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Taibatsu: ‘corporal punishment’ in Japanese socio-cultural context

AARON MILLER

Abstract: This article grounds *perceptions* and *perspectives* of *taibatsu* (‘corporal punishment’) in the Japanese socio-cultural context in order to better understand why and how it is used in schools and sports. By discussing how people define *taibatsu* and the various perspectives from which they decide their definitions, this article illustrates the importance of socio-cultural context in analyzing contemporary social practices. By laying out the various perspectives held about the meaning of *taibatsu* today in relation to other important Japanese concepts, e.g. *bōryoku* (violence), *shidō* (guidance), *shitsuke* (discipline), *gyakutai* (abuse), *kibishii* (strict), *seishin* (spirit), *konjō* (guts), this article also puts forward the argument that *taibatsu* is a multi-vocal symbol.

Keywords: *taibatsu*, corporal punishment, violence, discipline, sports, multi-vocal symbol

In the early 1980s, 17-year-old Takeuchi Emi, a javelin thrower from central Japan, won her prefecture’s qualifying round and secured a chance to perform at the All-Japan Track and Field Championships. It seemed a dream come true. Before she had a chance to prove herself as Japan’s best female javelin thrower, however, Emi tragically committed suicide, leaving notes that said that *taibatsu* (‘corporal punishment’) by her coach had taken its toll. The following letter to her parents was written just before her death:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am tired. There is no escape route anymore. Why did all the other children have such an enjoyable time in the club activities while I suffered so much? I am tired of being beaten. I am tired of crying. What should I do? . . . That’s why I don’t want to be in this world anymore. I am sorry Mom and Dad. I am really tired. There is no way. I am just fed up . . . I am not that strong. . . I am sorry.

(Imabashi 1986: 34)

In this essay, I explore the various ways in which the use of *taibatsu* is perceived in Japan. Only by acknowledging the importance of the socio-cultural context, I argue, can we understand the significance of the practice, why it might be endorsed by some but also why it might drive a young athlete to take her life.

Researching *taibatsu* and ‘corporal punishment’

Research on corporal punishment worldwide is far from thin, but *taibatsu*, the closest Japanese equivalent, has rarely been examined extensively in English. Globally, some scholars say that corporal punishment is under-researched (Straus and Donnelly 2001: 7), but it has been given much more attention in recent years (e.g. Shaw and Braden 1990; Morrell 2001; Arcus 2002; David 2005). In English-language research on Japan, however, there have been brief popular accounts (Schoolland 1990; Young 1993) and short scholarly accounts (Hill 1996; Kobayashi *et al.* 1997; Yoneyama 1999; Nogami 2005; Fukuzawa 2006). In Japanese, there have been numerous scholarly accounts (Okihara 1980; Emori 1984, 1989; Morikawa 1990; Shinagawa 1990; Kumae 1991, 2006; Miyata 1994; Sakamoto 1995; Mogami 1996; Nakatani and Namimoto 1999; Terasaki 2001; Morita 2003; Imazu 2006; Takahashi and Kumeda 2008).

Meanwhile, some scholars claim that there is no debate within Japanese schools over corporal punishment, that Japan is a ‘society that has tolerated severe physical punishment and intimidation by teachers’ (Tremml 2001: 115). It is an oversimplification to conclude, however, that Japan lacks the controversy found in other countries over corporal punishment (Iwai 2008: 314). Hori argues that ‘corporal punishment and coercion were formerly part of school education in both Japan and the West but since World War II, modern Japanese schools follow Western example and actively discourage their use’ (1994: 22). This is not quite accurate, either. Many schools across Japan today do indeed discourage the use of *taibatsu*, but there are still a great number of schools where *taibatsu* is not discouraged and even some where its use is *encouraged*. In addition, when one considers the low rate of punishments for teachers and schools that use *taibatsu* – only 30 to 45 per cent are punished – one can only conclude there is much controversy over the use of *taibatsu* to which scholars such as Tremml and Hori do not give ample consideration (Kobayashi *et al.* 1997).

Taibatsu is legal in the Japanese home but *taibatsu* in schools has been prohibited continuously since 1941.¹ Much research on *taibatsu* in schools has therefore focused on why it has persisted despite a long history of legal prohibitions. Some examples include research that focuses on the need to understand *taibatsu* in a wider context (e.g. within the context of more general forms of discipline, Japanese cultural practices, goals of its usage, etc.) (Fukuzawa 1994, 2006; LeTendre 1994, 1999, 2000; Hill 1996; Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001). Understanding through contextualization is not only important for the Japanese school; Hori

(1994) shows that discipline of enlightenment-seekers in Zen training, though occasionally physical, must be understood in the context of their larger effort towards self-improvement.

Other scholars point less to understanding and more towards eradication (e.g. Schoolland 1990; Mogami 1996; Yoneyama 1999). Yoneyama (1999) notes the close link between *taibatsu* and school management which ‘silences’ students and Schoolland (1990) argues that *taibatsu* is part of a ‘dark side’ of Japanese education. On the other hand, Kuwayama (1996) says *taibatsu* is given too much attention altogether, arguing that other disciplinary measures are just as if not more prevalent.

Physical punishment in a narrow sense – though not always called *taibatsu* – has been researched in many realms of Japanese life, including the home (Wagatsuma 1981; Hendry 1986: 109ff.; Kobayashi-Winata and Power 1989; Goodman 2000, 2003; Morita 2003; Chang *et al.* 2007). Some scholars insist that the term *jidō gyakutai* (‘child abuse’) should be used in place of *taibatsu* (Kobayashi *et al.* 1997) and others assert that fathers are the main perpetrators of violence against children in the home (Giles-Sims and Lockhart 2005: 209). Hendry (1986: 109ff.) found that there were three general types of punishments used in the Japanese home when raising children: corporal punishment (*taibatsu*), isolation and exile. She explains that, though corporal punishment is ‘not often administered in public’, most of her informants ‘said that they did smack their children from time to time if they refused to listen, or if they were particularly naughty’ (1986: 109). Corporal punishment in the home can also mean pinching or ‘the well-known one which has shocked several Western writers into describing it in detail’ *moxa cautery*, ‘the burning of incense on the skin’ (Hendry 1986: 109).²

Discipline conceived in a broader sense is taken up in Kondo’s study of an ethics center, where the author finds that one of the center’s essential doctrines was ‘hardship is the gateway to happiness’ (1987: 264). Rohlen’s (1984) article on spiritual education in a Japanese bank shows that some of the ideas and techniques of socialization used on Japanese soldiers (Tsurumi 1978: 171), though not necessarily *taibatsu*, came to be used in Japanese companies as well. Many scholars have noted that *taibatsu* was widely used in the military (e.g. Tsurumi 1978; Millet and Murray 1987: 230; Drea 1998: 92; Kratoska 2006: 179; Ohnuki-Tierney 2006: 3, 5, 10, 41) and the term continues to be used in the context of the Self-Defense Forces today (*Mainichi Shinbun* 2008). *Taibatsu* was one part of the comprehensive if inconsistent attempt to socialize soldiers into the pre-war Japanese military, the others being the use of isolation and a general lack of privacy (Tsurumi 1978: 167–8). Tsurumi explains: ‘More often than not, when new recruits were hit or humiliated by their superiors, there were no reasons for the acts other than the need to drive home the necessity of unquestioning obedience’ (1978: 169).

Finally, there are myriad interpretations of *taibatsu* in sports (Kumae 1991, 2006; Ōta 2005 [2002]; *Asahi Shinbun* 2006; Nagai 2007; Takahashi and Kumeda

2008). Some Japanese scholars interpret *taibatsu* in sports in functional terms, explaining that it acts as ritual in school sports (Iwai 2008), some blame the ‘culture’ of physical educators for its persistence (Kiku 2001; Sawada 2001), while others try to absolve physical educators of blame on the grounds that they are ‘expected’ to fulfill the role of physical punisher (Morikawa 1990). Some say that *taibatsu* is relatively widespread because sports training involves physical instruction methods which can quickly lead to *taibatsu* (Takahashi and Kumeda 2008). Still others argue that *taibatsu* is merely a reflection of other problems in Japanese sports such as the overemphasis on winning and/or education (Ōta 2005 [2002]; Nagai 2007). Finally, many scholars say that corporal punishment is a violation of the human rights of student athletes (Kobayashi *et al.* 1997; Yoneyama 1999).

It is therefore clear that in Japan *taibatsu* is a multi-vocal symbol in the sense that it is ‘capable of more than one interpretation, hence becoming a possible cause of conflict, as different groups attempt to have their particular definition adopted as the standard’ (Marshall 1998). Turner argued that multi-vocal symbols have three dimensions: the *exegetic*, or the ways in which a symbol is explained by indigenous informants; the *operational*, or the ways in which participants use a symbol (this includes the ‘structure and composition of the group which . . . handles it’); and the *positional*, or the relation which the symbol has with other relevant symbols (Turner 1974: 12). Though this article touches only briefly on these dimensions, it will show that Japanese people explain *taibatsu* in numerous ways, use *taibatsu* to justify various arguments regarding philosophies of education, and that *taibatsu* cannot easily be separated for other relevant symbols. *Taibatsu* is a complex term that defies simplistic definition.

Many researchers worldwide, however, assume that all societies can be covered by a universal definition of ‘corporal punishment’. Ember and Ember write: ‘By corporal punishment of children, we mean hitting, striking, wounding, or bruising a dependent child for the purpose of punishing, disciplining, or showing disapproval’ (2005: 609) and Ripoll-Núñez and Rohner (2006: 244) argue that a universal definition is essential towards understanding corporal punishment cross-culturally. They offer the following:

[Physical punishment refers to] the direct or indirect infliction of physical discomfort or pain on a youth by a parent or other person in a position of authority over the youth, usually for the purpose of stopping a youth’s unwanted behavior, for the purpose of preventing the recurrence of an unwanted behavior, or because the youth failed to do something (s)he was supposed to do.

(Ripoll-Núñez and Rohner 2006: 241)

Definitions of corporal punishment often depend on the research discipline in which the author operates. Miethe and Lu, comparative sociologists, also argue that corporal punishment ‘involves the infliction of pain on the offender’s body’, and that ‘pain and suffering are the primary and immediate goal of

corporal punishment', but identify such examples as 'flogging, branding, stretching (racking), keel-hauling, dunking stools, electric shock, raping/sodomizing, amputations, other disfigurements/mutilations, and capital punishment' (2005: 33–4), certainly not forms education scholars find to be 'corporal punishment'. On the other hand, even within the narrow context of corporal punishment in schools, some scholars cast wide definitional nets:

Educationally, corporal punishment has been generally defined as: the infliction of pain by a teacher or other educational official upon the body of a student as a penalty for doing something which has been disapproved of by the punisher. The infliction of pain is not limited to striking a child with a paddle or the hand. Any excessive discomfort, such as forcing the child to stand for long periods of time, confining one in an uncomfortable space, or forcing a child to eat obnoxious substances, fits the description.

(Hyman and McDowell 1979: 4)

In a Japanese educational context, however, these definitions are not quite sufficient because the kinds of acts considered to be 'corporal punishment' are different and distinct. In Japanese schools and sports, *taibatsu* can mean many of these things, but it can also mean sitting in *seiza*, holding buckets of water for extended periods of time (*hōman*) or, according to one author, even attending class lessons. This author bases his claim on the grounds that students have to endure such lessons even when they do not want to (Hosaka 1986: 142). While aspirations for cross-cultural research based on universal definitions are admirable, corporal punishment cannot easily be explained in global terms. More fruitful comparison of corporal punishment can be accomplished after extensive socio-cultural contextualization.

This article begins such contextualization by reviewing numerous and diverse perspectives on *taibatsu* found in both popular and scholarly literature. This article is also based on long-term participant observation with a university basketball club and longtime residence in both rural and urban Japan, from 2002 to 2004 in Ehime Prefecture and from 2006 to 2009 in the Kanto Region. I have relied slightly more on discourse analysis because of the sensitive nature of *taibatsu* and the methodological rigor demanded by the anthropological method of participant observation. Concerned that as a foreigner broaching the subject of *taibatsu* would not guarantee the straightforward responses necessary to complete this research (not to mention my unwillingness to be a 'participant' of *taibatsu*), I sidestepped this methodological problem by consulting a nearly exhaustive amount of Japanese literature on *taibatsu*. Because the literature on *taibatsu* is generally free of the *tatemaie*³ which is commonly used by Japanese in conversations with foreigners, this methodology has assisted the acquisition of the data necessary for this research to be completed. Due to space constraints, I have here focused solely on the socio-cultural context relevant to understanding *taibatsu* today.

Socio-cultural context is essential to understanding the ways in which ‘corporal punishment’ manifests itself in various societies and may seem an obvious consideration, but there is a significant body of scholarly literature which overlooks the very meaning and usage of words purporting to describe ‘corporal punishment’ in other socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Solheim 1982; Anderson and Payne 1992). Part of the problem is methodological; comparative, cross-cultural research should always be the final aim of research on corporal punishment (or any social phenomenon for that matter), but definitions and data sets need to be checked extensively for comparability before proceeding with such comparison. Moreover, whereas most previous literature on corporal punishment has employed primarily psychological, legal and/or medical methodology with the explicit research agenda of finding ways to eradicate corporal punishment, and though these endeavors are admirable, I would join those scholars who have suggested that we need to consider definitions and the socio-cultural context more carefully when discussing corporal punishment in non-English speaking societies (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001).

The discourse on *taibatsu*

How do people talk about *taibatsu*, and from what perspectives do the words they use originate? Arguments for and against *taibatsu* today take myriad forms, as they always have (Terasaki 2001). In addition to the difficulty of establishing a universal definition of ‘corporal punishment’, one of the main points of contention in the debates over *taibatsu* is the definition of the term in Japanese itself. Goodman notes that the uncertainty surrounding the definition of ‘physical abuse’ in the late 1980s and 1990s ‘related to the fact that the use of physical force against children was described using a number of different expressions: *taibatsu* (corporal punishment), *chōkai* (disciplinary punishment), *gyakutai* (abuse) and the more general term *shitsuke* (training)’ (2000: 167).

Meanwhile, a look at what Japanese people *perceive* to be *taibatsu* reveals that there is much disagreement on definitions, and opinion surveys suggest that the types of ‘*taibatsu*’ used by educators have changed over the years. Teachers surveyed in 1986 said that *taibatsu* was ‘hitting with a rod or something like it’ (69 per cent), ‘kicking’ (63 per cent), ‘punching with the fist’ (60 per cent), ‘making a child sit in *seiza* for a long time’ (59 per cent), ‘slapping’ (54 per cent) or ‘making a child stand or sit in *seiza* for a short time’ (20 per cent) (Imabashi 1986: 213). A decade later, however, Sugiyama found the perceptions of what constituted *taibatsu* had changed: punching with the fist (42 per cent) and sitting in *seiza* (for any duration) were considered less applicable (25 per cent), while slapping was considered slightly more applicable (58 per cent) (1997: 105).

It is not just the acts that people debate; it is also the associated terms they use to describe *taibatsu*. Some Japanese student athletes refer to *taibatsu* as *bōryoku* (‘violence’). One high school baseball player described his experiences of being hit

this way: ‘There was nothing gained through that *bōryoku* and I don’t understand why I had to get hit’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006). His coach described hitting the player this way: ‘I understood that *bōryoku* is unacceptable, but when children are bad, it’s the responsibility of the teacher to stop them’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006). To many, *taibatsu* is nothing more than ‘violence’ by a teacher or coach against a student or athlete. Yoneyama and Naito therefore call for caution in translation:

The Japanese word *taibatsu*, which literally means ‘physical punishment’, is quite different from what is normally understood as corporal punishment in the West where it is expected to be used only in a highly regulated manner. *Taibatsu* is often nothing but an arbitrary use of violence by teachers.

(Yoneyama and Naito 2003: 322)

On the other hand, many people in Japan dispute the claim that *taibatsu* is *bōryoku*, and historians suggest they always have (Emori 1989; Terasaki 2001). Indeed, some athletes (and students) do not call *taibatsu* ‘violence’, and some actually come to approve of the *taibatsu* they received after the fact (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006; Sanuki 2005: 176–7). Opinion surveys corroborate these findings: in one survey, of the 80 per cent of all children who answered that they had been hit by a parent or teacher, approximately 15 per cent felt that their ‘punishment was justified because they were wrong’ and only 25 per cent ‘thought that they were scolded too harshly’ (Benesse Educational Research Center 1999, quoted in Nogami 2005: 82–3). These athletes and students do not describe *taibatsu* as *bōryoku* but rather as justified punishment, which they can understand (*nattoku dekiru*) (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006). One student reflected on his experiences with *taibatsu* and said the following:

I have never looked back on my times receiving *taibatsu* – which were many – and thought that I should not have been hit. This is because my teacher loved me. He didn’t just get mad. We both understood the meaning of *ai no muchi* (‘the whip of love’). . . . He wanted us to ‘grow up to be good people’, and he communicated that message well. . . . Thanks to *taibatsu*, I didn’t go down the wrong path.

(Sanuki 2005: 176)

As Yoneyama and Naito note, some believe that *taibatsu* is distinct from corporal punishment in that it is arbitrarily administered, and for this reason some informants say that the difference between the two is a matter of emotion. Sanuki argues that *taibatsu* in Japanese schools differs from corporal punishment in English schools, up until its banning in public schools in 1986 and private schools in 1999, in that in the latter it was administered using an ‘objective’, five-tier system which helped keep the punishments ‘fair’ (2005: 182). On the other hand, in Japan most cases of *taibatsu* are due to a teacher simply getting angry and hitting a child out of emotion. Sanuki calls this the ‘subjectivity of *taibatsu*’ (*taibatsu no shukansei*) and argues that in such a ‘subjective system’, a student who is hit by a

teacher will think that he has upset that specific teacher, not that he has broken a school rule which will *always* be punished in the same way. As a result students will come to learn that ‘*taibatsu* functions to form a submissive personality which never complains and always follows the existing order’ (Sanuki 2005: 183; see also Imazu 2006).

Of course, there are other Japanese scholars who do not use the terms *taibatsu* and *bōryoku* interchangeably (e.g. Miyata 1994: 219; Mogami 1996: 147). Whether one should distinguish between the two is up for debate, but what is clear is that *bōryoku*, when used to describe *taibatsu*, is a term most often used by people intent on denigrating the practice as arbitrary, emotional and unjustified.

Shidō is a common response to the assertion that *taibatsu* is ‘violence’, a term which is used to justify the use of *taibatsu*. Dictionaries and scholars translate it as ‘guidance’, ‘leadership’, ‘coaching’ or ‘instruction’. LeTendre explains that ‘the word *shidō* is composed of Chinese ideographs that mean ‘to point out the path’ (1994: 38, n2) and that *shidō* constitutes ‘an institution that forms a core of activities and expectations for what goes on in secondary schools’ (1994: 38). McVeigh adds that ‘the most common word encountered in official discourse of [moral education] is “guidance” (*shidō*) though it often denotes more of a sense of actively directing or strongly persuading others’ (McVeigh 1998: 127). In some cases *shidō* is the term which best exemplifies a teacher’s or coach’s perspective on the use of *taibatsu* (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006). One high school baseball coach, justifying the use of *taibatsu*, said: ‘I knew that violence was wrong but in order to coach, I thought that a little *taibatsu* necessary. I knew I couldn’t be violent, but to instruct (*shidō*) I felt it was necessary to use *taibatsu*’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006).

Scholars indicate that there is an internal logic among Japanese teachers which links *shidō* to *taibatsu*. Kobayashi *et al.* (1997) argue that because ‘teachers in general still depend on corporal punishment to solve difficult guidance problems . . . it is very difficult to eradicate *taibatsu*’ (see also Rohlen 1983: 196; Nakano 1990; Morita 2003; Nogami 2005; Takahashi and Kumeda 2008). Satō adds that *taibatsu* will never fully be eradicated because it ‘always comes out as the “last instructional resort” [*kyūkyoku no shidō*], when teachers, no matter how hard they instruct [*isshōkenmei shidō suru keredo*], cannot connect with the students’ (1999: 162). *Shidō* is therefore one response offered by educators against claims that the physical punishment they employ is nothing more than *bōryoku*.

Shitsuke is another, the closest equivalent in Japanese to ‘discipline’ (a.k.a. *chōkai*). *Shitsuke* means ‘discipline’, ‘training’ or ‘breeding’ (Hendry 1986; McVeigh 1998; Goodman 2000), in the sense that an adult ‘disciplines’ a child, and the Chinese ideography which represents *shitsuke* literally means ‘beautifying the body’ (Morita 2003: 14). Dictionary definitions in Japanese also ‘include the idea of the inculcation of good manners in a child, the passing on of daily customs and the teaching of correct behavior’ (Hendry 1986: 11). Hendry adds that folklore definitions include the idea that *shitsuke* implies the ‘putting into the body

of a child the arts of living and good manners in order to create one grown-up person' (1986: 11).

The concept of *shitsuke* may be broader than its Western counterparts in the sense that the body and training itself are ultimately linked in Japan (Hendry 1986: 12). Hendry explains that as 'oriental culture generally opposes this Cartesian opposition' (1986: 12) of a separation between mind and body, Japan has in many realms connected the training of the body with the training of the mind. Indeed, Professor Sogawa Tsuneo asserts that the real purpose of *taibatsu*, though literally and superficially a punishment of the body, is actually for the purpose of punishing the *kokoro* ('mind'), an idea he terms '*shinbatsu*' (pers. comm. September 2007). This also makes sense given the Japanese expression *shinshin ichinyo* ('mind and body as one') (Emori 1989: 16–7).

Who disciplines and how

Perhaps because of the widespread belief that teachers ought to provide such 'guidance' and 'discipline' and because schools in Japan have an explicit moral education curriculum, they are often expected to instill values in their charges, and the role of disciplinarian is seen to be part of their job description (Kobayashi *et al.* 1997). Japanese teachers have historically been entrusted with the duty of being disciplinarians, but not without some conflict. Hill points out that this role sharing often works nicely – parents indulging children in the home and teachers disciplining them at school – but there are times that teachers would like some help: 'several Japanese teachers have complained to me that they are pressured to be *kibishii* [strict] by parents who are themselves indulgent' (1996: 105). This relationship was nothing new; Rohlen had written ten years earlier that 'parents typically look to the teacher for the discipline that they feel their affection for their children prevents them from exercising fully' (1983: 196–7). More recently, Ban (2005) came to a similar conclusion, arguing that teachers play a major role in the disciplining of children because Japanese schools more explicitly prepare students to conform to roles they will later be expected to play in Japanese society.

The teacher's perceived role as disciplinarian seems especially pronounced in Japanese middle schools. Kuwayama contrasts this with the United States:

Unlike Americans, who are generally disciplined strictly in childhood, but who are allowed more and more freedom as they grow older, the Japanese are pampered in childhood and leave behind them all the innocent days upon entering middle school.

(Kuwayama 1996: 129)

Indeed, it is clear that there is a strong perception that the middle school's disciplinary response is harsher than that of Japanese parents, that the 'Japanese tend to believe that parents are too easy on their children but that schools have the

moral authority and resolve to properly punished a delinquent child' (Hill 1996: 103).

On the other hand, while many scholars of Japanese education agree that discipline and punishment often are harsher at middle school by teachers rather than at home by parents, some believe that at the level of early socialization, teachers often take a hands-off approach and allow children to regulate each other. Kelly relates that, at this educational stage, 'teachers do not abdicate authority; they simply keep a low profile, avoid setting firm guidelines, but maintain a constant, unobtrusive presence' (1991: 409).

Other scholars believe peer control constitutes a form of discipline even in middle schools (Fukuzawa 2006: 14). My own fieldwork experiences with a university basketball team confirm that peer control acts as an important means of discipline. One day before an intra-squad practice game, in which female basketball teammates were asked to compete against each other to hone their skills in preparation for a 'real' game, a coach told the team's starting members (called the 'first team') that because they had been losing to the 'second team', they needed to make their own game plans. The first team huddled together, discussed strategy quietly and decided to 'keep the second team under thirteen points in the next ten minutes of play'. Waiting for the second team to finish their meeting, the first team players soon fell silent. In response to the silence, one of the third-year players said that the under-class-women looked 'dark' (*kurai*). All of a sudden another upper-class-woman slapped one of the underclasswomen on the left shoulder, and in its wake came an echo of nervous giggles and a chorus of 'Ouch!' (*itai*) from other players, team managers and team trainers. Only the team's coaches made no reaction, and practice continued as usual. Discipline therefore comes from many actors (peers, parents and various educators), depending on the situation and/or context. What remains uncertain is whether parents continue to expect and/or tolerate teachers and coaches to discipline their children physically as they once did.

If the actors playing the role of disciplinarian are always changing, so are the ways in which adults discipline children. As mentioned above, some surveys suggest that 80 per cent of all children receive *taibatsu* in the home (Benesse Educational Research Center 1999). On the other hand, Lanham, in her research on Japanese child-rearing, concluded thirty years ago that there is:

a strong Japanese emphasis on getting the child to understand; i.e., having him want of his own volition to do that which is acceptable and proper. Force is rarely used. When the child resists, parental response is more like the way an American relates to another adult rather than to his or her child.

(Lanham 1979: 14)

Hendry also came to similar conclusions, noting that 'punishments are avoided where possible' (1995: 45). If the use of punishments is necessary in the home at all:

they are often associated with the outside world (*soto*), rather than with members of the inside of the home (*uchi*). Thus threats may be made about demons, policemen and passing strangers, and a severe punishment is to put a child out of the house altogether.

(Hendry 1995: 45, see also 1986: 109ff)

If parents are generally wary of disciplining their own children, would rather leave the major efforts of discipline and punishment to school teachers, associate punishments as part of the outside world and consider banishment more effective than *taibatsu*, what kind of discipline are they providing? Do they 'discipline' through praise more than through criticism?

Interestingly, this does not seem to be the case. Hendry notes that mothers rarely use praise in child-rearing, 'nor is praise mentioned very much in the manuals as an important aspect of training' (1986: 106). She suggests that praise, if used at all, is probably likely to come from outside the family, or from someone in a position of some distance from the *uchi* ('inside') group. My fieldwork suggests similar conclusions: coaches, despite pursuing a 'progressive' coaching agenda (in terms of using the latest in coaching philosophy, tactics and strategy, much of which is borrowed from coaches in the United States), rarely praise the players. On the other hand, the fans (parents, 'old boys' and 'old girls') often praise players, though some of the more serious old boys perceive their role as similar to that of the coach – to correct and criticize players so they do not make the same mistake twice.⁴

Though it is certainly not always the case, there seems to be a perception in Japan that parents, teachers and coaches should use criticism more than praise when educating children. This conclusion is supported by various research projects (e.g. Benesse Educational Research Center 1998; Kobayashi-Winata and Power 1989). Ban found that 'Japanese teachers scold rather than praise children' (1995) and LeTendre (1999: 41) reports that there is often no need for rewards in Japanese education. In schools, scholars explain, Japanese parents want teachers to 'realistically strengthen students, not shelter them, in anticipation of the future tasks that students will face' (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001: 93) and in the process such teachers probably feel an obligation to criticize or scold more than to praise.

Such criticism seems part of a broader project to get a child to understand what they have done wrong so they can make sure they do not repeat the mistake again. In her middle-school fieldwork Fukuzawa found that 'punishment consisted of [teachers] lecturing students until they "understood"... Discipline consisted of students' recognition of the error of their ways, sincere repentance, and resolve not to repeat the problem behavior again' (1994: 78). She adds that discipline is 'personal' as teachers try to establish a caring relationship with their charges, that discipline is 'psychological' in that teachers ask that 'students reflect on their misdeeds until they "understand"' and that 'discipline reaches into the home:

lifestyle management is more penetrating than physical punishment and makes it possible to supervise home life' (1994: 83–4). *Taibatsu* is therefore merely one of many forms of discipline, but it seems clear that there is a general tendency among Japanese educators to use criticism to ensure that a child both understands their mistake and will not make the same mistake again.

Meanwhile, one of the most powerful ways Japanese educators 'discipline' is through the ritualization of certain behavior. One of these rituals is cleaning, 'forced' labor (which some informants actually say they 'enjoy') whose disciplinary effectiveness is often perceived to be greater than either praise or criticism. According to many scholars, discipline through cleaning is about ritualizing daily habits more than it is used as an overt punishment. In this way cleaning can perhaps be viewed as a kind of 'preventative maintenance', whereas *taibatsu* may be viewed as a 'cure' for 'bad behavior'. Informants and scholars agree that cleaning in Japan is perceived to be a way to clean one's surroundings as well as one's 'mind' (*kokoro*), especially in sports. As janitors are rarely hired in Japan, classrooms, sports fields and gymnasiums are often cleaned by students and athletes, thus reproducing a desire to keep one's work space clean and a sense of respect for both people and place (Blackwood 2005: 137). Kuwayama reaches a similar conclusion at *gasshuku* ('training camps'), where cleaning, *hansei-kai* ('meetings for reflection'), sleeping and keeping to the general schedule of the day are all means by which Japanese students are morally 'disciplined'. He writes: 'cleaning is essential to Japanese discipline, not because the Japanese are obsessed with cleanliness, but because *darashinai* ('being untidy') is a sign of moral degeneration' (Kuwayama 1996: 121).

Moreover, whereas cleaning might be rewarded with something 'fun' in schools elsewhere, scholars say there is no need for rewards in Japanese education, and in turn the Japanese school gets cleaned without the promise of something else to follow (LeTendre 1999: 41). Based on a belief that being a self-disciplined adult comes from properly managing one's life and environment, cleaning can therefore be seen as a daily ritual better capable of routinizing behavior than any amount of praise or criticism. *Shitsuke*, meanwhile, is part of an agenda of moral education that is accepted in Japanese schools with relatively little dissent. It is also part of a general belief that students and young athletes should be criticized more than praised so that they will understand what they have done wrong and ensure that they will not do it again.

Discipline in Japan is further complicated when it goes too far. In such circumstances, some use the term *gyakutai* ('abuse') to describe the injustice (Morita 2003). *Gyakutai* is an increasingly common response to the assertion that *taibatsu* was done for *shitsuke* or *shidō*, a word used by anti-*taibatsu* advocates to emphasize the cruelty of the 'educational' practice. Though *gyakutai* has hitherto been used primarily to describe a parent or relative 'abusing' offspring in the home, it is a term increasingly being seen in the school context.

Then again, many non-Japanese are surprised to learn that some parents condone teachers or coaches hitting their children. The number of parents willing to transfer the 'right to discipline' (*chōkaiken*) to a teacher (referred to in English as being *in loco parentis*, a.k.a. *oya no kawari* in Japanese (Sugiyama 1997: 199)) is higher than many non-Japanese observers expect; according to one survey, only 25.6 per cent of respondents said corporal punishment should never be administered by a teacher (Goodman 2003: 137).

Perhaps as a result, the point at which *taibatsu* stops being for *shitsuke* or *shidō* and becomes *gyakutai* (or *bōryoku*) is often subjective, contingent on context and situation and is said to depend on the intentions and emotional level of the educator. Some maintain that an act of *taibatsu* becomes *gyakutai* when a teacher loses control and stops using *taibatsu* for the sake of the child but instead to satisfy his own will to power (Imabashi 1986: 2; Shinagawa 1990: 75). Some claim *taibatsu* is an example of 'abuse' not only of the child but of the position of actual and symbolic power guaranteed to a teacher/coach by a society like Japan, which is known to respect its teachers (Saitō 1990: 196). Finally, others believe that when teachers use *taibatsu* it is part of a post-war education system marked by extensive and excessive power of teachers over students.⁵

Meanwhile, in a still comparatively hierarchal society like Japan (though there are signs that this hierarchy is breaking down somewhat), submission to the 'power' of physical punishment may be viewed as a type of 'power' (or at least maturity) in and of itself. In other words, it is difficult to *always* describe *taibatsu* from a senior (teacher or coach) to a junior (student or player) as the exploitation of their position of power. A student or athlete who bears the punishment may be considered stronger and thus more 'powerful' than a player who does not (indeed it is often team captains who are the recipients of *taibatsu*). Players may justify their coach's use of *taibatsu* as 'educational' or with the expression *ai no muchi* ('the whip of love')⁶ and in so doing prove they do not feel they are the 'victims' of an exploitation of power (Shinagawa 1990; *Asahi Shinbun* 2006). In this sense, in some circumstances power can be viewed ecologically and non-linearly: a coach's 'dominance' and an athlete's 'submission' as part and parcel of each other. Through the 'shared' pain of punishment, both teacher and pupil 'grow' (this interpretation is less convincing in cases of 'extreme' *taibatsu*). At any rate, there may be a need for a new, more nuanced definition of what 'power' and 'submission to power' mean in the Japanese socio-cultural context.

***Taibatsu*, discipline and sports**

In sports, where 'power' and victory are often emphasized above all else, some informants explain *taibatsu* in the context of an 'old', *kibishii* ('strict') style of teaching sport, but explain that in hindsight they can understand why their coach had hit them.⁷ As with the nuances that terms such as *taibatsu*, *shitsuke* and power

have in the Japanese context, the term *kibishii* should not be associated with the negative connotations that its English translation, ‘strict’, may carry. One assistant coach (of a basketball team for which she once played) told me in an interview that she was hit by her ‘*kibishii*’ coach during university. She said her coach instructed in an ‘old’ (*mukashinagara*) way:

He always glared at us when we made mistakes, though he said nothing. When he did speak, he said things that didn’t really make sense. He had been a good player but all he would tell us was ‘Run and shoot! Don’t wait! Just shoot if you are open!’ Nowadays coaches have game plans and strategy but this coach never did. . . . He just wanted us to understand our place in society. That’s probably why he hit us – to teach a lesson. Looking back I understand that now, though I didn’t at the time.

Indeed, some coaches, especially in the past, have used terms like *konjō* (‘fighting spirit’, ‘guts’, ‘willpower’) and *seishin* (‘spirit’) to justify using *taibatsu*, and such coaches are often described by players, parents and coaches themselves as being *kibishii* (‘strict’) (Moeran 1989; Kumae 1991; Kelly 1998; *Asahi Shinbun* 2006). *Konjō* was and in many places still is a pervasive term in the Japanese sports context, but it is not without its critics (e.g. Kelly 1998; Otomo 2007).⁸ Historically, two coaching ideologues have had a particularly significant impact on the continuing discourses of *konjō* and *seishin*: Tobita Suishū and Daimatsu Hirofumi. Tobita, a baseball coach at Waseda University, argued for a link between education and sport and believed that baseball coaches should inculcate the values of the samurai. In the 1910s and 1920s, the so-called ‘God of Baseball’ promoted the idea of *konjō* in baseball. Tobita ‘demanded that his players demonstrate moral commitment through absolute loyalty to the manager and total devotion to the sport’, and though Tobita did not invent the term *konjō*, it would be hard to discount the lasting influence that the term, its corresponding ideas and Tobita himself have had on coaching ideology in Japan (Kelly 2000: 104–5). Daimatsu was also famous for invoking *konjō* as a women’s volleyball coach. In preparation for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, Daimatsu led the Japanese Women’s National Team, the so-called ‘Witches of the East’ (*tōyō no majo*), to an improbable gold medal. Otomo (2007: 119–20) shows that with the victory *konjō* became solidified as the dominant postwar narrative of hard work in sports. Old ideas die hard; *konjō* continues to be perceived as important in some sports contexts. In the summer of 2006, a women’s basketball coach in Shikoku made his junior high school team ‘run naked on three occasions’, and his justification for doing so was that it was to ‘infuse fighting spirit (*konjō*)’ (*Japan Times* 2005, emphasis added).

Konjō is a term often heard in the same contexts as *seishin*, an even more persistent and influential term in the Japanese educational context. *Seishin* has been researched in many areas of sports, e.g. rugby (Light 1999), rowing (McDonald and Hallinan 2005) and high school baseball (Esashi and Komuku 1994), and even in

the training of bank employees (Rohlen 1984). Though *seishin* was looked down upon after the Second World War because head soldiers used to give ‘spiritual education’ to new army recruits during the war (such ‘education’ often included the use of *taibatsu* (Tsurumi 1978: 171)), Moeran (1989: 402–3) highlights sports, especially high school baseball, as a realm in which *seishin* has re-emerged.

Indeed, *seishin* is often invoked by coaches to justify their use of *taibatsu* (*Asahi Shinbun* 2006) and some scholars believe that *seishin* is an inviolable concept, which not only makes Japan unique but is also the main goal of the punishment of the Japanese body. Emori concludes that ‘the philosophical traditions of the West are fundamentally different from those of Japan’ and that what is considered ‘true education’ (*honrai kyōiku*) in Japan was never included in ‘the Western philosophical tradition which thought that the spirit [*seishin*] was independent of the body [*shintai*]’. The ‘honorable spirit [*renchi no seishin*] produced by *bushidō* is deeply related’ to this synthetic philosophical tradition. He concludes that there is an ‘emphasis on the emotions’ in Japan which is ‘an essential factor controlling education’ and the use of *taibatsu* (1984: 21–2). Could it be that *taibatsu* in Japan is a symbolic manifestation of such a ‘culturally unique’ Japanese pedagogy, which punishes the body in order to strengthen the spirit, infuse fighting spirit and the emotions?

Even if such pedagogy could be called ‘culturally unique’, there is evidence that suggests that an emphasis on *konjō* (*‘konjōshugi’*) may be dying out (Otomo 2007). In her article comparing the narratives of *konjō* in Olympic coverage by Mishima Yukio and Murakami Haruki, Otomo argues that in Murakami’s writings (2004: 24–5) one can see a denial of the *konjōshugi* that Mishima lauded at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. At my university field site, neither *konjō* nor *seishin* nor *taibatsu* is regularly emphasized or used and none of them seems to be perceived to be as important as learning the fundamental techniques of basketball, learning to think for oneself as a player and a person and the development of ‘mental toughness’ (*mentaru tafunesu*) which can withstand any pressure or challenge. Though the punishment of the body was, and in many educational contexts still is, seen as a way of strengthening the spirit, mind and the will, there are concerted efforts being made by coaches, teachers and parents across Japan to find alternative means toward accomplishing those goals.⁹

The debate over the pedagogical values of praise and discipline and the discourse of *konjō* and *seishin* are part of a larger ongoing debate in sports education over how coaches should educate athletes. Today, the authoritarian, ‘Shut up and follow me!’ (*damatte, ore ni tsuite koi*) coaching style of Tobita and Daimatsu, which emphasized an ideology of ‘hard training’, selflessness and extreme devotion to the team and dominated Japan during its resurgence following the Second World War (Igarashi 2000; Otomo 2007), is in many places giving way to and being challenged by ‘scientific’ coaching methods which emphasize the teaching of skills (*gijutsu*), reliance on self-discipline and a ‘thinking’ approach to sports.¹⁰ This trend is strongest at the university and professional level rather than the

school level. One university basketball coach explained to me in an interview the dilemma he faced trying to discipline his students in this changing environment:

The players don't understand what I am saying because at every level they have played basketball – mini-basketball, middle school basketball and high school basketball – they have always had coaches who have just told them what to do. I tell them, 'Think! Think!', but they don't know how to respond. When they screw up, it would be better if I just hit them. They would understand that better. But that would be *taibatsu* and I am not that kind of coach. My job is to teach them the skills of basketball, but sometimes I don't think they understand what I am saying. I wonder if I am coaching in the right way.

In some ways, it seems that the dominant coaching style of postwar Japan created by ideologues such as Tobita and Daimatsu has had the unintended consequence of making players so reliant on coaches that they have forgotten how to discipline themselves.

***Taibatsu* as multi-vocal symbol**

Who should discipline? How should they discipline? *Taibatsu* is a term that elicits these questions. It also reveals perhaps inevitably conflicting responses. To some *taibatsu* is a manifestation of *konjōshugi* or an example of a coach instilling *seishin* in a player. To others, a *kibishii* way of educating is effective and justified, while opponents say *kibishii* training need not include *taibatsu*. To some, *taibatsu* is necessary for *shitsuke*, while to some *taibatsu* is considered the fulfillment of a duty to *shidō*. In other contexts, *taibatsu* is nothing more than *bōryoku*, *gyakutai* or an abuse of power. There is virtually no limit to the way people define, perceive and interpret *taibatsu*.

The definition of *taibatsu* is thus continuously being challenged, redefined and reinterpreted. Cultural explanations of a 'unique' Japanese pedagogy of discipline do not sufficiently describe why *taibatsu* happens and/or why there are movements today to rid Japan of it. One can therefore understand discipline and punishment in Japan only in the specific social, cultural or historical contexts in which it is talked about or used. The impetus for *taibatsu* depends greatly on the time/place at which it occurs – elementary school, middle school, high school, university, sports or the home – and the subjectivity of each individual incident and the contingency of each individual's opinions clearly demands only one justifiable conclusion: that *taibatsu* is a multi-vocal symbol.

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Notes

1. Though *taibatsu* was initially banned in Japanese schools in 1879, the prohibition was repealed (1885), reinstated (1890), repealed (1900) and then reinstated again (1941). Then, following the end of the Second World War, *taibatsu* was again officially prohibited by Article 11 of the Fundamental Education Law (*gakko kyōikuhō dai 11 jō*) (Kobayashi *et al.* 1997; Terasaki 2001).
2. Hendry also puts these corporal punishments in the home into a broader context of punishments as the child grows older, and finds that ‘as a child matures, disciplinary measures tend increasingly away from physical punishment and more towards censure designed to make the child feel ashamed’ (1986: 115).
3. *Tatema* refers to ceremonial language which is used to appease, please or placate a listener more than it is about striving for an ‘honest’ expression of one’s own ideas through words. It is often contrasted with *honne*, or one’s true feelings or beliefs. In other words, though Japanese people often say the minimum amount necessary for an anthropologist to stop asking them questions, scholars can hear the many voices speaking ‘honestly’ about *taibatsu* in the wide range of publications available on the subject.
4. Hendry also notes that this theory of inside critique and outside praise ‘would fit in with the general practice in polite language of humbling oneself and one’s family in conversation with others, to whom one accords deferential phrases of respect’ (Hendry 1986: 107).
5. Yoneyama (1999) claims that the Japanese school is all-encompassing, and her theory regarding discipline in Japan is that it represents a systemic problem not merely the aberrant uses of *taibatsu*. In the United States, Bogacki argues similarly that ‘attitudes toward corporal punishment are related to the ideology of school personnel regarding control of students’ (1981: 69).
6. LeTendre shows that some teachers perceive disruptive students as lacking ‘parental love’ (*aijō*), and this may explain why some of them justify their use of *taibatsu* with the expression ‘*ai no muchū*’ (2000: 177).
7. Many informants say that parents often ask teachers and coaches to ‘please teach my son/daughter strictly’ (*kibishiku shite kudasai*), showing that the term *kibishii* does not always have a negative connotation in Japanese. One informant related that the reason for such ‘strictness’ (*kibishisa*) was that ‘it is essential for a child to learn how to respond to social expectations and be successful within the Japanese group’.
8. Kelly argues that *konjō* supplies a ‘powerful rhetoric for reifying intersocietal differences’ and Otomo argues that it was the dominant but not necessarily desirable discourse of postwar Japanese sports.
9. In Tachikawa, the local government started a program in which ‘teachers take on roles of either inflicter or victim’ of *taibatsu* as a measure to wean teachers off it (Nemoto 1999: 81), and Morita Yuri has started a similar private program in the Kansai region (pers. comm. 15 July 2007).

10. This debate was common in discussions of 'formal' education as well, where a pedagogy of harsh discipline associated with 'managed education' (*kanri kyōiku*) and strict school rules gained ground in the 1980s in response to violence by students against each other and against teachers (*kōnai bōryoku*) (Kakinuma and Nagano 1997; Miyata 1994: 219; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999; Yoneyama 1999). Within this context, *taibatsu* was often seen as a cure for an increasingly 'wild' Japanese school.

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