

A Centenary of Rugby and Masculinity in Japanese Schools and Universities: Continuity and Change

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Introduction

Sport has been identified as a central site for the social construction of masculinity and boys' experiences of school sport assume profound significance for their development of masculine identity. As Whitson argues, this is particularly so in advanced capitalist societies characterised by extended formal schooling and reduced social value attached to other ways of demonstrating physical prowess such as physical labour and combat.¹ When gender is recognised as a social pattern, as Bob Connell suggests it should be, it is clear that the masculinity constructed in school sport needs to be seen as essentially historical and the product of changing social, political and economic conditions over time.²

Despite the growth in literature on the role sport plays in the construction of masculinity there has been little attention paid to the relationship between sport and the construction of gender in Asian cultures published in English. Given the cultural specificity that the various forms of masculinity can assume this represents a significant oversight in the literature on gender and sport.³ This paper represents an attempt to address this gap in the literature by providing a brief historical sketch of the development of a culture specific form of masculinity that characterises the contemporary practice of school and university rugby in Japan. In tracing the development of rugby within institutions of education in Japan over the past century it identifies dynamic tension between, dominant, 'traditional' culture and Western ideology embedded in the practice of rugby that have shaped, and continue to shape, the particular form of masculinity evident in the practice of rugby in Japanese schools and universities.

In addition to secondary literature, this paper draws on the author's

experience as a rugby coach, at both university and high school level, in Japan over a six year period from 1990 to 1996. It also draws on data gathered during a larger comparative study on high school rugby in Australia and Japan conducted from 1996 to 1999. During this ethnographic study data was generated and analysed using a grounded theory approach characterised by a continual process of data generation and analysis. The interviews drawn on from this study were conducted in Japanese as unstructured conversations without the assistance of an interpreter.

Masculinity as an Historical Construct

Connell's work on the construction of masculinity suggests that any analysis of masculinity requires recognition of the multiple forms that develop within changing class-specific and culture-specific contexts.⁴ Within such contexts masculinities exist in relationships of dominance, subordination, competition and compliance.⁵ Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony,⁶ Connell identifies how some forms of masculinity come to be dominant over others to the extent that they are accepted and unchallenged as *the* masculinity.⁷ The ways in which these particular forms of masculinity assume, and then maintain positions of hegemony as uncontested, common sense, notions of what it is to be a man can only be fully understood as products of historical processes. Whitson argues that views of masculinity as fixed and universal assume the development of masculine identity to be a natural process and ignore hegemonic masculine ideals of mental and physical toughness as historical constructs. He suggests that the processes through which boys learn to become men need to be seen as collective practices through which patterns of empowerment and expectations of domination are encouraged over successive generations of boys.⁸

In order to better identify and understand the particular nature of the hegemonic masculinity that characterises Japanese school and university rugby it is necessary to account for it as the product of larger historical and social changes in Japan over the past century. Rugby, and other Western team sports as practised within the Japanese education system, played a central role in the development of national identity and homogeneous cultural values in the shift from a feudal to industrialised capitalist society during the late nineteenth century. Within this context rugby, and other adopted sports such as baseball, played a significant

role in the dissemination and maintenance of a cultural hegemony that has provided continuity and social order and acted to maintain existing positions of power and influence in times of profound social change.

Recent research on the construction of masculinity has also illuminated the importance of institutional settings in the construction of masculinity in sport. Richard Gruneau and David Whitson⁹ show how business and political interests construct the hyper aggressive masculinity that characterises Canadian hockey while Mike Messner illustrates the significance of entry into the institution of sport for the development of boys' masculine identity.¹⁰ The construction of young men's masculinity in Western settings is intimately shaped by the institutions within which sport takes place and they are typically marked by hierarchical, competitive, structures which interact with larger political and economic forces. This paper suggests that institutional contexts are equally significant for the construction of masculinity in Japan. Played in universities and secondary schools for a hundred years, rugby in Japan has acted as a vehicle for the bodily inculcation of particular social and cultural values and has been an important site for the reproduction of a culture-specific, hegemonic masculinity.

Sport, Masculinity and the Development of Japanese National Identity

Western sports were introduced into Japan during a period of profound economic, social and political change and, as important elements in the national education system, have played a significant part in the development of Japan as a modern state. Following the end of over two centuries of isolation the Meiji Revolution (1868-1912) heralded the dismantling of the feudal system in 1871 and the wholesale adoption of Western institutional models as Japan rushed to close the gap between itself and Western, industrialised, nations. Herbert Passin argues that during this period of dramatic change educational reform ranks as one of the key measures employed in the transformation of Japan from a feudal to a modern and unified state.¹¹ The system of mass schooling initiated in 1872 not only provided for the production of skilled labour for military and economic development but was central to the formation of a unified, national state from the 280 separate feudal domains that had constituted pre-Meiji Japan. From 1872 the education system played a pivotal role in the creation of national identity, the promotion of homogenous culture and the maintenance of social cohesion.

Donald Roden's examination of baseball in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century suggests that as central elements in the new education system imported Western team sports, and baseball in particular, played a highly significant part in the development of national identity in post-Meiji Japan.¹² Since the introduction of mass schooling in 1872 education in Japan has constituted hotly contested terrain with competing social and political groups fighting for control. This struggle has been characterised by dynamic tension between liberal Western educational ideals and 'traditional' cultural ideals derived from the feudal samurai classes. Within this context of political and ideological struggle over education the practice and meaning of Western team games has undergone constant change tied into major economic, social and political shifts for over a century. This has been manifested in a dynamic tension between 'traditional' Japanese ideals of masculinity and the resilient notions of Victorian 'manliness' that continues to influence the practice of rugby around the world.¹³

The 1870s witnessed the wholesale adoption of Western social, economic and political institutional models as Japan rushed to establish itself as a modern, industrial and military power. This was initiated by a realisation of its vulnerability to Western colonial intentions in the mid nineteenth century as Japan's military vulnerability to external threats became evident in 1854 when American Admiral Perry forced the opening of ports at Shimoda and Hakodate to American trade. Similar agreements with other powerful Western nations soon followed and European and American settlements soon flourished in port cities around Japan where the British and Americans brought with them the games ideology and played sport at social and recreational clubs. Some of these clubs are still active today with the annual rugby match between the Yokohama Athletics Club and the Kobe Recreation and Athletics Club the keenly contested highlight of the two clubs' rugby seasons. World wide British colonial expansion during the nineteenth century and its military might was widely attributed to the moral strength imparted into its leaders through the playing of games. By the late nineteenth century the vigour of team sports had come to function as a symbol of national strength and health in England and Roden contends that the absence of sport in foreign lands came to be interpreted as a sign of cultural, racial and moral inferiority to the British.¹⁴ This shaped Western views of the Japanese in the mid nineteenth century as being effeminate, under exercised, and morally

inferior led many foreign teachers employed in Japanese universities voicing concern with the lack of 'virility' among students.¹⁵

Japanese educationalists also expressed concern over the lack of virility and the incidence of illness among their students which they attributed to a preoccupation with study and a lack of exercise. Gymnastics had been encouraged in schools by the Department of Education as early as 1872 and, largely in response to foreign criticism, the National Institute of Gymnastics was established in 1879. By 1885 gymnastics was compulsory in all schools. However, as institutions serving the social elite, universities were exempted from compulsory gymnastics by the ministry of education.¹⁶ In response to Western criticism of under exercised and physically weak students, and a growing concern among Japanese educationalists, the teaching of sport as part of the education of the social elite was adopted. Following the introduction of baseball in 1872 and soccer in 1873 other forms of Western sport were gradually introduced into Japanese universities and by the late nineteenth century leading Japanese educationalists acknowledged the national value of exercise and the propensity for games to build the *esprit de corps* needed for a modernising Japan.

During the initial widespread adoption of Western institutional models from 1870 to 1880 those promoting Western educational ideals and practices assumed dominance over traditional Japanese and Chinese approaches but by 1881 conservative reaction to what was perceived as Western excesses was manifested in education. From early 1880 liberal ideals focused on 'child centred' approaches to learning increasingly gave way to educational ideals driven by nationalist sentiment. In the late 1880s the Minister of Education, Mori Arinori, declared that education was not for the sake of the pupils but for the sake of the nation.¹⁷ It was during this period of emerging nationalism encouraged by expanding national confidence and military power that sport began to spread throughout the Japanese universities and, in 1899, rugby was introduced at Keio University by Englishman, E.B. Clarke and English educated Ginnosuke Tanaka.¹⁸

During the 1890s the growth of games in universities during the 1890s was stimulated by a rise in nationalism following the revision of the 'unequal treaties' and Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese war. Roden contends that the increasing popularity of games during this period of growing national confidence and the search for a modern national identity

saw efforts by educators to locate the games ideology and accompanying Western ideals of manliness within traditional, samurai culture.¹⁹ Government policies guided by the ideal of *Wakon Yosai* shaped the practice of imported sport in which the values of the feudal samurai classes were fused with the Victorian ideals of manliness. Although the new forms of martial arts resurrected in the late nineteenth century (*budo*) embodied the samurai ideals of masculinity they were essentially individual in nature and were not seen by educators as suitable practices for the dissemination of dominant cultural ideals. Derived from the military techniques of the samurai the martial arts of judo and kendo promoted the values of the samurai but featured individual contests. This precluded them from functioning to inculcate the collectivist ideals of 'traditional' culture that were promoted as a means of maintaining social order. On the other hand, the collectivist nature of team games and the stress placed on team spirit made games such as baseball, soccer and rugby attractive as vehicles for the promotion of preferred culture.

The analogy between the field and the battlefield articulated in Britain also made Western team sports such as rugby attractive for the promotion of national identity and the development of national confidence.²⁰ The link made between team sport and warfare in late nineteenth century Japan is evident in the response to the Ichiko Higher School baseball team's resounding victory over the Americans from the Yokohama Athletic Club in 1896. The yearly report of the Ichiko Baseball Club claimed that: 'The aggressive character of our national spirit is a well-established fact, demonstrated first in the Sino-Japanese War and now by our great victories in baseball'.²¹ The appropriation of Western sports from the late nineteenth century saw their practice guided by appropriated Victorian notions of manliness and driven by the samurai code of *bushido*. By the turn of the century imported team sports had come to function as vehicles for the promotion of discrete Japanese national identity and operated as sites for the construction of an increasingly militaristic, hegemonic masculinity. Conflict between Western ideals and 'fundamentalist revivalism' continued during the early twentieth century shaped the practice of sport and physical education in schools and universities.²² With Japanese victory over the Chinese in 1895 and the Russians in 1905 and the annexation of Korea in 1910 the ideals of *bushido* came to be increasingly manifested in nationalistic and militaristic approaches to the practice of sport and the form of masculinity promoted in schools and universities.

During the rush to emulate Western social, economic and political practices that characterised the early stages of the Meiji Restoration the wearing of swords in public was banned and the martial arts of the samurai waned. With growing national confidence and an emerging national sentiment by the close of the century, the transformation of the feudal arts, generically known as *bujitsu*, experienced a revival led by the reconstruction of *jujitsu* into the modern sport-like form of judo by Kano Jigoro. The modern forms of the martial arts were reconstructed into sporting forms according to the model of modern Western sport yet maintained a strong sense of tradition through their connection to the pre-Meiji era samurai. Inoue contends that *budo* contributed strongly to the maintenance of a national cultural identity and the continuation of traditional values in times of great social change.²³

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the expansion of team sports in universities and schools where their practice was shaped by ideals of imported Victorian manliness intermeshed with the traditional military values of *bushido* as central elements in the development of national identity. Under these conditions, rugby enjoyed a period of growth throughout universities and schools. Originating in universities and then spreading to schools its growth was marked by the first national championships in 1918, which included university and school teams in the one competition.²⁴ The short term prosperity that followed World War I witnessed a significant shift toward Western liberalism reflected in the rise of liberal approaches to education and it was during this period that Abe et al. contend 'athleticism reached its zenith'.²⁵ A national body for rugby, the Japan Rugby Union, was founded in 1926 and rugby flourished in the 1920s with major university games attracting crowds of up to 20,000.²⁶ Several universities rugby teams undertook overseas tours and hosted visits by foreign teams in the early 1930s with an Australian university team touring in 1934.

Japan's desire to accumulate colonies and its increasingly aggressive militarism fuelled by growing nationalist fervour beginning from the late 1920s brought about an increasingly anti Western sentiment. English terms in rugby were replaced by Japanese and the practice of rugby was increasingly guided by Japanese martial arts. From the late 1920s the values of the samurai classes promoted through *budo* increasingly came to guide the practice of rugby and other team sports as martial arts training was incorporated into the national curriculum and promoted as

symbolising the 'traditional Japanese spirit'. Despite the collective nature of team sport their Western origins and the values of individualism and liberalism they were seen to promote threatened nationalist sentiment in schools, and Inoue contends that they underwent processes of 'Japanization'.²⁷

The 'traditional' Japanese martial arts operated as a model for the practice of sport in schools so that they might better embody Japanese spiritual values and this approach was explicitly aimed at infusing Western sport with 'Japanese spirit'. As Japan headed towards war in the late 1930s Western sports suffered a marked decline in popularity and were radically transformed to promote what were seen as the unique qualities of the Japanese and a nationalistic militarism. Rugby in pre war schools and universities was characterised by the promotion of a 'traditional militaristic masculinity manifested in severe hierarchical disciplinary practices, hazing and extreme training regimes that not uncommonly resulted in death.'²⁸

Rugby as Educational Practice in Japan

The transformation of Japan from a feudal to a modern society was achieved in a remarkably short time during which the ruling oligarchy had to find different modes of control to deal with the accompanying social upheavals and the problems of maintaining social order.²⁹ As a central element in the modernisation of Japan a mass education system, introduced in 1872, was aimed at both the creation of a skilled and productive work force as well as promoting a sense of national identity, cultural homogeneity and social order.³⁰ This involved the promotion of the values of the ruling samurai classes as the culture of the Japanese people.³¹ The holders of power in Meiji Japan showed faith in the use of tradition as a counter to social unrest and revolution. The family and state ideologies taught in schools were articulated as 'traditional' but were actually selected adaptations of tradition. Passin argues that the family ethic taught in schools was actually the Confucian ethic of the ruling classes and not the tradition of the dominated classes, the majority of Japanese.³²

Although the first Order of Educational System (*Gakusei*) reflected the domination of Western educational ideals over the Confucian ideals that had guided the pre-Meiji education of the samurai there was a conservative backlash by the end of the decade. By 1890 the Confucian ethic had been

incorporated into the Education Rescript and the curriculum for schools and the values of the samurai were promoted as the values of all Japanese. The Japanese populace had been prone to express grievances through violence prior to the Meiji Revolution and social control was an urgent task confronting the government of a modernising Japan. One of its major strategies for control was to foster an ideology conducive to the maintenance of social order through the state education system in which appropriated Western sport formed an integral element. After the turn of the century the government sought further to emphasise social control through the promotion of the emperor as the head of state and values of loyalty, obedience and obligation to him in an imperial ideology propagated through the press and the education system.³³

From the introduction of Western sports into the national education system in the late nineteenth century team sports such as rugby have formed essential elements in schools and universities. They played a significant role in the dissemination, and consequent maintenance of, homogenous culture and the development of national identity. As such the practice of rugby in Japan was restricted to educational institutions until the post Pacific War period when, in 1945, Kobe Steel formed the first company rugby team.³⁴ Using rugby as a form of exercise for staff and a means of marketing and promotion, other companies began to develop rugby teams leading to the initial national company championships, won by the Kintetsu Railway company, in 1949.³⁵ Despite the development of company rugby since the end of the Pacific War the rugby played at schools and universities continues to attract more public and media attention.³⁶ The biggest crowd of the year is always at the annual match held between traditional university rivals Waseda and Meiji. Held within days of the Oxford/Cambridge match attendance at the ground of up to 60,000 surpasses attendance at the company finals or any games between the national team and international touring sides. Significantly, the interest shown in the Waseda and Meiji game and the national high school championships extends beyond those who follow rugby during the year to the general public who know little about rugby in particular yet recognise the cultural symbolism attached to the contests. The attention paid to the national championships for high school sport indicates the significance of school sport as a means of expressing and confirming dominant culture and as a site for the embodiment of a culture specific form of hegemonic masculinity.

***Seishin*, Masculinity and the Development of Rugby in High Schools and Universities**

The form of masculinity guiding the practice of Japanese rugby in contemporary schools and universities is most distinguished from that typically evident in comparative Western settings by the influence of *seishin*. *Seishin* is a key cultural concept that was central to the ideology of the samurai classes and the code of *bushido*. It is tied into a particular view of human existence as a unity of mind, body and soul which differs markedly from Western, Cartesian derived dualism of mind and body. Moeran describes it as a general reference to the inner being spiritual fortitude and self discipline developed through specific forms of physical training.³⁷ During the period of militarism leading up to the Pacific War the concept of *seishin ryoku* (spiritual power) was appropriated and employed by the military to promote faith in the unlimited potency of spiritual concentration and it was during the Pacific War and the pre-war period that the extreme militaristic forms of masculinity built on the belief in *seishin* power exerted most influence on the practice of rugby, and all other sport in Japan. To counter a general awareness of the superior material might of the USA the military government promoted faith in spiritual power as evident in the nationalistic glorification of *Yamato damashii* (the spiritual power of the Japanese race).³⁸ The traditional discourse of *seishin* ideology promoted by the prewar military extolled a belief in the power of the human spirit, when fully cultivated through appropriate physical training, such as that which came to characterise university sport, to overcome material opposition.

Through its association with pre-war militarism, education that promoted *seishin* was officially frowned upon after the war by the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers (SCAP).³⁹ The occupation forces' identified *seishin* ideology as a central element of the extreme military masculinity promoted in prewar schools and set out to eradicate it from the curriculum. The United States Department of State's revision of the Japanese Education System document written in 1947 forbade the teaching of military subjects, the wearing of military style uniforms and the teaching of 'classical sports such as *kendo* which 'encouraged martial spirit'.⁴⁰ It also stipulated that, 'Physical training should no longer be associated with the *Seishin kyoiku* (spiritual education)'.⁴¹ Acting under the advice of the Education Commission the State Department SCAP set out rebuilding the Japanese education system along the lines of the United States model. To encourage

the fostering of democratic ideals in schools the authorities set up the club system within which a variety of extra curricular activities were to be offered.⁴² Sport was to be practised within the club system where students were to be given enough autonomy to encourage independence and initiative. Had the occupying forces known more about the extreme versions of militaristic masculinity which developed in pre war sports clubs they may have taken a different approach as, ironically, the sports clubs of universities and schools provided fertile sites for the reemergence of *seishin kyoiku*. Severe training regimes, hazing and strictly enforced student hierarchies became common characteristics of post-war sporting clubs with rugby clubs among the most severe.⁴³

Many Japanese and foreign scholars see 1945 as a turning point in Japanese society and Inoue argues that the relationship between sport and *budo* was reversed in post-war Japan for the practice of *budo* to become 'sportized'.⁴⁴ There is no doubt that the practice of martial arts, initially banned after the war, and sport were very much different in post and pre-war Japan but while the structure of sporting practice may have changed the implicit ideology underpinning it remained. This was certainly a period characterised by shift away from an explicit emphasis on ideals associated with *bushido* and the concept of Japanese spirit (*Yamato damashi*) toward the ideals of sport typically associated with Western practices. The loss of faith in 'traditional' Japanese masculine ideals following defeat in the Pacific War and the occupation forces' program of eradicating educational practices associated with the promotion of *seishin* from school curricula led to profound changes in the practice of sport in schools and universities. This included radical changes in the structure of school and university sport and the banning of martial arts. As part of the occupation forces' attempts to root out militarism and values associated with it the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers prohibited the practice of *budo*. Martial arts were banned in schools and Western sport was promoted in the quest to democratise Japan. With the resumption of Judo in 1948 the martial arts were gradually reintroduced into post-war Japan but in forms which were intentionally structured along the lines of Western sport but, as Rohlen contends, the cultural imperative of *seishin* continued to shape the practice of sport.⁴⁵

While the concept of *seishin ryoku* is not always explicitly articulated in and around rugby in Japan it is subjectively experienced and tends to

operate subconsciously. Although there is often direct reference made to *seishin* in many rugby clubs it is not always a dominant feature of discourse and tends to operate at a subconscious level. The championship winning team in the 1997/98 high school championships was a strong rugby-playing school but, atypically, it was also an academically elite institution where there was little articulation of *seishin* among the players and coaching staff yet analysis showed that it had a powerful influence over practice at the school. During an interview with the captain 'Ken' he suggested that an emphasis on *seishin* was both outdated and counter productive but, upon reflection said that it was likely most players saw it as a significant factor in playing strong rugby:

[The coach] doesn't talk about *seishin* at all and its not an important part the way we play but I guess most players would tell you that in some ways its important. But all fifteen players in the team would think that *seishin* is very important. Tackling huge guys coming at you is scary, going into violent rucks is scary. I think if you ask anyone they'll tell you that *seishin* is important. Its not the most important thing but all fifteen players would agree that its important.⁴⁶

Coaches at more conservative schools often articulate values and personal qualities associated with *seishin* such as *ganbaru* (do your absolute best), *isshokenmei* (give everything), *konjo* (guts/courage) and *gaman* (endurance, perseverance). These are qualities admired and expected in all sportsmen in Japan and, arguably, to a large extent, from boys playing rugby in many Western schools but it is the stress on restraint and self control and obligation associated with *gaman* that most differentiates the masculinity practised in Japanese schools from its equivalent in Western settings. While many of the qualities admired in Japanese school rugby players have much in common with those expected from boys in middle class schools in Australia the methods used to develop them differ considerably and are guided by a stress on *gaman*. While much of the masculinity which can be identified in Japanese rugby is derived from the very same Victorian ideals of manliness which shape the practice of rugby around the world, the manifestation of *seishin* and its associated ideals differentiate it from other forms.

Many of the schools fielding rugby teams in contemporary Japan do not aspire to success at the national level and take a relaxed approach to training with rugby functioning as a means of getting together and

sharing the joys of being in a club. However, for those competing at elite levels training typically involves hard sessions six days a week for eleven to twelve months of the year with little variation in activity or intensity and it is here that ideals of 'traditional' masculinity are manifested in ways of training and playing.⁴⁷ Training in these clubs is underpinned by the assumption that more is better, that effort produces results and training harder and longer is the answer to losing games.⁴⁸ In Japanese schools there is a similar emphasis on effort in academic endeavour in a school culture where success is linked to effort and failure is seen as evidence of not having worked hard enough.⁴⁹ Training and playing is underpinned by an assumption that achieving victory in rugby games is the direct result of effort, sacrifice and single minded commitment; all characteristics of *seishin* power.

With a strong sense of hierarchy maintained in most school rugby clubs, juniors are often treated harshly as a means of 'sorting out the men from the boys' with the more traditional clubs explicitly setting out to cut down the number of first year members to a tough core of players who have the moral qualities perceived as necessary to be of use to the team.⁵⁰ First year students typically endure particularly severe and unrewarding training. In some of the more conservative schools first years are differentiated by the wearing of white jerseys and are sometimes not permitted to train with the ball and are restricted to running and callisthenics for the duration of the year. They are also required to perform menial tasks such as raking the dirt field, washing the seniors' jerseys as well as pumping up the rugby balls before training and deflating them after training each day. This ability to endure discomfort, frustration, physical pain and suffering is universally seen by rugby players as both an indication of, and a means of developing, a particular form of masculinity shaped by *seishin* and the associated cultural concept of *gaman*. When players at a high school in Tokyo were asked what masculine traits they most admired, and aspired to, they invariably nominated the strength to endure and maintain effort over long periods of time regardless of barriers that might arise and having the strength to resist temptations to give up:

The sort of man that I admire is someone who is always directed, who sets goals and doesn't give up until he achieves them... you have to set yourself clear goals, a man makes his own road, sets goals and doesn't give up until he achieves them.⁵¹

The connection between training for, and playing, rugby and developing appropriate masculine qualities was clear, not only in the way the team trained and played but also in the players' discourse. The masculine qualities admired by players were the same qualities seen as being prerequisites for becoming a good rugby player:

[To become a good rugby player] You need to set yourself a clear goal that you are going to achieve and never lose sight of it, not be distracted. When you set a goal for yourself you can manage yourself, guide yourself and not waste your energy or time. You must be focused on a goal and always remember it at training and when you are playing. Focus on the goal and work toward it then you will become a good player.⁵²

When compared to the practice of soccer since the introduction of the professional 'J League' in 1993 it appears that rugby operates to conserve 'traditional' ideals of masculinity and has recently become less attractive to school boys.⁵³ Soccer is perceived by most high school students as being expressive and fashionable while rugby still clearly emphasises the development of character and good manners through hard work. For players who are members of the stronger and more competitive rugby clubs 'hard training' involves suffering physical and emotional hardship over years of membership in the club and is seen to build strong spirit. This is a view that is intimately tied into ideals of a hegemonic masculinity reproduced through the physical and emotional demands of competitive sports such as rugby.

High school rugby players interviewed during research in 1997 and 1998 indicated that such 'traditional' masculinity was inculcated through playing rugby but was threatened by different approaches to new and restructured sport such as soccer since the introduction of the professional 'J League'. They invariably indicated that 'traditional' masculinity was no longer universally practised or valued in a rapidly changing society. In the often severe training regimes that characterises training in the powerhouse, vocational schools, elite level rugby players are subjected to year after year of hardship that is seen to develop good manners, courage, commitment, tolerance and perseverance. Membership of a strong school rugby club can act as a sound reference for employment for school leavers and, for some, can gain entry in university and then into work where the same conservative masculine ideals are valued.

Conclusion

The form of masculinity identified in this paper bears much in common with the hegemonic forms of masculinity connected to ideals of dominance, sacrifice, suffering and aggression identified in comparable Western settings. Different class and cultural contexts produce different forms of masculinity and the masculinity that characterises the practice of rugby in Japanese schools and universities displays features that are clearly culture specific. However, as Connell contends, although we need to recognise the differences between the masculinity produced in particular class and culture/race settings, different versions develop within the same cultural and institutional contexts.⁵⁴ Within the same culture specific context, the masculinity identified in this paper is so dominant over other forms that it is hegemonic. It is unquestioned, culturally exalted and accepted as common sense

Research shows that, within Western contexts,⁵⁵ the practice of rugby in the stronger rugby playing schools and universities in Japan promotes an exalted form of masculinity against which all boys' masculine status is measured yet there are other subordinated and marginalised forms that exist within the same institutional and cultural setting. Examination of how such hegemonic forms develop over time helps in understanding how such hegemony is neither fixed nor universal yet maintains its dominant position. When the masculinity practised in and around rugby in Japanese schools and universities is viewed as an historical construct it encourages recognition of how deeply it has been tied into social, economic, political and institutional changes overtime. It thus illuminates how particular economic and political interests have operated to shape the construction of a particular form of masculinity over time. It also illustrates how complex this process is and how a particular form of masculinity has adapted and changed to maintain its hegemonic position in response to competing social and political forces that have acted to modify and limit its dominance.

Economic and social change over the past decade has seen a decline in the number of boys playing rugby in Japanese schools and this is evident in the growing number of ten man rugby competitions. Far fewer young men are now prepared to put up with traditional hard training, hazing and the strict hierarchy which has characterised the way rugby has been conducted in the strong rugby playing schools and universities. When combined with the surge in soccer's popularity since 1993 this has forced

the Japan Rugby Union and individual schools to critically examine the way that rugby has been practised. Some high school rugby players interviewed in 1997/98 identified the form of masculinity to which they aspired as being 'unfashionable' with many young people who they felt saw rugby players as being 'strange, big, smelly, sweaty men with huge necks'.

Research conducted in a Tokyo high school rugby club in 1997 and 1998 and interviews with coaches and players from other schools at the 1997/1998 national high school championships indicates that practice has, in fact, altered considerably over the past five years. Coaches interviewed said that life in a rugby club in the 1990s was far removed from the brutal experiences that they endured as students. While it is not surprising that changes had taken place over a twenty year period the players and coaching staff suggested that there had been very significant change over the three years prior to 1997. They suggested that conditions had improved considerably for first year players over the past three to four years:

When these [third year senior high school] boys were in first year they got a pretty hard time from their seniors but its not so demanding now. You can't get away with that sort of behaviour any more, you wouldn't have any players.⁵⁶

The hegemonic form of masculinity identified in this paper has been produced and reproduced over generations of boys playing rugby in Japanese schools and universities and should be seen as the product of changing social, economic and political conditions over the past 100 years. It is a form that has undergone significant change over time yet, profoundly guided by the cultural imperative of *seishin* and linked to the culture of the pre-feudal samurai classes, has maintained its hegemony. In contemporary Japan it is, however, increasingly challenged by alternate interpretations of what it is to be a man in a rapidly changing society. Globalised and commodified forms of rugby and other sports will likely see further and very significant change in the practice of rugby within schools and universities and the form of masculinity that guides it.

Notes

- 1 D. Whitson, 'Sport and the Construction of Masculinity' in M. Messner and D. Sabo (Eds.), *Sport, men and the Gender Order*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, 1990, p. 19.
- 2 R. Connell, *Masculinities*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 80.
- 3 R. Connell, *Masculinities*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 81.

- 4 Connell,
- 5 Connell, p. 77.
- 6 A. Gramsci, *Notes From Prison Notebooks*, ED and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1971.
- 7 Connell, p. 77.
- 8 D. Whitson, 'Sport and the Social Construction of Masculinity' in M. Messner and D. Sabo (eds.) *Sport, Men and the Gender Order*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, 1990, p.19.
- 9 R. Gruneau and D. Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, Garamond Press, Toronto, 1993.
- 10 M. Messner, *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992.
- 11 H. Passin, *Society and Education in Japan*, Kodansha, Tokyo, 1980, p.62.
- 12 D. Roden, 'Baseball and the Quest for National Dignity in Meiji Japan' in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 85, no.1, Feb. 1980, pp. 511-524.
- 13 See J. Nauright and T. Chandler, *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, Cass, London, 1996.
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- 15 Roden, p. 514.
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