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**Jedi and Samurai:
An Analysis on the Influence of Japanese Culture in “Star
Wars” Media**

Mariana Ferreira Albuquerque
1421186

TUTOR/A
Artur Lozano Méndez

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Author: Mariana Ferreira Albuquerque

Tutor: Artur Lozano Méndez

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Abstract

ENG

The objective of this thesis is to understand how Japanese culture has influenced the world of Star Wars; especially focusing on the differences and similarities between the Jedi Order and the real-life samurai, from whom George Lucas drew significant inspiration when creating the world of Star Wars. Through the analysis of several Star Wars media (books, TV shows, films, comics, video games, etc), I aim to compare and contrast it with historical sources on the samurai, thus reaching a better understanding on where these two factions converge and diverge in philosophy, values and even other aspects such as

aesthetics.

ES.

El objetivo de este trabajo es entender cómo la cultura japonesa ha influenciado el mundo de Star Wars, enfocándose principalmente en las diferencias y similitudes entre el Orden de los Jedi y los samuráis, a partir de quiénes George Lucas se inspiró mientras creaba el universo de Star Wars. A través del análisis de diversos medios de Star Wars (libros, series de televisión, películas, cómics, videojuegos, etc), espero compararlo y contrastarlo con fuentes históricas sobre los samuráis, llegando entonces a un mejor entendimiento en donde ambas facciones coinciden y se dividen en ámbitos como la filosofía, valores e incluso la estética.

CAT.

L'objectiu d'aquest treball és entendre com la cultura japonesa ha influenciat el món de Star Wars, enfocant-se principalment en les diferències i similituds entre l'Ordre Jedi i els samurais, a partir dels quals George Lucas es va inspirar mentre creà l'univers de Star Wars. A través de l'anàlisi de diversos mitjans de Star Wars (llibres, sèries de televisió, pel·lícules, còmics, videojocs, etc), espero comparar-ho i contrastar-ho amb fonts històriques sobre els samurais, arribant doncs a un millor enteniment d'on ambdues faccions coincideixen o no en àmbits com la filosofia, valors i inclòs l'estètica.

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Introduction

While some people have never watched Star Wars in their lives, it would be hard to believe that they have never heard of it. For over four decades, Star Wars has become a pop culture phenomenon that has swept the whole world and has achieved immeasurable popularity within popular culture. Its permeability in the realm of common culture has reached such boundaries that one cannot even be sure if the Darth Vader reveal in *Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1980) constitutes a spoiler anymore.

The creator of the franchise, George Lucas, originally based the concept of the first film of the franchise, *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977), on Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (Kurosawa, 1958). George Lucas has declared himself a fan of the samurai and Japanese culture several times, and the influences and references to his favourite filmmakers are visible throughout his work in the Star Wars franchise.

With that in mind, the objective of this thesis is to analyze several pieces of Star Wars media (films, books, video games and comics), and compare the information presented in them to historical and academic resources on the samurai, with the aim of providing an analysis on what elements of samurai history, philosophy and values George Lucas borrowed while creating the series. This is meant as a possible introduction to the topic, which can be researched more thoroughly in the future.

For the purpose of having a more cohesive database for this project, I have decided to restrict my research to the current Star Wars canon —often referred to as “Disney canon”—, as the previous canon, now renamed “Legends”, is far too extensive and presents many inconsistencies throughout its several media, which would possibly make the source material more unreliable for this essay.

As a clarification for the reader: The original trilogy of Star Wars, released between 1977 and 1983, comprises Episode IV, V and VI, and their events take place 19 years after those of the prequel trilogy, released between 1999 and 2005, which comprises Episodes I, II and III. The events of the sequel trilogy, which was released between 2015 and 2019, is set around 30 years after the original trilogy, and 50 years after the prequel trilogy; and comprises Episodes VII, VIII and IX.

The first film, *A New Hope*, was originally released under the name *Star Wars*, which was retroactively changed by George Lucas to *Episode IV: A New Hope*. To avoid confusion between the franchise itself and this film in question, I shall refer to this film simply as *A New Hope*.

1. Samurai: Origins and a Brief History

We can pinpoint the origins of a Japanese warrior class to the reign of Emperor Monmu of Yamato (697-707), in the early 8th century. Shortly after the Taihō Code was enacted, a national conscription system was put into place, as these political reforms introduced a system of population census (Kawakami, 1952:65). This reform was inspired by the Chinese Tang Dynasty, and it was inscribed in a period of recurring Chinese influence on the Japanese language, culture, politics, philosophy, and religion. It was during the Nara period that the word *bushi*, meaning “warrior,” first appeared and was put into use; but the political rise of a warrior class dates to the posterior Heian Period (Friday, 2003:5).

In the late 12th century, tensions between the Taira and Minamoto clans, both claimants to the Imperial Throne, led to the outbreak of the Genpei War (1180-1185). Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199) was victorious and founded the Kamakura Shogunate (1185-1333), which would lay the foundation for the Japanese state policy that lasted until the late 19th century, as it placed the warrior class firmly on the upper echelons of Japanese society (Friday, 2003:10). Initially, this did not give much significant power to other warrior leaders, but it did change the way they related with each other, as their common ties and service to the shogunate led them to establish deeper connections among them, which would eventually give way to marriages and other family unions out of convenience (Wert, 2019:253-274). At this time, warriors tried to act more like nobles, as they generally had a bad reputation among the populace. This was one of the main reasons why the Kamakura shogunate never took or tried to take over the Emperor’s rule (Wert, 2019:274). Eventually, the shogunate felt the need to redistribute and extend its governmental network, thus awarding the title of *shugo daimyō*¹ to the noble warriors who were closest to the shōgun.

Following the untimely deaths —and assassinations— of several Minamoto clan members, Emperor Go-Toba tried to overthrow the Minamoto shogunate with the help of the *sōhei*, warrior monks who followed the Buddhist branch of the True Pure Land faith.² His reign, however, did not last much— after three years, he had been ordered into exile after the

¹ Feudal lords who held military, police and economic powers in a province.

² School of Pure Land Buddhism (also known as Amidism) founded by the Japanese monk Shinran. It is also known as Shin Buddhism.

failed Jōkyū Rebellion (1221) (Friday, 2003:13). The Minamoto clan seized back control and the shogunate ruled Japan for the next few decades, during which the Mongol Empire tried to invade Japan twice, though failed as their fleets were destroyed by powerful typhoons on both occasions.

By the year 1333, Emperor Go-Daigo (1288-1339) had managed to overthrow the shogunate and regain control of the country. This was achieved, in no small part, thanks to key betrayals within the Kamakura shogunate itself: Ashikaga Takauji (1305-1358), who had originally been sent by the shōgun to capture the Emperor, ended up taking Kyoto for the Emperor and declaring his loyalty to him. Veteran *bakufu*³ official Nitta Yoshisada (1301-1338) also had a change of heart and allied himself with the Emperor (Friday, 2003:13). On the 5th of July 1333, the regime fell and Go-Daigo regained full powers as Emperor through the Kenmu Restoration (Friday, 2003:14). This would be the last time an Emperor would have full control over the country until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Go-Daigo committed several mistakes during his brief period of absolute power, such as appointing his son as the shōgun. This did not sit well with the warrior lords who had sided with him and helped the rebellion succeed, as they felt they had barely gotten anything in return for all they had risked in his favour—soon, Ashikaga Takauji left his ranks and turned against him. With his allies slowly leaving his side and his continuous failures, Go-Daigo was forced to leave, settling with his remaining court on Yoshino mountain⁴, establishing what would later be known as the Southern Court. When he lost to the Ashikaga brothers, he gave them fake imperial relics, making their founding of the Northern Court illegitimate in the eyes of many (Friday, 2003:14). It was not until the mandate of shōgun Yoshimitsu that both courts were finally reunited as one in 1392—effectively leaving imperial authority in the hands of the shogunate (Friday, 2003:167). During the Ashikaga shogunate (1336-1573), all *shugo daimyō* were required to live in court, and their domains were left under the care of a *shugodai*, an administrator. In some cases, *shugodai* usurped power from the *shugo daimyō* they served and became *shugo daimyō* themselves (Steenstrup, 1991:102).

The Ōnin War (1467-1477), which had originated as a family feud between two noble samurai families, brought the Ashikaga shogunate to a violent end. The city of Kyoto was

³ Shogunate government.

⁴ Located in modern-day Nara prefecture, southwest of Tokyo.

severely damaged, with the bodies of hundreds piling up in its streets. With no government, Japan descended into chaos as several lords fought each other over the possibility of controlling the government (Ion *et al*,1996:53-55). One of them, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), stood out for his military genius and revolutionary political reforms. Despite his unexpected death⁵, his legacy was continued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), with the latter eventually establishing the Tokugawa Shogunate, commonly known as the Edo period. The capital of the shogunate was moved from Heian-kyō, modern-day Kyoto, to Edo, modern-day Tokyo, thus the name of the period.

The Edo period was notorious for many reasons; first and foremost, Japan closed itself off from the rest of the world, albeit with some exceptions. This period is referred to as the *Sakoku*, literally meaning “closed country”, and lasted from 1633 until 1853. Portuguese and Spanish missionaries had brought Christianity a few decades back, and although initially popular —Oda Nobunaga himself favoured them—, the populace and several lords feared that traditional Japanese beliefs and religion would be lost to those foreign ideals (Hall, 2006:5). As a consequence, many of the *daimyō* who had converted to Christianity were forced to renounce the religion, although many of them continued to practice it in secret.

By closing off the country, international relations were mostly limited to trading, which was only allowed to the Dutch, Chinese, Koreans and Ainu people. The lack of external influence led to a period of political and social stability. The population was controlled— and the flourishing of arts and entertainment, combined with the improvements in the economy, judicial system, agricultural yield and infrastructure kept them mostly content about their living conditions. During this time of peace, the samurai were relegated to their political duties, with most of them not doing much more than just ruling their domain, or serving their lord. During this period, warriors enjoyed a surge of popularity among the general populace, and many of their hobbies soon became available to commoners. One such example is *kabuki*⁶, in which the actors started interpreting the characters who represented heroes as samurai. The samurai figure became so popular in fact, that many commoners tried to become one. Generally, such a title was only awarded to approved fencing teachers with a

⁵ Oda Nobunaga was forced to commit ritual suicide, commonly referred to as *seppuku* or *harakiri*, after being ambushed by Akechi Mitsuhide (1528-1582), one of his generals and closest allies, at the Honnō-Ji temple. This event is commonly referred to as the Honnō-Ji Incident.

⁶ Traditional Japanese theatre.

commoner background (Wert, 2019:1124-1131). The samurai were not only the dominant social class, but they were also widely respected and admired.

Japan was ultimately forced to put an end to their isolationist policies after the United States of America pressured the country into opening its borders in 1853. It wasn't too long before the power of the samurai weakened, both by political incompetence and new Western ideas, and eventually, the shōgun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837-1913) was forced to abdicate his title in favour of Emperor Meiji in 1868. With the advent of the Meiji Restoration, samurai were mostly stripped away from their titles and social privileges, although many of them became nobility. Many were forced to sell family heirlooms such as ceremonial armours, as they found themselves in poverty after being unable to perform their former obligations (Wert, 2019:1475-1481). In the late 19th century, many Japanese people found samurai to be an embarrassment, and that they hadn't been very useful (Wert, 2019:1481).

2. Jedi

In the Star Wars universe, the Jedi Knights are the members of the Jedi Order, a religious order devoted to the so-called light side of the Force.⁷ Despite referring to themselves as “peacekeepers,” Jedi Knights are fully trained warriors who are extremely well-versed in combat and duelling and have, several times, engaged in conflict⁸ with several civilizations and other orders; with their most notable enemies being the Sith. The Sith, like the Jedi, are a religious order dedicated to the study and use of the Force, although focusing on its dark side.

The Jedi first appeared in the film *A New Hope*⁹ (Lucas, 1977), directed by the then mostly unknown George Lucas. The protagonist, a moisture farmer¹⁰ named Luke Skywalker,¹¹ discovers that “Old Ben,” a hermit living in the desert of Tatooine, is former Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi.¹² Luke also discovers, much to his surprise, that his late father Anakin Skywalker¹³ had also been a fellow Jedi knight — Luke grew up believing he was a navigator in a spice freighter —, and a friend of Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan also reveals to Luke that his father was murdered by Darth Vader,¹⁴ a Jedi knight who had been “seduced by the dark side of the Force.” During this exchange, Luke is gifted Anakin’s lightsaber, which Obi-Wan had kept until Luke was old enough to use it (Lucas, 1977, 00:33:17). The lightsaber is a weapon comprised of a plasma¹⁵ blade, powered by a kyber crystal¹⁶ that is safely kept inside its hilt. This is the first image that we are given of the Jedi and is surely the one that has stayed the most relevant in mainstream culture.

Over the course of the next few films, the Jedi Knights are explored further. In the Prequel Trilogy (Episodes I, II, and III) we are shown the Jedi at the end of their glory days, with the Jedi Council presiding over the Order directly from the capital of the Republic,

⁷ Energy field that involves all living creatures. For a more in-depth analysis, refer to the section: *The Force*.

⁸ This paradox has been addressed and highlighted in works belonging to the Star Wars universe, such as *The Clone Wars* (2008-2020). This will be explored further in the section: *Politics and Military*.

⁹ Later renamed as “*Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*.”

¹⁰ Farmers who collected humidity from the air to produce water in desert planets such as Tatooine.

¹¹ Hereinafter referred to as “Luke.”

¹² Hereinafter referred to as “Obi-Wan.”

¹³ Hereinafter referred to as “Anakin.”

¹⁴ Later revealed to actually be Anakin Skywalker, who had turned to the dark side to save his wife Padmé Amidala and their unborn child from death.

¹⁵ Matter with electromagnetic properties, from which most weapons in the Star Wars Universe are made of.

¹⁶ Crystal with a connection to the Force, from which the plasma blade in a lightsaber is emitted.

Coruscant.¹⁷ The Jedi eventually became military leaders over the course of the Clone Wars,¹⁸ slowly losing their status as “peacekeepers”, with their involvement in the conflict eventually leading to their demise and extinction during Sidious’¹⁹ regime. Luke Skywalker reestablishes the Jedi Order after the defeat of the Galactic Empire, hoping to bring it back to its former glory and to follow on Obi-Wan’s and Yoda’s legacy, sharing the knowledge they gave him with a new generation of powerful Jedi Knights. Ultimately this fails, and Luke himself grows to resent the Jedi Order and its doctrine (Johnson, 2017).

2.1. *Japanese Influence*

In *A New Hope* (1977), the Jedi are presented as the extinct guardians of the Old Republic,²⁰ who sought to achieve peace and balance in the galaxy through the control and mastery of the light side of the Force, which is described by Obi-Wan as being “an energy field, created by all living things.” The concept of the Force as Obi-Wan puts it is very similar to the Chinese concept of *qi* (*ki* in Japanese), which shall be addressed later on. This is not the only clear East Asian element present in the scene—Obi-Wan’s Jedi robes have a striking resemblance to the Japanese *kimono*. Darth Vader —though not a Jedi himself anymore— wears a set of armour that strongly resembles that of the samurai. This East Asian influence is very clear in the climax of the film: Near the end, Darth Vader and Obi-Wan face each other, each with their own lightsaber. The movements are quite simple, yet precise and technical. Both men eagerly try to break the other’s defence and deliver the finishing blow. From a martial arts standpoint, it very closely resembles *kendō*, a swordsmanship technique that evolved in the 18th century from older samurai sword fighting techniques. Considering this, together with the basic notions of *Bushidō* that have permeated the Western world through the boom of Japanese culture, it is not hard to see that George Lucas inspired himself on the samurai when creating the figure of the Jedi knights.

¹⁷ Capital planet of the Galactic Republic, and later on, the Galactic Empire. The whole surface of the planet is covered by several levels of buildings.

¹⁸ War between the Republic and the Confederacy of Independent Systems. It is the last major war before the fall of the Republic in 19BBY, and it directly leads to the rise of the Galactic Empire. Its name derives from the fact that the Grand Army of the Republic was mostly comprised of cloned soldiers.

¹⁹ Darth Sidious, also referred to as the “Emperor” in the original trilogy, was the Sith *alias* taken by Sheev Palpatine, former Chancellor of the Republic Senate. He orchestrated the Clone Wars in order to establish the Galactic Empire

²⁰ Government previous to the rise of the Empire (19BBY). The time period Obi-Wan refers to goes from 1032BBY to 19BBY. The capital was the planet Coruscant.

Note: BBY refers to “Before the Battle of Yavin”, the climax event of episode IV.

George Lucas happens to be a big enthusiast of Akira Kurosawa, and this is visible in the very first film of the saga. *A New Hope* (1977) shares a multitude of plot points with Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958). In Kurosawa's film, two peasants—Tahei and Matashichi—are captured by different enemies after a short disagreement. Later when freed, they help a man and a woman crossing enemy lines; but it happens that the man is a general, and the woman is a princess. In *A New Hope* (1977), droids C-3PO and R2-D2 crash on Tatooine after fleeing Princess Leia Organa's²¹ ship, who has been taken prisoner by Darth Vader. After being captured by a desert scavengers species named Jawas, the droids are acquired by Luke and his uncle; and when Obi-Wan is finally able to convince Luke to come with him to Leia's aid—having just received a distress message from her through R2-D2—both droids join along. The similarities between the droids and the peasants are quite evident, as is Leia's to Princess Yuki's. The plots of both films are already strikingly similar as it is, but George Lucas's initial draft of *A New Hope*, written in 1973, was so similar to Kurosawa's work that he even considered buying the rights of *The Hidden Fortress* for a remake (Kaminski, 2008:47-48). Eventually, the plot differed enough that such legal action was not needed, but the similarities between both films are still quite evident.

Even in later films and other Star Wars media since then, Kurosawa's influence is quite noticeable. In *The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017 02:12:00), Luke has a stand-off with his nephew Ben Solo, who's now become a Sith Lord known as Kylo Ren, following in his grandfather's (Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader) steps. This scene was inspired by a sparring scene in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), according to Charmaine Chan, a senior compositor who worked on the film (Industrial Light & Magic, 2019). This very same film has also seen some of its elements borrowed in other Star Wars media—*A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) has a clear “team assembly” theme that is inspired by this film. *The Clone Wars* (2008-2020) episode “Bounty Hunters”²² (Ellsworth *et al*, 2010) is a clear homage to the film—Anakin, Obi-Wan and Ahsoka Tano²³ team with four bounty hunters to protect a Felucian²⁴ farming village from pirates. Similarly, in *The Mandalorian* (Favreau,

²¹ Hereinafter referred to as “Leia”. Biological daughter of Anakin Skywalker (Darth Vader) and Padmé Amidala Naberrie; and fraternal twin to Luke Skywalker. Adopted and raised by senator Bail Prestor Organa and his wife, Queen Breha Organa of the planet Alderaan.

²² Season 2, episode 17. First aired March 27, 2010.

²³ Anakin Skywalker's Padawan (Jedi apprentice). Hereinafter referred to as “Ahsoka.”

²⁴ Felucia is a lush jungle planet in the world of Star Wars.

2019-present) episode “Chapter 4: Sanctuary”²⁵ (Favreau *et al*, 2019), Din Djarin, a Mandalorian²⁶ bounty hunter, and Cara Dune, a former Rebel²⁷ shocktrooper, teach the farmers of a village in Sorgan²⁸ how to defend themselves from the Imperial Forces. In a more recent episode of *The Mandalorian*, “Chapter 13: The Jedi”²⁹ (Filoni, 2020), Kurosawa’s artistry is once more rendered homage. The scene where Ahsoka infiltrates the village of Calodan³⁰ very closely resembles that of a stand-off in Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* (1961), in which the character Toshiro Mifune is a lone hero in empty streets, walking towards a line of enemies (Filoni, 2020).

All things considered, it should not be much of a surprise to learn that the word “Jedi” itself comes from *Jidaigeki*, a term usually referring to period dramas or films set during the Edo period, often depicting the adventures of samurai (Torres, 2015:104).

²⁵ Season 1, episode 4. First aired November 29, 2020.

²⁶ Originally from the planet of Mandalore, historically known for its conflicts with the Jedi Order.

²⁷ Political resistance movement against the Empire, the latter being ruled by Darth Sidious.

²⁸ Sorgan is a forested swamp planet, with a very small population.

²⁹ Season 2, episode 5. First aired November 27, 2020.

³⁰ Located on the planet Corvus.

3. Politics and Military

Though very similar in several other aspects, the way samurai and Jedi deal with politics—and even their degree of involvement in the matter—tend to be quite different. The samurai had originally been little more than a warrior chaste but eventually grew powerful enough that they managed to take over the government of Japan. Despite their evident military prowess at the time, their political power was generally very limited during the time of the Kamakura shogunate, and the only samurai lords who held actual power were Minamoto no Yoritomo and his closest allies. With subsequent rebellions over the next few decades and centuries, the shogunate slowly started accumulating more power, eventually reaching the point in which they were the *de facto* leaders, having more ruling power than the Emperor himself. This was especially evident during the Tokugawa shogunate, as the samurai slowly relinquished their warrior ways and became nobles and political leaders, limiting their military prowess to martial arts instead of war.

In Star Wars, the Jedi are presented as having a far more symbiotic relationship with the Republic and its government. They do not get directly involved in political matters, but they are often sent as diplomats under the Republic's jurisdiction—such as when Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn and his Padawan³¹ Obi-Wan Kenobi are sent to Naboo to resolve the Trade Federation's blockade on Naboo³² in *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999). With the outbreak of the Clone Wars, the Jedi become the leaders of the Grand Army of the Republic, thus being directly responsible for the Republic's safety and military advancements. Ultimately, the Jedi do not wish to become involved in politics, but they will eventually oblige if their involvement is needed.

3.1. *Political and Military roles*

In the Prequel trilogy, the Jedi are shown to involve themselves in the political matters of the Republic as little as possible, showing contempt towards politics. One could even argue that from a philosophical point of view, political aspirations were immoral to a Jedi,

³¹ Name given to a Jedi Apprentice who is under the direct tutelage of a Jedi Knight.

³² One of the most prominent planets in the Star Wars universe, Naboo is a beautiful garden world. It is the birthplace of several major characters, such as Queen Amidala (who later becomes Anakin Skywalker's wife and gives birth to his children, Luke and Leia) and Chancellor Sheev Palpatine, who is later revealed to be Darth Sidious, and eventually becomes the leader of the Galactic Empire.

and it violated their Code.³³ A Jedi should not look for power, only balance, and getting involved in politics implies holding power in some sort of way, which could also interfere with their own tenet of avoiding all possessions. That does not mean that they were completely apolitical or that they refused to get involved in any conflict that the Republic had partaken in, as this is clearly not the case given their participation in several conflicts such as the Clone Wars. They were also often sent on diplomatic missions in the name of the Republic, and several members of the Jedi Order offer official protection to Republic politicians; such as when Anakin Skywalker is assigned as Senator Padmé Amidala's personal bodyguard after an attempt on her life, as shown in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002). But on a general note, Jedi would rather not get involved in politics. In *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002 00:11:58), Obi-Wan even goes as far as telling Anakin not to trust Padmé so much, as "she is a politician". At the core of the Jedi Order exists a sense of brotherhood and trust in each other, which the Jedi may not think exists in many other environments, especially in a place that can be as treacherous as the Republic Senate. We also need to take into account the political climate brewing at the time that Obi-Wan makes this declaration: The Separatist movement was gaining traction in several regions of the galaxy, provoking the sedition of several planets from the Republic. These planets tended to be located pretty far from Coruscant, the centre of galactic politics, and they often felt ignored when it came to their own social issues.

Ironically, one could even say that the Jedi had a quite political structure themselves. The ruling body of the Jedi Order was the Jedi Council³⁴, which had its own requirements for those who wished to join it; its members were required to be Jedi Masters, and the admission of a new member had to be approved by all current members of the Council. This was important, as they were the ones who decided what the Order should or should not do. The fact that Chancellor Palpatine appoints Anakin to the Jedi Council without the approval of all Council members in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) causes immense friction and deep concern within the Order, as this is seen as needless and inappropriate external intervention. Anakin is accepted into the Council, as the Jedi fear retaliation from the Senate and the Chancellor if they do not; but he is assured that the Council is not happy with this decision.

³³ Explored further in the section *Bushidō and the Jedi Code: The misunderstandings of Anakin Skywalker*.

³⁴ Officially called the Jedi High Council, but normally simply referred to as "Jedi Council" in Star Wars media.

He is not granted the rank of Master —thus giving him no actual power or status within the Council itself— and some of its members, most notably Mace Windu and Master Yoda, express their concern and disapproval of the decision (Lucas, 2005, 00:36:50).

They were right to be concerned: Palpatine had, after all, orchestrated the war that had led to billions of deaths, had effectively gained control of the Senate, and was now directly interfering with the integrity of the Jedi Council, thus endangering the integrity of the Order itself. This is similar to how the subsequent Japanese shogunates slowly took power away from the Emperor, legitimizing their actions through war and military power, while still giving the image that the Emperor was the person who was truly in charge. Palpatine chose a similar path for himself, although ironically enough, he became the Emperor.

The Jedi's power waned as they got involved in The Clone Wars, and were eventually forced to become the defence corps of the Republic. As the best-trained warriors in the galaxy, Jedi Knights and Masters were given the role of Generals; while their Padawans received the rank of Commanders. However, the Jedi were a minority in their own army, as the vast majority of its members were Clone Troopers. Created from the DNA of bounty hunter Jango Fett, they were created and raised on the planet of Kamino, where they would go through extensive military and physical training, before being sent off to the Grand Army of the Republic and put under the command of a Jedi general or commander, as seen in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002) and *The Clone Wars* (Filoni, 2008-2020).

To ensure their good behaviour, they were all implanted with an inhibitor chip in their brains, the task of which was to eliminate “unwanted” behaviours such as aggression or more self-autonomy than what was initially planned (Lucas, 2014). Unbeknownst to the Jedi, these chips held a darker secret: They were programmed to execute and purge all Jedi at the whim of Chancellor Palpatine, who secretly was the Sith Lord that had orchestrated the war, Darth Sidious.

The clones' role in the Grand Army of the Republic could be compared to that of the *ashigaru*³⁵ in the Sengoku period. The recruitment of an army and providing them with formal training revolutionized warfare in Medieval Japan (Naohiro, 2006:54), and in the case of Star Wars it shaped the galaxy massively, as it was directly responsible for the purge of the

³⁵ Foot soldiers. Most were recruited peasants.

Jedi Order.³⁶ Like the aforementioned Japanese foot soldiers, who would fight with arquebuses as the *bushi* charged in with their swords, clone troopers would fight with blasters or similar fire weapons, while the Jedi employed their lightsabers and the Force. Similarly to the case of some few *ashigaru*, a few clone troopers rose to the same ranks as some Jedi. Captain Rex of Anakin Skywalker’s 501st Legion was promoted to the rank of Commander shortly before the siege of Mandalore, giving him authority equivalent to that of a Jedi Padawan (Filoni *et al*, 2020). In the case of the *ashigaru*, the most infamous rise in ranks is that of Toyotomi Hideyoshi— who started as Oda Nobunaga’s sandal-bearer and eventually came to control most of Japan as *daimyō*.

The war worsened the public’s perception of the Jedi, but many within the Order were disappointed with the direction they were taking and felt like they were losing their morals. This dissatisfaction and resentment led Barriss Offee, a Jedi Padawan, to stage a terrorist attack in the Jedi Temple, incriminating Ahsoka. While on trial, she expresses her deep resentment towards the war and the current state of the Jedi Order, as seen in *The Clone Wars* episode “The Wrong Jedi” (Murray *et al*, 2013):

“I did it... because I’ve come to realize what many people in the Republic have come to realize, that the Jedi are the ones responsible for this war, that we’ve so lost our way that we have become villains in this conflict, that we are the ones that should be put on trial, all of us! And my attack on the Temple was an attack on what the Jedi have become, an army fighting for the dark side, fallen from the light that we once held so dear. This Republic is failing! It’s only a matter of time.”

The public opinion on the Jedi was varied, but a considerable portion of the population disliked the Jedi— many considered their use of the Force to be nothing more than pure fairytales, and that their direct involvement in the Clone Wars showed their hypocrisy, as they considered themselves to be “peacekeepers,” and that in many cases, they were out of touch with reality. This is exemplified in the Martez Sisters Arc³⁷ in the 7th season of *The Clone Wars*. In the episode “Dangerous Debt”,³⁸ the sisters explain that their

³⁶ The events of Order 66 can be seen in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005), the episodes “Shattered” and “Victory and Death” in *The Clone Wars* (Filoni *et al*, 2020) and the episode “Aftermath” in *The Bad Batch* (Lee *et al*, 2021).

³⁷ Comprising the following episodes of season 7 of *The Clone Wars*: “Gone with a Trace”, “Deal no Deal”, “Dangerous Debt” and “Together Again”.

³⁸ Season 7, episode 7. First aired April 3, 2020.

parents had died after being crushed by a crashing ship, which had been shot by bounty hunter Cad Bane in an attempt to distract the Jedi who were chasing him. The next day, a Jedi Master visited the crash site to evaluate the damage and coldly told them that they should not be worried about their parents' deaths, as the Force would be with them. Ahsoka, despite having left the Jedi Order months before, is still quite shocked at the Jedi's lack of compassion (Filoni *et al*, 2020).

Much like the common people living in the universe of Star Wars, the general Japanese populace also had a negative image of their warriors. In art and literature, they were often depicted as blood-thirsty beasts, who did not care about the impact of their bloodshed. Peasants feared them, as they would often pillage entire villages (Wert, 2019:97). Feudal disputes in medieval and modern Japan would often be bloody, and the country did not really experience widespread peace until the Tokugawa shogunate. This relatively long period of peace and stability swayed people into admiring the samurai and idolizing their image. A very similar phenomenon happens in Star Wars; by the time of the Empire, many people regard the Jedi as a myth, and their feats have become semi-legendary tales. This contradiction in the populace's view on the Jedi is expressed by Luke in *The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017, 00:59:17):

LUKE

Now that they're extinct, the Jedi are romanticized, deified. But if you strip away the myth and look at their deeds, the legacy of the Jedi is failure. Hypocrisy, hubris.

REY

That's not true.

LUKE

At the height of their powers, they allowed Darth Sidious to rise, create the Empire, and wipe them out.

4. Philosophy

4.1. *Bushidō and the Jedi Code: The misunderstandings of Anakin Skywalker*

What we know as *Bushidō* in the west is a compilation of several ideals, philosophies and practices that have changed in many ways throughout the history of Japan. The book that we can credit with introducing *Bushidō* philosophy to the West is Nitobe Inazō's *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*, published in 1899, although his work has suffered from claims of inaccuracies and associations with early 20th century Japanese fascism (Etzrodt, 2018). *Bushidō*, rather than a single universal concept, was an amalgamation of several points of view on a warrior's moral and military code, moulded by the philosophies and beliefs of a certain prominent warrior or clan, and then shared with others, who may have had different views on the matter (Etzrodt, 2018). It is safe to say, however, that a few ideals were shared among the different interpretations of *bushidō*; such as loyalty, dutifulness, and the acceptance of death. In the Jedi Code, we can find some of these ideals, as represented in the novel *Dark Disciple* (Golden, 2015:287): "There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force."

In the Jedi Code, we can find many references to Buddhist thought, which was quite popular among the samurai elite and scholars, such as Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) or Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659-1719), with the latter even affirming in his *Hagakure* (Yamamoto, 2013:4), "The way of the warrior is death."

The Jedi order encourages the release of attachments: once someone has a strong attachment towards something or someone, they may feel compelled to do anything to satisfy that aspect of their lives. The possibility of that not happening and the expectations surrounding it are what ultimately cause suffering. As Yamamoto Tsunetomo expresses in *Hagakure* (Yamamoto, 2013:124), the path to fulfilment includes letting go of all attachments related to life or death. Similarly, "letting go" of attachments is a recurring theme in the Star Wars prequel trilogy, most notably in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005).

Anakin Skywalker's downfall is triggered by a series of losses: Firstly his mother, whom he massacred a village over; followed by his Padawan's abandonment of the Jedi Order, and eventually the loss of his wife and children—with him being directly blamed for the latter. Despite Yoda's warnings in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) that he should let go of attachments and just willingly accept a loved one's death, Anakin is ultimately unable to do so; leading to his downfall and misery.

The 5th scroll of Saitō Chikamori's (1603-1674) *Kashōki* (1642) exemplifies what he perceived as a warrior's proper conduct, and further exposes Anakin's failure to adhere and understand the tenets he was supposed to uphold:

“The essence of Bushidō is: do not lie, do not be insincere, do not be obsequious, do not be superficial, do not be greedy, do not be rude, do not be boastful, do not be arrogant, do not slander, do not be unfaithful, be on good terms with comrades, do not be overly concerned with events, show concern for one another, be compassionate, with a strong sense of duty. Being a good samurai takes more than merely a willingness to lay down one's life.”

Aware that he is meant to be “the chosen one” who will eventually bring balance to the Force, Anakin often acts boastfully and arrogantly, showing off his abilities and giving into his ego, as seen in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002). In *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005), he is entirely convinced that he cannot only save his wife and children from certain death but that he will be able to defeat Palpatine and declare himself Emperor. He is aware that Jedi are not supposed to have romantic attachments, even explaining this to Padmé—but he decides to marry her anyway, invalidating his oath to the Jedi Order (Lucas, 2002). By marrying her, he betrays his Order and what it stands for and wilfully lies about the nature of his and Padmé's relationship over the course of several years. His arrogance and fear of loss are often laced with anger and impatience; when he witnesses Rush Clovis³⁹ trying to kiss Padmé, he becomes so irate that he nearly punches Clovis to death, only stopping because of his wife's pleas (Taylor *et al*, 2014, 00:12:08). When he is denied the rank of Jedi Master by the Council in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005, 00:37:09), he angrily declares that it is an outrageous and unfair decision. Eventually, his inability to deal with the consequences of his deceit, his ambition and his unacceptance of death leads him straight into his downfall.

³⁹ Human politician from the planet of Scipio. Implied to have been Padmé's romantic interest in the past.

Anakin may be an accomplished duelist and Force user, but he fails to understand the way a Jedi, or a warrior for that matter, should behave.

4.2. *The Force*

LUKE⁴⁰

What do you know about the Force?

REY

It's a power that Jedi have that lets them control people and make things float.

LUKE

Impressive. Every word in that sentence was wrong.

In the Star Wars universe, the Force is the life energy that binds all living beings together—plants, animals, humans, and all other alien species. They all exist within the realm of the Force, and their lives are bound to it. Described as a field of living energy that connects everything in the universe, the Force is the base of the Jedi Order's beliefs. Due to the nature of the Force, it is easy to find a resemblance to the Chinese concept of *qi* (*ki* in Japanese), a vital force that comprises one of the main principles of Chinese traditional medicine, and an important concept in the development and philosophy of some martial arts, such as *aikido* or *kendō*.

As with the Force in Star Wars, *qi* binds all living beings together, and is present in every aspect of daily life— in Chinese traditional medicine, an imbalance in someone's *qi* can render them ill, as the *yin* and *yang* need to be balanced (Jacobs, 2015:228). The *yin* and *yang* are opposite but complementary sides of *qi*. Both must be balanced for the sake of one's health and stability. And such is the case with the Force (Torres, 2015:190).

In Star Wars, the Force is presented to us in a binary setting— it is divided between the dark and the light side. The light side is the side of the Force practised by the Jedi; it encourages love, compassion and humbleness; ideals encouraged by the Jedi Order's tenets. On the other hand, the dark side of the Force is that practised by the Sith— it is nurtured by hatred, anger and violence. While all beings are connected to the Force, only a few

⁴⁰ *Star Wars Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*. Timestamp: 00:47:45.

individuals are born with a natural affinity and can use it without training; they are referred to as Force-sensitive.⁴¹ Force sensitivity normally manifests itself in early childhood, and the Jedi Order would normally recruit their future apprentices when they were still toddlers, after the first signs of Force sensitivity —mostly telekinesis—⁴² were observed.

Despite there being two clear sides of the Force within the Star Wars universe, some characters have chosen to become what is called a “Force-sensitive outcast”. These are individuals who may have had an amount of Jedi or Sith training but have come to refuse either doctrine and reside somewhere in the middle morally and philosophically. The most notorious case is that of Ahsoka Tano, who had become deeply disillusioned with the Jedi Order and the path it had taken during the Clone Wars. Her framing in a terrorist plot by a fellow Jedi friend and the lack of support from any Jedi members other than Anakin Skywalker, her master, shattered her trust in the Order and pushed her to leave the Order (Murray *et al*, 2013). The Force alignment of these individuals varies—Ahsoka Tano stays a light side Force user, Darth Maul remains connected to the dark side even after his ties with his Sith master and the Sith Order are severed.

The Force potential within Force-sensitive individuals is measured through the count of an individual’s midi-chlorians. Within Star Wars lore, midi-chlorians are living organisms that reside within the cells of every living organism, and determine that being’s future abilities with the Force (Lucas, 1999). Due to the Force’s deep connection to all living beings, those who are naturally attuned to it are able to perceive when others are in deep pain or suffering, or when the Force experiences some sort of strong imbalance. In a way similar to the imbalance between *yin* and *yang* causing illness, a major imbalance in the Force causes pain and physical unwellness in those who experience it. This is particularly observed during the events of Order 66. As he perceives what is happening, Master Yoda clutches his chest in pain (Lucas, 2005, 01:22:04). Jaro Tapal stumbles, bringing his hand to his head as if he was suffering from a severe headache (Respawn Entertainment, 2019). This event impacted the equilibrium of both sides of the Force in such a way that even dark side users, such as Darth Maul, were able to feel this event as it took place (Filoni *et al*, 2020). This only reinforces the

⁴¹ Technically, all beings in Star Wars are Force-sensitive, as the Force binds them all together, but this term is exclusively used to refer to those who are sensitive enough to develop Jedi or Sith abilities after appropriate training.

⁴² Ability to move objects with one’s mind.

concept that the Force, just like the *yin* and *yang*, needs both the dark side and the light side, as both comprise the Force, in the same way that both *yin* and *yang* are *qi*. Both sides are interdependent and cannot exist without the other. In *The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017, 00:47:30;00:59:24), we can see a mosaic representing the Prime Jedi⁴³ in Ach-To.⁴⁴ This Jedi is represented in a meditative pose, holding his sabre; with the background being split into two colour tones: dark and light. On each side, there's a circle representing the other's colour. The image very closely resembles that of the *taijitu* (in Chinese), the symbol used to represent the concept of *yin* and *yang* in Taoism. This implies that the Jedi Order, in its inception, already understood that the dark side of the Force was deeply interconnected to its light side, in a very similar way to *yin* and *yang*.

When Obi-Wan defeats Anakin on Mustafar, he expresses his anger and exasperation at Anakin's failure to bring balance to the Force. For years, the Jedi have struggled to retain their connection to the Force, as mentioned by Mace Windu in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002, 00:58:40) during a conversation with Master Yoda. When Qui-Gon Jinn met young Anakin in the desert planet of Tatooine, he found the boy to have an incredible amount of potential within the Force, as he discovered the boy's midi-chlorian count to be off the charts, higher than any known Jedi's. This leads Qui-Gon Jinn to believe that Anakin is the chosen one who will bring balance to the Force, and restore its harmony. The Jedi are eventually led to believe that this means the complete and total destruction of the Sith, as mentioned by Obi-Wan himself after defeating Anakin in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005, 1:59:57): "It was said that you would destroy the Sith, not join them! Bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness!"

Buddhist, Taoist and Shinto doctrines would disagree with this vision, as all elements in the universe are interdependent. *Yin* cannot exist without *yang*, and the light side of the Force cannot exist without the dark side of the Force. To achieve balance, both must exist.

The Force is not only portrayed as some kind of "superpower"—characters will often move objects and other people around with little effort, perform incredible acrobatic feats, and will even use the Force to change someone's will; but it is also presented as a guiding instrument to those who can attune to it.

⁴³ Founding member of the Jedi Order.

⁴⁴ Island where the Jedi Order initiated.

After his life-changing duel with Darth Vader in *Empire Strikes Back*, Luke is hanging from a shaft at the bottom of Cloud City. While trying to hang on for his own survival, he calls for his sister, Leia, using the Force. Through their connection, she immediately locates him and guides Chewbacca and Lando to his rescue (Kershner, 1980, 01:53:35). During Ahsoka's frantic fight for survival after the onset of Order 66 in "Shattered" (Filoni *et al*, 2020, 00:20:02), she manages to render her trusted friend, Captain Rex, unconscious. A clone, his free will had been overtaken by his inhibitor chip, and his brain was now programmed to eliminate Ahsoka at all costs. Removing his inhibitor chip was her only hope for survival. As she lays him down in the medical bay of the Jedi Venator, the medical droid is not able to scan the chip lodged inside Rex's head. She knows that this is not right and that the chip must be there. She decides to trust the Force. Gently, she goes into a meditative state and repeats a Force mantra as she holds his head. The droid is then finally able to detect the inhibitor chip in his head. The Force reveals the chip's location, thus leading to Ahsoka's salvation (Filoni *et al*, 2020). The same Force mantra, "I am one with the Force, and the Force is with me," is repeated by Chirrut Îmwe, a blind Guardian of the Whills,⁴⁵ as he walks across the battlefield in Scarif,⁴⁶ trying to find the master switch of the Imperial Base. The rebels need it activated so that they can send the Death Star's⁴⁷ plans to the Rebel Alliance. He makes it to the switch and activates it, unharmed, as the laser blasts are unable to hit him. Having fulfilled his duty, he is eventually shot down and dies (Edwards, 2016, 01:51:30). Chirrut, just as Luke and Ahsoka, trusted the Force with his life, and let it guide him to his objective. This would not have been possible if this interconnectedness within the Force did not exist. In his book *The Dharma of Star Wars* (2012:84), Matthew Bortolin affirms that "[...] The Force, like nirvana, is not separate from us; it is a part of us—surrounding, penetrating, and binding us with it and the galaxy."

⁴⁵ Monastic order from the moon of Jedha that worshipped the Force.

⁴⁶ Remote tropical planet, which hosted an important military-industry complex belonging to the Galactic Empire.

⁴⁷ First seen in *A New Hope*, the Death Star is a space station that is roughly the size of a moon. It hosts a superlaser weapon capable of destroying planets or making them unsuitable for life, as seen in *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) with Alderaan, and Scarif in *Rogue One* (Edwards, 2016).

4.2.1. *One with the Force*

Traditionally, Jedi are cremated once they pass away, as is shown during Qui-Gonn's funeral in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999). Cremation is a common practice within Buddhism, and in many countries with a Buddhist background, such as Japan, cremation is the preferred way of dealing with a deceased individual's body. In Japan especially, Buddhist practices are normally associated with death, while Shinto practices are associated with life—thus the notion that Japanese people are born as Shintoists, but die as Buddhists (Kasulis, 2004:942). While Buddhism may not be as widely practised in Japan anymore, it was the preferred religion of the samurai, and many of their ideals were based on Buddhist beliefs, with those of Zen Buddhism being the most predominant ones.

Buddhism believes in a cycle of reincarnation, called *samsara*⁴⁸. If an individual collects good *karma*⁴⁹ through continuous good deeds, they can eventually strive to achieve *nirvana*,⁵⁰ or enlightenment. When *nirvana* is achieved, the individual is finally able to see the world as it is. When an enlightened being dies in its physical form, they reach the *parinirvana*,⁵¹ and they will no longer be subject to further reincarnations. While reincarnation is not directly discussed in the Star Wars universe, we can find that it has its own version of achieving *nirvana*: Becoming one with the Force.

At the end of *A New Hope*, Darth Vader faces his old master and rival, Obi-Wan. They have a short fight, and after exchanging short visual contact with Luke, Obi-Wan decides his time has come. Vader is ready to strike him, but Obi-Wan does not move. He stays still and closes his eyes. And as Vader strikes him, he disappears, becoming one with the Force (Lucas, 1977, 01:32:17).

Obi-Wan is the first character that we see achieving this, as *A New Hope* was the first Star Wars movie to be released. Canonically, Obi-Wan is not the first character to have reached this state. Obi-Wan learns this ability from his deceased master, Qui-Gon; who had himself learned it from the Force Priestesses, five beings who lived in the Wellspring of Life, the midi-chlorians' place of origin (Taylor *et al*, 2014).

⁴⁸ Sanskrit for “world.”

⁴⁹ Sanskrit for “work, deed, action.”

⁵⁰ Sanskrit for “blown out.”

⁵¹ Final form of nirvana, which is achieved after death.

During his exile in Tatooine, Obi-Wan starts communicating with his late master, who guides him through the process to reach unity with the Force. And when he fights Vader, he puts it into practice. Vader, confused, stomps on his former master's Jedi robes. With his death, Obi-Wan has followed the Jedi teachings to the end: he has left all his possessions behind, his own body included, and has humbled himself to the Force. He understands that everything starts and ends with the Force and that people should not use it for greed, corruption, or evil. But Vader does not understand this, as he has been corrupted by his will for power and control. As a Sith, he could never understand the true, pure essence of the Force. His mind is clouded with violence and darkness. Thus, he can never reach what would be the Jedi's equivalent of *nirvana*. Becoming one with the Force is something reserved for light side users, to those who have not been corrupted by anger, hatred and greed.

Once a Jedi becomes one of the Force, their physical body disappears; as shown by Obi-Wan in *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977), Yoda in *Return of the Jedi* (Marquand, 1983) and Luke in *The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017). However, their spirit remains intact within the realm of the Force, and they can communicate with other Force-sensitive beings as a disembodied voice, as shown in *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) and *Rise of Skywalker* (Abrams, 2019), or as a ghostly apparition.

5. Combat

5.1. *Samurai blades and the lightsaber*

The figure of the samurai is intrinsically tied to that of a fearless, noble, sword-wielding warrior; with the most notable of those swords being the *katana*, a curved single-edged sword. With time, the *katana* has become an enduring symbol of Japanese culture and history, with replicas being highly sought after by martial arts enthusiasts. In Feudal Japan, the bearing of a sword was a marker of social class and a clear distinction of the bearer's importance in Japanese hierarchy.

The *katana* originally derives from an older Japanese sword, the *tachi*. Both swords are very similar in shape and length, but they differ in their use. *Tachi* were slung with the blade facing downwards, meaning that the unsheathing and the first strike were different movements. As swordsmanship evolved and Japan became increasingly more tumultuous, swordsmen looked to improve their technique and, if possible, modify their weapon in a way that would ensure a faster attack. Thus, the *katana* became the perfect weapon, as it would be worn with its blade upwards, assuring a fast attack during the drawing of the weapon itself (Turnbull, 2006:4).

Katana were fabricated by authorized high-skilled artisans, who would leave their personal signature on the tang, the portion of the sword where the blade met the handle (Michel, 2011:436). They were normally made from different kinds of steel, providing the sword with specific qualities. The outer surface of the sword had a higher carbon content than its core, making it hard enough that it could cut through anything. On the other hand, the lower carbon content on its centre also meant that the sword was highly resilient, allowing it to take a considerable amount of shock before it could become noticeably damaged or broken (Lapp *et al*, 2012:61). During its fabrication process, the swords were heated to temperatures up to 1300°C-1450°C (Michel, 2011:342), but the steel was never fully melted, giving the *katana* its characteristic resilience. While some details are known to us, much of a *katana*'s creation process is shrouded in secrecy. To harden the blade, one would have to be highly knowledgeable of the temperature of the water, the temperature of the blade, the thickness of

the clay wrapping the blade and how long it should be submerged. This was highly dependent on the experience and skill of the swordmaster.

When worn, the *katana* was normally combined with a *wakizashi*, a short-bladed sword. This combination was called a *daishō*, meaning “big-little”, and both swords would have matching scabbards and handles. Originally bows were the preferred weapon of the samurai (Wert, 2019:503), but this changed after the Genpei War in the 12th century, as the precursor of the *katana*, the *tachi*, became more widespread. They dominated the battlefields for centuries to come, even after firearms were introduced to the Japanese. The high demand for these swords eventually diminished much of their quality and artistry, as they became mass-produced during the Sengoku Period, in an attempt to equip the frontlines of the armies at war, which made high-quality blades exclusive to the best warriors. Swords were normally customized to the owner’s preferences, often decorated with different colours and materials. Deep down, sword making was considered an art, so the blades were subjected to the taste of the men who would wield them. An anecdote about Toyotomi Hideyoshi tells us how he correctly identified the owners of five separate swords, by simply comparing their designs to their owners’ personalities (Turnbull, 2006:70-71)

With the advent of the Tokugawa Era and the political and social stabilization of Japan, the need for battlefield-ready swords practically disappeared. Still, the sword remained a powerful weapon, a reminder of the ruling class. Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s sword hunt in 1588 marked the decline of the sword as a readily available weapon for most social classes, and by the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, only military officials were allowed to retain their swords. Hundreds of samurai, now relieved from their past duties, were forced to sell their swords and other family heirlooms for survival (Wert, 2019:1475-1481). Many of the samurai who had kept their swords still trained with them in sword-fighting academies run by master swordsmen, in an attempt of keeping their traditions alive. Similarly, sword-making artisans faced several difficulties given the restrictions that were imposed on these weapons, and the westernization of Japan (Lapp *et al*, 2002:37-38). By the time of World War II, only the

military carried swords -particularly the *guntō*⁵² and the *shōwatō*⁵³; and after Japan's surrender in August 1945, swords were banned.

Very much like the samurai, the Jedi Knights in *Star Wars* are sword-wielders, with the lightsaber⁵⁴ being their weapon of choice. Lightsabers, unlike regular swords, are not made from metal, but from a powerful plasma blade, powered by a kyber crystal. Kyber crystals are rare crystals that have a natural strong connection to the Force. Though available on several planets, the Jedi Order relied on the Crystal Cave on the planet of Ilum for their supply of kyber crystals. Given its importance to the Order, the Crystal Cave had been transformed into a Jedi Temple centuries prior to the original *Star Wars* trilogy, with giant statues of Jedi Knights towering in its rooms, as seen in *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* (Respawn Entertainment, 2019).

Unlike the samurai who had sword crafting artisans at their disposal, each Jedi was responsible for the construction of their lightsaber. The construction of a lightsaber was considered a rite of passage in the Jedi Order, and it indicated that Jedi younglings would soon be ready to be trained as Jedi Padawans. For this purpose, the apprentices would be escorted to the planet of Ilum, to participate in a ceremony named 'The Gathering', in which they would enter the Crystal Cave on their own, tasked with finding their own kyber crystal. Due to the kyber crystals' natural attunement to the Force, a Jedi could not choose a crystal out of their volition —the crystal chose its owner. Only the intended owner of a crystal can perceive it, as they are the only ones who see its glow or hear its calling through the Force, as exemplified in *The Clone Wars* episode "The Gathering" (Taylor *et al*, 2012), and the videogame *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* (Respawn Entertainment, 2019). After the fall of the Jedi Order, travelling to Ilum in search of a kyber crystal was not necessary, and would be avoided if possible as the planet was tightly controlled by the Galactic Empire. In the *Star Wars: Rebels* episode "Path of the Jedi" (Murray *et al*, 2014), Ezra Bridger is given his kyber crystal by Master Yoda after passing a series of Jedi trials. In the novel *Ahsoka*, Ahsoka Tano

⁵² Sword fabricated for the Japanese military, specifically the army and the navy.

⁵³ Name given to non-traditional Japanese swords manufactured until WW2.

⁵⁴ Referred to as "laser sword" by some characters, mostly by those unfamiliar with the weapon.

initially travels to Ilum in order to acquire new kyber crystals, but eventually finds them in another place after reaching out through the Force (Johnston, 2017:307-308).

After acquiring their corresponding kyber crystals, Jedi younglings would build their lightsabers. During the time of the Old Republic,⁵⁵ this would be done aboard the Jedi vessel, the Crucible, under the close supervision of the architect droid Huyang. The droid was tasked with providing the materials for the lightsaber's construction, as well as guiding the apprentices through the process, as kyber crystals can become dangerous weapons when unstable.

Jedi were able to personalize their lightsabers, choosing what materials and colours they wanted for the lightsaber during its construction. The colour of the blade also depends on the lightsaber's owner and their connection to the kyber crystal. The most common blade colours for Jedi lightsabers are blue and green, but there have been instances of yellow, purple and white lightsabers. Occasionally, Jedi can unwittingly attune to and tamper with the kyber crystals of others, as it happens to Anakin Skywalker —after keeping Ahsoka Tano's lightsabers in his bedroom after her departure from the Order, he accidentally changes their colour from green to blue through meditation (Filoni *et al*, 2020).

The assembly of the blade was done during a state of deep meditation, in which the Jedi would visualize the design of the lightsaber in their mind, and then build it through the Force. The lightsaber includes a small light, which glows green if the lightsaber has been assembled properly and is safe for use. Once turned on, the length of the plasma blade could be adjusted by the user, as some species, such as Yoda's, prefer shorter blades due to their own short stature. These shorter blades are called *shoto*, as per the Japanese name used to refer to shorter bladed swords such as the *wakizashi*.⁵⁶

The lightsaber is a very resilient weapon; being able to cut through most of the materials found in the *Star Wars* universe, and only materials such as beskar⁵⁷ or another plasma blade could effectively protect one from a lightsaber blow. Lightsabers also work underwater and are often used to light dark rooms. Despite its resilience, lightsabers and even kyber crystals can be broken when put under extreme pressure, as is observed in *The Last*

⁵⁵ Timeline of the Prequel Trilogy.

⁵⁶ Japanese short sword, measuring around 30 to 60cm in length.

⁵⁷ Highly resilient metal, native to the planet Mandalore. Traditionally it was used to produce Mandalorian armour.

Jedi (Johnson, 2017, 01:51:26), when Rey⁵⁸ and Kylo Ren⁵⁹ break Anakin Skywalker's lightsaber when simultaneously force pulling⁶⁰ it towards themselves. Rey is later able to repair the lightsaber, healing the kyber crystals through ancient Jedi knowledge. In the video game *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*, Padawan Cal Kestis is also able to heal a broken kyber crystal (Respawn Entertainment, 2019).

In the same way as with the samurai and the *daishō*, the lightsaber is what distinguishes the Jedi from the rest of the populace. The lightsaber is a symbol of the order and denotes the social status of its bearer. In *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999, 00:41:39), young Anakin recognizes Qui-Gon Jinn as a Jedi after seeing the latter's lightsaber hanging from his belt. Most Jedi will only wield one lightsaber, but dual-wielding is not unheard of—Ahsoka Tano was a double wielder, owning both a standard length lightsaber and a *shoto* lightsaber, in a similar fashion to the traditional Japanese *daishō*. In the Star Wars universe, the dual-wielding of lightsabers receives the name of Jar'Kai.

Due to its strong ties to the history and philosophy of the Order, the lightsaber is also used as a ceremonial weapon. In a Jedi's knighting ceremony, a lightsaber would be swung above their shoulders (Gilroy *et al*, 2016).

5.1.1. Kenjutsu, Kendō and Lightsaber Combat

We can attribute the start of the Japanese “era of the sabre” to the Muromachi period⁶¹ (1336-1573), as the *bushi*⁶² class was formed and increasingly started gaining power in Japanese society (Pita, 2014:215). We can trace the origins of *jujutsu*, or martial arts, to the rise of the *bushi* class in the Heian period (794-1185), and the introduction of the *katana*. As Japan descended into civil wars and nationwide conflicts in the following centuries, being proficient in a proper fighting technique was essential to winning conflicts; and winning battles meant keeping the clan together and its territory safe. Despite the introduction of the

⁵⁸ Force-sensitive individual from the planet Jakku, who becomes Luke Skywalker's last Jedi apprentice.

⁵⁹ Son of princess Leia Organa and the bounty hunter Han Solo. Nephew to Luke Skywalker, and grandson to Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader and Padmé Amidala.

⁶⁰ Ability to pull an object towards oneself by using the Force.

⁶¹ Also known as the Ashikaga shogunate.

⁶² Japanese for “warrior.”

arquebus to the battlefield during the Sengoku period, it was mainly relegated to the infantry, the *ashigaru*, as it was considered to be a weapon beneath the status of a samurai. This also appears to be a common perception in the Star Wars universe regarding the Jedi Order's choice of offensive weapons; as after using a blaster to defeat General Grievous in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005, 01:07:00), Obi-Wan calls it an “uncivilized” weapon—and similarly to the *ashigaru*, the use of ranged weapons falls on the clone troopers. In the case of Japan, the usage of the arquebus helped in the development of *kenjutsu*, leading to a more efficient use of the sword, as fighting often ended up happening within close quarters (Pita, 2014:222).

During the first decades of the Tokugawa Period⁶³ (1603-1867), *kenjutsu* practice was still very influenced by the country's recent political and social instability, which often made *kenjutsu* practice quite violent. Despite the emergence of practice wood swords such as the *bokutō* and *bōken*, real weapons were occasionally used in practice duels, leading to serious injury or death (Pita, 2014:295). As Japan kept a peaceful government over the course of the following decades and tensions lessened, *kenjutsu* gradually became a martial art that focused on training an individual's mental and physical wellbeing, rather than actual preparedness for conflict. This is exemplified in works such as Miyamoto Musashi's *Book of Five Rings*, in which the author expresses: “Both in fighting and in everyday life you should be determined though calm [...] Even when your spirit is calm do not let your body relax, and when your body is relaxed do not let your spirit slacken.” (Miyamoto, 2015:14). Although Musashi had lived during the last years of the Sengoku period and tensions were still rife during his lifetime, his approach to mental and physical balance would be a recurring theme in *kenjutsu* practice over the following centuries. Hundreds of *dōjō* were opened in Japan during this era, and it is estimated that by the end of the Edo Period, around 700 different styles of *kenjutsu* were taught and practised all over Japan (Pita, 2014:228). These *dōjō* would hold demonstrations to attract new students, showcasing their combat style and their philosophical approach to the art of fighting. These schools would often engage in duels against each other, with their students showcasing their school's fighting school to spectators and authorities of varying degrees (Pita, 2014:295). As its practice became increasingly more influenced by different philosophies and the artistic sensibilities of the time, *kenjutsu* gradually became what we currently call *kendō*. This transition was mostly marked by the introduction of the

⁶³ Also referred to as the Edo period.

shinai, a bamboo practice sword, and *kendōgu*, light armour specifically made for the practice of *kendō*.

Unlike medieval Japan —where swords were relatively common among the general populace until Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s sword hunt in 1588— sabres in the world of Star Wars are weapons almost exclusively used by the Jedi and the Sith, with a few notable exceptions —most notably, the Mandalorian Darksaber, a lightsaber-like weapon created by the Mandalorians to fight against the Jedi. Jedi Padawans were instructed in lightsaber combat from a very young age, although most of the training associated with it started once they were able to build their lightsaber.⁶⁴ Given the Jedi Order’s aversion for violence and conflict, lightsabers were, for most of their history, a ceremonial weapon. That does not mean that Jedi were not prepared for battle during those periods of peace and stability—the Jedi, very much like the *bushi* class in Japan, used the practice of martial arts as a means to achieve their wellbeing through the mastery of the body and the mind (Fantasy Flight Games, 2018:5). In a similar fashion to the several *dōjō* that existed in Japan throughout the Tokugawa Period, young Jedi would hold public demonstrations of lightsaber combat, as exemplified in *Dooku, Jedi Lost* (Scott, 2019:22-23).

During lightsaber combat, a strong connection to the Force was necessary. When fighting against other Force-sensitive individuals, simple mastery of sword combat was often not enough, and the Jedi needed to have their abilities in the Force as sharp as their blade. Use of the Force is not uncommon during Lightsaber combat, and some lightsaber fighting forms rely more or less on it. Similarly, the understanding of *qi* is essential in *kendō* practice. A warrior must learn how to channel this energy for the improvement of his fighting skills. Issai Chozan’s works such as *Tengu geijutsu-ron* or *Neko no myōjutsu*, both popular reads among samurai, exemplify the importance of harnessing and controlling *qi* (Bennet, 2015:66-67).

During his duel against Maul in *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999), Qui-Gon takes a brief moment to meditate, sitting in a position reminiscent of *seiza*—the traditional way of sitting in Japan. *Seiza* is an essential element in the practice of martial arts in Japan, and a recurring action in *kendō dōjō*, and is often accompanied by meditation (Wada, 2008:65). A

⁶⁴ Refer to the previous section, *Samurai blades and the lightsaber*.

Jedi should be aware of the consequences of violence and its methods, and how those impact the Force. An honourable Jedi should fight defensively, mercifully, honourably, and for the greater good (Fantasy Flight Games, 2018:7). Qui-Gon's meditative state is directly opposite to Maul's—he impatiently paces around, waiting for the shield barrier to come down. Chaos and impatience are traits of the dark side and are not desirable traits in a warrior. Miyamoto Musashi explains in the *Book of Five Rings* how a calm spirit is essential in both life and battle (Miyamoto, 2015:14), as exemplified by Jedi such as Qui-Gon Jinn.

5.1.2. *Lightsaber forms, kata, and a warrior's stance*

Jedi combat is divided in “forms”, and members of the Jedi order are encouraged to pursue the style that better suits their personal sensibilities and strengths. Jedi Padawans were initially taught the most basic of lightsaber combat, Form I, and would later learn and adapt to other forms, eventually staying with that which suited them best. Very much like *kendō* learners in pre-modern and modern Japan, Jedi would practise their combat skills in a *dōjō*.⁶⁵ They would be taught the basics by the Jedi Master in charge of the *dōjō*, but once they became Padawans, the responsibility of martial arts training fell on their masters.

The main forms of lightsaber combat, and its most notable users, are as follow (Fantasy Flight Games, 2018:67-72):

- **Form I, *Shii-Cho***: First form of lightsaber combat that was ever created, and is also the first that is taught to Padawan learners. Basic defensive and offensive movements, and is highly defensive in nature. The objective is to maim the enemy, not kill. Requires the use of both hands for tighter control. Practised by Kit Fisto.
- **Form II, *Makashi***: Designed for one-on-one combat with another lightsaber wielder. Just like Form I, its movements are quite basic and are better suited for duels than to combat against several enemies. Practised by Count Dooku/Darth Tyranus.
- **Form III, *Soresu***: Defensive. Tight and controlled movements and economy of action. Practised by Obi-Wan Kenobi.

⁶⁵ Within the Star Wars universe, these practice rooms are also referred to as *dōjō*.

- **Form IV, *Ataru*:** Acrobatic, fast, and aggressive. High focus on using the Force for movement. Demanding both physically and through the Force. Practised by Qui-Gon Jinn, Yoda, and Anakin Skywalker⁶⁶.
- **Form V, *Shien* and *Djem-So*:** Very physically demanding, uses dedicated defensive stances to create an opening for an attack. *Shien* allows for a reverse grip. *Djem-So* lacks agility, but is good for sabre-to-sabre combats, and to deflect attacks. Practised by Ahsoka Tano⁶⁷ and Anakin Skywalker.
- **Form VI, *Niman*:** Most popular style within the Jedi Order, combines different styles. Very balanced, and makes extensive use of the Force. Practised by Darth Maul.
- **Form VII, *Juyo/Vaapad*:** Very aggressive and unpredictable, it was controversial within the Jedi Order due to its connection to the dark side. Only those selected by the Jedi Council were allowed to use this form of lightsaber combat, as *Juyo* feeds on negative feelings and aggression. *Vaapad*, which was developed by Jedi Master Mace Windu, is similar but requires the user not to give in to those feelings. Practised by Mace Windu and Darth Maul.

It is worth noting that the form chosen by a lightsaber user often reflects part of their personality. For instance, Obi-Wan believes in the old ways of the Jedi Order, and has a calm, pacifist demeanour— thus his use of *Soresu*, a form which heavily relies on very controlled movements and is geared towards self-defence, is consistent with his personality and beliefs. It's also important to note that this form is heavily inspired by *kendō*, most notoriously seen during his duel with Vader in *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977). Obi-Wan grips on his lightsaber with both hands has a forward stance, and moves very little; just enough to contain Vader's strikes. Obi-Wan's movements are similar to some *kendō kata*. His fighting style seems to include:

- *Harai-waza*, which involves deflecting the opponent's *shinai* and then striking back.

⁶⁶ Anakin's main style of combat is *Djem So* (Form V), but he was proficient in *Ataru*.

⁶⁷ Ahsoka Tano is shown to have a preference for reverse grip, a common trait of *Shien*, which she practises. However, reverse grip was considered to be an inappropriate grip by some Jedi, including her master, Anakin Skywalker.

- *Suriage-waza*, a variety of parries.
- *Hiki-waza*, short-quarter parrying techniques, giving some room for retreat.

Kendō is the base of the lightsaber combat we see in Star Wars films, and Mark Hamill, the actor who portrayed Luke Skywalker in the original and sequel trilogies, explains in *Star Wars: Evolution of the Lightsaber Duel* (Khodabakhshian, 2015) that he was extensively trained in the martial art for his role as Luke Skywalker. Though this is easier to see in the original trilogy, as lightsaber combat became notoriously more acrobatic during the prequel and sequel trilogies, *kendō* has always remained at the core of Star Wars' choreographed combat scenes. Luke's furious use of *Katsugi-Waza*, which requires one to wield the *shinai* over the shoulder before striking, as he strikes down on Vader in their final showdown resembles *kendō* more closely than any of the fantastic acrobatics Anakin pulls off in the prequels—though it must be noted that Anakin does perform *Katsugi-Waza* during his duel with Dooku in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002). Still, we can find clear influences from Japanese martial arts in the philosophy and training behind the combat present in the subsequent trilogies.

We can see clear influences of Japanese sword-fighting philosophy in some of the major duels in the series, such as the showdown between Obi-Wan and Anakin in the planet of Mustafar in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005). Several of their attitudes during the fight reflect several principles stated by Miyamoto Musashi in his *Book of Five Rings*, written in 1645.

Musashi recommends a warrior to chase his enemy into awkward places, making it complicated for the adversary to escape, even recommending a warrior to position himself in higher ground if possible (Miyamoto, 2015: 24); this is what Obi-Wan eventually does, and it allows him to win the fight. If we go by Miyamoto Musashi's teachings, Anakin follows a *Ken No Sen* attitude—he takes the initiative in combat, setting the enemy up by dominating and then stalling him. This is consistent with his preference for Forms IV and V of lightsaber combat, which are primarily offensive. As Musashi himself points out (2015:24): “Because you can win quickly by taking the lead, it is one of the most important things in strategy.” On the other hand, Obi-Wan prefers a *Tai No Sen* approach, which relies on waiting for the opponent to strike. This translates well with Obi-Wan's *Soresu*'s defensive style (Miyamoto,

2015:24). However, Miyamoto Musashi calls for the death of the enemy— Obi-Wan’s Jedi ideals and his love for Anakin impedes him from doing this. Without doing this, Obi-Wan can never win, as he did not kill his enemy. As Miyamoto correctly predicts, this allows Anakin to come back stronger, in the form of Vader, which does eventually lead to Obi-Wan’s death in *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977).

6. Japanese influence in Star Wars

6.1. *Robes and armour*

George Lucas' self-professed interest and fascination for the samurai and Akira Kurosawa's period films is not only visible in the variety of East Asian philosophical references in his work, but also in the series' visuals. Visually, the Jedi Order wears a costume consisting of several layers of light-coloured fabric, held in the waist by a leather sash, and often accompanied by a long cape that could cover the Jedi's whole body. It is hard to look at it and not think of a Japanese *kimono*- the tunic's collar falls to the side, and the leather sash resembles the traditional *obi*.⁶⁸ Although Jedi could choose their apparel once they became Padawans, few strayed away from the traditional light-coloured *kimono*-like garments. Notable exceptions do exist: Ahsoka Tano and Aayla Secura, who wore differently-styled garments; and Anakin Skywalker, who despite wearing robes closer to the traditional variant in shape and cut, preferred them to be in darker colours. This unusual choice of colours warranted some concern from the Jedi Council, as they found it to be a possible sign of Anakin giving into the dark side (Star Wars: Battlefront II, 2017).

It must be added that the Jedi are not the only people in the Star Wars universe who have *kimono*-inspired garments: In both the original and the prequel trilogies, the inhabitants of Tatooine wear very similar clothes to those worn by the Jedi; with young Anakin recognizing Qui-Gon's social status by his lightsaber rather than his clothes in *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999). Although it is not directly addressed in the series, we can assume that due to the Jedi's insistence on not having possessions, that these are common garbs for poorer people in less fortunate planets, well outside the Republic's reach.

Even so, there are a couple of notable exceptions to this— in *A Phantom Menace*, Queen Amidala⁶⁹ of Naboo wears a lavish gown that is very clearly inspired by the *kimono*. Her makeup look is also reminiscent of a *geisha*'s, with a powdered white face and bright red lips. During Padmé's funeral in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005, 02:11:08), the newly elected Queen Apailana of Naboo wears a very similar looking silk gown, also

⁶⁸ Sash, traditionally worn over a *kimono*.

⁶⁹ Padmé Naberrie.

complementing it with a white powdered face. Both Queen Jamillia in *Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002) and Queen Neeyutnee⁷⁰ (Tittley *et al*, 2009) wore differently shaped clothes from Amidala and Apailana, but both share the same white-powdered bright red lipstick look with Amidala. This implies that this *geisha*-like look has some sort of connection or deep history with the Naboo people, as at least four of their queens have worn make-up in this style.

Despite the Jedi's frequent presence in conflicts and warfare—most notably the Clone Wars— they did not always wear armour. During the Clone Wars, Jedi armour was quite basic, only covering the limbs and upper chest, so that it wouldn't hinder lightsaber combat. Similarly, *kendō* armour is an adapted version of traditional samurai armour, made lighter to facilitate movement.

Curiously enough, the most notable armour-wearing character in the Star Wars universe is Darth Vader, a former Jedi. As he fell to the dark side and his body became unrecognizable after burning alive, Anakin Skywalker, now Darth Vader, was condemned to spend the rest of his days inside of a constricting, mechanical armour. While it kept him alive with its built-in life support system, it severely restricted his movements and was painful to wear. Darth Vader's armour is inspired by ceremonial samurai armour, with its most iconic element being the helmet, which was modelled off a *kabuto*⁷¹ and a *menpō*,⁷² both as *per* Ralph McQuarrie's suggestion (Windham *et al*, 2010:VII). In Vader's case specifically, we can observe that his front helmet is inspired by the *sōmen* type of facial armour (*men-yoroi*), which covers the whole face. In a similar fashion to the *menpō* (Hanel, 2007:18), Vader's mask presents a fearful expression, resembling that of a skull showing his teeth. Vader's scarred face is not revealed until *Return of the Jedi* (Marquand, 1983), and his mask adds to the terror that the character exudes. In the book *The Complete Vader*, Windham marks "Vader's lack of a face" as one of the main reasons as to why the character was so well received internationally. This lack of natural facial expression, replaced with a terrifying

⁷⁰ In Neeyutnee's case, she also presents a hairstyle very similar to those worn by women during the Tokugawa period.

⁷¹ Samurai helmet. It possesses a wide neck guard on the sides and back of the helmet, very closely resembling Vader's helmet in shape.

⁷² Also called *men-yoroi* or *mengu*. *Mempo* can also be romanized as *menpō*. Refers to several types of traditional samurai facial armour, with its range of facial coverage depending on the specific type.

facial mask, is meant to intimidate Vader's enemies—similarly to how certain types of *men-yoroi* such as the *menpō* or the *sōmen* were meant to stir fear on the enemy.

The similarity between Vader's armour and the traditional samurai armour has inspired the creation of fanart, cosplays and merchandise in which Darth Vader is depicted in samurai armour. One of the most notable examples is the Darth Vader samurai armour made by the Japanese company Yoshitoku in 2007 (Windham *et al*, 2010:79), which replicates Vader's garments in the style of a traditional samurai armour.

Conclusions

Having analyzed several Star Wars media and compared them to historical and scholarly sources, it is safe to state that George Lucas drew a great deal of inspiration for Star Wars from the samurai and Japanese culture as a whole. In the original trilogy, we can see clear references to Kurosawa's films, especially given the story similarities between *A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) and *The Hidden Fortress* (Kurosawa, 1958). Kurosawa's influence can even be noted in other aspects of Lucas' cinematography as the series went on. In *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), Anakin is often shown in poorly lit locations or in the shadows; normally contrasted with Obi-Wan Kenobi or other Jedi characters, as they stand in the light. This is meant to represent Anakin's pull to the dark side, which happens during the film; and draws similarities to Kurosawa's use of shadows in *Rashōmon* (Kurosawa, 1950), in which the use of shadow and light allude to the character's intentions (Rins, 2007:23-26). Kurosawa's work has often been homaged in later Star Wars media, such as *The Clone Wars* and *The Mandalorian*, which shows the continued influence of Japanese film-making in the series.

Most notable is the inspiration it took from East Asian philosophies and religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto and Bushidō. It is noteworthy that this influence has continued over the following trilogies, not only on a philosophical level but even within the characters themselves. The name of Padmé Amidala, one of the central characters of the series, is inspired by Buddhist concepts: the Sanskrit word *padme* (meaning lotus flower), is present in the Buddhist mantra *Om mani padme hum* and is associated with the bodhisattva of compassion—which is reflected in the character herself, as Padmé is shown to be a very compassionate character throughout the series, often fighting for humanitarian rights, and believing that her husband, Anakin Skywalker, was still a good person despite his betrayal and turn to the dark side (Lucas, 2005).

As we have seen in this essay, the Jedi and the samurai share some similarities in their history, philosophies and values. Zen Buddhism was widely practised among the samurai, and this can be observed when analyzing some *Bushidō* authors, such as Miyamoto Musashi. Buddhism's influence is also clear in the Jedi Code, which contains Buddhist elements such

as detachment, the acceptance of death and meditation as a way to ease and strengthen one's mind.

Similarly, the concept of the Force has strong connotations with that of *qi/ki*, especially in its division between *yin* and *yang*, which is represented in Star Wars as the “light side” and the “dark side” of the Force. However, it is also important to remark that it presents some elements from Buddhism, such as the adaptation of the concept of *nirvana*, as Jedi knights can achieve absolute peace with the Force and become “one” with it, which draws parallels to the state of *nirvana* and *parinirvana*.

It is also important to note the importance of *kendō* in the construction and evolution of the saga's lightsaber fights. George Lucas envisioned an epic space opera featuring his adaptation of the samurai, and this is also visible in other aspects such as the clothes that the Jedi wear, as they are clearly inspired by the Japanese *kimono*. Most notably, the most recognizable villain of the series, Darth Vader, wears an armour set that very closely resembles that of a samurai warrior.

As previously mentioned, this work can be interpreted as a starting point for anyone who would be interested in learning more about the similarities between the samurai and the Jedi and possibly investigate further into the topic. This is also a possible topic of research on cross-cultural phenomena—it is interesting to note how traditional aspects of Japanese culture have gained international relevance due to the popularity of the Star Wars franchise. Star Wars has become very popular in Japan as well, gaining a manga comic adaptation, as well as exclusive merchandise with samurai motifs. Although Star Wars is far from being the only western series to be influenced by Japanese culture, it is interesting to see how it has adapted traditional Japanese values, traditions and social structures and transformed them for an originally western audience. As Toshio Miyake points out, Japan is often posed as a “traditional” place, while juxtaposing it against Euro-American hegemony or “modernity” (Miyake, 2015:98), which can be seen as reflected in Star Wars, where the Jedi, an ancient order, share similarities to the Japanese samurai class, despite living in a hyper-developed world such as that of Star Wars.

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