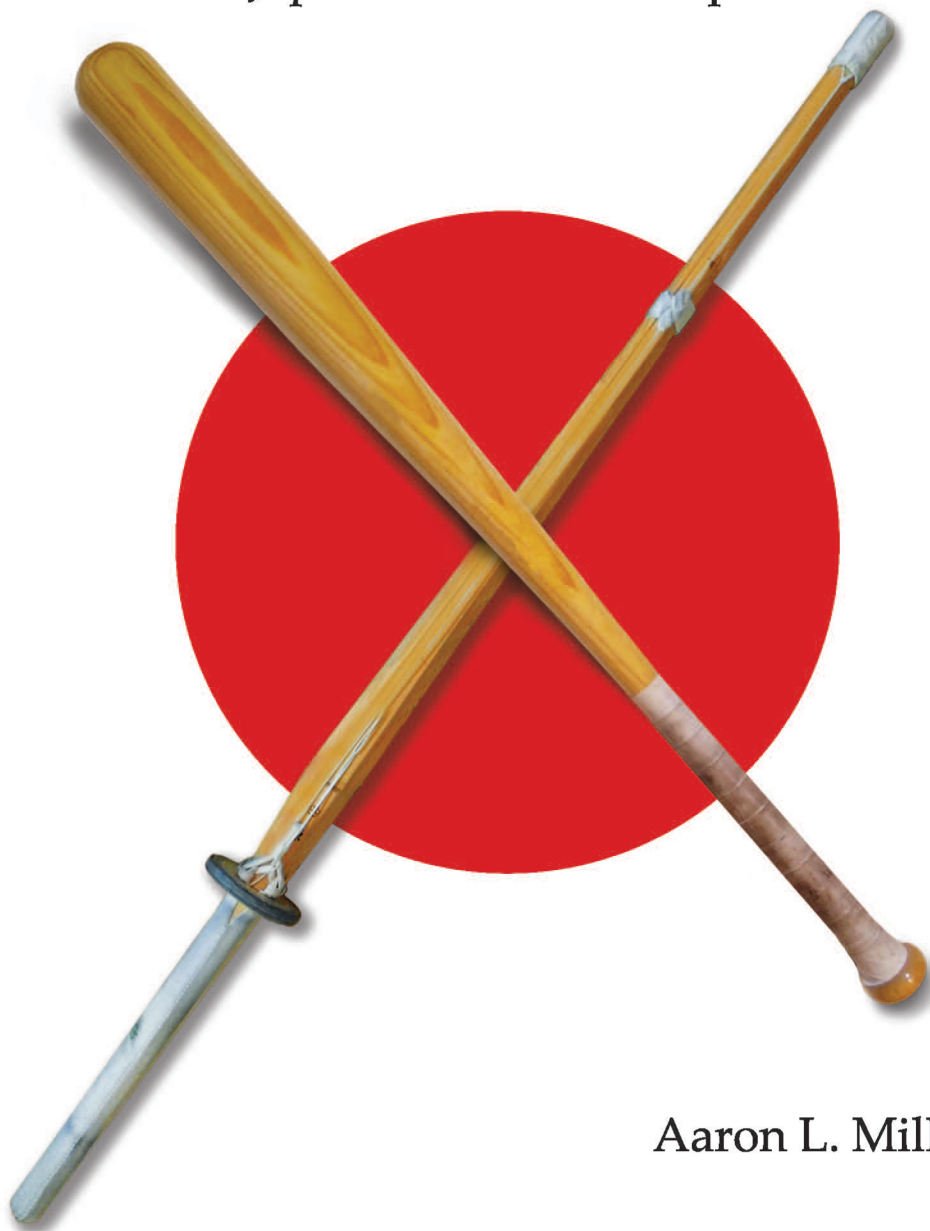


Discourses of Discipline

An Anthropology of Corporal Punishment
in Japan's Schools and Sports



Aaron L. Miller

JAPAN RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 17

Notes to this edition

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Japanese Research Monograph 17

*Discourses of Discipline: An Anthropology of Corporal Punishment
in Japan's Schools and Sports*

Aaron L. Miller

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-161-5 (electronic)

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-105-9 (print)

ISBN-10: 1-55729-105-5 (print)

Please visit the IEAS Publications website at
<http://ieas.berkeley.edu/publications/>
for more information and to see our catalogue.

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**Institute of
East Asian Studies**
University of California, Berkeley

May 2015

JAPAN RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 17

CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES

Discourses of Discipline

An Anthropology of Corporal Punishment in Japan's Schools and Sports

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**Institute of
East Asian Studies**
University of California, Berkeley

A publication of the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Although the institute is responsible for the selection and acceptance of manuscripts in this series, responsibility for the opinions expressed and for the accuracy of statements rests with their authors.

The Japan Research Monograph series is one of the several publications series sponsored by the Institute of East Asian Studies in conjunction with its constituent units. The others include the China Research Monograph series, the Korea Research Monograph series, and the Research Papers and Policy Studies series.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Miller, Aaron L. (Aaron Levi), 1980– author.

Discourses of discipline : an anthropology of corporal punishment in Japan's schools and sports / Aaron L. Miller.

pages cm. — (Japan research monograph ; 17)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-55729-105-9

ISBN-10: 1-55729-105-5 (alk. paper)

1. Corporal punishment of children—Japan. 2. Rewards and punishments in education—Japan. 3. School discipline—Japan. 4. School children—Abuse of—Japan. 5. Child athletes—Abuse of—Japan. I. Title.

LB3025.M46 2013

371.5'4—dc23

2013001591

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Cover design: James Wildman

For my parents

When society is orderly, a fool alone cannot disturb it;
when society is chaotic, a sage alone cannot bring it order.

—Proverb from the *Huainanzi*, an early Taoist classic

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Acknowledgments

Ultimately, all scholarship is collective, the modest product of grand philosophical influence, selfless mentorship, generous collegial support, and candid informants. This work is certainly no different; to only a minor degree is it the result of individual epiphany.

The idea for this research project first crystallized at Oxford, in the summer of 2006, under the exceptional tutelage of Nissan Institute Professor of Modern Japanese Studies and Head of Social Sciences, Roger Goodman. Here I express my warmest gratitude to Professor Goodman for guiding me through my graduate work in the study of anthropology, education, sports, and Japan. I could have had no better doctoral supervisor. Professor Kariya Takehiko also played a tremendously instrumental role in my intellectual development, serving as a most hospitable host at the University of Tokyo, where the fieldwork portion of this study was undertaken. More importantly, though, I must thank Professor Kariya for taking a personal as well as professional interest in my work, and giving me the chance I needed to develop it.

Professors William Kelly and Sogawa Tsuneo have left major impacts on my research, as any careful reader will note, and Professors Ellis Krauss, David Blake Willis, and Jeremy Rappleye have been wonderful friends and mentors throughout the early years of my academic career. I also wish to thank Professor William Damon of Stanford's Center on Adolescence, who has graciously encouraged me to broaden my research focus beyond Japan. Professor Damon's unparalleled generosity has given me the opportunity to not only finish this book, but also to start my next one. For an "egg of a scholar" (*gakusha no tamago*) like myself, nothing could be more important. Among many other colleagues and mentors, Professors Nathan Badenoch, Marcus Banks, Robert Barnes, Thomas Blackwood, Christopher Bjork, Christoph Brumann, Simon Creak, Silvia Croydon, Martin

Dusinberre, Elise Edwards, Elizabeth Ewart, Glenn Hook, Horiguchi Sachiko, Imoto Yuki, Inagaki Kyoko, Victor Kobayashi, Konishi Sho, Sophia Lee, Sarah Moskovitz, Mark Rebick, Mike Singer, Patricia Steinhoff, Tanaka Koji, Tuukka Toivonen, Ann Waswo, Dan White, and colleagues on Kyoto University's Hakubi Project have all guided me along the path that must be walked to make sense of one's most complicated thoughts.

These mentors, colleagues, and friends have helped shape the overarching ideas that guide my research, but special thanks must also be given to those who helped shape this book in particular. My sincerest appreciation goes to Professors Stephen Carney and Jeremy Rappleye, Nakajima Mizuki, and the anonymous reviewers at the Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS), University of California, Berkeley, for carefully considering early, middle, and late-stage drafts, and also for making eminently constructive suggestions toward their improvement. Suzanne Zaretsky's help with the index was also invaluable, although it was no doubt torturous work for her.

An exceptional group of Japanese sports researchers helped me map out the ideas for this book project as well as fill that map in. I wish to especially acknowledge Demachi Ichiro, Ikegami Tsuyoshi, Nakazawa Atsushi, Sawai Kazuhiko, Shinta Sasao, Suzuki Naofumi, Takahashi Yoshio, Tsukahara Fumio and Yokota Masatoshi, for all of these scholars have helped me consider corporal punishment and Japanese culture in new and enlightening ways. Many of them also helped track down elusive bibliographic references in Japanese, which any non-native Japanese studies specialist knows is truly yeomen's work. I must also mention Professor Okamoto Kaoru of Japan's National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, who helped me make contact with relevant bureaucrats at Japan's Ministry of Education. Last, but certainly not least, I would never have been able to read or understand, let alone translate, the vast Japanese literature on corporal punishment without the incomparable language education provided by the instructors of Stanford University's Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies in Yokohama, Japan; to all of them, but especially to Aoki-sensei, Sato-sensei and Akizawa-sensei, I offer a humble bow and, "*Arigato gozaimasu!*", perfectly enunciated, I hope.

My close friend and artist James Wildman designed the marvelous book cover, and David Nakanishi of the San Francisco Kendo Dojo kindly allowed the use of his personal *shinai* to grace it. Kate Chouta and Keila Diehl of IEAS shepherded the publication of this project through its many peripatetic stages, with outstanding professionalism and patience, and Erin Martineau's editing expertise worked wonders for my writing. I very much appreciate all of your hard work.

Among the many friends around the world who have supported me throughout the years it took me to write this book, I must single out Thabit Al-Murani and Kate Hibbs, Bud Anderson, Shilpa Thanawala, Talia Andrei and Matt Presseau, Jihan Bowes-Little, Burt and Amy Coombe, Mike and Anna Downing, Tommy Duncan, Will Feldman, Verity Fitzsimmons, the Futagamis, Sean Greenwood, Scott Henderson, Nadia Kanagawa, Kashmali Khan, Komori Yusuke, Martha Anne Leche, Namiko Kunitomo, Haku Li, the Medevoys, Steve Miller, Obayashi Mika, Rhys and Bethan Parsons, Kyle Peacock, Tzveta Pokrovska, Nate Pollak, Nicole Quinton, Andrew and Marian Pomerantz, Eric and Sara Rotner, Tony and Vanessa Rusca, the Sasaki, the Singers, and Jeff Vahid-Tari. I thank each and every one of them for taking time out of their busy lives to help me to improve my work and, often more importantly, to forget about it. Finally, these pages would still be blank if not for the unconditional love and limitless support of my loving family. Thank you all very much.

Introduction

"Corporal punishment is education."

—Totsuka Hiroshi

Three Stories of *Taibatsu*

In the early 1980s, a seventeen-year-old javelin thrower named Takeuchi Emi took first place in a regional track and field tournament in central Japan, thereby securing herself a berth at the All-Japan High School Championships. It seemed a dream come true.

But before Emi could become Japan's best javelin thrower she tragically committed suicide, leaving notes that indicated that persistent "corporal punishment" (*taibatsu*) by her coach had taken its toll. She wrote the following letter to her parents just before her death:

Dear Mom and Dad, I am tired. There is no escape route anymore. Why did all the other children have so much fun in our club activities, while I suffered so much? I am tired of being beaten. I am tired of crying. What else should I do? That is why I don't want to be in this world anymore. I am sorry. I am really tired. There is no way out. I am really fed up . . . I am not that strong . . . I am sorry. (quoted in Imabashi 1986, 34)

According to news reports, Emi's coach, once a well-known track and field athlete in his own right, had slapped her face to the "point that it became red," made her sit on her knees with her legs curled up behind her buttocks for excessive periods of time (*seiza*), and repeatedly kicked her when she did not perform to his liking (see Imabashi 1986, 39). The following entry was discovered in her diary by authorities investigating her suicide: "I like my teacher, but he is really scary. He is always so angry with me, so much so that my heart hurts. I am really fed up. I am really tired. I don't know what to do anymore. . . . I'll probably get yelled at again tomorrow, and I hate it" (quoted in Imabashi 1986, 39).

Tragically, Emi's story is not unique. Thousands of Japanese people choose to take their own lives every year. Some estimates suggest that there may be as many as 30,000 suicides each year in Japan, many of

which are committed by children, adolescents, and young adults. Many, like Emi, leave notes blaming rigid regimes of strict discipline, demanding teachers and sports coaches, or *taibatsu*.

In June 2007, there was another death caused by *taibatsu*, but this time it was not a suicide. In a shocking and highly publicized incident involving sumo, Japan's national sport (*kokugi*), a seventeen-year-old wrestler named Tokitaizan was killed after being beaten by senior members (*sempai*) and coaches of his training stable (*Kyodo News* 2007, *Economist* 2007). Although sumo journalist Takeda Yorimasa's January 2007 article about "match-fixing" had already begun to sour public opinion toward the sport, Tokitaizan's death brought renewed condemnations of sumo's training styles and even sumo culture as a whole.¹

According to various reports, Tokitaizan had been physically forced to train through extreme pain, even as he made it clear that he was having trouble breathing. When he tried to escape, his *sempai* dragged him back to their stable and struck him with metal baseball bats and beer bottles. They even burned him with cigarettes (*Nikkan Supotsu* 2007). Japan's national newspapers published gruesome photographs of his bruised and battered body. Although Tokitaizan's stablemaster, Tokitsukaze, insisted that the incident was an "accident" and that his corpse ought to be cremated immediately, Tokitaizan's father, infuriated by his son's death, demanded a thorough autopsy. Coroners complied, concluding that excessive training had triggered a heightened level of potassium in Tokitaizan's body, and that his death had been no accident. In fact, Tokitsukaze had apparently also hit Tokitaizan with a beer bottle, a specific blow that autopsies determined had contributed to, if not outright caused, Tokitaizan's death (*Japan Times* 2010).

Tokitaizan's older and by definition more experienced *sempai* wrestlers insisted that they had repeatedly thrown Tokitaizan to the ground "to instill toughness." They said that "the purpose of their violence was

¹ The controversy between Takeda and the Japan Sumo Association (JSA) involved the issue of whether the practice of "match fixing" (*yaochō*)—when two wrestlers agree to throw certain sumo matches in exchange for cash payments—existed, how prevalent it was, and how many people were involved. In 2007, when Takeda's article first appeared, the JSA claimed that the "*yaochō* problem" was a myth and sued Takeda, along with his publisher Kodansha, for publishing the articles. In a series of court cases, juries eventually found Takeda guilty for naming individuals in the scandal, and though it seemed that Takeda had lost his "battle" with the JSA, he won the broader "war" when, in 2011, a large match-fixing scandal was discovered by an independent investigation commissioned by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. The 2011 sumo "match-fixing" scandal precipitated the first cancellation of a "Grand Tournament" (*honbushō*) since 1946, the JSA was finally forced to admit that "match-fixing" had long been widespread, and Takeda's article was vindicated after all.

CHAPTER 1

Anthropology and Corporal Punishment

"Anthropology is philosophy with the people in."

—Tim Ingold

Corporal Punishment (Research) Today

In the last two decades, rigorous efforts have been undertaken to eliminate corporal punishment around the world. These efforts partly constitute a reaction to the enactment of Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Signed into law in 1989 by the General Assembly and effective beginning the following year, the Convention reads:

Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Yet according to an advocacy group called the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, by 2009 there were only twenty-seven nations that had ratified this international treaty in all potential spaces where corporal punishment might occur (i.e., the home, the school, the penal system, and in alternative care settings).¹

Bans on corporal punishment in schools far outweigh bans in the home. As of 2008, 106 nations had outlawed corporal punishment in their schools, and most of these bans have come in the last few decades (*Economist* 2008). Corporal punishment may perhaps be on the decline in schools

¹ Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Sweden, (Southern) Sudan, Ukraine, Uruguay, and Venezuela (as of May 2009, Italy's ban on corporal punishment in the home had not yet been confirmed in legislation) (<http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org>). See also *Economist* (2008) and Ripoll-Núñez and Rohner (2006, 223).

CHAPTER 2

Histories

“What experience and history teach is this—that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.”

—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

The types of acts that humans have used to punish each other have changed over time, as have the purposes of these punishments. For example, corporal punishment and torture were first used in Europe in an effort to reform criminals. Before this, criminals were simply executed. At that time, few saw a point in maiming criminals since there seemed little hope that they could ever be made into law-abiding citizens. According to Gombrich (2008), torture became a tool of state terrorism in the time of Nero around 60 A.D., when Christians were rounded up, killed and maimed in the Roman arena, but by the eighteenth century many European countries had abolished the practice (Pinker 2011, 149). According to Hunt (2007), this was in part because the spread of the novel helped people begin to see human suffering as something rather universal; as a result, many began to believe that everyone ought to have their “human rights” protected, regardless of birth or station in life.

Corporal punishment historian George Ryley Scott identifies three stages of punitive systems in human history, explaining that the “earliest of all forms of punishment was neither more nor less than private vengeance, immortalized in the proverb, ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’” ([1938] 1952, 165). Later, people gave tribal gods “the responsibility for the infliction of punishment,” and with the “advent and growth of civilization the whole concept of punishment was elaborated and the responsibility for its ordering and its infliction was no longer placed upon God, but was accepted by society itself” (165). As a result, he argues, the “number of rules and the need for retributive or punitive measures were enormously extended,” and the “machinery for inflicting punishment became ever more extensive.” In other words, over time punishments became more complex: first justified as “private vengeance,” next justified by “God,” and finally by the will of “society.”

CHAPTER 3

Contexts

"The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences."

—Ruth Benedict

The Importance of Context

In chapter 1 we examined the many benefits an anthropological approach can provide to the study of corporal punishment, and in chapter 2 we investigated the historical trajectory that the term "corporal punishment" has taken in Japan. In this chapter we will focus on detailing the various contexts in which such "corporal punishment" takes place in Japan today. The analysis of "corporal punishment" in any foreign context must be based less on "universal" definitions (see, e.g., Ember and Ember 2005; Ripoll-Núñez and Rohner 2006) and more on individual, socioculturally contextualized incidents. As we saw in chapter 2, *taibatsu* has been used and discussed in a variety of contexts throughout Japanese history. Because the definition of *taibatsu* has continuously been challenged, redefined, reinterpreted, and even at times ignored, one can only truly understand discipline in Japanese schools and sports if one understands the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it has been used or discussed.¹ The impetus for *taibatsu* depends greatly on when and where it occurs (e.g., elementary school, middle school, high school, university, sports, or the home). The impetus for its use also depends upon the intent of the individual inflicting such discipline: parent, teacher, coach, or peer. These diverse antecedents can only be understood through contextualized analysis (Scott 1938 [1952], vi; Miethe and Lu 2005, 212).

¹ Various anthropologists advise that scholars must put specific incidents of "violence" in proper context. For example, Ben-Ari and Frühstück write: "Anthropology's most useful contribution has been to document how violence is preeminently collective rather than individual, social rather than asocial or antisocial, and culturally interpreted" (2003, 551). Blok also argues that the "forms, meanings and images of violence differ widely in time and space, and can only be grasped in terms of their specific social and historical contexts" (1988, 785).

CHAPTER 4

Ethics

“One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.”

—Author Unknown

Conflicting Sports and Classroom Pedagogies

The “languages of discipline” detailed in the last chapter reflect conflicting pedagogies of the classroom and sports field. After all, the disciplinary method an educator chooses to employ says a lot about his professional pedagogy. These “languages of discipline” and conflicting pedagogies therefore indicate a larger debate in sports education as well as classroom education regarding the issue of how coaches and teachers should educate players more generally. As Yoneyama rightly explains, “Discipline is the issue on which autocratic and democratic paradigms of education divide most clearly, and the question of punishment is at the heart of the issue of discipline” (1999, 91ff).

Considering the general tendency of scholars worldwide—most vocal-ly, medical doctors and psychologists—to oppose corporal punishment, it seems clear that a significant divide also exists between (“idealist”?) academics theorizing the scientific causes, effects, and morality of corporal punishment in order to seek its eradication, and (“realist”?) teachers and coaches interacting with students and athletes on a daily basis who believe the corporal punishment will always be necessary in some instances. These two groups—scholars and practitioners—do not see eye to eye when it comes to corporal punishment.

These debates have long existed in Japan’s discourses of baseball coaching. Although various Japanese baseball players insist that they endured extremely harsh training (see Waldstein 2012), and while sports journalist Kobayashi asserts that “incidents of [baseball] coaches throwing their fists never end” (2007, 167) and there is clearly a perception that *taibatsu* by high school baseball coaches is widespread (*Asahi Shimbun* 2006a), there are many Japanese coaches who have not used or do not use this disciplinary method. For example, at schools like Meitoku Gijuku High School in Kochi Prefecture, there is a perception that if “hard training”

CHAPTER 5

Purported Causes and Plural Cultures

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

—Mahatma Gandhi

Throughout the many years that I lived in Japan and studied *taibatsu*, most people I spoke with told me one of two things: either that *taibatsu* was a common "problem" in Japan, or that the use of strict discipline, including *taibatsu*, was not common enough. While proponents insisted that Japanese adults ought to keep the paddle close at hand, detractors insisted that they ought to relinquish it altogether. Although a few Japanese authors and scholars have suggested otherwise in their writings, few Japanese people I spoke with in person considered the possibility that *taibatsu* might be useful in only some limited cases, or that such a perspective represented the rationale behind the Ministry of Education's notoriously weak enforcement of extant *taibatsu* prohibition laws. While it is possible that I encountered these "all or nothing" responses because my informants thought that I, as a foreigner "visiting" Japan, sought a simple answer to what is clearly a complicated matter, such responses could just as likely have been caused by a particular mindset held by many of these people, a mindset that assumes that Japan is a homogeneous nation of people who all think the same, talk the same, and therefore *must* discipline in the same way.

When this lens of homogeneity is used to explain *taibatsu*'s existence or persistence, I call it "culturalism": the prioritizing of cultural explanations above all other possible explanations.¹ People posit such a culturalist view when they insist that it is Japanese culture—or specific aspects of it—that determines the existence of physical discipline in Japanese schools. In fact, as we will see in this chapter, culturalism has been a rather common lens through which many Japanese authors, as well as some West-

¹ By "culturalism" I do not mean the same thing as "cultural essentialism," which I use to describe theories that attempt to reduce a particular culture to its purported "essence." Rather, "culturalist" arguments emphasize how the essence of a particular culture—or essential elements of a particular culture—explain(s) certain phenomena within it.

CHAPTER 6

Discourses of Power and the Power of Discourse

*"Grandpa cracked the whip down/It stung a long, long time
Daddy picked that whip up/Cracked that back of mine
In a moment of confusion/Got a grip on me
I wonder how that whip now/Is in the hand I see."*

—Lyrics from "Chains" by Railroad Earth

The Importance of Historical and Cross-Cultural Analysis

The many discourses of discipline encircling the term *taibatsu* have shaped the way that Japanese people view their pedagogies, their education system, and their sports culture. These discourses include the ways that foreigners as well as Japanese have discussed *taibatsu*. In certain cases, most notably Professor Murray's introduction to Japan of New Jersey's early anti-*taibatsu* laws, the things that foreigners have said about physical punishment have had significant influence on the course of Japanese educational history. After all, *taibatsu* would not likely have been made illegal in Meiji Japan without Professor Murray. Perhaps it is not terribly surprising, then, that many Japanese locked in the aforementioned culturalist mindset look overseas for comparisons in order to strengthen their explanations for why *taibatsu* exists. If you believe that all Japanese are the same, act the same, and think the same, then it makes sense to ignore historically-informed explanations for why *taibatsu* exists and jump right to explanations that emphasize the aspects of Japanese culture that make it "uniquely different" when compared with other cultures. These aspects could include culturally Japanese conceptions of the body, mind, or spirit. As a result, in many cases the debate over discipline has been simplistically shoehorned into two polarized camps—a rigid, disciplinarian, and "Japanese" camp, and a lenient, accommodating, and "Western" camp.

In introducing a variety of voices in this book, including those of Japanese students, athletes, teachers, coaches, and scholars, I have tried to transcend these simplistic, dichotomous understandings of *taibatsu* because such cross-cultural comparisons are incomplete if not outright inaccurate, and because these assertions of cultural uniqueness mostly lead nowhere.

EPILOGUE

Beyond the “Violent Culture” Myth

*“It is not part of a true culture to tame tigers,
any more than it is to make sheep ferocious.”*

—Henry David Thoreau

In late 2011, Harvard psychologist, linguist, and popular science writer Steven Pinker published an 802-page tome on violence entitled *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*. In it, Pinker channels the “civilizing process” hypothesis of Norbert Elias (1939) in arguing that a variety of factors—the rise of the state, which gave order to what otherwise would have been Hobbesian anarchy; the rise of cities, which established new codes of conduct that became so deeply ingrained that people’s very psychology changed; the spread of literacy, which widened our “circle of empathy”; the strengthening of various rights-based movements (women’s, gay, animal, civil), which forced people to conclude that “everyday” acts of violence such as beating one’s wife or kicking one’s dog were “antisocial”; the spread of trade, which turned potential enemies into potential business partners; the rise of democracy, which required “un-like-minded” people to get along peacefully; and the reliance on thinking itself, which over time eroded our hot-blooded impulses—have led to what he believes is, in historical terms, a relative lack of violence in Western society today. In order to craft his argument, Pinker relies rather heavily on statistics, such as the number of deaths incurred during major wars or conflicts in relation to the total human population of the time. By this particular measure, for example, the Second World War was the ninth bloodiest war of all time, the First World War the sixteenth.

Such reliance on the quantification of violence is rather narrow-minded, though. What of the more insidious forms of violence that scholars have explicated, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s illumination of “symbolic violence”? What of the constant threat of violence established by modern tyrants and terrorists alike? What of the various *meanings* of violence to humans, even if these meanings cannot be quantified? Death toll from war is certainly a tempting means of comparing brutality over time, but it does not tell us everything we need to know about violence. Moreover, as Kolbert (2011) notes in her review of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*,

Appendix 1

Selected *Taibatsu*-Related Research

| <i>Author</i> | <i>Title of Book/Article</i> | <i>Publisher</i> | <i>Year</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 鈴木茂 Suzuki Shigeru | 生徒をなぜ殴れない (<i>Seitō wo naze nagurenai</i>) Why Can't We Hit Students? | ごま書房 Goma Shobo | 1979 |
| 沖原豊 Okihara Yutaka | 体罰 (<i>Taibatsu</i>) Corporal Punishment | 第一法規 Dai Ippōki | 1980 |
| 宮下清 Miyashita Kiyoshi | 体罰のすすめ (<i>Taibatsu no susume</i>) Recommending <i>Taibatsu</i> | 光風社出版 Kōfūsha Shuppan | 1980 |
| 学校災害から子どもを守る全国連絡会 National Liaison Meeting for Protecting Children from School Disasters | 学校災害と校内暴力・体罰 (<i>Gakkō saigai to kōnai bōryoku · taibatsu</i>) "School Violence, <i>Taibatsu</i> , and School Disasters" | Published by author | 1982 |
| 上之郷利昭 Kaminōe Toshiaki | スパルタの海 (<i>Suparuta no umi</i>) The Spartan Sea | 東京新聞出版局 Tokyo Shimbun Shuppanyoku | 1982 |

Appendix 2

Notable Incidents of *Taibatsu*

1976. Ibaraki (Mito). The “*Mito Goju Incident*”: A physical education teacher strikes a boy who is helping him administer a body strength test. The boy dies a week later, but because the boy had the measles at the time of his death, the teacher is acquitted of murder charges. School officials fail to notify the parents of the victim and forbid other students from attending an all-night vigil for him.
- 1979–1983. Aichi (Mihama). The “*Totsuka Yacht School Incidents*” (see introduction).
1985. Gifu. At Nagatsu Shōgyō Prefectural High School, a young girl named Takeuchi Emi commits suicide after receiving “persistent *taibatsu*” (*shitsuyō na taibatsu*) and being verbally abused (see introduction).
1985. Gifu. The “*Giyō Hair Dryer Incident*.” A boy is beaten for bringing a hair dryer on a school trip. A court gives his teacher a three-year sentence for the incident because it “has no relation to education” (*kyōiku to wa muen no kōi*) (Yoneyama 1999, 92 and Watanabe 1986, 45).
1986. In July, a thirteen-year-old girl is kicked in the face repeatedly for being three minutes late to lunch. In a separate incident, twelve teachers beat another thirteen-year-old girl for several hours because she rode a motorcycle (Young 1993, 131).
1991. Hiroshima. At a public institution called Kazenoko Gakuen, a school principal puts two children in solitary confinement for two days. They later died of heat exhaustion (Yoneyama 1999, 93).
1995. In July, a teacher beats a high school girl to death using a roll book (Mogami 1996).
1995. Fukuoka. At Kinki University High School, a boy is killed after receiving violent *taibatsu*. His teacher justifies his actions as part of his “guidance plans” (*shidō hōshin*) and says that the school’s administration encouraged *taibatsu*. Nevertheless, the teacher is convicted of first- and second-degree murder. A local woman gathers 75,000 signatures to reduce his sentence (see Wray 1999, 101).

Appendix 3

Corporal Punishment in the United States

*“He that spareth the rod hateth his son;
but he that loves him chastises him betimes.”*

—Solomon, Proverbs 13:24

Americans are often shocked and appalled to hear that the Japanese use corporal punishment, hazing, or hard training in their schools and sports. Many quickly conclude that it must be Japan’s homogenous national culture that incubates such behavior. In fact, as this book has shown, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Many Americans are also surprised to learn that corporal punishment still exists in the schools of some of their own conservative, mostly so-called “red” states, and that vast swaths of American parents stand by the paddle as their preferred tool of discipline. In fact, as this appendix will show, the debate over corporal punishment in the U.S. is actually quite similar to the debate in Japan.

Many of America’s educational ideas were formed in Europe, and corporal punishment was widely used in nations such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany long before the European colonization of the North American continent. As George Ryley Scott explains in his monumental work on corporal punishment:

In the olden days boys and girls both . . . were flogged by their parents at home, and by their employers at work; while the children of aristocracy received their floggings at the hands of their governesses or private tutors, and later at school. Even so long ago as the days of Ancient Greece, pretty nearly a couple of thousand years ago, if history does not lie, the schoolmaster used the birch as an instrument of correction. Homer was flogged by his tutor; so was Horace; and so no doubt were all those who went to school at all. ([1938] 1952, 95)

The list of intellectual luminaries who were beaten in schools is extensive—Erasmus, Frederick the Great, Arnold, Coleridge, Milton, Voltaire—and these are just the people who left written records. In Great Britain, corporal punishment existed “from the days when schools were first

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