Ekiden Racing: Examining the Intercultural Sporting Experience of Canadian Elite Runners in the Japanese Context

by

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BA, Dalhousie University, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Kinesiology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2020

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submitted by Kimberley Jean Ekstrand in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

in Kinesiology

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Abstract

Western perspectives on sport in Japan have tended to overlook running as a manifestation of a unique set of features influenced by environment and cultural attitudes. Running is exhibited through a variety of cultural displays in events, competitions, and training philosophies, with the runner embodying a system of performativity relevant to his or her cultural context. This offers us an opportunity to explore Japanese running culture by considering the cultural context which has encouraged, supported and enticed Japan’s proclivity for long-distances running. The lacuna of historical works concerning the social and cultural considerations related to Japanese running culture elicits an invitation to revisit Japanese sporting traditions through the experiences of Canadian athletes, as they navigate the Japanese running cultural context. Ekiden racing particularly embodies these sentiments: it is a long distance, multistage relay running event, invented in Japan which is credited with being responsible for propelling a national long-distance ‘running craze’. Despite its popularity in Japan, and the fact that international elite athletes are selected and invited to participate in these events, there has been little academic study of the sport of Ekiden racing. We know even less about the experiences of those who lived, trained and competed in a running event steeped in Japanese culture and tradition. Ekiden racing has become particularly alluring to numerous elite Canadian athletes who are attracted by this challenge to participate in a distinctive running culture revered by the Japanese. My study examines Ekiden racing through a transcontinental lens, in particular through the eyes of two elite Canadian runners who were invited to compete in Japanese elite running events. Sue Lee participated in Japan from 1990-1992, and Jeff Schiebler between 1996 and 2005. This study is designed to trace the experiences of two elite Canadian athletes in the Japanese running context and has encouraged me to revisit aspects of running culture from two main perspectives: 1) An exploration of the origins and cultural significance of long-distance running in the Japanese context, and 2) The ways in which Canadian runners have experienced Japanese running culture.
Lay Summary

In Japan, long-distance running is a national obsession. This is not well known outside of Japan nor has much been written about Japanese running culture or about foreigners who have experienced this particular running culture in Japan. This thesis looks at how the act of long-distance running is manifested differently within different cultures, in particular Japan and Canada. Ekiden racing is a type of long-distance relay running race invented in Japan that holds significant cultural meaning to the Japanese people. For a number of reasons, Canadian elite runners have been inspired to go to Japan to live, train and compete within this rich running culture. This study focuses upon the experiences of two such runners, Sue Lee and Jeff Schiebler, to learn about their reasons for and experiences of, participating in Japan’s unique running culture.
Preface

All the work presented henceforth was conducted in the Physical Cultural Studies and Sport History Research Group at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author. Ethics for interviews was provided by the University of British Columbia, Ethics Certificate Number H18-00289.
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Acknowledgments

A heartfelt thanks to Dr. Patricia Vertinsky for her guidance and support during my Masters. Her mentorship, patience, razor-sharp memory and editing eye have made me a better writer and researcher. Sharing space with such a force in the academic world has inspired me to new heights and possibilities.

Special thanks to Dr. Brian Wilson, with whom I took my first Kinesiology course; Sport, Peace and Conflict. By happy accident this course inspired and introduced me to a discipline that changed my academic trajectory. Thank you for opening my mind to this area of study and for helping me make those study interests a reality with your encouragement and support.

Dr. Moss Norman, thank you for your advice, insight and feedback on this project.

To my partner Tom Michie, my greatest supporter, enabler…and formatter!

My deepest gratitude to Sue Lee and Jeff Schiebler, for whom without their generous contribution this project would not have been possible. They each have amazing stories to tell and are truly an inspiration.

Finally, to my parents Sylvie Robichaud-Ekstrand and Ken Ekstrand, whose unyielding support and belief in me, is the bedrock that forever propels me to explore and grow.
Introduction

Reading *What I Talk About, When I Talk About Running* by Haruki Murakami greatly influenced my thinking about the nature of this research project. I was enthralled by the musings and general philosophy of Murakami, as he eloquently linked his career as a writer with his passion for running. I could tell that Murakami is a master storyteller, even as I read the English translation of his work. Deeply moving and insightful, it allowed me to glimpse a way of thinking about culture that has strongly influenced me. He describes mundane incidents with such attention that they become both beautiful and meaningful. They remind me of a quote from art educator Ralph Ammer who speaks about how drawing is more than art; it is a skill that enables one to see the world differently. “We don’t find beauty,” he says, “We make the world beautiful by paying attention.”¹

Murakami’s approach pressed me to understand running in a new way. I took his ideas to signify that cultural values, symbols and language embed us in a matrix of context. Hence, the act of running, a common human experience, can manifest itself rather differently in various contexts. By exploring how running is understood, practiced and performed we are able to gain a greater understanding of our deeper motivations, values and philosophies. Running, as viewed by Murakami, takes on many different missions, such as escapism and distraction, but also serves to build mental fortitude, consistent habits, and perseverance, giving him time to contemplate his work as a highly successful writer. Mostly, I was amazed at the sensitivity in which he expressed some of his deepest fears and insecurities and how running served as the perfect metaphor for many of the life lessons he had learned. In a sense, the connections he made between the creative

process of writing and athletic pursuits such as running, reminded me of the foundational works in anthropology on symbolism within cultures and how sport represents deeper meanings and values. “Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity” Clifford Geertz points out “it renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity.”² In this regard, Murakami speaks about how the “one thing I noticed was that writing honestly about running and writing honestly about myself are nearly the same thing.”³ What I realized while reading the memoir was that even in translation, which can never truly grasp the nuances of meaning, I could still gain insight into his thinking and behaviour. I was moved that I could infer so much from an English translation, but also knew that I was only seeing the tip of an iceberg. This book influenced my decision to conduct research on Japanese running culture and inspired me to seek out information from a wide variety of sources. I see myself as a researcher peering into a window that is already tinted by Western interpretations.

I begin with a critical look at how running cultures may have been ‘lost in translation’ when it comes to sport history and socio-cultural studies – my reading of Murakami being the first clue that an academic gap existed in the literature about Japan. Secondly, I sought to engage with sources that related as closely as possible to my topic. This included the use of three memoirs by Nixon Sloan (Jeff Schiebler’s pen name), Adharanand Finn, and Michael Sandrock, two documentaries (Running Japan and Ekiden in Japan), two interviews with Canadian athletes who lived, trained and raced in Japan, and one anime series. The anime series Run Like the Wind, was partcularity useful in illuminating several Japanese values on Ekiden racing, training, and

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running more generally. It considered issues around training as a team, training with a foreigner, and competing in the Hakone Ekiden, Japan’s most prestigious running event of the year. Additional cultural and theoretical texts were gathered, along with the use of news websites in English which specialize in Japanese running such as Japan Running News, all of which have proven to be exceedingly useful. This project, therefore, is able to focus on only one side of a much larger picture, to be developed in the future with the use of direct Japanese sources.

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore the cultural relevance of long-distance running within the Japanese context by investigating cultural values and meanings attributed to running through a focus on Ekiden racing. An Ekiden is a long-distance, multistage relay running race that is exceedingly popular in Japan. Distances and courses vary greatly, as well as the number of competing athletes. The height of the Ekiden session runs between September and February every year. Several features make these races distinct; an emphasis on the importance of the team, who often train and live together; Japan’s sizable sporting system which encourages, supports and values long-distance runners; the specialization of certain runners for certain stages within races; the passing of the tasuki (sash) and its symbolic representation of teams and its support staff; the ‘unscripted drama’ within races and the excitement and viewership this fosters, and finally; the hiring of foreign elite runners by Japanese corporations to live, train and race in Ekidens. Only through placing a lens upon these values and meanings can one begin to

5. Adharanand Finn, The Way of the Runner: A Journey into the Fable World of Japanese Running (New York: Pegasus Books Ltd, 2015), 7. For example, “in Japan, live broadcast of marathons and Ekiden events, which carry all the expert analysis and technical quality given the NFL here at home [in the US], garner staggering numbers. While US marathon broadcasts rarely creep above 1% ratings, in Japan a 10% rating for a major Ekiden or marathon would be a disappointment; certain athletes and events can bring Super Bowl-like 40%-plus ratings.”
understand the experiences of those who participate in Ekidens races, especially if the runners are not themselves Japanese.

My study begins with a substantive examination of running from the Japanese perspective and then moves towards the experiences of Canadians, who learn to navigate their own values and beliefs about running, as they are exposed to the Japanese context. Having illuminated the Japanese running context, I turn to examine the case of two elite Canadian runners, Sue Lee and Jeff Schiebler who both have had direct and extended experience as professional runners in Japan. This emphasizes an interpretation of Japanese running culture as it was experienced by Canadians. Their experiences highlight several intriguing considerations on running, the meanings and values associated with running, and how context influenced their interpretations and experiences with running in Japan. The Japanese context helps support the Canadians interpretations of their experiences and in return, the Canadians highlight significant currents within the Japanese running culture context.
**Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives**

When the words Japan and sport are coupled, long-distance running is not the kind of sporting event that instinctively arises in the popular imagination. Western sporting perspectives on Japan have routinely imagined the martial arts to be indicative of indigenous sporting traditions, while running, a universal physiological form of human movement, has not typically been affixed to any specific culture. The act of running, though seemingly simplistic in execution, is complex in its varied manifestations around the world. It can be viewed as a cultural display, and the runner can be seen as embodying a system of performativity relevant to their cultural context. Running events, competitions, traditions, and philosophies make for compelling research questions and cultural insights and have been examined in a variety of contexts worldwide. The lack of historical works and socio-cultural considerations concerning Japanese running culture is the anchor of this project and provides an invitation to revisit Japanese sporting traditions.

While running in Japan is a manifestation of a unique set of features influenced by environment and cultural attitudes, nothing embodies these sentiments more than Ekiden racing. Ekiden racing is a long distance, multistage relay running event distinctive to Japan. It is a manifestation of how culture informs the presentation and meaning of running, allowing us a glimpse into Japanese long-distance running culture. This study therefore explores historical examples of long-distance running in Japan, and examines its cultural significance through interviews, memoirs, documentaries, and additional literature spanning topics from cultural psychology to sports journalism. It focuses in particular upon the perspectives and experiences of Canadians as expats in Japan, while they participated in Ekiden competitions. Additional works by Japanese authors and socio-cultural works by anthropologists on Japanese culture, have been
utilized in an attempt to triangulate between first-hand and second-hand information. This was needed given the lack of detailed literature concerning this event and became a strong argument for further research on such a remarkable cultural phenomenon. The principle of triangulation was intentionally deployed as a research strategy to support an interwoven perspective, rather than seemingly unconnected threads of information. By pulling from various available mediums and materials, it is in the rich diversity of sources that thematic currents have been woven together, culminating in this project.

This study therefore addresses a number of theoretical perspectives in order to understand the values and meanings of Ekidens to the Japanese, as well as the ways in which elite Canadian runners have themselves experienced, and/or navigated running in and through Japanese culture.

**How Symbols Construct Public Meaning in Sports**

The first section of this project looks at cultural context. This has been interwoven with literature on Japanese identity through currents found in sports literature on running. This project attempts to tease out the values associated with and on display during Ekiden races. Sports have come to represent, “mass produced spectacles which channel the emotional needs of consumers in instrumental ways.” In so doing, cultures have determined “the desirable values or ends of activity and the norms or codes of conduct necessary and proper for the attainment of [those] valued ends.” The intentionality of participating in sports creates social bonds and causes, “the transformation of the self”s inner nature, uniqueness and egoism into symbolic meaning and purpose, discipline and fortitude; and the medium for ties and bonds with others through interpersonal understanding and expectations, generating sociability and solidarity,

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rights and obligations.” In this manner, “sport engages players and fans into a commonly-believed, symbolic universe.”

The combination of sport as spectacle, and sport as creating normative beliefs and social obligations, originated from borrowed anthropological theories on rituals, which would later take a performative turn. In this way, sporting events can be interpreted as symbolic displays of values, known as cultural performances. This speaks directly to the conditions which have fostered the emergence of Ekidens in Japan; the conditions which have created symbolic meaning and purpose for Ekiden participants and spectators. This project calls for the interpretations of cultural symbols, which is the perfect assignment for an anthropologist.

Clifford Geertz is well known for developing the concept of symbolic and interpretive anthropology, demonstrating how culture is complicated, nuanced, and subject to fluidity. He argues that culture can be interpreted through cultural artifacts and that these can be found in cultural texts, languages and rituals, all of which produce symbols which tell us something about the values and meanings individuals attribute to them. In his seminal work, “he describes the sport of cockfighting in Bali, which he says may appear to be a superficial social practice but in

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9. Ibid, 93.
12. Patricia Hudelson, “Culture and Quality: An Anthropological Perspective.” International Journal for Quality in Health Care: Journal of the International Society for Quality in Health Care 16, no. 5 (2004): 345.; See also; Orville Lee, “Observations on Anthropological Thinking about the Culture Concept: Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu.” Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 33 (1988): 115-130. This is in line with most anthropological definitions on culture. For the purpose of this study, culture is loosely defined as the transmission of patterns of meaning, embodied in symbols. This creates a system that perpetuates artifacts created under certain ontological systems. In other words, culture is “the shared set of (implicit and explicit) values, ideas, concepts, and rules of behaviour that allow a social group to function and perpetuate itself.”
fact is related to deep elements of the Balinese culture, self-conception and world-view.”¹³ Sport, in its many iterations, is simply another form of cultural data ready for interpretation. My project uses memoirs, interviews and an anime, on the subject of Ekidens, as cultural texts. Leitmotifs have been gathered and analysed in an attempt to interpret several values and meanings within Japanese running culture. Next, these currents are discussed by the Canadians through their own experiences and interpretations.

One crucial concept is Geertz’s ‘meta-social commentary’ which can comment on Japan’s international perceptions emulated in how the Japanese portrays their athletes in international sport competitions coverage; a tradition that continues today. In this regard “it is widely accepted that Japanese athletes are physically inferior, and have to make up for it by trying harder, practicing harder, and becoming more proficient technically than their physically blessed foreign adversaries.”¹⁴ This symbolic representation of postwar Japan and its international relation to the world, especially in terms of the national sentiments that mental fortitude and superior techniques are the advantages that will defeat the physically stronger foreigners, “is similar to the rhetoric used to motivate the masses for the wartime effort a decade earlier.”¹⁵ William Kelly, points to how this rhetoric is reinforced through the ‘meta-social commentary’ and its reflection in national anxieties which have deeply influenced Japanese sporting traditions and training techniques. This narrative consists of the idea that “Japan, a country lacking in natural resources, defeats the resource-rich countries of the West […] through hard work.”¹⁶ So powerful is the underdog story, that several cases can exemplify how a runners’

¹⁴ William Kelly, This sporting life: Sports and body culture in modern Japan (Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University, 2007), 116.
body follows this predictable description.\textsuperscript{17} This ‘presenting’ of a Japanese body, is a repeated current seen in the literature, the Canadian experiences, and a potential explanation for the emphasis the Japanese place on certain training methodologies.

**Performativity in Sports – The veil between theatrics and performance**

Roland Barthes’ concept of *Performativity* (1972) and an updated modern iteration by Broderick Chow (2017) is a useful lens by which to think about running and the drama that often accompanies Ekiden races. Barthes and Chow’s ideas are closely tied to the notion of *embodiment* articulated by Marcel Mauss (1935) whose *Techniques of The Body* famously examined embodiment within socio-cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{18} Mauss argued that citizens learn how to move their bodies in accordance with socio-cultural norms and expectations. Pierre Bourdieu would later expand on this into the realm of sports, making the investigation of sports and physical activity (SPA) a respectable sociological endeavor. It should be noted that Bourdieu’s work has been criticized because of its deliberate vagueness, which often makes it difficult to apply, due to the ambiguity of his concepts.\textsuperscript{19} Bourdieu is famously known for being both difficult to read and “forcefully opposed to the dogmatism that eventually leads to a sclerosis of thought.”\textsuperscript{20} This means that his concepts are adaptable and not operationally defined,\textsuperscript{21} which can be problematic, but simultaneously applicable for work that requires some fixability. An

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 117. American runner Cathie Twomey won the 1982, 20km competition at the Chunichi Road race in Nagoya. Masuda Akemi from Japan came in second place. The ‘meta-social commentary’ within the media headlines demonstrate how the Japanese runner had set a world record (they both set records, but the American won). It goes on to stress the differences in physical size between the American and Japanese runners (they were nearly the same). To this effect “it is not statistics that made Catie Twomey ‘large’, but the fact that she was competing against Japan’s star Masuda Akemi. Twomey had to be “large” to fit the pattern so that the media could dwell on Masuda’s frail appearance, wondering where in that tiny body was hidden such superhuman stamina”. A second example is seen with Seko, who “subdued the powerful (kyogo) foreign athletes” despite the perceived physical handicaps of his Japanese body.


\textsuperscript{20} Laberge, “Pierre Bourdieu’s,” 261.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 261.
anthropologist by trade, Bourdieu’s seminal works reflected his attention to the social and
cultural significances represented in physical activity, which have greatly contributed to the
discipline of sport sociology. His pivotal concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ as they are applied to
SPA, are the roots from which performativity has emerged. Bourdieu looked at the social
conditions that leads to the existence of sporting activities and discusses the dual roles of activity
and spectacle in this process.\textsuperscript{22} This included determining factors such as “spare time (a
transformed form of economic capital), economic capital (more or less indispensable depending
on the sport), and cultural capital (again, more or less necessary depending on the sport).”\textsuperscript{23}
Although this is used to demonstrate the effects of social class, this can also be applied to nations
and cultures at large, and lays the groundwork for an argument on why running in Japan is
manifested in the way it does. For example, in the case of the Canadians, the Canadian track and
field landscape at the time, had neither economical capital in terms of resources, nor the cultural
capital in terms of national interest in running. In Japan, however, there existed a large national
sporting budget,\textsuperscript{24} and a culture that equally admires running and consumes it as entertainment.
This is most likely due to the exciting format of Ekiden races and the national televised
broadcasts of long-distance races more generally.

The concept of ‘habitus’ is described as “the mediating construct between social position
and social practices” or in other words, how “life conditions and position in a social structure
would fashion a certain sense of the world and shape our perception and desires.”\textsuperscript{25} This
describes a framework from which individuals ontological systems shape their behaviours. In

\textsuperscript{22} Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Sport and Social Class} (Informational Social Science council, 1978), 820.
\textsuperscript{23} Bourdieu, \textit{Sport and Social Class}, 834.
\textsuperscript{24} Lamartine Pereira da Costa, \textit{Worldwide Experiences and Trends in Sport for All} (Meyer & Meyer Verlag,
2002), 96. For a detailed breakdown of the national budget in relation to sport from 1985 to 1995, see Costa.
\textsuperscript{25} Laberge, “Pierre Bourdieu’s,” 247.
this way distinctive preferences as they relate to SPA, can be explained by cultural differences as
these are seen in the perception and appreciation of certain sports, physical activities, and certain
athletes within a cultural context. To this effect,

“the social conditionings linked to a social condition tend to inscribe the relation to the
social world in a lasting, generalized relation to one’s own body, a way of bearing one’s body,
presenting it to others, moving it, making space for it, which gives the body its social
physiognomy.”26

This lens permits culture to be fluid, while still pointing to how the manifestation of SPA
can be reflected back onto the culture itself. In this regard, “SPA practices are the visible
manifestation of the impression one wants to give oneself, of one’s ethic or moral virtues (e.g.,
dignity, straightforwardness, toughness) or social value (e.g., virility, femininity).”27
Furthermore, it is relevant to sporting events as Bernier from The Anthropology of Sport,
explains how,

“sport events reaffirm core beliefs that people hold about their social worlds, provide
some structure for social change, and provide an embodied context that expresses the ways in
which those worlds are changing and how those changes should be understood.”28

The concept of field is valuable as it points to an approach through which to view Ekiden
racing and long-distance running culture in Japan. Field “refers mainly to arenas of production,
circulation and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status centered on a particular
issue.” It is also “a space of competition for resources (economic capital) and rewards (symbolic

26. Ibid, 249.
27. Ibid, 250.
capital).” 29 He argues that specific practices are endowed with their own logic, incentives and rules, generating cultural competence. The concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ are suitable in so far as they provide evidence that ambiguous concepts can still situate behaviours in a meaningful and symbolic manner to be further examined. To this effect,

“Bourdieu’s concept of field encourages the researcher to investigate what is at stake in a given arena, to seek out the sources of conflict and collusion between social groups and institutions that interact, and to uncover the latent patterns of interest and struggle.” 30

Since this study endeavors to explore how sporting events are represented culturally by the Japanese, the contributions of Mauss and Bourdieu’s are useful perspectives to consider as more specific lens.

Research on performativity speaks directly to the embodiment of cultural values through sport; the primary theoretical support of this project. Of particular use are the following ideas expressed by Barthes (1972) when discussing the connection between audiences and spectacle regarding entertainment wrestling. These include; the acceptance of certain emotional expressions within the confines of a performance; the rhetorical amplification of larger cultural values; and the symbolic function of grandiloquent displays as acceptable. To this end, “wrestling is like a diacritic writing” 31 written on the body of the wrestler while demonstrating how “there is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in theater. In both, what is expected is the intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private.” 32

This is significant when one considers how Ekidens encourages a spectacle of emotional ranges often displayed in similar ways, as exaggerated contorted faces and emotional outbursts

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30. Ibid, 258.
32. Ibid, 18.
Ekidens are both a sport and a spectacle, with the theatrical components interlinked with athletic performances. This is represented by the Canadians and within the literature as ‘unscripted drama.’ In both cases they share an “exhibition of suffering which is the very aim of the fight. This is why all the actions which produce suffering are particularly spectacular” and show how “suffering appears as inflicted with emphasis and conviction, for everyone must not only see that the man suffers, but also and above all understand why he suffers.” Athletes are sincere in their displays of suffering and pain, but these actions are equally bound up in the formal symbols of culturally acceptable arenas. Suffering, especially the public displays of suffering, are acceptable and anticipated in long distance running events, a testament to how “in wrestling, as on the stage in antiquity, one is not ashamed of one’s suffering, one knows how to cry, one has a liking for tears.”

Professional entertainment wrestling similarly holds a philosophical space at the intersection between sport and performance. There is a debatable tension between concepts of real and fake, authenticity and realism, sincerity and formalism. Barthes (1972) looked to wrestling as displaying humanistic experiences and values, but which at times blurred the space between spectacle and sport. For example, he stated that; “fair wrestling could lean only to boxing or judo. Whereas true wrestling derives its originality from all the excesses which make it a spectacle and not a sport.” It is not a sport because the audience does not seek to view a

34. Barthes, Mythologies, 19-20.
35. Ibid, 16.
36. Ibid, 23.
sporting competition but “the transient image of certain passions.” 37 This could perhaps be akin to the cathartic experience often described in line with the production of theater.

However, Chow’s (2017) more recent explorations of Barthes concepts take performativity a step further, arguing how although the theater is fake, performances can fall within the realm of the ‘real’. 38 Of particular interest are the strategies used by wrestlers to communicate pain to an audience. Literature on performance scholarship assumes that wrestling is both physically like a sport, but also cooperative and theatrical in nature, which is how an athlete can perform certain cultural values through the medium of sports. The performance creates a connection between performer and audience/spectators in a shared symbolic ‘field’. Performers conduct actions, much like how athletes perform, yet the motivation behind the athletic action is theatrical. The audience must engage in a suspension of belief on the dramatic plot and their personification of characters. Performance, therefore, is the same in sport, but the suspension of belief is less necessary for the ensuing drama to proceed. This goes beyond just representation into the realm of symbolism. In a similar way that flags in wrestling “become theatricalised national identifiers” the tasuki, or sash can have a shared meaning. Literature on professional wrestling suggests that it is “a distinct form of representation that bridges the gap between sport and performance” and therefore it might be possible to view sporting events like Ekidens in a similar fashion.

Cultural critic Peter Stromberg makes an interesting argument on the importance of play within cultures and suggests how a suspension of belief is often necessary in order for audiences to engage with a fiction as if it were real. He states how “serious play is a form of human

37. Ibid, 16.
development that enables us to work through experiences in low-stakes situations.”\textsuperscript{39} Although this can be interpreted that sports are simply ancestral survival reenactments; it is more likely a performance of shared nationalistic agendas and cultural values. An Ekiden is a sporting event, imbued with ideological symbolism through which values are communicated to an audience. To this effect,

“the experience of play is linked to forms of entertainment and the structure of spectacular events affect attendant responses in predictable ways. If play is a form of human development used to train in without risk of death, then creating playful events has the potential to be used to shape human behaviour and to create shared values.”\textsuperscript{40}

An example of this at work are the strategies used in performance wrestling to communicate pain to an audience. This is relevant because it points to how “our ability to manage, control and articulate pain can be unique to a culture, group or individual.”\textsuperscript{41} This does not ignore that there are universal biological response within the body to pain, but suggests that the expression of pain, is predicated on socialization. This is why running, another universal form of human movement, can manifest itself differently and can be seen and performed in a variety of acceptable ways. For this reason, both entertainment wrestlers, and Ekiden runners perform pain in a way that is recognizable and authentic to the local audience or spectators. The Japanese both hide and/or overtly display pain and suffering based on the appropriate social contexts.\textsuperscript{42} Ekiden races become spaces of acceptable exhibition in a similar way that for

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\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 27.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{41} Chow, \textit{Performance and Professional Wrestling}, 54.
wrestlers, “pain authenticates the consequences of the performance for fan and participants alike.”

Performance and the ‘real’ become increasingly blurred, especially when considering how wrestlers have been known to use real injuries as “markers of endurance and signifiers of pain.”

Despite the cultural assumption that the Japanese demonstrate control by remaining calm and emotion-less, “if anything, one demonstrates that “I’m doing my best” through expressions of pain and distress.” This concept does not ignore that pain is real, it simply suggests that even something as fundamentally humanistic as the experience of pain can be performed in accordance to powerful cultural influences.

This section thus shows how the concept of performativity functions as a theoretical thread between the live connection of the performer and audiences. It considers the embodiment of cultural values through sport, and how sport can be a spectacle as well as a site for ritual in so far as it produces shared symbolic meaning. Performativity can thus help us understand the connection between sport and performance and demonstrate how Ekidens and long-distance running is an acceptable cultural performance of pain and suffering – though also of elation, drama and community.

**Transnational Grafting – The Mobility of Sports**

Another important perspective when looking at sport in Japan, is an understanding about the transnational grafting of sports. This project prefers to look at how long-distance running as a topic has been overlooked for several reasons (e.g. an inwards gaze, Nihonjinron literature, and

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44. Ibid, 161.
45. Kelly, *This Sporting Life*, 94.
46. Ibid, 50. One example is that club members of a baseball team are “not allowed to use words for hurt or pain, but instead could only talk about an “itch.”
orientalism) and moves away from an ethnocentric view of a cultural ownership when it comes to certain sports. At the same time, one of the most recognized iterations of imported sports in Japan is baseball, which provides a fascinating example of how sport is manifested when coming into contact with the Japanese social context.

Whiting’s study *You Gotta have Wa*, is one of the best analyses of Japanese culture through the lens of sport to date. He suggests that attempting to claim ownership of a sport, once it has been integrated into a different culture, ignores the fluidity of culture, and by definition the plasticity of sporting cultures. He provides Japanese baseball as evidence, demonstrating how a sport can be ‘grafted’ onto a culture, making it simultaneously recognizable and yet entirely dissimilar in its manifestation. For example, “even though the games are played by the same set of rules, Japanese and American baseball reflect the respective cultural backgrounds from which they have evolved.”

The concept of transnational grafting can be extended to individual athletes, in so far as they become exposed to new philosophies around training. This underlying philosophy is what permeates the approach taken with Ekiden racing and the Canadians’ involvement. By exploring the Canadians’ reactions and experiences to what running long distances entails within the Japanese context, we can highlight several important issues, such as the available resources and support systems for runners, or the training philosophies and techniques that have accompanied them.

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Transnational Mobility of Athletes – Why Japan?

Literature on leisure travel points to the privileged position given to those who travel for pleasure, health reasons, intellectual interests and cultural education. This is in contrast to migration studies which emerged out of labour history and focuses upon the difficulties of movement and the harsh realities of adjustment. The experiences of Lee and Schiebeler are reminiscent of both these camps; both are privileged in the nature of their mobility, although they could be simultaneously included under the term ‘labour migration’. Lee and Schiebeler noted that the Canadian climate was not supportive to an elite athletic lifestyle or regime, and that they were attracted to the financial incentives offered by Japan. However, our Canadians runners are neither leisure travelers nor underprivileged immigrant workers. Research conducted on affluent expats communities seems a better analogy for their situation, in which ‘mobile professionals’ is a closer fit. For this reason the Canadians are not ‘uprooted migrants’, as migrant studies suggest, but more attuned to the idea of resilient and privileged ‘transplanted professionals.’ This aligns with how anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated a recent interest in expats, which has emphasized the novelty of elites migration abroad and the need for new definitions to describe their professional and elite status. The mobility of athletes across nations to train and compete has also been explored by Elliott, and Stead, who explore the sport labour migration

of Nordic and Scandinavian soccer plays into the professional league in England. Elliott examines athletic labour migration, following the flow of sporting culture across borders. Pulling from research outside of the sociology of sport, he argues that athletes can be considered as ‘professional skilled workers’. Lee and Schiebler were ‘employed athletes’ of the corporate Ekiden system in Japan and hence fell within the ‘elite’ category as athletes in terms of skills. Filo further developed a hypothesis on the motives of participating in international running event. Although focused on sporting tourism, some topics such as prestige, and the learning of intercultural knowledge are in line with the Canadians’ knowledge of Ekidens and the contracts they received from the Japanese corporations. The mobility of Tongan rugby players to Japan by Besnier provides further insight into the kind of agency and constraints experienced by the transnational movement of foreign professional athletes. These were experienced by both Lee and Schiebler as they navigated their new running contexts, especially in terms of hospitality and the leniencies they were granted. While there was no overt attempt at complete integration on the part of the Canadians, Schiebler explained that he resisted the Japanese attempts to integrate him into their training culture. Lee was in a different position having her husband and coach with her, as well as a contract that stipulated they have full control of their training regime. Additionally, both acknowledged that they were granted leniency and tolerance given their foreign status – a situation that was not permitted for Japanese individuals.

It is well known that Japan has actively recruited international athletes and running coaches to gain skills and knowledge in long-distance running. Stead’s work on the migration of Nordic/Scandinavian soccer players to England follows the motivations for transnational mobility of professional athletes with financial incentives and the quest for experiences. These are key elements in the migration of international runners and have also been acknowledged in various studies concerning Canadian athletes who train and live as corporate sponsored athletes in Japan.

Literature on self-initiated expatriates (individuals who have chosen to move to Japan to live and work) is explored by Peltokorpi. A discussion on cross-cultural adjustment in Japan is particularly useful for two reasons: it helps explain the motivations for traveling to Japan as skilled professionals, and secondly, the leniency given to foreigners by the Japanese. For example, self-initiated expatriates “have the objectives of cross-cultural experience, adventure, [and] self-development,” attitudes that were mirrored by the Canadians. On the other hand, the treatment of foreigners in Japan was indicative of both a positive experience in terms of exceptional hospitality but also a distancing experience in terms of relational connections. For example,

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57. Stead, “Rite De Passage.”
“Japanese tend to give foreigners the red-carpet treatment by being polite on the surface but distinguishing them clearly as out-group members. This red-carpet treatment is likely to make long-term foreign residents in particular feel that they are guests who are unable to integrate into Japanese society no matter how hard they try.”

Discussions on in-group and out-group relations is discussed in the ‘sources of cultural context’ section but should be acknowledged as also playing a significant role in the experiences of the Canadians while in Japan. Additionally, among the examples of adjustment challenges, a relevant issue is that “there is a tendency among Japanese to show the ‘right’ attitudes, behavioral patterns and values in order to fit into the group.” This ‘correct’ attitude plays a noteworthy role in the behaviours demonstrated by the Japanese and witnessed by the Canadians, when it comes to long-distance running and training in Japan.

**Big in Japan – The Inward Gaze**

Runners who have lived and participated in the Japanese running culture suggest that Japan has an ethos of looking inwards, hence running culture and running events such as Ekidens are in a sense contained by geographical, linguistic and cultural interests. The term ‘Big in Japan’ represents an orientalist definition of ‘success’ that is limited within a bounded local; a continuity of geographical identity made possible through relative historical isolation. Brett Larner a Canadian journalist whose career consists of reporting on Japanese running culture through his website *Japan Running News* sums up the lack of international exposure and the exclusivity of Japanese running events when he states, “it’s one of the sad truths of Japanese

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61. Ibid, 1098.
distance running that you never see them at their absolute best unless you get to see the New Year or Hakone Ekidens.”

Hendry’s study *Understanding Japanese Culture*, “starts from the premise that understanding Japan helps us understand ourselves.” It is considered to be the anthropological standard on understanding Japanese society over the last 25 years. In addition to an inward gaze she suggests that, “Japanese people are extremely adept at presenting themselves and their country in the way they think appropriate to a local audience, and they may also be keen to present a good image of their country, even if they have private doubts.” As these layers accumulate when gazing at Japan, similar to layering glazes on ceramics, a clear interpretation is obstructed by the flows and counterflows of meaning.

This project argues that Japan is neither unique, nor a direct copy of other cultures, with sport as the model. What is interesting about Ekiden racing and Japanese running culture is that it appears to have the ability to pull runners in from around the world to Japan, which is demonstrative of a stronger draw inward, in comparison to its transmission outwards.

One such example is Douglas Wakihiuri, the 1987 World championships gold medalist from Kenya who was one of the first foreign athletes to be hired by a Japanese corporate company to run professionally in Japan in 1983. He is described as “born in Kenya, nurtured in Japan” and as “a man of two worlds” having spent 6 years professionally as a runner and living in Japan thereafter. He was a Japanese household name, beloved by the public and speaks fluent

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64. Hendry’s work considers the symbolic characteristics of Japanese behaviour in a comprehensive way.
Japanese.\footnote{Kenny Moore, “A Man of two Worlds: Born in Kenya, Nurtured in Japan, Douglas Wakiihuri is an Olympic Marathon Favorite,” Sport Illustrated Vault, September 12, 1988, https://vault.si.com/vault/1988/09/12/a-man-of-two-worlds-born-in-kenya-nurtured-in-japan-douglas-wakiihuri-is-an-olympic-marathon-favorite.} He performed well internationally and in local Japanese races, Ekidens and marathons. What is fascinating is that his Wikipedia page fails to mention anything to do with Japan at all, and yet this is clearly a relevant feature of his running career.\footnote{“Douglas Wakiihuri,” Wikipedia, March 27, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_Wakiihuri} He set several Japanese course records, yet these achievements are not mentioned on Western and European running websites.\footnote{“Wakiihuri Marathon ‘Mystery Guest,’” Chicago Tribune, November 4, 1990, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-11-04-9004030710-story.html} In our interview Lee mentions that he was hired just before her arrival in Japan and demonstrates an understanding that he is an example of a foreign athlete who embraced life in Japan.\footnote{“Runner sings Japan’s praises: Kenyan champ Wakiihuri dedicates CD to second home,” The Japan Times, November 27, 2001, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2001/11/27/national/runner-sings-japans-praises/#.XpOnHS8ZP-Y} His life in Japan appears to be only known by the Japanese, or those who are within the small circles of foreign runners who have participated directly in Japanese running culture. This inward world appears to be wrapped in two layers; geographical local with an internal current, and the social circles of elite national level runners. Fortunately, the province of British Columbia in Canada is home to many past and present elite runners, many of whom have direct knowledge about the Japanese running scene that otherwise goes unnoticed. For example; Jerome Drayton set the Canadian marathon national record in Japan (1975) which stood for 43 years, the oldest Canadian record ever.\footnote{Scott Russel, “Jerome Drayton and the oldest Canadian record,” CBC. June 7, 2012, https://www.cbc.ca/sports-content/blogs/scottrussell/2012/06/jerome-drayton-and-the-oldest-canadian-record.html.} He mentions the superior running scene in Japan saying,
“Boston, in my years, it wasn’t really that high quality. There were only two or three runners that I’d have to worry about in terms of competition. But in Japan, it was usually anywhere from up to about 20 including the Japanese. It was very high quality in those days.”

More recently Rachel Cliff in 2019, broke the Canadian marathon record while racing in Japan. These examples point to how runners seek out races that fit appropriately into their training, and Japan fits the bill in terms of organization and quality. Dylan Wykes and Rachel Cliff address the question of why Canadians perform so well in Japan. Cliff states that;

“There is a real love for road racing in Japan and I think because of this they have a lot of depth in their races–anyone can see this by looking at the IAAF rankings but experiencing it firsthand was pretty cool. The event itself was so well organized, punctual, and a good environment to perform in. I also appreciated their hospitality –the meet director took the foreign athletes out for a nice sushi dinner in Marugame after the race, which was really fun.”

It is important to preface this ‘inwards’ perspective with an understanding that the transnational movement of athletes, sporting events and even ideas are never unidirectional. There is evidence in the literature that in the last ten-years Ekidens have begun to appear outside of Japan on several occasions. The transnational emergence of Ekidens in countries such as the

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U.K, Canada, New Zealand and France, points to an interesting trend in sporting globalization.75 This is especially true given that no literature has been found specifically on Ekidens and its transnational spread, including the use of the word ‘Ekiden’ to describe relay races abroad.

Green76 explains that the literature of transnationalism since the 1990s “has been used to describe everything, from crossing physical borders to crossing intellectual ones.” It is demonstrative of a flexibility and interchangeability between terms such as globalization, transnationalism, comparative history and connected history.78 This project is less concerned with transnational theory that presupposed Romantic leisure tourism as a primary motivation for travel.79 This is in relation to the idea of an exotic pursuit of Japanese culture or an ‘authentic’ training experience, which has been well documented in literature on Japanese sports such as Judo.80 While neither Lee nor Schiebler expressed their motives for going to Japan as a desire for an authentic Japanese running experience, their resistance was seen primarily in conflicting styles of training (for both) and monitoring (for Schiebler).

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77. Ibid, 851.  
78. Ibid, 852.  
79. Shelly Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Tyler Jared Miracle. "Western Bushido: The American Invention of Asian Martial Arts." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014.; David Brown and Aspasia Leledaki, "Eastern Movement Forms as Body-Self Transforming Cultural Practices in the West: Towards a Sociological Perspective." Cultural Sociology 4, no. 1 (2010): 123-154. Late 18th century and early 20th century incorporated research on Western/European travel and mobility that is associated with a romantic masculine (heroic or adventurous) leisure travel ideal. This emphasized a pursuit of an ‘authentic’ experiences or the ‘exotic’ especially in terms of Asia. This is particularly true in the martial arts disciplines, seen in the pursuits of a romantic or spiritual experience - a nostalgia or escape from modernity in the West.  
Given that Lee and Schiebler are included in both Canadian and Japanese sports history, and that travel encompasses cross-cultural encounters, it would make sense that their experiences are often expressed through comparing and contrasting ideas which elicit overreaching impressions. It is for this reason that their narratives are helpful in understanding the reasons why we travel for sport.

“In a sense it is an indirect approach, which hopes by way of the broader context to deflate claims of national greatness and to gesture to histories that are more connected, more aware and of a piece with the modern world. Furthermore, biography has become a favored mode of expression, highlighting the courage and creativity of individual actors.”81

Additionally, knowing what the word and meaning of an Ekiden race is increasingly seen as a sign of prestige and knowhow within the running community. Finn’s book, *The Way of the Runner: A Journey into the Fabled World of Japanese Running*, suggests that a running culture can be both hidden and unknown but also ‘fabled’ and remarkable by those who have had the opportunity to glimpse it. Finn also points to Japan’s inward facing running culture and in particular its intense focus on Ekidens and explains that “while events such as Hakone and the New Year Ekiden remain virtually unknown outside Japan, their best performances will continue to go unnoticed by the rest of the world.”82 Finn alludes to this sentiment, “One reason Japanese marathon madness remains semi-secret may be because the country’s amateur runners tend not to race abroad” and this is the same for elite runners because “there are so many big marathons in Japan, and [runners] get paid well to race in them by their corporate teams, who are focused on

the Japanese fans. The best runners here, he notes, are just as famous and recognizable as stars from soccer, baseball, karate and other sports.”

Amateur long-distance running is so popular that “the Imperial Palace in Tokyo sees an average of 4,000 recreational runners a day training for the marathon outside the Emperor of Japan’s residence.” The appeal of long-distance running in Japan extends beyond an elite or professional level, its marathon market exceeding that of the United States - one factor to consider when referencing the depth of running talent in Japan, which has generally gone unnoticed and unexplored. In fact, “Japanese runners accounted for more than 40 percent of worldwide growth in the event [marathon] from 2006 to 2015.” While marathoning has taken off since the inauguration of the Tokyo Marathon in 2007, Ekidens and specifically the Hakone Ekiden is still “the country’s most-watched sports event. It has the cultural impact of a Super Bowl and World Series combined.” This is a promising area in need of future research.

Sources of Cultural Context

In Invented Traditions (1983), Hobsbawm suggests that physical contests can take on larger national symbolic meanings which encourage social cohesion. This speaks to civic culture in Japan given that invented traditions can perpetuate beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour. Ekidens are a symbolic manifestation of meaning, identity and values embodying Japanese sentiments on endurance, suffering and mental fortitude. The intersection of performativity, embodiment and tradition can thus help us to explore the ethos of Japanese

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84. Seccafien, Feature: Running - Big in Japan.
86. Higginbottom, “Run Tokyo, Run.”
87. Ibid.
running culture through its connection to tradition within Japanese sport history in the form of Ekidens. Indeed, as Hargreaves has pointed out, the interplay between physical culture, national identity, and performance makes it “impossible to separate bodily experience from culture meaning.”

Finally, Benedict Anderson’s (1983) *Imagined Communities* is a cornerstone in many sociological explorations and ethnographic work on the personal and cultural feelings of belonging to a nation. This is relevant to Ekiden racing, helping explain why citizens feel that a certain sport ‘belongs’ to them and represents them favorably internationally, especially in relation to long-distance races like the marathon. The general premise of both *Invented Traditions* and *Imagined Communities* suggests a social and cultural construction of meaning, a suitable approach to syphering the cultural significance of long-distance running in Japan and the Canadian experience within the Japanese running cultural context. We turn now to an example within the literature of a specific Japanese runner in order to contextualize some of the values held within Japanese running culture.

**The Marathon is an Art; the Marathoner is an Artist**

Toshihiko Seko was one of the biggest names in marathoning during the 1980s, which coincided with Lee’s and Schiebler’s experiences and timelines. Both make reference to Seko’s cultural omnipresence during their time in Japan. He is described as being “an enduring figure who exemplifies the Japanese approach to running, which is far different than that of any other

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90. Michael Sandrock, *Running with the Legends.* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1996), 354.; This was famously quoted by Nakamura, Seko’s coach.
91. Ibid. Seko has won the Boston, London, Chicago, Tokyo and is the four-time winner of the Fukuoka Marathon. He also held the world record in 30,000-meter track event.
country.”92 For this reason, accounts of Seko by historians, journalists and elite runners, provide valuable insight into the culturally embodied values he emulated and how these were perceived by foreigners. Seko was internationally known and viewed as formidable when competing against American and European runners in the marathon, finishing second to Bill Rogers,93 who comments “all I could think of was, the Japanese have returned” and how Seko was “the fittest human being I’ve ever seen.”94 Rich Castro95 describes how Seko “kind of surprises you […] He wasn’t the most fluid runner; he was just tenacious.”96 In this way, “Seko embodied for the rest of the world all the mystery and discipline that is Japan.”97 One of these notions is the concept of makenki which can be roughly translated to mean ‘the spirit of not losing’ though it also insinuates a person who takes pride in what they are doing, and therefore strives not to lose.98 Seko’s father is known to have initially expressed doubts about his son’s ability to withstand marathon training in Japan, fearing that his son had neither the disposition nor the mental fortitude, and saying that a Japanese marathon runners’ training is a “terrible, cruel lifestyle.”99 In return, Seko is famously quoted as saying, “the marathon is my only girlfriend. I give her everything I have.”100

Despite his father’s anxiety about the arduous training demands, his description of Seko noted that “he wasn’t very big, but his will not to lose was strong.”101 The sentiment of being physically smaller and in a way ‘inferior’ to their Western and European counterparts in terms of

92. Ibid, 346.
94. Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 365.
95. Rich Castro is the Boulder Road Runners president.
96. Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 365.
98. Ibid, 347.
100. Ibid, 353.
101. Ibid, 347.
physicality, is a strong cultural reminder of wartime insecurities and environmental famine.  

Finn, explains how “Japan has a deep history with running. Since the end of World War II, many have relied on the sport. Marathon running was seen as a worthy and admirable pursuit, embodying the discipline, effort and commitment the country valued and needed to get back on its feet after the devastation of the war.”

This concept has also been explored in research related to plans to host the Olympic Games and promote what have been called ‘coming-out’ parties. In this sense, a lingering and “profound uneasiness about measuring up in the eyes of the West seemed to haunt the Japanese [...] the Japanese cared about the Games, and cared desperately.” The internalization of some of these ideas points out how “a tortured modern history and a persistent national compulsion to overcome it created a distinctive and uneasy Olympic nationalism.” On the other hand, this has had a profound effect on approaches to coaching and training in Japan regarding the focus placed on long-distance running. This has meant placing a focus on mental toughness rather than training for the physicality of a race. It is the same argument provided to account for the incredible depth of long-distance runners in Japan, despite the short and domestically focused careers they experience (by running in Ekidens), due to their high rates of injuries. For example, Nakamura explains that, “most American don’t practice as hard. They take breaks and cut down on distances. Seko and most Japanese runners run every day, even after a marathon. Just imagine

103. Higg imb o t, “Run Tokyo, Run.”
106. Ibid,10.
what the bigger, stronger foreigners could do if they trained like Seko, or if they had me as a coach.”¹⁰⁷ In this sense “the relationship between American coaches and their athletes is generally confined to practice, and all they talk about is strategy” while for the Japanese “it’s more important for the runner to be with the coach day in and day out so he can learn how to live and think.”¹⁰⁸ Seko is thus a central example of several relevant meanings and values through his embodiment of Japanese running culture. He “represents everything the Japanese value; he epitomizes the Japanese respect for their elders. He has what the Japanese consider the perfect coach-athlete relationship and personifies what might be known as ‘total obedience’, sunao.”¹⁰⁹ From the perspectives of the Canadians one could suspect that “the athlete doesn’t have his own mind.”¹¹⁰ As Lee pointed out it was an exceedingly difficult aspect to witness – and even more difficult for Schiebler who experienced instances where he was expected to integrate this approach into this style of training, resulting in his subsequent resistance.

Another current within Seko’s example is the sincere belief that while “talent is limited, effort is unlimited.”¹¹¹ Seko’s running career has followed a typical trajectory of many Japanese long-distance runners; through a system that is supportive both culturally and infrastructurally through the development of high school runners who participate in the Ekiden system through university and beyond.¹¹² At the time, the traditional way of training long-distance runners was a ‘total immersion’ which included a coach/athlete relationship described in the literature as shitei.

¹⁰⁷ Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 352.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 252.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 351.
¹¹⁰ Ibid, 351.
¹¹¹ Ibid, 349.
¹¹² Ibid, 347-348.; Seko, was “competing in ekidens - relay races with legs of varying distances that are a very popular cultural tradition in Japan. The New Years and many major calendar events are celebrated by the running of ekidens. The New Year Ekiden is the equivalent of America’s Super Bowl. Friends and families gather to eat and watch five hours of live coverage of the race.”
the teacher/pupil relationship. For this reason, a coach is seen more as a leader of an Ekiden corporate team, different from the definition the Canadians might have of a coach. For example, in Japan

“runners get in a circle around the coach, who gives words of wisdom for the day. The runners bow, then go to their workout. When they return, they again gather in a circle around the coach and bow again, thanking the coach for his guidance and for coaching them.”

The Japanese coach is thus not only responsible for workouts but expected to be deeply involved in all aspects of his athletes’ lives, so much so that many famous Japanese coaches are known to move in and live with their runners. This practice is demonstrated by Schiebeler in his experience with his coach under contract in Japan. While the Japanese runner perceives the total dedication and involvement of the coach in their lives as a sign of sincere caring and support, Schiebeler’s retelling of this particular practice is humorously expressed in his memoir and discussed in more detail in ‘The Canadian Runners’ section.

For Seko, moving in with Nakamura (his coach) was seen as complete dedication and devotion but also inevitably meant “that Nakamura could watch over every detail of his life.” Indeed Nakamura described his role as a coach noting how, “people are fearful, because they don’t know what things they possess. You can’t really know what your potential or possibilities are until they are shown to you. Someone needs to draw them out of you.” This is indicative of an idea about a right ‘way’ in which to train for a marathon through an intense and intimate coach/athlete relationship, giving “him literally 24-hours-a-day attention.”

115. Ibid, 249.
116. Ibid, 349.
117. Ibid, 350.
coaching has become known in Japan as ‘Nakamuraism’\textsuperscript{118} because of the total commitment, and
the fanatical training regimes involved. Indeed, some of Nakamura’s methods have become
described as ‘old-school’ training methodologies by the Canadians, alluding to excessive
authoritarian and punitive or negative reinforcement practices.

According to Brendan Reilly, an American who lived in Japan for six years and
translated Seko’s autobiography, these views include a strong belief in the importance of heavy
mileage. Nakamura feels that because the Japanese are not as big or as strong as their foreign
competitors, Japanese runners must work much harder and be capable of ‘unlimited effort’. This
caracter-building attitude is often translated into running workouts for Seko of 50 to 60-miles
(80km – 96km) a day as a regular part of training, resulting in 200-mile distance weeks
(321km).\textsuperscript{119} This also includes a regime of three runs workouts a day and intense training camps
called gasshuku.\textsuperscript{120} Seko often went to Hokkaido, a popular Ekiden team training prefecture. In
terms of training,

“very long runs are part of the running tradition of the Japanese, who place the utmost
importance on overdistance training. Some Japanese runners have been known to run eight hours
on their long runs […] They try to overcompensate by doing incredible workouts.”\textsuperscript{121}

Several currents are important to highlight here; a tradition of long-distance running; the
importance placed on over-distance training; and a belief in building the mental aptitude above
the physical in so far as the physicality follows naturally if an athlete has the ‘correct’ attitude. A
correct attitude is mirrored in what consists of running a ‘good’ race, one that does not always

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 352. Nakamura also eligibly said, “I gave up hitting my runners when I discovered that words were
more effective.”
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, 345-368. Other examples include: Running 1200km in 8 days (150 km a day) during a training camp,
setting a world record for the 50k distance in training, and running up to 6 hours a day.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 350.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 361.
mean a favorable performance. Ekidens have been described as ‘unscripted drama’ a concept that will becomes increasingly meaningful when discussed by the Canadians. The performative nature of this drama speaks to several culturally relevant displays; an acceptable arena in which to express cathartic civic emotions of joy and disappointment; and heroic public displays of effort and suffering. These are often performed by athletes who collapsed, crawled or cried during Ekidens, something the Canadians felt uncomfortable participating in themselves to the same dramatic effect.

This total commitment and fanatical training regimes understandably resulted in Seko battling injuries throughout most of his running career, something both Lee and Schiebler also had to do their best to navigate and avoid while in Japan. Additionally, the running of small measured loops was a practice the Canadians found challenging. This appears to have been a common custom in Japan during the 1980s, where even at training camps in the mountains (which had beautiful forest trails), teams would run around small gravel loops repeatedly. Seko is known to have run a 1,325m loop with every 100m measured and marked for accuracy, running loops up to 50 times in a workout.122 This ‘attention to detail’, and the reasoning behind the utility of running loops is discussed by the Canadians and linked in the literature on Japanese running culture. Again, it relates to the belief that “physical training is only 10 percent of the total preparation; the other 90 percent is mental. We have to do things like this so we can overcome the larger, stronger foreign competitors.”123 These are all reasons why Japanese running is seen as different by foreigners to Japan. Brian Sheriff for example comments that, “the Japanese approach to running is unlike that in the United States, Britain, New Zealand,

122. Ibid, 353.
123. Ibid, 353.
Australia, Kenya, or any of the other countries, with a deep running tradition. The one thing in common is the competition. Other than that, everything else is different.”

A major difference lies in the intensity of training undertaken though it is important to explore the underlying forces at work. Although Japan’s inward gaze and Ekiden system appears to be bounded internally, the case of Seko also illuminates an international awareness and sense of responsibility. To this end, “Japanese runners are not just running for themselves, but for their 120 million countrymen; and even beyond that, for the millions of ancestors who live on in the memories of their decedents.” The roots of some of the training philosophies may be reflective of ideas about Japanese identity and nationalism, which is also deeply integrated into cultural contexts. This could be why Seko’s last race was seen as “an event of national importance” and how Seko himself, for a decade, “had come to symbolize Japanese running.” He “made marathon training a sacrament” in Japan and is equally relevant in contextualizing the experiences of the Canadians in Japan.

**Performing Perfection – Kodawari**

Anthropologist Merry White in her ethnographic study on Japanese coffee life, covers over a hundred and thirty years of social change, the use of public spaces and the Japanese notion of sociality around coffee culture. Chapter four entitled *Masters of Their Universes*:

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124. Toni Reavis, “Where did the Great Mexican Runners turn wrong - part 2” *Wondering in a Running World*. Blog. September 11, 2013, https://tonireavis.com/2013/09/11/where-did-the-great-mexican-runners-turn-wrong-part-2/. “Brian Sheriff was one of the finest road racers of the late ’80s, early ’90s. [He] took an offer from Mazda to represent their Ekiden Relay team, and moved to Japan, where he lives to this day in Hiroshima with his Japanese wife and family.”


126. Ibid, 367.

127. Ibid, 359.

128. Merry White, *Coffee Life in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 71.; Coffee culture is surprisingly more appropriate here than the rites of the Japanese tea ceremony. The reason being that “the process and performance may overwhelm the experience of the product, but the goal of coffee-making, whatever formula is used, is the service, […] of a perfect cup to a guest.”; Additionally, coffee in Japan is an excellent example of how
Performing Perfection, is evocatively relevant to the concept of running and running a ‘good’ race because it deals with several currents within Japanese culture. The concept of kodawari is introduced as a performative act that imbues the making of a perfect cup of coffee. In this way, “perfection is in the person, not in the cup: the ‘master’ is an embodiment of the desire for the ultimate coffee experience.” Kodawari is a term so nuanced, that it separates itself from the English word ‘Master’ (maasutaa) and the Japanese term ‘Teacher’ (sensei), which customarily means “the person who has gone before” in experience and learning. This is why “the master is a teacher as well as a performer of this virtuous act.” In Japan a new word was required to describe the combination of these virtues as embodied and enacted by café owners, kodawari. This is translated as a passion bordering on obsession. It can also be translated as “fastidiousness”, “disciplined dedication”, a “personal passion to pursue something” or “obsession.” This is why kodawari is embedded in the thing produced and is “conventionally termed ‘art,’ but it can be in any endeavor a value-adding practice.” Encapsulated in this

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129. White, Coffee Life in Japan, 66.
130. Ibid, 66.
131. Ibid, 67.
133. Ibid, 68.
concept is the idea of *attention to detail* which can sometimes cater to a stereotypical view that the Japanese are fixated on perfection. From the perspective of an outsider, advertisements such as the All Nippon Airlines company whose tagline reads “attention to detail isn’t written in our training manual. It’s in our DNA,”\(^\text{134}\) appears to reinforce the concept that “many non-Japanese see Japanese as pathologically engaged in perfectionism.”\(^\text{135}\) However, I agree with Steven Reed\(^\text{136}\) when he explains how foreigners have difficulty contextualizing cultural acts, arguing that foreigners see the “Japanese tendency to focus on detail […] and cannot entertain the possibility that cultural acts can be rational, common-sense ones.”\(^\text{137}\) This concept is relevant when speaking about perfectionism and attention to detail as it relates to training methodologies and attitudes towards racing. This is made evident by the Canadians and within the memoirs on running culture in Japan. Interestingly, attention to detail which sometimes get extrapolated to mean a focus on technique, is assumed to come at the cost of creativity and ‘soul’. However, this is not entirely true as *kodawari* encompasses the belief “that one must love what one does to do it well”\(^\text{138}\) meaning that ‘soul’ must, by definition, be included in the performance. In fact, one performs perfection “as an act of diligence and a sign of value.”\(^\text{139}\) There is however, one important distinction to discuss. The built-in principle of learning in Japan is an understanding that one will never achieve perfection. This is why, at first glance the high standards of the Japanese are what have given rise to this presumption, although as we engage deeper there is little if no emphasis on outcomes. Rather it is “an ideal about process and effort. Children are not encouraged to think, ‘I’ve done my best’, but rather to work constantly to improve. There is no

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134. Ibid, 69.
135. Ibid, 68.
137. White, *Coffee Life in Japan*, 68.
138. Ibid, 68.
139. Ibid, 68.
ceiling on achievement in this model. Perfection is aspirational rather than attainable.”

*Kodawari* is an act of displayed diligence, a fitting word for the performance (such as racing a marathon) and the training required of long-distance runners. What is so appropriate about the use of the word *kodawari* is that it “describes correct attitude but does not demand perfect performance.” This is mirrored in the attitudes and values depicted in the anime series *Run with the Wind*, which are in turn, symbolic reflections of currents within Japanese long distance running culture. This is contrasted with the Canadian interpretations who understand that the process and subsequent building of character is a strong value in Japan, but whose’ status as a hired professional runner on these Ekiden teams appears to be predicated on performance outcomes. The Japanese attention to detail is equally challenging for the Canadians, which becomes apparent in descriptions of the precision in which training routes are charted. However, such attention to detail is socialized early in the Japanese school system. “In such an environment diligence is a highly prized quality and long-standing Japanese virtues of self-control, dedication and singularity of purpose are admired and rewarded.” The strong belief is that a lack of purpose will leave a void of ambition, but it is also connected to *seishin*, the value of inner strength. The concept of *kodawari* is useful to keep in mind as a basic cultural current that suggests how certain behaviours and actions manifest within the Japanese cultural context.

**Belonging – *Ie***

*Ie* can be translated to mean family, but it is better translated to encompass the idea of a house or household. It refers to a legacy, or a continuity that expands beyond an individual and the responsibility inherent in maintaining group obligations (both past and future). For this

140. Ibid, 69.
141. Ibid, 70.
Critique the oc in go trouble to o Japan emphatic important p wit values see and whi b
cor (usually legally) for all that you are ex rson, there is an a to b the wider net of allegiance. Following the Allied Occupation, the civil code Article 24,
which recognized individual dignities (such as the choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance
and divorce; values that where initially imported to Japan by the West) the family system was
seen to be discordant with the new democratic state that Japan was becoming. Yet, “these new
values were taught in school and held up as ideals to be emulated,”143 even though they struggled
with the discrepancy between the law and their own cultural experiences. Although ie is still an
important part of Japanese cultural identity,144 and at times appears to be in contrast with the
emphasis on individualism and individual rights,145 “the all-embracing nature of the large
Japanese company, […] has taken on the role of the tradition IE.”146 For example,

“Superiors may even concern themselves with the home life of their inferiors, taking
trouble to offer help in times of need, perhaps making the occasional loan, acting as ceremonial
go-between at their weddings, or even seeking a possible spouse if necessary. In return, the
inferior is expected to give absolute loyalty to the superior and be available for support any time
the occasion should arise.”147

143. Ibid, 28.
144. Takami Kuwayama, “The Discourse of Ie (Family) in Japan's Cultural Identity and Nationalism: A
145. Kuwayama, The Discourse of Ie, 4.
147. Ibid, 154.
We see these relationships repeated within the Ekiden teams, who are corporate sponsored, but also in the connection between coach and athlete. A superior is expected to take care of an individual, in exchange for total loyalty and devotion. So powerful are these circles of responsibility, that coaches give all their attention to their athletes, even sometimes choosing to live with their athletes for long periods of time away from their own families. This becomes exceedingly clear in the accounts of Seko and Nakamura, as well as Schiebler’s experiences with his coach Kawabuchi, and Lee’s understanding and devotion to ones’ superiors as witness within her women’s team. The expectation is that loyalty is given in exchange for benevolence, which implies that these types of relationships are heavily invested in for the reason that they are expected to last, sometimes even for a lifetime. The ‘temporary’ status of the Canadians as foreigners sometimes made the intimacy of these relationships challenging for both parties. This devotion and care is explored further in the anime and Canadian section; it is clear that unspoken cultural norms that dictate a coach’s attention, and an athletes response to such devotion, is a reciprocal agreement of mutual collaboration. This agreement sometimes goes amiss with the Canadians who do not perceive a coach’s omnipresence to be a sign of caring, but rather one of control.

The concept of *ie* remains deeply entrenched in Japanese corporate systems, which may also be why it is experienced in the Ekiden teams and within Japanese running culture. An Ekiden team represents a corporation, and an individual can represent a country, and the relationship between coach and runner can extend beyond the sport itself. These circles of relationships appear to be both small and large; the concepts of *Uchi* and *Soto* can further explain some of these relationships.

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148. Ibid, 38.
**Inner and Outer – *Uchi and Soto***

The concept of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) can be understood in relation to several interesting instances. In anthropological terms they delineate an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status for individuals, places, and even time. *Uchi* is also strongly associated with positive attributes such as cleanliness and purity while *Soto* is often considered ‘other’ in terms of social groups or dirty in terms of physical spaces.¹⁴⁹

For people it relates to social relations: one is within a family, a village, or an age group. In Japanese culture, people who are of the *soto* group are treated with great politeness. This is one explanation for the experiences of hospitality the Canadians experience, although both noted the distinctions between living and visiting in Japan. As foreigners there was a degree of permissible ‘otherness’ tolerated. Lee mentions how,

“it’s one of my favorite places to travel as an athlete for sure. Even to travel as a tourist, I would think. And everyone makes an effort to be helpful and they’re really eager to try.”¹⁵⁰ “I loved, loved going. *I loved racing in Japan. Traveling to Japan, (pause) living in Japan was really hard.*”¹⁵¹

For space, this denotes the importance of the home verse the outside, which is why shoes are not worn inside, and why toilets are often separated from places where one would clean oneself (shower or bath). Clear compartmentalization of physical spaces means that individuals also treat these spaces differently, something the Canadians sometimes found perplexing.

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¹⁴⁹. For example, train platforms might be considered dirty, but inside the train itself, would be considered clean.
¹⁵⁰. Sue Lee, Interview with Kimberley Ekstrand (Vancouver, 2019), S:: (54:01).
¹⁵¹. Ibid, S:: (53:47).
Time is considered insofar as one can be either inside or outside of a time period. For example, an era, a timeline or even a generation, although the argument is often presented that ingroup associations come at a loss of individual freedoms.

“The security gained through membership in such an *uchi* group necessarily involves a certain loss of individual freedom, but socialization is such that the needs of the wider group are presented as one’s own needs, and a certain sense of satisfaction seems to be associated with the contribution an individual can make to the workings of a larger endeavor.”\(^{152}\)

This consideration contextualized behaviour and further rationalizes the Ekiden system, and its inherent ingroup dynamics. It also points to leniencies granted to those considered *soto* and the importance in how the Japanese present themselves favorably within circles of *uchi* and *soto* groups. In this way, representing a corporation favorably entails representing one’s Ekiden team positively, and therefore running an Ekiden race in an approved manner. While *uchi* and *soto* represent a compartmentalization of sorts, the concept of *wa* takes a closer look at the relational dynamics within a sporting team.

**The Importance of Wa – Even when you are running alone**

*Wa* is often translated to mean an emphasis on group harmony although this term represents several values. There is a degree of social order associated with it, along with an emphasis on the importance of building human relationships in a cooperative manner. This means that communication can often be indirect, and that discord (or negative feelings and sentiments) are not overtly expressed. Western society values a code of conduct that champions truth. For example, if you are late for work you might admit that you were late to a co-worker. However, Japanese society’s emphasis on harmony can lead to indirect communication, using

apologies to return to harmony even when the whole truth is not given. For example, your Japanese co-worker might say something like, “are you sure you are late?” in a way that can give you a way out of any fault. You might politely take the hint and say, “my watch is incorrect, I am on time.” Some of these cultural nuances may initially be challenging to navigate because of the separation between public behaviour (or *tatemae*) and the real inner feelings of an individual, or *honne*. The ability to distinguish between these and to understand the inner feelings of others, is regarded as a sign of maturity in Japanese society.153 This value is also taught within the Japanese school system demonstrated in sport days’ where ‘marathons’ are routine for children from preschool to high school in Japan.154 To this effect, “the annual sports day emphasizes cooperation over individual competition, and children are encouraged to exert themselves for the sake of the class, or the area where they live, rather than for their own glory. Popular events include […] the three, five or seven-legged races, where cooperation is essential for success.”155

However, it should be noted that one of the biggest misconceptions about Japanese culture is that the individual does not disappear within the collective. In this sense “the success of a company is presented as dependent on the cooperation of its individual members, and the success of the members is then presented as directly dependent on the success of the company.”156 None of this, however, means that Japanese individuals lose their sense of personal identity. Hendry debunks the stereotypical view of Japan as a group-oriented society in opposition to the West, demonstrating that participation in groups across many cultures does not take away from the individual. In fact, it is more due to Western scholarship that has utilized overlapping concepts (seen in orientalism), overlooking the way in which personal interests and

153. Ibid, 44.
156. Ibid, 51.
achievements is entirely acceptable as long as they do not ultimately interfere with one’s obligations towards others. *Wa* in this regard is a shared harmonious quest to succeed as a team. What becomes apparent is that when Ekiden racing for a corporate team is understood to be a job, the true personalities of individuals become more apparent outside of this setting, while for the Canadians, running *is* their social time and an expression of their individuality. This distinction is discussed further in the anime and Canadian sections.

These concepts highlighting several principles within Japanese social interactions although they are not unique to Japan. For example,

“the creator of us/them dichotomies as we see in *uchi/soto* distinction is a feature of human society found all over the world. The separation of real feelings from one’s ‘face to the world’ as in the *tatamæ/honne* distinction is a recognizable human practice though the degree of social support it receives is a variable feature. The development of *seishin*, an inner spiritual strength, is a concept in other culture systems. What is unique is the way these elements combine and may be found in particular parts of Japanese society and recognized as Japanese.”157

For the purposes of this study, running is similarly reexamined with the aim of exploring cultural currents through sport.

**Understanding long-distance running and Japan: The Case of Ekidens**

In attempting to grasp a better understanding of the lack of literature on Ekiden racing and long distance running in Japan, several important ideological and theoretical assumptions must first be addressed. These include an understanding of *Nihonjinron* literature, the role of *Orientalism* (perceptions of ‘the other’ and the role of martial arts), the concepts of *Imagined Geographies*, and the use of the words *unique, currents* and *conjunctures*.

Nihonjinron literature and Nationalism

*Nihonjinron* refers to the prolific amount of both scholarly and popular literature on ‘what it means to be Japanese’. Dale’s work entitled *Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, attempts to survey “certain currents in Japanese thought and scholarship which, though marked by a highly tendentious strain of nationalistic feeling, have exercised a considerable impact on the way Japanese culture is perceived and discussed, both within Japan and abroad.”¹⁵⁸ Dale’s (1986) lifelong work is an applied trenchant analysis into Japanese culture through the use of Japanese language sources, or in this case *Nihonjinron* literature. The most significant distinction between *Nihonjinron* literature and modern empirical research on Japan are the following assumptions which have shaped methodological motivations. It is thus necessary to preface this literature review with an understanding that the closer the source material, the more nationalistic its vestiges. These include false assertions which perpetuate Japanese social homogeneity; that the Japanese people are radically different from all others; and finally, how the entrenchment of nationalism has translated into a concern for creating ‘otherness’ and ‘uniqueness’ in Japanese source literature. In the face of the Japanese tradition of intellectual nationalism, a sociological explanation has been offered to “show that this established way of interpreting Japan is formally invalid, and that much work has to be done afresh because this kind of approach has influenced even westerner scholarship.”¹⁵⁹ These sentiments are mirrored by Creighton who demonstrates how it took a declaration from the United Nations in 1993 (the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People) for the Japanese government to formally acknowledge that it harboured

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¹⁵⁹ Ibid, Introduction.
several indigenous groups with distinct languages and cultures. These groups were forcibly denied rights, land, government professions, acknowledgement, protection and even citizenship despite having been born in Japan over several generations, speaking Japanese and otherwise appearing and behaving Japanese in all aspects. Neither legislative nor judicial law acknowledged their existence, perpetuating repeated motifs on biological determinism, an eerie reminder of nationalistic thought from the last two centuries. These 19th-century ideals of national purity are discussed extensively through the fascinating example of Japanese rice and its link to nationality. For instance, “almost no rice can be imported in Japan, for example, because, in the words of a prominent Liberal Democratic Party politician, 'rice is the core of our spiritual civilization.’”

Ohnuki-Tierney in her work Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time, is an exercise in historical anthropology and presents a compelling argument on the nationalistic undercurrents within Japanese history. This is achieved by deconstructing the fused concepts of nationalistic thought with Japanese identity, with rice as the symbol synonymous with modern Japanese identities. In this way, meaning is often embedded in broader socio-cultural contexts and historical processes. The symbolic importance of rice as seen in its culturally decoded meanings is an example of how “the symbolism of rice has remained more important for the Japanese than rice agriculture itself.” White rice, and in particular, white rice grown on Japanese soil, was the epitome of a civilized people; a means of demonstrating a cultural opposition to the Chinese. Such propaganda of unification was certainly an effective tool for

162. Ibid.
statecraft but has since lead to some fascinating contradictions in the literature and within Japanese culture as argued by Ohnuki-Tierney. This is seen primarily in her thesis on the concept of the ‘purity’ of Japanese rice, a false sense of homogeneity constructed by means of a mythological agrarian past, that has proven to be more fictitious than historically accurate. Ohnuki-Tierney successfully uses food as a reflexive metaphor but warns that

“in an anthropological study one must wrestle with cross-cultural comparisons in a way that neither denies the specificity of a particular culture under the rubric of cultural universals nor examines culture in isolation to herald its uniqueness as has often been done with Japanese culture.”164

This counsel is helpful when attempting to write about differences without generalizing and is especially relevant when working with existing literature on Japan.

Rice as a symbol for identity is expertly deconstructed to explore concepts on Japanese nationalism, hence it seems promising to extend this into the realm of sports. Sports have equally been influenced and guided by similar ideologies, demonstrated in the following example;

“Japanese ski manufacturers tried to make the Government declare European-made skis - one of the few European successes in Japan - unsuitable for the Japanese market, because of the uniqueness of Japanese snow.”165

*Nihonjinron* literature warns us about the potential ideological perils of an enculturated political discourse, especially as a powerful means for social conditioning. This is particularly true when, “the ideological roots of these ideas have been forgotten while the ideas themselves

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164. Ibid, 10.
are hailed as new conceptualisations and ethnological descriptions of Japanese realities.”¹⁶⁶ The literature on Japan is complex, therefore it is understandable that,

“the distinctive character of the Japanese was the focus of anguished debate and soul-searching among intellectuals for at least a century. Japan had been so quickly and successfully modernized that she could match many Western powers in military might. But the price was a kind of permanent crisis of identity manifested in wild swings between worshipful emulation and violent rejection of the West.”¹⁶⁷

This concept ties into Japanese running culture because it is intertwined with problematic assumptions on both sides; orientalist tendencies by non-Japanese scholars and the entrenchment of nationalistic ideologies fused with biological determinism in Japan. The philosophical argument that Japanese identity is inseparable from biology is a concept that has been linked but is in reality epistemologically different. It can be argued that, “difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse.”¹⁶⁸ This is precisely why running is a useful physical activity to interrogate since there are relational phenomena that can support why Japan appears to have a propensity for long-distance running. Thoughts on biology (intertwined with identity) have in turn created a large pool of long-distance runners in Japan. Secondly, this had perpetuated a large support system that reinforces it. The negative aspects of this lie in the assumptions on physical capabilities and the stifling of short and middle-distance runners in Japan.¹⁶⁹ For example, Finn describes how Ikuto Yufu, the 15,000m national champion at the time, was expected to run the 21.5km stage at the Hakone Ekiden. His training was centered on

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¹⁶⁷ Buruma, “A New Japanese Nationalism.”
¹⁶⁸ Dale, Myth of Japanese Uniqueness, 43.
¹⁶⁹ In track and field short distances are considered sprints, ranging from 100m to 400m. Middle distances includes 800m to 3,000, (3km). Only in Japan is 5,000m (5km) considered a ‘middle distance’. Long-distance is anything over 8km to a marathon. An Ultra is anything that is longer than a marathon or 42km.
competing in this third leg, stating “that’s what he is training for, not the 1500m, even though he is clearly one of Japan’s brightest middle-distance prospects.”\(^{170}\) He asserts how Japan’s ultimate focus on long distance incurs how middle distance runners “are hustled into ekiden running from a young age.”\(^{171}\) This is further emphasized by Mara Yamauchi, who states that,

“all the training in Japan is geared towards longer races. I imagine if some of these athletes and teams switched their focus to the shorter distances such as 5km and 10km they would do extremely well because the Japanese work very hard, they have huge depth in coaching, therapy etc. and the system is well organized and funded.”\(^{172}\)

While this explains Japan’s propensity and depth of long-distance runners, it also demonstrates a running culture that has greatly influenced how running manifests in Japan and under what circumstances. For example, “Japanese secondary school boys regularly run 5,000 metres on the track rather than 3,000 meters. USA high school boys rarely run this distance except during cross country.”\(^{173}\)

In effect, *Nihonjinron* literature is ideologically intertwined with sentiments on nationalism and Japanese identity. This has deeply influenced Japanese literature as well as external interpretations of that literature since the early twentieth century. As we will see with the effects of Orientalism and the literature on Japanese martial arts, it is difficult to tease out some of these assumptions about Japan without also acknowledging how it has influenced the emergence of a nation so inclined towards long-distance running.

\(^{171}\) Ibid, 143.
\(^{172}\) Ibid, 144.
Orientalism

My project began with a focus on one Japanese word; Ekiden. The word Ekiden represents a long-distance relay running event that demonstrates several distinguishable features that make it indigenous to Japan. There is a lack of detailed literature on Ekidens which can be attributed partly to the legacy of Orientalism. Although not the focus of this project, it would be negligent to overlook the impact Orientalism has had on the scholarship concerning Japan. Edward Said (1978), points to two reasons why Japanese running culture might have been overlooked in the academic literature. The first presupposes that Orientalism is,

“a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the ‘Other’. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.”174

It is clear that the web created by this image of the Orient holds fast across various levels of culture. The emphasis on differences as a means of self-definition is central to understanding the worldviews in which literature on Japan was created and continues to be perpetuated today.

The ‘Other’ in Orientalism

This project does not ignore an East-West antithesis; however, it does interrogate the function of such a binary perceptive in modern Japan and scholarly literature. This perspective relies heavily on anthropological theory and ideology, in particular the concept of ‘otherness’ theorized under the umbrella term of cultural oppositions. Cultural oppositions can show us how the ‘other’ is valued, although often through the lens of exoticism. This can be presented as stereotypical, since the primary function of exoticism is often to reassert ones’ own values which brings personal comfort. This is why “exoticism is characterized by giving value to the other, contrary to ethnocentric bias” and that “exoticism is less the pleasure of confronting otherness than the pleasure of having the satisfaction of experiencing the sight of a reassuring version of this confrontation, true to our fantasies, that comforts us in our identity and superiority.”175 This project wishes to acknowledge the discursive processes of ethnocentric bias and the tension between identities and the creations of ‘otherness’. It is imperative to note that the East was not demystified by encounter, rather this collision often reinforced our own belief systems.

Anthropological distinction between emic (native informant) and etic (foreign observers’ analysis) is required given that this study has used several sources, often through translation or second party interpretation. Additionally, the term ‘currents’ has been adopted as a more accurate descriptor than ‘themes’ given the small size of formal and informal informants in this study, as well as the consideration that an anthropologist perspective typically finds its investigatory traction in smaller communities. Attempts to extrapolate interpretations to a larger social trend would destabilise any unity of vision, demonstrating how inference can be

problematic. However, I agree with Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotii, who taught at Tokyo University, when he proclaimed, “I decide that I prefer not to understand, rather than to colour and imprison the object of analysis with conceptions that are in the final analysis, 176

Dale argues robustly against common currents in academia, including issues with an ‘overwhelming mythopoetic vision’ of the orient, Eurocentrism and nostalgia which informs ideological reasoning “that cannot be applied mechanically to the reality of Japan.” 177 This perspective is accusatory and suggests that our “intellectual habit, which is considered to be analytical in the West, become prejudicial when applied to Eastern realities.” 178 Edward Said makes similar implications when speaking about Western images of religious Islam, which shows how the literature on Japan is not exempt. 179

The ‘Martial’ in Orientalism

An Orientalist mindset accepts Japan as an ‘Other’ by seeking to reference itself in opposition. This means that otherness is actively sought out, and results in a saturation of sporting traditions being studied and documented that are indicative of this perspective. It is therefore proposed that the act of running has been mostly overlooked since it sits too close to European track and field events and is seen as being introduced to Japan, which suggests that running in the Japanese context lacks enough ‘otherness’. This could explain the lacuna of interest and research on this particular topic. This is made especially clear against the copious

177. Ibid, 3.
178. Ibid, 4.
amount of work on traditional sporting disciplines such as the martial arts in Japan. Activities dedicated to the refinement of the human spirit such as sumo, karate, judo, kendo, and kyudo (archery) have been exhaustively documented. This is both true in terms of the volume of sociological works on these disciplines, but more importantly on how the martial has become entangled in militarism and nationalism. A review on kendo within the Western literature, argues that, “Bennett, by contrast, presents kendō as an archetypical example of Hobsbawmian ‘invented tradition’. He elaborates in depth on the degree to which kendō’s philosophical concepts, training methodology, equipment, rules governing competition, and other key elements of the art were developed and reformulated – again and again – during the


183. Andreas, Niehaus. "'If you want to cry, cry on the green mats of Kōdōkan': expressions of Japanese cultural and national identity in the movement to include judo into the Olympic programme." The international journal of the history of sport 23, no. 7 (2006): 1187.; Sociological works on Judo to consider which summarize expertly the western exoticization of Japan explaining how “the West often ascribed a spiritual and a religious dimension to judo that cannot be found in the writing of the founder of modern judo”.


185. Leleki, Eastern movement forms, 131. For Kyudo: “A good illustration of this has been identified for Japan, where the budo-based arts (e.g. Kyudo, Kendo, Karatedo, and Judo) have been reconstructed throughout Japanese modernity with a view to reinstating the embodied cultural heritage of the samurai warrior class as a central pillar of Japanese cultural identity, both internally for Japanese people and through the exportation of these activities internationally, in order to reconstruct notions of a national identity.”

186. Paul Bowman. "Asking the question: is martial arts studies an academic field?" Martial Arts Studies 1 (2015): 3-19.; In fact, academics continue to argue on whether or not martial arts studies is its own academic field.
twentieth century, emphasizing what he terms ‘certain inconvenient truths’ regarding the relationships between kendō, nationalism and militarism at various stages of its evolution."\(^{187}\)

This further begs the question that if connections to culture, tradition, symbols, meanings and values can be extrapolated from sports like sumo, kendo and even baseball\(^{188}\) then why has Ekiden racing been largely overlooked when it could have easily been explored using similar perspectives?

It should be noted that East-Asian countries do not use the term ‘martial arts’ in their native language, and that this was an entirely western invention that distinguished western sport as secular\(^{189}\) while at the same time exoticizing Japanese physical culture. For example,

“the most internationally spread term to designate these Asian disciplines is not an Asian term itself but the Western term ‘martial arts.’ Moreover, in most countries of the world, the term ‘sport’ can be understood independently from martial arts, but martial arts cannot be separated wholly from the notion of sport. These circumstances tell us something about not just the relation between two activities, but the whole geopolitical process surrounding the expansion, integration, reinterpretation, and accommodation of (physical) culture around the world."\(^{190}\)

In fact, the martial aspect of Japanese sports are often the sole topics of most books and research, which repeatedly refer back to one source; Bushido: The Soul of Japan by Inazo


188. Ingrid Kummels. “Anthropological Perspectives on Sport and Culture: Against Sports as the Essence of Western Modernity,” In Sport Across Asia, Routledge, 2013, 23. This is further elaborated by Kummels who argues, "in other words, the Samurai national character was a myth inscribed into Japanese baseball during this period. Belief in the Samurai imagery remains an essential part of current reality, with Japanese baseball perceived both by the Japanese and the Western press as having a fundamentally ‘different’ national style”.

189. Varda Burstyn. The rites of men: Manhood, politics, and the culture of sport. University of Toronto Press, 1999. Although it is clear that much of sport was initially invented to militarize and recruit healthy men into the military.

Nitobe, who wrote in English on Japanese culture in 1900. This text is reflective of societal attitudes at the turn of the 19th century, a pivotal period of transformation in Japan from feudal isolation to a modern nation.

This influential work is composed of the meditations of a Japanese educator seeking to define the ethos of Japanese citizens during this time of transition. His work in English, “made him the best, known Japanese writer in the West during his lifetime.” Hence, within the literature, Nitobe is commonly cited because of the historical impact his idealized martial ethnic made on the popularizing of Japan. This was later appropriated and adapted during the Meiji, and Showa periods of governance (1912-1926 and 1926-1989) as a ruling ideology that reinforced loyalty to the emperor in modern times. Nitobe’s work is the result of a Japanese scholar’s attempt to explain Japanese culture in such a way that Westerners could understand. For example, he compared the samurai ethos to examples within Western traditions of medieval chivalry, ancient Greece and biblical stories. He also discerned several Japanese virtues; correct judgment or justice, politeness, honesty and sincerity, honour, the duty of loyalty, self-control, courage; the spirit of daring and bearing. He also explored the virtue of kindness, in a rather unique way. He explains that “the bravest people are the most tender, and loving people are daring people. Bushi no nasake (the tenderness of the warrior) appeal[s] to that which is noble in us.” This alludes to the concept that one is always mindful of the suffering of others but that this is the cause of pain within oneself. Several of these concepts may be responsible for the perception of sporting traditions in Japan that is often viewed as steeped in militaristic and

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191. It was originally written in English and only later published and translated into Japanese.  
spiritual foundations. Conversely, they are the result of an author who witnessed the feudal system change with contact from the West, making it a 19\textsuperscript{th} century revelation, not a 21\textsuperscript{st} century one. Additionally, “Nitobe’s work was not very influential in Japan at that time, even though it would represent the main source for the West to understand the ‘Japanese spirit’ linked to the martial culture of the samurai.”\textsuperscript{195} Hence, “the rediscovery of Nitobe Inazo’s work on bushidō since 1985 generated a more internationalist discourse on a very traditional concept, blending the familiar and the exotic.”\textsuperscript{196} Nitobe’s work continues to be referred to in sports literature on Japan, trapped in a feedback loop of orientalist exoticism and Western digestibility, despite evidence that the samurai ethos is a construct of 20\textsuperscript{th} century nationalistic agendas and an ideological invention. This can be seen “when journalists and researchers talk about either modern or traditional Japanese sports on a global scale and in Japanese society, the influence of Bushido, a spiritual philosophy established by the samurai as the ‘Way of the Warrior’ is often referred to because it has played a significant part in the long-term development of sports in Japan.”\textsuperscript{197} However, several compelling works by Oleg Benesch demonstrate how the development of the ‘way of the samurai,’ or bushidō, has come to be viewed as a defining element of the Japanese national character through nationalism rather than a clear traditional heritage.\textsuperscript{198} Benesch eloquently summarizes this point by explaining that “rather than a continuation of ancient traditions, bushidō developed from a search for identity during Japan’s

\textsuperscript{195} García, The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts, 137.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, 213.
modernization in the late nineteenth century.” He points out that the former samurai class were widely viewed as relics by many Japanese in the 1880s and that considerations of bushidō at the end of the decade were strongly influenced by contemporary European ideals of chivalry. Japanese thinkers, he says, increasingly looked to their own traditions in search of sources of national identity, a process which accelerated as nationalism grew in the form of military victories over Russia and China. In the early twentieth century, bushidō became a core subject in civilian and military education, and was a key ideological pillar supporting the imperial state until its collapse. The close identification of bushidō with Japanese militarism meant that it was rejected after the war, but different interpretations of bushidō were later revived by seeking to explain Japan’s post-war national identity. This sentiment is equally mirrored in academia with discussions on how, “martial art culture has long been both the elephant in the room and the unloved stepchild of Japan Studies.”

Western perceptions of a Japanese cultural ethic and sport have overlooked long-distance running, even though it has existed alongside the martial arts disciplines. The Marathon Monks, ran extraordinarily long distances as a spiritual practice during the 12th century (1130), superseding all of the above-mentioned renditions of traditional Japanese sports. Additionally, the Marathon Bushi ran long-distances motivated by martial sentiments during the mid 19th century.

201. Friday, "Alexander C. Bennett, Kendo: Culture of the Sword," 146.
202. Sumo in the Edo period of 1603-1868; Karate in 1922; Judo in 1882; Kendo between 1711 – 1715; Kyudo around 1192. It should be noted that these are the sport renditions, not hunting or fighting methods that were unstructured and unregulated, in which archery and sword fighting have been recorded much earlier. Long distance running was used by the Japanese as a means of spiritual practice, a competition, mental training, and as a profession; all categories still relevant today for the modern runner.
This was twenty-years before physical education was introduced through German influences with the addition of track and field familiarized by British naval officers in 1874. However, even extensive works about sport in Japan such as those by Maguire and Guttmann, never mention the word ‘Ekiden’ nor refer to the Marathon Monks, or Marathon Bushi. Their focus has been primarily on the introduction of Western sports to Japan and the development of Japanese physical education and martial sports considered traditional and indigenous. ‘Relay’ running races are briefly mentioned but only in relation to the 1970s jogging boom. For example,

“the jogging boom from the mid-1970s led to a flood of civil marathon races and the organization of many running groups. National and international women’s marathon and distance relay races were frequently organized […] as the running boom grew.”

In fact, official Ekiden races are recorded as early as 1917 but are not mentioned nor explored in any detail other than this instance of ‘distance relay-races’. Japanese sport culture writer Shotaro Honda Moore laments that,

“Japan is not often associated with a sports culture by other countries around the world. This is probably due to many other perceptions of the country that outweigh this culture” for this

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205. Ibid.; Maguire and Nakayama, Japan, Sport and Society.
207. Maguire and Nakayama, Japan, Sport and Society, 69.
reason, Japan’s “sports culture is often an after-thought. That being said, Japan without a doubt, has an affinity for athletics that rivals any other country.”

In fact, long-distance running in Japan has gone from a temporary boom to a permanent fixture evident in “Japan’s five hundred annual marathons and long-distance relays (ekidens) [which have become] an integral part of both sports culture and Japanese social consciousness.”

I have explored how orientalism has influenced ideological assumptions about Japan by looking at how it creates an ‘other’, and how martial arts have been the central focus from which all sports in Japan have been compared. This background is presented as a possible explanation to the current neglected literature on Japanese long-distance running as a cultural phenomenon in its own right. It also situates ideological assumptions about the literature itself by considering the role of Nihonjinron literature. The notion of imagined geographies, for example, fosters an ‘inward gaze’, and shows how ‘otherness’ is accentuated through geographical locals. This concept helps to position the Canadian runners’ comments on Japan’s insular convention of looking inwards; receiving foreigners and allowing leniencies for them; the Canadian’s experiences of remarkable hospitality by the Japanese; and the transplanted sensation of entering and exiting an idiosyncratic cultural running context.

**Imagined Geographies**

Interestingly, even though there is evidence of running cultures all over the world, the question remains as to why have some received more attention than others? Edward Said’s second point is the concept of imaginative geography which suggests that,

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“Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography. Thus on the one hand the geographical Orient nourished its inhabitants, guaranteed their characteristics, and defined their specificity; on the other hand, the geographical Orient solicited the West's attention, even as -by one of those paradoxes revealed so frequently by organized knowledge-East was East and West was West.”

These preconceived divisions placed on physical landscapes that enclose culture both domestically and internationally, reinforce an ‘otherness’ that was repackaged in order to be palatable to Western consumers. Said also argues that; “far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude.” This means that cultures are fluid and inadvertently influence each other: Japan is famous for its capacity to integrate foreigner influences, only to exude these internationally, as a ‘national cool’. This concept allows for a theory on the transplanted nature of sports and its success in being ‘grafted’ onto Japanese culture by the transnational mobility of sport and individuals. It is in this light, that running might have sneaked its way past the imperial gaze, especially when reflecting on Japan as a nation on par internationally with Western and European forces during the 20th century and beyond.

‘Unique’ – The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness

The word unique is used with caution in this project for it predicates two assumptions. First, it presumes that Japan is unique, because something originated in Japan. Dale explains that

“theoretically, any Japanese phenomenon is natural grist for the uniqueness mill, and is
presumed not to exit elsewhere by virtue of the fact that it exits in Japan.”213 Secondly, the word
typically means ‘one of its kind’ although in this case, it represents something unusual and
different, a concept that has becomes synonymous with Japan. Nobel Prize winner in literature
Pearl S. Buck was the daughter of missionaries to China and Japan during the 1920 and 1930s.
She is famously known because of her ability to decipher the Asian mystique for Westerners, and
yet she makes two contradictory assertions when speaking specifically about Japan in her works.
The first, is that each country in Asia is different from each other, the second is that somehow,
Japan remains ‘unique’. Although Buck wrote incredible biographical accounts on Asian
cultures, Japan remains etched in an ‘epistemology of the blood’. There is an assumption that
Japan “is unable to be perceived by foreigners or understood by them, since its cognition is
grounded in social consciousness, in the epistemology of the blood.”214 Here, the title of
‘uniqueness’, as Dale explains, “by some unexplained convention, is reserved for Japan.
Whereas other countries are totally different from each other in their unlikeness, Japan is, we are
given to believe, unique in its dissimilarity.”215 Although there are classificatory principles that
have been applied to Japan, none of these principles are ‘unique’ to Japan. For this reason,
cultural anthropology occupies a space that allows for “the coexistence of conflicting notions of
the world and diverse value-systems,”216 which is exceedingly important when tackling the
intellectual and cultural challenges of researching Japanese running culture from a Canadian
perspective. This is exceptionally true when considering that “oriental culture, as constructed by
many of its interpreters, presents a seductive image of harmonious sociality in raw contrast to the

216. Ibid, 5.
‘alienated’ structure of Western life.”

217 This becomes more apparent in the interviews and within the literature of Western sources.

Despite the above preface, Japan remains a fascinating case study and its interpretations equally worthy of attention. Some reassurance can be gleaned from the following statement that “Japan is neither unique (as sometime asserted), nor merely a copy of the outside world, but rather a fascinating source of human experience which deserves to be tapped and disseminated far more widely than it now is.”

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Using the Terms Currents and Conjunctures

With this consideration in mind, the term conjunctures as suggested by Ohnuki-Tierney, have been utilized within this project to define the concept that individuals must redefine their sense of self as a result of an encounter with another. Currents and conjunctures are used reflexively because of their reference to a cyclic relationship between cause and effect embedded within experiences, contexts and cultures. Running can be a site for nationalism but also as a means of exploring currents within Japanese running culture. Conjunctures are created when the Canadians encounter contrasting behaviours around teamwork, training and racing.

Tracing the Historical Context of Long-distance Running

It is helpful here to provide a brief summary of the historical origins of long-distance running around the world, linking the plethora of literature on African long-distance running and the Tarahumara, as additional cultural accounts of courier runners, similar to the Japanese, and their significance within their respective communities. An overview of Japan’s Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei, the Marathon Bushi and Japanese courier runners is helpful here since it provides

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217. Ibid, 3.
218. Ibid, General Editor’s Preface.
an underpinning of contemporary Japanese cultural identity and helps illuminate reasons for the prevalence of long-distance running in Japan, and Ekiden racing in particular.

**Long-distance Running Around the World**

In similar fashion to the saturation of work on traditional Japanese sports, there exists bountiful research on Kenyan runners, routinely focused on the geographical local of Ngong and Iten, where many of the world’s fastest runners are produced.\(^{219}\) The geographical local along with the cultural practices and context of Kenyan and Ethiopian runners have enticed sport scholars to identify favorable cultural markers.\(^{220}\) The cultural argument considers the ‘gold mine’ effect of being rooted in a culture that values running to begin with, along with added features such as, training at altitude, running barefoot, running on dirt roads, a community based culture of physical movement, lower extremity flexibility due to squatting, running long distances from a young age as a means of transit, and the feasible financial incentives if one competes successfully abroad.

Several of these conditions, are paralleled in Japanese running culture. Biological markers are often touted, such as the lean light physique of the Kenyans as beneficial to efficiency, and in the Japanese case, a small light frame that is suited for long distances. However, ‘otherness’ and imagined geographies are still at the forefront of these ideas, sometimes with a biological focus that ignores relevant environmental, social and cultural contexts. Japan, in a similar fashion makes biological claims of its runners being physically

\(^{219}\) John Bale and Joe Sang, *Kenyan Running: Movement Culture, Geography, and Global Change* (London; Portland, OR;: F. Cass, 1996).; Adharanand Finn, *Running with the Kenyans: Passion, Adventure, and the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth* (Ballantine Books, 2012).; Bale, *Kenyan Running*, 128. Interestingly, some of the few references to Japanese running have come from books on Kenyan running, as was the case in Bale, which has a brief mention on the Kenyan diaspora, and how many of their best runners leave Kenya to lived and trained in Japan.

suited for long distances only, which has contributed to a singular focus on running events over ten kilometers. Although this has resulted in an incredible depth of long-distance runners, many skilled middle-distance runners in Japan have been guided into longer-distances, based on strong cultural beliefs surrounding an emphasis on mental training and toughness above physiological aptitude. This has resulted in the polarization and focus on distance running, but at the expense of many talented middle-distance athletes. It is through an exploration of such themes as suffering, endurance, pain, and mental callusing that this project seeks to unpack how culture can weigh on decisions around training and support systems which are powerful influencers in sport.

Following the ascetic practices from certain branches of Buddhism, evidence of other ‘spiritual athletes’ can be seen. In *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, David-Nell²²¹ discusses her encounter with a Lung-Gom-Pa runner in Northern Tibet. They were believed to be able to “travel nonstop for forty-eight hours or more and cover more than 200 miles a day. Many are said to be faster than horses and at times they were used to convey messages across a country.”²²² Information couriers and persistent hunting practices appear to be two of the most common reasons historically why one would engage in long-distance running. The Japanese, similar to the Lung-Gom-Pa, ran for reasons beyond survival; a spirituality of self-actualization. One can still see aspects of this today in researcher on the psycho-social impacts of distance running and its experiential connection to the self and a sense of spirituality (a connection to something bigger than ourselves).²²³ One fascinating article suggests that long-distance running was what allowed early homo sapiens to experience the divine. Sands suggests “that the existing

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biological reward system would have been enhanced through endurance running, driving the development of spirituality”224 and that, “the connection between spirituality and a heightened awareness of their environment would have provided Homo with a means to reinforce the necessity of running for survival and situate them as part of a larger, dynamic natural universe.”225

This is an interesting look at how running, which eventually became a physical activity that extended beyond the basic necessities of survival and subsistence, might have contributed to the creation of rituals. In this way,

“running, along with physical movement patterns of play, developed into ritual infused with awareness, or heightened consciousness […] This heightened awareness would have hardwired the mechanism and expression of ritual into Homo. Running was a crucial behavior that was keenly integrated into the fabric of Paleolithic culture and no doubt was instrumental in adaptive success to any number of differing environments.”226

Here Sands points to a link between running and culture, and a “biological artifact or legacy of running in early Homo can be found in the so-called runner’s high experienced by many endurance runners, from ancient Native Americans to contemporary ultramarathoners.”227 Scholarly work suggest that long distance running can create

“a ‘euphoric’ sensation experienced during running, usually unexpected, in which the runner feels a heightened sense of well-being, enhanced appreciation of nature, and

225. Ibid, 553.
226. Ibid, 556.
227. Ibid, 556.
transcendence of barriers of time and space […] In more than a few runners, this experience includes spiritual feelings and even altered states of consciousness.”

In the same way that running would have become central for subsistence, travel and communication, it was also integrated into the runners’ cultural landscapes. It’s a bold argument, but one that reinforces the need to view running through a cultural lens, with an interesting link between running and spiritual practices. Sands concludes by suggesting that,

“in essence, running long-distances (endurance/ultramarathoning to an extreme), ‘experienced’ through our neurobiology (runners’ high) and ritualized into a running ‘spirituality’ is a legacy of the role running played in the evolution of our species.”

These arguments reinforce the idea that running, even if its physiological movements are universal, can manifest in ways relevant to cultural context that nurture long-distance running as value laden. We turn now to several cultures who have integrated running long-distances into the fabric of their cultural and social lives as examples of the meaning and values which can become associated with this type of physical activity.

The Tarahumara of the Copper Canyon in Mexico are an example of this long-distance running culture which has been well documented for over 80 years by anthropologists and in other popular culture accounts. More recently, Dyreson has focused on the Tarahumaras,

228. Ibid, 558-559.
229. Ibid, 569.
who’s name translates into ‘the running people’. Here, runners (both women and men) function as couriers of information, delivering messages between villages, and engaging in persistent hunting, running up to 320km over several days. These accounts all point to a running culture, enveloped in its regional contexts and show how a tribe’s relative isolation leads to distinctive cultural values about running and the role of the runner. It is in this tradition that Japanese running culture needs to be revisited, reconsidered and our assumptions reassessed.

Other examples include Nabokov summarized by Muha which provides a brief overview of the cultural significance of long-distance running among the Pueblo, Hopi, Mesquakie, Iroquois, Luiseno, Creek, Omaha from North America and the Inca of Peru. The most significant take away is the ceremonial role of the runner within these cultures, a highly persistent hunting, running up to 320km over several days. These accounts all point to a running culture, enveloped in its regional contexts and show how a tribe’s relative isolation leads to distinctive cultural values about running and the role of the runner. It is in this tradition that Japanese running culture needs to be revisited, reconsidered and our assumptions reassessed.

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232. Christopher McDougall, Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World has Never seen. 1st Vintage books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.; The Tarahumaras are also known as ‘the hidden tribe’ as they experienced relative isolation from most of the modern world and where made famous by McDougall in his book Born to Run. The Tarahumaras are renown for running long-distances and are an excellent example of how the act of running can manifest itself in various ways based on shared cultural values. Their population is estimated to be between 50,000 and 70,000. They have begun to race in ultra-running events and winning them (for example the Leadville Trail 100 of 160km). It is important to note that these have been undertaken presumably for the prize money given their eco-economic status; these reasons are similar to the motivations of Kenyan runners when they race internationally. Another noteworthy race is the Ultra Caballo Blanco for 80km, in which Tarahumara receive free entry into the race and on competition of each loop receive food vouchers for maize, beans, rice and flour. The attraction is the opportunity to run amongst the legendary Tarahumara runners, a problematic remanence of romantic primitivism in the face of harsh indigenous realities. This community faces extreme poverty, tourism and dependency, environmental degradation and pollution due to mining, logging and the effects of drug violence.

233. Donald Quigley and Laurence M. Hauptman, “American Indian Great Iroquois Runners: Lewis ‘Deerfoot’ Bennett and Tom Longboat,” Magazine of Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian 17, no. 2, (2016). https://www.americanindianmagazine.org/story/great-iroquois-runners-lewis-deerfoot-bennett-and-tom-longboat. Famous Canadian indigenous runners include; Lewis “Deerfoot” Bennett (1830-1896) and Tom Longboat (1887-1949). Some evidence of earlier runners from the Haudenosaunee area speak to the origins of long-distance runners who would summon councils and convey information between tribes. Additionally, “to this day, Six Nations chiefs still designate “runners,” using the term to describe a person who serves the Iroquois Confederacy as a conduit for the conduct of essential business. For this role, the runner is accorded respect as a community leader worthy of other higher positions of authority. While it is true that Lewis Bennett, as Deerfoot, had to play the role of the stereotyped “Indian” in his career, he, nevertheless, should be remembered as one of the most extraordinary athletes of his time, beating the fastest white men in world-class competition.”


honoured position as ‘communicators of the culture’ and as ‘safe keepers of accurate information’ inseparable from religious and social life.²³⁶ For example, Mesquakie ceremonial runners, first documented by anthropologist Truman Michelson, were described as messenger-monks who followed ascetic codes, were honoured as tribal emissaries and had the power to “deliver the deciding vote in deadlocked councils.”²³⁷ Clearly the long-distance runner served social functions both spiritually and communally across several ancient cultures, proving their significance as actors within their cultures that expanded beyond communication, hunting, and exploring. Another example is provided by historian William H. Prescott, who documented Aztec runners that ‘could run like the wind’²³⁸ having trained from childhood, covering one to two hundred miles a day. The 14th century witnessed the meeting of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortéz and Aztec emperor Montezuma II of Mexico. So famous were the Aztec runners that Cortez wrote “that within twenty-four hours of his landing at Chianitzlan in May 1519, runners had described to Montezuma, 260 miles away, his ships, men, guns, and horses.”²³⁹ Additionally, Prescott’s most quoted item concerns “runners who managed to supply Montezuma’s kitchen with fresh fish from the Gulf of Mexico,”²⁴⁰ equating to approximately 400 kilometers in distance on foot.

When considering some of these incredible historical accounts of long-distance running from around the world, Japanese running culture and its history can be seen as part of a larger narrative in human movement. It becomes increasingly apparent that certain currents can be interwoven such as the significant ceremonial, spiritual and practical functions of long-distance running.

²³⁶ Nabokov, Indian Running: Native American History and Tradition, 12.
²³⁷ Ibid, 14.
²³⁸ Ibid, 19.
²³⁹ Ibid, 19.
²⁴⁰ Ibid, 19.
running, as well as the aura of respect and awe these acts can foster within communities. The role of running as a form of communication was central to the development of Ekiden racing, and its connection to spirituality, as seen by the Marathon Monks, or the Marathon Bushi (a combination of spirituality and the martial) are all present in Japanese history and yet have not been connected nor explored.

**Origins: The Marathon Monks, Bushi and Postal Couriers**

Three pre-20th century historical accounts of running in Japan can help situate how cultural foundations in the spiritual and martial have manifested. Before we begin it is necessary to back up running culture in Japan with some historical context. Some of the earliest accounts recorded include the Marathon Monks and the Marathon Bushi.

There is evidence that Japanese Buddhist Monks have been running extraordinarily long distances since as early as 1130. Known as ‘history’s greatest athletes’ and referred to as gyōja - spiritual athletes - these Monks take part in seven-year spiritual and athletic journeys known as kaihōgyō or ‘the mountain marathons.’ It is a ritualistic ascetic rite for Tendai Buddhist Monks on the sacred mountain of Hiei, in Kyoto, Japan. This pilgrimage follows aesthetic practices dating back to the 8th century founded by Sōō Oshō, which later formed into what is known today as the world’s most arduous ultra-running venture ever recorded. Monks run for 100, 700, and 1000 sequential days, from anywhere between 30 to 84 kilometers daily, depending on their year of training. This undertaking is only made possible by those who successfully petition a board of abbots, the highest-ranking authorities in monastic life, who may grant them permission to participate. Additionally, they run with a shide no himo - cord of death (for hanging oneself), and a goma no ken - knife of death (for death by disembowelment) and are

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required to commit suicide or die on route should they be unable to complete their daily routes. Clothed in white, which symbolizes death in Japan, their attire signifies a readiness for their own preemptive funeral as they participate in this seemingly superhuman endeavor. With the upmost gravity and seriousness, running in these contexts becomes a life or death act, and although “the number of Monks who died or committed suicide on route is not known, their path is lined with unmarked graves.”

In nearly 800 years, 46 Monks have successfully completed this practice, and are honoured as the only living individuals not required to remove their sandals when entering Kyoto’s Imperial Palace. The last successful candidate to finish was in 2003. The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei, are steeped in spiritual salvation and Buddhist ideology. Thus, they are indicative of a long cultural history of endurance and suffering emblazoned within the cultural narratives of modern Japanese sports today, even evident within the modern rendition of imported sports, such as baseball. Endurance and suffering are themes that will be revisited often as a means for self-actualization, reminiscent, in a way, to the Monks pursuit of enlightenment.

The Marathon Bushi, (or Marathon Samurai) are another example of long-distance running. The samurai inhabited a social class that embodied both a spiritual component in combination and sometimes in contrast to, a martial landscape. In 1855, the feudal lord Itakura Shoin, from the Gunma prefecture in Annaka organized races between his samurai troops in order to train their minds and bodies. The names of the finishers were recorded in order of arrival, similar to competitive running races today. There is evidence that this was an ongoing

243. Ibid.  
245. Heine, *Cultural Psychology*. 

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occurrence, although more research in Japanese is required for more accurate information. The course is recorded as encompassing a 30km mountain pass, and a 20km barrier course, which is interpreted as being a natural obstacle course. Running, in this context, was used as a means of suffering and endurance in order to prepare the troops for what the feudal lord feared might be an invasion by foreign powers. This was done as training for war and can be interpreted as also serving as a preparedness for fitness in battle. However, a crucial distinction must be made here; there is a cultural value in suffering that is believed to prepare oneself mentally first and foremost, regardless of the realistic physical demands required to perform one’s duties as a warrior. Mental fortitude or what some runners accurately term ‘callusing’, is the phenomena of training above and beyond the distance and difficulty of a race in order to mentally prepare for it. In other words, being tougher than the sport itself. In the case of Japanese attitudes, the ethos of this is the mental component, rather than the physical, although this relationship becomes increasingly complex and will be discussed further. This theme and the tension between training to become a better athlete (or warrior) in ways that seem contradictory to that end, is an idea rich in cultural attitudes and values. Today, a 160 years later, the Ansei Tooashi Samurai Marathon is run every year, with competitors dressing up in samurai costumes who run the modern standard marathon distance of 42.2km - 8km shy of its ancestor.

Japanese postal couriers during the mid to late 1800’s were the precursors to Ekiden racing today. These imperial postal couriers would run messages along the five main roads connecting all of Japan to the capital, Edo, known today as Tokyo. The most important of these was the Tōkaidō road, connecting Kyoto to Edo, and which served as an integral part of Japan’s communication and transportation system. Stages were set up along these roads to relay information and pass it from one runner to the next. These imperial couriers were known to run
up to 40 kilometers per stage. From this system, prize money was offered as incentives for the fastest stages, in which these couriers and other participants, often rickshaw drivers, participated. These events later became known as Ekiden races. The term Ekiden thus can be translated into “station” (駅) and “transmit” (伝), evidence of their postal beginnings. The first official Ekiden took place in 1917, and was run over three days, for a distance of 508 kilometers, between the old Japanese capital of Kyoto and the modern capital of Tokyo, as a means of celebrating the anniversary of moving the capital.
Methodology

This project utilizes qualitative strategies, with their underlining emphasis on meaning and experiences, as well as the ability to encompass multiple sources of data. Additionally, qualitative approaches accept that “humans engage in meaning-making activities to make sense of events in their world; understanding the ontological underpinnings of these activities helps us to understand the meanings people assign to events.” This feature views meaning and experiences as central to the research inquiry, data collection and subsequent discussion and interpretation. The aspiration to use social-cultural context in this study was driven by the challenge to develop a normative history of Japanese running culture – one that seems to have been rather overlooked. Scott argues that,

“the challenge to normative history has been described, in terms of conventional historical understandings of evidence, as an enlargement of the picture, a correction to oversights resulting from inaccurate or incomplete vision, and it has rested its claim to legitimacy on the authority of experience, the direct experience of others, as well as of the historian who learns to see and illuminate the lives of those others in his or her texts.”

It is for this reason that experience has been used as “the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built,” and why the interviews used with the Canadian informants, in conjunction with a context analysis, was valuable. Inductive reasoning was helpful in managing the volume of content. By definition, “inductive reasoning is the process of developing

247. Patricia Leavy, Oral History (New York; Oxford;: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jessica Smartt Gullion, "Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research by Patricia Leavy (Review).” Oral History Review 43, no. 1 (2016): 231.; Although this book is focused on oral histories, many of its assumptions are helpful for this research, such as the discussion on how the research process is impacted by ontology and the usefulness of impressionistic writing.
249. Ibid, 777.
conclusions from collected data by weaving together new information into theories.” Theories on symbolic meaning, performativity, embodiment, transnational mobility (and grafting), and orientalism, have together mapped a landscape from which the Canadians’ interpretations come to hold meaning.

General data gathering and document analysis were utilized to collect and sort available information on the subject of Ekidens and long-distance running in Japan. This was supplemented by the use of case studies and interviews to collect data on the experiences of those who participate in the Japanese running context. Three memoirs, two documentaries, two case studies (Lee and Schiebler), interviews, and an anime series where utilized in this process.

The document analysis was supplemented with historical works by Havens and Stevens as well as literature on Japanese society by Hendry, and news channels (such as Japan Running News and the Japan Times). Once I collected as many different sources of information as possible, an analysis of the text and videos helped detect patterns of concepts which I have described in the project as ‘currents’. These currents were elicited by employing the theoretical lenses of embodiment and symbolic meanings, which suggests that the enactment of sport encompasses cultural meanings and values.

253. Shimbun, “Run like the Wind.”
254. Havens, Marathoning Japan.
The final section discusses limitations in terms of the lack of available academic literature on various aspects of my project; the positives and negatives of being an ‘armchair anthropologist’; issues around language competency; and a short discussion on the role of memory.

**Document Analysis**

Contrary to the difficulties in finding specific information on Ekidens, the real challenge lay in determining which tangents to follow. Knowing when a search has ventured too far has proven to be exceedingly difficult. However, I do feel that depth was achieved in relation to my analysis of the interviews with the Canadian runners. The ‘currents’ discussed by them were very useful in illuminating and cross-referencing information found in the literature. This included the fact that Japan has excellent resources and support systems for their long-distance runners (including spectatorship and participation); Japan’s focus on long-distances, the depth and world class level of long-distance runners; a focus on LSD and over-training; an emphasis on building character (the value seen in suffering and enduring); and the assumption that perfection is aspirational. Challenges were also expressed by the Canadians in relation to the ‘intensity’ of training and the ‘tests of boredom’ required, which are meant to build mental fortitude, although these were not specific to performing in a race at their best. This is reinforced in the literature with descriptions of the details of the Japanese running training camps, with examples of the training methods used for these purposes.

Bengtsson, points out that the purpose in analysing documents, “is to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and to draw realistic conclusions from it.”258 This can be achieved by a process of de-contextualization, re-contextualization, categorisation and

compilation. This project was developed with an understanding that I am a non-Japanese speaker with little direct experience with Japanese running cultures except for second-hand accounts of Japanese running culture written in English. This is helpful given that “the researcher needs to understand both the context and circumstances in order to detect and take into account misrepresentations that may crop up in the data.” To this end, document analysis was useful, especially in gathering data on historical and social contexts in order to contextualize the data as much as possible, although this process is imperfect and subject to limitations.

Document analysis also helps when utilizing multiple data sources, which were woven together to provide an interesting perspective on this phenomenon. This process was used for both the document analysis more generally, the anime ‘Run with the Wind’, as well as for the interviews. The interviews in turn highlighted several currents which are reinforced in the literature. The researcher is tasked with familiarizing herself with the data, in order to obtain a sense of the landscape, after which currents are broken down into smaller ‘units of meaning’ and attached to examples in the literature and interviews. The objectives of this project aimed to foster a deeper understanding of cultural contexts, show sport is manifested in those contexts, and what it is like to participate in a sport across different cultural contexts. Document analysis is appropriate then in considering that the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of Ekiden racing, its meaning, along with the Canadians’ experiences, without falling into singular truths or over-generalizations.

At this point, I began an ‘open coding’ process where I made executive

259. Ibid, 8.
260. Ibid, 11. “A meaning unit is the smallest unit that contains some of the insights the researcher needs, and it is the constellation of sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other, answering the question set out in the aim.”
262. Howard Lune and Bruce L. Berg, Qualitative research methods for the social sciences (Pearson Higher Ed, 2016).
decisions on what constitutes a ‘current’. I felt that depth was achieved when the underlining currents within Japanese running culture began to make sense contextually. To this end, “categorization is finished when a reasonable explanation has been reached.”

This project proceeded with the understanding that interpretations can be exceedingly valuable, a perspective shared with that of Phenomenology. Phenomenology is an attempt to understand the experiences of others and has some merits and pitfalls in its methodological application in terms of understanding how individuals experience the world. Phenomenology shares some features with grounded theory (such as an exploration of participants’ behaviour) and uses similar techniques to collect data, but it focuses on understanding how human beings experience their world. It gives researchers the opportunity to put themselves in another person’s shoes and to understand the subjective experiences of participants. For example,

“in phenomenological and hermeneutical- based studies, the researcher focuses on exploring how the informants make sense of experience and transform experiences into consciousness. The researcher must then attempt to find the essence of the studied phenomenon. The researcher has the opportunity to reach a deeper understanding even if it is on a descriptive level.”

Although the experiential aspect of this perspective appears useful in theory, it is frustratingly difficult to pin down in terms of methodology. For example, an anthropologist is expected to suspend and then supplant value judgments received by informants. Dale

263. Bengtsson, “How to plan and perform,” 12.; “The researcher must still decide what constitutes the themes and what conclusions can be drawn from the results.”
264. Ibid, 12.
humorously names this intellectual attempt as “critical self-lobotomisation.”267 The aim of this study is to explore currents and to unpack their complexities. Like any culture, however, there are densely woven networks of assumptions inherent in all aspects of being, and these can only be hinted at through interpretation. Where this study can be helpful is suggested by Moore in the following.

“The Japanese thought-and-culture tradition is probably the most enigmatic and paradoxical of all major traditions, but – partly for that very reason – it represents more intellectual and cultural challenges, more unique and interesting suggestions, and more provocative reactions than any of the other great traditions of Asia.”268

For this reason, I felt it was imperative to make use of case studies and interviews so that informants could share their own experiences within Japanese running culture. This helped me to contextualize those experiences in historical foundations and cultural currents.269

Case Studies

Case studies are valuable as the requirements of inclusion provide guidance on the collection of data. Their specificity directs the information and clears a path through the volume of data generated through document analysis. Although a “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied,”270 it is relevant for this project for two reasons: the

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269. James K. Feibleman, "Culture as Applied Ontology," The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-) 1, no. 5 (1951): 416-422. Feibleman, makes a compelling argument that one can use the categorization of certain ontologies as a philosophical instrument in analysing cultures. It is perhaps a more complex way of saying that worldviews shape behaviour and perpetuate symbols that are relevant to a culture. However, this concept is too metaphysical for the aims of this study, in which currents serve as a placeholder representing the fluidity of culture and ontologies together.
270. Denzin and Lincoln, Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry, 134.
appropriateness of the topic, and the fact that these cases are ‘bounded systems’. In this fashion one must, “learn enough about their cases to encapsulate complex meanings into finite reports – and thus to describe the cases in sufficient descriptive narrative so that the reader can vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusions.” For this reason the case studies, through the use of interviews, guided the currents found within the document analysis.

The use of triangulation is mentioned under case studies and is of particular use for this project.

“Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observation or interpretation are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen.”

This is precisely why multiple sources have been utilized as an important part of the document analysis. For example, the use of several memories clarified what ‘long-distance’ might mean in training, or how news sources repeated descriptions of a vibrant running community in Japan.

**Interviews**

Interviews are valuable in collecting first-hand experiences. Even though they are used in conjunction with document analysis, they complement and guide each other. This project used semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions to assist memory retrieval and allowed

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271. Ibid, 236. In this way “the more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness of the epistemological rationales.”

272. Ibid, 141.

273. Ibid, 144. This is to say, “what results may be the case’s own story, but the report will be the researcher’s dressing of the case’s own story. This is not to dismiss the aim of finding the story that best represents the case but to remind the reader that, usually, the researcher ultimately decides criteria of representation.”

274. Ibid, 148.
space for the participants to describe those experiences that were both meaningful and salient to them. It also allowed the researcher to deepen the conversation with the informants by following the narratives offered.

Sue Lee and Jeff Schiebler were interviewed in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Recruitment was accomplished through channels of social connections within Vancouver’s running community. Many athletes in this community have gone to and raced in Japan, hence, there were several excellent candidates. For example, an interview with Chris Winter was recorded, but then omitted because he had visited Japan as a member of the Canadian Ekiden invitation team for a single event, while Lee and Scheibel lived in Japan for several years. Also, the specificity of Lee and Schiebler involvement came at a specific time in Canadian track running experience, as well as in Japanese international relations. The timeline between Lee and Schiebler as hired professional runners made sense for the goals and sample of this project. The interviews are supported by the University of British Columbia ethics board with consent given by both participants to use their images and full names.

The digitally recorded interviews were then transcribed using an online system called Temi. Temi is a computerized dictation service that generates a template of the transcriptions, and has internal features such as the ability to slow down the speaking speed, start and stop hot keys, and follows along with the sound-to-text for accuracy. These interviews were reviewed and edited multiple times, with the aim of eliminating extraneous features, while maintaining meaning, and the original wording as much as possible. These edits also served to separate out the dialogue visually, for accuracy of conversation and timing that was in synch with the audio. Most unfinished thoughts have been excluded from the text, such as unfinished sentences that

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were quickly reworded and do not make sense on their own. This also included extraneous hesitation noises such as “umm’s” unless they played a function in the dialogue, such as an affirmation which would have been made evident by a visual gesture, such as a nod. It is for this reason that the interviewer began transcription immediately following the interviews and felt it was important to do it personally. Therefore, if a visual or auditory element accompanied the audio, a description of this has been included in brackets such as (laughs) or (shakes head in sarcasm). Repeated affirmations have also been eliminated especially if there was more than one such as “yeah. yeah, yeah”. These were usually eliminated down to one “yeah”. Additionally, in spoken dialogue words are repeated such as in sentences like “and, I and, and I…”. Typically, the last rendition was the most accurate in carrying the sentence forward and was the one that was included in the transcript in this case “and I…”. Occasionally, words such as ‘cause’ have been changed into ‘because’, and other short forms or slang have been written out in their entirety. If there was an unfinished thought or a hanging question that was not clear in written form such as “so you mean it was…” a bracket with an explanation has been added when deemed necessary such as; “so you mean it was… (in reference to the event mentioned above)”. For clarity and ease of conversation flow while reading the transcripts, interjections were divided into separate paragraphs. Once the transcript was completed, a copy was offered, and if accepted, sent to the informants for clarity and transparency.\textsuperscript{276} It encourages an open and co-creative process in the development of the data and can be described as collaborative interviewing in so

\textsuperscript{276} Shaunna Burke, “Rethinking ‘validity’ and ‘trustworthiness’ in Qualitative Inquiry: How might we Judge the Quality of Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Sciences?” In, 352-362: Routledge, 2017.; This is described in the literature as ‘member checks’ in which accuracy can be checked in qualitative inquiries.
much as it can “give informants a measure of control and influence over the emerging research process.”

The overall experience was positive and informative, aiding in accuracy.

The interview with Schiebler was slightly more structured in nature, given that the memoire had been read ahead of time and certain themes had already been identified. The questions prepared aimed to both simultaneously prompt memories, as well as expand on some themes within his memoire.

The interview with Lee was more open ended, and questions were sent ahead of time, given that there was less information beforehand available. The purpose was to refresh memories before the interview as well as ease into building rapport.

Limitations

Language and competency

A limitation that requires acknowledgment is the lack of formal English studies on Ekiden racing, of which there appears to be many written in Japanese. It should also be known that the authors’ language capabilities and lack of direct exposure to Japanese culture and Ekiden racing also create an inherent bias in the document analysis of Japanese context and culture. This includes the researcher’s ability to interview Japanese participants directly and read Japanese accounts of participation or academics work on Japanese running culture. Additionally, there is the lack of opportunity to witness an Ekiden in person. Further concern lies in conducting academic research on a culture in which the author has no direct experience. This raises issues around the potential for insensitive generalizations. However, some solace can be gained from Wiggins, who expresses the transformative and educational potential of studying cultures outside

of one’s direct association. In this way being sensitive to the insider and outsider status of research can actually make one a better historian.278

It is with optimism that the literature review on Nihonjinron and orientalism has served to establish how the researcher has attempted to position herself epistemologically in the midst of interpreting the data. The combination of the document analysis (texts or data sets), with interviews, has been used in an attempt to yield more consistency (triangulation) in thematic trends (currents), than a single method alone could have done.

**Armchair Anthropologist**

With language and direct experiences limited, this project can only apply and develop a small part of a much larger body of knowledge. This raises the question of indirect research and its validity. Armchair anthropology is a term that refers back to the methods used by researchers in the discipline of anthropology during the late 18th and early 19th century. This marked a distinction between evolving methods during the first half of the 20th century, with the emergence of ‘professional ethnographers’. Armchair anthropology suggest that a researcher need not leave his or her study to write academically about people, places, cultures or experiences. During this time,

“informants such as missionaries, colonial officers and explorers were the sole providers of material for the armchair cogitations of 19th-century practitioners. It was not until the 1910s that academically trained ethnographers travelled abroad to undertake a recognizable form of intensive fieldwork and collect their own data.”279


This topic has been hotly debated within sociology and limitations include the value of direct experience, participant observation, and ethnographic work. Although these methods could have greatly enriched this research topic, they are not necessary for the present aims of this particular project.

**Issues of Memory**

Time and space play a significant role in memory, as was demonstrated by Lee and Schiebler. The physical act of moving geographically, as well as having specific memories associated with a separate time in their lives, has compartmentalized their experiences. Anderson suggests how “all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivion, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.” The experiences of Lee and Schiebler happened many years ago, but it is clear that certain emotions and stories have remained central to them and that Japan has had a profound and positive impact on them both.

However, it should be acknowledged that when speaking with Schiebler about how young he was during that time he mentions;

“Yeah. Your 20s are like huge. Yeah. And I don't think about it. It's a former, it's like I lived on a different planet. In a different life. I don't think about it, ever anymore. It's crazy. It is. And it was Japan I went to, which is like easy to separate from the rest of my life. Yeah. Because it's so different. It was like a different planet...and you forget. You forget so much stuff.”

Lee also mentions the separation between her Canadian life and the memories of Japan, although she does allude to the values she sought to instill in her children based on her and Richard Lee’s decision to accept the Japanese contract. These include the environment they

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281. Jeff Schiebler, Interview with Kimberley Ekstrand (Vancouver, 2019), J.; 01:19:00.
created around sports, but more importantly the value of being adventurous and passionate about something, although not necessarily to the extreme of the Japanese. She mentions,

“when I watch our girls who have their own experiences with sport, have they even looked at my pictures of Japan yet? No. Because this is their life and their experiences,”^{282} […] They just, they sort of grew up in a culture where they observed Dylan Wykes coming to our house for a run. All these athletes around and they just grew up in that culture and then found their own way.^{283} […] Try something new, try new things that involve kind of health and fitness, but it doesn't have to be, uh, you know, the pursuit of excellence always.”^{284}

How data unfolds in qualitative research using interviews is discussed by Randall^{285} along with issues on truth and qualitative research by Atkinson.^{286} Although memory is known to be selective, the ‘truth’ in qualitative research, is discussed in terms of how “stories – not ‘facts’ and not mere ‘information’ – are ultimately what we are hearing in a qualitative interview.”^{287} In this fashion, insistence on an arbitrary ‘truth’ is problematic in relation to memory, given that approximations or ‘expurgated versions’ are the best data we have. For this reason, “what is witnessed during the interview is a performance of memory”^{288} and by its temporal nature “our memories of the past are recalled amidst present agendas and present concerns, and always in the light of what we anticipate in the future.”^{289} It suggests that the past is therefore a moving target and our interpretation of it hinges on our present contexts. The methodological anxieties

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282. Schiebler, Interview, S:: (01:06:26).
283. Schiebler, Interview, S:: (01:06:42).
284. Schiebler, Interview, S:: (01:07:28).
289. Ibid, 127.
associated with ‘inferior’ research method in qualitative strategies (in this case inferences are drawn from stories and interpretations), is unwarranted, but ever present. No method is exempt from the human element and no method is an exact science. In the end it is true that language reveals, but it also conceals. This should not discourage our attempts at exploring and understanding the experiences and perspectives of others. With this in mind, we turn now to focus on the Canadians and the stories about their experiences in Japan.
How Anime can inform us on Japanese Running Culture

Anime is a cultural document that is readily accessible for researchers who reside outside of the Japanese social context. In fact, using it as a means of exploring Japanese running culture from afar has added value to this project. Anime is a form of animation with a noticeable Japanese stylization. The international reach of anime and its global appeal have made it the central topic of many research books and projects.

290. 風が強く吹いている (Kaze ga Tsuyoku Fuite Iru) or ‘Run with the Wind’ is an anime series that aired between October 3rd, 2018 and March 27th, 2019. It is considered to be a comedy sports drama, totaling twenty-three episodes of 23 mins each. Its main focus is on running, training and participating in the Hakone Ekiden, Japan’s most prestigious running sporting event hence it is relevant to this project for three reasons; 1. The anime series used to inform this project is centered on competing in the Hakone Ekiden, 2. It demonstrates popular culture tropes on sport and its meaning in Japan, 3. It is a cultural document that is accessible for interpretation.

In this way, “anime is characteristic of contemporary media in its interconnected webs of commercial and cultural activities that reach across industries and national boundaries.”

292. Anime is a cultural document which is produced and consumed by Japanese citizens within the realm of popular culture. In addition, it holds the added value of being easily accessible across national borders because of the international appeal and fandom that follows anime globally. For

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292. Tobin, Acereda, and Derusha, Pikachu's global adventure, 1.
example, Tobin\textsuperscript{293} discusses the international phenomenon of Pokémon (as an anime), as an illustration of the global proliferation of Japanese popular culture. Beyond its global circulation, anime also serves as a tool for pedagogical learning both locally and internationally. This is rooted in an understanding that anime teaches and informs Japanese citizens about their own culture and society, in effect socializing them on the topic of running. In effect anime extends itself as a cultural document abroad, transporting data made available for interpretation. According to Tobin, Pokémon is a cultural practice, understood as “something you do, not just something you read or watch or ‘consume’.”\textsuperscript{294} Tobin suggests that the relationship between creators, texts and viewers is a pedagogical one and more productive as a theory than those used in media studies alone. Anime as a pedagogical entity is further emphasised by West who states that, “like any other culture, the task of anime fan subculture is inherently a pedagogical one. Meanings, norms, frames, and the experiences that contain them are forged, transmitted, shared and interpreted in ways that build an educational basis for a culture’s continual perpetuation and change.”\textsuperscript{295}

Napies (2001) discusses how anime contain many distinctive Japanese cultural traits, but that it is a medium that can be distributed internationally exceedingly well.\textsuperscript{296} Similar to how ‘cuteness’ or \textit{kawaii} has become one of Japan’s most successful transnational products, other aspects sometimes described as an ‘odour’ or a scent of Japanese culture lingers and transmutes. This theory is described by Tsutsui as the ‘smell of pop’. Iwabuchi Koichi is a media studies scholar who examines Japanese pop culture and its transnational movement. His theory is that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{293} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Ibid, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{295} West, \textit{The Japanification of Children’s}, 120.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Susan Napier, \textit{Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: experiencing contemporary Japanese animation} (Springer, 2001).
\end{itemize}
global pop culture products reflect a *smell* or a “sort of odor reflecting the culture and society in which they were originally made.” 297 This ‘cultural fragrance’ can transport assumptions that have become associated with positive attributes. This includes certain narrative choices and topics within animation not seen in cultures outside Japan. Additionally, this is in line with the more common concept of ‘Soft Power’. Soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment.” 298 This concept is also referred to as ‘Japan’s national cool’ or its cultural influence which “grows from a country’s culture, values and ideas.” 299 This is an important concept when talking about Anime, as it has created a worldwide community that bypasses nationality. Not only does anime socialize populations by means of its distribution through popular culture, but it is a readily accessible inside and outside of Japan. Anime has its own transnational flow, as it is shared via the internet and by fans, in which no state is involved. It is not officially government sanctioned and yet it has a creative style and form of expression that is recognized as Japanese. In fact, 60 percent of the world's animated television shows originate in Japan. 300 In terms of research, anime is a viable source for those not fluent in the Japanese language or living within the culture as a means of gaining insight into contemporary sentiments on a prolific range of topics. Although there are instances in which sentiments ‘get lost in translation’, for the most part the actions of characters, visuals and storyline remain unscathed. This is also due to the fact that anime is cheap and fast to produce, lending itself easily to dubbing and close captioning by dedicated fans. *Otaku* 301 culture both

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298. Ibid, 59.
299. Ibid, 59-60.
301. Matt Hills, “Transcultural otaku: Japanese representations of fandom and representations of Japan in anime/manga fan cultures,” *Media in Transition* 2 (2002): 10-12. "Otaku is a Japanese word coined during the eighties, it is used to describe fanatics that have an obsessive interest or hobby... The Japanese think of otaku the
domestically and internationally have long created and supported the free flow of anime and have circumvented many of the copyright wars in the form of fan-subbing.\textsuperscript{302} Fan-subbing is “the translation and dissemination of anime online by fans- a controversial practice that illuminates debates about culture, economy, and intellectual property in the digital era.”\textsuperscript{303} What this means is that anime culture is shared “by providing timely, high-quality translations of Japanese releases for free to fellow fans.”\textsuperscript{304} Even more poignant are the cultural notes provided within episodes which explain certain Japanese customs, traditions or sayings. This is why “translations are often more detailed and provide more linguistic and cultural depth than the commercial releases.”\textsuperscript{305} Although this ‘media piracy’ can have a downside, there are some good arguments that speak to the economic globalization and the creation of translations as sufficiently original enough to be made available for sharing.\textsuperscript{306} Craig speaks to how

“Japan’s pop culture has a resonance that is derived from ethnic similarities and from shared values, tastes and traditions…For Western pop culture consumers, much of Japan’s pop appeal comes not from its familiarity but from its difference from what we are accustomed to in our home cultures.”\textsuperscript{307}

Resonance can hinge on either similarity or differences which sits deceptively close to the concept of exoticism. This concept is sometimes referred to as ‘stalled historicity’ in which “European and American scholars are motivated to produce Japan as the cultural counterpart or

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\textsuperscript{303} Ibid, 161.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid, 161.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid, 170.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid, 161- 184.
\end{flushright}
rival (and thus both similar and different).” Additionally, there is a big difference between American comics and Japanese comics.309

Anime is thus a valuable source of information for this study because it is easily distributed and translated abroad making it accessible and feasible to use. Furthermore, anime, much like other mediums of pop culture, socialize citizens in popular culture attitudes, especially concerning sporting performance and participation. Additionally, “since education is inseparable from the whole of a cultural life, it is impractical to speak of it in terms pulled asunder from cultural practices as a whole.”310 Instead, much can be gained by highlighting the pedagogical currents which may be missed by those already embedded within the everydayness of their social-cultural context.

Run with the Wind

The story follows former ace runner Kurahara from Sendai Josei high school. The series opens with Kurahara running away from a shopkeeper after shoplifting some bread. This act catches the eye of Kiyose a student from Kansei University who follows him on a bike; he is mesmerized by Kuraharas’ beautiful running form. He calls out “do you like running?” in which Kurahara demonstrates his anger and bitterness about running in general. This plays out later in the series pointing to the unforgiving and harsh reality of high school track and field, in which many team members trained to injury and weaker runners are berated in front of other team members by coaches. This is reflected in the real-life accounts of Seko and the context in which

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308. Ibid, 19.
309. Condry, The Soul of Anime, 21. The Comics Code of 1954 in the United States “regulated the content of comic books so they would be appropriate for children.” Japan did not experience the same regulatory sanctions on its comics which has resulted in the social acceptance of comics for everyone, rather than the Western view that cartoons are allocated for children. In postwar Japan, manga was a cheap and accessible form of entertainment. Additionally, in Japan cartoons are developed for all ages with many different genres giving it a wide audience and scope.
he trained during the 1980s. It is also reflected in Lee’s experiences in which the weakest link
carries the blame for the team. The Japanese emphasis on mileage and unquestioning devotion to
one’s team and coach, often leads to injuries and burnout in which the runner’s careers is often
short lived.\textsuperscript{311} Kurahara is clearly talented but has become disillusioned with running because of
the coaching style. It is reminiscent of what is often referred to as an ‘old-style’ of coaching
which is authoritarian and punitive. An authoritarian style is meant to instil discipline and is
heavily outcome-based, which is counterintuitive to the cultural emphasis on building character
before performance.\textsuperscript{312} This series also presents the individual as succeeding only as a team
member and because of the team, but also then plays up the idiosyncrasies of individuals within
the group as being integral to overall success. This is mirrored in Hendry’s work, which points
out the benefits of \textit{ie}, but also its appeal to the individual because “the pursuit of
accomplishments is a common leisure activity for Japanese men and women of all ages.”\textsuperscript{313}
Although this is in reference to the arts more generally, the rise of the amateur marathon running
in Japan suggests a cultural acceptance and value in this civic pursuit.\textsuperscript{314}

Kiyose persuades Kurahara to move into an old rundown apartment complex that houses
eight other students; it is clear that Kurahara has lost the financial support he had been awarded

\textsuperscript{311} Havens, \textit{Marathoning Japan}, 169-170.; J J O’Donoghue, “Japan’s runners need a change of pace,” \textit{Japan
Times}, (May 16, 2015), https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/05/16/books/book-reviews/japans-runners-need-
change-pace/#.Xpy9gC8ZNAY. “Students who try to do so, as well as many others who focus on the ekiden, often
face the dangers of significant injuries, bodily stress and mental burnout by their early twenties, with little spark left
for competing at top levels or even undertaking civic marathons. Being good at ekidens requires year-
round training.”

\textsuperscript{312} Christian Brinton, Brian J. Hill and Peter J. Ward. “Authoritative Coach: Building Youth through Sport.”
\textit{Journal of Park and Recreation Administration} 35, no. 1 (2017): 51-65.; Authoritative coaching is a negative
predictor of autonomy in athletes.


\textsuperscript{314} Simon Parke, “Inside the Most Running Obsessed Nation on Earth,” \textit{Newsweek}, (April 3, 2015),
https://www.newsweek.com/2015/04/10/inside-most-running-obsessed-nation-earth-318385.html.; Havens,
Run.”
as a top runner since he walked away from running at the end of high school. Unknown to all the occupants, Kiyose has carefully chosen each member based on specific individual strengths that contribute to the team as a whole. He divulges his plan to the group about competing in the Hakone Ekiden, Japan’s most prestigious yearly running event, much to the surprise and shock of the occupants. It is at this comical moment that they realize that they have all unwittingly signed up for the Kansei University Track and Field Club in order to live in the residence. The series is humorous yet heartwarming, as many of the students have not trained at such a high level before and hence embark together on journeys of self-growth and discovery.

Kurahara repeatedly seems to want to run alone for two reasons. He wants autonomy, which is something he has never experienced in his running career so far, and secondly because he is a much better runner than the others. This slowly changes over the course of episodes, as he begins to find communality and joy by helping his teammates become better runners. One of the telling moments between the begrudged Kurahara and the team captain Kiyose, who is trying to teach him to love the essence of running again, can be seen in Kiyose’s misunderstanding as to why he should train with the team. Kurahara refused to run with others claiming that “if you want to run, you can run by yourself. Isn’t that what it means to run?” to which Kiyose replies, “even though you run by yourself, you’re not actually alone. You’re always running with someone else.” This is helpful when it comes to understanding how a seemingly individualistic sport can also be incredibly collectivist, although in these instances it appears to manifest more as a general respect and understanding of the interconnected efforts of others. This is in direct relation to the social concept of ie and the wa.
**Injuries**

Injuries play a central role in the series, alluding to several repeated currents in the literature on burnout and overtraining. We learn that Kiyose has had a serious career ending injury due to overtraining and an overbearing coach.

Kiyose demonstrates leadership by coaching the others and by always running with the slowest student on the team nicknamed ‘Prince’ a literature student. This follows a cultural principle of nurturing the weakest link of a team in order to succeed together. Although it should be noted that the ‘old-school’ style of coaching emphasized the weakest link in a negative way, there remains a belief that, “the study of any skill is expected to involve long and arduous training rather than being a ‘talent’ which one is encouraged to feel one either has or doesn’t have.”\(^{315}\) This is socialized early within the Japanese school systems and provides the fundamental roots underling the dedication to training in sport. It consists of an underlying assumption that anyone could, with enough application, be successful - the idea of ‘unlimited effort’. This may be why more is considered better, as was demonstrated with Seko as a Japanese athlete.

Generally speaking, the improvement of skills is largely based on imitation and repetition in which “much of the movement involved is ritualized, clearly decided, and a pupil strives to achieve perfection in conforming expectations.”\(^{316}\) The pursuit of perfection, which can be the perfect running form, winning or losing in the ‘right’ way, or in many instances, the practice of *kodawari* are repeat currents within the literature. This might explain how, “many hours are passed in repetitive routine” and why “perseverance and even suffering are an integral part of the

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316. Ibid, 173.
Although this is in reference to the educational system, as well as the pursuit of individual interests such as hobbies, the connection to running is similar. It is worth revealing how equality is not overlooked in this process. The assumption about ability is that if an individual is to follow the ‘right approach (typically being persistent and persevering) anyone is capable of rising to a challenge. Hendry argues that this approach “is fundamentally much more egalitarian than the emphasis on innate intelligence [and other attributes] which is found in many other countries, although it is not to be denied that Japanese teachers are aware of such differences.”

This idea is reflected in how talented members of the Kansei Ekiden team, and their achievements, are routinely downplayed (by either the runners themselves or the team as a whole), while the efforts of characters like Prince, with no talent for running whatsoever, receive considerably more attention from teammates. Prince’s attempt to run are filled with exaggerated suffering to the point of comedy.

His inner thoughts are often portrayed on his training t-shirts which say such things as ‘Feeble’ or ‘Why?’. Gradually, they each find different individual reasons to run until the goal of participating in the Hakone Ekiden becomes the goal for them all. Some want to know what running ‘is all about’, while others use running to battle their growing frustrations and depression with job searching (a very poignant and realistic current issue in Japan). Akihiro (or Senpai, the oldest student), uses running to quit his nicotine addiction and finds joy in running again after being discouraged and embarrassed by a coach during high school who told him he was too tall and heavy to be a runner. Even Kamara, a foreign exchange student from Africa, continuously battles assumptions that he is a sponsored elite runner and seeks to prove his own worth free from such stereotyping. The team also test each other’s tenacity with comical games such as

317. Ibid, 173.
318. Ibid, 225.
seeing who can stay the longest in the hot water of the *Sentō* (銭湯), a communal bathhouse. In the beginning the students reluctantly train saying things like “we are being forced to run without objection. Can we really call ourselves people?” and display images of piles of smelly and dirty running shoes at the entrance of the Kansei residence.

The series ends with Kiyose running a ‘perfect’ race at the Hakone Ekiden. This perfection has nothing to do with his time nor the placement of the team overall (however, they are selected to be seeded for next year which insulates a revival of the Kensai track and field program, a positive legacy for the university). Instead he gives everything to the race and is permanently injured for his heroic efforts. Yet, having experienced ‘perfection’ or *kodawari* (an upmost commitment to the love of an Ekiden) the spectators knew they had witnessed something spectacular and felt uniformly moved and inspired.

**Details about the Hakone Ekiden**

The series was also helpful in gaining insight into details about the Hakone Ekiden race, such as the difficult qualification process. For example, the series depicts the teams’ collective goal of being able to run one kilometer in the time it takes to prepare a cup of noodles, meaning less than 3 mins. The series also detailed how every section of the Hakone Ekiden ranges from 18 to 23km in length, meaning that the ten to twelve runners must train to race 20km each. The series does a comprehensive overview of the process, by learning about the race as the characters themselves learn about it.

First, all team members on each university team must meet the qualifying time. The qualifying time for a University team to qualify to participate in the Hakone Ekiden is that all
runners must race 5km in under 14mins and 30secs.\textsuperscript{319} To put this into perspective, the Canadian championship qualifying standard for men 35 years and under, in the 5 km race, is 19mins.\textsuperscript{320} For a University team of 10 to 12 athletes (typically there are 2 or more alternates), this is truly impressive. Secondly, during the preliminary qualifiers, which consists of 50 teams, only the top 15 qualify. This race is called \textit{Yosenkai} and it is the biggest and most competitive 20km race in the world.\textsuperscript{321} All individual team performances are added together, and the top 10 teams move on. The top ten teams from the previous Hakone Ekiden year are seeded, meaning only 20 teams in total participate in the Hakone Ekiden. The shows’ depiction is accurate with a few minor details left out. For example, “ten of the fastest individuals at the \textit{Yosenkai} whose teams don't make it are chosen for the select team” to participate in the Hakone Ekiden. Otherwise, details of the different stages are represented with great accuracy. Some relevant moments of the race which was mirrored in the anime include the second stage of 23.2km in which the teams’ best runners often race because of the excitement of the two hills at the end of the stage. Another dramatic moment is the fifth section at 23.4 km, “the leg is famed for its steep slopes and curves, with the runners having to climb 864 meters to reach the town in Mount Fuji’s foothills. Every team has a ‘mountain specialist’, who trains specifically for that leg.”\textsuperscript{322} Those who beat the course record for this section are awarded the designation of ‘Mountain God’ or ‘Mountain King.’\textsuperscript{323} The emphasis on collective effort is further solidified through the symbolic ritual of passing the

\textsuperscript{319} Most runners opt for a 5km time trial; however, a runner can also qualify if they run 10km in under 30mins. This equates to running 5km under 15min twice, which is typically considered more difficult for most runners.

\textsuperscript{320} “Championship Series – 5km Champs.” Athletics Canada, last modified September 9, 2018, https://athletics.ca/championnat/5km/.


tasuki between runners of the different stage to team members. It is a symbol of group solidarity alluding to its ‘weighted’ significance. Some universities even have their tasuki purified at the Hakone Shrine. Its symbolic significance is expressed in an Ekiden documentary, saying “spun along with the runners’ sash are numerous dramas.”

The depth of talented Japanese runners is repeated often in the literature and interviews. Finn alludes to how “something is going on in Japan” when 52 Japanese runners broke 2 hours and 15 mins in the marathon in 2013, while the U.S (with a population more than double that of Japan) only had twelve runners make that time. For the half marathon, 18 Japanese runners ran under 63min in a single race. In the U.S, only 21 runners made that standard over the course of an entire year. There are several important factors to consider here; first the talent pool might be deep, but it is also young and relatively short lived (usually because of the intensity of training and high injury rates). Secondly, much of the talent remains in Japan is specialized for Ekiden racing, and while many runners transition to the marathon and international events, Ekidens remain localized. Essentially, “it is the university runners who are the most impressive in Japan, running times that would rival even the Kenyans at the age for depth of long-distance talent.”

However, many foreigners lament how if only the Japanese would “train like in Kenya, all the world records would come from Japan.” Interestingly enough, of the fastest marathon runners in 2013, “only six did not come from Africa; and of those six, five came from Japan.”

In terms of training, the amount of volume is certainly impressive and in line with other sources on mileage in Japanese running. The students are shown running together early in the

324. The Japan Times, “Facts about the Hakone Ekiden.”
325. Barakan, “Ekiden.”
328. Ibid, 114.
329. Parke, Inside the Most Running Obsessed Nation on Earth.
morning, sometimes sneaking in a run in the afternoon and late in the evening. They are not allowed to work a part-time job, although several of them do so secretly on the side, staying up all night and are shown falling asleep on transit and in classes. The most telling moment in which running becomes a positive experience is when one by one they realize that rather than being forced to run, they feel inspired to improve their running. When Kiyose is asked why he wants to run in the Hakone Ekiden he explains that he never truly enjoyed running but that he wants to learn to appreciate it. Because of this reason he explains, “I thought I’d give it an earnest shot. I might come to like running. I’m not serious about it because I like it. I thought taking it seriously might make me (like it).” He explains that everyone can run, but that he ultimately wants to discover for himself what running is, and what it means to run.

**Different Heroes- winning and losing the ‘right’ way**

Of equal fascination are the integrated distinctions between structure and agency within anime narratives, as well as the contrasts to the idyllic superhero or villain when anime punctuates Western culture. Japanese stories which de-emphasize the individual with an awareness on collaborative involvement have led to anime’s global international media success. Themes within anime are seldom about a single superhero, but rather groups of individuals who come together in collaboration. This is also portrayed in the imagery of real public images surrounding long-distance running and Ekiden racing, memorial statues with slogans such as “running towards tomorrow” as a runner passes his *tasuki* to his teammate.

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Shige Yamauchi, elite marathon coach and husband to British marathon runner Mara Yamauchi, explains that in Japan there is an emphasis on personal development through sport, a theme that is ubiquitous in anime about sports. Yamauchi goes on to emphasize how “many of the stories are about sport, but the storylines are very different from typical western narratives.” In Western culture the most popular sporting narratives include an underdog and winning, while in Japan, sport stories are centered around team spirit and the “belief in Japan that sport is not only about winning. To be truly accepted and celebrated, you have not only to win, but to win in the right way.” The ‘right way’ in this case is an appreciation, understanding and respect for how the group makes you great, not that a person can be great on their own, which is precisely how Run with the Wind plays out. Yamauchi explains how in anime the narratives typically begin “with an individualistic person who wants to do everything his own way. But this causes trouble. Finally, he is brought into the group, into harmony with the team, and then the team starts to win.” This is perfectly portrayed in the example of how Japanese and Western cultures play the game of football (soccer) differently. He interprets the style of play as “in England, everyone wants to score. Nobody wants to pass. But in Japan, it’s the other way around. Nobody wants to score; they prefer to pass.” The ‘right way’ is also in reference to losing the right way.

333. Ibid, 267.
334. For example, Rocky Balboa in the film Rocky (November 21, 1976), or Chariots of Fire (June 4, 1981) characters Eric Liddle and Harold Abrahams.
336. Ibid, 268.
337. Ibid, 267.
**Foreigners in Japan**

The depiction and stereotyping of Africans in Japan, is both challenged and reinforced in this anime series. In the series, foreign exchange student Musa Kamara is considered ‘unusual’ because he is a government sponsored academic student studying engineering and not a ‘typical’ sponsored African runner. This assumption is depicted in the shifting recruitment and hiring practices mentioned in the interview with Jeff Schiebler. The Japanese realised in the early 2000s, that African runners were less maintenance then their Western of European counterparts, as well as being much cheaper to hire. In the anime series, we see several instances of ‘hired’ African University runners, with comments like “they’ve surely come to Japan in order to devote their lives to running."

Kamara the foreign exchange student from Tanzania comes face to face with this assumption repeatedly in the series and often feels immense pressure to run at the same exceptional level as other sponsored African runners in Japan. He cries out, “It’s prejudice to think black people are fast runners.”

However, his scholarship is based on his fluency in the Japanese language and his academic aptitude, not his athletics abilities (in which he has little at the start of the series). At one-point Kamara overhears two Japanese individuals expressing disgust because the Kansei University track team in not completely Japanese which is upsetting to Kamara.338 For most African runners the pool of competitiveness is so great that you must be an exceptional runner to have a chance at leaving their country. This is similar to how both Lee and Schiebler were initially attracted to Japan, and these opportunities are equally, if not more sought after by African runners, primarily for the financial incentives. On the topic of movement culture and

Kenyan running, Bale and Sang speak briefly about the diaspora of Kenyan athletes. They described how track and field in particular has created “a common marco-culture among some members of each of the world’s nations”339 and that the 1990s and 2000 have seen an increase in Kenyan talent migration with Japan being of particular interest. It “has been suggested that migrant athletes are the most visible expressions not only of globalization sport but also of the increasing diversity of sports culture.”340 Yuki Kawauchi341 in an interview mentions the difference in values between the hired African runners and himself as a Japanese runner saying, “unlike the African or other professional runners, I’m not running for prize-money or sponsors, I’m running to satisfy my own interest and my own challenge.”342 Finn goes on to assert that motivations are different between the cultures, and although both countries value and support long distance running unlike any other, the Japanese have such a strong depth of runners because of an infrastructure that supports them, while the Kenyan runners use running because there is a lack of infrastructure of support for living. For example, one Kenyan athlete living in Japan states,

“in Kenya there is nothing to gain from being a good runner, the competition is so fierce, and the opportunities so scarce that you have to be a great runner. In Japan, it is easy for runners to get too comfortable with a paid salary on an average team. Kenyans are running to put food on

339. Bale and Sang, Kenyan Running, 129.
340. Ibid, 129.
the table. [While in Japan] Athletes struggle to stay motivated after the highs of Hakone. By the age of 22 your career highlight has already happened.”

In the end however, Kamara is selected to run the famous second section because he embodies the characteristics of a runner who can run ‘bravery, calmly and without fail’.

**Don’t be fast, be strong**

To begin, the series demonstrates the transition of all its characters who are metaphorically ‘running from’ something in their lives, into ‘running to’ achieve or overcome, which results in the end with the joys of ‘running with’ others. This is beautifully summarized in the following statement: “running is all about strength, not speed—the strength that comes from being you and forming a bond with someone else.” Another observation includes the typical saying from a Western perspective which might suggest that someone runs ‘like’ the wind, while the emphasis here is to run ‘with’ the wind like a companion. Even the series itself devotes equal sections of an episode to each individual runner during the sections of the Hakone Ekiden race, and when certain episodes focused on specific characters, all of the others are included within the story. It is equally difficult to determine between who is protagonist and the deuteragonist. Kiyose and Karahura are often at the nexus of the story but share equality in relevant plot moments with the other team members. The use of first names or nicknames in the series is also a strong cultural indicator of harmonious and close relationships among the team members. Additionally, despite the runners having their own eccentricities that act as their defining traits, everyone on the Kansei team is shown to harbour more depth than they let on reflecting “the trope of a ragtag group that have learned to overcome their differences in order to succeed

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343. Ibid. 311.
344. The person second in importance to the protagonist in a drama.
together.”  All members show support for effort exerted, rather than performance outcomes, and “this especially applies to the non-athletic Prince’s achievements at the track meets and when he completes his section of Hakone.” Prince is the weakest runner of the group and yet is exceedingly valuable because his anguish brings his teammates to tears and inspires them to try harder. This was done purposefully in the anime, when certain members of the team who would easily meet the standard times are asked to forgo a race and watch their fellow teammates run instead. This was done precisely to instigate passion from cheering, with the goal to give them all courage. During a track meet, Kiyose laps Prince several times. As he is coming up on his last lap, he slows down and runs beside Prince encouraging him on. Prince makes the cut-off time and this is the team’s most jubilant celebration, in contrast to the subdued reactions of Kiyose’s ‘easy’ win at 13mins and 27sec. In fact, an onlooker is corrected – “don’t call them fast, call them strong. This is the greatest compliment to give a runner.”

This ‘right attitude’ when it comes to training, racing and failing is a repeated motif throughout the series. This is mirrored in the concepts of kodawari, in which serious practitioners of any task, be it running, or drinking coffee, understand that “I may not be so careful about everything, but at least I know how it feels to be devoted to something.” This ‘correct attitude’ is reiterated every episode in the series in sentences like “Don’t we keep running because there are ideals and goals we value more?” or “if you guys can’t run because you can’t win, will you quit living because you’ll die someday?” which alludes to the pursuit of perfection as an ideal, and not an achievable goal.

345. “Characters/Run with the Wind,” TV Tropes.
346. “Characters/Run with the Wind,” TV Tropes.
347. White, Coffee Life in Japan, 70.
**Unscripted Drama**

Drama is accentuated when Sugiyama, who is ill to the point of a high fever, unknown to his teammates when he starts, decides to run his segment; the most difficult uphill section of the race. The commentators of the race attempt to give Sugiyama an honorable exit from the bounds of team duty he is experiencing by saying “it wouldn’t surprise us if he stopped at any time. Will he be able to make it over the mountains of Hakone?” The coach offers several opportunities for him to forfeit the segment, which he declines, and his teammates remark that “the stronger you are, the more you value the way you lose.” Accepting failure is reflected in the concepts of *tatemae and honne*, the moment when the commentators and the coach are attempting to give Sugiyama a culturally acceptable withdrawal from the responsibility he carries for his team.

This is an important element that can speak to the performance of suffering which was shown repeatedly in the anime and is also present in the literature and experiences of both Lee and Schiebler. This is seen in grimacing, and the dramatic collapsing and crawling of athletes. This is not a new phenomenon, one of the most famous accounts is Julie Moss’s dramatic 1982 ‘Crawl of Fame’ at the finish line in the early formation of what is known today as the Hawaii Ironman triathlon.348 This moment was one of the first Ironman event to be broadcast on TV which captured her inability to stand up from exhaustion and her subsequent crawl to the line unassisted to finish the race officially. While on her hands and knees, her competitor runs past her to the finish line, and a grueling thirty seconds later, she crawls across the finish line, stunning millions of viewers watching on television, “at age twenty-three, Julie became the

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348. The Hawaii Ironman is considered to be the most difficult Ironman race in the sport of triathlon. Admittance to the race is competitive and extreme weather conditions make the 3.8km swim, 180km bike and 42.2km run heinously famous.
instant global icon, and the public face of fitness and endurance sports — which exploded in popularity, partly because of her inspiration.”

This moment, although not new in the world of endurance sports, was the catalyst that sparked the idea that the Ironman event focused on toughness and transcendence and is credited with inspiring the triathlon boom in the 1980s. In Iron War: Dave Scott, Mark Allen and the Greatest Race Ever Run, Mark Allen describes how watching Julie Moss on television changed his perspective on dealing with physical anguish. In fact, the event brought him to tears, which inspired him to sign up for his first Ironman. Serendipitously, Mark Allen would go on to become one of the sports’ most legendary icons. Clearly these moments resonate with those in sport and suffering appears to be an emotional state we all relate to. So too are those moments when Ekiden runners can be seen collapsing at the finish line, crawling and enduring heinous weather conditions.

Crawling to the finish line also made news when Rei Iida fractured her leg and crawled to pass the tasuki on to her Ekiden teammate, representing Iwatani Sangyo corporate.

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352. After coming in second (mainly to Dave Scott) in the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii. Six times. Allen would go on to win the race six times. His first victory against Dave Scott in 1989 is recounted in the book ‘Iron War: Dave Scott, Mark Allen and the greatest race ever run’ by Fitzgerald (2011) which recounts one of the most grueling and exciting races documented in the sport.

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Another example can be seen in the reactions to images of Yumika Nagahama, a high school student who was leading the National Women's Ekiden for her team during a ‘whiteout’ or snowstorm in Kyoto. A Chinese website proclaimed the event to be; “Unbelievable! Appalling! Images of Japanese Women Running Relay in Snowstorm.”

While the Japanese complained about the invisibility of the racers’ bibs, the race was not cancelled and proceeded as usual as a full live broadcast. The article comments on how the Chinese article proclaims that Japanese women's distance running is “hell running,” “crazy” and “too cruel.” Equally telling are the comments under the article by Western runners, who make several points. First that “civilians, non-runners, will never understand,” second that weather is relative to experience, and finally that cultural differences are exceedingly powerful in shaping behavioural expectations. Brett Larner (Japan Running News author and owner) eloquently writes

“I take the criticism as an indication of different cultural ideals of gender identity or women’s roles in society. Many people watching the race including me saw hundreds of strong, tough bad-asses. Others apparently saw delicate flowers they think belong in a hothouse.”

The physical manifestation of effort to the point of bodily failure receives news attention and resonates with onlookers. It is in the extremes where the performance of pain, effort and suffering takes on a visceral meaning as it is embodied within the runner. The anime presents these moments visually, demonstrating their relevance and importance in performing pain, and suffering.

355. Ibid.
Throughout the training, physical excretion is also clearly portrayed in the anime, though as the characters progress their “facial expressions are notably much more serious and courageous, symbolizing their dedication, growth and increased confidence.” The amount and degree of suffering during training is made abundantly clear throughout the series. There is joking among the team that being forced to run is a ‘human rights violation’ but never is it depicted nor vocalized in a negative light. Even Prince’s distorted running form is endured, if sometimes for comic relief. His efforts are never criticized nor mocked by anyone in any fashion. When a team member begins to criticize a rival running team who is attempting to qualify, he passionately proclaims, “I really hate running, but more than that I hate people who criticize others for what they do! The team…at the very least recognize me, my ideas, and my worth. Among them, there is no high or low level. The only thing that matters is who we are!”

Throughout the series the team cheer becomes a call and response, “To the mountains of Hakone!” with the reply from the team being “The steepest in the world!” Collapsing at the finish line in complete exhaustion appears to be very common and these dramatic finishes are reflected in the witnessed experiences of both Lee and Schiebler and is less common and considered over dramatization within the Canadian context. Finn explains the drama of the passing of the tasuki during the stages of an Ekiden race with the following, “At every handover the effort and passion for this race is etched across the contorted faces of the runners […] as they pass the tasuki, they tumble to the ground and are helped up by comforting team-mates, who wrap jackets and towels around their broken bodies, their faces twisted, sometimes openly weeping with the effort.”

What is equally fascinating about these performances is that they are both acceptable expressions of emotion which are otherwise rarely on display in public spheres, as well as representing an embodied spectacle of runners showing their teammates and the spectators how much effort they have made while carrying the *tasuki* across the finish line. Western onlookers noticed how “I’ve seen this falling across the line in other ekidens and always though it was at least partly an act. Even in the amateur ekidens, people were doing it, presumably copying their idols.”357 This is apparently a common phenomenon and is “noticeable in every ekiden,” the only difference being that the finishes become more and more dramatic the further they are from the loser or winner of the race. For example, “the teams in the lead are less dramatic at the changeovers. By winning the stage, he doesn’t need to show how much he has tried. But every runner after him puts on a bigger and bigger display of paine and effort.”358 The intensity of these events is summarized in the following account; “the further back they are in the field, the more dramatic it becomes, with the last few runners collapsing as though they’ve run their legs into a useless pulp, refusing to be dragged back to their feet, pleading to be left to die at the side of the road.”359

Although an Ekiden’s dramatic effect can be viewed as a performance, as Barthes and Chow suggest in the literature on performativity, the pain and effort are still very real. However, it is done for social, and culturally relevant reasons in Japan. Even foreign onlookers compare Ekiden racing to football describing “the atmosphere of the day has been quite extraordinary. It feels as though every other race I’ve ever watched was like a football match played out in front of a half-empty stadium. Here, though, the stadium was full, the noise was deafening. This was

357. Ibid, 256.
358. Ibid, 257.
359. Ibid, 257.
long-distance running as a blood-and-thunder sport, where every last competitor was willing to break himself to keep up. It was fantastically epic.”\textsuperscript{360} Finn comments how “seeing this spirit at the end of such genuinely incredible performances, with the whole country watching, feels like stealing a tiny glimpse into the collective soul of Japan.”\textsuperscript{361} Even spectators are crying and saying, “it is so moving”, something that lends weight to the emotional impact these events impart.

Episode seven is entitled \textit{Bare your Fangs at the Summit}, alluding to how the performance of suffering and effort appear to be acceptable and indicative of courage and toughness. Runners in the anime can be seen crying and apologizing on the side of the road, falling into the arms of volunteers and collapsing at the finish line.

This is also true in reality where the suffering comes at a price. For example, the sense of responsibility (or \textit{ie}: unpayable depth to one’s group) can be so high that “runners who fail to hand over their own team’s \textit{tasuki} at a relay point in time are thus haunted by feelings of guilt and shame for years after.”\textsuperscript{362} However, the anime points to a self-imposed will, rather than external pressures saying “you can’t force a person to run, the only thing that makes a person run is their own will.” It is followed with the comments that it is within our nature that “people always want to be strong”. Being ‘strong’ in the Japanese running context is to be mentally resilient. Strength of mind overcomes all shortcomings according to Kiyose, who attributes failures in the following paradigm, “most things we call mistakes are the result of pressure or weakness of the mind” therefore, “We must find strength. Unwavering strength. True strength, so we won’t be defeated by ourselves!”

\textsuperscript{360} Ibid, 259.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid, 257.
\textsuperscript{362} The Japan Times, “Facts about the Hakone Ekiden.”
Although the team’s overall standing decreased because of Sugiyama’s slow time, the question asked is “why can’t we stop doing something so painful and difficult?” in which the answer becomes, “For our friends. For our goals. For ourselves”. The commentators and spectators continue to justify watching someone suffer not because its cathartic but because it represents something more. “That’s why we can’t look away” says an onlooker, and “why it sticks in our hearts.” The commentators say, “Sugiyama is greeted by a continuous wave of cheers after demonstrating that he has the strongest will in the country.” This determination demonstrates an understanding of *ie* as a value and shows that “he’s running to pass on the hope the ten of them built for future generations” says the sport commentator. This is an example on where the individual does not disappear into the crowd but is equally essential to the success of the team. In the end, Sugiyama is the most celebrated athlete at Hakone because of the heartfelt drama that is experienced by everyone watching.

The drama of Ekidens are seen repeatedly in the contorted faces described by Finn, the collapsing as experienced by Lee, and the crawling to finish lines. Real images have been captured by Finn and when compared to images from the anime, the expression of intense emotions is evident.
The Canadian Runners

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of Canadian elite runners were recruited by the Japanese and encouraged to live, train and compete professionally under a Japanese corporate sponsorship. This transnational flow of Canadian elite runners to Japan highlights an interesting historical moment in sporting movements and running culture in particular, speaking to the difficulties – and benefits - of cultural sporting exchanges.

Interviews with two elite Canadian runners who signed professional contracts in Japan highlight the types of support systems offered to Canadian athletes and the nature of their Japanese sponsored systems. They illuminate differences in cultural values, training styles, and expectations involved in running cultures. In discussing their experiences, Canadian runners noted how they were affected by financial incentives, and the unique opportunities of participating in a traditional sport revered by the Japanese – an opportunity that facilitated important intercultural exchanges.

The transnational influx of Canadian runners to Japan, along with other Western and European elite runners during these decades, marked an interesting shift in long-distance running globally, appearing on the precipice of the emergence of elite African runners during the 2000s. The manifestation of running events such as Ekiden provided a particularly compelling draw for Canadian elite athletes who came to understand how sport brings individuals together through the shared passion for running. In particular it highlights the concept of suffering, enduring, and performance as cultural values around the intended purpose of sport.

The concept of adventure and mutual learning through exposure in the spirit of cross-cultural exchange was also noticeable, falling in line with literature on self-expatriation and the
mobility of professional skilled workers. Lee explains her intercultural exchange in the following way.

“I felt like in many ways we were sort of a really healthy release for them to hear that there are other ways that people do things and view things, and we were respectful. We were always respectful when we were there, but through our interpreter we would say, ‘can we, can we share?’ and sometimes she would say ‘no, no this is very Japanese’. ‘Yeah. But can we share?’ I felt so, we always felt so bad for her because she was sort of this, you know, in the middle, this position in the middle.”

While there was no overt attempt at complete integration, Schiebler expressed having to resist the Japanese attempts to integrate him into their training and culture. Lee was in a different position having her husband and coach with her, as well as a contract that stipulated they had full control of their training regime. Additionally, both acknowledged that they were granted leniency and tolerance given their foreign status, allowing for more autonomous actions not permissible for their Japanese teammates.

Sue Lee’s first introduction to Japanese running came about through channels available within the elite running community. This type of insider information is a topic of great excitement and interest to Canadian elite runners, though it is seldom spoken about outside these circles. In some respects, it is a subculture of subcultures, a very small percentage of individuals who have knowledge of what is happening in Japan and why it would be beneficial and of interest to spend formative athletic training years abroad under a foreign contract. Finn explores

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how having knowledge of Ekidens demonstrates a selected awareness that distinguishes and affords prestige to those in these liminal circles.364

Finn gives the following example. After arriving home in the U.K having spent six months in Japan, he joins a local road race and names his relay team ‘The Ekiden Men’. At the post-race awards the announcer has difficulty pronouncing the name of the team. However, the 1983 London marathon winner Mike Gratton who is distributing the awards says to them, “you’re obviously real runners, you know what ekiden means”.365 This was also confirmed when speaking informally with current Canadian Olympians, such as steeplechaser Chris Winter.366

Lee’s introduction to Ekidens took place between her participation in the 1984 Los Angeles and 1988 Seoul Olympics. In 1985 she was a member of the first Canadian team sent to participate in the Yokohama Ekiden. International Ekiden racings, in which Japan invites teams from around the world to participate, contributes to the ‘know-how’ among current Canadian elite runners with the International Chiba Ekiden providing a coveted team spot and destination race for Canadians. Many current Canadian long-distance national record holders have participated, such as Lanni Marchant,367 Rachel Cliff368 and Dylan Wykes.369

369. Doyle, “Canada Names Chiba Ekiden Team.” Dylan Wykes is currently the third fastest Canadian marathoner of all time and a 2013 Chiba Ekiden participant.
2013 Canadian Chiba Ekiden participant Andrea Seccafien, wrote an extensive article entitled, *Running – Big in Japan*. She discusses Japan’s reverence for long-distance running, it’s extraordinary talent and depth, the Canadians who have participated in Ekidens, and speaks to the long history and significance of long-distance running in Japan. As someone who has herself participated in the Japanese running culture through the elite channels of ‘know-how’ her article points to Japan’s insular running scene, that is nonetheless exceedingly attractive to Canadian elite runners.

In a sense, the introduction to Ekidens for both Lee and Schiebler began with invitations to Ekidens and cross-country events held in Japan and developed through headhunting and recruitment by Japanese agents, which turned into the long-term contracts they both obtained. Japanese corporations were actively seeking out international runners for hire during which Lee was introduced to a small corporation called *Okabe Komuten*, a construction company, whose team of six women lived and trained in rural Japan.

Lee describes how her situation was somewhat different from Schiebler. She was hired by a small company in rural Japan, while he was recruited by a much larger conglomerate. However, and perhaps for this reason, Lee expressed having more freedom in terms of her contract negotiations, given how earnestly the team appeared to want her, saying “they were still happy to consider us coming to be part of this team,” despite the Canadians’ many requests. Lee insisted that their obligations to the Canadian team would come first in terms of Canadian competitions, training camps, and ‘peaking’ for Canadian events. Additionally, it was agreed that

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371. Lee, Interview, S:: (04:37).
Lee would be accompanied by her husband Richard, who would also contribute by training and coaching her (he also raced).

While Lee was the first Canadian to go through a corporate running sponsorship in Japan, where she and her spouse remained for approximately two years (1988-1990), Schiebler was the ‘next generation’ of young elite Canadian athletes to go through the Japanese system. Schiebler’s experiences are different in the sense that he went alone at twenty-two years of age, and so his memories and interview reflect a sense of solitude and a steep intercultural learning curve. This is shown in his knowledge about Sue Lee and Richard Lee’s experiences in Japan, reflective of the sub-circles in which these stories circulate. When asked how he first learned about Ekiden racing he states,

“there’s a runner, Sue Lee, ...Sue and Richard Lee who are from Vancouver, they’re maybe 10 years older than me, so she was doing that when I was like 15. [...] So, I had heard about it. I knew, there was something out there but had never thought it was going to be for me. [...] Just people talking about it. And there were these people that you don’t even know, but you just hear names that go to Japan and make money running.”

He goes on to explain just how exclusive this knowledge was, by describing how many “high level professional runners in many corners of the world haven’t heard of this. And I bumped into that all the time, ‘what do you mean road relays?’ [...] And these were like established people, managers, coaches, agents from all over the world. Like, ‘what? Japan?’”

372. As far as both Lee and the researcher are aware of at the moment of this thesis.
373. Schiebler, Interview, J: (07:22).
374. Schiebler, Interview, J: (08:05).
375. Schiebler, Interview, J: (08:39).
It would appear that Ekiden racing was like a rumor of an imagined runner’s paradise, where you get paid to run and its citizens value the sport you yourself enjoy so much. Lee spoke eloquently about the Japanese propensity for long-distance running and her experiences in Japan saying, “we loved all the corporate competition, like watching all the Ekidens and watching all the marathons and all, like they are 'obsessed' with running in Japan.” She continues by stressing how Japan is “a marathon mad culture” but that Ekidens in particular have thrived because of the concepts of group harmony or wa. Lee makes the point that varsity teams in Canada are similar and relatedly more fun when done as a relay, and that athletes do have a tendency to race harder in team events. She also alludes to ‘pressure positions’, which means that Canadians do experience the ‘weight of the team on their shoulders’, but that they also interpret the pressure to be higher in individual events because of the need to perform an individual time, while team events seems to be less focused on overall times and more on the teams’ performance. For the Japanese, the concept of ie can be incredibly empowering, but also overwhelming. ‘Intensity’ or the significance of a team efforts, is a recurring current that permeates the literature. Lee explains how Ekidens are both extremely enjoyable, but that an underlying intensity saturates the running culture. Ekidens are more fun, but also noticeably different in the level of seriousness the races evoke. She compares Ekiden racing to other

376. Lee, Interview, S:: (20:11).
377. Lee, Interview, S:: (45:36).
378. In some cases, the seriousness of training in combination with internalized nationalistic pressures, have resulted in tragic outcomes. For example, Kokichi Tsuburaya’s bronze-medal performance at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics was the best finish at the Olympics in the marathon (even though Japan had several world record holders in the marathon during the 1930s, and two Korean marathoners who ran under the Japanese flag both won gold and bronze in the 1936 Berlin Olympic marathon). At only 22 years of age Tsuburaya was highly honoured in Japan for his Olympic performance, however, it was also expected that he would be a contender for another medal at the next Olympics in Mexico. Sadly, after suffering from running related injuries and being unable to train, he committed suicide one year before the Mexico City Olympics, with a letter that simply stated “Sorry; can’t run anymore”. Sandrock, Running with the Legends 345-368.
379. Lee, Interview, S:: (49:06).
mega sporting events saying, “it's like being at the Olympics or something, the 'intensity'. This is a big deal.”\textsuperscript{380} And, therefore the pressure is equally, “huge. The whole population is watching. So, it's like, you know, when you have regular season hockey or whatever, then you get to the Stanley Cup level and everybody is paying [attention].”\textsuperscript{381} Furthermore, Lee points to several underlying currents in the culture that have contributed to these running spectacles saying,

“in the population yeah, they, I guess that value of team for sure. But also the suffering aspect is like, ‘we work hard’ and with a value; dedication, commitment, hard work. Like that is the core values that makes us Japanese.”\textsuperscript{382}

Schiebler mirrored these sentiments with the following; “Yeah, the Ekidens are super popular. Most are televised, watched, you know, by, I mean, Japan's a country of 130 million, so its watched by lots. And again, it just comes down to that process-oriented mindset of the Japanese. The longer, the harder, the more grueling, the more satisfying it is. Whether you're participating or watching, they just appreciate the length, how hard it is.”\textsuperscript{383}

These sentiments are similar to the cultural values the Canadian runners themselves valued, although, the most noticeable difference was the presence of support and cultural acceptance that enabled them to foster these qualities in themselves. This was a unique and life changing experience for both Lee and Schiebler. Lee’s description of the magnitude of Ekiden races indicates an undercurrent of cultural meaning. She states, “yet the excitement, and I think that's what goes along with those Ekidens, is they are so exciting. The streets are lined with people, your whole company is out. Your whole company, so it's meaningful.”\textsuperscript{384} While this

\textsuperscript{380} Lee, Interview, S.: (49:18).
\textsuperscript{381} Lee, Interview, S.: (49:24).
\textsuperscript{382} Lee, Interview, S.: (49:40).
\textsuperscript{383} Schiebler, Interview, J.: (24:33).
\textsuperscript{384} Lee, Interview, S.: (48:25).
points to how the cultural context dramatically changed Lee and Schiebler’s experience of running in terms of pressures, intensity and support, it doubly reinforced a sense of exceptional atmospheric devotion in celebrating certain qualities associated with long distance running. This was also true for the marathon in which, “the marathon is recognized and appreciated by the public at large in Japan. Performances are appreciated, and marathoners have different status. It’s part of their heritage. Everyone knows running in Japan.” Additionally, the cultural context plays a significant role, which is in line with the psychological support runners also experience while training and racing in Japan: because of how running is valued.

Schiebler explains the limited knowledge of Ekidens outside Japan as culturally nuanced and subject to historical consequences stating, “Japan is like that. It’s an island nation. Super private. It’s their thing. Yeah, they don’t advertise it.” He would, however, continuously endeavor to renew his running contracts in Japan over the next nine years. He signed with NEC, a large computer electronic conglomerate, between 1996 and 2003, and then moved to work for Fujitsu, between 2003 and 2005. As a UBC varsity track and field runner Schiebler won the national cross-country championships in 1994, and was subsequently invited in 1995 to Fukuoka, Japan, where he also won a prominent cross-country race, with his results and image being printed in Japanese newspapers. He says,

“I went to this cross-country race in Japan and I won it, so there were Japanese agents, coaches, managers at that race watching. And the second-place runner in that race that I won had placed fourth at the Olympics in 1992 in 10,000 meters [...] So I beat him and all these Japanese stars. So now they’re like, ‘he beat fourth place’. Like that means he’s as good as

385. Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 358.
386. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (09:05).
third, and it doesn’t mean that, but on any day, anybody can beat anybody. I beat them that day. So, it put me on the radar in Japan.”  

Later that year in 1995, at Vancouver’s Harry Jerome track championships, the same agent that had witnessed his invitational race in Japan saw Schiebler win again, and hence a conversation began that evening between him, his coach and the Japanese recruiter. Schiebler negotiated a move to Japan a week after his participation in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Japan’s international efforts to invite high caliber runners to Japan to participate in these events served as exposure and a unique experience for Canadians, but simultaneously was used as a recruitment opportunity by the Japanese. For example, the Chiba Ekiden was held between 1988 and 2016. Its international draw was clear to Canadian runners like Chris Winter, who took photos of the ‘international wall’ in the communal Chiba cafeteria.

The Chiba Ekiden legacy is celebrated by federation officials with the following sentiment concerning how, “it played a large role in developing our athletes as well as in providing opportunities for international exchange.” Additionally, the Women’s Yokohama Ekiden would eventually be replaced in 2009, like many other international Ekiden races, in favour of international marathons. This is largely due to shifting national priorities and funding in the lead-up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics with Japan’s focus on the Olympic marathon. Schiebler expresses how the marathon is, “the ultimate. That’s the only race that they really care about in the end. [...] They do Ekiden

387. Schiebler, Interview, J: (03:45).
389. Brett Larner, “More Details on Marathon National Record Bonus Plan as Project Sponsors Sought,” Japan Running News, March 31, 2015, http://japanrunningnews.blogspot.com/2015/03/more-details-released-on-marathon.html; This is also in light of the Japanese shifting international marathon focus, for example corporations funding incentives for a million-dollar bonus for a new marathon record.
relays of all different varying distances [...] But what they really care about is the longest, most
grueling event. The marathon." When asked why, it comes down to “their mentality. It's the
longer, harder, more grueling, the process is, the more rewarding it is in the end for all
involved.”

Schiebler emphasises that the focus and appeal of the marathon to the Japanese, is
centered around an internal cultural attitude, but one that is also “cognizant of the marathon as
the longest official kind of Olympic distance [...] And that therefore legitimizes it as the ultimate
event.” Ekidens are Japanese, meant for building Japanese runners at home to participate in
pinnacle national events like the Hakone Ekiden. Marathons on the other hand, transmit an
international stamp with worldwide repute. The comradeship and pride created within an Ekiden
team ultimately extends itself internationally with the marathon. It’s the concept of an individual
within a team, where there is,

“an individual component of the game. But you're on a team. And everybody rotates
through, everybody bats. So, the Ekiden relays are like that. [...] I only had one, often one
seventh of the distance, was all I could do. That was the max I could do. I couldn't run the first or
last leg. I didn't get to run it twice. It's like going through the batting rotation once, I got one
spot to run and usually I was third or fourth to try and either catch up or get farther ahead. I was
seldom first, but sometimes, never last, because I wasn't Japanese. And if you win, they prefer
the Japanese person running across the line first. Just the way Japan is. Yeah. So it's also the
grind of distance running that, that mental focus strength, they love that, you know, the harder it
is, the longer it is, the more rewarding the end result. Win or lose, it's not really the winning, it's

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391. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (49:16).
392. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (49:39).
393. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (49:57); J:: (50:13).
and ultimately run a hundred kilometers divided up between eight people.”

Evidence points towards how Ekidens ultimately serve as a feeder system into the marathon, and this has contributed to Japan’s marathon market, which surpassed the United States marathon market in 2016. Additionally, the Japanese have the most marathon finishers by nationality worldwide since 2015. Even though Ekidens are a Japanese phenomenon, the resulting cultural propensity for long-distance running continues to grow. Ekidens were mandatory races written into the contracts signed by Lee and Schiebler, an interesting facet considering that there was no opportunity for Canadians to compete in Ekiden races anywhere else in the world. The specificity of Ekidens are not standardized internationally in the same way as track and field events because Ekiden distances and racecourses vary greatly. Additionally, Ekiden teams are carefully chosen based on individual strengths, a strategy used when deciding which runner will run which stage and section of the race. This is relevant when considering that neither Lee nor Schiebler fully understood the reasons behind why the Japanese were so eager to hire them and support them so advantageously. Lee describes how “the president, the owner of the company wanted them to hopefully make it to the corporate Ekiden Championships,” and that she was brought on as an anchor runner. Lee explains, “it was really hard to define why they were bringing me. And we had an interpreter assigned to us and she just kept saying, you will be the ringer, the ringer.” Lee continues by saying that she believed it had to do with exposure, including wearing the company logo at international events and appearing in numerous Japanese

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394. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (09:58).
396. Higginbottom, “ ‘Run Tokyo, Run.’ ”
397. Lee, Interview, S:: (06:17).
398. Lee, Interview, S:: (05:53)
magazine articles and newspapers. On the other hand, Schiebler was described as being a ‘hired gun’, when the Canadian media spoke about his career in Japan. The Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) goes on to report that he “is paid a six-figure US salary to be the legs that help carry his team in the wildly popular Japanese races called Ekidens” and that “his deadly weapons are running shoes and ability to adapt to a different culture.” In another full length feature, the title announces; “our best long-distance runner races for a corporate team in Japan. His bosses will make him rich - if the training doesn’t kill him.” This observation is mirrored in Schiebler’s description on how one must learn to endure differences in culture, but more distinctly how that same culture trains their athletes. He states, “they know what they’ve got in me, they know they can count on me. There is a risk in getting somebody else because of the cultural differences. So many foreigners go over there, last three months and leave.” These sentiments allude to several important observational experiences, the first is the image his presence on the corporate team established, the second is his athletic abilities as a commodity for the Japanese teams, and the third is the importance of navigating a culture around training philosophies and regiments.

**Resources and support systems in comparison**

Both Lee and Schiebler admit that the financial incentives were too lucrative to turn down during their careers. Additionally, the resources available to professional athletes in Japan under contract far exceeded any opportunities available to them in Canada, which continues to be the case today, although Japan has since shifted its recruitment gaze to African countries given that African runners can be less demanding and less expensive than their Western and European

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399. Lee, Interview, S:: (06:31)
400. Morris, “B.C’s Schiebler a distance-running superstar in Japan.”
counterparts. Lee in particular emphasized how the 1988 Olympics was a pivotal time for runners in Canada with the impact Ben Johnson had on athletics. Still a sensitive topic for Canadians, the social concerns of ‘the dirtiest race in history’ rest at the crux of many anxieties over doping at the Olympics. Canadians were stunned when Johnson tested positive for performance enhancing drugs and had his 100-meter gold medal revoked. The public investigation known as ‘The Dubin Inquiry’ shook the sporting world and especially the international image Canadians held of themselves as honest, hardworking athletes exhibiting sportsmanship qualities.\textsuperscript{403} Sportsmanship, which describes behaviour that is ethical, polite and fair, was in direct violation of many of the values Canadians believed made up their national identity. This defining historical moment has had severe consequences for Canadian track and field athletes in which Lee’s experiences are central. She states;

“right after the 1988 Olympics was a really interesting time in track and field because that was when Ben Johnson, right? So, all the sponsors where pulling out and nobody wanted to host track meets anymore. Like, it was really sad, kind of where we had been on top of the world between 84 and 88; 84 Olympics, all this sponsorship because everybody wanted athletes wearing their stuff. And then the bottom kind of fell out in 88. Especially for Canadians. There was a period of time where there wasn’t trust in Canadian athletes because of Ben Johnson testing positive. So, we were sort of in this position where we were motivated financially more than anything.”\textsuperscript{404}

Schiebler also underscored the dire situation for distance track athletes, even though his contract would commence six years after Lee’s return to Canada. He said,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{404} Lee, Interview, S.: (02:50).
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“well, ultimately there's very few opportunities for distance runners from Canada to be able to compete professionally and make money at running. [...] So it was an opportunity to not have to go to school and train, not have to work and train. Not have to pay for anything. And all the money that they pay me, I was going to be able to bank. We're going back 25 years ago. Pretty much a 150 - 200 grand at that age (authors note: Jeff was 22 years old at the time). It was a lot of money.” 405

The attractiveness of running professionally in Japan was clearly financial, but also similar to Lee’s situation in so far as “there was seemingly no other opportunity” 406 and “financially-wise there's no support whatsoever in Canada for distance runners.” 407 On the other hand, Japan made huge increases to its sporting budgets during the 1980s, so much so that “the private and public money spent on producing Japanese distance runners, male and female, high school, university and corporate, neared a billion dollars annually.” 408 The incentives continued to accumulate, as the corporate sponsorships included a contract that guaranteed income, as well as housing, travel, health coverage, general expenses, bonuses and a salary. When comparing the degree of financial support to that from Canada, Schiebler noted,

“you know, it's one thing to say, okay, I'm going to train hard for a race and you go to race, the prize money is $3,000. If you win it, you make lots of money. But you got to win the race to get it. This one I did, it was 20 months of guaranteed income, whether the day after I signed it, I broke my leg and couldn't run for 20 months. There was some guarantee, which is huge.” 409

405. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (17:46).
406. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (19:11).
407. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (20:47).
409. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (19:19).
He went on to stress that,

“for a distance runner who was 22 years old, just out of university, I had never really worked in my life. And now the only thing I'm known for, I'm good at, is running and now you're going to pay me to do it? I'm in. I'll do my best with it. See what I can do. So, after lots of careful consideration, we all just decided, this was worth the risk. Because of the opportunity and the guarantees involved.”

When pressed to describe how other long-distance elite runners were faring in light of the limitations of Canada’s support, he explains that,

“if anybody in distance running is making money at it, they're doing it making money in Europe, in Asia or in the States. Very low. I mean, you know, it might be a couple of races for 15,000 bucks or something for a win or whatever, but there was no, there's no support here. It's an amateur sport in Canada essentially. And the best are treated as such.”

Lee sums up Japan’s athletic support system as facilitating running as a viable career choice for Japanese athletes, a notion that required defence and justification in Canada. First, she describes the volume of runners Japan produces from high school into university, and secondly “the fact that you can finish university and get a paycheck to run for a company” as a clear indicator of the cultural value placed on running in Japan. She indicates that Japan is deeply devoted to the sport and understand long-distance running in a way that Canadians lack. She describes how “the culture there loves and knows, I'm going to say understands. They know running and they can't wait to watch running.”

410. Schiebler, Interview, J: (19:51).
411. Schiebler, Interview, J: (20:56).
412. Lee, Interview, S: (50:58).
413. Lee, Interview, S: (43:16).
She laments that despite the running boom in the 1970s, and the rise of concepts around health and fitness, elite running and track competition in Canada failed to foster much attention and interest. In Japan, this experience is reversed, and it is deeply embedded in the culture according to both Lee and Schiebler. She compared it to the phenomena of how Canadians know hockey players by name and that this cultural connectiveness is shared in Japan with long-distance runners. One such example is Toshihiko Seko (mentioned above), a household name in Japan during his career in the 1980s. She explains this different culture by stating how Canadians, “are thinking about ourselves, but we're not entrenched. We still know who our hockey players are, the average Canadian. Distance running just isn't part of our cultural history. So, it's very unique.”

While Canadians see athletes in the NHL as an acceptable profession, running, despite the changing amateur landscape, remains difficult to justify as a vocation. Lee remarked upon the degree of questioning she experienced in terms of her career as an athlete by other Canadians, despite competing in two consecutive Olympics. She mentions how,

“Here it’s like ‘You're going to keep running?’ ‘Well, you're going to get a job. Right?’ It didn't matter what level I competed at, family, friends would say, ‘when are you going to get a job?’ ‘I have a job, that is my job!’ […] But yet when you're in your early thirties you're feeling like, oh, I got to start real life. Whereas in Japan, now, right out [of] university, its gone on for a long time. You can have a job as a runner, as something and people are lasting longer and longer and longer.”

Lee’s perception of opportunities available to Canadians in comparison to how the Japanese have structured their running systems, is summed up by how in Japan “there are

414. Lee, Interview, S:: (44:11).
415. Lee, Interview, S:: (51:09).
options for thousands of people that don't exist here." She extends this support system to include the countless invitational international Ekidens Japan hosts for runners from around the world. Most sources include a remark on large spectatorship with thousands lining a race course to cheer on runners. It is of little surprise that many of our current Canadian Olympic marathon hopefuls continue to opt for long-distance races in Japan today. Running articles continuously comment on the depth of Japanese runners, mentioning how Canadian runners such as Rachel Cliff, “loves racing in Japan and has set all four of her national records there. She says that the depth in Japanese running is astonishing and great to experience first-hand,” it goes on to mention how “Cliff says the Japanese are so supportive of distance running and proud of their races.”

In her own words, Cliff comments,

“There is a real love for road racing in Japan and I think because of this they have a lot of depth in their races–anyone can see this by looking at the IAAF rankings but experiencing it first-hand was pretty cool. The event itself was so well organized, punctual, and a good environment to perform in. I also appreciated their hospitality.”

Lee also speaks generally about the Canadian draw to Japan as well as the exceptional hospitality mentioning how,

“If you go back to like, Chris Winter having run an Ekiden or any Canadian athlete going to an Ekiden, those were like, 'so fun'. And they are the best hosts when you get off the plane. Accommodations are taken care of and I went to a lot of track and cross country meets as well and they would pay us very well in terms of appearance fees and prize money and then per

419. Ibid.
So, every day we would get like $200 for our expenses, but all our meals were provided.”

For Lee and Schiebler, their transnational journeys were related to two primary movers, a financial incentive that was exceptional and a rewarding life experience. What remains true for both Canadians is that long-distance running is revered by the Japanese, and that Ekidens have played a central role in establishing its value within Japan. Some articles suggest that the Hakone Ekiden is the greatest running race on earth, describing how,

“millions are tuning in for the start of two days of wall-to-wall television coverage of what can genuinely stake a claim to be the greatest race on Earth: the Hakone Ekiden. With a 30% TV audience share over two days, this long-distance relay race, 200km long and featuring 23 university teams all from one region, is Japan's biggest sporting event of the year.”

Other sources compare long-distance running in Japan to the reverence the United States has for American football stating that, “the major ekidens are broadcast live on television with the biggest race on New Year's Day. While North Americans watch U.S. college football games, Japanese huddle around their television sets cheering their favourite relay team.” It is no accident that running events in Japan have been dubbed as the greatest running events in the world, or “the toughest relays on earth.” This is the case with the Mt. Fuji Ekiden and The Hakone Ekiden, which are repeatedly described as “one of the toughest mass-participation

420. Lee, Interview, S.: (52:47)
422. Morris, “B.C.’s Schiebler a distance-running superstar in Japan.”
423. “Top 5 Toughest Relay races in the World,” ForeSport, https://foresport.net/top-5-toughest-relay-races-in-the-world/; “The Mt. Fuji Ekiden: The toughest relay on earth,” Runner's World, September 17, 2014, https://www.runnersworld.com/races-places/g20833322/the-mt-fuji-ekiden-the-toughest-relay-on-earth/; Although the Mt Fuji Ekiden is undeniably grueling, it should be noted that there are many other races that could claim this title just as easily.
endurance events in the world”. 424 Ekidens are a national sporting event, steeped in cultural symbols and traditions and fueled by an underlying cultural propensity for long-distance running. The Canadians sought ways to understand and participate, although in some circumstances it was difficult to match the intensity with which the Japanese themselves train for long-distance running. The experiential nature of their journeys is tied together by opportunity, an environment that respected long-distance runners, but also contrasting training styles and different concepts on discipline that influenced their perspectives significantly.

A Job or a Joy?

Lee expresses that some of the more challenging moments during her training were the differences in ‘old school’ training ideologies and how running was used within the Japanese context. In her experience, one would become closer and more connected with those you trained with by sharing easy runs and talking during these sessions. However, it became clear that running was not meant to be fun, she explains,

“Whereas the joy, I mean I loved running and training by myself for my mental health, but I also valued as much those group runs where you were out with the cross-country team and you were just yakking about everything under the sun. Like you needed that balance. Right. […] They need a peer group to have other people who are doing the same thing, who get it and support each other. And so, these runners had that, but not really in their training. They had that outside of their training. So, they live together in a dorm. They were apartments actually. They all had their own separate little apartments and they had so much fun in their life outside of

running [...] You weren't allowed to have fun. It wasn't fun. It wasn't supposed to be fun. Same in racing.”

While for Lee running was a source of joy, a mental escape and a means to socialize, the ‘serious business’ of Japanese training and running, was emotionally challenging to navigate. She expressed sympathies for her teammates whose training was,

“Serious business. And I think in the end what became the most difficult for us was, there was an understanding amongst the runners about personal bests and those kinds of things. But amongst the leadership, the weakest runner on the team always had failed the rest of us and always had to apologize and take the blame for the team not doing well. And so the sort of shaming of the weakest link was the hardest. Like, just so hard to see. It was hard to experience and hard to not speak up.”

It was only outside of the context of running that Lee felt she could really connect with her teammates. Lee goes on to say, “I mean, the sad part of this is they were, they were very unhappy. Uh, they didn't like running. It was their job.” This is in accordance with the concept of wa which Lee also mentions, and how individual personality only really began to come through outside of the running context. She says, “I think the Ekiden fits because of the team element. Right? That concept of 'wa', you know, that we are as strong as this unit can be.”

She goes on to explain that the individual personalities came out outside of the responsibilities for wa and ie, as well as the distinction between tatemae and honne which become clearer to the Canadians. In terms of training she states, “but where there was sort of balance and joy is we always would invite the team over to our place and they loved coming to our place and seeing

426. Lee, Interview, S:: (15:05).
427. Lee, Interview, S:: (09:41).
428. Lee, Interview, S:: (45:42).
Richard ‘ohhhh!, Richard cooks!’ ‘Ohhh a husband who cooks!’ ‘I want a husband who cooks!’

[...] So they were fun and giddy and yes, and relaxed.”

Schiebeler also understood that the real benefits were believed to come outside of running; that running was the tool used to forge deep cultural qualities in their athletes. He states,

“And these runners, these teams were all companies and when you're done running, you then get a job in a company. You're just in the running department for now. So they're building allegiance to the company, their building, you know developing team building, commitment, after you're done running.”

It would appear that the Canadians float between running as both a joy and a job but have learned to lean into running as enjoyment in times of hardship. On the other hand, the Japanese teammates seem to endure running, and gained fulfillment outside of running with a focus on the process that will eventually reward them with admirable qualities and potential promotions within a company. For them the hardship is at times the running itself; for this purpose everything outside of training becomes easier in comparison, demonstrating the ability to endure challenges in other aspects of their lives.

**How to Survive a Japanese Running Training Camp**

When Japan’s Asian Games winner Kenji Takao was asked if he enjoyed the notorious running training camps Japan was becoming famous for, his eyes widen and he replied, “No. It was very, very serious. Not fun.” However, when asked about what contributed to his

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429. Lee, Interview, S: (17:46).
430. Schiebeler, Interview, J: (58:59).
431. Sloan, *The Running Joke*, 432. “Successfully showing a proper attitude allows the athletes to directly increase their promotion opportunities.”
433. Ibid, 71.
successful race he remarked, “I won because of ekiden training. In ekiden, you never let anyone pass.”

Training camps for both Canadians were at first an expectation, seen as a team building endeavor, but from which they would eventually find ways to tactfully avoid. If the regular Japanese training regime was considered excessive, the training camps were considered a test in survival. Schiebler mentions how the day he arrived in Japan, “they expect you to go to the training camp and start tomorrow, running a marathon a day. I was like, no. I never agreed to that. So, you start learning how to survive.”

In his memoire he describes the regimen as menticide, with his biggest concern being the ability to negotiate his new situation.

Five relevant aspects were expressed by the Canadians; the first is the incredible mileage the Japanese ran, sometimes running as much as 180 miles (289km) a week, often at what is known as long-slow distance training or LSD. This continues to be a popular way to train in Japan, referred to in Western literature as the Lydiard technique. Second, the Japanese attention to details in terms of measuring and recording data is discussed. Third, the concept of callusing the mind in accordance with LSD training. Fourth, is the ‘test of boredom’ given the mundane, repetitive and measurable small loop runs (sometimes as small as a tennis court, but in the Canadians case 500m to 1km loops) despite having access to running beautiful trails at the locations of the training camps. Lastly, and expectedly, was the overwhelming running injury

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434. Ibid, 72.
435. Schiebler, Interview, J: (24:02).
436. “Menticide” Webster Dictionary, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/menticide. This is defined as the systematic pressures that is used to undermine and destroy a person values and beliefs. Or, a systematic and intentional undermining of a person's conscious mind.
437. Sloan, The Running Joke, 64.
438. Author Lydiard was famous in the 1960’s and has since revived LSD training in the 1900s, presenting his technique in Japan, in which the Japanese readily embraced, but also exceeded his original recommendations. If some was good, then more must be better.
439. Sandrock, Running with the Legends. Seko’s coach is famous for training 2 times a day, for 2 hours each time, while running circles arounds a tennis court.
rate this style of training incurs. Japanese training is summed up as a “focus on battling long, battling hard and battling often.” This system endures because there is such a large pool of runners from which to pull. “When one runner is gone, another steps in to take his place. Elite Japanese marathoners don’t bemoan the end of their career or try to hang on. They just continue working for their corporation, where they often have lifetime employment.” Schiebler was very aware of this, but also of the precarious nature of his own ability to survive the Japanese training without getting injured or burnt-out himself. He mentions how in Japan, “they just, see the process, you train hard. The tougher you train, the tougher you’re going to be and the tougher you’re going to race and the stronger you’re going to be in the end.” The combination of high mileage, callusing, being detail oriented, boredom and injury are all currents experienced and witnessed by the Canadians in the Japanese running system.

A Marathon a Day

High mileage training is often referred to as ‘over-distance’ training but with a positive connotation. Over-distance training is in reference to doing more of either mileage or intensity in training than the race itself might require. This is designed to give athletes a sense of confidence when preparing for a race. Inherently, “very long runs are part of the running tradition of the Japanese, who place the utmost importance on over-distance training” and “they [the Japanese]

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440. Parke, “Inside the Most Running Obsessed Nation on Earth.”
441. Sloan, The Running Joke, 76.
442. Several examples include, “of the hundred fastest marathon runners in 2013, only six did not come from Africa; and of those six, five came from Japan.” Parke, “Inside the Most Running-obsessed Nation on Earth.” “Of the world’s hundred fastest times in this event, fifty-two were recorded by Japanese between 1961 and 1970.” Havens, Marathon Japan, 63.; “Top marathon countries in mid- 2013: Japanese men rank fourth, after Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda and just ahead of the United States; Japanese women rank third after Kenya and Ethiopia, with Russia fourth, and then Ukraine and the United States.” Havens, Marathon Japan, 118.
443. Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 357.
444. Schiebler, Interview, J: (52:41).
try to overcompensate by doing incredible workouts.” This tradition continues – Japanese runners with the corporate teams that train in Boulder, Colorado can often be seen walking single-file up the mountain roads, going on regular 20-to-25-mile walks (40km).

Lee explains how the Japanese “were training very, very, very differently. Extremely traditional Japanese training where they train two or three times a day, slow, slow, slow pace around the same loop.” She explains that long-distance running requires discipline but remarks that how Canadians define discipline must be different. In this way, the training, which is arduous, long, repetitive and boring, turns the races on beautiful open roads into a welcome reward. But the ‘test of boredom’ was often too grim for the Canadians. In her training diary Lee exclaims in bold letters, “NEVER AGAIN”, written in the corner and “painfully slow” while explaining how she was made to run at the pace of the slowest runner in a single file.

One photo portrays the Japanese runners in the dreaded single file running line, while Lee is shown breaking formation.

She mentions how,

“literally every single day they ran at the same pace, again, because of the discipline” and “about a 500 – meter loop where our girls ran every day, twice a day. [...] very rarely they would go to the track to do something at a higher tempo. But again, you asked like what, what is sort of the motive behind that? And I think, the thinking is mental toughness.”

To get around the training camps, the mileage and the boredom, sometimes Lee would even try and get her teammates to enjoy a run with her ‘off course’ a privilege she was permitted

445. Sandrock, Running with The Legends, 361.
446. Lee, Interview, S:: (08:29).
447. Lee, Interview, S:: (59:58).
448. Lee, Interview, S:: (09:11).
449. Lee, Interview, S:: (36:36).
because of her contract details and status as a foreigner. When describing how beautiful the training camp areas where she mentions how,

“We went on one, [training camp] and it was up in a beautiful area called Akita and it was in the mountains and yet that [a small loop] was where they would train three hours a day, three times a day. Yeah. So that was the difference. They would train three times a day, but again, they would find like a loop somewhere and we were off exploring the trails. It was just so sad. ‘Can’t they come with us?’”

The Reason is in the Details

In his memoire Schiebler describes in great detail many instances of boredom. He writes that they would jog at a pace so painfully slow that his “mind hurt more than his legs” and he would “count money with each painful stride and tried to convince himself it was all worth it.”

The focus on details was another aspect the Canadians found challenging, but also helps explain why runners were running such small loops. One was a test of boredom, the other was so that coaches could watch and monitor every stride their runners took. This is similar to the coach/athlete relationship described by the example of Seko. Even when Schiebler was asked to run an LSD training session, the distances had to be exact, and the coach would call out splits. He explains the differences in a discussion he had that “in Canada, we call it a one-kilometer loop” while in Japan the training staff would correct him by saying "No, no, no Jeff. It's not one kilometer. We measured it. It's 993.5 meters." He continues by explaining, “and then we'll do the same loop 15 times because there was a 15 kilometers session and they write down

452. Schiebler, Interview, J.: (44:36).
the time of each loop of 'every' run."  

Exhausted by the small loops and the endless statistical measures he states how every night the entire support staff would meet and analyze the data but “looking for who knows what, nothing. There's nothing there. No, no. Nothing of value on a one-hour easy jog.”

Finn describes joining an Ekiden team to train with them and describes the experience in the following way. “I’ve never actually run 10,000m on the track before. In the UK it would be considered far too monotonous for a training session. But in Japan I always seem to be running short repetitive loops of some kind.”

The meticulous recording, measuring, and analyzing of running data is also described in Schiebler’s memoir, where courses would take three hours to measure, but only two hours to run and a pervasive attitude of how the Japanese do everything in a “harder, longer, slower, more methodical, detail oriented way.” Schiebler explains that the obsession with details comes out in volumes of statistics, exclaiming, “Data! That and then analyzing subset data, that I never took part in, but they were analyzing it later in meetings and it's like, this was just a 15-kilometer easy one-hour jog. But they measure it out!”

Mara Yamauchi explains that the reason the Japanese do all their running back and forth around short loops, is because it is easier to measure, survey, and is mentally more difficult on the runners. This fits with the idea that only through repetition and struggle can success be achieved. For the Japanese, and according to the Canadians, it is usually the hard option that is considered most worthwhile.

453. Schiebler, Interview, J: (45:02).
454. Schiebler, Interview, J: (45:16).
457. Schiebler, Interview, J: (44:10).
Schiebler’s experience in comparison was more restrictive than Lee’s. This was perhaps because Lee had a partner and coach with her and was older and more experienced, while Schiebler was twenty-two, inexperienced and lacking familiar social support during his initial contract in Japan. In a similar fashion to Seko, Schiebler’s coach, Kawabuchi, attempted to become a fixture in every aspect of his life, even moving next-door to his apartment and at times living with him. Schiebler found Kawabuchi’s omnipresence challenging. He found himself in a situation in which Kawabuchi would drive and pick him up from Japanese language learning school, bike alongside him on all his runs, and even attempted to teach him how to do laundry correctly (meaning every day and in a certain way) and how to take a proper shower.

Schiebler recounts in a good-humored way how,

“I think definitely, he was in his own way trying to support me. His job was to be there for me and support me. But I'm an individual and a grown adult at the time and I'm quite capable. I mean, we were alternating nights cooking dinner for each other. Like I didn't want to cook dinner for him. I was still learning how to cook myself! I'd never lived on my own. I was like, this is a big change for me too. And I'm trying to adapt in my own way and get my feet on the ground as like, on my own, a single guy living in Japan. I want to find my routines and do the laundry, but make mistakes doing the laundry and figure it out myself. Not, have him stand there and go, ‘oh no, no, no. You've got to separate the colours like this’”.459 He continues by stating, how he “walks in, he says, ‘No, no, no, no. You sit on a stool and do it here and then you, and then you keep the tub full of water and then you get in the water and soak’. He taught me that. I'm like, I'm going to do it the way I want. I'm 23 years old.”460

460. Schiebler, Interview, J: (01:12:06).
Although seen as amusing 25 years later, during his first year in Japan, Schiebler struggled to understand the intentions behind Kawabuchi’s constant attention.\footnote{461} He explains the difference by stating,

“\textit{In Canada, you know, a coach is somebody you saw four or five hours a week at specific, more important sessions and then the rest of the training was done basically on your own volition within a plan. But, it was up (to you), you know, it's not up to a coach to get me up in the morning. [...] Over there and with him, he wanted, I guess to get to know me and he had one job on this team. He had one job [...] His job was me. So, you take that mentality of longer, harder, stronger, and he's going do his best with me, which often only translated into watching me. Living with me, eating with me, right? (laughs) And I didn't go over there looking for a roommate. You know.}”\footnote{462}

The surveillance was nonstop and invasive, even though Kawabuchi’s intentions were sincere. The level of dedication is further detailed in the following.

“\textit{It was nonstop. I was his only job. Yeah. He had nothing else to do. His family was away. He wasn't, he just sends the checks home. That was the way it is. For six months, he knew everything I did.}”\footnote{463}

Lee understood this relationship of loyalty to entail deep trust, but also as a sign of how much easier making decisions are. For example, the contrast is expressed by Lee in the following:

“\textit{Yes, so isn't life simple in a way? Like if there are just set rules for everything, that's simple. Simple, yet for us unsatisfying. Where you challenge, challenge everything. 'Why are we...}”

\footnote{461} Sloan, \textit{The Running Joke}, 274. Kawabuchi was often personally offended when Schiebler would lock his apartment door out of habit, something Schiebler was used to doing in Canada.
\footnote{462} Schiebler, Interview, J:: (01:04:23).
\footnote{463} Schiebler, Interview, J:: (01:05:46).
"doing it that way? Why can't we do it this way?' And the value to actually voice your thoughts, have an opinion and speak up about those things. And those aren't really valued. They're actually seen as a sign of weakness."  

The attention to detail is a sign of devotion, caring, and commitment. This is reflected in the meticulous measurements of loops and courses, the dedication to analyzing seemingly ineffectual recorded data from every run, as well as the coaches’ oversight of the lives of their athletes.

**Callusing the Mind**

The practice of callusing the mind is a metaphorically appropriate concept when attempting to explain training that can be viewed as counterintuitive to performance. Callusing is the concept of being tougher than your sport but is also in reference to overtraining. This attitude often results in athletes and coaches conducting workouts, speeds and distances that far exceed what is necessary to perform at the desired event. This term relates to several relevant concepts surrounding suffering, endurance, and mental toughness. Callusing however, as opposed to mental toughness appears to be fitting in this context to describe training techniques the Japanese engaged in that are not aimed at nurturing physical improvements within the specifics of the sport itself. This extends into cultural situations such as how, “corporations require employees to attend hardship training courses, in which running barefoot on gravel and dousing oneself with icy water, with nary a complaint, is considered a sign of a strong character.”

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An empirical review of embodiment through martial arts and combative sports suggests that an attitude of excess permeates the Japanese attitudes when it comes to training.\textsuperscript{466} To this effect, overtraining can lead to an idealization of an ‘enduring body’ in which pain and suffering is expected as an aspect of self-control.\textsuperscript{467} Taken a step further, the concept of an ‘enduring body’ also forms the basis for an ‘obedient body’\textsuperscript{468} and might play a role in how long-distance running has been manifested in civic Japanese culture. This is also connected to the cultural belief in both the physical stature of Japanese runners, and their ability to endure. Schiebler writes how “[the Japanese believe that they have an innate capacity to endure more mental pain […] what could not be conquered through physical stature or strength could be vanquished through mental toughness.”\textsuperscript{469}

Another example of overtraining and callusing as it was experienced by a Canadian in Japan is that of 19-year old Canadian Doug Rogers, who from 1960 to 1965 traveled to Japan to live and train in the martial art of Judo.\textsuperscript{470} A documentary film, titled Judoka,\textsuperscript{471} explores the experiences of living and training in Japan as a foreign athlete who is introduced to the Japanese sport training context. The opening scenes show him, along with his Japanese teammates,


\textsuperscript{467} Spielvogel, Working Out in Japan, 107. In the gym, there is an emphasis on effort and pain, with pain being understood to intrinsically foster proper learning and development, with the belief that ‘feeling follows form.’

\textsuperscript{468} Kelly, This Sporting Life, 42.

\textsuperscript{469} Sloan, The Running Joke, 202.

\textsuperscript{470} “Doug Rogers,” Judo Canada. 2017, https://www.judocanada.org/athletes/doug-rogers/; Anna Michelle Marrian Rogers, “Twentieth Century Travels: Tales of a Canadian Judoka.” Masters diss., ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005.; Rogers was in pursuit of an ‘authentic’ training experience and the opportunity to improve his skills, and moved to Tokyo for five years during 1960 to 1965. He trained with the best Judoka athletes from the police force and local universities. Rogers was initially a self-taught Judo competitor and participated in the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, winning a silver medal to Japan’s Isao Inokuma, the current all-Japan champion. He trained under Japan’s most renowned Judo competitor and coach Masahiko Kimura, considered to be the greatest Judoka of all time Rogers is the first Canadian to win a medal at the Olympic debut of Judo. He is also the first non-Asian foreign competitor to participate in all-Japan University Championships and win a gold medal. Additionally, he won gold in 1965 and 1967 at the Pan-American Games. He was inducted into the Canadian Olympic Association Hall of Fame in 1973, is a five-time national champion and a Canadian Sport Hall of Fame member.

\textsuperscript{471} Josef Reeves, “Judoka,” National Film Board, 1967, online video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XRgumW2SfY.
running around a small courtyard as a part of their training, single file in loops around the enclosed gardens of the dojo grounds. His opening remarks begin with what his teacher told him; “if you train three hours a day and become champion, you should immediately begin to train six hours a day.”472 While narrating images of himself training, Rogers explains how his coach, Kamura, stays up at night thinking of ways to train him harder. Rogers states, “I don’t think Kamura recognizes physical limitations. He just trains us beyond any that happen to come up.”473 He continues by explaining,

“Each member of our university team does 600 push-ups a day. Once in a while we do a thousand. This is unreasonable. We know that. But he pushes us beyond physical limit. To another place. Way outside or way inside. I don’t know where exactly. But I’ve been there. If I don’t train hard, I feel guilty. Because even if I do win, I know there is someone, some place, in Japan or Europe who can beat me. Because he is training harder.”474

Another example according to Schiebler is Seko and the details about his training regime. In many ways Seko was an exemplar of the Japanese training system. He states, how Seko “was a famous runner and those are the sorts of stories that inspire young runners. It’s like, ‘that’s it’. That’s a great way to develop mental resiliency.”475 He also makes reference to how the training is not focused on being the best physically, but rather mentally first, with the assumption that the results will follow. This is echoed in how Seko strives for victory with such intensity that “the Japanese operate in an entirely different milieu than we do, an intense ascetic.”476

472. Reeves, “Judoka”.
473. Reeves, “Judoka”.
474. Reeves, “Judoka”.
476. Sandrock, Running with the Legends, 363.
While describing how the Japanese often run small loops repeatedly as a ‘test of boredom’ he mentions famous stories of marathoners running circles around tennis courts with the following, “Yeah. I mean, who would want to run around a tennis court? Especially in the same direction. You’re only going to develop an imbalance by turning in the same direction all the time.”477

Lee also explains that she and her teammates would don several layers of clothing during long runs, in order to sweat profusely. She explains that, “they wanted to sweat, they wanted to suffer. Because then when you raced, and you didn’t have all those clothes on [it would be easier], so that was part of the training. So, we used to always, even when we came back [to Canada], we say, ‘let’s go, I’m going to go for a Japanese run’ when you wear lots of clothes.”478

In this way, ‘going for a Japanese run’ became synonymous with a long, often unnecessarily arduous and heinous workouts. Lee explains, “I’m going for a Japanese run and ‘sweating it out’. And so that just didn’t make sense to us either. Like you can’t, you can’t run fast when you’re so hot and you’re overheating, and they’re getting dehydrated!”479 ‘Sweating it out’ and withholding drinking water is a common training technique used to build resiliency over long runs, although it has a clear negative training effect.480 The suffering, and overtraining aspects of these practise were often at odds with the Canadians desire to perform at the level that was expected of them during races in Japan. At times it became necessary to find culturally appropriate excuses to be excused from some of these training methods.

480. Collins, “Running Japan.”
These practices fall under the concept of callusing, which attempts to encompass the physical, mental and spiritual under this term. However, it is more useful as a metaphoric concept meant to foster a set of cultural values that extend past the boundaries of sport. Like the Ekiden training camps, sport becomes a metaphor for more universal truths on building an ideal character that interacts with the world. Callusing is in reference to the psychological facet necessary to endure over-distance training. This is perhaps valued because one learns how to suffer and endure more generally.

**Injuries – The Fallout**

While the training techniques and attitudes do ensure an incredible depth of long-distance runners in Japan, they also leave a wake of injuries. While Lee and Schiebler had to battle their own injuries, they were also both acutely aware of the high rates of injuries of their teammates. Lee noted that eventually the cultural act of sitting on the floor agitated her knees, while Schiebler remembers his need to wear orthopedic shoes all the time (including indoors) which clashed harshly with Japanese norms of *Uchi* and *Soto* and the number one cultural faux pas in Japan of wearing shoes indoors. The amazing depth of long-distance runners in Japan is also predicated on a replaceability of runners from which to pull from. Often an A, B and even C team are training for the same race, along with multiple alternates. Schiebler remembers how,

> there's a whole spare team for the people that are chosen because they're at the best fitness. So, if there is 12 or 15 [runners], in the relay that weekend or that day, there's another 12 or 15 that didn't make it, but they've trained just as hard and hoping to make it next year. So,

481. Lee describes good heartedly how they (the big gangly Canadians) experienced considerable difficulties with folding their tight legs on the tatami mats. The Japanese often attempted to suppress a laugh as the Canadians struggled, but when the Canadians themselves laughed, it was a comedic scene that all parties found amusing.
there's an A team, there's a B team, there's a feeder system, somebody gets injured, somebody steps in."  

He goes on to explain the connection between the attention to details, the high mileage and the high turnover of runners,

“Yeah. And the quotas in the logs are huge for the Japanese. They just want you hitting in these quotas. Based on nothing more than the quota, you know, and they don't care how slow you do it, you gotta hit it. Well, you know, that doesn't make any sense to me. That's just, you know, you're just jogging around the track for seemingly nothing. [...] It was very different. This is just literally “go in and run yourself into the ground”, but there are always 5 or 10 (runners) standing at the end. And there's, you know, just (gestures to a wide availability of runners). “

The precarious nature of being replaceable along with high rates of injuries, did not go unnoticed by the Canadians. Injury would eventually become the only ‘acceptable’ means for which both parties could agree to end their relationship and contract in an amicable way; a tool the Canadians both used to navigate the Japanese training system.

While Lee expressed a degree of freedom in her training, because they had negotiated an independent training and coaching regime ahead of time, this was not the experience for the other Japanese women on the Ekiden team. At times, there were attempts to bring her into the Japanese training system, but for the most part this was often resisted by both Canadians. Both also understood that it was permissible for them to resist, given their status as foreigners, which granted them allowances not available to their teammates. Lee understood that she was treated exceptionally well because both she and her spouse were guests saying,

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482. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (13:36).
483. Schiebler, Interview, J:: (35:58).
“We were different, and we were allowed to be different because we were different. We were foreigners, we were gaijins, gaijins can do that, you can do what you need to do. And there were only really a few obligations they had for us with the team. That I will try my best at this Ekiden or this 10km.”

According to the Canadians, the combination of overtraining, along with unquestioning dedication, is the dark underbelly of a highly successful and prevalent running system in Japan. It is for this reason that, “the heavy mileage and total devotion inherent in Japanese running leads to burnout, and careers often last only a few years.” At some points, several authors simultaneously emphasized how the arduous training in Japan might actually kill Schiebler - a claim that is backed up by Lee’s description of the intensity and volume of training the Japanese runners endured. The concept of ‘death by work’ was not lost on Lee, the crossover evident in the work ethic by,

“watching people say, well, you know, ‘I live here, but I take the train to Tokyo and then I work from seven in the morning until eight at night. And then I take the train home and I see my family for an hour, and I sleep for four hours and then I go back’ and you know, that concept of death by work, that was a concept, that was a thing! And yet pride in that too, right? Because we work harder than anybody else.”

Schiebler’s early years in Japan speak to an element of surveillance, in which defiance and resistance, especially in terms of training regimes, was often managed within the language and explanation of ‘survival’. Lee describes this coaching style as being, “Really old school. Like

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484. Lee, Interview, S.: (10:36).
485. Sandrock, Running with the legends, 357.
486. Good, “Company Man,” 20-24. This is quoted as a tag line in an article on Schiebler which states how “our best long-distance runner race for a corporate team in Japan. His bosses will make him rich- if the training doesn’t kill him”
if you think back to the old school coaching stuff then ‘do another lap’ or ‘due some push ups’, because it serves as “a form of discipline to make you try harder.”

‘Surviving’ the Japanese training camps, entailed the Canadians witnessing the type of training the Japanese engaged in, as well as learning acceptable ways through which to avoid or be excused from participating in them. On the one hand, their foreign status allowed for them to deviate from their Japanese teammates in permissible ways but witnessing and engaging in Japanese running culture was also evocative, and highlighted aspects within the Japanese approach that was alluring at times, and difficult to witness and participate in, at others.

**Unscripted Drama of Ekiden Racing**

In the documentaries, ‘unscripted drama’ refers to the excitement experienced within Ekiden races, in particular the non-professional university events. Since the athletes are both young, inexperienced, but extremely driven to represent their team and university on national television in a favorable fashion, mistakes are often witnessed and add to the performance. The concept of performance can also relate to the athletes’ grimacing and collapsing during races. This is a repeated current observed by the Canadians, as well as within the literature by those who have seen or participated in Ekiden races themselves. Its fixture in Ekiden races extended to the expectation that the Canadian runners would also perform enactments of exhaustion at the finish line. This was expressed by Lee, in the following,

“*That again, enduring and suffering. It’s interesting, if you watch Japanese races and Ekidens over the years, um, when a lot of Japanese athletes finish a leg of an Ekiden or a marathon, they collapse and fall to the ground. Like I don’t, I don’t know, I’ve never fallen and*”

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490. For example, missing a crucial turn off, while racing to the finish line on the home stretch of a race.
collapsed to the ground, no matter how much I’ve put out an effort. Right. And so that again is sort of an acceptable way of showing that you have spent yourself and given every extra effort. So, they expect that. I would finish a race and they would all come to carry me off the track.”

She continues by describing how they would all rush forward with the expectation that she would collapse with “these big towels and blankets too. And the Japanese athletes, again, that was a sign of kind of caring and respecting the effort you had put forward.”

Schiebler also noticed the dramatic effect of Ekiden racing stating,

“Whether you’re participating or watching they just appreciate the length, how hard it is. Some people crawl across the finish line, you know, super dramatic like these finishes. But they ‘get it’ there, like so dramatic sometimes. But they buy into that and they love it and you know, ‘oh, he’s broke his leg’, you know, and ‘he’s hobbling in’ and then, but he gets it to them [the tasuki] and now they’re way behind, but they’re still competing and battling to the end. That’s the Japanese spirit.”

The allure of Ekiden racing appears, at least in part, to be attributed to these displays of suffering and exertion, something that has contributed to the prevalence of Japan’s national running culture.

Conjunctures – After Japan

The experiences of Lee and Schiebler are expressed with fondness, the intercultural exchanges have left a lasting impression on the Canadians. Although the approach to running was at times challenging and the intensity of training difficult to navigate, the conjuncture of their experiences has shaped their perspectives of themselves and the Japanese. The first was the

491. Lee, Interview, S.: (37:02).
ubiquitous cultural admiration for running, and the second was the distress experienced by the intensity of training, but also the heavy respect garnered by the tenacity of the Japanese runners. In many respects, both Lee and Schiebler hold deep admiration for Japanese runners, which has contributed to changes in their own threshold for suffering and endurance.

Lee expresses her admiration, but also her struggles with the Japanese running culture saying;

“Just amazing, right? Literally you can sit and watch a marathon, the entire marathon from start to finish and or an Ekiden as well. Each leg of the Ekiden. And the popularity. The people who live there, like the corporations are so proud of their team, […] it starts in high school, high-school Ekidens are very competitive. And uh, I think the university Ekidens are the biggest, that's the biggest event. And everybody, the whole, just the whole entire nation watches the university Ekidens. They're really passionate about it […] Because really, they're a marathon wild country. It's like the marathon epitomizes, the Japanese values of hard work, discipline, enduring, suffering, all those things that they really value. Like somehow, sometimes at all costs, which I mean, it's very, in the end it was a very morally distressing experience for us. […] And so, at times there wasn't a lot of joy, there just wasn't, we didn't see a lot of joy. And the joy was in the downtime that we spent together outside of the workplace. Right. Seeing the runners relax. And that was so, in the end that became really wearing for us.”

Despite these difficulties, her admiration for Japanese runners is unmistakeable;

“I have a lot of respect and always cheer Japanese athletes when I'm watching them in competitions. Because again, I really respect athletes who are disciplined and fully committed to

494. Lee, Interview, S: (20:26).
what they're doing. And you know, if anything, that's a criticism of North American athletes that we have, you know, too many distractions and we're not committed enough.”

Lee goes on to iterate how, “I feel so strongly about what sport provides people with, right? Because you learn how to fail 'all' the time, you learn how to succeed 'some' of the time. You learn how to hurt, you learn how to suffer, and all of those things translate into what you're going to do in everything else for the rest of your life.”

During our interview Lee expressed great personal satisfaction when a co-worker told her that she was the ‘hardest working’ individual she knew. Lee states how “that is the best compliment anyone's ever given me.” According to her, the Japanese have simply found a way to perfect a template (or a systematic formula), one that has contributed to incredible results and a large pool of talent from which to pull.

Schiebler is adamant that his time in Japan has shaped his resiliency, while still acknowledging that running long-distances by definition selects for certain personalities. He admits that the Japanese didn’t see the process in the same way: they don’t tailor the training to individual athletes, athletes adapt to the training. He explains how, “for me, like I did, I do get it. And that mental strength, you know, I did have what they had, but I also saw myself as an individual too.” He continues with, “it's that daily punching in, punching out, hard work. Smart work.” When asked if he thought the Japanese trained smart, he remarked, “in my opinion, they train tough.” When reflecting on his time in Japan, and how the Japanese running culture has shaped his perspective, he states how “all those things I learned as a runner

495. Lee, Interview, S.: (41:13).
496. Lee, Interview, S.: (01:05:02).
497. Lee, Interview, S.: (01:06:04).
and traveling, I'm using it every day. You know, to stay strong. You know, every day and deal with the next body blow. Yeah. And then you just wake up and go at it.”

He admits that, “running isn't easy. Running fast over long distances isn't easy either. And racing against the best runners in the world is even more grueling. Running fast is tiring and exhausting and it hurts. It hurts. For everybody, at all levels, in any country, for sure. Yeah. So you have to be mentally strong to be able to want to do that, to do it. But I wanted to do it because I was good at it at the time and now, I put that energy into other things. You know, I go to work and I've got kids. And I don't run anymore. But, all the things I learned, I'm using. For sure.”

Despite the many challenges the Canadians faced during their time in Japan, the intercultural exchanged fostered respect for the devotion and intensity in which Japanese runners embodied. Japan’s running ‘obsession’ is what has created a system of support for long-distance runners unlike anything offered in Canada, something both Lee and Schiebler benefitted from financially and experientially. The conjunctures shared with their Ekiden teammates and through exposure to Japanese running culture, fundamentally altered their own perspective on mental toughness. Mutual intercultural exchange was present, albeit often outside of the sport itself.

Concluding Remarks

This project explored the phenomenon of long distance running in Japan, especially Ekiden racing from a variety of Japanese cultural perspectives. In so doing, several cultural currents have been illuminated which have provided insights to the trans-cultural experiences of two Canadian long-distance runners. Lee and Schiebler were recruited and hired as professional runners by Japanese corporations to live, train and compete in Ekiden races in Japan.

In particular this study examined how an anime series can foster particular insights into the Japanese cultural fabric, with its ability to convey and socialize others to commonly held cultural values around running. The example of Seko, a national long distance running hero, was used to highlight important aspects of the coach/athlete relationship in Japan, including the required emphasis on heavy mileage (and the resulting high rates of injury), the building of mental fortitude (or callusing), running small loops as a part of training (as a test of boredom), a methodical attention to details (tracking data) and the intensity of personal responsibility to the team (the ie).

Through the perspectives of the two Canadian runners who were interviewed for the project, one can become privy to a small glimpse into the complex phenomenon of long-distance running in Japan. Descriptions of the Canadians’ experiences, in turn, highlighted some fascinated currents of Japanese long-distance running in need of further investigation.

In his memoir, Canadian runner Jeff Schiebler sums up the differences between Japan and Canada with the following metaphor.

‘There are two mountain runners, one is Japanese and the other a foreigner. The goal for both runners is the same, to get to the top of the mountain. The foreigner will charge recklessly to the peak of the mountain, in a straight line. The Japanese runner will slowly
circle the mountain, gradually moving unnoticed towards the top. In the end, everyone runs, but how we run and for what reasons can teach us a lot about each other and ourselves.’

Reflecting back on Murakami’s memoir with which this study began, it becomes clear just how well he understood the symbolic significance of running in his own life in Japan, deriving particular meanings from its hardships and suffering. For him, running was both exercise and metaphor, perhaps alluding to the potential of trying to translate experiences into words. Murakami ends his memoir stating a desire for his gravestone to be inscribed with the following, ‘Haruki Murakami. Writer (and Runner). At least he never walked’\textsuperscript{503} - perhaps a testament to how running had moulded him, but also as a metaphor for a life well spent. If running can be the metric from which a worthwhile life is measured, then it is the authors’ hope that this project has elucidated several cultural nuances that have made long-distance running so meaningful to the Japanese.

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