

Regimes of Training, *Seishin* and the Construction of Embodied Masculinity in Japanese University Rugby

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Abstract

Focused on the author's experience as a rugby coach in a Japanese university over a three-year period this paper examines features of training at a Japanese university rugby club which, it is argued, were distinctly Japanese. It suggests that a culture-specific form of hegemonic masculinity acted as a structuring discourse for young men's experiences of rugby in a Japanese university and that, as expressions of dominant culture, the bodily practices that characterised daily training at the university operated to embody a culture specific form of masculinity. More specifically, it is argued that the form of hegemonic masculinity embodied through rugby training is most differentiated from the dominant forms of masculinity that shape the practice of rugby in Australia through the influence of the cultural concept of *seishin*, loosely translated as 'human spirit'.

Introduction

Recognition of the body's role in the construction of gendered identities has shown young men's bodily experiences in sport to be central to the development of masculinity (Connell, 1983, 1990; Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1990). This is particularly evident within advanced capitalist societies where there has been a decline in traditional ways demonstrating physical prowess (Whitson, 1990). As the work of feminist researchers such as Susan Bordo (1989) and Suzanne Laberge (1994, 1995) illustrates, bodies are gendered through the corporeal dimensions of social practice.

The work of Bob Connell (1983, 1990, 1995) highlights the pivotal role that sport can play in the construction of masculinity. Connell (1983) suggests that particular, learned bodily movements in heavy contact sports teach young men to use their bodies in ways that both produce and suggest power. From this perspective, to learn to be a man is to learn to use the body in such ways as project a physical presence that suggests latent power. Connell (1995) also identifies the ways that particular masculinities develop within specific cultural contexts, but research on the interaction of culture and masculinity has, to date, been largely restricted to Western settings. Given the long history of sport in Asian cultures and the joint hosting of the next soccer World Cup by Japan and Korea the paucity of research on the connections between sport and gender in Asian cultures represents a significant gap in the literature.

Focused on a Japanese university rugby club this paper identifies a particular form of hegemonic masculinity that acted as a structuring discourse for young men's experiences of rugby. It is proposed that the bodily practices that characterised daily training at the university were expressions of culture and operated to embody a culture specific form of masculinity. More specifically, it is argued that the form of

hegemonic masculinity embodied through rugby training is most differentiated from the dominant forms of masculinity that shape the practice of rugby in Australia through the influence of the cultural concept of *seishin*.

Rugby in Japan

Historian Donald Roden (1980) argues that adopted Western team sports have played a significant role in the development of modern Japan. The massive social changes that characterised the *Meiji* Restoration beginning in 1868 were accompanied by social unrest and the *Meiji* leaders sought to establish social control through means that were appropriate for a modernising nation. Team sports, with their emphasis on collective effort formed important elements within the mass education system introduced in 1872 and aimed at the creation of a productive workforce, homogenous culture and a sense of national identity (Passin, 1980, Roden, 1980). Introduced into Keio Imperial University in 1899 during a period of growing nationalist sentiment, rugby spread throughout elite Japanese educational institutions from the early twentieth century to experience rapid growth during the liberal 1920s. By the early twentieth century, along with other imported Western team games such as baseball, rugby came to be regarded by educators as an important medium for the social development of young men (Abe et al., 1990; Abe & Mangan, 1997; Roden, 1980).

During the nationalist fervour and rising militarism of the 1930s, adopted Western sports underwent radical transformation for their practices to be modelled on that of *budo* (martial arts) and to operate as a vehicle for the inculcation of an exemplary and militant masculinity. In the lead up to the Pacific War the militarist government actively promoted the view of the Japanese as a unique people endowed with *Yamato damashi* (The spirit of the Japanese). The populace was encouraged to view *seishin ryoko* (spiritual power) as a means through which they could overcome the military and industrial might of the USA (Lebra, 1976). Within this context the practice of rugby in pre-World War Two (Pacific War) university and school clubs was characterised by hazing and brutal training regimes (Rohlen, 1983, aimed at fostering fighting spirit, and an extreme form of militant masculinity.

Following defeat in the Pacific War the education system was restructured to be modelled on the American system in which sport was practised as an extra curricula activity in after school clubs as a means of promoting democracy and individuality (Rohlen, 1983). The association of *seishin* with militarism encouraged the post-war occupation forces to adopt a program in which they actively set out to eradicate cultural and educational practices that they saw as promoting *seishin* (Passin, 1980). Rohlen contends, however, that it was through the practice of post-war sport in schools that, ironically, *seishin* began to first re-emerge and has continued to shape significantly the practice of sport in Japanese schools.

This article begins with a brief comment on the research site, researcher and method before moving on to a discussion of Japanese masculinity and the notion of *seishin*. These sections preface an extended analysis of various features that characterised regimes of training at the university and their significance for the embodiment of a culture specific masculinity.

The Researcher the Site and the Data

This paper is focused on my experiences as head rugby coach at a Japanese university from 1990 to 1992 but also draws on my observations of, and involvement with, rugby in other settings over a nine year period in Japan, six of which were spent as a full time resident. Up until accepting an offer to coach rugby at a prominent rugby playing university in Japan in 1990 I had played and coached rugby solely in Australia, coaching in schools and community based clubs. In my first year of coaching in Japan I concentrated on 'cleaning up' details of play and compromised with the senior players to experience a successful first year at the university that is referred to here under the pseudonym of Nishi University. Over the following two years I attempted to 'impose' Australian methods of training that I felt had been validated by the national team's performance that led to Rugby World Cup triumph in 1991. The results were disappointing and produced considerable friction between myself, the senior players and the other coaches that continued for the remaining two years I was employed as coach. During this time I was continually frustrated by attitudes and approaches to training that were very different to what I had accepted as 'common sense' practice in Australia. In an attempt to better understand the nature of the cultural setting within which I was coaching, I kept detailed notes on the problems that I encountered as part of reflective coaching practice and much of the data for the paper is drawn from these records.¹

Connell (1998) argues that while two decades of research on the social construction of gender has been very fruitful we only have the 'barest sketch map of this part of social reality' (Connell, 1998: p. v) and suggests that new social research approaches such as critical autobiography can offer a key from of pedagogy in the field of gender research. This recognition of personal, practical experience as a potentially rich source of data has also influenced recent approaches to educational research. As Goodson (1996) notes in the field of educational research, disenchantment with the often distant and disengaged nature of educational studies has seen some scholars respond by embracing the 'practical' and focusing on teachers as practitioners. Goodson contends that a crisis in structural displacement and of representation in educational studies makes teachers' knowledge, in the form of teachers' stories and narratives, a valuable means of overcoming the dilemma of trying to capture the 'lived experiences' of teachers within text. He suggests that teachers' narratives offer personal insights into their practice and that the 'nirvana of the narrative' (Goodson, 1996: 212) offers a means of overcoming the problem of representation in educational research. Research based on narratives, oral histories and other personal accounts has also long been productively employed in historical analyses. From the perspective of a practising coach I draw on my own experiences at 'Nishi' University and detailed written notes from my coaching diary as a means of providing valuable insight into the significance of culture for young men's engagement in rugby training and the development of their masculine identity.

The analysis was guided by a later, and larger, three year comparative study of rugby in Japanese and Australian high schools conducted from 1996 to 1999. In this latter study data was generated through ethnographic field trips employing a grounded theory approach to data generation and analysis. The analysis in this article is further supported by my observations of rugby training in Japan made over nine year period.

Seishin, Sport and the Construction of Masculinity

Cultural anthropologists Brian Moeran (1986) and Thomas Rohlen (1983, 1986, Rohlen & Le Tendre, 1998) contend that a particularly Japanese view of human existence focused on human spirit and expressed in the concept of *seishin*, underpins Japanese cultural and educational practice and most distinguishes it from Western practices. Although often translated as 'spirit', *seishin* is a broad, subjectively understood concept which has no precise equivalent in the English language. It is a cultural concept tied into a particular view of human existence as a subjective unity of mind, body and soul. The concept of *seishin* refers to the inner being and is derived from Confucian and Buddhist ideals central to *bushido*, the samurai code of behaviour (Rohlen, 1986). Rohlen and Le Tendre (1998) suggest that the logic of *seishin kyoiku* (spiritual training) is underpinned by a belief that personal development, character building and moral education necessarily must entail individual suffering. There is no separation of mind and body in Japanese views of existence (Lebra, 1976) and such suffering typically involves enduring physical hardship. Rohlen and Le Tendre contend that moral development is seen in Japan as the responsibility of society and is typically undertaken in institutions such as companies, religious organisations schools and universities with school and university sports clubs constituting primary sites for spiritual education. They further argue that spiritualism (*seishin shugi*) is central to what Japanese and non-Japanese consider to be traditional and uniquely Japanese culture.

Seishin has long underpinned samurai military practice but the *Meiji* era (1868-1912) saw the samurai lose their right to wear swords in public and, having no apparent place in a modern society, the military arts of *bujitsu* began to wane. By the close of the century, however, in a social mood of rising national sentiment, new forms of martial practice in the form of *budo* emerged. Beginning with Kano Jogoro's restructuring of *jujitsu* into judo these sport-like forms of martial practice were profoundly shaped by *seishin*. Inoue Shun (1997) suggests that *budo* has profoundly shaped the practice of imported team sports and particularly so up to the end of the Pacific War.

During the late nineteenth century emergence and consolidation of *budo* Nitobe Inazo (1899/1975) wrote that the training of the samurai in arts of war was focused on the development of spiritual and corporeal harmony (*seishin*) and the attainment of a state of 'no mindedness' that allowed him to act with 'clarity and detachment' in battle. Suzuki's explanation of *mushin* illuminates a distrust of the intellectual and a faith in embodied learning in the practice of Japanese martial arts that Rohlen (1986) contends characterises physical practices guided by *seishin* ideology. Suzuki states:

intellectual calculations are lost sight of and a state of no mindedness prevails. When the ultimate perfection is attained, the body and limbs perform by themselves what is assigned to them to do with no interference from the mind (Suzuki, 1959, p. 74).

Theeboom, De Knop & Wylleman (1995) also suggest that, in the practice of Asian martial arts in general, physical effort is viewed as a means of developing preferred moral qualities and spiritual strength rather than an end in itself. They argue that

Asian approaches to martial arts are underpinned by a emphasis on spiritual cultivation, whereas Western approaches tend to emphasise the acquisition of techniques. I have experienced this approach to training through my own involvement in karate for 25 years and suggest that this is also a common feature of training regimes for rugby in Japanese schools and universities. The adoption of Western sports in Japan has been accompanied by tension between dominant culture derived from the samurai classes and Western liberalism (Roden, 1980) that has been evident in the dynamic relationship between Western team sports and *budo*. Inoue (1997) argues that pre-war sporting practice was guided by the military ideals contained in the martial arts and that the post-war period has seen this reversed for sport to guide the practice of *budo* in a process he describes as 'sportization'. While it likely that the relationship between the two is more complex than this, it is evident that there has been dynamic interaction between the practice of sport and *budo*. Within this context I suggest that the practice of combative sports such rugby has been profoundly shaped by the concept of *seishin* and that this was clearly evident in the training regime at Nishi University.

The following section begins with an outline of the training regime at Nishi University in general terms after which several specific instances of training are examined. This particular episodes offer insight into the body's central role for the production and reproduction of dominant culture and a particular form of culture specific masculinity.

The Training Schedule

As is common for strong Japanese university rugby clubs, Nishi University trained six days a week for almost eleven months of the year. The Nishi University rugby club took a month off in the middle of summer due to the extreme heat and humidity and had a short break at the end of the championship season but, for the rest of the year, they trained six days a week for at least two hours each session. in the context of this long season, the training regime featured as a prominent aspect of membership of the university rugby club and, for those who had gained entry into the university on their playing ability alone, rugby formed the central focus of their lives for four years. Despite the well documented demands of 'exam hell' that many students must endure to gain entry into universities the academic demands of university life are minimal at best (Van Wolferen, 1993). Within this context membership in a university club, particularly a sporting club, assumes central significance in the life of a university student.

The rugby season for many elite level Australian school, university and club teams can also very long but the nature of the year's training schedule is significantly different with distinct differences in emphasis for different periods of the year aimed at peaking the team for the season. in contrast, the programs of training that were favoured at Nishi and in all other clubs that I was familiar with, were unvaried over the year. They demanded constant effort, day in day out, with little change. They demanded personal qualities of perseverance, tolerance, effort and single-minded commitment valued in all areas of Japanese social life.

Although I introduced many Australian training ideas and exercises this was achieved through negotiation with the seniors and compromise in designing the training 'menu' each day. Daily training practices set by the seniors consisted of

highly structured exercises that were well known by all the players and varied little from day to day for most of the year. They were characteristically simple movement patterns repeated from twenty minutes to an hour and performed as quickly as possible with all players expected to keep up with the physical and emotional demands placed on them. All players in the squad of up to eighty players knew the drills well and all apparently enjoyed doing them. Conversely, Australian exercises are typically of shorter duration, are focused on a particular skill and require adapting to a changing context. When Australian players and coaches watched some of the traditional training conducted by Nishi University while on tour in 1991 the common opinion expressed was that it looked tiring and boring. The players at Nishi preferred to have the entire squad training together and working within structured patterns where they were released from the pressure to make individual decisions. They also gained great satisfaction from working themselves close to exhaustion and saw this as tangible evidence of a good training session.

Rohlen and Le Tendre (1998) argue that spiritual training (*seishin kyoiku*) is seen in Japan as a form of moral and social training achieved through a range of experiences that entail suffering and physical ordeals. Rohlen (1986) contends that such physical experiences are typically repetitive, demanding of physical and emotional endurance and require the exercise of self restraint. These were all features of the drills and routines that characterised regimes of training at Nishi University. While *seishin* was not a common feature of discourse it was clearly embedded in the relentless, unvaried nature of the year's schedule and in the regimes of training that comprised it.

The Summer Training Camp: Ritualised Suffering and Sacrifice

Nowhere was the influence of *seishin* on training more evident than at the *natsu gashuku* (summer training camp). During the oppressively hot Japanese summer thousands of rugby players make the pilgrimage to the Japanese Alps to escape the heat and take part in one of Japanese rugby's great rituals. During winter Sugadaira is a popular ski resort but during the latter part of summer the ski resorts, which all have their own rugby fields, are crammed with rugby players undertaking physical and spiritual preparation for the upcoming competitive season. Training and playing programs for teams at Sugadaira are, without exception, brutal. As part of a larger study of rugby in a Japanese high school in 1997 I spent four months with a strong rugby playing high school that, in addition to daily training, played eighteen hard games over a ten day period at their summer training camp. While this was seen by their coach as being very demanding he did not feel that it was particularly unusual for the best high school teams in Japan.

Nishi University rugby club had a disappointing year in 1991 and was determined to have a good season in 1992. The director, Nakamura Sensei and the senior old boys felt that this could only be achieved through hard training and the team played nine games over seven days in addition to hard training before and after games. We had lost every game in 1991 and I felt that the team needed to win their last game to boost their confidence for the upcoming season. I suggested to Nakamura Sensei that we should just have a light training session in the morning but he insisted that the team perform two hours of exhausting running up the steep mountain slopes. We had a heated exchange in which he told me that that was how

Japanese teams became strong and that, because I was not Japanese I could never understand. During the next game the team tired badly in the second half to lose by a large margin and several players were injured. The players all looked exhausted after the game but there were no complaints. Nor was there any compassion shown by the director or the old boys and there seemed to be an acceptance on everybody's part that that was how it had to be.

The next day, when I was feeling a little calmer I asked Nakamura Sensei about the extreme demands of the camp and his reply illuminates the extent to which the extreme training regimes of the summer training camp are driven by *seishin* ideology:

Japanese are not naturally aggressive. You need to be very aggressive to win rugby games in the championships so we Japanese need to train hard every day to build the spirit needed to be strong at rugby. The only way to become strong is to train hard all day and every day. The way you play is the way you train. Foreigners look at the way we train and think we're crazy but this is how we have to train. We Japanese are different to Australians, we work very hard and students must study very hard so rugby players must train very hard and it is satisfying for the players to work together hard in a big group and do their best together. The summer training camps look really crazy to a foreigner but we Japanese need really hard training to prepare our spirit for the championship games. (Nakamura Sensei, interview at summer training camp, August, 1991)

To some, Nakamura Sensei's description of Japanese as being naturally non-aggressive may seem at odds with the behaviour of the Japanese military during the Pacific War but this chapter in Japanese history is seen by many historians such as Robert Edgerton (1997) as an aberration produced by a complex combination of social, political, economic and historical factors. Edgerton suggests that much of the cruelty practised by the Japanese military was in fact learned from the European powers during the Boxer Rebellion in China and that the army underwent a radical transformation leading up to the Pacific War. There is little evidence to suggest that the Japanese military's shameful behaviour is in any way representative of Japanese culture in general. In fact, Japanese scholars such as Ishida (1986) argue that European culture is inherently less forgiving and more severe than the culture of the Japanese. Regardless of the military's wartime actions contemporary Japanese society is remarkably peaceful and ordered, stressing self control, conformity and harmony. Certainly, the aggression and violent use of the body required to win rugby games is far removed from the behaviour expected in day to day social life in Japan.

The notion of no pain, no gain (McKay, 1991) and the perception that sacrifice and suffering are necessary requirements for success in heavy contact sports is, of course, not unique to Japanese rugby. The connection between notions of pain, suffering and sacrifice and exemplary forms of masculinity is a feature of high contact, competitive sports in Western settings (McKay, 1991; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1990). There was, however, far more

emphasis at Nishi University on self control and the internal struggle to conquer individual desires and weakness. As part of his general civilising theory Norbert Elias (1986) contends that patterns of violence in sport have tended to shift from expressive forms to rational and instrumental forms. Expressive violence refers to that which is spontaneous and uncontrolled while instrumental forms are seen as rational and used to achieve specific ends. This offers a useful way of distinguishing the controlled, rule legitimated violent use of the body in games and training at Nishi University from the uncontrolled acts of violence such as punching, and 'all in brawls' where instrumental violence suddenly takes the form of expressive violence. Despite increasing efforts to eliminate such violence from rugby games in Western settings such as Australia it is not uncommon at grade, university or colts (under 19) rugby games with violent players achieving almost legendary status for their fighting prowess. This celebration of illegal violence as a marker of masculine status is illustrated in a British rugby magazine that ranked the game's worst fifteen 'villains'. Rugby Magazine (The Biggest Villains, 1996) ranked Australia's Steve Finane, the 'Phantom puncher', in second behind South Africa's Johan Le Roux who, after a lengthy ban for biting an New Zealand captain Sean Fitzpatrick's ear, was again banned for head butting. Unlike Australian rugby no masculine status was gained from fighting, raking of players on the ground or any of the other illegal and 'marginal' play that is not only tolerated, but also celebrated in Australian games.

Players, particularly junior players, complained about the cruel extremes of training yet it was clear that they enjoyed the suffering and saw the ability to endure it as a mark of masculine status and as a unique feature of being Japanese. As many researchers (Hori, 1998; Keifer, 1970; Rohlen, 1983, 1998; Singleton, 1993) have noted, Japanese education stresses process over product. The effort and character required to succeed in the highly competitive exam culture of Japan is implicitly accepted as more significant than knowledge or intellectual ability. Similarly, the pre season *natsu gashuku* emphasised general spiritual development over any attention to specific aspects of play or the tactical considerations.

'Run Pass': Developing *Gaman*

Over the past decade corporate rugby in Japan has experienced increasing engagement in international rugby through the national team's involvement in all world cups to date, frequent overseas tours and the influx of high profile international players and coaches. This has seen changes in both styles of play and approaches to training which have resulted in an ever increasing gap in performance between the company and university leagues. Fifteen years ago the annual game between the top university and company teams was the hotly contested highlight of the rugby year, but recent results such as university powerhouse Meiji University's 108-0 loss to Kobe Steel in 1998/99 clearly indicate the current disparity in playing standards. Despite annual overseas tours by most university teams, university and school rugby however, remains more insulated from the effects of globalisation and the training regime at Nishi University, as with most other university and school rugby clubs, retained a traditional form. On a tour by another Japanese university rugby club in 1998, Queensland Rugby Union coaching staff expressed surprise when, following a full coaching session using Australian methods, the teams followed up with two hours of traditional hard training until all the players were close to exhaustion:

We took them through a really good session for nearly two hours, told them (through an interpreter) that they shouldn't over train and his was the sort of training they should be doing. They seemed to enjoy the session and the coaches understood what we said but as soon as we'd finished they're off to the other end of the field training their arses off until they're all buggered. I couldn't believe it (Tony, QRU coaching staff, interview, June 18, 1998).

'Run pass' provides a typical example of a conservative, traditional drill which was favoured by the seniors and coaches at Nishi University. This involved running in groups of five or six players at full pace for the length of the field passing the ball while the rest of the squad watched and the juniors chanted encouragement such as *gambatte iko* ('do your best, lets do it'). Once all groups accumulated at the end of the field they would repeat the exercise to return to the other end. This simple drill of running from end to end while passing was commonly repeated with little variation for twenty to forty minutes but many other clubs that I observed would perform this for up to an hour. The pace of 'run pass' was gradually increased to place more stress on the players to the point at which many struggled to keep up, with players gasping for breath at the end of a hard session. As an exercise to develop passing and catching skills, run pass is very inefficient with players often not handling the ball at all during a dash over one length of the field. An Australian player who spent two years in the team found 'run pass' to be: 'pretty tiring alright but what's worse is that its mind-numbingly boring' (Ron, interview, August, 1991). The Japanese players, however, thoroughly enjoyed these exercises where they are not required to make decisions but were expected to give a 100 per cent physical effort. The players at Nishi University saw run pass and other repetitive exercises as being well suited to building spiritual strength as the Nishi University captain for 1992 indicated:

It's probably different from foreign training but its good for Japanese players. It looks simple but you need *gaman* (perseverance, tolerance, self control) to do it well and not drop off. It builds the *gaman* that you need in the game. You've got to be able to keep going and do the best you can for the whole game and everybody enjoys it the best. It makes you really tired by the end of it but we all work together and build team spirit and *gaman* and that's why we need to do this training because that's what wins games (Team captain, interview, September, 1992).

A belief in the need for collective sacrifice and a degree of suffering in order to become a strong rugby team is common to training approaches in both Australia and Japan, as are the connections between ideals of toughness and dominant ideals of masculinity. There were, however, culturally distinct characteristics evident in Japanese training regimes and in the idealised form of masculinity that guided them. Traditional exercises such as 'run pass' favoured by players at Nishi University demanded, and were seen to inculcate, the ability to endure physical, emotional and spiritual/mental stress over long periods of time. Australian training drills and routines that I introduced were also physically demanding but were characteristically conducted over a shorter duration, emphasising concentration and placing pressure

on players to make individual decisions. They provided little sense of a form to be refined and perfected over time and did not lend themselves to the development of *seishin*.

The Scrum: Embodied Force as a Manifestation of Seishin

There can be no more explicit means of displaying and testing superior force and commitment in rugby than in the scrum. Despite changes that have opened rugby union up as a running game the scrum remains a powerful symbol of a team's potency. Japanese university teams spend inordinate time and effort on scrummaging and a team with a weak scrum cannot expect to win games. As one of the senior old boys said when addressing the squad:

Clever play is fine but what wins rugby games is determination and strength. Rugby is about hard contact, strong scrums and hard tackles win game, scrums and tackles! (Senior old boy's post training address, field notes, September 1991).

Australian teams typically perform most of their scrum training on scrum machines to prevent injuries, only using live scrums for fine tuning. Club teams such as The University of Queensland first grade and even elite teams such as the Queensland 'Reds' rarely spend more than thirty minutes on scrum training each session, most of which is performed against a scrum machine. Scrum training at Nishi University, however, favoured long and aggressive sessions of 'live' scrummaging, pitting one scrum against another. There was no scrum machine until I convinced the Old Boys' Club that we needed one in my second year. It was, however, unpopular with the forwards. They continually complained that it was not like the real thing and that their scrum would never become strong using only a machine for opposition.

When the scrum was found wanting in games the answer was invariably to train harder, more often and for longer. These special scrum sessions were extremely aggressive and, in my eyes, very dangerous. I also saw the techniques employed as inefficient. In my first year as coach I concentrated on the back line with reasonable success and turned my attention to the forwards the following year. Disagreement over the scrum produced considerable friction between myself and the senior players and, despite training sessions with former Wallaby squad member Matt Ryan and New Zealand All Black legend Wayne 'Buck Shelford, they remained steadfastly opposed change. In response to friction over the scrum early in 1992 Nakamura Sensei, a prop forward in his youth, oversaw a traditional session aimed at 'sorting out' the scrum. I was not directly involved in the coaching, and the session conducted in late April 1992, is briefly outlined here.

After half an hour of training as a full squad the forwards and backs split into two and trained separately. The backs refined their set attacking plays ('sign plays') and the forwards worked on scrums. They began with some brief stretching and soon moved onto one on one pushing, then to two on two and three on three. The ground was hard packed dirt and, even in this warming up stage, many of the players lost their footing. This was followed by the tight five (the central five players in the scrum) engaging each other and working out some technical details before the

back three joined the scrum and training began in earnest. With a squad of up to eighty players there were at least three scrums available with a few spare players and the A team began working against the B team. The initial engagement in scrummaging is, arguably, the most important phase as it immediately establishes a position of superiority and advantage of one pack over the other.

The two packs crouched and the front rows strained to hold back the weight of their team mates, waiting for the hooker of the A team to call, *sei no ...* and with a loud, collective shout the two sides slammed into each other. From engagement the two sides strained to gain an advantage and, to the call of *ready go!* (in English), they timed their shoves and tried to drive the other pack backwards. When live scrummaging is conducted in Australian clubs and schools the scrum is always stopped as soon as one side looks to be under too much pressure and it is restarted. The opposing scrums at Nishi University, however, kept pushing until one side's domination was complete with the opposition collapsing in the dirt or the scrum disintegrating. It was then replaced by another pack. This pattern continued for an hour with several players injured and taken to the first aid room. As training continued and the players tired, there were more collapses. The players not engaged in the contest shouted encouragement as the packs tired, calling for them to do their best (*ganbare*) and attack the opposition”

All training was conducted on the club's hard packed dirt ground and many of the players finished drenched with dirt caked on sweat and blood seeping from scraped knees and elbows. They all looked physically exhausted yet satisfied. They walked away from the session saying how 'buggered' (*shindoi*) they were before joining the backs for fifteen minutes of high paced, unopposed team runs. The post-training banter indicated that they felt deeply satisfied.

Discussion

The aspects of training discussed in this article were typical of the that favoured by players and staff at Nishi University during the three years that I coached there. They are also representative of training that I observed at other strong rugby playing schools and universities over a nine year period in Japan. As Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowset (1982) argue within the Australian context, schools are deeply implicated in the production of masculinity and football (rugby union, rugby league, Australian football) operates as a central site for the production of a hegemonic and exemplary form of masculinity. The analysis presented here and in other research on rugby in Japanese schools (Light, 1999a, 1999b) indicates that rugby in Japanese educational institutions also plays a significant role in the production of a particular, hegemonic, form of masculinity.

While the masculinity evident at Nishi University was, in some ways, similar to that typically practised in equivalent Australian settings there were distinct differences that appeared to be manifestations of dominant Japanese culture and the cultural imperative of *seishin* in particular. The yearly training schedule and the preferred approach to training were both long, unvaried, physically and emotionally/mentally testing and displayed an emphasis on the development of spiritual/moral strength. Particular types of physical practices have long been favoured in Japanese culture as means of building internal spiritual strength and the moral qualities associated with it (Moeran, 1986; Rohlen, Rohlen & Le Tendre, 1998; Suzuki, 1959)

and the traditional regime of training at Nishi University displayed similar characteristics. Considered in light of the role that sport has historically played in the promotion and preservation of traditional culture (Roden, 1980; Rohlen, 1983) this indicates that much of the training at Nishi University was driven by the cultural concept of *seishin*.

The ways in which *seishin* thought underpinned and shaped training, however, might be seen most appropriately as the implicit workings of an ideology, since it was only on occasion articulated formally, and is understood subjectively in Japanese cultural life (Rohlen, 1986). It is lived through day to day social life and reproduced through engagement in social practice. While the notion of *seishin* was articulated as such on occasion it was not so much seen as something tangible that could be brandished or somehow 'used' to attain particular outcomes nor was it a prominent feature of discourse. It was, instead, embedded in a range of practices surrounding the game and in the players' actual bodily engagement in the training regime at Nishi University. The connecting of distinguishing features of training to *seishin* does not, however, represent any attempt to reduce the analysis of masculinity practised in Japanese rugby to that which is shaped wholly by one cultural concept. Research such as that of Connell (1983, 1990, 1995) conducted in Western settings clearly identifies how complex the construction of masculinities is and how specific the forms they take are.

Norbert Elias (1982) contends that without some understanding of history the study of social relations is empty and ambiguous and Brett Hutchins (1998) suggests that a historical dimension is needed in social analyses to understand the development of social practices and change. A similar position is adopted by Connell (1995) and Whitson (1990) who argue that masculinity must be seen as a historical construct shaped by economic, social, cultural and political change over time. The form of exemplary masculinity identified at Nishi University is historically linked to the militaristic values of the samurai as preserved through the practice of the martial arts and appropriated Western team sports from the late nineteenth century. It has, however, also been profoundly shaped by the Victorian and Edwardian games ideology and ideals of manliness originating in the Public Schools of nineteenth century England (Abe & Mangan, 1997, Light, 1999b). Since the opening up of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century and its remarkably rapid modernisation, there has been constant and dynamic tension between what is generally viewed as traditional Japanese culture and the influence of Western culture in which the bodies of Japanese boys can be seen as 'contested cultural terrain' (Donnelly & Young, 1985).

From the late nineteenth century imported Western team games have played a significant part in the maintenance of tradition and cultural hegemony and, along with other team sports rugby has long functioned in Japanese institutions of education as a culturally important form of social integration. Adopted team sports were important elements in the dissemination of a homogenous culture and have continued to be a medium through which dominant culture and a culture specific form of hegemonic masculinity is reproduced. Of the major team sports played in contemporary Japan, the practices of baseball, as the national game, and rugby, are characteristically conservative and favour the traditional *seishin teki* (*seishin* style) approach. As such, rugby, as practised in the stronger universities and high schools

of contemporary Japan such as Nishi University, appears to be continuing a tradition of preserving dominant Japanese culture and a conservative form of masculinity.

Conclusion

This study identified a particularly Japanese approach to rugby training as an expression of a culture specific form of masculinity operating at Nishi University and this has significant implications for studies of the relationships between culture, sport and the construction of gender. As Whitson (1990) argues, sport has become an important site for the production of masculinity and this examination of training practice at a Japanese university highlights how specific uses of the body over time act to embody culture and culture specific forms of masculinity. As Loic Wacquant (1995) shows with his study of professional boxers in Chicago, continuous work on, and with, the body over time embeds particular bodily postures, movements and responses that operate as second nature. This is a process Bourdieu (1990) refers to as embodied learning and one through which much more than sporting movements are learned. As Wacquant (1995) and Bourdieu (1990) argue, it is through constant and relentless work on the body that the world within which the athlete lives and labours comes to constitute his/her habitus, it is embedded deep into the body. For the young men at Nishi University their constant bodily engagement in rugby training, characterised by culturally shaped bodily practices, operated to embody both dominant culture and a particular, culture specific form of masculinity.

Given the paucity of studies published in English on the social dimensions of sporting practice in Asian settings, this study focuses long overdue attention on the ways through which gender is constructed through engagement in sport in cultural contexts removed from the Western settings where most such research has been conducted. The cross-cultural nature of the research into the body's role in the construction of gender is invaluable for highlighting the culture specific nature of masculinity and the ways that it is constructed through the body's engagement in social and cultural practice, but it is all too common for cross-cultural studies of Japan to emphasise differences and focus on the 'unique' nature of Japanese culture and society. While there is much to be learnt from identifying differences from culture to culture, similarities are equally informative for our understanding of sports role in the construction of gender. Cross-cultural studies offer the opportunity to better understand the significance of people's engagement in sport for the development of their gendered identity not only through what is different but also what is the same. While I suggest that the notion of *seishin* contributes to our understanding of how culture specific forms of masculinity are constructed through particular bodily practices in Japan there is also a danger that this can obscure our recognition the similarities that Nishi University rugby club shares with sports training in other cultural settings.

The insight that this study provides into the relationship between sport, training, culture and the social construction of gender has significant implications for the more general practice of sport in institutional settings and, perhaps, for the practice of school-based physical education. As much research on the construction of gender through sport has shown, when young men and women take part in sport they are learning far more than just how to play the game or developing their physical abilities; they are also learning to become particular types of women and

men. The findings of this study encourage more critical scrutiny of educational practices such as school sport and physical education characterised by the manipulation of the body and the role that they play in the production and reproduction of particular forms of masculinity. Given the prominence of sport in the curriculum of Western and Japanese schools and universities, further research is required into the interaction between culture, gender and sport and the central role of sports training within educational institutions in the production of both culture and gender.

NOTE

1. Interviews with players and other people involved with *Nishi* University quoted here are accounts of conversations that took place during the three years that I worked as head coach. The conversations were not planned but arose from the day to day interaction between players, myself and other significant personnel in the rugby club. They were all conducted in Japanese without the services of an interpreter and recorded by hand immediately after training. Interviews quoted from a subsequent, comparative study were recorded by hand or by portable recorder with the permission of the informants.

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