that it is a locus of uncanny and as yet unnamed power. Unnamed at least in Western terms. In the East this is ninki at peak voltage. If we could perceive each spectator at such events projecting his ki or psy-wattage as a visible laser, the focal charge at the stage — and in the performers — would be blinding. The radiant terminology applied to celebrity in the West — star, luminary, dazzler, etc. — perhaps reflects a recognition of the phenomenon, but it tends to relegate the audience to a purely passive role.

In the case of rock concerts the charge and less open to egoistic abuse. In this style, each member of the collective applies his ki or attention to the “patient” directly. While they frequently employ shared rhythms, prayers or incantations to synchronize and enhance their individual emissions, members of these circles each approach the subject and his pain alone.

Judging from their recurring appearance in a diversity of epochs and cultures, these ceremonies do deliver. In terms of ki dynamics they can be analyzed in two ways:

As an acute therapy: These collective attention furnaces provided high-wattage ki transfusions which charge the psychosoma of the target individual like a jolt of ethereal B vitamins. This is “drug-grade” ki which oriental medicine deems useful in resuscitative emergencies but too powerful and addictive a stimulant for regular use. (In the West, this is viscerally understood by ki junkies or attention-dependent types who perform their way to the high at the center of any available circle.

As a long-term regimen: One effect of receiving intense and sympathetic group attention is a lingering warm self-consciousness. During this afterglow the recipient is likely to regard himself more positively and hence more frequently. In oriental medicine this mirroring back upon the self of ki’s generally outgoing or extroverted flow is believed to vitalize the being, rendering it more psychosomatically assertive and immunologically sound. The terms self-regard, self-respect, self-esteem partially express the dialectic by implying that the self is attended to because of its value and that its value is enhanced by reflexive attention. But compared to group-generated, megadose ninki, individual self-regard offers attention in only “herbal” or homeopathic amounts — which is often adequate in normal, non-pathological times.



氣氣氣氣 K₁, K_E spirit, mind, soul, heart; intention; bent, interest; mood, feeling; temper, disposition, nature; care, attention; air, atmosphere; flavor; odor; energy, essence. air, indications, symptoms; taste; touch, dash, shade, trace; spark, flash; suspicion. *ki(ni)suru* mind, care, take to heart, be nervous about.

氣尽 *kizu(kushi)* earnest exertion
氣氣 *ki(ga) ki(demai)* be always worrying
氣向 *ki(ga) mu(ku), ki(ni) mu(ku)* feel inclined
氣任 *kimaka(se)* one's pleasure, free will
氣休 *kiyasu(me) ni* for peace of mind
氣扱 *kiatsuka(i)* solicitude, anxiety, worry
氣早 *kiabaya na, ki(no) haya(i)* quick-tempered
氣多 *ki(ga) o(i)* wavering, vacillating
氣宇 *kiu* magnanimity; feeling
氣食 *ki(ni) ku(wanu)* go against the grain, be unsatisfactory, be disagreeable, dislike

PERSONAL KI

[I]n holistic disciplines based on yoga, meditation, mantras, tai chi, etc., the main therapeutic value derives from mindful attention to the self, and an hour or so a day is considered sufficient. While a tithe of one's daily ki budget may be enough to maintain health, psychosomatic technologies like the Chinese *qi gung/ (kiko in Japanese)* advise those wishing to acquire "powers" to spend only 30% of their attention upon the world and retain 70% for the irrigation of the self and the internal environment. Heightening internal ki charges the endocrine system. Acupuncture journal studies, for example, document that ki stimulation techniques in men tend to raise the blood level of adrenalin and testosterone, as well as most other male hormones and steroids. This enriched broth of androgen and energy molecules makes the subject more behaviorially and biologically self-confident, aggressive and sensual. These are also the power molecules of Tantric and Taoist liberation techniques that use sensual arousal to raise the creative heat and awareness of mature adepts. Pleasure and passion are natural allies in these disciplines, synergizing ki flow to and in the body and enhancing the sense of self. In the everyday world also, the more self-directing one becomes, the more often the self turns to the things and activities it enjoys, until pleasure and profession merge. "You become good at what you like", as the Japanese proverb goes.

The melting away of conflict between personal desires and practical responsibilities, between needs and obligations, is comparable in ways to a loss of circuit resistance, or superconductivity. It frees enormous psychic energy, and tends to drive the process of individual maturation to completion: a sense of power and wellbeing promotes co

which increases spontaneity, which in turn yields creative surprise (master-pieces). By displaying the unpredictable, unprogrammed & thus unique aspects of a person, it marks him out as special, an individual, and makes his “name”.

Human individuation is thus the social analogue of speciation and can be justly credited with the lush historical diversity our planet has enjoyed. But whatever its evolutionary merit, it is also a centrifugal social force, and a schismatic threat to all complex corporate bodies.

In pre-corporate societies individuation was a path of power. To achieve it many traditional disciplines, both occult and overt, used attention-intensive techniques to focus energy on the self. These practices were generally designed to incubate a cultural rebirth and the manifestation of one’s indwelling deity or “genius”. In most religious and artistic traditions the emergence of this spirit and its seminal power marked one’s passage from discipleship to mastery and full adult rights. (Certain ancient Japanese professions such as medicine continue to call apprentices well into their twenties *tamago* (eggs) in recognition of the internal effort and external care that is still required to birth the autonomous practitioner.) The archetypal master is a fully mature and energized being — sexually active, physically skilled, psychically fertile. He cuts a splendid figure in an open field, but in a hierarchy he is likely to burst forth as a charismatic, insubordinate pain in the ass.

THE POLITICS OF KI

[K]eeping followers’ personal ki levels subdued is an ancient hierarchical concern. Sexual vitality and assertive *kiryoku* do not correlate very well with corporate docility and obedience. Authoritarian collectives accordingly treat ki like a “controlled substance” and make body-negating and anti-sensual themes leitmotifs in their teachings. Unisex Mao jackets, Christian hair shirts, Islamic purdah, school uniforms, in fact uniforms of any kind, are other tactics to lessen attention paid to individual bodies and beings. New “somebodies” erupting out of the faceless “flocks” or “masses” attract influence with attention, and authoritarian ki politics is a zero sum game.

Psychiatric incarceration, castration and auto-da-fe are only the most overt methods great collectives have used to rid themselves of insubordinate personalities. Less well known are the sophisticated psychosomatic techniques they employ to stop their members from acquiring independent identities in the first place. If the urge to individuation and autonomy is a common and natural evolutionary drive, successful social organisms like churches

corporations, etc. have apparently discovered some powerful technologies to suppress it. To either beat or join their game requires some working knowledge of these techniques and the ki dynamics which empower them. Two areas of primary import are the nature of social bonds, and how various socialization strategies work to strengthen them.

Just how much a Japanese depends on, and expects from, his co-workers may be incomprehensible to the outsider. There are no clear lines which divide one's own from another's...

—Dr. Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society*

Recent research in social embryology and organizational development has described intragroup bonds with a new theory of “attention structure”. This approach was developed in African field studies by anthropologists M.B.R. Chance and Clifford Jolly, who used “attention maps”, graphing how often and how long primate troop members visually refer to each other, to decipher group structure. The methodology was inspired by the etymologies of words like respect, re-gard, and re-verence — ki-intensive words which denote human importance in terms of the re-peated looks (*specere*), heed (*garder*), and wariness (*vereri*) individuals attract. Attention structure thus represents the flickering web of ki channels that bind and integrate a social body (cf. Hamano’s “mysterious filaments”).

Their maps unsurprisingly demonstrated that dominant members receive the lion’s share of the group’s ki. Although ferocity was observed to be a major advantage in attaining dominance, coalition-building “politician” apes and resourceful “entertainers” could also occasionally achieve it. This was surprising since these types clearly require group feedback, and ethology traditionally defines a dominant individual as one whom other members look to for reference, while he himself is not obliged to refer to anyone. (In cowboy-movie terms, the stranger’s joke isn’t funny until the gang boss laughs.) Their findings called into question the old “who can clobber whom” hierarchy models. The political success of relatively non-threatening leaders showed that individuals were dominant because they attracted the most attention and not vice versa. Parenthetically, the researchers also noted that the troops’ least attended male members were, or became, almost sexually inert.

Their attention distribution charts proved quite stable over time and showed that ki circulation within a specific social group can become as patterned, routinized and “hard-wired” as in a physical body. In human systems, for example, this is dramatically evidenced in the extraordinarily high mortality rates among older men who abruptly lose the accu.

attention of wives and/or work groups. Once external sources of attention are integrated into one's internal ki economy, the individual becomes dependent upon this larger whole for energy and identity. The sudden severance of these interpersonal ki channels can cause the equivalent of psychosomatic hemorrhage and anemia, and drain the victim all the way down to the immune system.

Enlarging and perfecting these group circulatory systems are arguably the main objectives of Japanese socialization processes. Comparative childrearing studies have noted, for example, that while the American child is considered to be a dependent entity who must be helped to independence, the Japanese child is felt to be an independent being who must be drawn into dependence. This conditioning for incorporation continues throughout schooling and beyond. Japanese corporations complete the process by “encouraging a deep receptivity, empathy and openness in each new member which allows him to make others a part of himself (*jibun no naka ni aite o ireru*, literally ‘putting others inside oneself’).”⁵

The resulting social ki linkages can be almost palpably apparent. Several Japanese social critics have graphically compared groups here to bowls of natto (fermented soybeans swaddled together with shining mucilagenous strands). In group life this pulsating web of mutual attention quite literally ob-ligates its members and powerfully affects their behavior. Kurt Singer, a German economist who worked in Japan's great bureaucracies in the 30's, vividly captured the effect:

*Where the quasi-magical force of rite and custom prevails, the give and take, address and reply, the warp of daily life, assume the harmonious aspects of a self-regulated organic process. The movements of a Japanese seem not to originate in his frail body but to avail themselves of it, making him bend and bow and vibrate like a tree in wind and rain.*⁶

In addition to energy then, ki bonds or attention channels distribute sensory and motor information throughout a social organism like a rudimentary nervous system. It is this mechanism that ties diverse members into a functional whole, and the power or *kiryoku* invested in it determines a corporate body's integration, productive efficiency, and responsiveness to central command.

These are issues of deep concern to leaders trying to organize vast groups for governance, industry or war, and in Japan, where the importance of ki distribution is pervasively recognized, a great deal of thought has gone into ki technology. From preserved ur
the emperor system to estrogenic soybeans and chronic test stress, many ingenio

have been developed to psychosomatically condition Japanese to foreswear individuation, and attentively embrace and subserve collective systems. The extraordinary vitality of Japanese corporate bodies certifies the final effectiveness of these techniques, as do the less well remarked side effects of neurosis, apathy and psycho-sexual retardation many overmilked salarymen have learned to endure.

For those interested in economic miracles then, or in the evolutionary competition between human and corporate bodies, Japan's group consciousness and its attentional arts & sciences deserve some serious study.

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