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Resilience Building Pedagogies and Women’s University Club Sport in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Anglophone studies on school club sport (undō bukatsudō 運動部活動) in Japan commonly consider sport as cultural fields that reproduce hegemonic masculinity and ‘traditional’ notions of femininity. This study suggests that school club sport for women in Japan is more diverse and complex than what the dominant symbolic level gender ideological frameworks imply. This article is based on a broader embodied ethnographic project that examines how university club kendo contributes to the construction of women’s identity via member relationships and sport’s cultural learning. It discusses resilience (gaman 我慢) as an important indigenous value that women develop through sport and manifest as embodied cultural capital within employment. It highlights that engagement in resilience building for women varies and practices are in motion in alignment with social change. Despite these developments, methods of disciplining resilience in sport settings continue to be murky and waver between maltreatment and personal development. This paper offers a unique sporting example of how women’s lived reality of sport is multifaceted and dependent on homosocial relationships, member dispositions, educational trajectories, and personalized ambition.

Introduction

Female sport is a lucrative business in Japan and the nation’s women athletes are highly successful in the global arena. In 2021, some 1.2 million female students participated in junior and senior high school sport club activities.¹ Sport is culturally significant in Japan and empirical studies have described university sport clubs as educational spaces that provide opportunity for members to learn social values and life skills in preparation for adult society.² Researchers have identified the role of schools as institutions that cultivate ‘human capital’ through the motivation and commitment to hard work.³ Resilience (gaman 我慢) is one important social value that underpins and interconnects several aspects of cultural learning within educational
settings, particularly school club sport. However, resilience learning intensities can vary between the type of sport club and university. This study focuses on university ‘sport-oriented’ (taiikukaikei 体育会系) sport clubs which are more competitive and formalized in terms of cultural learning.

Most anglophone studies on school club sport in Japan have centred on male participation and have connected resilience building to male homosociality and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity in preparation for the workplace. The characteristics of hegemonic masculinity within sport club contexts have previously been described as sociability, alcohol tolerance, commitment to training hard, and working long hours. These attributes are recognized as physical capital in sport and can convert to embodied cultural capital which has been noted to be positively regarded in male corporate environments. Identifying this concept of the body is crucial in addressing the question of transferring educational (in this case physical) capital into forms of cultural capital. Females can invest in club sport to amass athletic success and cultural capital to access educational and employment pathways proportionate to males. Aspects of university sport clubs’ cultural learning may be gendered but women can also accrue embodied cultural capital in ways that are relevant to their sport and employment in Japan. However, due to the paucity of contemporary and female-centred sport studies, extracurricular sport remains to be perceived as a social field that nurtures the reproduction of gendered social role norms. Specifically, the male ‘corporate warrior’ and the female ‘devoted housewife’.

More than 30-years ago, sociologist Chizuko Ueno observed that gender role ideologies have an influential presence at the symbolic level but do not necessarily reflect the diverse lived realities of women in Japan. Nevertheless gender ideologies continue to be called upon in academia to make sense of women’s lives in Japan as a default framework despite women’s diversified and complex identities and the social need for women to be in workforce. Scholarship examining women’s lives in Japan has generally focused on the sphere of domesticity and women’s social relations to support expected gender roles rather than examine how women engage in ‘self-production’ and ‘identity-making’ through relationships with other women.

Although some more recent studies have examined the paradoxical intricacies of women’s university sport and gender identity in contemporary Japan, there remains a scarcity of in-depth female-centred empirical research in school sport club settings that have investigated the utilities of sport, female comradery, and the deeper meaning women attach to sport.

This paper focuses on various aspects of resilience building for women in university club kendo in Japan. Specifically, the resilience forging methods that are reliant on female homosocial relationships, member dispositions and their educational trajectories and personalized ambition. It argues that the methods and purposes of building resilience for women in sporting contexts are diverse, and also prepare women for the workforce. These points illustrate that social role norms are not stagnant in Japan and sport pedagogy moves in motion with social change. This perspective posits that researching the educational setting of university club sport from a female perspective can broaden our understanding of contemporary issues within Japanese society.
The following section contextualizes the term *gaman* (resilience) and situates it relative to women’s university club sport in Japan. Thereafter, empirical data collected through survey, interview, and participant-observer fieldnote methodologies during an 18-month ethnographic research project in a university women’s kendo club is analyzed. The empirical findings focus on describing how homosocial relationships played a key role in resilience building engagement and how university club kendo provided important socialization processes for women members that depended on their educational trajectories and personal ambitions.

**What is Gaman?**

*Gaman* is a multilayered term that is often summarized as a particularistic attribute of cultural identity in Japan that describes a mindset of patience and perseverance amidst physical and/or mental hardship. *Gaman* is a common word used in the Japanese language to describe a person’s state when an effort is made to maintain personal integrity and social harmony. Its forging is supported by vertical relational structures. Hierarchical relationships are tied to an ideology in which the government, schools, and workplaces put emphases on people abiding by social conventions. The term is considered to be a virtue in Japan and has roots in Zen Buddhism philosophy. *Gaman* among other Buddhist principles, have shaped body culture and learning in Japan. Buddhist ethics form the philosophical underpinnings of the Japanese martial arts (budo), and as ‘national sports’ they are considered representative of ‘traditional’ ways of thinking and moving. Nondualism or the unity of the mind (heart) and body is a goal of several pursuits in Japan. Learning in Japan values imitative and repetitive learning during the early stages until it ‘sticks’ to the body. Okano describes the Japanese understanding of learning as ‘a belief that it involves not only acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also individual moral betterment and spiritual training’. Western models of sport share similar pedagogies to the martial arts in Japan and this is due to ‘budofication’ processes in the early 20th century that sought to indigenize all forms of sport as a vehicle to assimilate the nation for modernization and empire-building purposes. However, traditional Japanese sports are considered very rich in context and this is one reason why the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology introduced compulsory Martial Arts and Dance Curriculum (*Budō-dansu no hisshūka* 武道・ダンスの必修化) in junior high schools in 2008. Through movement that emphasizes traditional way of thinking and competing with respect for the opponent, the budo programme aims to build interest in the martial arts among school children.

Sport in Japan, particularly in education settings, has developed in ways that correspond with the political climate. In the early 20th century, physical education for boys consisted of militaristic exercises in the interest of the nation and sport for girls was designed to complement good manners and reproductive health. Education in sport continues to reproduce gender ideologies and indigenous values relevant to contemporary identity politics and social need. There are some philosophical and pedagogical differences between traditional sport and non-traditional sport clubs. These are communicated through differences in bodily movements and philosophical/
historical narratives. There are also a number of similarities as extracurricular sport in general is viewed as a productive site of social reproduction where contemporary cultural values and life skills are learned. Sport pedagogies in Japan are considered culturally particularistic through methods that cultivate the ‘Japanese spirit’ in both female and male athletes, and this has often been attributed to the overcoming of bigger and stronger opponents in the international arena. In terms of resilience building pedagogy, a sport club’s institutional format or type of sport club can play a greater role in determining the intensity of cultural learning outcomes, as opposed to whether the sport is traditional or not.

**Gaman and Sport Pedagogy**

In school sport clubs, values associated with ‘spiritual education’ (*seishin kyōiku 精神教育*) are often prominent and *gaman* is a foundational element of ‘spiritual education’ that can inscribe sociality at corporeal levels. School sport clubs have been noted as fertile environments of resilience cultivation through the ‘inclination towards competition, endurance, obedience, discipline and the acceptance of hierarchy’. Sport’s pedagogical methods are often imbued with emotional and physical hardships to inculcate resilience into members’ dispositions which takes place not only through team competition but also disciplined training and managing hierarchical relationships.

Athletic success and instinctive communication skills are often attributed to embodied levels of resilience that denote effort and commitment. Resilience building requires to ‘give one’s best effort’ (*gambaru 頑張る*), which is also a commonly used word in daily life in Japan. In an educational context, the amount of effort applied is also believed to enhance the likeliness of achievement and ‘effort expended is the best predictor of achievement’ and ‘conscientious efforts to learn are considered more important than natural ability in achieving knowledge and skills’. This learning philosophy applies to school club sport where application of effort and commitment to building resilience forecasts sport success.

Opportunities to cultivate *gaman* are integrated into the everyday experiences of school sport club activities and this important cultural value centres on sociality. It can manifest itself at the embodied level through sport as a result of consistently ‘giving one’s best’, exerting hard work and effort, even in the face of adversity or failure. In sport ‘giving one’s best’ requires ‘guts’ and describes the drive or courage to push beyond capabilities and is similarly indoctrinated in women’s sports.

Resilience is essentially ground in sociality and the opportunities to develop it within university ‘sport oriented’ (*taiikukaikei*) sport club contexts arise when experienced among others when training, competing, managing hierarchical relationships, interacting with others, and undertaking club-related labour. Although one can forge *gaman* in solitude, the cultural attribute is valued as it enhances sociability and therefore deeper levels of resilience can be purposefully developed amongst others. Greater levels of resilience can be forged when moderated by those that have endured embodiment processes and hold authoritative status, such as instructors or senior members in sport club settings. *Gaman* development is often reliant on codified
practices that are monitored by those of higher status. Peers also play a role in maintaining each other’s engagement through accountability measures, surveillance, and a consciousness that non-conformity to codified rules disturbs group cohesion and team success. As gaman is oriented towards sociability, ‘playing the game’ through abiding by club codes and hierarchical relationships that demand resilience can result in increased opportunity and the strengthening of human bonds which together can lead to achievement and increased public status within homosocial spaces. These are important life skills the women members can learn in formally organized ‘sport-oriented’ (taiikukaikei) sport clubs.34

This type of university sport club can complement and replicate the hierarchical and gendered structures of schools and workplaces, and as such provide a type of cultural apprenticeship to members in preparation for Japanese society.35 These environments can metamorphosize athletes into a form of ‘human capital’ that implies productivity and also instinctive ability to communicate effectively within hierarchical social systems. The resilience cultivated can become inscribed on the body and as such become embodied forms of cultural capital that employment recruiters recognize as enhanced social skills and the ability to work diligently.36

Ethnographic Method

The author is a kendo practitioner of 31-years and started kendo in Japan as a high school exchange student. This research was motivated through her positive experiences of competing against Team Japan at the World Kendo Championships and training with elite-level women in ‘sport-oriented’ (taiikukaikei) university kendo clubs. She thereafter became inquisitive to how university club sport, particularly kendo, intersects culture, education and career, and contributes to the construction of women’s identity in Japan.37

The author’s research journey has been attached to their own kendo practice and utilized autoethnographic and embodied ethnographic methodologies. Specifically, through embodied approaches as a participant-observer, she investigates the significant role kendo plays in women’s lives and how praxis simultaneously contests and resignifies notions of ‘traditional’ gender identity. Through her embodied research, she advocates for kendo to be a more equitable, inclusive and safe space for women and girls.

This paper primarily draws on the data of an 18-month in-depth doctoral embodied ethnographic research project set in the location of KSU university kendo club (an abbreviated pseudonym).38 Hereafter, I refer to the kendo club of KSU university as KSU.39 Gaining rapport and deeper access to the participant’s lived experiences involved full immersion in the club. For a consecutive 18-months, I joined every possible KSU club related activity which demanded the participation in 9 kendo training sessions per week and notably, full participation in the notoriously gruelling winter training camp. During the field research period, I also attended all competitions, numerous formal and informal social events and fully participated in the club’s intensive training camps. The amount of time spent with the research participants accumulated to approximately 25-hours per week during the school terms.

The ethnographic data presented in this paper was collected from daily conversations, observations, and visceral interactions that took place on and off the KSU dojo
floor. A daily ritual was the writing of detailed observational field notes. Further analyses were drawn from club documents and semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Japanese with club members, teachers, and KSU alumni. In this period an extensive survey \((n=203)\), titled ‘A Sociological Study of Women’s Kendo Clubs at Physical Education Universities’ \((Taiikukaidaigaku no joshikendōbu no shakai-kuteki kenkyū 体育系大学の女子剣道部の社会学的研究)\). The survey also distributed to 7 university kendo clubs that were co-ed and considered to fall within the same university ‘sports-oriented’ \((taiikukaikei)\) category as KSU.⁴⁰

**Participants**

The core participant group of this study is the female section of KSU kendo club. The female club comprised of 25 members aged between 18 and 22-years of age, tallying a quarter of the club’s total student membership. There were 4-year levels, and each indicated your status in the club as either a peer, junior or senior to another member. In general, the 1st and 2nd-year members were considered junior club members, whilst the 3rd and 4th-year members were considered senior club members. First year juniors were considered ‘vassals’, whilst the 4th-year female seniors were the ‘gods’ of the women’s club. The period of university was demanding, as the weekly hours committed to the club on average equated to a full-time job when calculating the club’s daily meetings, labour, and athletic schedule. Female members also spent their days in class together and members rarely mingled outside the female club’s social circle. These relationships were time intensive and on average female members spent approximately 50 to 70-hours together on a weekly basis.

**Gaman, Indigeneity and Belonging**

During my field work, I often heard female research participants using the word ‘gaman’ in various contexts, whether it was in relation to training, competition, menial tasks, or intraclub relationship matters. The application of gaman in these contexts symbolized perseverance amidst mental and physical discomfort until the task was completed or conflict was resolved. In physical training situations, gaman was developed not only through the significant number of hours spent on the dojo floor and other KSU spaces, but also through training methods that were arduous and highly repetitious. As mentioned earlier, this mode of learning is common in educational contexts in Japan for the movement and awareness of others to become visceral. When considering that kendo movements are orthodox in the sense that only certain body parts are used, training through muscle fatigue with highly repetitious and can easily lead to overuse injuries. Given these bodily techniques, members often wavered between injury management and building resilience by training through fatigue and pain. This practice is common in other sports. In a survey conducted by the Japan Sport Agency, findings highlight that only 2% of junior high \((n=28,665)\) and high school sport school club members \((n=21,900)\) rest from participation when they are injured.⁴¹ These statistics suggest the training through
injury and pain is normalized from a young age to expand one’s pain threshold motivated by the pressure to meet external social demand.

This bodily commitment signified stoicism and contribution to the club which was empowering as it invited admiration from clubmates and instilled confidence. Demonstrating *gaman* in this way demonstrated that effort was made to maintain personal integrity and social harmony. Members considered training through injury as a group-centred responsibility and token of contribution as explained by 4th-year female senior member Kumiko.

I understand how hard it must be to not train for the injured members. My body has been too broken at times to train. It is the worst feeling because you feel that you cannot contribute to the club and that you are useless. It feels better to persevere through the pain of injury and train, rather than not train at all. (Personal communication)

To engage in embodied ethnographic research, I was also required to adopt codes of practice and partake in resilience forging methods to gain a sense of belonging which also demanded that I contributed by training through injury in the dojo. Through this process and failing my first ‘test’, I developed an understanding of how resilience symbolized indigeneity, belonging, and contribution within KSU.

‘Can’t you persevere’? (‘gaman dekinai?’), a female junior member commented when I dropped out of training due to the pain in my elbow joint. A pang of guilt pierced my chest and I immediately understood why my physiotherapist had mentioned that it takes great courage to rest when injured in Japan. The unwanted attention did not end there as my withdrawal from a competition also compelled an instructor to comment that my withdrawal surprised her because I seemed ‘Japanese’ in many other ways. I decided to compete despite my injury as the estrangement and character assessment I experienced was more upsetting than the pain in my elbow. (Field note)

From this personal experience, I also came to understand how surveillance mechanisms pressured members to maintain engagement in club protocols and how non-engagement created a mistrust that threatened to destabilize social cohesion within the club. One way to maintain group solidarity was to estrange non-conforming members or sustain their ‘outsider’ status. The intensity of my emotional response to criticism was exacerbated as I held an immense desire to be a part of the club’s inner circle and be considered a legitimate kendo practitioner, as many non-Japanese kendo practitioners do.

Opportunities to develop *gaman* are ubiquitous in the indigenous martial art of kendo, as expressed by the respected kendo sensei, Yoshimoto Masami of Takachiho high school kendo club who stated, ‘kendo is resilience’ (‘kendō wa gaman desu’). The 1987 documentary *Daikon ni Hana ga Saita*. Yoshimoto explained his intention behind training both his female and male students under harsh conditions to be that ‘I want you to walk in society with resilience, courage, and determination’ (‘gaman to yūki to soshite ketsudan-ryoku de shakai o ayunde itte hoshii to omoimasu’). The documentary demonstrated that resilience was also forged in females with a similar objective which inspired a (Japanese) female kendo practitioner, who would later join an elite police kendo squad and represent Japan, to select Takachiho high school under the impression ‘I will become Japanese under the guidance of this teacher’
This statement suggests that women also engage in male-dominant indigenous cultures with the intention that they too can consolidate a sense of 'Japaneseness' through engaging with cultural principles such as *gaman*.45

In indigenous pursuits, resilience underscores learning as it is considered a particularistic characteristic of Japanese identity. As such, my initial aversion to training through injury signified Western individualistic selfhood and prolonged my status as an 'outsider.' Comparisons between Japanese culture and Western culture can still be framed with Japanese collectivistic v Western individualistic selfhood which has been described as a type of 'complicit exoticism'.46 By not training through injury, I demonstrated lack of *gaman*, specifically, a lack of personal integrity and social contribution. I understood how important *gaman* was to membership as I became accepted into the club 9-months into the field research when I fully participated in the notorious KSU winter training camp which solicited unrelenting resilience for a 15-day period. Through committing to training despite injury and sickness during the camp, my position within the club and sense of belonging shifted momentously. The subsequent strong sense of inclusion and camaraderie I experienced through my commitment to resilience building deepened my relationships and desire to ascend to higher levels of fortitude. This experience enabled me to understand how one's sense of belonging hinged on what one contributed to the club and this required full commitment to cultural learning that was enmeshed in resilience building pedagogy. Specifically, through my commitment I had found a 'way in' to the club's inner social circle and was determined to protect my newly found sense of belonging. This event illustrated how motivation for *gaman* appeared to be related to the perceived threat of loss and an attempt to prevent that loss.47 However, not all members perceived an 'outsider' status as a threat of loss or to be socially excluding. The effectiveness of the monitoring systems and disciplining processes that ensured learning engagement depended on the aspirations of the members under surveillance. Typically, those that sought a sense of belonging or had personal development and competitive aspirations, often abided by the social convention of resilience building in the club. This point highlights that compliance to codified cultural learning was not forcefully indoctrinated. This view presents an alternative perspective on the dominant discourse that frames sports as an oppressively gendered learning space for women in Japan.48

**Female Hierarchies and Gaman**

There are distinct differences in hierarchical relationships between gender and education levels and (female) seniors can have more power and influence in university clubs than (male) instructors.49 Building resilience hinges on intraclub relationships and methods of engagement depend on social status indicated by year level. First and 2nd-year students were required to engage resilience to withstand the demands of training, club labour and manage relationships with senior members. Resilience was strengthened in the process of navigating and making errors within the complex social game and workload that was monitored adamantly by seniors. To develop resilience, a sense of suffering was vital, but processes were often engaged with more
commitment if the members perceived it led to reward. In other words, it was not mandatory to abide by club conventions and many did not engage full heartedly if it was perceived to have little personal benefit. At KSU, resilience was enmeshed in club pedagogies and orchestrated the social interactions between junior and senior members within KSU women’s club. Junior members perceived that female seniors played a critical mentoring role in learning etiquette and resilience building in ways that were predicted to assist in preparations for adult society. During ethnographic and semi-structured interviews, junior members explained that the disciplinary methods of enculturing values caused intense misery at times, but the hardship was anticipated and met with appreciation as it demonstrated that seniors were invested in the junior’s learning.\(^{50}\) Some of the alumna interviewed during this research project also explained that the hardships experienced during their university years provided them with communication skills and resilience that aided conflict management in their working lives.\(^{51}\) Therefore, it can be assumed that such learning processes that occur within female hierarchies provide practical life skills and embodied cultural capital for the workplace. Akiko, a female senior of KSU explained the perceived benefits of resilience building in KSU club setting.

I anticipate that life after graduation will be easy-going after enduring this strict environment. When I think about the strict hierarchical relationships, the morning trainings, the training camps…I have an advantage over students that messed around during university. I think learning the appropriate etiquette when interacting with those of a higher status has been valuable. I also think a special characteristic of KSU is that it has the feeling of family. (Formal interview)

Akiko’s perspective suggested that female student-athletes purposefully select auster sport clubs for learning cultural values such as human relationship etiquette and resilience to work diligently. Therefore, members did not necessarily feel oppressed by the strict regimes of KSU as they predicted that enduring the environment could provide status, and opportunities in the club or benefit their adult life. Importantly, disciplining practices and resilience building pedagogies fostered the deepening of human bonds.\(^{52}\) Aside from the practical employment related benefits of club sport, student-athletes can also purposefully select certain clubs because affiliation can augment a lifelong sense of community and ‘family’, which is noted to be a characteristic of school sport clubs.\(^{53}\) The connection between seniors and juniors can reflect familial relationships and there is an agreement that seniors will protect and teach juniors in exchange for obedience and respect.\(^{54}\)

Women’s friendships through sports are enduring and can influence education and career decisions. According to the results of a survey that examined the practices of ‘sport-oriented’ (taiikukaikei) female university kendo clubs (\(n=203\)), 24% of research participants indicated that university selection was influenced by the fact that they were following female high school kendo club seniors.\(^{55}\) During the formal interview process, members further explained that career prospects were inspired by those chosen by senior female club seniors that they admired. It was observed that members who had such bonds were the most invested in club cultural learning and often shared competitive ambitions and career aspirations. A deep human connection between a senior and junior member influenced engagement in resilience building.
These homosocial learning relationships were given meaning through the opportunity to engage in resilience building through pursuing personal development, competitive goals, and career dreams.

In formal club settings, particularly within the dojo, special connections between members and emotional states could be palpably felt but members often attempted to conceal their feelings as a way to demonstrate a personal integrity that contributes to social harmony. These points highlight that homosocial bonds contribute to women’s identity formation as it influences degrees of engagement in cultural learning and also competitive or career ambitions. Members also expressed the importance of the senior and junior relationship through either a description of their existing tender bond or loneliness. These reciprocal relationships were highly sought after as they provided intimacy and purpose in ways that enhanced their daily experience of kendo and university life. From the perspective of the junior, such a bond resulted in a sense of protection, guidance, and intimacy, which simultaneously empowered senior members with purpose and status. Disciplining processes strengthened self-confidence and bonds within the club and through shared learning and hardships lifelong loyal friendships resulted. As such, the experience of forging resilience can be viewed positively in the long-term, as it deepens human bonds and can provide intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and opportunities.

Through observational fieldwork at KSU and other university clubs, it was evident that often female seniors held a significant amount of power and were responsible for the running of the women’s section of the club. The women’s club had their own set of rules and customs which slightly differed from the men’s clubs. Cultural learning and disciplining processes primarily occurred within homosocial hierarchical relationships. Many of the differences in rules reflected how KSU club culture imparted appropriate femininity on women. The variances in practice were also due to the lower symbolic and economic value attached to women’s kendo development. This meant that the women’s club were often left in charge of their domain with little input and interference from (male) head instructors. Within the women’s club rules were therefore open to interpretation and at times applied with impulsive inconsistency by senior members.

**Methods of Disciplining Gaman**

At KSU, the club culture was organized in a way that made it almost impossible to avoid developing resilience as most aspects of membership were purposefully arduous and the numerous ‘rules’ were made to be broken during the 4-year period of university. The ‘rules’ were set to learn values associated with society, kendo, and KSU club culture. Most of the rules were centred on learning how to maintain personal integrity and social harmony which required effort across all club-related activities, an acute awareness of the dojo environment and respect towards female senior members. These elements were concurrently emphasized and required resilience in focus and presence of mind. Maintaining this level of focus was extremely challenging for junior members and they were regularly subjected to disciplining processes administered by senior members that had the responsibility to regulate club rules and learning engagement.
The club rules and disciplining methods were not stagnant as they changed yearly and depended on the 4th-year senior’s personalities and other social and educational influences. For example, there had been an increased awareness on the harmful effects of corporal punishment (taibatsu 体罰) that coaches inflict on student-athletes and how this abuse of power can seep into junior-senior student relationships. This increased social awareness was likely to have impacted on the changes made to the women’s club’s disciplining practices. University sport clubs are often student led and gender segregated and therefore female senior members are often, but not always, responsible for administering disciplining processes to female junior students.

Over the course of the data collection phase, the 4th-year seniors explained that they had adapted the rules, in response to the bullying they had experienced as juniors in previous years. These senior members explained that they had often received ‘the cold shoulder’ from their seniors without a clear or rational explanation as to why. As a result, the disciplining processes were changed to be purposefully less severe, and ‘the cold shoulder’ was less often used as a disciplining method and rather inside the dojo, the common methods of disciplining was a drill referred to as kakarigeiko (掛かり稽古) and the restriction of socialization opportunities.

The exercise kakarigeiko is part of daily training menu for most school kendo clubs and is a practice method in which a receiver (motodachi 元立ち) and an attacker (kakarite 掛かり手) work in pairs, and the attacker continuously attacks the receiver. It is most often administered by senior members and is considered a useful way of developing instinctive sporting prowess and building resilience through pushing the performer past both physical and mental thresholds. As a disciplinary method, it can be gruelling. Often the person who is being disciplined is required to perform the continuous attacking drill (kakarigeiko) against a senior member as a corrective measure. The duration and intensity of the exercise is controlled by the receiver until ‘the lesson’ is learned. As it is publicly executed, it can be a dreaded activity in this context. As such it also acted as a deterrent for the conscious breaking of rules. The exercise was also used as a self-disciplinary measure. In the case that a senior broke a ‘rule’, such as being late for training, I observed that senior members would request a senior year level peer to administer the training drill. Engagement in this exercise as punishment was to set a good example to the junior members but also as a self-disciplining measure so that the error would be deposited in corporeal memory.

How senior members subjected juniors to this corrective exercise depended on the personality of members and their intentions. For example, some senior members used the activity as a means of maintaining their status in the club, and some junior members were not afraid of disciplinary action so they knowingly breached rules. However, for the most part the exercise was effective as it encouraged members to abide by club conventions, forge resilience, hone their kendo skill, and meticulously perform human relationship etiquette. Albeit the disciplining measure was tough.

Although juniors were less susceptible to bullying as the ‘cold shoulder’ had become an unacceptable form of disciplining, some members pushed boundaries as their fit bodies and independent dispositions did not fear physical discomfort or social restriction that had become steady forms of disciplining. Therefore, to what degree resilience was developed or engaged with through compliance to the club rules became dependent on individual personalities, their kendo trajectories, and personal objectives.
The effectiveness of the disciplining processes hinged on the aspirations of members, specifically those that had competitive aspirations or gained a sense of belonging to the club through compliance. This illustrates how motivation for *gaman* seems to be related to the perceived threat of loss and an attempt to prevent that loss. Not all members were able to develop such meaningful relationships or were engaged in the cultural learning social framework of sport clubs. During my field research, I observed that power was misappropriated by senior members, junior members were disengaged from learning, and some senior members neglected their mentoring responsibilities. Although the club rules were codified based on cultural values, to what extent members engaged with regulations depended on personal goals and relationships with other members. For example, it was observed that junior members detached from cultural learning processes due to lack of competitive aspirations, personal development goals and disinterest in seeking a sense of belonging. This point highlights that KSU kendo praxis was much more than just the physical doing of kendo. It was deeply intertwined with a cultural learning that necessitated genuine human connection and purpose. Further emphasizing that resilience building was essentially ground in sociability and partially autonomously engaged with.

Members who had competitive aspirations often abided by the systemized rules as these were monitored by the 4th-year seniors that controlled team selection. This was another instrumental way to motivate members to engage in processes that enhanced cultural learning during kendo training, club labour, and social occasions that required the consumption of alcohol. Those that adhered to club rules and applied exceptional effort across all club related activities were sometimes selected over more technically skilled members. This was one aspect of KSU culture that could be considered as part of the cultural apprenticeship as it facilitated interdependency and conformity to achieve personal goals. This observation resounds with a study on school club sport that describes how coaches provided more instruction and competitive opportunity to athletes that were obedient.

Members were not selected to compete for the university on kendo merit alone unless they had exceptional talent, and even then, the most technically skilled members were required to concede to the club rules at a basic level with sincerity. Those who did not have personal development and competitive ambitions, or a sense of selfhood tied to the club often struggled to cope with the daily demands of club activities.

Disengaged members became personal dilemmas for those 4th-year senior members whose self-confidence hinged on their perceived mentoring ability and juniors abiding by club ‘rules’. Most senior members invested in developing their leadership capabilities as it was perceived as their club duty, and it also provided status and a sense of purpose. When members were unable to train due to a serious injury or when a club rule is broken (deliberately or unintentionally), members’ sociability was limited to inflict emotional hardship until members had redeemed themselves or healed from injury. The impact of this isolation and reward depended on the extent of their investment in the *illusio* of ‘the game’. Nevertheless, this method of disciplining that sought to encourage assimilation, interdependence and strengthening of *gaman*, was only effective when administered to the club’s partisans. As mentioned, training through injury and discomfort was a common method to develop *gaman* in KSU. The members who were unable to train due to injury, most often had quite serious injuries such as bone fractures. Those members were not permitted to
socialize with alcohol and in the dojo were required to exercise independently and channel positive energy towards those who were training.

As I personally experienced, not partaking in the daily grind restricted the opportunity to be a part of the club and connect with members. Although non-compliance had consequences, members considered the pros and cons of their engagement in club regimes. Not all members felt pressure to conform to the club rules by contributing to the collective or engaging in cultural learning. The easing of disciplinary measures had also frayed the social fabric of the club that had been previously kept together by a stricter disciplinary system. By lessening the intensity of disciplinary measures, the junior member's behaviour expressed that it was not mandatory to abide by the club rules. Intuitively, seniors were aware that disciplining uninvested members was unlikely to rouse repentance, therefore seniors became disinterested in disciplining particular members to protect their own energy, status and self-confidence. Hence, whether members inflicted discipline or subjected themselves to disciplining processes depended on the perceived personal benefit or risk, which demonstrates that university sport club practices are diverse and impacted by societal change.

'Rule-Breaking' and Gaman

If a rule was broken unintentionally or intentionally and repentance was expressed, seniors were more willing to discipline juniors to correct the behaviour. This would strengthen the learning relationship and the junior's resilience. This field note describes a successful example of the disciplining process and it was effective as Yumi a 1st-year junior had competitive ambitions and therefore had a purpose to adhere to the club rules.

Yumi had dropped out of training on three occasions due to exhaustion. Kimie was the senior designated to discipline her as she was a club leader and had the least tolerance for members who did not fight through fatigue. Yumi had worked out who would be responsible for disciplining her and approached Kimie every day for a week pleading to be disciplined. In desperation, whilst crying, Yumi approached Kimie who finally accepted her plea and disciplined her intensely one afternoon during training.

Everyone in the club knew why Yumi was being disciplined and viewed the punishing process in their peripheries with empathetic emotional synchronicity. Yumi gave all of her effort to every single attack during the continuous attacking drill (kakarigeiko) in spite of her exhaustion. Based on Yumi's effort, one hard training was deemed as sufficient by Kimie who tapped her armour to signify she had expressed sufficient remorse.

I overheard Kimie yelling at Yumi 'Do you know why I am angry with you or what you have done wrong'!? to which Yumi replied 'Yes'. Kimie continued, 'You have dropped out of training too many times. We all find it hard to train. If you don't demonstrate consideration for others or etiquette towards your seniors by being resilient you won't become stronger. You want to get stronger, that is why you came to KSU right? If you do it again, I won't forgive you'. After that I never saw Yumi drop out of kendo once and she learned how to behave conscientiously in sight of senior members. She also competed regularly in competitions. (Field note)

Yumi’s regret and effort expressed demonstrated her willingness to improve and contribute to the club's collective identity although it was also likely that she was
aware that any behavioural issues impacted the team selection process that the senior members controlled. The positive outcome of this situation also beneficial Kimie's status within the club personal sense of purpose as she was able to demonstrate her kendo prowess and fulfil her role as mentor in a public space. On this occasion, Kimie was able to discipline Yumi for not demonstrating sufficient resilience and the process had effectively passed on cultural knowledge and increased the level of resilience in Yumi. Kimie was able to play to her strengths in this disciplining process as she herself had developed a resilient disposition from surviving one of the most militant of high school kendo environments which had led to her hospitalisation through exhaustion. Kimie's disposition was compatible with Yumi's ambition which enabled the disciplining process to be successful. There were other situations where senior members 'gave up' on juniors that did not show remorse or sufficient effort during the disciplining continuous attacking drill (kakarigeiko). This often happened in the absence of trust between junior and senior member or when there was an incompatibility between the senior's kendo and mentoring ability and the junior's kendo trajectory and ambition. For example, some junior members that attended lenient school kendo clubs prior to KSU and did not have clear ambitions, were not able or willing to comprehend the rules or know how to show remorse through applying sacrificial levels of resilience during continuous attack drill (kakarigeiko). These situations were perilous to the confidence and status of the senior member and disciplining juniors with incongruous dispositions was often avoided. The only times senior members would persist with disciplining juniors with no security of a positive outcome or increased social standing was when a rule was broken with malicious intent. The senior members then collaborated to correct behaviour to safeguard the club culture against social erosion.

Sporting intensities in resilience building engagement depended on the ambitions of individual members. Specifically, disciplining methods were effective if there was trust between members and complemented the member's individual ambition. This idea advocates that in university it was not obligatory to abide by club codes of resilience forging and this was impacted by a shift in consciousness towards corporal punishment taking place across sporting settings in Japan. This change also reveals that persevering through resilience building processes was anchored to the perceived threat of loss and an attempt to prevent that loss. In other words, if a member did not perceive threat of loss for non-compliance, they were not compelled to abide by club codes, particularly when the protocol was perceived as irrational or irrelevant to individual members goals. Non-compliance was a ‘problem’ for senior members as it demonstrated lack of power and as such it diminished their status within the club. Refusal to comply was also a consequence of softening the disciplinary measures that had previously been harsher in ways that forced compliance.

Despite eases in disciplinary measures, a sense of authoritarianism persisted through incentivizing engagement in resilience building systems. Specifically, non-compliance could result in having competitive opportunity withdrawn for members that had such aspirations. This point highlights that vertical hierarchies continue to operate within institutions and these configurations manifest a social glue that ensure people abide by social conventions through awarding collaborative effort rather than natural ability, knowledge and skills. This focus on cohesion is with the belief
that groups can be more productive and achieve more than individuals alone, ‘the intended lesson is that people are dependent on others.’ This highlights that school sport club environments do not definitively promote democratic values nor are they always meritocratic as compliance can enhance competitive opportunity. This selection process, applied by coaches often evaluates members politeness and acquiescence as a basis from which to select team members. However, it is important to disclose that it was observed that high-skilled kendo tacticians were exempted from adhering to club rubrics with sincere effort due to their ability and likelihood that their performance would enhance competitive success for the university. Again, this point highlights the diversity of sport experiences and suggests a cultural change taking place within sport. Studies suggest that social conditions in Japan have impacted sport pedagogy and the ‘educational techniques’ of ‘discipline’ and ‘autonomy’ considerably shifted in the 2000s.

Female Sport as a Multifaceted Cultural Field

Culture is always in motion and society informs sport and vice versa. Due to sport’s relationship with indigeneity in Japan, aspects of contemporary school sport club pedagogies do, however, determinedly partake in the reproduction of traditionalist gender and cultural ideologies, specifically hierarchized social structures. Positively, studies have also suggested that women develop self-confidence and coping strategies, in addition to learning how to circumvent male domination in the workplace through club sport pedagogy. Importantly, forms of capital that are noted to be accumulated through male sport have, for some time, also been relevant to women’s employment. The economic crisis of the 1990s saw women’s participation in sports become normalized through the social need for a disciplined and efficient work force. When considering that women have been encouraged to participate in school club sport to benefit the domestic economy since the 1990s, it is a dubious claim that club sport has steered women towards fulfilling a narrowly defined social role of ‘devoted housewife’ or that competitive female athletes connect this symbolic level of gender ideology to their learning. It is common for women in contemporary Japan to manage the ‘double burden’ of full-time employment and domestic labour. It is, however, important to consider that during university, women are often fully absorbed in their sport and relationships and do not necessarily consciously connect their learning to social role expectations and gender ideologies.

Although resilience building and etiquette are considered cultural characteristics of educative sport in Japan, learning intensities vary substantially between school sport clubs. Resilience building methods are diverse and engagement levels depend on numerous variables such as: the athlete’s educational trajectory, the institution, personal ambition, personality, relationships, social change and so on. Thus, university kendo for women is by no means a monolithic experience as practice varies significantly depending on the education format of the institution and national ranking. The survey (n=203) provided valuable demographic data which confirmed kendo clubs similar in format to KSU were rule-bound, hierarchically structured and provided similar cultural learning, competitive, and employment opportunities.
within these clubs that shared a similar educational format, each was unique in the sense that the founding instructor of each club, past and present members shaped the club's philosophical underpinnings, nuanced rituals, and methods that disseminated cultural knowledge. Individual kendo club cultures are neither stagnant, as sport pedagogy within educational setting are constantly in motion, shifting to adapt and correlate with societal change. However, certain ‘traditional’ practices are maintained to preserve indigeneity and also a sense of exclusivity and fraternity to a particular club.

Revealing how sport club practices are heterogenous, my adolescent experience of high school kendo clubs in Japan did not entail resilience forging. Although we trained 6-days a week, hierarchical relationships were non-existent, and the trainings were not strenuous. I cannot recall feeling physical or mental discomfort, nor did I once witness corporal punishment. This contrasts with the experience of a research participant, Rika, who was a member of a highly esteemed, nationally ranked high school kendo club similar to Takachiho high school. During an informal conversation, she explained that she had been hospitalized from over-exertion and that the sensei was excessively authoritarian whereby corporal punishment in the form of physical violence was standard practice. With humour, Rika explained that she feared nothing after enduring her high school kendo life, but between her words, her micro-expressions revealed painful recollections that she would rather forget, indirectly suggesting she had endured what studies have framed as a form of child abuse masked as resilience forging.

The ability to be resilient can likewise act as a mechanism of denial that can normalize and conceal maltreatment. Undoubtedly, disciplining methods have softened, but corporal punishment as a disciplining practice, remains to be viewed an effective method of building resilience in sport although it can normalize and conceal athlete abuse. Recent studies have found that corporal punishment is still firmly established as a type of instructional method, especially in athletic club activities. Female athletes can be more tolerant of abuse in sport and they are often caught in a ‘double-bind’ as an unequal power relationship exists between female athletes and male coaches, i.e. the male-female relationship and the coach-athlete relationship, which makes it difficult for women to resist traditional male power structures. This system can have permanent negative consequences on women's physical and mental health and also naturalize women's lower social positionality. Moreover, disciplining methods legitimized as ‘cultural learning’ can condone and repeat a cycle of abuse through sport, i.e. that the abused become abusers. Women can also become ‘abusers’ or soften disciplining practices based on their own sporting experiences, as did the senior members of this study.

It remains unclear whether sport coaches are fully aware of the long-term repercussions when resilience building methods are administered inappropriately. Since resilience building through sport continues to be considered a significant method of cultivating indigeneity through Japan's sport culture, it is difficult to change this aspect of sport culture. Disciplining practices continue to conceal maltreatment committed by sport club instructors and senior members. As such disciplining practices that emphasize resilience building are muddy and can often waver between abuse and character development. There have been marginal improvements in practices, awareness and accountability measures regarding corporal punishment. The Japan Sport Agency's new
initiative, ‘No! Sport Harassment’ (‘No! Supohara’) is optimistic. In addition, from this year, junior high schools sport clubs will be shifted to community-based sport clubs to ease teacher workload and provide proficient coaching. However, it is unclear whether these initiatives will shift consciousness regarding the harmful effects of corporal punishment in the short-term, considering that studies show it is still firmly established as a type of instructional method in athletic club activities, and that the term *gaman* is a characteristic of sporting and cultural identity in Japan.

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented a female-centred ethnographic perspective on resilience building as a multidimensional and complex cultural learning process for women within university club sport in Japan. Utilizing women’s university club kendo as a case study, this research has situated the multifaceted term of *gaman* as an indigenous value that underscores several aspects of club related activities and emphasizes sociability. The term *gaman* was contextualized to describe a person’s state when effort is made to maintain personal integrity and social harmony through abiding by social conventions. It has argued that resilience developed within university sport can convert to embodied cultural capital for women in workplace in similar ways to men. Specifically, the ability to instinctively manage hierarchical relationships and to work diligently. As a gendered educational space, the university sport club was also considered as a learning environment that prepares women with life skills and coping strategies to circumvent male domination in society and manage the dual role of domestic and paid labour.

Methods of cultivating resilience were described as heterogeneous and nonstationary. In the past 20-years, the social conditions in Japan have impacted the ‘educational techniques’ of ‘discipline’ and ‘autonomy’. The ethnographic data presented an example of these developments through demonstrating how resilience forging was not forcefully indoctrinated and rather how learning engagement depended on homosocial relationships, member dispositions, educational trajectories, and personalized ambition. Specifically, those that had competitive ambition, personal development goals, or sought a sense of belonging or increased status, perceived value in abiding by the codified club system of resilience building. This perspective exemplifies university club sport as a personally significant and complexly diverse location of cultural learning that intensely depended on the female bonds within homosocial hierarchies. It is important to note that despite the improvements in resilience building pedagogy, research suggests that corporal punishment is still firmly established as a type of instructional method in sport clubs that continue to vacillate between maltreatment and personal development. This remains an issue for women and research has shown that female athletes are subject to maltreatment more often than male athletes due to their gendered social positioning. This paper has exemplified sport an important research field to examine contemporary society and the cultural changes occurring within educational sport. Research that empirically examines women’s perspectives on how sporting resilience manifests in the workplace and other social spaces would further enrich the current discourse that intersects sport and society in Japan.
Notes


4. For example, university ‘sports circle’ clubs are focused on a more casual enjoyment of sports, and developing friendships through sports activities.


7. McDonald, Learning Masculinity through Japanese University Rowing.

8. This paper considers Bourdieu’s theory of embodied cultural capital in relation to university club sport and employment in Japan. Cultural capital is linked to the body and ‘predisposes embodiment’ and in its embodied state, cultural capital is ‘a form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body’. Pierre Bourdieu’s The Forms of Capital, in Cultural Theory: An Anthology An Anthology, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (West Sussex: Blackwell, 2010), 82-83. (Original work published 1986).


11. Cave, Bukatsudo, 415


14. see Itani, Taiikukaikeijoshi no Poritikusu; Seki, Joshi Mane no Esunogurafi; Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan.
24. Itani, Taiikukaikeijoshi no Poritikusu.
25. Empirical field work and a focused survey (n = 240) was conducted by the author within 7 women’s taiikukaikei clubs (kendo, judo, handball, basketball, dance, cheerleading, softball) of a sport university in Japan in 2022. Eighty-six percent of the participants agreed that gaman is cultivated through club sport. Preliminary data analysis indicated that there were no distinct differences in terms perceived learning outcomes between traditional and non-traditional sport clubs surveyed. This research was funded by Japan Foundation. Grant reference: 10138975.
27. Hidaka, Salaryman Masculinity, 66.
28. Ibid.
29. Yamamoto and Satoh, Ganbari.
31. Yamamoto and Satoh, Ganbari, 231.
33. Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
37. The research motivation of author is described in Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan, 3.
38. This paper utilises data collected for the author’s PhD thesis. Kate Sylvester, ‘Negotiating Kendo Capital and Gendered Identity in a Japanese Sports University Kendo Club (PhD
This paper also references text and data that appeared in the thesis, which was recently published as the research monograph titled, *Women and Martial Art in Japan*.  

39. To protect the identity of the research participants, ethnographic interview data has not been dated, and all names presented in this article are pseudonyms and fieldnotes are written as fictionalised amalgams.  

40. For survey and report see Sylvester’s *Negotiating Kendo Capital*, 101–111. See also Appendix E and F.  


42. The documentary was accessed on Youtube. *Daikon ni Hana ga Saita* [Radish flowers have bloomed], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB4y3cY59oo (kamyu03: 2016), 1:03:35.  

43. Ibid., 1:04:07.  

44. This interview was accessed on Youtube. *Kendō Kafei* [Kendo Cafe], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjEStKmckus (Kensei: 2020), 5:47.  

45. ‘Japaneseess’ centres on resilience and the ‘Japanese spirit.’ The embodiment of the ‘Japanese spirit’ in both female and male athletes has often been attributed to the overcoming of bigger and stronger opponents in the international arena. See Itani, *Taiikukaikeijoshi no Poritikusu*.  


51. Ibid.  

52. Ibid, 160-161.  


54. Miller, *For Basketball Court and Company Cubicle*.  

55. Sylvester, *Negotiating Kendo Capital*.  


57. Ibid.  

58. Ibid.  

59. Corporal punishment (*taibatsu*), is form of physical or psychological violence, that as a coaching technique, has a long tradition in Japanese sport clubs. It is often seen as essential to achieving excellence in competition and in personal character (see Human Rights Watch, ‘*I Was Hit So Many Times I Can’t Count*’ Abuse of child Athletes in Japan’, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/07/20/i-was-hit-so-many-times-i-cant-count/abuse-child-athletes-japan (accessed March 01, 2022). It can also connotate various other mental or physical burdens as outlined in the ‘*Undō Bukatsudō de no Shidō no Gaidorain*’ [Extracurricular Sport Clubs Instructor Guidelines]: 2013, https://www.mext.go.jp/sports/b_menu/sports/mcatetop04/list/detail/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2018/06/12/1372445_1.pdf, 11. Although corporal punishment is illegal, it continues to be used as a form disciplining cultural values through club sport in Japan. It is a ‘grey area’ and the conceptualization of *taibatsu* differentiates between violence used in an irrational or impulsive way and violence being used in a purposeful or educative way. It is not always viewed negatively by parents or the athletes themselves due to its perceived benefit related to
resilience building, inculcation of discipline, and sport performance enhancement. However, in light of serious accidents and deaths, there have been recent moves to more strictly administer the prohibition of corporal punishment in school sport clubs. See Brent McDonald and Keiji Kawai, ‘Punishing Coaching: Bukatsudō and the Normalization of Coach Violence’, Japan Forum 29, no.2 (2017): 196–217.

60. Studies have shown that the frequency of corporal punishment between coaches and students occurs more often in junior high schools and high school clubs than university clubs (see Kubo Kouta, ‘Undō-bu Katsudō ni Okeru Hitaibatsu Keiken-sha no Taibatsu Yōnin-teki Taido ni Eikyō suru Yōin’ [Factors Influencing the Acceptable Attitude of those who have Experienced Corporal Punishment in Athletic Club Activities], (PhD dis., Kyushu University, 2023). This may be due to how university sport clubs are students led and the perception that corporal punishment occurs between coach and athlete. The author did not witness coach administered corporal punishment within the women's club at KSU, but it was observed at another women's kendo club in the form of physical violence and verbal abuse.

61. The ‘cold shoulder’ (mushi) is a method of disciplining that can act as a corrective measure through forced self-reflection. It can also foster emotional resilience through social isolation.


63. Sylvester and McDonald, Tactical Drinking in a Female University Kendo Club.


65. Bourdieu describes ‘the game’ as an illusio and as a product of competition between agents that are playing for stakes. See Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 98.

66. Cave, Bukatsudo, 403.


68. This discourse can be found in the following studies. Omi, ‘The Potential of the Globalization of Education in Japan’; Kazuo Uchiumi, Extra-curricular School Sport (Bukatsu) and Corporal Punishment in Japan, Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science 3, no.2 (2014): 108–114.

69. Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan.


71. Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan.

72. Itani, Taiikukaikeijoshi no Poritikusu.

73. Sylvester, Women and Martial Art in Japan.

74. see note 40.

75. Sariyama, Severing as Perseverance.

76. Human Rights Watch, I Was Hit So Many Times I Can’t Count.

77. Kubo, Undō-bu Katsudō ni Okeru Hitaibatsu provides an extensive list of recent studies that articulate this and show that corporal punishment is still firmly established as a type of instructional method, especially in athletic club activities.


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Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance was approved by Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia, Arts, Education & Human Development Human Research Ethics Subcommittee. Approval Number: AEHD HREC 12/37/.

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