My Life in Kendo:

Gender & Masculinity Across Cultures

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Abstract

Contact sports have often fostered an aggressive and violent, hyper-masculine culture which prioritises strength and demeans characteristics associated with femininity. The Japanese martial art of Kendo, however, has transformed into a modern sport which trains men and women together, and where women also frequently compete against men, in contrast to many other contact martial arts. *My Life in Kendo: Gender and Masculinity Across Cultures* uses an autoethnographic methodology to explore how my journey in kendo can help us understand gender relations in kendo and improve them so that any woman can enjoy and benefit from kendo without being discriminated against. More generally, this research seeks to gain insight into what kendo offers in terms of positive/productive experiences for women in particular, along with some key moments where this has failed. At issue are also questions of Confucianism, migration, anger, masculinity, and aging.

Doctor of Philosophy Student Declaration

I Hyun Hong Wright (Cho), declare that the PhD thesis entitled *My Life in Kendo: Gender and Masculinity Across Cultures*, is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

This thesis was adjudged to not require Ethics approval.

Signature:  Date: 01. 08. 22

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Therefore, this is time to give respect and gratitude to my wonderful supervisor Dr. Matthew Klugman sincerely. Without his teaching, it would be very difficult. A PhD helped me think about myself how much I had changed when I migrated and became a sensei. Likewise, a PhD paper made me think through what I have lost and what I need to find. Every Friday meeting with my supervisor was my best day for nearly 5 years. Some meetings, I cried madly because I was overwhelmed by reflection, at the same time, I was fighting back to who I was. I never found my PhD hard because I loved it like kendo. Now, I am retracing my thoughts, attitudes and behaviours, but also I am starting to express my knowledge reasonably in English because of my PhD. The most important thing is that I started to love people again as before, this made me a better sensei than before, as well as giving me the inner confidence and maturity similar to that I learned through kendo. This enormous awareness and realisation came from my supervisor guidance and he made my dream of becoming a scholar come true. Thank you, indeed.

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Now, my dear four sisters, brother, and my whole families. I love you all dearly. You all never get sick about hearing my dreams. Also, even though I am the youngest and lecture you, tell you off, and tell you what to do, you still let me do it. I am very sorry and thank you. I will never be better than you, I do not want to be. My strength and freedom come from your existence. The best things to happen in my life were mum and dad making love and giving life to you all, so that you are all always there for me. How can other people live without siblings? I am a very lucky one as always.

My dearest husband, I lost my words. There is no word to express your love in this world. I tried to find the words for it in the Oxford Dictionary, but I could not find anything that expresses how I feel about you and your incredible support. I need to make a word for you one day myself. When I met you the first time, you were one of many strangers. Now, you are the most important person in my life. How can it be? You love me, and I am still talking with my mouth full. I am still making a sound when I eat an apple. I still interrupt every sentence when you talk. All these are really annoying you, but I am still your world. How can it be? My confidence comes every day from your morning kiss, “You are beautiful. My heart pops up when you open your eyes.” Thank you for giving me unconditional love and endless support more than anyone in this planet. I love you Genuinely. I will never compromise your happiness and health with anything. Be my husband and live with me forever *Yabo* (darling).

Lastly, God! My almighty God! This is your work and you did it through me. When I tried to do it myself it was incredibly hard, but when I let you do it everything is incredibly easy. I know that you

are training me to be better person, and you know how to make me keep coming back to life when I am lost. I cannot live without you. This is the fact. I Love…Love…Love You! You are my destiny and I am yours.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction – Approaching My Life in Kendo

Over twenty years ago, my third sensei gave me a Japanese book called Kendo and Human (Inoue, 1998). At that time, I had been training in kendo for almost three years. I was a very junior kendoka (the name given to people training in kendo: the equivalent of "footballer"), but I was preparing to represent Korea in the World Kendo Championship in America in 2000. My third sensei trained me for eight to ten hours per day. He realised that I did not understand the deeper aspects of kendo. He wanted to introduce these to me to help me understand practices of self-discipline, self-reflection and confidence. He thought that this book would help me. It was very difficult to explain and teach some of the skills of high level kendo to someone very junior like me. It was like a parent trying to teach Shakespeare to a three-year-old. For example, how you win before you even enter the shiaijo (competition area). I started reading this book and found I couldn't stop because it fascinated me. Among other key things, I realised that I was just cutting to gain a point rather than seeking to understand my opponent (human) and engage them deeply and maturely through kendo.

The author, Inoue, was a well-respected Japanese sensei. His book detailed the morality, ethics, bravery, and manners of kendo. I just adored it. When I moved to London, it was one of the few books I took with me. I treated it the same way as my bible. It continues to inspire me. However, recently, I reread the whole book again while researching this thesis. I was very surprised and shocked when I realised that it was meant to be for men only. Most disappointing of all was the three to four pages on women and women's kendo. It would be better if he did not write this section. Inoue sensei thought that women should train to improve their health and become better wives, mothers and sisters for beauty rather strength.

How did I not recognise this sexism at the time? Honestly, back then I thought that it was actually very good advice for a tomboy like me who had been brought up freely with an older brother. Reflecting on this now reminds me also that my third sensei had very similar perspectives to Inoue sensei. When I was training as a strong kendoka, he always told me off. He thought that women's kendo should be beautiful rather than strong. I understood what he tried to teach me, but I struggled with it for a long time. Being strong was the best part of my kendo. I did not want to give that up.

My second sensei and I shared the belief that I could beat all women and men physically and spiritually. Women could be very strong as strong as men. So, he taught me how to be strong enough physically to beat strong men. One day, he told me to smash the column one hundred times. I did it. My male friends tried to stop me, but I ignored them. The next day my second sensei made me compete with one of the biggest men in the dojo (193cm, 120kg). I found it very easy to make him fall over. No one could

believe it, yet after that I could do it against other huge men as well and easily against other girls. My second sensei had taught me how to do a body attack. It was very fun and glorious.

I was known as a violent girl. I took it as a compliment. When a fight of mine at the (South Korean) SBS Kumdo (Kendo) Championship was broadcast on television, my friends told me that the main commentator was a big fan of me because I was fighting like a man. But then I started to train with my third sensei who always told me not to physically attack my opponents. It was so confusing and frustrating. I learned a lot about how to control my strength and how to be flexible from this sensei, but I lost my spirit and physical power. As I have grown older and become a sensei myself, I have benefited from being able to fight beautifully with good form rather than relying on my strength. However, I still find that many senseis, especially outside Korea and Japan continue to doubt my ability to fight well against skilful and physically strong men. It is these experiences – of the pleasures and maturity I have found through kendo, along with moments when men have felt threatened by me, and sometimes tried to seriously wound me – that I want to explore in this thesis. How can we understand the gender relations in kendo – and more broadly corporeal politics and combative activities – and improve them so that any woman can enjoy and benefit from activities like kendo without being discriminated against?

Positive and Negative Value of Kendo

One of the traditional Japanese martial arts that are based on warfare, kendo has transformed into a modern sport that trains men and women together in contrast to many other contact martial arts (All Japan Kendo Federation, 1973; Ozawa, 1997). Kendo means "literally, 'the way of the sword'" (Sylvester, 2015, 19). It is based on Japanese classical legends incorporating the spiritual and philosophical notions and customs of the samurai from the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) (Sylvester, 2015). The philosophy of kendo aims to develop the self, self-esteem (McKay & Fanning, 2000), and positive thinking more generally (Peale, 2015) by using a bamboo sword (shinai) while wearing fully protective armour (bogu) (Salmon, 2013; Ozawa, 1997; Sylvester, 2015; Hiragawa, 1997). The philosophical underpinning of kendo intertwines morality, ethics, intrepidness, modesty, dignity, respect and courtesy, while the purpose of training kendo is to become a mature human (Lee, 1996; Lee et al., 2003; Inoue, 1998; Kim, 2001; Hiragawa, 1997; Kiyota, 2002).

According to McDonald (2009), the mythological samurai status has become a symbol of masculinity in Japanese society. At the same time, traditional Japanese martial arts have been transformed into the education curriculum. Kendo has been one of the most rapidly growing of the budō martial arts (i.e., karate, jodo, judo, iaido and kendo etc.) over the past few decades throughout the world (Dumić, 2016; Im, 1997; All Japan Kendo Federation, 1973). Yet because the education of Japanese boys and girls is supposed to be equal (Article 26 of the education constitution), kendo has attempted to become gender-neutral (Manzenreiter, 2014; Hiragawa, 1997; Im, 1997). Thus, kendo offers training and competitions

where girls and women can compete against boys and men, with all participants abiding by strict regulations and wearing body protection (Craig, 2003; Ozawa, 1997). This thesis builds on a limited body of research undertaken by Dekšnytė, Dumic and Sylvester into the gendered dimensions of kendo.

A central philosophy of kendo is that people of any gender and almost any age can train with each other, and often compete against each other. For this reason, there are not usually separate training sessions and "open" competitions are commonplace. This is particularly true outside of South Korea and Japan where mixed teams are used in five-person team competitions (i.e., The London Cup). Some women find this liberating. For example, Dekšnytė (2013) interviewed a Finnish female kendoka who said:

> I think that it's nice that there is the possibility to practice no matter if the other people are old or young or if they speak the same language or not. It doesn't play any difference if you are tall or short or fat or slim. It doesn't make a difference if you're a man or a woman. -*Eva* (35)

More broadly Dekšnytė (2013) investigated whether kendo can introduce gender-neutrality between women and men and whether their interactions promoted equality and respect. Dekšnytė (2013) found that while some women in Finland found kendo empowering, some of the Finnish men seem to struggle with interactions with strong and skilled women. The result was that female kendoka seemed more likely to experience aggression and violence than male kendoka. Hence, there are some problematic issues with male kendoka feeling challenged by female kendoka and intentionally directing violence towards them during training and competition. Indeed, some male kendoka use inappropriate physical behaviour towards females during training. For example, Dekšnytė (2013) interviewed a Finnish female kendoka who said:

> The first time I thought about what it is to be a woman in kendo was when I encountered a man who had overwhelming physical power and a determined attitude to give a lesson to a "girl"... The match was long and painful. Physical pain connected with mental threats causes fear. Individuals with such an attitude always exist, bruises heal and bad experiences are not the only ones in kendo... That time the most shocking aspect was that no one did nothing (sic) or said anything to the guy of his behaviour. The rest of the guys just congratulated him on his success, while I was considering stopping kendo for good. -*Laura* (45)

Thus, in Finland kendo was only sometimes suitable for a woman who desired to practice martial arts in non-prejudiced environments.

What happens with these moments of discomfort when men struggle with strong and skilled women? Importantly, Dumić (2016) investigated what motivates kendoka to train and compete in Serbia. She

found that the benefits female kendoka received from training included increased self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of challenge and change in their life (Dumić, 2016). Thus, further study is needed outside of Finland to ascertain the effect of kendo on gender relations. This thesis seeks to build upon the scholarship of Sylvester, Dekšnytė and Dumić to explore the experiences of a woman who competes and trains against men in kendo. At issue are questions of gender – both in terms of masculinity and femininity – and what kendo offers in terms of positive/productive experiences of violence for women in particular, along with some key moments where this has failed.

Research Aims and Methodology

Specifically, this thesis aims to:

- Understand the complicated relationship that martial art – in this case, kendo – has with gender;
- Understand how gender relations shape experiences of masculinity and violence.

These aims will be addressed via the following research questions

- What kind of experiences have I had in kendo?
- What kind of gender relations have shaped these experiences?
- What can be learned from my positive and negative experiences in kendo, in particular around gender relations and masculinity in particular?

Contribution to Knowledge and Statement of Significance

For many people, martial arts symbolize masculinity rather than femininity (Mierzwinski et al., 2014). Likewise, in sport, politics and the corporate culture of modern society, a male-dominated environment persists (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Burton & Leberman, 2017; Kavoura et al., 2018). In fact, masculine violence embeds several problems in sport in which existing supposedly superior, hypermasculine behaviours are directed aggressively toward weak men or women (Cover, 2015; Butera, 2008; Jamieson & Orr, 2009). For this reason, most contact sports prohibit women from competing against men (Thing, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Groenen, 2012; Miarka et al., 2011; Pfister, 2010). This segregation has affected female sports performance globally (Capranica et al., 2013).

In contemporary kendo, however, women are able to not only train with men, they frequently compete against them as well (Ozawa, 1997). In creating spaces where women regularly fight against men in both training and formal competitions, kendo has quite radical possibilities for gender relations and for understanding and interrogating gender relations. However, female kendoka seem to encounter negative experiences of violence when women train and compete with men. This study will explore in depth how kendo can shape a woman's experience of gender, masculinity, bodies and violence. Furthermore, this research will also provide important insight into the way contact sports where women can compete against men might reshape not only the gendered experiences of individuals, but social and cultural

gender relations more broadly. Ultimately, this project will hopefully also be able to inform policy development around the inclusion and support of women competing against men in contact sports. More broadly, this research seeks to contribute to the development of cultural changes, policies and processes that maximise the positive effects of sport, while working against negative forces of sexism (Hargreaves, 1994). This builds on work undertaken into the relationship between sport and racism (Klugman & Osmond, 2013), and imperialism (Brownell, 2008).

Gender and Hegemonic Masculinity

Gender is defined as the social and cultural ideas used to differentiate females from males to create the categories of girls and women, and boys and men (Delamont, 1980). Instead of trying to understand biological differences, scholars analysing gender explore what particular cultures and societies believe are the differences between, for example, men and women, and masculinity and femininity (Kavoura et al., 2018; Burke et al., 1988; Spence, 1985; Pfister, 2010). For instance, supposed traits of femininity and masculinity are often divided into personal lifestyle choices such as fashion and hobbies (Delamont, 1980; Katz, 1986; Borgatta et al., 2000). A scholar analysing Australian gender practices might ask why pink is seen as naturally a feminine colour (Jamieson & Orr, 2009).

In many places including Australia, the traits associated with masculinity are elevated over those associated with femininity. This social and cultural practice is defined as hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson, 1993; Connell, 1997; Hearn, 2004; Adams et al., 2010; Messner, 2005). Scholars have highlighted the way contact sports tend to have a hegemonic masculine culture (Dekšnytė, 2013; PaaBen et al., 2017). One way that sport reproduces hegemonic masculinity is through the celebration of successful manly players ‘‘as heroes’’ (Connell, 1990). The heroes perform ‘‘the pattern of masculinity’’ that is held up as the cultural ideal to be learned and emulated by other males, especially boys and young men (Connell, 1990). Typically these patterns of masculinity emphasise risk-taking, self-reliance, dominance, competitiveness, independence, assertion and aggression including violence (Bozkurt et al., 2015).

Violence and Hegemonic Masculinity

Coakley and Donnelly (2009) note that sports violence includes actions that are “physical, assertive, tough, rough, competitive, intense, intimidating, risky, aggressive, destructive, and violent” (187; see also Houlihan, 2008; Cashmore, 2000; Cashmore, 2005; Hemphill, 2000). Indeed, violence is a central part of hegemonic masculinity. Messner’s interview (1990) with the American footballer Jack Tatum gives a sense of the role of violence in the masculinity of contact sports. Tatum notes that:

> When I first started playing, if I would hit a guy hard and he wouldn’t get up, it would bother me. [But] when I was a sophomore in high school, first game, I knocked out two quarterbacks,

> and people loved it. The coach loved it. Everybody loved it…The more you play, the more you realize that it is just a part of the game – somebody's gonna hurt. It could be you, it could be him – most of the time it's better if it's him. (207)

Similarly, Spencer (2009) notes that men training in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) are proud of their bruises which symbolize hardness and masculinity (Cited in Mierzwinski et al., 2014; Massimiliano et al., 2011; Curry, 1993). Moreover, in these contact sports the human body can become a weapon to harm others which can cause serious damage, perpetual injuries, or in extreme cases death (Atyeo, 1979; Underwood, 1979; Sabo, 1985, Tjønndal, 2016; Messner, 1990; Young, et al., 1994). Feminist scholars mention that the male body is utilized to implement violence (Messner, 1990). For instance, a former high school athlete told Messner (1990) that:

> On the football field, I'd be dirty, like I'd kick guys in the groin… or in basketball, I'd undercut people. And I think it was mainly to earn their respect. It was like I had to let them know that, hey, I'm a super stud and you, you're second class, you're not as good. (207)

But this athlete found that when he was injured:

> I was hurt. I couldn't play, and I got a lot of flak from everybody. The coach, you know: "Are you faking it?" And I was in the whirlpool and [teammate] John came in and said "You fucking pussy!" I still remember that to this day. That hurt more than the injury. Later, people told me it was my fault because we lost, and I just couldn't handle that – not just coaches and other players, but people in the whole town…it hurt, it just really hurt. (208)

These insults reveal the gendered relations that are often at stake in contact sports. Not only was he insulted when he was injured, but the insult deployed feminized language. Treating him as a girl/woman by taking a slang word used for vagina, and using it as an insult. So he was feminized, and this hurt, because he lives in a world where hyper-masculinity is celebrated, and those things thought of as feminine are demeaned. He was ashamed to be treated like this. Because he lives in a world that treats those behaviours seen as feminine as shameful.

The Negative Experiences of Women in Combat Sports

The prevailing image of martial arts is that it symbolises men's power and capability. According to Kavoura et al. (2012), female participation in martial arts is restricted, as men strongly believe that martial arts belong to them. As Young notes the majority of relatively violent sports have been organized around the capabilities of the male body, for example, Mixed martial arts, Judo, Taekwondo,

Ice Hockey, Boxing, and Wrestling (Young, 2012, 162-180; see also Woodward, 2007; Groenen, 2012; Pfister, 2010; Woodward, 2007; Tjønndal, 2016; Merz, 2011; Sisjord, 1997).

These martial arts have also tended to uphold conservative gender ideologies that position masculinity and femininity as a naturally and biologically opposite phenomena (Hargreaves, 1994; Cover, 2015). Vertinsky (1990), for example, discusses this conservative gender ideology in detail, noting that men were supposed to be more powerful in terms of their bodies and minds, whereas women were supposed to be fragile and domestic (see also Groenen, 2012). Moreover, as Yap notes, many people remain ambivalent about seeing female fighters in pain, or engaging in high-risk activities (2021). Despite these continuing conservative gender ideologies, women have continually tried to participate in martial arts combat sports (Woodward, 2007).

Women's boxing is one example where women have challenged the traditional masculinity of combat sports (Massimiliano et al., 2011; Trimbur, 2013) despite powerful men constantly seeking to limit female involvement in the sport (Guerandel & Mennesson, 2007; McNaughton, 2012). Yet as Joyce Carol Oates (1987) points out:

> In any case, raw aggression is thought to be the peculiar province of men, as nurturing is the peculiar province of women. The female boxer violates this stereotype and cannot be taken seriously – she is a parody, she is a cartoon, she is monstrous. (73)

Hence, the 'women's sports movement' is directed more towards healthy and strong but still feminine body shapes (Pfister, 2010), "for women, becoming a boxer is more than just a matter of developing a fit body and physical skill – it is a continual project of negotiating gendered identity" (Nash, 2017, 747). Antrobus (2004) defines the 'women's movement' as comprising "a range of struggles by women against gender inequality." (25) One reason for the rise in women undertaking martial arts is that they have increasingly become seen as a means of self-defence for women (Hargreaves, 1994; Groenen, 2012; Miarka et al., 2011; Trimbur, 2013). Women are more likely to learn self-defence while they attend combat sports (Kavoura et al., 2018). The assumption of this phenomenon of the feminist self-defence movement might be that women are being threatened by patriarchal, masculine violence (Hollander, 2004), and so need to be able to fight back.

According to Beth, in taekwondo, some women only practice martial arts for self-defence, but Beth also believes that mixed-sex training should be encouraged (Cited in Mierzwinski et al., 2014). In addition, Channon (2014) recommends that martial arts instructors should be encouraged to integrate the training of women and men in physical contact sports. Therefore, women can learn how to be strong

and how to deal with aggression (Channon, 2013; McCaughey, 1997). For example, Channon (2013) observed and interviewed in kung fu training:

> Nico spars Beth. He can't get it. She says hit me, he says okay, does nothing. Been like this for the full two mins. I call time, they stop, he's not hit her once but she hits him good maybe five/six times. He bows and won't make eye contact. Body language said it all, doesn't wanna fight, doesn't wanna be there. Everyone switches partners; he fights Steve, goes in hard and heavy like always. Must've seen this a hundred times now with these types of lads (Field notes, kung fu training, 2009)
>
> Nico: It's just not in me, man, to hit a woman, it's like I know I won't be able to do it even if I wanted to, like my hands just won't do it.
> Alex: But your hands hit Steve fine.
> Nico: I can do that 'cause he's a man. I can't hit Beth 'cause she is a woman, I can't do it. (Field notes, post-training, 2009)

Undermining women in this manner does as little to improve their skills and physical strength as does overaggressive action and a sense of masculine superiority.

In particular, in boxing, Merz (2011) comments that women can hit harder than men, whereas men tend to not admit women are skilful and strong physically (Jefferson, 1998). Merz emphasises that in the future, women could become leaders in boxing. However, Channon (2016) points out that while female and male disciplines formats are becoming common in contact sports where women are often treated differently to men. Kavoura et al. (2018) interviewed female judoka who recounted that:

> What annoys me is that some men are kind of playing with you. You can see it that they are playing with you in the randori [freestyle practice of fighting] when they move like saying "oh you cannot do anything". This annoys me. You just want to do something and throw them, but it doesn't always happen… When they want to rest, they take me [as a partner for the randori] because I am small. I don't know if it is because I am a woman or because I am small. For example, yesterday a guy came a bit late to the practice and we had already started doing some groundwork, and when we were changing partners, he kind of told me "I take you first [as a partner] because I don't need to use so much strength". This kind of comment you can hear often. -*Heli* (245)

Other studies of judo by Guerandel and Mennesson (2007) have also found that male judoka tend to be gentle, protective and patronising toward women when they practice. Guerandel and Mennesson (2007) interviewed a judoka who said:

> I don't want to hurt girls so I take it easy, physically, I mean, because after . . they are as skilled as us but, well, they have less strength, so even if I fall . . . well, that doesn't hurt me at all. I know that I can still come back. -*Patrick* (176)

Some literature also suggests that when hypermasculine men feel threatened by strong women in contact sports, they will be violent against these women to show them who is the strongest and toughest (Nash, 2017; Kavoura et al., 2018; Halbert, 1997). For example, Nash shares an experience sparring in boxing with a man:

> We had a small group so Julian suggested that I spar with Troy (who was at training for the first time that evening) because we were about the same height. I could tell that he didn't want to spar with me but I assumed it would sort itself out in the ring. We touched gloves and Troy unleashed a series of hard and fast punches. I stood in shock, guarding my face. This was no longer an exercise in self-control. Troy punched hard but he was clumsy and had little technical skill. I had a killer hook. This was my weapon. I hooked left and put all of my power behind it and followed that with a left jab. He stumbled, surprised, but it made him angrier. He threw wild haymakers, which I parried away but a few got in and my nose went numb and my cheek throbbed. I punched Troy strategically – fewer punches with greater impact – just to get to the end. When the bell rang, I was overwhelmed. Tempted to complain about getting beaten up, I adhered to the code and said nothing. I didn't want to give Troy the satisfaction of seeing me suffer. I sat on the bench dripping with sweat and blood with my head down so he wouldn't see my tears. My male friends came over to show their support, saying that 'never should have happened'. Later that evening Troy asked Jason [an ex-professional boxer] to spar. Contrary to his normal routine of going easy on 'hopefuls', Jason dismantled Troy as payback [for his excessive aggression against me]. The devastating bout made Troy a laughing stock. He never returned to training (14 December 2012, field notes). (745)

Kavoura et al. (2018) interviewed a female judoka who reported that:

> Sometimes the boys were making fun of me, because I was the only girl. But little by little, I was getting better, and then I was beating them. This made them mad, and their reaction was to make fun of me again. -*Elli* (245)

In another example, Halbert (1997) interviewed a female boxer who observed that:

> You're gonna find it everywhere. It doesn't matter what a female does. … I guess it comes down to when you're doin' female stuff it's okay. But when you're doin' other stuff … women just catch hell, period. (18)

Research with regards to wrestling also indicates that women can also face pressures to maintain feminine bodies. For example, Sisjord and Kristiansen have found that juniors female wrestlers hold themselves back in an attempt to keep their bodies more feminine, "whereas seniors female wrestlers had accepted the 'athletic body' and muscularity with its social costs" (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009, 1).

The Positive Experiences of Women in Combat Sports

However, women who participate in contact sports often experience great pleasure and affirmation from them (Channon, 2013; Nash, 2017; Merz, 2011). For example, Alsarve and Tjønndal (2020) point out that "women exercising mixed martial arts contain a potential to act as feminist role models through their counter-hegemonic renegotiation of norms and views on femininity and, more specifically, the perception of femininity as something fragile and passive" (1) (see more Maor, 2019). In Kerala, South India, it was a woman, 76-year old Meenakshi who preserved *Kalaripayattu*, the traditional martial art of that state (Mandakathingal, 2021).

With regards to kendo, Helen, a participant in Dumić's (2016) study, described kendo as effecting her body like "a drug":

> I got addicted to it [kendo] and now I cannot do without it. No matter how long of a break I took, I was still there. If I made too long of a break, I would have dreams, I would dream of going to competitions, to a training session where I had no hakama [training clothes] and so on. (39)

Merz (2011) mentions that when she went to a tournament where "women's physical power was acknowledged and celebrated, they were not expecting the violence of boxing nor did they realize how strong they were or how challenging it was. The whole charade of an innate feminine fragility was gone and yet femininity itself had survived" (Merz, 2011). For example, Halbert (1997) interviewed female boxers:

> [A friend] had received an invitation in the mail to go see a women's boxing match … and so we went to it. And it was the first boxing match. I've ever been to, and I had never heard of women's boxing, so I was really intrigued. … You know, I thought to myself, "Oh my god. I've got to learn it. I've got to do it! I want this to be me!" (15)

Nash (2017) also described when she attended amateur boxing training in Tasmania. She said:

> I was faster and stronger than many of the men. I felt powerful and I loved it. Julian asked me to demonstrate good technique for others ('Now, watch the Doctor!' 17 August 2011, field notes). I felt like my gender transgressions illuminated the artificiality of constructions of gender, undermining the sexist undertones of the sport. It felt good to be the woman showing men how to box. (743)

Moreover, Dumić (2016) interviewed female kendoka Helen who experienced harsh and tough kendo training. Afterwards, she felt that full of accomplishment when she survived:

> That moment when practice ended and when I took my gear off, that was kinda the most remarkable to me in that period, it was hard, very, I mean physically hard. That was cool to me. I managed to endure the entire practice despite being exhausted to death, red, white, green [laugh]. After that, it was kinda cool. -*Helen* (48)

According to Merz (2011), "Eventually you understand that the physical impact of being hit is not so disturbing when there is no emotion connected to it when it's no longer personal. That is when you can start to think like a fighter." Another example from Halbert (1997) backs this up, with a female boxer stating:

> I love it! I love the training. Boxing gives you an inner strength like nothing else, and no one can take that away from you. I'm addicted. Also, an adrenaline high – a lot of excitement. (15)

Merz (2011) also describes that it could be "glorious" to feel the jaw is creaking, to see the eye is bruised, and the nose is broken. Boxing provides women with the chance to enjoy being aggressive, tough, dangerous, and brave (Merz, 2011; Wedgwood, 2004). There are also important developments in martial arts regarding the inclusion of transgender participants (e.g., Kavoura et al., 2021; Yap, 2021). However this is beyond the scope of my thesis.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender Relations in South Korea

Confucian ideology has meant that traits linked to hypermasculinity have dominated feminine traits for a long period in South Korea (Kim, 2016). Confucianism was introduced in South Korea based on the ideas of the Chinese Spring and Autumn period (B. C. 770-403) by the philosopher Confucius (Kang, 2004). The aim of Confucianism seeks self-discipline and self-reflection through moral education to

become an ideal human (Lee & Park, 2014; Ryu, 2014). These ideas entail a strict hierarchy where men are elevated above women, and the primary role of women is to serve men (Kim, 2016).

These ideologies influenced South Korean society and produced a particular family structure where notions of traditional hegemonic masculinity begin. For instance, men were regarded as heaven (precious), women as earth (trivial), while mothers insisted that their young daughters treat their husbands highly like 'the sky' (Kim, 2016). Several words were developed to express this gender order. For example, *남존여비 (Namjonyeobi)* encapsulates the precious social status of men and the trivial status of women, *칠거지악 (Chilgeojiag)* refers to the right of husbands to expel wives who violate Confucian rules, while *삼종지의 (Samjongjiui)* instructs women to follow her father in her youth, her husband in marriage, and her son when her husband dies (Kang, 2004).

When Protestant Christianity became popular in the 1960s, it was frequently viewed through the lens of Confucianism. For example, South Korean versions of Christianity focus on biblical references to Eve being born from Adam's rib, so that "Eve's subordination was inherent in the creation order." (Kim, 2016). These gender relations have shaped sporting practices, with vigorous contact sports seen as inappropriate for women (Kim et al., 2015). As Kim et al. (2015) note of boxing:

> Perhaps due to the cultural perception of boxing as a predominantly male pursuit which involves frequent physical contact and vigorous and potentially aggressive action, comparatively fewer numbers of women are willing to join a boxing club. This tendency is not unrelated to the fact that a dominant form of Korean culture had long been structured in line with the traditional Confucian ideology, which underpins the patriarchal social system and a gender hierarchy locating women in a somewhat less powerful position than men (Cited in Kim et al., 2015). (205)

Nevertheless, Joo et al. (2013) note that "this traditional gender order is being challenged, requiring equal opportunities for women in every social, political and economic domain", which also extends to contact sports (Kim, 2003; Lee, 2010). As a result, at least at an institutional level, the number of women who experience sexism and gender discrimination has meaningfully decreased (Kim et al., 2015). Moreover, the "Me Too movement" has rapidly spread to South Korea and had a significant impact on both public opinion and legislation (BBC News/Korea, 2018).

Yet, as Sylvester (2015) points out with regard to Japan, the expectation remains that the primary role for women is to be a wonderful wife and wise mother. Therefore, serving tea is a female kendoka's duty in the dojo for senseis and men rather than discussing winning, skills and being a strong kendoka

(Sylvester, 2015). Sylvester also observes that in Japan, the cultural gender hierarchy repositions the practice of kendo to protect the "higher symbolic value of men's kendo" (Sylvester, 2015). For instance, Sylvester (2015) found that no women had achieved the top rank (8th Dan), and very skilled female kendoka were often not in positions of leadership or teaching as a sensei. Sylvester's findings are in line with my experiences in South Korea. However, the culture and gendered expectations of kendo in South Korea are yet to be studied by scholars.

Recently, I found that the Me Too Movement was in kendo. Park (2018) reported that Korean female national team had experienced strong sexual harassment by the coach. The coach had used his power to groom and seduce young women in the team. A brave female national team member fought this battle of bringing this mistreatment to the attention of the public just before World Kendo Championship (https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=4007734). This example provides more evidence of the crucial need to study gender relations in kendo, and to be able to better understand the power relations between senior men and younger women in kendo in South Korea among other places.

Overview of Thesis

The next chapter of this thesis outlines my methodology, which utilises autoethnography in order to explore what my personal experiences reveal of gender relations in kendo and their possibilities. Initially I thought of methodologies in terms of "class" or "status". This made me ashamed of autoethnography because it was not the thought to be the best method in South Korea (I was supposed to seek the best my whole life). At first, therefore, I consumed extra energy writing without any trust or belief. Autoethnography was not attractive to me at all. However, gradually after a big battle, I made some progress that helped me trust and believe in this method. Through reflecting on my past, autoethnography made me start to look at myself in the third person and I started to analyse my stories using social science scholarship to explain what happened, what I learned, and that affected in my life, in particular, my kendo life. Pursuing autoethnography more closely than any method made sense in my research and faithfully offered me a clear answer to improve myself, not others. Choosing this challenge will reward me for the rest of my life. I argue confidently that autoethnography was underestimated by myself and many other scholars from South Korea.

Chapter Three starts the process whereby this thesis traces the development of my understandings around gender, and masculinity in particular. It begins by drawing on my fourth sister's birth, and reflects how my mum's life was affected as a Korean woman. My mother lived informed by gender relations in Korea and its strict rules and roles. She did not study where her pain came from or what gender roles meant for Korean women like my mother. This chapter also explores how I was brought up and treated by my parents in South Korea as a tomboy (*seonmeoseuma),* hanging around with my older brother and village boys and naturally learning masculinity. I chose to tell these stories to make

sense of how gender, patriarchy, hyper-masculinity, custom, practice and social expectation shaped me as a child in South Korea, and to use this to reflect on how it has affected the lives of women in contemporary Korea and specifically my life and practice of kendo. At issues are questions of gender, culture and history. I did not have *han (deep sorrow)* like my mother or other Korean women because I was lucky enough to have rare space to generally live with the opportunities that men had. I was allowed to access and challenge what I wished. However, I had different difficulties when I grew up into a woman and entered the men's world which created disappointment, frustration and irritation.

Chapter Four continues to examine how my understanding of masculinity developed and changed by charting the different forms of anger that I have experienced and the role kendo played in these. It begins by exploring my historical anger towards Japan before turning to the way my experience of migrating to London was expressed through a number of types of anger. I lived with frustration since I left Korea and it had developed into anger for everything as an immigrant woman outside Korea. Particularly, my view was adapted, adjusted, and perhaps even fixed by the Korean culture of Confucianism where my ideology had been built. This frustration created an emotional explosion. I was uncontrollable. This chapter is focused on where my anger came from and how I came to understand my anger. In consequence, I found that we are victims of our own anger. As that anger is often used as a type of power, it is crucial to understand our anger and build our own real power to replace anger with peace.

Chapter Five examines the forms of masculinity that I experienced and learnt about through my life in kendo, including one encounter of distressing violence towards me. Kendo was supposed to be neutral in its gender relationships throughout kendo training. Yet, it was not. Some issues continually occurred, but I accepted them as part of learning kendo. Through this chapter, I also explain how I gained a sense of the unequal gender power relations that are often part of kendo in Korea and elsewhere. In one notable experience, I felt betrayed by a sensei who attacked me with great violence, going far beyond the written and unwritten rules of kendo practice. Being just as strong as male sensei, it seemed not right that I should experience this even though I went through as much (or more) hardship than them in my kendo. When I achieved a high grade, I found it more challenging than rewarding. I did not understand why. Now, I can understand why it happened and why I sometimes had such a hard time when I only wanted to be one of the best sensei like the men. I hope that this chapter makes helps everyone to think about gender relations and power more deeply, particularly in kendo.

Chapter Six explores my experiences of growing old with kendo and my ideals of masculinity, part of which involved striving for, becoming, and being a *Nanadan* (7th Dan). Initially on the way to 7th Dan, I was battling to learn a dynamic, determined and macho masculinity, like the lessons my father taught me when I was young. As I was growing older, my body became unable to sustain the glorious wild

youthful masculinity that I adored. This journey left me with the very significant question of what is true masculinity? Particularly, when I saw my father's struggle in the face of his death, I encountered the limitations of macho masculinity. I was confused. Since then, I looked for persistent, steady and mature masculinity instead of bright and energetic masculinities. Fortunately, when I went to Kyoto, I saw an inspiring Taikai (competition) between very old sensei and learned that there was another way I can do kendo. A soft, subtle, flexible, way of fighting that maintains fierce courage and inner strength. Afterwards, seeing my mother's death left me a powerful example and message of what strength means. This led made me to transform my ideas and practices of masculinity and helped me achieve my *Nanadan*. It also started the process of me re-evaluating gender expectations, and gender relations in kendo in particular.

My brief conclusion returns to questions of masculinity and how to survive and produce strong women. Overall, I write about how we can transform our notions and practices of masculinity to make it something that is available to everyone at all stages of life. This will help us all work together as individuals and as team to demolish our prejudice and pride in daily life, just like daily kendo training.

Conclusion

Contact sports like kendo are often shaped by hegemonic masculinity which values supposedly masculine traits over feminine traits (Nash, 2017), and are linked to practices of violence. These practices often seek to exclude women, yet at times women have enjoyed access to physical aggression. Although gender relations are different in South Korea to places like the UK and Australia, forms of masculinity have still been raised over forms of femininity. My thesis will explore whether kendo can promote alternative gender relations. Furthermore, this research seeks to investigate what kendo offers in terms of positive/productive experiences of violence for women in particular, along with some key moments where this has failed. This study will contribute to the literature on women's involvement in contact sports, literature examining the effects and outcomes of mixed-sex training on gender power relations.

Chapter 2: Positioning Myself – The Doubts and Joys of Autoethnography

How did I become a scholar? Because I could not be a professional kendo athlete anymore. I was preparing for the 12th World Kendo Championships which were being held in Britain in 2003. On the last national selection day, on the way home, I received a phone call from the Korean Kendo Association to submit my passport and all my details. It seemed that I was IN. One month later, I had still not received an official national squad training invitation letter. It seemed that I was OUT. A few months later, I participated in one of the biggest national Korean kendo competitions (SBS Kumdo Championship). I was getting somewhat skilful in kendo at that time and I made the final. After the closing ceremony, the principal coach of the national team ran to me and invited me to national squad training. How wonderful! I received the official invitation from KKA. It seemed that I was IN again. Wow! I made it.

The five days of national squad training were brutal, but I coped well. Yet for some reason, I did not receive an invitation to the next one. I was OUT again. I was IN and OUT so many times. Some mornings, I was confused as to whether I was in or out that day. I became used to this. I put it this way: God has a plan for me. I did not need to blame anyone. I will know one day. When that day came, I found that I was OUT again, this time for good.

Even though I felt prepared for this, I still lost my way. I did not know what to do. I had quit my job for kendo. Kendo was all I had. Suddenly, it seemed that my dream and my all efforts disappeared. I needed to plan my life again. I shifted my dreams from kendo to being at a university. Yet, I still entered all the competitions even though people joked about me. “Are you still competing?” Hearing this, I started to feel selfish rather than proud. I tried not care, but I could not completely ignore it. At that time, I was actually enjoying learning something of the deeper side of kendo rather than collecting the medals or titles.

My life turned. Kendo was still at the centre, but the university also became another focal point. I planned to study management again, which I was very good at. But somehow I chose to study Master of Sports and Leisure Education at Yonsei University because of kendo. I spent more time in the library than the dojo. I was falling in love with writing my thesis. I used qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews, fieldwork and observation. It was great fun. Eventually, my thesis came out. My professor and I started discussing further research. Doctor of Philosophy! Wow.

The Korean university system focused on traditional quantitative and qualitative work, with an emphasis on quantitative methodologies (Park, 2012). Nevertheless, during the 1990s in Korea the use of qualitative approaches was rising (Na, 2006). This rise was accompanied by critiques of the

dominance of quantitative research, along with questions as to whether qualitative research "can help solve the problems" (Back, 2006; Park, 2012), an argument still ongoing in the Korean scholarship field. I preferred to use qualitative over quantitative methods because when I was interviewing people I could access greater details and depth. Yet I found that qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, field notes, questionnaires) were also not able to deliver the outcomes I needed. It could be that I lacked experience as a researcher, or there were key limitations with the qualitative keys we were using, but also people seemed to mask themselves – that is, they seemed to hold back something of themselves from me as the researcher. Nevertheless, I never doubted or questioned that the quality of the methodologies which my supervisor told me to use for my Masters.

My previous academic dreamlife before I met kendo was opening again, filling me with memories. Life was so pleasant. Hundreds of ideas were visiting my head. I could not stop preparing for the next project. I visited Japan regularly and received permission to take kendo videos for further research. Becoming a researcher was as much fun as kendo. Yet due to one silly mistake – I forgot to express my mention a gratitude to the most important of my professors in the acknowledgement section of my MA thesis – I was not able to do a PhD in Korea. Instead, as compensation, I was allowed to be a lecturer at Yonsei University. From the first day, it was a huge success, but I was more than sad not to be able to continue my research. When I left Korea, I gave all the data that I had collected to a friend to use for her PhD. I had married an English man, and believed that I should be a good Korean wife and leave my dreams of study behind. His success felt far more important than mine, even though my husband encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Fifteen years later, my husband encouraged me to go a university in Melbourne where we were now living. I met my professors and began working on a PhD. I could finally live my dream. But the methodology that I used was radically different to that of my previous studies.

In this chapter I explore how I came to adopt the methodology of autoethnography and position myself more broadly in the field of autoethnography within sports studies. It was not a simple journey for me, indeed it was one of my many battles. This methodology is not well-regarded by all scholars. When I met this method I could not understand whether I was using science or writing a non-fiction account of my life. In the beginning I must confess that I was only writing like an auto-biographer. I had no idea that this creative non-fiction writing could be linked to the social sciences. I felt like my supervisor was asking me to reference my diary. I was confused, was I a PhD Student or a writer? At the time I definitely wanted to be a scholar rather than a writer. This disconnection led me to consistently question whether this was the right choice. Hence I understand the doubt and distrust regarding this method because I have felt it myself. Nevertheless, as time passed, I found evidence and reason to believe that autoethnography itself must be recognised alongside other social science methods in places like Korea.

I invite you to challenge and fight yourself as much as I did before you decide whether autoethnography is valuable. My experiences working with autoethnography as a scholar, person and kendoka have been exceptional and powerful. I am determined to establish its status as an important methodological tool. I believe that it can provide insight into both myself, others, and humanity more generally.

What Does Autoethnography Mean? Shame…

When I discovered the autoethnographic method, I doubted it straightaway. I was resistant to the idea of using autoethnography because it is not traditional. From my Korean perspective, this meant that I felt that it is not the best, the equivalent of "low status". Korean society used to be based on a formal class, system, with the noble, highest-status class named *yangban* in the Joseon Dynasty (Gwon, 2010). In modern Korean society, this class system is not used officially anymore, but it has left a legacy where status is very important in Korean life. For this reason, I endeavoured to pursue the best for my whole life. What did I think was best? The things that were traditionally used and valued. Like quantitative methodologies, and some rigorous qualitative methodologies as well.

Autoethnography dates back to the 1970s in the western world, but it was yet to become a mainstream part of Korean scholarship. It was not yet traditional. Indeed, I had never even heard about it in my previous studies. Then when I started writing, I felt shame. "Shame is deeply related not only to how others think about us but also to how we think about ourselves" (Probyn, 2005, 45). Probyn focused on the roles and experiences of shame in Western cultures. But I was feeling a very Korean sense of shame. In Korea shame is tied into feelings of inferiority associated with markers of high status such as high education, wealth, esteemed careers and so on. As Lee notes, "Those accomplishing more feel proud and superior, while those failing to do so feel inferior" (Lee, 1999, 187).

Probyn (2005) has observed that in Western cultures, shame is embodied and recalled as a "blush". In South Korea, the focus is on the face, and on saving the face from showing any signs of embarrassment – from blushing red or indicating shame in another way. The three options are: "saving one's face, losing one's face, and maintaining one's face" (Lee, 1999, 187). A key way of saving face is to try to give the impression of high status, even when you are not actually of high status (Lee, 1999). In other words, to pretend to be of high status in order to avoid being shamed. When I was growing up, meat was expensive, so people who could not afford meat would still use toothpicks after eating in order to give the impression that they had eaten meat. More recently, people with luxurious cars highlight this by parking close to events like weddings and business meetings, while those with less expensive cars park far away to hide their inferiority (for more examples see Chung & Kim, 2009). It all comes from our noble ancestors (the yangban: upper-class), who did not run when it was raining, in order to retain their dignity and thus their high status (Lee & Lee, 2020). These behaviours are nonsensical when

viewed from a distance. However, if you are living in this kind of society, it is a serious means of social control (Kim, 2017).

So I was afraid to use autoethnography which did not seem to be highly valued as a methodology. How could I retain my high position (status) as a scholar if I used this method? How could I save and maintain my face? How could I stop my embarrassment from showing? I was also concerned about my Christian values. Do not criticise, do not judge, just forgive. What God will think about me? My writing would be full of these foundational sins. I got stuck. This was the real battlefield for me. However, I am a fighter. I decided to fight the shame. This challenge might be worthy. I started to negotiate with my doubts. I gradually started building trust in this method and then I started getting excited, but also a bit scared about the insights that autoethnography could bring.

Yet every early step, I struggled. I felt like I was interviewing myself. I had to be very honest. It was unpleasant. I did not like criticising others, particularly men. I adored men – I adored women like my mother and sisters and friends, but the nature of Korean society meant that I did not see heroic examples of female leadership outside of home. I knew that some men were not like my father, my brother, or my husband, but I embraced them nevertheless. It felt like it was the only way to show them, that I am strong. Kendo taught me that. God taught me that. My family taught me that. When I wrote about men who were not agreeable, men who were unreasonable, egoistic, arrogant, and even violent, I felt terrible. Ashamed and full of regret. I seemed to be becoming a very small weak immature person as much as them. I felt that all I was doing was complaining. (I will return to this more in Chapters Five and Six.)

Likewise, when I read other scholars' papers, I encountered many negative words, which made me depressed. This feeling was supposed to have been banished from my life. I learned from my family how to resist it – we were too busy talking about dreams and bright futures. Now instead of being in control of my destiny, I felt like a loser. It seemed that my life was going backwards. I hated that. Tomorrow has to be better than today.

However, after wrestling with this methodology for a few months I found some significant reasons in favour of it. Firstly, my empirical stories might offer a profound chance for myself and others to acknowledge mistakes that we had made. Secondly, autoethnography might help me to use the social sciences to understand the consequences of these mistakes for myself and others. Thirdly, in having to deal with the unpleasant aspects of life and mistakes, this methodology might help me and others learn from these moments. And then fourthly, this learning about key moments of feeling and behaviours can create the conditions to make a real change. Therefore, lastly, my shameful moments might help people to rethink behaviours and attitudes, and as a result, it might help make a better world. These reasons and hopes persuaded me to keep going.

I was gradually coming out of the self-fighting and self-doubts about utilizing autoethnography. After the initial combat I started to become curious about all these unpleasant moments. In part, I was persuaded by reading the autoethnographic works of other scholars. I also began to be fascinated to learn how this method works in an academic field. Observing my thought convinced me that autoethnography can make my PhD more interesting than any other methodology. I would find my buried stories, and write about them. Therefore, I was willing to open my uncanny (at once familiar yet strange, disturbing and unpleasant) stories and to then analyse them from a social science frame. In the end, I found myself agreeing with Bolin and Granskog (2003) that autoethnography provides key insights into the role that constructions of gender and power relations play in women's life experiences, and especially in their experiences with sports.

Nevertheless, many of my stories were attached with real shame and humiliation. I found that other auto-ethnographers also discussed shame and the chance to fight it through autoethnography (see Javaid, 2020). Although maybe he is not a martial arts fighter like me, Javaid used autoethnography to illustrate his past experiences being single, queer and Muslim, which had been a stigma that he previously hid. Like me, Javaid (2020) experienced the way autoethnography writing "can heal wounds from the past: it can offer one a way to forgive, and it can allow the writer to release the burden of pain, resentment and hurt so that he can continue to live life to the fullest, without memories acting as 'shackles' where movement is restrained." (80)

Likewise, Javaid (2020) was fighting from other scholar's criticism like I was. He notes that "some regard autoethnography as a contentious and a 'self-indulgent' methodological approach, whereby it is seen as less social scientific and more 'navel-gazing' autobiography." (Javaid, 2020, 80). Like Javaid, I frequently felt like an outsider. I am an ordinary woman while also being a *seonmeoseuma* **(**tomboy), coming from an amateur background, training in martial arts, challenging the men's world of kendo. I am also a Korean, training and teaching a Japanese martial art in Western countries with different values and cultures to my own. A stranger navigating strange worlds. And using autoethnography to try to understand both myself and the worlds that I have lived in.

Nowadays, writing autoethnography is like kendo. It makes me cry. It moves me. It fixes my narrow and shallow views. It inspires me. It opens my eyes and heart. It makes me lower my head down in an expression of humility. *벼가 익으면 고개를 숙인다* (*byeoga igeumyeon gogaeleul suginda: the rice is ripe, lower your head. This is an indication of humility*). Indeed, it teaches me how to be truly humble. I feel like it has made me a better person, as well as a better scholar.

Fighting for Autoethnography

When I moved to England and then later to Australia, I lost the ability to communicate easily that I had in Korea. However, since I started using autoethnography for my PhD, I have found the self-control that I had when I lived in South Korea as a mature adult. Living over sixteen years of life in the UK and Australia, I felt that I was passing through a nasty toddler to adolescent period. I had never been through these phases in South Korea. I experienced that real anger of adolescence. Then finally recently I felt like grown lady again. Yet, I am still battling to maintain myself on the right track to be a noble person by western cultural standards. Autoethnography became my real sensei more than any human during this period. Follo (2018) claims that autoethnographic accounts of martial arts "can be utilized to bring a new perspective to current literature and how personal experience can be included in a critical reflection of societal practices and discourses." (1) For this reason, I will fight with other scholars views against autoethnography. I feel like I understand where the criticism and concern comes from. The various autoethnography research tactics are like memos and narrative writing (Hamilton et al., 2008). Likewise, autoethnography brings forth personal emotions and other subjective experiences (Nash, 2015) which causes some critics to doubt this methodology (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Delamont, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2008; Sikes, 2013; Atkinson, 2006).

Nevertheless, individual experiences, emotions, perceptions, values and beliefs are important, and autoethnography can use these to help understand societies and cultures (Sikes, 2013). The weaknesses of the methodology can be seen as strengths. This is why it now fascinates me. Story-telling allows me to write with freedom. It allows me to explore those important moments where I (and others) failed to be rational. When unexpected things occurred. I would like to open through my stories to explore these moments which are often hidden. To explore the depths of our inner worlds and the effects of this on the outside world.

However, this process never became easy for me. The shame would return, especially, when I read my first drafts. My writing was wild, exposing all my bitterness and complaints. However, in the process of critical thinking, as a scholar, I started to see something else about me and others and then my writing became more sensible and understandable rather than merely angry. I started to read my emotions and others as a scholar which provided the space to reflect differently. This realisation gave me significant and profound insights into the hyper-masculine worlds of kendo as well as an understanding of both the Korean culture that I grew up in, and the western cultures that I moved to as an adult.

And so through autoethnography I came to feel that I am a lucky person. My negative experiences seemed to turn into great benefits. My scars and pains developed into empirical stories – sources and data to interrogate and investigate for social patterns. Without those unpleasant experiences, I could not write autoethnography in depth. The most painful humiliations became my treasures. The most

interesting discovery was around “misunderstanding” each other. How occasionally we misunderstand individuals which creates friction with our perspectives. This recognition made me embrace people who were not human for me previously. Now I could see that they were humans like me. Most athlete’s life finishes at the middle 30^{s} or before 40. Very luckily, in kendo, I am still training fully with my students and teaching in armour as well as competing, and will not stop until the last day of my life. These unique experiences and opportunities will offer deep insight into my research to be enriched. I am excited to write more research with autoethnography again.

In short, I can describe the method of autoethnography as like looking into a mirror. Auto-ethnographical research allows me to look at the process of the past and review my experiences intellectually in social science in order to discover very interesting things that happened in my life. I am writing in my voice. It can be subjectively interpreted, examined, observed and proved, and I am relying on my own capacity to engage rationally and critically with myself. I am passionate about this methodology and welcome the chance to debate the merits of it and my stories. My life feels like it has taken a step forward. I am neither frightened nor ashamed any longer.

English is Terrifying & Nerve-wracking

My English level was stuck in one place. Every morning after I woke up, my dear husband said “I genuinely love you.” But I heard, “I *generally* love you.” I thought this sentence was weird, but I did not complain. On average, he loves me. Satisfied. Sometimes, he loves me when I am cute, sometimes, he does not love me when I become a little monster. Fair enough. Eight years later, I said to him, “Could you please not mention ‘generally’?” My husband almost cried and said, “What do you mean?” I said with a very furious voice, “For God sake, please do not say it! Never mention again the fucking “G” word.” He was very confused. He took out the yellow Korean-English dictionary from our living table, we had not used for a while, found the “G” word and showed me. *Oh.*

When I started this project, I had many troubles. I was terrible with computers. I was terrified by English. I did even not like reading in English when it was required for my thesis. How could I be a PhD student then? My major problem was that since I moved to London, I was not interested in any English writers. I tried but I could not understand any of it, as a result, no one inspired me after I left Korea. Definitely none of the scholars outside Korea. How can I write my thesis then? I said to myself since I had left home and university, “Clearly, someone has inspired me?” Who then? Real people. Like my mum and dad, or kids that I met, or someone who deeply understands life like a grandmother who has never been to school. Their stories, their life, their experiences, and their words inspired me since I married and lived outside of my home (Korea).

It was the same with kendo. Who has inspired me the most since I became sensei? In the middle of nowhere, no one knows who they are, training in the few square metres of a small dojo, some of them were strong, some were senseis could not tie their men (head protector) by themselves anymore because they were too old. But they were training, teaching kendo with passion and love. They inspired me the most. I had stopped spending the time at my desk, since I immigrated to the UK. I had done that enough in Korea. Instead I started traveling with my armour and interacting with real people. Surely, that means I have meaningful stories to tell (to research)?

But there was no way to avoid reading scholars. Al-Khairy (2013) notes that the simple errors of learning English – such as spelling errors and grammar – can lead students to lose their temper during classes. I was one of them. My husband started to fix my grammar when we spoke, which was very beneficial. Previously, he did not want to correct my English because the way I spoke English charmed him. He did not want to lose it, but he agreed that it was time to change my English. Hence, I started to read the Bible for him on the bed every night to learn words. My husband said that it was a bad idea because nowadays, some words are not used anymore, and academic writing is different. As a stubborn person, I carried on. I did not care. I needed inspiration when I was reading in English. It was not easy to read the Bible either in a second language. Actually, it was a nightmare. But it only motivated me to read even more although I did not understand it fully at the time. And then it helped me to write some sentences in English.

Since I started my PhD, these difficulties became lightened because my professor did tremendous work for me. He made me confident to say anything in front of him. This freedom made me brutally honest to my professor. “I hate the computer, reading, and academic English” I said, but he seemed not to find that a problem. He taught me to go step by step and took the time to observe me. One day, he discovered my strength, which was writing a real story. I could not leave my laptop when my professor asked me to write what I had experienced. He did not mind my grammar and structure, he just let me write. This freedom made me love my PhD. It made me do everything that I really did not want to do. Since then, I kept memorising academic English in the bed quietly and repeatedly. It drove my husband mad. He is very sensitive to sounds. He realised that he could not stop me when I start something. He started to pronounce for me, I followed him, but I could not pronounce some of the words like “shit” and “sheet” they sound the same to me. We laughed a lot.

Yet, all our hard work disappeared the next morning. I hardly remembered any of the words and pronunciation that I practised in bed. When I started my Masters in Korea, I memorised ten thousand academic words. Ten hours per day for a few months. Fifteen years later, those words and my effort were all gone. Now, my brain is broken like an electric bulb, the memories of words come and go like waves. I began to accept the reality. It made everything much easier. This acceptance settled me.

Gradually, I started to read. I started visiting bookstores. I was not looking at the pictures anymore like I was two years old. I started reading the words calmly. I remember my first meeting with my professor in his office. I felt so small, but somehow my professor made me talk non-stop as if bullets came out from my mouth endlessly. I know why. Because I had silently held onto these words and thoughts and dreams for almost fifteen years. He did not stop me or interrupt me at all. He just sat there and listened to me almost for two hours (he did that almost for two years, the meeting was supposed to be for thirty minutes). He was very patient. Listening to ridiculous English grammar was so messy, rough, loud, angry, frustrated, unstructured speaking like mad chicken, but it seemed unimportant to my professor. He was seriously listening and letting my passion and energy be unleashed. If I was in Korea, talking like that in front of my professors? No way. One day, my professor opened his lips very gently. I stopped immediately and paid attention to his voice, "Honga, I think that you need to read this." He searched for one book on computer, which was Hargreaves (1994) "Sporting Females".

Headaches with Hargreaves

I started reading straightaway for ten to eighteen hours per day. It was my first scholarly book to read in a second language, therefore, this was a big challenge. But also I was neither a feminist nor masculinist. – I lived my life in my way. Whatever happened to me, I accepted rapidly and made the best of it. For example, when life was not equal because I was woman, poor and uneducated, I strove to fight to improve my situation with endless effort to earn respect and equal treatment. I was not trying to change the world at that time. Instead, I made a changes to myself in order to fit into the world I was living in. At the time I thought that extreme opinions were dangerous, and that feminism was opposed to the kinds of masculinity that I adored. Later I would discover that feminism was not necessarily extreme or dangerous. (Indeed, part of what this thesis does, is show my journey from relatively simple – and at times problematic – understandings of gender to something more complex.[1])

Previously, I only read one book in a decade, which was "Twilight". My husband bought it for my birthday, "It is easy to read and teenagers love it." I was very upset, "I am not teenagers!" I turned the book and read back cover, "Oh my gosh, Vampire? No, I do not want this." One month later, I read it. Was this because I wanted to? No, I did not want to disappoint my poor darling. I quite enjoyed the love story and understood it all. On that day that I finished it, my chin was up, shoulders and chest were fully opened. One book was enough to make me very confident. My husband and everyone kept saying that my English was good. I did not need books anymore.

[1] My use of autoethnography in this thesis documents how I was feeling at certain times in the past, rather than my thoughts at present. Therefore, the thesis traces the development of my thinking around topics of gender and power relations.

Why did I need to read scholarly books for writing autoethnography? I just needed to write true stories honestly. Why was that not good enough? With my numerous questions and doubt, I opened Hargraves's book. I did not like it. It made my head go down and down. One page took a whole day, but I could not understand one sentence. I sat and lay down on the bench at the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne. I wanted to eat the whole book. I kept calling God, mum, and dad to help me. So many words. I found one word in a dictionary, one paragraph later, I knew that word, but I could not remember what it means again. *For God's sake.*

I was banging against words twenty four hours a day, even when I was sleeping. I was angry with my English and then I started to blame Hargreaves. She made me look stupid, and then I started to get angry with all scholars. "Why do they use such difficult words? It is so hard to understand. What is the point of writing like that? Who is going to understand? Do they understand what they are talking about? It is all bullshit." Some scholars seemed to use difficult words to make themselves appear very important. I started to shout to the trees. It was torture to open the Hargreaves book every day. But I had no choice, wrestling with words and wrestling with her knowledge for weeks. Still I could not understand any of her work. Shit! I would not give up. When I was sleeping, I put her book on the top of my face. I sincerely wished that when I woke up, an angel would have translated the whole book in my brain. It never happened. The next meeting was coming soon, I was terrified of what I was going to discuss or question with my professor.

I put down the book for two days. I went for a walk, I took this book with me, and then I found something was wrong with me. It was not words, sentences or her knowledge, there was some unknown resistance. I sat on the bench at the Botanical Garden. I closed my eyes and questioned, "Why did I not get anything from this book? What is it?" How can I not understand any of the words? It cannot be, right? You are better than this. Tell me." My inner voice finally started to open to tell me the truth. I was not interested in those words, for example, Hegemony, Segregation, Domination, Marginalisation, Complexity, Gender and so on. When I accept those words, I felt weak. I was fighting against those words for the whole of my life. Whoever tried to control me with those words, I overcame. And then a few seconds later, one thought visited me. "How about others?"

I forced myself to open my mind and eyes, put my preconceptions aside. I read the title loudly – "Sporting Females" – and opened the chapter that I was the most interested in. And then a miracle came to me. I started to understand a few words, "Sports education", "Girls and Boys", "Gender and Segregation". I realised that it related to my experiences. For example, when discussing Physical Education, Hargreaves mentioned that girls and boys used to play together, but not anymore. This interest enabled me to read her whole book. She helped me to change my views, even though she was not aggressive. (This voice was very familiar. I thought for a second, I used to be very good at those

communication skills in Korea.) Hargreaves approached me gently to think about the problems without any stimulation like my professor in Australia. I liked it and I wanted to listen to Hargreaves' voice as a scholar, and then she made me nod. Her opinions and her knowledge started to make sense. After reading the book, I agreed with everything she had written. I had no negative opinion on her perspectives. Now I was going in an unexpected direction. She looked like a Sporting Female God. *Oh, Lord!*

Even Worse than Hargreaves

What an achievement to read Hargraves's book. I was on the train to meet my professor. I felt sort of confident and comfortable the first time. My brain was buzzing with thoughts about gender related experiences in my life. These experiences seemed relevant to everything that I had just read. I could not wait to discuss in terms of feminism and masculinism with my professor. I knocked on his lab, he was just finishing his email. I sat on the chair and saw a new book had arrived. I picked it up, but was not interested. Then he said, "You can borrow it if you like." My heart shrunk. When he turned his chair toward me, I opened my mouth immediately and did not stop nearly for two hours again. He only nodded. After he listened all my emerging thoughts, he said, "I think that you need to start to read Kate Sylvester's thesis." Bang! Immediately, I lost my mind and said to him, "Kate Sylvester's thesis? Again? I do not like reading her thesis. Her style of writing and approach is inappropriate for my work!" It was the greatest complaint that I felt able to make to my professor. He just nodded side to side with a half-smile. He was a very difficult opponent to fight. If someone were rude or angry, I must fight. But if someone were polite and nice, I could never win this match.

Suddenly, I had a headache. I could not say no to my professor. It was very difficult to do so as a student and as a Korean. It is against our culture. In Korean culture one will usually agree freely, even if one feels like disagreeing. To disagree breaks the *삼강오륜 (Samgangolyun)* principle (Yang & Rosenblatt, 2001). Samgangolyun is well known as the elementary moral guidelines in Confucianism (Min, 2017). Serving the king (who could be a teacher, sensei, father and boss) is fundamental (Min, 2017). I valued *삼강오륜* (*Samgangolyun)*, but sometimes, it is hard to just follow when a teacher and sensei says something wrong. However, I stick with *삼강오륜* (*Samgangolyun)* values. For this reason, when my professor asked me to do something, I just said yes to keep *삼강오륜 (Samgangolyun)* and be morally correct. I also do it to maintain kendo traditions. When a sensei commands, I just need to say, "Yes, sensei." Whatever! It works very well sometimes. But sometimes it does not. By the way, there is no choice in my culture and my kendo life. I sort of admire this culture. It feels like the Army. I must listen to my professor even though he seems wrong!

In Korea, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, I had tried to disagree with my third sensei. The result was that I lost his trust. I became a very disappointing student to him forever. It was a painful moment. I would not challenge my Australian professor now. No way. Sylvester's thesis was good enough to use some of the sentences as a reference, but nothing more for my work. She seemed to misunderstand Asian culture and the kendo world. In my experience, I can truly understand only what I have experienced for a long time. Even I did not understand my own culture sometimes. I lived in the UK for almost ten years and Australia so far for eight years, and I hardly understand these people and their cultures still. My judgment about Sylvester was that she was sensitive. I considered that her thinking was too junior. It is not easy to say only "Yes" whatever sensei says, yet there are some benefits for doing it. This system is not just hegemonic or masculine dominance. She disappointed me.

Previously, when I just started my PhD, all scholars were untouchably amazing including Sylvester. Since I started to read many scholars, even though I was a beginner in this field, I am afraid to say that I started to notice that some of the contributions were disappointing. Some scholars create confusion. They hardly solve the issues. What is the point of reading their work? Sylvester's thesis seemed like one of these. This disappointment blocked me from reading her work properly. If I can explain a difficult subject easily with simple words, I knew that I fully understand it. I adore simplicity, it is the best. Living simply is my motto. Some scholars love to make the simple things complicated and then celebrate their knowledge. However, somehow in my mind, I believed that some inspiring scholars definitely exist, same as kendo senseis, but very rare. Where are they? I must meet them one day.

Reading Sylvester's thesis was a task that I undertook purely to follow the Confucianism ethics that the student should listen to the teacher. Full stop. Then some miracle happened. I opened the first page and started to read slowly. The sentence started spinning in my brain. I kept nodding and made a sound. Aaaaa! Some sentences were very me. For example, she was the only girl to play rugby with the boys. She loved it, but peers teased her for playing with boys. Finally, she was told not to join rugby games anymore. She lost her joy and confidence for a while. However, Sylvester (2015) moved to Japan and discovered kendo when she was a teenager. "I learned to reconnect with my authentic self and connect with others who were similar. I felt special and that I was able to express my physical body in kendo as I had in rugby." (Sylvester, 2015, 11). I was like that. I played with boys all the time when I was young. I understood how it felt. One thing was different between her and me, she loved *Robin of Sherwood*, but I loved *Candy, Candy*. Nevertheless we both loved to play outside with boys as our companions. And we both found that kendo provided a way for us to reconnect with our love of physical activity.

When she entered kendo, Sylvester found out that women were marginalised by sex discrimination in kendo where also is "little space for women to permanently change the culture due to how firmly patriarchy is entrenched" (Sylvester, 2015, 8). I experienced that all the time, but I did not understand

what it was. I was the one who missed this point entirely. In Korean proverb, *암탉이 울면 집안이 망한다* (*amtalgi ulmyeon jibani manghanda*: *If the hen crows, the house is ruined – the implication is that when the wife starts to act beyond a husband, the house is ruined*) (Kim, 2013). It was nonsensical in my house, without my mother's work, we can barely eat any food. My father appreciated it and he trained us (daughters) like my mother, but when I heard those proverbs outside house, it seemed reasonable that women should behave as if they were lower than men. I accepted the marginalisation without doubts. Besides, when I was hearing from men I was good enough or better than them, it was also a massive achievement at that time. I did not question that why it had to be.

I must confess that I was totally wrong, and my professor was absolutely right. Sylvester's thesis made me aware of the crucial point that what seemed so natural was not actually natural. Being controlled by men, now, it seems very strange. It was not only my position to overcome the oddly powerful and unfair masculine dominance. After this realisation, Sylvester became like my little sister. I would like to hug her. But I also found myself wanting to argue with her at times as well. Sometimes, what she wrote was eye-opening. Sometimes, it was confronting. Sometimes it confirmed my experiences. Soon the pages of her thesis were passing so quickly like a novel. Eventually, I had a connection with her. I would like to learn from her. When I went to World Kendo Championship, I thought that I was the best one in the world, but I realised that I was the last one. I felt exactly the same relationship with Sylvester's thesis. I thought that I knew better than her because I am a senior to her in kendo.

I was collecting her knowledge. I grabbed a red ballpen with full excitement and then she criticised the use of tea in Kendo culture. I dropped the pen on the desk. Bang! She criticised our female culture. As if pouring the tea for senseis and male kendoka was not the right thing to do. She was attacking and challenging the terms of Confucian heritage and the place that I occupied. It seemed that she did not understand how to behave toward senseis. I am the person to preserve ethical values toward adult, senseis and seniors. I am teaching my students in the dojo. It is one of our cultural practices to prepare tea for adults and senseis. Park (2013) describes tea ceremony as one of the crucial parts of women's education. Some naughty men did not deserve women's treatment. I would never serve them, but generally, in my life, many men appreciated me and I love to receive this appreciation. In my dojo, I gave this job to juniors. I missed her point at that time. I closed her thesis and put it in the cupboard where I kept my vacuum cleaner. I tried to be diplomatic when I was reading Sylvester. Adegbite (2005) mentions that "Diplomatic skills require the power to persuade and influence others to do what one wishes." (1), I tried it, but it did not work for me. It was very uncomfortable hearing from a foreigner who had not lived long enough in an Asian culture to judge Confucian cultural heritage. I felt that I had just lost a good friend. It was sad.

Next meeting, my professor rerecommended reading Sylvester again. I brought out her thesis from my cupboard once more, and found she mentioned something else I disagreed with, which was 8th dan grading. She pointed out there were no 8th dan females. I think that I know why there is currently no 8th dan for women. When I went to Japan, I observed 8th dan grading. I was immensely excited to see female sensei in the grading. When I heard women's kiai (yelling), my whole body was covered with goosebumps, I felt the hope and the future of my kendo and female kendoka. They were very impressive, delicate and skilful. Yet, while I might be wrong or insulting female senseis, it seemed that they were missing something important compared to the male kendoka who were also going for 8th dan. 8th dan to me in Japan is so important, it seems that there should be no sympathy or generosity or politics or gender or power relationships involved. I could be wrong, but I could see that the judges try to protect and preserve 8th dan values. Pure Kendo. I think that we need to more carefully think beyond gender in 8th dan. Again, I lost my ability to connect with Sylvester's view. I knew that what she tried to say, but…

That said, I do not deny that hyper-masculinity behaviours occurred often in kendo. Sylvester wrote of frustration with the masculine environment of kendo in Japan. Of how it slows down, ruins and challenges pure kendo (Sylvester, 2015). I totally agree with her. People believe what they want to believe. There are certainly some senseis who take for granted their power and interpret kendo in their terms. It is very disappointing and it is vital to change to offer the space for women in kendo. Again, no one can be perfect. I am not perfect either. To focused on a sensei's mistakes over how much their life they give to their students, it seems very small to me at that time, yet still...

Arguing, negotiating, wrestling for almost two years with Sylvester's work, eventually, I started to understand her points. I owe Sylvester an apology. I did not know how to see many of the issues, forgot how to discuss them, and how to make changes. Sia et al. (2002) point out that "group polarization is the tendency of people to become more extreme in their thinking following group discussion." (1) It was much harder to read Sylvester's thesis than Hargreaves' book because I thought that I knew the kendo world already. Likewise, it was also hard to listen to her perspectives in terms of Asian culture, Confucian values and particularly, the cultural significance of kendo because I am Asian and a Korean kendoka. She seemed to challenge and attack the values I believed in.

Ultimately, Sylvester taught me several things. The most important lesson was that it was ok to agree with some things that a scholar said and to disagree with other things. However, with regards to the agreeing and disagreeing, I needed to learn to explain my reasons. For example, she made me rethink that serving tea was not a problem, but forcing female kendoka to make tea for males was the problem. Following a sensei's direction was not a concern, but being forced to respect and follow misdirection was a concern. Questioning the lack of 8th dan females was appropriate, but that should be questioned

in terms of the fundamental of the lack of a supportive system in order to produce females capable of achieving 8th dan. Significantly, Sylvester helped me recognise the gendered aspects of kendo culture that had previously felt very natural to me. Therefore, I reacted defensively.

It is important for auto-ethnographers to deal with the emotion for "analyses of psychological experiences rather than biochemical or neurological mechanisms, research subjects must express their emotional experiences in words and communicate them to researchers" (Buckley, 2015, 1). Yet, I had to also learn to question my emotions, such as my anger and defensiveness. Even if sometimes I come to different answers, I realise that Sylvester's position is crucial. It is vital for outsiders to examine the gendered power relations inside cultures such as Japan and Korea where insiders are not allowed to discuss problems with powerful senseis.

Furthermore, Sylvester made me aware of the way my thoughts were often based on limited experiences. She helped me see other women's anguish and pain, and allowed me to empathise with them like they were my mother, sister, female friends, female kendoka and other female martial artists that I knew. Now, I found a reason to work harder. I found the reason to fight. I used to say to my students, "When you do something, do it until you die." This was my time to show them again. Showing is the always best teaching.

The Joy, Delirium and Pain of Writing - My Position as the Researcher and Auto-ethnographer

My battle was over with Sylvester. It was a very good ending even though I lost my arguments. I was well pleased with that. I wanted to fight this time with reasonable knowledge. I started writing, but managing my thoughts in the right order rationally on the screen, was almost impossible. In front of the screen, I was writing nonsense. I realised that my battle was now with how to express my arguments. Writing all day. Skipping meal all day. During the shower once, some sentences were flying through my head, I came back to my chair and started typing. Of course, I was naked. Shampoo was laying down on my head. My husband came to my room to say hello, he sent me back to shower, "You mad woman." Once I was in the middle of the street I stopped to put my thoughts on my mobile phone. I remained in that spot for thirty minutes. It became habit. I did not care what people think about me. I was in the middle of writing. No one could stop me.

Endlessly, I struggled to spell certain words. It was highly irritating. My ideas were coming and going, I did not want to lose them, I must put everything on the screen (when I went to bed, I got up and went back to my desk so many time until my husband stopped me). But writing is hard. I found myself repeating the same ideas continually or writing other stories that got side tracked into things that were completely irrelevant to this thesis. It was difficult to not lose the depth of my work.

Once, on a rainy and grey day I wanted to do something to cheer me up instead of writing about my difficult and confronting emotions. But I needed to write, so I was writing on the bed when what I was writing became too emotional for me. I cried and cried. “If I do not laugh, I’m going to cry (Wells et al., 2019, 334). “A cry for scholars is to engage the vibrating force of the story. Craft in service of our life-enhancing, knowledge-constructing, world-building praxis of the autoethnographic bring a memory to light, to write relationships into being” (Poulos, 2017, 33). Yet, “Empathy can be a dangerous liability. Rather than trying to find meaning in loss, such work may be better understood as a practice of survivance” (Tamas, 2011, 258). It was loud. My husband ran into the room, I almost gave him a heart attack. “It is just writing”, I said. He got used to it.

Another time I went to the toilet and somehow some of the thoughts came out (toilets are a weird place). I had to finish quickly as possible and I grabbed my laptop, put it on my bed, knelt and started writing until my neck and my arm had numbness, my chest was hurting. I grabbed my chest with one hand, but I was still writing with the other. I started losing my eyesight, then I had to stop. It turned to hundred pages for one chapter. I did not know which paragraphs were good. At that same time, my niece was writing her thesis. She found it distressing to have to write an extra ten pages. I was the opposite. I had to reduce a hundred pages to ten. Basically, I did not know how to succinctly explain my experiences in order to reach into the main point. I did not know how to deliver my knowledge to readers at all.

I needed my professor’s opinion continually. I could not trust myself. Even I did not know what I wrote. But my professor did not stop me until I needed it. This freedom made me write with joy, but also encouraged me to maintain my interest. And then I started to recognise by myself when it was not good enough. Instead what I wrote was like other scholars who I found it easy to criticise. I had a similar experiences in kendo. When I saw my own fighting on the video, I cried because it was not me. Criticising how someone else competes is easy. Writing was the same. When I was reading other scholars’ writing it was easy for me to condemn. Reading my own paper made me humble. This awareness stimulated me to fight to write better. But it was also the most confronting and unkind experience. Since then I started to appreciate all scholars efforts as much as all kendo senseis.

After a while, I found that I was not the only person struggling with writing in a second language. Other non-English speakers have also struggled writing the task of scholarly work theoretically and conceptually (Casanave & Li, 2015). Fujieda (2008) recalls that “writing in English resulted in the most time-consuming and laborious task of my graduate coursework.” (80) Fujieda (2008) also makes the important point that “autobiographical research illustrates accounts of literacy achievement as well as language learning by multicultural writers.” (75) There is a double-learning that needs to be accomplished. As part of this, Fujieda had to confront difficulties such as learning how to write an academic paper, with the struggle to develop the main theme, losing confidence, writing in Japanese

contexts rather than those in English, the frustration of continued mistakes understanding sentences and so on (Fujieda, 2008). I felt very connected with Fujieda. I am certainly not alone.

It was also easier to speak to others than to have to write in an auto-ethnographical way while paying attention to questions of "representation, balance, and ethics." (Wall, 2008, 38). Even those people whose first language is English find autoethnography to be a difficult methodology, in particular when writing about culture (Stanley & Vass, 2018). Likewise, the theoretical writing of academics can be difficult, especially for the working class (Dews & Law, 1995, 1-12). My class status in Korea was complicated (my father had been upper-middle class but then lost money and status). However, my father continued to teach us academic words in Korean (I learned the "Chinese" form of academic words around six years old) so that when I entered the university, my writing benefited from these lessons. Academic writing in Korean was not a struggle for me. Whereas when I married with my husband (his father had also been upper-middle class but then lost money and status like my father), he did not use academic English at home. (When he spoke to his clients, I thought that he was speaking another language like Latin, and barely understood any of it). So the English I had previously learnt at home and the pub, was casual rather than scholarly. This made it extra difficult to speak, read and write in academic English. Law and Dews (1993) observe that "the coming out as working-class academics is a revolutionary act and also a necessarily autobiographical act". (5) This rang true for me. Therefore, I have begun to find a place in academia in English by writing my own stories through utilising an autoethnographic method.

My Autoethnographic Approach

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that explores the researcher's self-reflections and personal experiences to help make sense of social, cultural, and political worlds (Plummer, 2009; Chang, 2008; Nielsen, 1999; Karpiak, 2003). Ellis (1991) points out the power of questions generated by a social scientist who has lived through the experience and is consumed by the search for answers about something personal yet culturally relevant. According to Sparkes (2000), auto-ethnography can enable researchers to challenge conventional hegemonic power relations by focusing on the stories of people negatively affected by these power relations (see also Sikes, 2013; Wacquant, 2013).

There are many methods of scholarship, including the use of statistics, graphs, fieldwork, and interviews. Yet, these methods do not allow me to engage with my hidden thoughts, my shame, my joy, and my uncanny experiences. If another researcher asks me a research question, some of the data they find could be important, but they will never find out my real stories. I will only answer the question broadly and formally because of my position in kendo as a sensei. Autoethnography can offer me the space to explain my personal experiences which helps others to understand the situation. My autoethnographic stories in this thesis are based on reflective account of what I remembered of that time. Yet I draw on

the work of other scholars as well. For example, Messner interviewed athletes such as the American footballer Jack Tatum in terms of a sense of the role of violence and masculinity with contact sports. Messner interpreted and analysed the data he gained from these interviews in relationship to existing scholarship (Messner, 1990). I do the same with my data. The difference between Messner and I, is that Messner interviews other people, while I felt like I was interviewing myself and narrating my personal short stories. But the process of interpreting and analysing the data is the same.

I also draw on the approach of Hylton who suggested the use of humour and satire to engage with difficult topics such as racism (Hylton, 2018). And I similarly am informed by the ethnographic as well as autoethnographic work of other scholars, especially those who have studied martial arts such as Sylvester (2015), and Nash who wrote about violent experiences she had at an amateur boxing club in Tasmania (Nash, 2017). I felt like I understood what these scholars experienced deeply. Their accounts resonated with me, taking me deeply into the experience of what it is like to be fighting physically against other people.

These autoethnographic accounts help give a sense of both feelings and bodies. “Looking aggressive was different to actually being aggressive”, notes Nash (2017, 744). She takes me inside the experience. Outsiders cannot tell the subtle details of what is happening when people fight or practice fighting together. For instance, in kendo, the judges score hits (snap), but it is the participants who know how much the hit hurt, whether it was mild or humiliating, and what other dynamics are part of the fight that are not necessarily reflected by the score. It is hardly recognisable unless you are actually in that place. Autoethnography can explain that. “The popular literatures of ecstatic religions, active military combat, and extreme outdoor sports all argue that there are feelings that are only comprehensible to individuals who have experienced them in person (Buckley, 2015, 209).

Anderson (2006) highlights five key features of autoethnography: “1) complete member researcher status, 2) analytic reflexivity, 3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, 4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and 5) commitment to theoretical analysis”. (378) These five key features were very useful when I was approaching my thesis. When I thought of autoethnography in these five ways, it reminded me of the need to relate my work to the findings of social scientists and humanities scholars. For example, when I was writing Chapter 4, the issue of my anger became central. For a while I doubted my writing about subjective emotional eruptions. But then I found some Korean scholars who defined, shaped and analysed anger in terms that helped me make sense of my anger. In addition, the practice of reflexivity has allowed me the freedom to write exclusively of shame. In particular, I have been able to question what I had taken for granted as natural or the correct way of doing things.

Nash (2017) writes that "Reflexivity was a methodological practice and source of data" (738) and Anderson (2006) outlines that reflexivity involves awareness of the self or others "reciprocal influence". (382) More generally, "Self-reflexivity encourages researchers to acknowledge how their perceptions and background influence the research and analyse how subjectivity shapes the research process" (Fortune & Mair, 2011, 457). For me, this has meant thinking and reading deeply about life in South Korea, as well as my experiences as a kendoka in Japan, and as a migrant in England and Australia.

More specifically, my analysis is based on the life journey and kendo life of a well-educated, upper middle-class, heterosexual, Asian woman who was born and lived in South Korea for thirty three years before moving to England for around a decade, and then migrating again to Australia where I have now lived for almost a decade. My experiences of kendo span almost three decades in South Korea, Britain, and Australia, and occasionally Japan and Europe. In South Korea, I was trained (almost every day three to ten hours per day, representing the Korean national team) and competed (almost every two months at a national level) for around ten years. When I moved to UK and Australia, I also trained (three to five times per week), competed and refereed including in Europe. I sat on grading panels in UK and Australia, was involved in the British Kendo Association as a grading officer and was invited as a guest teacher throughout the UK, Australia, Europe and Asia. I was national female coach in the UK and state assistant coach in Australia as well. Furthermore, over sixteen years I established an international kendo competition (founding the London Cup) and founded Tora Dojo in London and Melbourne. Additionally, I had experience teaching kendo as a lecturer at Yonsei University and middle school. Traveling the world mainly for kendo I had profound and significant experiences, which offered insight into various experiences of society, culture, history and humanity. These experiences occasionally assisted me to open my eyes in order to recognise different human attitudes, behaviours, expectation and perceptions, but sometimes these experiences disturb me and I do not want to embrace the differences. Hence, hopefully, those complex and diverse experiences inform my thesis as autoethnography by self-reflection. Besides, those diverse modes of analysis have a complex critical interaction in ethnocentrism, orientalism, essentialism and westernism. This research is strictly conducted for protecting participants' confidentiality, as well as anyone has involved in this thesis telling stories that are used anonymously and pseudonyms.

As I have previously alluded, autoethnography has been critiqued as being too subjective and emotional (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Delamont, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2008; Sikes, 2013; Atkinson, 2006). However, these aspects can also be viewed as strengths of this method, because as Richards (2015) and Church (1995) have observed, both the emotional and more generally subjective experiences have often been neglected by scholars. Sylvester (2015), for example, has highlighted the importance of the gendered emotions of kendo participants, and autoethnographic stories provide a way of both telling and reflecting on the place of gendered emotions in kendo.

In addition, Sparkes (2000) argues that auto-ethnography can enable researchers to challenge conventional hegemonic power relations by focusing on the subjective experiences of people negatively affected by these power relations (see also Sikes, 2013; Wacquant, 2013). For example, Nash (2017) used autoethnography to analyse the way she felt 'haunted' by the bad experience where she was hurt by a man boxing in a hypermasculine way, and how she felt betrayed because the instructor did not step in and stop it. Nash, however, only experienced being a boxer for a short period, while I can use autoethnography to reflect on the experience of being a kendoka over several decades. My experience spans from a young age to my middle forties, so I can explore the intersections of kendo and gender experiences over half a lifetime. With the passing of time, my views, perspectives and ideas have changed gradually from adapting, learning and studying. This means my research has been deeply and meaningfully informed by my experiences as woman entering and surviving the most of hyper-masculine field, the Japanese martial art, kendo, over a long period.

More specifically, autoethnography uses the experiences of the self and their social and cultural perspectives to contribute to our understanding (Sikes, 2013). Therefore, an auto-ethnographic approach demands that the researcher engage with the specific details of their experiences (Hamilton et al., 2008). My autoethnographic stories come from my experiences competing and training against men in kendo for half of my life in Korea, Japan, Great Britain, Australia and occasionally Asia and Europe. I have received many positive experiences through kendo, but also some significant negative experiences around gender, power relationship and violence that I analyse in this thesis.

Sylvester notes from her study that "Women's kendo participation in Japan does not threaten masculinity due to how practices are gender hierarchised and segregated", adding that "Kendo also provides a social space to re-produce femininity, which reaffirms 'traditional' ideals of Japanese identity" (Sylvester, 2015, 221-222). However, I have had several experiences in Korea, Japan, the UK, and Australia where it seemed that my participation in kendo did threaten the masculinity of some people. In quite a few of these instances, violence followed. In using autoethnography to both tell and begin analysing these stories, I am able to initiate an understanding of how gender relations shape experiences of violence, as well as the impact of this violence on gender relations. Autoethnography is particularly useful here because it is a reflexive methodology that enables me to recount what happened, as well as to explore how my understanding of these experiences of violence (and gender and kendo more generally) have changed. Here I am following the path of Symons who drew on Didion and Gandolfo to use autoethnographic writing to help understand what she was thinking and feeling (Symons, 2019, 8).

As Symons notes, "writing in a reflexive, autoethnographic manner, I have made the familiar strange", and "I have also become aware of just how much of the strange I had made feel familiar" (Symons

2019, 17; Olive, 2018, 237). My autoethnographic stories help show how initially the systems of power in kendo felt familiar to me, and I have only recently started to realise how strange they are. The effect of these stories is that they can challenge power relations, and hopefully create space for change (Rossiter, 1999). I have already made one change, starting to look attentively at myself as a scholar like my kendo. Hence, I am becoming a slightly better person and sensei in western countries. I am relaxed and happier like in Korea. I have started to get back control of my feelings and behaviours as before. I am changing. What do I need to explain more about autoethnography?

Auto-ethnographers develop their own stories into a form of self-analysis that can have the intimacy and emotion of a confession, but also enables critical self-understanding (Felski, 1989). Pelias (2003) advises that it "lets you use yourself to get to culture." (372) Part of my autoethnographic narrative involves my childhood in South Korea where I was brought up. My parents treated me as a tomboy rather than a little princess. I remember my father always watched a boxing match on Sunday night when my favourite TV cartoon programme was on. I had no choice when my father held the remote control. I did not like to watch boxing because it was too violent, rough and brutal for a little girl. I was only around five years old. I was lying down on the warm heated floor with an angry little bird face, hardly noticeable. That was the most I could show to my father, it was impossible to make any grumpy sounds. If I did, my father would throw me out on the ground. There was no mercy when he was watching boxing. However, I loved the end of the match. When the presenter held two boxer's hands, I woke up immediately and stared at the TV screen full of excitement. The presenter announced the champion in the middle of the ring. When the champion's hand rose to the sky, I felt good. My father was jumping around the house and he talked all night about how great the winning boxer was, particularly when his favourite boxer won the match. None of the rest of my family was interested. However, strangely, I would like to jump around also. I did not. Somewhere in my mind felt glorious. I enjoyed the triumph very much.

Another part of my autoethnography narrative involves my experiences in kendo as an adult. When I met kendo, I loved it from first sight. Maybe I found kendo attractive because it was like a mix of boxing and ballet. Becoming a champion, becoming a star in kendo, it was special. People came to me to say hello and congratulate me, and a very famous sensei approached me to give a wonderful advice. It made feel me that I had become someone. My favourite thing was receiving the medal on my neck in front of thousands of people. I liked it very much. I could not believe that I became like one of the famous boxers.

However, one day, a sensei attacked me in keiko (sparring practice) without mercy. I was a sensei like him. Yet he disregarded the rules to try to destroy me. I was broken. No one stopped it or said anything against it while it was happening. I could not rely on anyone or anything to help. Fortunately, when

someone blew the whistle, it saved me. “Hmm, whistle” I looked at the ceiling with a big sigh. The whistle sound was like God’s voice, “It is enough!!!” After the keiko finished the sensei had a big smile on his face. However, it is not how kendo is supposed to be. I realised that there was a gap in kendo despite all the strict regulations and rules. If some men, who had a position of sensei can break the rules, then there is a problem. I want to use my autoethnography and reflections to think more about this, and the changes that are needed to make kendo glorious for everyone.

For this reason, I was battling with reading and writing, which at times felt like it threatened my health. But I survived writing my thesis, just like I have survived kendo. Scholarship involves conflict and negotiation, discussion and understanding, answering and solving, and then recreates those cycles. In the end of this writing, I see that this world of scholarship is also a battlefield. I smelled the blood in this world as same as kendo (sparring). It fascinates me. I thought that I can fight only in kendo. I also thought that only soldiers fought to save a country. I did not know that scholars can save the world. I did not know that scholars can fight with a pen. Yes, they can. They can change the world with a pen. I can see it, their effort and their fortitude. “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Now, I have a (kendo) sword and a glorious pen.[2]

[2] I lost sense of the meaning of life when I lost my mother. After her death, my dreams, desires, passions and energy vanished. She took it all. When she was gone, the world was not interesting to me in any way. I was not very me anymore. My husband used to tease me when I woke up every morning with new dreams. Now there were no more dreams left. He missed it. This time it was not me, instead it was my wise husband who found my dreams. He sent me to back to study for a PhD. I am very glad he did this for me. Otherwise, I would not have found the glorious pen.

Chapter 3: Growing up as a 선머슴아 (Seonmeoseuma [Tomboy]) – How I came to Kendo

This chapter aims to talk about how I came to be a kendoka, and at the same time, to give an introduction of me and to my life in Korea, which includes gender relations in Korea (and some relevant history in Korea). It is also a chapter about words – Korean words – and what they reveal about Korean culture, and ideologies and practices of gender in particular. These are the words I grew up with. For example, my father called my mother *안사람 (ansalam: inside person)* or *집사람 (jibsalam: house person)* although she was the one who went out into the marketplace to sell the fruits and vegetables that my father grew on our farm. My mother called my father *바깥양반 (bakkat: outside + yangban: the best social class in the Joseon Dynasty)* when she talked about my father to someone. My mother and many of the women I grew up around were in charge of the finances. But she was called the lower status 'inside person', and my father was spoken of as someone of high-class status. How did I not notice this before I began this research? I heard these words every day without recognizing that they made the unequal gender relationships of Korea seem natural.

It is new to examine these words, and their cultural legacies. These words are used in passing by some scholars of Korea, but no one has focussed on them. Indeed, no one has examined these words, and their cultural histories, in any detail. Instead, they have focussed on general gender relations. For example, women's opportunity at the workplace, equality, leadership, and gender broadly. But this means that they miss out on some of the complexities of gender in South Korea. So I want to talk about the gendered aspects of very common Korean words that are generally taken for granted – words that affected what kind of kid I became, how I lived life as a girl, and how this life led me to kendo.

In addition, this chapter explores some short autoethnographic stories in relation to South Korean society perspectives, gender relationships, hierarchy, patriarchy, hyper-masculinity, practises, customs, and cultures when I grew up. These stories include the births of my fourth sister, older brother and I; my life as a tomboy, playing with boys, and how I started to learn Korean gender roles, and the expectations that were supposed to guide me as a girl growing up in South Korea.

Confucianism and the Han of My Mother

The story of how I became a kendoka starts not just with my birth, but of the two children born before me. They are revealing stories about both the expectations around gender in South Korea and also about how my parents treated me differently right from the beginning. My parents had six children. Four daughters, then a son, and then me (another daughter). It took a long time before my mother told me the story of the birth of the fourth girl. I was in my early 20s. Until then my mother had only tried to be strong for me. She was the most positive, resilient, loving person I ever knew. Everyone called her

"human angel". But by the time I was in my mid-20s my mum started to treat me as an adult, and one day she carefully mentioned her married life to me for the first time. For the first time, she told me a story of how hard things were for her. Oh no, then does she carry 한 (*Han*) in her heart?

Understanding Han

The word *han* is a very important Korean word that is used to speak about a deeply emotional experience, but not many scholars have studied it in detail. Instead, when scholars do mention *han*, they do so just in passing. The National Institute of Korean Language defines *han* as "resentment; deep sorrow: A feeling of bitterness, deep resentment or sorrow that builds up in one's mind from an unfair or regretful event" (https://krdict.korean.go.kr/). While Han and Han (2007) state that *han* is an important concept to understand the worldview of Korean people, they only briefly define the term, noting that *han* means negative emotions resulting from the loss or loss of self-worth. Lee notes that *han* can refer to subjective experience (my *han*) or be used as an objective statement of how someone else is feeling (their *han*) (Lee, 1991). *Han* is generally used by women towards men to express their distress at the way they have been treated or in an unjust world that does not allow them to be strong like men. This one-word powerful sums up the pain of being a woman in the Korean world. For example, the Korean folk song 한오백년 (*han-obaegnyeon:* hundreds of years) tells the story of a woman waiting away her whole life for her lover (an intolerant man) to return, but he never does.

But *han* is also used when speaking about the painful unjust treatment that has occurred to the Korean people as a whole. It can be used by men who lament their weakness and are upset about those who oppress them. For example, Lee speaks about the *han* that Koreans carried against Japan when Japan colonised Korea and then subordinated Korea from 1910 to 1945 (Lee, 2007). During this period the Japanese forced Koreans to work at the factories or made them fight in the front line in the war, and thousands and thousands of Korean women were forced to serve in sexual slavery as "Comfort Women" for the Japanese (Rahm, 2020, 104). The *han* here refers to the brutality and harshness of Japanese rule and also the shame of Korean men who failed to protect their country, culture, language, women and children (Cho, 2018). Koreans started to sing more 민요*(minyo: folk songs)* at that time, especially 아리랑 *(Arirang: a popular anthem),* a song symbolizing the hometown of the heart and a song of history (The academy of Korean studies, 2018). This song implies patience, acceptance in this era of not being able to do anything (Jeong, 2018). It is interpreted as a sad song containing *han* (Jeong, 2018). Many versions of the unofficial Korean anthem and main song of resistance *(Arirang)* spoke implicitly to the unjust treatment of the Korean people and can be interpreted as expressing *han* (Jeong, 2018). As I will discuss later in this thesis, I also felt this *han* against the Japanese when I competed against them for the first time in the World Kendo Championships.

After the Second World War, the Japanese colonial period was over but there was no peace. The Korean War began in 1950, with the Korean peninsula split between the warring superpowers of the United States of America and the Soviet Union (Kim, 2012). In 1953, one country was divided into two (Kim, 2012). Since the South and North division, Koreans carried a different form of *han*. Koreans could not cross the Korean Demilitarized Zone anymore. The Demilitarised Zone became untouchable, with animals, flowers, birds even weeds enjoying their peace without any human interruption. It became their peace park (Healy, 2007). Many Koreans had no peace at all however, it was an absolute disaster for them. They lost contact with parents, sons, daughters, husbands and wives, and they lost their 고향 *(gohyang: hometown*). Families became divided, it was a tragedy (Yang, 2011).

Since then people started to sing *"한 (han) 많은 (manh-eun: a lot of) 대동강 (Deadong-gang: river in Pyongyang)"* in order to console their mind and express their 그리움 *(geulium: yearning*). As time passed, gradually those people passed away and their *han* were buried with them (Yang, 2011). Their children, second generation, did not feel *han* as much as their parents, as a result, they became indifferent to this family and community division (Yang, 2011).

When the U.S. military occupied Korea after liberation from Japan, Korean women became "Comfort Women" for American soldiers again (Kim & Choi, 1998, 116). Women were often raped and prostituted by American soldiers, and struggled to survive under colonial rule (Choi, 1998). "This presupposes the helpless impotence of Korean males." (Choi, 1998, 15). During The Korean War, powerful American military masculinity dominated over women and men in Korea (Kim & Choi, 1998). In consequence, Korean women are more likely to carry *han* against hyper-masculine Korean men, while Koreans, in particular men, are more likely to carry *han* against Japanese men, and those American soldiers. Moreover, divided families often carry *han* until they died, and still in their tomb against powerful nations and their own nation's powerful leaders.

All the women I knew when I was growing up experienced *han*, but my mother never spoke much about her difficult feelings. Yet when she finally told me with a big deep sigh, that she carried *han* in her heart, I understood it immediately. It was the most powerful word for despair, sorrow, and the bitterness of an unjust world. But the *han* which my mother felt was not about the injustice of what Japan or America did Korea. So why did my mother feel *han*? What had made her sad, unpleasant, and disappointed? What did she feel was the main injustice in her life? The story of her *han* that she waited so long to tell me was about the birth of her fourth child – her fourth daughter.

The Birth of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Children in My Family, and the 한 (Han) of My Mother

The man my mother married – my father – was the sixth child of thirteen, who had suddenly become the oldest son in his family due to the devastation of the Korean War. Around eleven years of age, he was unexpectedly the head of the family, inheriting the 'throne' of our families. He was not born to it, but destiny came to him because of the Korean War. Therefore, as the oldest living son, he had to wear the crown of the Cho families. There was no choice for him. He had three younger sisters, and two younger brothers, the youngest of whom was only a few months old.

This made it even more important for my mother to have a son to inherit my father's family name (Cho). It was her obligation. Luckily, my mum had no living mother-in-law. Thank God. My mum's first three children were girls. One born almost every second year. But no sons. When she tried to talk to me about her painful memories, she softened the stories. However, I could read through her eyes. When she described her stories, she was looking down, and her voice was so quiet. I was old enough to catch the agony underneath her words. She was very careful about what she said to me because she did not want me to dislike my uncle. My Uncle!!! What did this have to do with my Uncle? I held my breath. The story was that when she was giving birth to the fourth child, the whole family waited outside. It was an emergency for the whole family.

When my aunt checked the baby she looked at my mum with massive disappointment. It was a girl. My aunt went out and quietly let the family know, "The fourth daughter". My mum heard my uncle's voice from outside immediately. His furious loud voice shattered on the house, "Shit, another girllll!" He was angry with my mum and did not help her or talk to her for a few weeks.

However, my mum said to me straightway, loudly, "Your father was never angry with me when I had another daughter. He was happier having another daughter than having a son. REALLY!" Poor mum, she carried her burden always as a sinner.

She was continued talking to me and explained her feelings at that time, "I was so weak when I gave birth, I felt that I might die. I put my fourth daughter on my tummy. Who can look after my little poor thing when I die?" She did not say the next sentence, but I could hear her silent voice from her eyes, "I wished you were a son." At least, if she dies, she would not be guilty, her responsibility was over. If she dies without giving birth to a son for my father, her soul might hang around in this place forever, she might not go to another place (heaven) where all life after death begins.

Fortunately, she survived. She had to have another child very soon with a weakened body. She was desperate. She did not mention it in more detail to her youngest child (me). I understood her with my

brain at that time. When I became over forty, I profoundly understood her with my heart. I might have become an adult then!

My mother's *han* was about the way she was treated when she 'failed' to give birth to a son. The mean treatment that she received from both my father's family and her own family was shaped by Korea's version of Confucianism. The ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius had been brought to Korea in the second half of the *Parhae* kingdom which lasted from 57 BCE to AD 676 (Kim, 2012). During the following kingdom, Confucian ideology became the main organising principle of Korean life. Status was organised around class – the *왕조 (Wangjo: dynasty), 양반 (Yangban: middle class), 천민* (*Cheonmin: working class)* – and around gender. Status was inherited from generation to generation and was generally not supposed to change (Kim, 2012). For example, there is a proverb, "If you cannot climb up the tree, do not look at the tree." It implies that you are born with status, you are living in this status and you die with your status. Kwon (2014) mentions that when members of the working class became rich, they bought the surname to promote their status in Korea (see also Park, 2014).

When I was studying my Masters course in my 30s, I started to like one guy from the library who was studying law. One day, I found out his name. I was very excited and said to my dear friend about his name but then she pointed out that his surname came from slavery status. I could not believe that she said that. This status existed around the times when villagers were scared that tigers might appear at their gate (a long time ago). We were now living in the 21st century. Nevertheless, she advised me that I should not consider going out with him because of his low-status surname. My mouth hung open.

Status does not even end upon death and is inherited by the children. It was the cruellest rule for Koreans. The working-class, slaves and women are good examples of this ongoing cruelty. In Korea, without asking someone's first name, people know from the surname who is upper class or working class. It is similar to England when people hear an accent and judge which part of the country someone comes from. Still, people talk about the prestige associated with their surname and are often proud of their status, like my uncle and aunt in Korea. I accepted their attitude because they were the old generation and I was supposed to respect their wisdom.

Patriarchy and Korean Confucianism

Korea thought of itself as the land of the morning calm (Kim, 2012), while China called Korea the country of courteous people in the East (Kang, 1994). This calmness and courtesy, however, was built on a patriarchal system. As Rahm notes, "Confucianism is based on the idea of male superiority within a patrilineal family structure and this ideal shaped Korean gender relations for centuries" (2020, 103). "Hierarchical social relationships between generations, classes and the sexes are thought to maintain

harmony between nature and human affairs" (Rahm, 2020, 103). For example, in Korea, there is a typical expression that women are earth, men are sky (Kim, 2016). Moreover, Abelmann notes, in Korea, women's inequality was fostered by their own family and family status (Abelmann, 2002) and they were defined by their roles as a daughter, wife, and mother.

Another example of this patriarchal Korean Confucianism can be found in the names given to women. Unlike in Anglophone cultures, Korean women keep their surnames when they are married. (I am the only one of my sisters whose surname has changed because I married an Englishman and chose to take on his surname.) However, in the Korean form of Confucianism women lose their first names when they get married to men. For example, after she was married, my mother's friends stopped calling her by the name she had grown up with – *성산면 (Seongsanmyeon)* – and started referring to her by the name of her husband's village. It was like she had lost her name (and her identity?), and was now named after something linked to my father. Then, after she had a child, women like my mother lost their names again. Now she was always just called the first child's mother (in other words, Hyun Suk's mum).

While scholars have not discussed what it means for women to lose their names like this, Kim (2018) has reflected in it in her fictional book, "My mum's name is mum." This book tells the story of a woman who dedicated her whole life to her family, telling her young child that if my children are doing well, my devotion has paid off (Kim, 2018). Yet as she got older, the woman starts realising that she had neglected herself, and her family also took her for granted, rather than treating her as special. She tells her now-adult children that she lost her life and no one even calls her by her name. She has been forgotten. The story then follows the daughter as she tries to recover her mother's real name, along with her pre-married life and identity – her hobbies, favourite foods, movies, colours, and the dreams she had when she was young (Kim, 2018).

Confucianism worked in Korea by assigning each person specific roles depending on their status and gender (Kim, 2016). The roles for women were limited. Kim (1994) states that "women's social position" was to be "devoted wives and dedicated mothers whose central role in the Confucian world was to generate a male heir to preserve the husbands' family line in Korea." (see more Rahm, 2020, 103). Women were expected to devote themselves to their husbands' families and their children (Kim, 1994). These expectations are articulated in the seven sins for which wives can be expelled from their homes in Korea (Sun, 2004; see more Kim, 1994, 148):

> Not obeying their parents in law
> Not conceiving a son
> Lewdness

Jealousy

Bad sickness

Too talkative [3]

Stealing

In having four daughters without a son, my mother was therefore treated as a sinner (Kang, 2004). If women did not provide the son for a family like my mum, which was one of the women's sins, husbands could abandon wives and no one would blame them for this immoral treatment of their wife (Kang, 2004). This was because, as Rahm observes, the male heir, firstborn son preserves the family line – if a wife sinned failing to provide a son, it meant that their husband had an acceptable excuse to leave her (Rahm, 2020). Women, therefore, had a massive pressure to have a son from the whole family, especially from mothers-in-law or mothers (Kang, 2004). My uncle was therefore upset that my mother was not fulfilling her duty to continue our family line. He was worried that the family name would die. Very luckily, the next child my mother conceived was a son. And so she survived by Confucian rule.

My Brother's Birth, My Birth

God saved my mum. Hang on a minute. Actually! My older brother saved my mum. Wow! He saved mum's life just by being born. What a saint. Eventually, she had a son eight years after her first child was born. My uncle celebrated his nephew's birth. New Born King of Cho!!! Hooray!!! My mum recovered well because my uncle did not let my mum work for a month, and helped with all the housework, and carried all the heavy stuff, but also he listened to my mum until he left the house. My mum said with a very bright voice, "It was so pleasant to see the boy's willy when I washed him." Oh, dear. She was the one who wanted a son more than my uncle. That is why my mum could not blame or hate my uncle harshly. Naughty mum!

After my brother's birth, my mother did not want any more children. But my father asked my mum to have another six more daughters. She refused, "We have enough children, no more." Yet, she was surrounded by superstitious friends. They encouraged her, "The way your boy is acting, he will bring another boy. DEFINITELY! Can you not see?" No one persuaded her, but a superstitious friend's mouth opened my mum's heart. Despite becoming a sincere Christian, my mum could not resist her friend's superstitious views, practices and customs. Neither God, Jesus nor of course the Holy Spirit influenced her. All failed.

[3] Under these Confucian rules and expectations, women are expected to not comment publicly or have opinions regarding anything that a man says.

Unfortunately, her friends were all wrong. She had another girl. "ME". I wonder how everyone felt about that. But, without their weird faith, I would not exist. I was coming from a ridiculous belief. I would like to thank them. Maybe, God was punishing my mum for her superstitious belief, "Here you go, the fifth daughter, my dear!" Almighty Heavenly Father gave her a great lesson. If she did not listen to a silly human's opinion or she did not believe an absurd idea, I would not be born in this world. Ultimately, she did not believe anymore in any humans, only God.

I loved being the youngest. I could do anything. I was allowed to do anything! I do not need to look after anyone except myself. How lucky I am. When I was ten years old, my father still asked my mum to have five more girls. The answer was from mum, "NOOOOOOOOO!" Also, I said to dad, "NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" I was very glad that my mum became a very sincere Christian, otherwise, I would lose my favourite position as the youngest. Thank God.

My brother was my mother's fortress, rock and deliverer from her sin. If my mother did not birth my brother, she was going to be in trouble. Park and Cho mention that many aspects of the patrilineal ideal and the associated preference for sons remains unchanged in modern Korean society (Park & Cho, 1995). Therefore, it is important to have a firstborn son in Korea to maintain the family line. In my family, my brother is seen as preserving the family line, even though he was the fifth child. He was brought up to be the head of our family, and when my father passed away, my whole family (including my uncles and aunts) believed that my brother was now head of our family without any discussion. It was only when I started writing this thesis that I began to ask myself why the fifth child became the head of the family.

Yet while my family followed the Confucian expectations in this regard, in another way they did not. Usually, my mother would have lost her name for the third time and be called the mother of my brother, her first son. But instead, she kept on being called the mother of the first child (Hyun Suk's mum). Although scholars of Korea have not studied the way mothers lose their previous names, they have reflected critically on the representation of mothers. Lee (2001), for example, has analysed the way Korean fairy tales continually produce patriarchal perspectives of mothers who are only spoken of in terms of what they do for their families, rather than being important people in their own right. The Confucian expectations and depictions of mothers remain powerful, with Jeon, Kim and Cho observing that representations of mothers in Korea are yet to fundamentally change despite other social changes in Korea (2013).

When Protestant Christianity was introduced in South Korea in the 1960s, Confucianist ideology was weakened (Kim, 2016). However, gender relations did not immediately change because South Koreans interpreted the story of the Bible to fit Korean society. For example, Eve was born by Adam's rib, which

implied that as a result of their gender, women's position and status were lower than men's according to the Bible (Kim, 2016). The Bible encouraged hyper-masculinity in Korean society, instead of changing gender relations. As a result, people like my mother turned to Christianity to try and help make sense of their suffering, rather than to try and change things so that they would no longer suffer so much.

My mother always said, "If I did not meet God, how could I live." I could not understand what it implied when I was young. I thought that she was very glad to meet God. I was naive. There was a more significant meaning. Her life was not as easy as I thought and what I saw. She also often said, "Compared to Jesus, my agony is nothing. Christian Faith save my life. I am very sorry for someone who did not meet the God. How do they handle their lives, indeed?"

But despite the strict Confucian gender relations, when it came to my upbringing, I was treated differently to my four older sisters. And this treatment would eventually lead me to embrace kendo. It is to the story of my upbringing that I now turn.

Becoming/Being Called a 선머슴아 (*Seonmeoseuma*)

I grew up with a lot of freedom, but I was not very aware of it. However, one day, when I was around fifteen, my aunt (my father's cousin) started to visit my house and I heard from her for the first time, "You are such a *선머슴아 (seonmeoseuma)*, aren't you?" She started to lecture me and made me realise that I am not really behaving like a girl is supposed to.

The Korean word *seonmeoseuma* is usually translated as a tomboy. According to the Oxford Dictionary (1989), the word "tomboy" was first used in 1592. The early definition of tomboy is "a girl who behaved like a spirited or boisterous boy" (Jones, 1999, 125), another example is "bold or immodest women" (Hilgenkamp & Livingston, 2002, 743). Later on, this term started to be used for girls who preferred to do activities and play games mainly associated with boys (Abate, 2011; Harris, 2000). Tomboy has also been used to refer to particular fashion and hobbies in western countries (Abate, 2011). It can have negative connotations because it threatens the masculinity of boys and the femininity of girls (Abate, 2011). Abate notes that tomboy also functioned as a protective identity, for example, protecting the sexual reputation of heterosexual girls and women, as well as closeted lesbians (and other closeted queer women) (Abate, 2011).

In South Korea *seonmeoseuma* generally conveys similar meanings to the use of tomboy in English, although *seonmeoseuma* is generally used to refer to particular behaviour rather than to a broader identity. The term *seonmeoseuma* began to be used around 1796 (King Jongjo 20) in Korea to refer to

rude or careless boys (Simpson & Weiner,1989; Korea Institute of Mental Culture, 1991). However soon it started being used to refer to girls who were behaving roughly (Korea Institute of Mental Culture, 1991). Although scholars have not studied the use of *seonmeoseuma* in-depth, several have indicated the various behaviours that the term refers to in contemporary Korea. For example, Lee (1996) observes the word is used for women who are too outgoing, Kim (2010) notes that it refers to women who behave roughly, Won (1992) mentions that it is used for women who speak too loudly or toughly, Kim (2002) uses it for girls that play boy's games, while Lee (2004) states that women who have a manly attitude are also called *seonmeoseuma*.

While Lee (1999) argues that *Seonmeoseuma* is sometimes used as a compliment for strong women, the term is still generally used as a criticism in Korea for girls and women who are deemed too masculine (Pyeon, 2005). Indeed Lee, Hyo-Seok (2014) notes that *seonmeoseuma* is often understood as a rude word, while Pyeon (2005) and Lee (2014) show how the word is treated as an insult. In my case, my aunt often gently told me off regarding my behaviours and attitudes. Yet, it did not offend me. She was merely trying to help me to fix my behaviours and attitudes to introduce Korean social perspectives on how to be a woman. For instance, some Korean men are looking for wives who will look after them well. Lee (2016) mentions that in Korea, men are still understood as just wanting to marry a *chamhan yeoja (the opposite meaning of seonmeoseuma: lady*). For this reason, my aunt was really worried about me when I became a young lady. As time passed, she took my behaviour more seriously because it became time for me to marry a fine man, and she kept telling my mother to teach me how to be *chamhan yeoja* or ladylike.

But how did I become a *seonmeoseuma* before the intervention of my aunt? Maybe it began with my hair.

My hair

I looked like a boy. Perhaps, I was affected before I was born in my mum's womb what she wished and prayed, "God, please give me one more son!" "I am sorry, mum. I will try my best to be a boy." I think that my mum also treated me as a boy as did my father. Like my brother. After playing with all the dirt with my brother, my mum did not say anything that I had done. She boiled the water in the kitchen with a wood fire, washed me with my brother in the huge rubber red basket. I saw my brother's willy looks like a small gochu (chilli). It was cute, but I did not have one. Pity! Did it matter? Absolutely, not.

Sometimes, the wood burst making sounds like a firework, my brother and I shouted, "Wow~~~" and laughed. My mum's hands were very busy, and her hands became the best scrubber. Rubbing against our bodies made the sound like when you step on the snow, "Ppodeudeuk! Ppodeudeuk!" I did not mind that it was hard and hurtful. I liked it. Also, she made a big sound from her mouth when she rinsed my

whole body with fresh water, "Swi~~~" and she rinsed my brother's body, and one more rinsed my brother's gochu (willy) and said very happily, "All done! Off you go!" Her face was with a big smile. I instinctively understood why my mum likes to wash my brother. My mum confessed when I was over twenty, "When I washed your brother, humm! It was nice and just having a son, it made me secure in my life." My first sister and fourth sister did almost everything for her, not my brother, but somewhere in her mind having a son gave her comfort.

I did not remember having long hair when I was a very little girl. My older sisters had long hair, but my father shaved my hair as he did with my brother. I did not complain. It was natural for me. Then one day, I saw a little princess Rose Girl Candy on the TV. She was almost the same age as me. She has not shaved her hair like me. She had lovely blond long hair, I thought "I want to have long hair, she is so pretty. I want to be like her. Why am I different?" I made a decision.

It was a normal Saturday morning. We did not need to help on dad's farm, being lazy was entirely acceptable to dad during the weekend. The Bible said, "You can rest during the weekend." I loved God more because of that. I was laying down and watching my favourite cartoon. No one interrupted me. Suddenly, my father's voice broke the peace and called us, "Everyone gets up and out right now!" Everyone was out except me. My father was always a little bit gentle with me because I was the youngest. Also, I took after him more than anyone. Especially in terms of temper. He liked it. He put the orange water round basket on my fourth sister's head as usual and he followed the shape of the basket and trimmed her hair like a girl.

My sister liked it very much. Then he shaved my brother's hair with clippers. He started to call me when he was shaving my brother's hair. I must go to see him before the third time he called my name. Otherwise, there was no mercy anymore. He still held his clippers. I reminded my dad to change to scissors, and said, "Please do not shave all. I would like to keep some." He smiled and said, "Close your eyes, otherwise, your tiny hair will stab your eyes." I trusted him. But he shaved the front of my head in a second. I could not cry in front of him. I bite my lip. I was sobbing without any sound, but the clipper sound was getting louder and louder as if it was teasing me and enjoying conquering my hair.

My father and his clippers won this match. I lost it. For a while, it stopped. I was head down as if my neck had been broken. And he showed me the mirror in front of me. I wished some hair was still left. I only moved my eyes up. Uhaaaa!!! All gone. My hair was the same as my brother AGAIN. I could not hold my tears and sound anymore. It just came out naturally. I did not care. I must cry to remind him, "I am not happy." My father let me cry. He was very generous on that day. It was unusual. So, I cried more loudly, I knew that he would not throw me out on the ground. He could. I cried out for a whole day. But I could not bring my hair back.

The next day, I forgot again. A few months later, my hair became normal and grew fast. It was a great joy to see it grow every day. Looking at the mirror often was unusual for me when I was young. My third sister loved looking at herself. I used to not be interested in that. However, I started to understand her.

One Saturday morning, when I woke up, my nightmare came again. My father started preparing to cut his kid's hair. This time, I would not let him touch my hair. I grabbed my shoes. I was ready to run away. My father turned his head, immediately commanded my brother to bring me over. My poor brother had no choice. My shoes became a relay race baton, I held tightly, and started running barefoot.

My little village was designed like a circle. Perfect for a relay. We ran and ran, without passing the baton. I turned my head and saw that my brother was just a few steps behind me. I said to him desperately, "Do not catch me, otherwise, I will kill you." He was out of breath and replied, "If I do not catch you, daddy will kill me. I would rather die by you than dad!" Bastard! My energy was running down, my legs were wobbling. I sat on the ground. I gave up. He dragged me out in front of my father, and who started to shave my whole hair again. I cried loudly and shook my body roughly, "My hair, my hair, no, no, no!" My father commanded my sisters and brother to hold me tightly. In front of my Father's Powerful, Hierarchical, Dominant, Dictator order no one said "NO". Sometimes, he was the scariest person I knew. Only my father kept saying to me, "You will look great. You look much better without hair. You look much prettier than any princess I know. Trust me! I have good taste." My father's bright, confident voice made me calm down and I started to believe him. He brought the small plastic red framed mirror with a handle in it and outreached in front of my face. So, I turned my face from side to side. Very surprisingly, I looked much better without hair! He was right!!! How? And my smelly, sweaty, itchy hairs were gone. It was quite hard to keep the hair in the countryside (we used hard laundry soap for our whole body). I felt great. Heaven! I was looking surely prettier than before. I must listen to him more often. Indeed.

Among other things, this story shows the deep influences parents can have on children. But the media is also influential when it comes to gender. Indeed, I started see what kind of girl I wanted to be on TV, and I tried to build my identity by myself as a girl. However my father had influenced my views of girl's appeal by cutting my hair short like I was a boy. It was easier to maintain, and stopped me scratching my hair at night, which was stopping me from sleeping. But still, it was a very unusual thing for thing to do to a girls hair.

Delamont (1980) mentions that one of the key ways the children learn about gender roles (and ideologies) is through the division of fashions and hobbies into feminine and masculine in western countries such as Britain, Australia and the United States (see also Borgatta et al., 2000). In the second

half of the 20th Century in South Korea, girls were supposed to have long hair and wear the colour pink in Korea, whereas boys were supposed to have short hair and wear the colour blue (Jamieson & Orr, 2009; Park, 2011). In South Korea, these colours are used early, with baby boys typically surrounded by blue toys, while in contrast, baby girls are surrounded by pink hair bands and dolls (Choi, 2018). As a likely consequence, Park (2011) found that four to seven years old boys selected blue more, and girls selected pink more in South Korea.

My sisters and brother were brought up with traditional gendered expectations. There were some strict rules for my sisters and my brother around what they looked like, and what they wore. However, this strictness generally did not apply to me. One result of this was that I did not clearly understand the gender categories of girls and boys at that time because my hair. Likewise, I did not know the exact differences between fashion for girls and boys. I wore blue and pink and liked both. I knew on some level that my brother never wore pink, and had his hair cut short, and that my sisters' hair was longer and they loved pink but were not fond of blue. But it was unclear how this related to me.

It took a cartoon for me to realise that I wanted to look like a "princess". As in much of the world, the media in South Korea is very powerful, and women's fashion, facial images, and sexy beauties are more likely influenced by "socio-culture environments factors" (Baek et al., 2012, 44). In particular, images of actresses in film and cartoons have shaped notions of how girls and women should look from the 1960s to the 1990s (Baek et al., 2012). And these depictions of women tended to emphasise forms of femininity – youthful and pure or sophisticated and sexy – rather than anything associated with masculinity. It was not until much later in 2001 that a film came with a positive depiction of a rough and bossy, although still pretty, *seonmeoseuma* as the central character (the film was titled *엽기적인 그녀: yeobgijeog geunyeo,* "*A Sassy Girl*"). So eventually, my era came.

I was around six. Once my father's lessons started, it seemed they would never end. My brother and I would kneel for over two hours, there was so much he wanted to pass on to his son. But my brother would start to get sleepy. My father used to tell him off. I never went to sleep. My eyes and my heart were open to absorb all his words. My father's eyes were a little bit dissatisfied when my brother really did not concentrate his words, but when he saw my eyes looking at him intently, his voice rose, and he talked with passion again. How to be a man. The importance of justice, bravery, strength. How fascinating. My brother's dull eyes made my father stop. And then my father said, "Ok! Ok! That's all for today. Next time, I will teach you more." Suddenly, my brother's eyes started to shine brightly like stars. Strange. My eyes were completely opposite. My father looked disappointedly at my brother. I looked disappointedly at my father. When would the next lesson be?

But even though I wanted to be a princess, I also loved my father's special lessons and wanted to learn from him. I thought that all men were very lucky (except that they were not allowed to cry like girls or women, I was sorry for them regarding that). However, as a girl, I was very lucky, too. Because my father started to give my brother lessons about the masculine world. I was invited as a guest. These were the most sensational moments in my young life – hearing the secret of how to be a man, I mean a true man. I learnt alongside my brother and loved hearing my father's lessons. I adored his leadership, loved catching the lessons of how to be a strong man, how to be a success, how to live life, how to lead people, and so on. I knew I could not be a boy, and I did not want to be a boy. But I wanted to learn what boys learned. To be able to do what boys did. To do and learn the same things as my brother did. Even when he didn't want me to.

My Brother and Me

One day, I noticed my brother lying down on the floor doing nothing. After a while as I played with my third sister and her dolls, my brother slowly started moving. Suspicious. He might have a plan with his friends. I smelled it. I pretended to play with my third sister. My eyes were watching Rose Girl Candy, but my mind concentrated on his movements. He carefully opened the door and closed it. I stood up rapidly and opened the door. He was grabbing his shoes rather than wearing them. I knew it! Something is coming! I shouted to him with full excitement, "DaeHyun!" (my older brother's name: I was not supposed to call his name in Korea. You never ever call the name of someone older than you. I did not care. He was under my control. I only called him, "Oppa: older brother" when my father was around. Otherwise, my father would kill me. And I did not want to die yet.) "Where are you going?" I yelled. He looked up at me, his face scared shitless and said, "I am not going anywhere." His voice was shaking. I replied, "I seeeeeeee." Then he said, "I need to go wee." I followed him. I was inspecting him outside of the toilet where I could see his feet and head. Suddenly, he kicked the toilet door and started running. I shouted, "Youuuu!"

He could not get rid of me in this little town. He tried so many times, but each time, he failed. Anyway, immediately, I took off my slippers, grabbed them. "I will get you, bastard!!!" I screamed. Stubborn and determined, it was me. His one shoe came off, "Thank you, God!" He picked it up and started wearing it because the little stones were hurting him. I was barefoot. I did not care. I pushed myself to get him. Of course, I succeeded. I grabbed his T-shirt and tumbled with him to the ground. I saw the massive disappointment in his eyes. In contrast, my mouth opened like a hippo. Haaaaaa!!! He was such a nice gentle boy, he could not resist, he dropped his shoulder and walked very slowly. I was the opposite. I encouraged him to walk fast and then run. A few minutes later, he started to run with me. He met up with his friends. The boys looked at me and looked at my brother. They knew immediately; my brother had failed again. They were so disappointed. Hahahahahahaha.

It was a BIG day. They ran to the rice field. They caught a snake and frogs at the same time. It was unusual. Usually if they wanted to catch a snake, they must go to the mountain, but on that day, the snake was having a frog as his snack in the rice field. What a lucky day for boys. Both of them were a boy's snack. They made a fire, grilled the frogs and snakes and ate them. Eeeeeeugh!!! Disgusting!!! The snake was the grossest animal. I stepped back for a while and I was squatting and playing with a stick on the ground by myself. Boring!!! I could hear all the boys, "Why is she with us?" My brother said, "I do not know." I felt left out, but I kept my distance and stayed with them.

After they filled their tummies, heavy rain started suddenly pouring down. All the boys ran into the rice field again. Yahooooo!!! They started swimming in the muddy rice field that was filled with water already. When it is raining, the water rises very quickly. My brother climbed up the hill and dived. All the boys followed him. I was so scared. If I did not jump, they will not take me on their next adventure. I hated it, but this time, I had no choice. I must do what boys do. Heavy rain covered my face. I closed my eyes, hold my nose with both hands and jumped. Waaaaaah!!! Surprisingly, I landed like a gymnastic player. How do I stand up? I took off my hand from the nose and arise my arms and looked at the sky, heavy rain pouring into my face, and shouted. "Yahooooo!!!" It was glorious. I tried to get out, but my feet were stuck in the mud. Eventually, I came out with mud. I wanted to cry because I do not like dirty things. But I knew that boys did not like anyone who cried. I tried to smile instead. I had to prove that I can do this. I jumped and jumped. I drank and drank so many muddy water. Horrible. Yet also fun. But I had forgotten that I was wearing the new long purple velvet dress that my mother bought me for the first time in my life. I was the youngest so I never had new clothes. I tried to wash it. All the boys were looking at me. I stopped it. My poor dress!

I joined the boys' festival again. They were catching fish with their tops. I shared my brother's one. And we picked snails, after diving on the hill to the rice field over again and again. As rainwater filled the rice field it became a perfect swimming pool. I was scared because it was getting deeper. I hated deep water, but I stayed in. I drank from the muddy water, but all the boys were laughing when they saw me. I contributed some joy to them. They included me more, so I forgot the fear and laughed with them loudly. Some of them were great fun, some of them were terrifying.

All day, I was outside with them in the heavy rain. After a while, my soaked body began to shake. I could not control my lips like an engine. Buluuuuuu. I picked up hundreds of snails and carried them on my velvet dress that was not purple anymore. It turned brown like a poo colour. The rain stopped, mud water became like glass. I tried to see myself in the reflection on the water. The mud-covered my whole body and face, even my hair. Eventually, my hair turned brown. I turned my head up and down, side to side, "Wow, brown hair! I've got brown hair!" I shouted. All the boys looked at me madly. I moved my face more closely to the water, "Who is this? Is it me? I got brown hair! Why am I not pretty

like Rose Girl Candy? That is weird!" On that day, I learned a great lesson. I could not be Rose Girl. I looked ridiculous with brown hair. I was much better with my real hair colour, black. Since then, I did not try to be anyone else. I wanted to be just me. Honga.

When I got back home, my fourth sister looked at me with shock as I dropped hundreds of snails from my dress into the red plastic basket. She washed me. I put on the red tight pyjamas, opened the door, and curled inside a brown flowery blanket on the warm floor (which was heated by the fire when my fourth sister was cooking for me. She was around 11). Watching the heavy rain while inside the cosy warm blanket was the best reward. I had endured the repellent snake, and the horrors of being dirty and wet, and gained a great victory. I reflected on what I had learned that day. It was much more fun than playing princess stories. After I had dived into the water, the boys had accepted my presence in their company. I had passed their test. Next time, they will test me again. I will survive again. What a wonderful day. Boys know how to live life with fun! Definitely!

Did I dream of what I might do in the future like other kids? Yes, but not completely. What kind of dreams did I have? My dreams were different from others. Becoming a doctor or a firefighter was not my dream. My dream was how to join the boys the next day. And this dream often came true. Playing outside with boys, was extraordinarily magical and adventurous. Sylvester (2015) also had a similarly experienced when she was playing outside:

> I loved watching the television series, *Robin of Sherwood*. Playing as a child was outdoors and adventurous. I remember playing in our front yard, wearing a plastic bow on my back, hiding behind trees aiming at imaginary foes, and engaging in sword fights with broken off branches. (9)

Like Sylvester, I was one of those "Girls" who played in a group where everyone else was a "Boy" (Sylvester, 2015). Yet the first battle for me was to join in the adventures. I had to fight to enter into this outside play that seemed a natural part of the boys' world. A part of me was always aware of what my brother was doing, in case he tried to sneak off again without me. The other boys were not happy with it. But my brother was the leader of the boys. And I led my brother. They had to accept me. Every single time, I turned up with my brother, their faces changed to something like a crushed tin bowl. I did not get upset, instead, I treasured their expressions as a sign of another victory for me. I thought that they should go to acting school, their dismay was so vivid. It amused me. I had an iron face. I learned from my father's long lesson. Now I was able to put the lesson into practice.

Most of my favourite memories as a child involve playing with those boys. They were so cool and tough. I liked that even though I could not do everything that they did. If I wanted to stay, I had no

choice to complain about what they did or I could not suggest what we could do. I just needed to follow whatever they did and go wherever they went. I had to deal with it all. Sometimes, I felt isolated from them and lonely. But most of the time I adored it. Challenging boys was a joy.

I looked like the boys too. I already had the hair that my father kept short, and I quickly learnt to wear trousers as well. Girls' clothes in Korea are designed for indoor use, just like those in Western countries (Delamont, 1980; Katz, 1986; Borgatta et al., 2000), and the predominant feminine colour is bright pink (Jamieson & Orr, 2009). This was true of Korea as well. Yet the bright pink dresses got dirty easily, and stopped me from climbing trees and mountains, hanging out in fields, and running with the boys. In other words, the dress stopped me from moving. Yet sometimes, I was also a little bit disappointed when my mother purchased my dress or shoes. She soon started choosing only the dark colour of dresses and sandals for me, realising that dark colours were better for me when I followed my brother to play outside. Which was fine, but, strangely, in my mind, at times I thought my mother should have given to me bright red or pink. Sometimes.

Still, I loved the days filled with physical exertion. Even though I often felt dead by the time evening came, I'd sleep deeply and then be resurrected the next morning, ready for more. McVey et al. (2012) have found that so-called "tomboys" feel more positive about their bodies, and enjoy learning how to use them (McVey et al., 2012), observing the importance of "the freedom to express individuality through the body, connection with the physical environment, and the openness to use the body as a source of knowledge in interacting with the world." (183)

Wedgewood and Sykes note that many girls develop a positive embodiment by playing masculine sports at school (Wedgwood, 2004; Sykes, 2007). Positive embodiment means that girls are more confidently managing and controlling their body movement (Wedgwood, 2004). As Wedgwood observes, through playing football or training full-contact sports, adolescent females are able to develop "a less fragile embodiment and a great sense of their real physical potential." (153) For example, learning skills, tactics and tackles teaches them to how to interact with others and their own body in sports. This helps them move naturally and efficiently, allowing them to be as comfortable kicking balls as those boys who grew up playing football. But for me, this positive embodiment came outside of school, through the adventures I had with my brother and his friends. Through the challenges of beating the boys in this outside world, I became strong and vigorous, happy with my body, and full of life. School, however, was a different matter.

Segregation – Becoming a "Girl"

My life started to change slowly when I entered primary school. In particular, I started to "learn" more about the gendered behaviours that were expected of me. For example, I learned about how girls were

supposed to dress, look, and behave, while even my father stopped cutting my hair short. In primary school in Korea, girls tend to play with girls, while boys play with boys (Kim, 2004). As with places like England, gender segregation is learned at school in Korea (Hargreaves, 1994). I could play with girls at school and outside of school, sometimes I could join unisex games like *나이 먹기* (*Nai meoggi: an attacking territory game between two sides*), *무궁화 꽃이 피었습니다* (*Mugunghwa kkochi pieossseubnida: a game like Hide-and-seek*), and *오징어 게임* (*Ojingeo game: another territory game between two sides*), but I could not join in with the boys during school. While no one prevented me from playing with the boys, it became very awkward and a bit embarrassing when I tried to enter into their games. It was like I was made to realise that I was a girl who was not welcome in this boys' space. I vividly remembered at the lunch break, standing in the middle of the playground, not knowing what to do. Should I join the girls or the boys? So I started to separate myself from the boys at school to avoid those uncomfortable, alienating feelings and joined in the with the girls where we played games like *공기 놀이* (*gongginoli: playing with pebbles*), *고무줄 놀이* (*playing with rubber bands*), or *팔방 놀이* (*palbang noli: drawing a line, throwing a stone inside the line and then picking it up in a single jump*). Sylvester (2015) describes a similar experience with rugby of being made conscious that she was a girl, and that this gendered status made her supposedly unsuitable to play with, and like, the boys:

> I was the only female player and was the first or second picked to be on a team… Although I was aware I was the only female participating, I wasn't conscious I was a girl when engaged in play… It was only near the end of primary school (as I was about to enter high school) that I was told girls don't play sports like rugby. It was then that my peers started to tease me and I was prevented from participating by my teachers… I received a strong message (as a 12-year-old) that girls cannot play sports as boys do. (9-10)

Stories of tomboys in Asian culture are relatively rare, however Mary Kimoto Tomita (1995) has reflected on her experiences as an American girl growing up in Japan as an *otemba* (tomboy) and bonding with other tomboys, and enjoying the thrill of being the only girl to take up kendo in her class (39). Tomita tried to persuade some of the other girls around her to also join in kendo, but was unsuccessful, with one fearing that she would lose her "dignity" (34).

Outside of school, however, I still preferred hanging out with the boys. I refused to give up the thrill of playing games like *불꽃 놀이* (*Bulkkochnoli: putting charcoal into a can and burning it on the mountain at midnight*), *자치기* (*Jachigi: a game played by hitting or bouncing a small stick with a long stick*), *딱지치기* (*Ttagjichigi:a traditional Korean game for boys who place a folded sheet of paper on the ground and eat it when it flips over by hitting it with another sheet*) with my brother and the other boys.

Then my aunt (my father's younger sister) passed away, and my family moved to a town where I went to a different primary school with thousands of strange kids. And everything changed. Not only did I lose all contact with the village boys, but in this town the girls and boys also did not play together. After school, all the kids seemed to disappear. If I wanted to play with my friends (female), we needed to arrange the time. Sometimes, my brother brought his friends and I played a little bit with them, but it was not the same as before. Also it seemed not right. I felt lonely and for a while, I missed the joys of my previous country life.

The gendered segregation increased when I went to middle school. South Korea is one of the places where girls are often separated from boys after Primary School (Schoon & Eccles, 2014). Now I was at a girls' school. I only saw the boys on the street. It was even rare for me to talk to my brother, and I never followed him out again. Instead, I started to play with other girls, running, dancing and volleyball etc. It was fun but different, and something massive was lacking. Still, after a while, it started to feel natural to only spend time with other girls. Gradually, I forgot all the games that I had played with those village boys.

Like so many other children, I had finally learnt that girls wore skirts while boys wore trousers and that girls played indoors and boys played outside (Borgatta et al., 2000; Katz, 1986). My school uniform meant that I wore a skirt every day, and middle school taught me how to be feminine (Spence, 1985; Pfister, 2010). In particular, I was taught how to cook, make clothing, how to nurse, along with ballet, music and painting. It was one of those education systems that seemed designed to encourage girls to take up different, more feminine, hobbies than boys (Borgatta et al., 2000). We had Physical Education (PE) twice a week but never played any contact sports. The most exciting parts of my life had vanished. And I was no longer much of a *seonmeoseuma*. Sylvester (2015) notes that when she quit rugby, she missed it and she lost a sense of self and confidence (Sylvester, 2015). Although I did not notice at the time, I now think that I might have been experiencing a similar loss.

During High School, however, I had some opportunities to show the tomboy side of me despite still wearing a skirt as my uniform. Physically active women, such as female athletes, were celebrated at my High School. I was searching for an activity that I could truly love. I participated in extracurricular activities and athletics as much as I could. Giving speeches for student president election in front of thousands of students, playing music in the school band, dancing at the summer school trip, and in particular, playing sports. Han et al., (2015) found that schoolgirls in South Korea who take up physical education are more likely to make friends and have an active social life. This was true for me, and being good at sports and some official school actives made me popular, with some girls writing me fan letters, and some putting roses on my desk.

I started to enjoy my life again. To enjoy being a tomboy again. This time cutting my hair short was my decision, and it made me feel reconnected who I was. Recently, I realised why I was allowed to celebrate those things. Because I met an incredible male teacher. He taught us to have a dream and a passion. He was like my father. He was the second person who, as a man, gave me a great lesson how to live life as a human, not just a woman. His eyes believed in us all like my father believed me. My first year of high school was a very important moment in school life because of him. I was allowed to be confident and allowed to build masculine identity without it being a problem. It seemed that it was very good thing. I loved my first year school teacher for this reason. But it was over too quickly. When I entered the "real world" after graduating from high school, I encountered strict gender norms again. The fun of being a *seonmeoseuma* completely disappeared, and so did my delight with life. Waking every morning was not delightful. My heart became numb, my brain comatose, my body felt paralysed. I screamed inside my mind, "Why my life is so dull? I cannot live like that, God! It is better to die. Please make my life fun again." I did not like to drink alcohol, I did not like clubbing. Even when I went out with friends it was not enchanting. I tried to live like other young women, but it did not work. I couldn't spend my youth like this. I needed something else. "God! God! My God! Where are you?

My First Crush – Falling in Love with Kendo

When my husband visited my father's farm house for the first time he saw all the children's wedding pictures, and family pictures randomly covering the wall everywhere. My husband looked at our early family photo and asked me, "Who is this big boy next your brother?" and he asked me again, "Where are you, darling?" I looked at him, "Darling, it is Me." He said, "Oh~~~I am sorry."

My happiness was growing with my rice bowl. Rice was sweeter than honey. I became a 뚱보 (Ttungbo: fat girl). I was the biggest girl in the school. This was my first achievement to be number one. Yet, when I looked at the mirror, still, no one beat my beauty. One day, my brother asked me to do something together. TOGETHER!!! What a wonderful idea. I had not been playing with my brother from middle school. I hardly know about him since then. I got so excited. My brother suggested to have a group meeting. Meeting for what? I brought my friends and he brought his friends. This meeting was only for making a match and having a date. I was disappointed. I thought that we were doing something fun like when we were children. Four girls secretly put our stuff on the table and the boys picked one. Luckily, I got the best boy. I was so happy, but that boy's face was almost ready to run away and none of my brother's friends (bastards) liked me because I was fat. I came back home and looked at the mirror. There was a big King Kong standing.

Since then, as a young adult, I started looking after my weight and looking pretty (heating up a metal chopstick on the stove and perming my eyelashes just like my older sisters), for getting the attention of

boys was becoming my battle. I searched for physical activities for this reason. I started to ride a bicycle for commuting across the mountain, on the way work, swimming for four hours every morning, and also attempted a lot of sports. All my coaches and friends started to mention to me that I could be a professional at one or more of these sports. But I was never interested. Studying and becoming sportswoman was last thing I wanted to do because it was the lowest class in the academic area in Korea. I did not want to become a person of such low status. At the time they had not deep meaning for me. I was only interested in doing sports so that I looked amazing for young men. My brother's friends (bastards) really taught me that, and Korean society told me that. I also knew that if I was a pretty girl then I would have multiple choices from which to pick capable future husband in order to live a comfortable life. To be picked up by successful man was the best luck a young woman like me could have at the time. Unfortunately it became true, because as I was getting prettier, I was attracting more wonderful men. Even on the street, often many fine men followed me. So, I believed that this silly social idiom (being feminine and looking pretty for man also) was worthy. Oh, dear. *My young adult life felt hard because I fought this battle (looking pretty for men) rather than fighting more for my own success and the chance to be independent. This incorrect direction started to fall apart. I got bored with each new sport. Doing exercise was torture when it was boring. I had to love it, otherwise, I could not survive in this battle (I started getting bigger again). I was stuck. Help!!!*

Somehow, I settled as a young lady. I kept my size at safe zone, but still something was missing in my life. Even romance did not bring me fulfilment. I needed more than a man. More than a future husband. I did not know what it was, but I craved something beyond all that. "What is it? Where is it?" One day, walking down my street, searching for something meaningful, not men this time, but living with joy, I looked up at the sky. The stars were hiding shamefully because the street lights were brighter than them. Even the moon was shrouded and outshone by the attention-seeking street lamps. In big cities in Korea, the evening is brighter than during the day. I was drearily reading crazy advertising neon signs all about foods, which was meaningless because my tummy was full. It was better to see the concrete road, I might spot a coin. Yet I could not find any coins either. The road was as tedious as the sky. I dragged my eyes upwards again, then stopped as I saw a very handsome word. 검도 *(KUMDO: kendo in Korean).*

"What is kendo?" I asked myself. The vivid red word was glowing brightly fifty meters away. It captivated me with a sense of life and solemnity. Back home that night in bed, I recalled vague memories of seeing martial arts on tv, of hearing discussions of manly dignity and courage. And of one instance where I had heard someone speak about kendo as a remarkable thing to do. I found myself imagining warriors wearing armour on the battlefield, swinging their swords, striving to win. "Are people still doing it? Wow! How?" I said to myself, "You are ridiculous." Yet then, I had a flashback to my childhood, to playing with my brother and the other boys with any wooden stick. We almost killed each

other every day (although our parents never needed to know about that). That was why rural kids like me were rough and tough. Yet we learnt how to avoid harming each other seriously, just a few scratches on our body. It was thrilling, real and very fun. It made me smile happily. "Can I live again like that? Hmmm… Let's find out tomorrow."

I could not sleep. Even know I cannot explain exactly why. It felt like I had met a strange man on the street and immediately fallen in love. The word kendo enticed me with its mystery. I wanted to find out more. When morning arrived I put some clothes on, hurried out and arrived early. I stood and stared at the red letter. It was not powerfully attractive to me, but I felt strangely connected, as if a baby and mum connected with placenta. The chilly air smashed me, it was so fresh. I had stopped early morning exercise a few months before. I missed it. I was looking for the door, but I could not find any entrance, "Where is it?" I searched but never found it, and went home disappointed. The next day was same, I could not sleep, I felt a little bit excited as if waiting for date with someone I had only seen a picture of. This time, I banged on the door early in the morning. But no one was there.

On the third day, I did everything to open the door. I drummed on it with my fists, and run around, up and down. Although I wore white clothes, I felt like I might be mistaken as a thief in the dark. Another abandoned door was covered by plastic which was flapping in the wind. The morning was getting dark, with the sun hiding behind clouds. I was a little bit more scared than the days before. I was screaming "Is anyone there?" The silence remained. I sat on the floor, ready to give up. One voice inside my head was telling me, "Go home! Here is nothing for you. What are you looking for in this dark, cold creepy place? Go home and sleep!" I stood up and I smashed the door with both hands and kicked the abandoned door nearby. Now my hands and feet hurt. Leaning against the door, I was silent for a few seconds to calm down my temper and breath. I was about to give up something that I was strangely excited by. I had a last big sigh that made me sort of let it go, "Enough, It is enough." I had nurtured a little hope that kendo would rescue my life. As if kendo was like 백마탄 왕자님 (Baekmatan wangjanim: the knight on a white horse in shining armour). I felt sad. I had fought to find this kind of exciting feeling for such a long time. I did not want to go back to a normal and boring life again. I called God and I looked at the sky and it was so awfully, utterly grey.

I took one step forward and almost left. What a heavy moment. Then, I heard very quiet voice, so quiet. I had to go back to the door to put my ear against the door. A young woman's voice was coming from somewhere. She was telling me to come down. "Who is this?" I could not believe it. I shouted immediately because I did not want lose her, "Hello! Hello!" I was desperate, "How can I get in? Where is the entrance?" She explained, but I hardly understood. She raised her voice, "Basement". I

repeated very loudly, "Basement?" I became so excited, looking everywhere like mad mouse for the entrance to the basement. Finally I found it.

I went down into a dark, scary basement. I wanted to run away. I hated this kind of mood and feeling. Then I saw a big poster of kendo. An iconic figure was wearing very dark clothes and staring at me. I paused a second, staring back. His eyes were vivid and sharp as if he would come out from the poster. I liked that very much. Looking at it helped me to stop running away. I went down more, then I could see a small little light. I held my breath in the dark. A lady was walking towards me. She turned on the light, it sounded so loud, "Ttak" My heart jumped. My eyes closed. I knew that she was human, but, what if she is a witch or a ghost? I opened my eyes, and it felt like my heart stopped, my body freezing like a fish one ice. The lady was standing there wearing same clothes like an actor on the poster. But she was real. It felt surreal. "Wow~~~~~!" I'd never seen a woman wearing an outfit like that before. It looked like a skirt that was built for vigorous activity. Built for war. Like the outfit of a warrior, who was also a ballerina with male dignity. She looked so strong, elegant and cool. I did not know that woman knights existed in this world. The sight was absolutely, remarkable and BEAU~~~TIFUL! Words fail to explain her. I WAS IN LOVE. For the first time, I was in love without a man. The bright and exciting life that I had dreamed of was finally landing on me. Hallelujah!

The woman invited me to see her train. I sat down on the floor. She was fighting a man! Yelling at him with a loud voice with such dynamic energy. There was no fear at all. The sticks (bamboo swords) were smashing across each other. I could not take my eyes off of her. I could not breathe. It was more than I was looking for. Much more. I wanted to grab the stick and join in. I wanted to belong here. Here was the solemn dignity and moderation that my father had taught me and my brother, along with the joy of battle that I'd had with those boys from the village. Even the dojo smelt good like burning wood, taking me back to the favourite winter aromas of my childhood. And it looked great.

It still gives me goosebumps when I think of it now.

During my first training session, I felt reborn. Here were men I could fight with. Men, I could be friends with for the first time since I was a child. We bonded immediately. On that day, I found what I had lost a long time ago. A masculine world that I could be part of. After training, we went for breakfast. I said to them, "You all look amazing." They all laughed, "We are all beginners (white belt)". I could not believe them. They told me, "You are the scary one." When they taught me how to yell, I just did it. My gentle smiley face became like a tiger. It was so easy. It seemed like my whole body had waited for this moment. My kendo friend lent me his shinai (bamboo sword). I kept smashing as hard as I could for as long as I could. I felt great. I was born to be a strong woman.

I slept soundly that night, just like when I returned home from playing with the boys. After training for one month with my blue armour, I joined Keiko (sparring practise) for the first time. I went wild. I did not know the rules. I ran to my opponents and attacked them non-stop. My male friends were all going backwards. I pushed them into in the wall and I hit them until they said, "Please stop. Please. It hurts" I loved hearing that. I felt glorious. They had surrendered. I killed them all. Ha! At breakfast, they shook their heads and asked, "What happened to you? You look like a lady, but when you wore the armour, you became crazy." They continued, "You will be in national team in Korea." "What? You all are crazy." I replied at once. I laughed, but they were all serious. I stopped laughing.

Waking up early in the morning to train was a cruel thing. But kendo stimulated me more than anything I had ever experienced. If I lost focus for just a second, my male friends hit my head. I did not like that at all. I hated losing to them. Every day I was full of energy, driven by the need to beat them. Once again my days were filled with the excitement of masculine adventure with strong vigorous men. It was even more than I had hoped. What would happen next?

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how I came to kendo. While gender roles are generally strict in South Korea, I grew up with much more freedom than my sisters and my brother. Confucian ideas about male superiority did not dominate my childhood at home and my identity as *seonmeoseuma* was accepted. Some of my parents' own behaviour demonstrates this acceptance, such as the cutting of my hair. Perhaps it was because I was the youngest. My parents' reputation was safe with my sisters and brother, therefore, whatever I did or did not do was not an issue for them. I just needed to be healthy. That was all. So I had a place being the last child, it did not make anyone shameful at all. Or perhaps it was because my parents secretly wanted another boy. My father cut my hair like a boy, allowed me to listen in to the lessons he gave my brother, and my parents allowed me to wear trousers, and to go off with my brother and play with his friends. It was not that they encouraged it, more that they allowed it.

Pyeon (2005) points out that children should play beyond the feminine and masculine roles. Children can be argued to live within a more private "inside" space, however as we grow we become more gendered and have to confront societal expectations of our behaviour. It was as a young woman at school that I began to experience the effects of segregation and the negative impacts that cultural expectations of my behaviour had on me. As Kim (2004) details, there is now a movement in South Korea to develop a curriculum for all students rather than teaching boys and girls separate things. Jung (2010) hopes that this will improve the social education for girls, which is currently insufficient. But when I was growing up, I was the only person I knew who had the absolute freedom to play with who I wanted. As a result, I became a *seonmeoseuma*. The fact that this word exists shows that even in the strict gender segregation of Korea, there has been a history of girls like me who embraced the masculine,

outdoor world. Like Sylvester and Dekšnytė (2013), I loved many elements of this manly world where you could fight physically with your friends, and still be friends. Through this world, I learned to be comfortable with a body that ran, fought, and then slept in exhaustion afterwards.

But I experienced powerful gender segregation at school. First through discovering that I was unwelcome in the spaces and games that the boys at school played. Then through going to girls-only schools for middle school and high school. I lost my sense of masculinity. Then as an educated young adult, I struggled immensely without knowing why I was struggling. I quickly got bored with the sports, because my only aim was to make my body look beautiful. I had no male friends to hang around with. Men were supposed to be for husbands, not friends, and I was supposed to be on the path to becoming a good wife. Gendered expectations seem even more strict for adults than kids in South Korea. Wives should look after their children's health and education and be "inside-people", while the husband earns money for the family from working in the "outside" world (Kim, 2016; Moon, 2002). From this dynamic, the personal *han* of my mother arose. I did not want to be dependent on a man, or to carry her *han*. When I discovered the world of kendo, I found independence in a masculine space where women could join in, seemingly as equals. It transformed my life. Suddenly I was able to fight with men – to beat them, to conquer them – while being friends with them as well. Once again, I felt alive.

Chapter 4: Exploring My Anger – Moving to London

Angry Tiger

At 33 I unexpectedly found myself married in England without a job or any other form of status. When I was a lecturer, I visited London every holiday period for two years to learn English in order to undertake my PhD at Yonsei University. While I was in London, I went to local kendo dojos to continue my training. During one training, I scolded a member of the British national team for not being aggressive enough when he fought with me. I told him "When you cut it should be like a punch through my throat." Then he did it so quickly that I was not able to move out of the way. I fell hard on the floor. It hurt, but I stood up quickly, told him that what he had done was 'great', and gave him the thumbs up. Later he said that was the moment he fell in love with me. It was very strange. In Korea, men seemed to run away from me in this situation, but this man soon asked me to marry him. I said yes. We got married after a few dates. It was quick, and I moved to live with him in London.

My friend called her husband "sky". I liked it. I started to call my husband "sky", then he said, "You weirdo." Nevertheless, I decided to be the earth to his sky. For example, when we had a chicken for Sunday roast, he always offered to pull the wishbone. I lost for sixteen years deliberately because I wanted to play myself down (but tonight after writing this chapter, I decided to try win and then I won). Sacrifice was my job so I gave up all my dreams, and his dreams became my dreams. I had no problem with it.

However, becoming a housewife in a country whose language I still found hard to speak was difficult. Very little things started to make me angry. My husband often said to me when I was angry, "You little monkey." Yet I was not a little monkey, I was an angry tiger. I often hurt his very gentle heart. My poor husband did not know what to do. I had not been an angry person in Korea. I was fierce and passionate in life and kendo, but I was a gentle and bright lady in daily life. When something bad happened in my life, I got upset or sad, so I cried alone and grieved for a few days. Then I forgot about it. However, anger became a dominant emotion in London. Particularly, when I was teaching kendo. This chapter is about that time and the forms of anger that I experienced in London.

Forms of Anger

I grew up with my mother's lecture every day, "Do not be angry with people like your father." Yet I wanted to be like my father one day. He was my superhero. The one who taught me the secrets of how to be a warrior, but only when my mother was away at the market. Then she would return and tell me to "love people". I did. For that reason, I am still a very cheerful person. Except with kendo.

Kendo training awoke a big wild tiger inside me. Then I became fighter like my father in kendo. Donohue (2015) notes that kendo can help develop both self-control and the joy of excitement during competitions. I learnt control, but the most exciting thing about training and competing was the chance to become a fierce warrior. To beat everyone. In kendo, I could live out the truth of my father's lessons. But I did not get angry in kendo or elsewhere. Just ferocious. Until I moved to live as a wife, migrant, and sensei in London.

Not much has been written on kendo with regards to anger. Instead, Dumić (2016) speaks about kendo bringing people together, which is true, I experienced this every night after training. The closest research was that of Satoh et al. (1991) who mention that kendoka can experience "aggression, intention, self-assertion and expressions of anger". (65) Yet, I did not experience this anger in kendo. I wanted to win, but kendo was not about the cathartic release of anger for me. Going to kendo training was like going to ballet or music concert or theatre. The artistic side of kendo was as same as those arts, moving, touching, inspiring, enlightening and beautiful. The kendo dojo was my stage to express myself like an actress, ballerina, singer, and presenter. If I needed to express frustration, I needed to go to church, not the kendo dojo.

This chapter is going to explore ideas of "anger", which are expressed differently in Korea and western countries. Anger can be linked to gender and power relationship, patriarchy, hyper-masculinity, religion and socio-cultural expectations including family beliefs. I will trace anger in Korean words and observe where my anger fits. Im (2000) distinguishes between conceptualizations of *화 (hwa: anger*) in Korean. For instance, *골 (gol)* means that anger caused by being disgusted or upset, *노여움 (noyeoum)* comes from erupting emotions by resentment and disappointment, *분 (bun)* caused by unfairness and torment, *분노 (bunno)* is pouring out anger, *성 (seong)* is unpleasant feelings caused by disagreeable emotions (Im, 2000).

Lee (2007) highlights the illumination of *hwa*, which is constructed on a cognitive scenario of "bad feeling". Lee also distinguishes that scenario of *hwa* is different from "anger'" in English (Lee, 2007). She claims that the explosion of *hwa* (*화를 내다: hwaleul naeda)* explains "pragmatic meanings and expression of emotion because *hwa* in Korean has a different social and cultural function." (77-96) In consequence, this language and cognition are intertwined in different ways (Lee, 2007). Im (2014) also reveals in his paper that "semantic characteristics of 'anger' in the Korean cultural perspective of cognitive linguistics and contrastive view, there are a lot of commonalities in physiological metonymy among cultures and socio-cultural contexts, Korean has the greatest number of body parts related to the response to 'anger', and the most precise physiological responses." (199)

In western culture, “anger” is described as follows: anger is nursed by “feelings of disappointment, hurt, rejection, and embarrassment” including losing temper (Chapman, 2015, 15). Rosenwein (2020) comments that if anger is natural, and thus part of human nature, then it is vital not to reject it, but instead important to try to understand it. For example, “Where it resides, how it is produced, how it works, how we might control it.” (Rosenwein, 2020, 130). Poole (1886) declares that “Anger is sin, anger destroys our own peace.” (93). Chapman (2015) also highlights as Poole, anger is hurting people’s lives, but people do not know how to fix it. Anger could be silent or explosive, it could damage relationships, it should be learned how to handle anger in healthy ways, “understanding the origin of anger is essential to understanding the purpose of anger is essential to learning how to process anger in a constructive manner.” (Chapman, 2015, 156).

Rosenwein (2020) observes that verbal anger is a form of violence. Words make people hurt emotionally. Rosenwein explains with an example: when saying “I am angry” loudly or with the voice tone raised in a certain way, people are performing their anger, reinforcing, changing or adding to people’s original feelings. There is a great expression of this in the Bible, “The stroke of the tongue breaketh bones” (Eccles. 28: 17; Ps. 57:4) (Rosenwein, 2020, 67).

What makes people angry these days? Rosenwein notes that it could be climate change, abortion, Brexit, fascists, anti-virtue (Rosenwein, 2020, 10-23). I can relate to those forms of anger, but in London my anger was different. It seems to have been driven by Confucian thought and Christian learning from parents, schools and churches. Yet after outbursts of my anger I was filled with regret, in particular, after kendo training. Although my anger started with passion and love, it did not make me proud. After kendo, I knew more clearly what I had done. Kendo was a place like a church, a place for confession and self-reflection place, sweat (hard work) offering the hope of change and comfort after I lost my peace. After training, on the way home, I cried alone many times and I promised, “I will be a better person and sensei next time. I would lose my mind less than this time. I need to be more patient. I must remember to do this.” I was getting calmer and controlling my mind and my shinai (bamboo sword) when I was training kendo, but I was losing more calmness and control in real life than before, then there was something wrong. I should be super patient and still, the same as my kendo performance. Yet, where were these qualities?

This chapter will explore stories that give a sense of the kinds of waves of anger (*hwa*) I carried and expressed, often in volcanic eruptions. For instance, I begin with the anger I felt towards Japan and the history of colonial rules which I experienced in the World Kendo Championship. Secondly, I turn to the anger I felt towards my husband in our marriage while introducing patriarchal order and Confucianism’s role. Thirdly, is the anger I felt towards my undisciplined students. These relatively short stories help make sense of why as migrant woman I was fighting with my ongoing anger. My

anger (passion) has had some positive effects, but it is also something I am still struggling with. Chapman advises that when people are angry, count to ten before doing or saying anything (Chapman, 2015). It worked sometimes, but it did not work for me yet in London.

My Unknown Anger with Japan

Before I moved to London, my main experiences of unknown anger were to do with Japan. When I was a high school student, my school had an exchange programme with Japan. I made friends with lovely Japanese girls. Those international exchange programmes continue to build on the relationship between college students in Japan and Korea through sports (Seo, 2018). As a result, the relationship between the two countries has improved. The positive response of Korean students' perspectives toward Japanese students has risen to 75%, and Japanese students' perspectives regarding Korean students has also risen by 65% (Seo, 2018). They were as human as us. I met foreigners for the first time. Surprisingly, the strangers became good friends in a very short period. When we said goodbye, it was hard. Hundreds and hundreds of Japanese and Korean girls cried. We also cried. The Japanese girl gave me a little gift. I gave her a letter telling her how much I loved being with her.

Yet this memory faded away very soon. I lost my positive feelings towards the Japanese because I often heard criticism of Japan by media, newspapers and school. And then when I entered kendo, my good memories of Japan were brainwashed away by Korean senseis. Since then I started to sprout negative feelings about Japan. I was looking forward to giving a lesson, "I am not either below you or below your country." I was extremely upset with them. However, one good thing was that this anger transmitted motivation when I was training for World Kendo Championship.

Observing my anger now, it seems to have been rooted in the historical rage of Koreans to Japanese colonization, and related to the *han (resentment; deep sorrow)* about this (Rahm, 2020; Cho, 2018), even though it did not happen to me. Hence, historic anger is still ongoing in politics and economics (Dudden, 2014; Cha, 2000). There is still no sense of genuine friendship between Korea and Japan unless mutual benefit arises (Lee, 1985). Korean officials want Japan to apologise like Germany apologised to Poland and asked for "forgiveness" (Seo, 2019; see also Dudden, 2014). However, the sense of historical injustice is yet to be resolved.

Even at the level of kendo, there is animosity over the 'real' origins of this martial art, with people in Korea claiming that it was based on ancient Korean practices (Heo & Jeong, 2011). The two nations have become obsessed with trying to prove historical connections to kendo (Heo & Jeong, 2011). The historical debates mean a lot to both countries due to their shared pride in swordsmanship (Bennett, 2015; Heo & Jeong, 2011). However, I would prefer that those involved in kendo in the two countries focus instead on other questions such as: Why isn't kendo growing worldwide? How to cultivate one's

life through kendo? (Inoue, 1998). How to enhance relationships in society through kendo? (Dumić, 2016). How does it develop to "World Kendo"? (Nakazawa & Inoue, 2014), not only for "Japan Kendo". These questions have been fascinating to me, but I was also a person who lived in the past in a chain of historic Korean rage, which made my kendo journey very ugly until I faced down bitterness and inferiority.[4]

A key turning point for me came at the World Kendo Championship in Santa Clare in America in 2000. I drew my shiai (competition) with the Japanese captain. I had been leading but was overwhelmed by need to defeat her and made a mistake that enabled her to tie the match. When I finished competing, I went upstairs to watch her next match. I was still very upset about my mistake. But watching her kendo from afar helped to transform me. It was like watching "Swan Lake". Her kendo was so beautiful and elegant, while also being sharp and skilful. Suddenly, tears flowed down my face. I almost beat her in shiai, I definitely beat her in spirit because the historical rage was boosting my energy. This was the anger Chapman spoked about, which is nursed by feelings of disappointment and hurt (Chapman, 2015). It made me lose my temper. Yet watching her compete against someone else, I started to recognise that there was something wrong with my kendo. I could not deny that my unknown anger toward Japan, motivated my strong performance, yet it was not the right motivation, and it was not right spirit. After the Championship finished, I begun thinking about fixing my anger, but I did not know how to resolve it.

Sylvester (2015) observed that at a (later) World Kendo Championship, "Something happened where I felt a unity of mind, body and spirit within. The *flow* experience was connected directly to Japanese women's kendo." (13) I felt the same way. Japanese kendo was special and different from mine. After the tournament ended my teammates and I dressed up and went to the sayonara (farewell) party. The senior sensei said, "Watch your behaviour. Especially, do not go to the Japanese team and say hello first." I was so disappointed, but luckily, my two Japanese heroes walked toward our table and said hello to us first. I was free from the sensei's instructions. Therefore, I asked them to take photos together. All Korean team started to take photos. On that night, beyond nation, kendo made us as one (Dumić, 2016). I reminded myself strongly on that day strongly not to forget this moment, that kendo was beyond history.

As Poole notes (1986), anger had destroyed my own peace until that night. I vowed that the next time I fought with a strong Japanese kendoka, I would do so freely with the right spirit. A few months later I travelled to Japan with this purpose. Yet when I fought against a Japanese lady who was not as good as

[4] While a more extensive analysis of colonization here is beyond the scope of this thesis, could be done on linking my anger to a more in-depth analysis of this history and its patriarchal power relationships.

me, I struggled. I did not know how to compete without the historical rage that had previously driven me. My third sensei said that my performance embarrassed him. Indeed, my kendo was an embarrassment as a former member of the Korean national team. I felt ashamed to put my sensei in this position. To become his shame.

I felt lost and lonely, ready to give up kendo if something else bad happened. However, one Japanese sensei came to my rescue. While training in Hiroshima, part of the skin from the sole of my foot came off. Annoyingly, when I pulled out the skin, blood covered the floor. My sensei looked at me with shame again. Suddenly, a Japanese sensei appeared, looked at my foot and insisted that I sit down. He took my foot on his leg, sterilised it, put some medicine on, and covered my foot with tape. Then said to me "Your foot will be ok now. Off you go and enjoy the rest of the training." He was much better than any nurse. All my sadness regarding kendo was gone. I was no longer alone.

On that day, an unknown Japanese sensei showed unexpected care through kendo. It changed my mind and my life. I promised myself, that I would not give up kendo whatever happens. Instead I would let go of my historical rage toward Japan. The *han* I felt left me, as did the feelings of *골 (gol)*, *노여움 (noyeoum)*, *분 (bun)*, *분노 (bunno),* and *성 (seong*) (Im, 2000; Rahm, 2020; Cho, 2018). Those awful poisonous toxins towards Japan disappeared. Since then I have striven to overcome and fix my prejudice and anger (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). This Japanese sensei became my angel on that day. I would like to bow down and wholeheartedly sincerely express my gratitude to him even though it was now around two decades ago.

Angry with the World Housewife Championship

In South Korea, while schooling has improved for girls, social education for women remains insufficient (Jung, 2010). I was taught by society what kind of woman I should be. There are three representative female figures in Korea. I strived to follow these female images. First, *참한 여자* (*Chamhan yeoja),* second, *현숙한 여인* (*Hyunsughan yeoin), the last, 현모양처 (Hyonmoyangcho).* From the dictionary, the meaning of *참한 여자* (*Chamhan yeoja)* defines women's temper as warm and calm (Lim & Lee, 2016). *현숙한 여인* (*Hyunsughan yeoin)* defines a smart, generous, virtuous and quiet woman, the meaning is close to *chamhan yeoja* (Lim & Lee, 2016). *현모양처* (*Hyonmoyangcho)* defines being a sensible mother and a decent wife (Kim, 2017). Particularly, *현모양처* (*Hyonmoyangcho)* this form of women's character explains women's role in the family line in South Korea (Kim, 2017). It seems that if women do not belong these themes, it is shameful in Korea. I had no problem with these figures because I was enjoying being *chamhan yeoja* when I was older as much as when I was being *seonmeoseuma (tomboy)* early ages. When I was over thirty, I was willing to train *hyunsughan yeoin* before I married and then when I married, I desired to be *hyonmoyangcho.*

The conventional role of women in Korea is closely connected to the uneven family structure and relationships (Kim, 2017). Therefore, when my husband asked to marry him, I let go of everything immediately without any discussion. I followed Confucion mandates *삼종지도 (Samjongjido*). This is defined by three rules: women ought to follow their fathers when they are young, their husbands after marriage, and their sons after the death of their husbands (Kim, 2017). Fathers, husbands and sons are regarded as leaders, who are take responsibility for all of their family members (Kim, 2017). This idea felt natural to me.

My husband did not know the *삼종지도 (Samjongjido)* rules. Yet I kept treating him as a leader in our marriage and kept calling him "my sky". I could not help myself. The problem was that when I was in a bad mood, my *분노 (Bunno: pouring out anger)* exploded (Im, 2000). At these moments I treated him as like "earth" (Kim, 2016). My husband was scared of these rules. He would rather we shared roles. The clashes that we had over *samjongjido* and *hyonmoyangcho* were typical of the tensions that many immigrants experience when they marry someone from another culture (Baltas & Steptoe, 2010).[5]

The hardest thing about moving to London was that I became like a one year old child again. Everything had to be re-learned. My husband bought a yellow English-Korean dictionary, which we used every night to communicate. My husband thought that it was very romantic, but for me, it was not romantic at all. It generated a lot of frustrations. I could not talk to my husband equally. I knew the knowledge, but I could not explain it in English. I always said to him in the middle of the conversation, "That's what exactly I mean." The good thing was that eventually I became a better listener with strangers, but I felt the embarrassment that Chapman (2015) links to anger when I could not understand what people were saying. This anger ended up being directed at my husband all the time. It was the kind of experience where anger overwhelms someone (Chapman, 2015). I was trying to be an angelic peaceful wife, but the devil ruled me. I lost.

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[5] Apparently, in contemporary South Korean society, women's perspectives are rapidly changing (Moon, 2002; Rahm, 2020). Korean images of what it means to be an ideal woman are developing differently, with kids also learning from a different aspect of animation such as *Frozen* where two sisters did not marry a prince but finished with a happy ending (Lim & Lee, 2016). It reveals the complexity and nuances of gender relations more in South Korea. Seemingly, gender relations in South Korea are now not as simple as black and white. In one very interesting example, I recently found something new through this study of modern South Korean society: *참한 여자 (chamhan yeoja: gentle, calm, listener and carness of behaviour*) is also now an insult and rude word for some women nowadays in South Korea. It already points to complexities. Cho (2010) notes that in terms of the ideal of a model of Korean female are as a family member, women symbolised infinite love and self-sacrifice. These days, some women are against this model, they do not want to be *chamhan yeoja*, some women want to be *seonmeoseuma.* It is very interesting.

When Koreans migrate to western countries such as the UK and Australia, they often encounter challenging experiences (Kim, 2017). The connection between acculturation-related challenges and adjustment has been constantly found in migratory research (Kim, 2017). According to the mental health literature, "In order to facilitate migrants' adaptation, the need to address the possible acculturation challenges and the acculturation process has been further emphasised" (Kim, 2017, 1). Frequently these challenges relate to family life, exacerbating the tensions between parents born in South Korea and their children who are growing up in an Anglophone culture (Kim, 2017). This can then lead to additional conflict between spouses. Migrants also tend to have difficulties receiving social support from the new societies that they are in due to different interpersonal and communication skills (Joy & Kolb, 2009). However, while I also faced acculturation issues, they were more around the practice of kendo and married life, than the issues that families of South Koreans experience in western countries.

I tried my best to be a noble wife for my husband, but the Korean noble wife did not fix our marriage. Instead it kept confusing my English husband and we clashed many times. I was just doing what my mother suggested, "becoming an earth" to his "sky", but it made me exhausted and frustrated. Over time my frustration turned to anger. Then it exploded like a volcano.

One day, I was really annoyed by my husband. A clean house made me relax, a little bit of a messy house made him relax. I was going to fight like a boxer. Maybe a few punches…. Then my anger will disappear. Huuuuuu~~~ I was looking forward to this fight. I could not wait. I must teach him a lesson about how to discipline himself in the house. No more patience. Sorry, Mum. Words were useless. Then what was the next? Of course! A few punches! I knew how to win! I was ready. I knew about a man from my father. Man's maximum was three times and three seconds! When he lost his temper then he will try to punch me. I must punch him first. I closed my eyes. I screamed at him three times as quick as possible because I could not wait to punch him. "You are mother fucker." "You are a twat." "You are such wanker." Wow! It was loud. It came from my abdomen. Perfect London accent. I could not have done better than that. I was impressed for a second with my pronunciation, then I opened my eyes. Huh? "Where is he? Where has he gone?" He had run away.

Without recognizing it, my frustrations had built up due to the sudden loss of the dreams I had nurtured for so long. I wished my husband was Korean so I could keep my profession and life in Korea. I did not chase my dreams anymore when I arrived in London. It was hell living without a dream and job. My father always mentioned keeping dreaming until you die. I did in Korea, but I did not know how to chase my dream in London. Banks et al., (2006) state that migrants like me have a lower level of local language skills, they tend to have a limited opportunity in the workplace. I stayed at home, but I felt 화

(Hwa: anger) (Im, 2000). I resisted it, but it kept revisiting me, then it built into rage 분노 *(Bunno: pouring out anger)* Im (2000).

Eventually the fear and doubt that followed these explosions of anger made me very ill. When I recovered, I could not hide in the room. I went outside and started to run in front of my house next to the river Thames, saying to myself, "I can do it. Again!" Thousands and thousands of times I repeated this phrase. I had showed myself that I could still be strong. Still be powerful in the world. But I was still behaving with Confucian mandates to be feminine. I came back home, had a cold shower, then one dream job landed in my mind. World Housewife Champion! 현모양처 (*Hyonmoyangcho: being a wise mother and a good wife)*! I felt great again. I thought that my husband would be very pleased with my new dream. But it terrified him. I was betrayed by *samjongjido* and *hyonmoyangcho.* My husband and I were trapped with these rules and roles, without either of us understanding what was happening.

Gender roles of marriage in Britain were very different from South Korea. I wanted to be a *hyonmoyangcho*, but trying to be *hyonmoyangcho,* made my husband's life a nightmare. My husband's ideal of a wife was close to being "friendship" rather than "ownership", and "equality", having fun together in our life, and being best companions. My husband encouraged me to do my things, but my mind kept saying to me to look after him. My husband reminded me that marriage was compromising not sacrificing. My mother emphasised that sacrifice saved marriage. And I kept saying to myself that I must sacrifice for him. I was confused. Who was right?

I still chose my mother's opinion. Hence, I woke up early every morning, wearing my apron instead of kendo gi and hakama (training clothes). I made breakfast for my husband and when he went to work, I cleaned the house like it was a hotel. Then I prepared all his shirts, started to cook again for his lunch which I delivered to him warm (seven different fruits, seven different mixes of rice and seven different side dishes) on time in front of his company by my little electric car. I did that for three years until my husband said, "My favourite moment is to make my own coffee, my own breakfast and listen to my music by myself in the morning. You do not need to do anything for me. I still love you." I looked at him and thought, "What a liar."

These clashes and misunderstandings built frustration and anger in both of us, but I could not stop believing that my husband should be the "sky", even though my sky (husband) denied it and spoke about the values of "equality". I could not understand him. Why doesn't he just appreciate my sacrifice like other Korean men? These made me carry 성 *(Seong: unpleasant feelings caused by disagreeable emotions)* (Im, 2000). But the alternative seemed even worse. If things changed, I would lose the precious position of being a wife and my meaningful role of being the earth to his sky. Sometimes, I

worried that my husband might leave me if I did not occupy this Korean traditional role. That was what I heard from other Korean women over and over, that marriages failed when the woman did not work hard enough to be the earth. Fung (2014) notes that something similar occurs in Chinese culture where the woman is blamed for a divorce, and might even blame herself and say, "I was guilty of not being a good wife." Hence, I tried to complete my mission. On the other hand, my husband tried to bring back his peaceful mornings. Our regular clashes made things hard for us. Indeed we both carried *성 (Seong)*.

Likewise, my Confucian perspectives translated to the dojo. Although I was ranked above my husband in kendo, I asked him to be head sensei because he is a man and husband, but he declined. Yet when we sparred (keiko) at the dojo I would not beat him. I was worried about his dignity as a husband. Then one day I heard him telling my students in the pub about how he beat me in keiko. It made me mad. How unfair. Did he not realise what I was doing? I kept forms of my anger *골 (Gol*: *upset)*, *노여움 (Noyeoum: disappointment*), *분 (Bun: unfairness)* for whole that night (Im, 2000). I was waiting for the next training, "I will kill you in keiko. Tomorrow will be your funeral." But I did not want to do it in front of my students because I was still worried about his dignity. (This still shapes my behaviour. I noticed recently that when I was training with senior sensei, who I respect, I started to make sure that I did not win).

The collision between our two cultures was painful (Kim, 2017). After a big crisis, we decided to start again. I found a way of making him sky without getting interrupted and frustrated. He found a way of appreciating what I was doing for him, and started to reciprocate, treating me as sky as well. My sacrifice was not wasted. He also felt loved, and loved me back. My mother and I were partly right. The compromise in the marriage was coming from the result of patience, sacrifice and fortitude like kendo. What I was missing was balance and communication. Tili and Barker (2015) emphasise the importance of communicating clearly for intercultural married couples to manage cultural differences and conflicts effectively. We began to do this. Eventually we realised that our dream lives involved me working in the world, and him working from home. I needed to be active in the world, to find power and meaning in that as well.

As a migrant woman, I started to notice and understand how gender relationships work in western culture and I began to adopt the different aspects of how the concept of gender roles has been shaped in the UK and Australia. This learning and adapting process made me feel for the first time there was something unbalanced in gender relationships in Korean culture. My anger and distress over this has led me to become interested in the history of gendered expectations for women in Korea and the

Western world (Kang, 2019).[6] Thus when my niece married recently, I tried to assist her in learning what kind of wife she should be and what kind person she should be, but also how to keep the relationship balanced with equality and respect between husband and wife in their marriage. Therefore, hopefully she can prevent unnecessary themes of anger of *골 (Gol*: *upset)*, *노여움 (Noyeoum: disappointment*), *분 (Bun: unfairness), 분노 (Bunno: pouring out anger), 성 (Seong: disagreeable emotions)* (Im, 2000) in her marriage and her life.

Anger with My Students

I realised that I could *not* be the World Housewife Champion. What else should I do? My husband always mentioned that life was full of excitement. He recommended exploring. I knew that, but without fluent English, what could I do? I got confused with Kitchen and Chicken all the time. One night, my husband brought news. Someone was looking for sensei. Yes! My new dream landed on me that night. Becoming the best sensei! Making my students like me, sounded excellent. Far better than any championship. I nailed this plan. My poor students, they did not know what they were getting themselves into with my anger (passion). Poor me, I did not know what I was going to go through either. So I started teaching kendo in London with my poor English. It brought magnificent stress, anger and comedy.

*My husband and I called our dojo Tora. When my husband was studying in Japan, one of his favourite kanji (*Japanese: "Chinese character"*) was Tora. It means a tiger. Also, the tiger shaped map drawn by Namseon Choi was my favourite – a Japanese geographer compared the shape of the map of Korea to a rabbit – I believed what I want to believe. We made a decision. Then, I became an angry tiger sensei.*

As soon as I started teaching kendo it all went wrong. My English was still in the early stages of development. I was like one year old, telling them what to do. It was like a joke. The first thing was to get them to find a training partner. I said to my students, "Half, go, another side." Some of my students started to move uncertainly, fear in their eyes. "Hurry up!" I said. Suddenly, all of my students moved to the other side. My speech was getting quick, loud and harsh. "I said, Half!" They got more nervous. I looked at the clock, already five minutes were gone. I started shouting at them. They did not know what to do. All of them moved together like a herd of sheep. I lost my mind. The angrier I got, the worse

[6] England also had a history of women being expected to respect their husband's authority and that their main job was to look after their husband (Jordan, 1987). However, England had gone through a major feminist movement from the 1970s, that was yet to reach Korea during the time that I lived there. Feminism arrived as a mass movement in Korea (Lee, 2018) after I had left to marry my husband. More recently, however, Korean feminism has started to be at the forefront of global change, such as the #Me Too movement.

my English got. It became a disaster. Oh, dear! *They stood still like frozen fish. Standing close to each other to avoid being "lost lambs" that would be the target of my temper. If one of them bleated like a missing lamb, it would be their funeral. I was not Jesus.*

Everyone was terrified. If they understood me then I treated them like a hero. If they did something wrong, I scapegoated them. Some of my students were stockbrokers, lawyers, professors, doctors, famous authors, tax inspectors, chief executives, some of them were from Oxford or Cambridge, some looked like gangsters. But here they were like mice, unwilling to challenge my authority. They were quivering in the middle of the dojo. Not moving, barely breathing. Even my husband stayed quiet next to them. I looked at the clock again. Ten minutes passed already. What a waste. How could I make them be a champion soon like me? My eyes turned inside out and I screamed at them, "You, idiots!"

I hated to see my students' lack of confidence and I hated to waste my time and theirs. Every second was valuable. I wanted to teach them the skills to become the best. Then I would become the best sensei. Help God! I shouted to the assistant sensei (my husband), "Do something!" He came out slowly and asked quietly, "What can I do for you sensei?" And then he explained to my students very softly in one sentence. They all found a training partner. Finally. I said to him loudly, "Well done, sensei. Well done!"

Wanting to be the best takes a lot of effort and patience. Martial arts are no different. Kim (2015) notes that it takes a huge amount of effort and passion to become the best Taekwondo player. But my students did not strive to be the best like Kim or I had. They did not work hard enough. I felt *정 (seong)* towards them. Morris and King (2018) investigated teachers' frustration and emotion while they were teaching foreign language in the class. It caused stress and ultimately exhaustion for teachers (Morris & King, 2018). I was the teacher (sensei),but could not speak English in the training. Every night training turned to hell. We all struggled. Sharp elegant commands make the best lesson, but it was impossible. This frustration exacerbated my exhaustion (Morris & King, 2018). Frustration is often linked to anger. In this form of anger was closer to *노여움 (noyeoum: erupting emotions by resentment and disappointment)* (Im, 2000).

Migrants from South Korean often encounter acculturation challenges in western life through their kids (Kim, 2017). Children introduce western practices, education, language, and culture to their parents, which creates tensions between these first and second-generation migrants (Kim, 2017). I was in a different situation but looking back it feels like the students were like my kids (Im, 2011). I absolutely loved them from the first day when they walked in the dojo. But while I wanted to be proud of their achievements, they were so slow to learn kendo. This slowness also made me very frustrated. I thought that they were lazy and had no discipline. My advice turned nagging, my passion turned to anger. I did

not know how to handle my disappointment at that time, and it hurt some of my students (Chapman, 2015). Indeed, a number of students seemed to feel shame and embarrassment like the low-skilled physical education students that Kim studied (2003).

The most irritating aspect of it all was that my students wanted to turn into spectacular samurai overnight. I could make them into samurai over time, but they did not even turn up every training. They seemed lost or did not understand the reality of the work it took to be a samurai. They lived in their fantasy kendo samurai world. "Typical westerners!" I thought. As Shin notes (2010), the white samurai fantasy with blond hair and blue eyes is a familiar image in American admired culture. Films like "The Last Samurai" convey "The white fantasy of becoming a samurai warrior" which "is one symptom representing the complicated American desire for Japan that has been shaped by the shifting Japanese-American relations of the past 150 years." (Shin, 2010, 1065).

According to Inoue (1998), the purpose of training kendo is to become a mature human and should be accompanied by the primary elements of kendo principles: morality, ethics, modesty, dignity, respect, courtesy and courage (Inoue, 1998). To attain this maturity requires a bucket of sweat every day from training, but the most of students did not get wet enough even with their heavy training clothes. How could I make them become the best contemporary samurai then? How could I become the best sensei? I struggled with these questions. Every training I tried to wake my students from their samurai fantasy. Every training I failed. Then my frustration (*성: seong*) boiled over into anger and they became embarrassed (Chapman, 2015). A belief in hard physical work was at the centre of my Confucian masculinity, but somehow many of my students seemed to want to become a strong, powerful warrior without putting in the effort.

Might my anger also come from my Confucian heritage? The traditional relationship between teacher and student in South Korea emphasises the need to "not step on the shadow of the teacher." Every year on May 15th teachers are celebrated for their hard work (Kim, 1983). There is a teacher's song also. "The teacher's grace is like the sky, so the more I look up, the higher it touches. You have taught me to be true and right. The teacher's heart is a parent." (Im, 2011, 88). This song still moves me when I sing it or hear it. A few teachers were my heroes, like my parents were. Although they disappointed me sometimes (Chapman, 2015), it was nothing to compared to what I owe them. I wanted to be like them. I dreamed of passing their passions onto my students.

As a sensei, I expected Confucianism attitudes and behaviours from my students. For example, how to bow rather than wave, how to sit and stand politely, how to answer properly and talk courteously inside and outside the dojo. My Western students did not know any of these. They did not even know how to call me "sensei". Therefore, I tried to force my students to learn positive Confucianism attitudes. To

call me “sensei” rather than my name, to behave with respect and politeness (Shim et al., 2012). It should have built their faith and trust in me, and my faith and trust in them (Min, 2017). Being respectful had helped me a lot in my journey, driving me to great success. But these behaviours were very difficult for my students, leading some to quit kendo. I was very upset. I cried. My anger was that of 노여움 *(Noyeoum: disappointment)* (Im, 2000), while I also I felt hurt and rejected by my students (Chapman, 2015).

Observing my anger towards my students and people in London, it seems closer to the way Jesus was angry with the merchants in Jerusalem when they were trading oxen, sheep and doves (Chapman, 2015). I was very angry with people who were rude on the street, overruled by the public service, and the post – colonial attitudes of the Japanese government. I was angry at how people were controlled by religious leaders and, in particular, oppressed by powerful sensei and kendo association leaders. Are they serving their members? Or are they serving themselves? I was disappointed, it developed my anger. Chapman explains well regarding my defence of my anger, “valid anger- that is, anger provoked by genuine wrongdoing on the part of the other person” (Chapman, 2015, 27), this anger is a positive reaction, “*loving* - it is designed for the benefit for the person” (Chapman, 2015, 27).

Often when I got angry with my students I was trying to make them better (Chapman, 2015). But at the time I did not understand my anger, I was unclear on where it came from and I did not know how to fix it, handle it, control it, or work through it (Rosenwein, 2020). I was casually angry with my students because I believed that my anger (passion) made them change. But my students and I all lost our peace (Poole, 1986). We were all beginners in our anger, fighting in different ways. It made for a very hard time for us. Another source of anger came from the way my kendo life had changed. Before I could just concentrate on my own kendo. Now I was responsible for the kendo of all my students as well in a strange place where I had lost my identity, culture and language.

I even had to be an actor in the dojo. I had to lose to my students deliberately. The acting had to be perfect, otherwise, they knew that I opened the timing for them to cut me. My job was to make them believe in themselves by defeating me. It is one of the tasks that a good sensei needs to learn. I was not an actor. I was a fighter. I wanted to be free to fight my best with whoever I could find. Now I was not allowed to be so selfish. One day, some of the students sent me a message on mother’s day. I realised that I became their kendo mother. Uuuugh! I could not commit a hundred percent to my own kendo since I became a sensei. I lost my freedom like so many other mothers. Coming back home after training and teaching, I was so exhausted. I was dead the next day. Becoming an example sensei was hard. I thought that if I became a sensei, it would be very easy. What a naive thought. It was the most frustrating

position I have ever been in in my life. This overbearing, constant frustration changed my character dramatically. I was riding a roller coaster every day. I felt so 골 *(Gol: upset)* (Im, 2000).

Another unsettling anger came from being a female sensei. I barely noticed this anger, but I sensed something unpleasant which frequently ended up as sexism. Sometimes this was from my own students. I also experienced moments of racism from Japanese kendoka and westerners who idolize the Japanese. It made me carry a little bit of 성 *(Seong: unpleasant feelings*) every time it happened.

Over time, however, some of my students started understanding that my anger was not personal. That it came from my wish for them to be the best that they could be. That it came from passion and love. For these students my anger started to have a positive effect (Chapman, 2015). My own sensei had known how to make training hard. I adored it, so I made training hard for my students. They talked about it in the pub afterwards, marvelling at how hard it was. But they also spoke of their surprise at how strong they could be. To be honest, I gentler than my sensei. Seeing my students suffer was harder than when I suffered. Nevertheless, my students started learning how to become brave, and became proud of their little victories – of how they survived my hard training. Eventually they came to adore the hard training like me. But it took so long for this to happen. Much longer than it would have taken in Korea.

I felt a big sense of achievement when I saw my western students make this progress. They truly started to understand what real samurai means. Then they finally started to come to training every time they could. They started to understand the need for discipline. Our journey into kendo culture was settling down. They had started to take kendo seriously. Ultimately, they became real warriors. I often received great compliments on my students attitudes and behaviours from other kendoka or sometimes even outsiders. I could say very proudly, that they became great kendoka if they could survive my various forms of anger. And I truly appreciated their hard work.

As I came to the end of this chapter, I realised that my attitude to English was similar to the way my students initially approached kendo. I adore English, but I did not want to put that much effort into learning it. I always wanted to be the best presenter on BBC Proms overnight. But I did not take seriously the need to correct my English. I ran away from English as my student ran away from kendo. Preparing for English exams causes extreme stress to many South Koreans (Kim, 2019). A long time ago I took the International English Language Testing System so that I could apply for a PhD in Korea. I left the exam venue with a double nosebleed. Such a thing had never happened during the eight to ten hours of kendo training I did per day. Since then I got scared by English. The language had defeated me. I did not try another English exam for almost fifteen years.

In kendo I can be patient. I can control my body and mind. I can take kendo seriously rather than abandon it. I have ability to transform my temper to be a great warrior. I had the balls to do all these things in kendo. No other kendoka can make me fear. However, in front of that English exam, I was losing my patience, losing my mind, and my whole body was shaking with fear.

That said, I did work hard to improve my English in London. I stopped speaking Korean with friends. I turned on the tv all day even though I did not understand any of it. Yet now I realise that I worked hard in inappropriate ways. Perhaps, my students were the same as me in kendo. They might work hard, but they were frustrated by themselves not improving fast enough. When they made the same mistakes endlessly, I shouted at them. It might have brought shame. Perhaps, I was the person whose "stroke of the tongue breaketh bones" (Eccles. 28: 17; Ps. 57:4) (Rosenwein, 2020, 67). I could not see their efforts and struggles enough. I was the person who needed to study more. The person who needed to learn how to teach kendo culture with patience, without obsession.

Conclusion

This chapter explored my anger in both Korea and London. Many elements of this anger came from being a migrant and using a second language. This had a significant effect on my personality and identity. I was a successful woman in Korea, but my migration led to struggles with learning English, along with cross-cultural expectations in marriage and western society. I had the issue of needing to get westerners to be able to work in a Confucianist framework. For example, different ways of being polite, in particular, hierarchies and ways of doing things. Some of my unknown anger was about the problems of the Confucian model in Korea, in particular the hierarchies around gender and expectations of women. Therefore, when I moved to London, I lost the freedom to fight freely with my husband, my students and sensei because I wanted to represent Confucianism ideology in kendo as an example to westerners. It seems that I lost a different freedom in London.

This confusion and difficulty led to immense frustrations. And these frustrations frequently exploded into moments of anger that I did not fully understand. I lost my manners and temper quite often. Especially at home and the dojo because what we had learned as our values previously were different. The home was where I had learned to be controlled and behave well from a very early age, informed by Confucian, Christian, and Korean values. I thought that my new home in London would also be peaceful and civil. But instead I became an angry tiger.

Anger is often associated with masculinity. Yet although my father was frequently angry, I did not link anger with masculinity and had instead tried to follow my mother in being calm and loving. The Confucian masculinity of kendo emphasised the importance of self-control, as did the lessons my father gave my brother that I had loved sitting in on. Yet in London I found myself getting so angry that

sometimes I scared my husband as well as my kendo students. It was complex. I loved fighting. My passions were part of this. But in London for a few years my temper and anger overwhelmed me. The issue was that I might have followed my father's example too far. Now is the time to return to my mother's lesson and true kendo lesson. No more unknown angers should live within me. However, without this process of the journey, I would not understand how to embrace my anger truly. I am relearning how to love and enjoy kendo and life again where my heart used to belong.

Kendo training will keep reminding me not to lose my way. Kendo will keep my unsettled mind in the centre, my feet on the ground. I am still fighting every day in order to escape from inappropriate tradition and rules. At the same time, as I am accepting and learning new cultural norms, I am also introducing the central message of kendo to strangers to retain the beauty of my traditions. Those battles will continue, but I would prefer to fight with patience rather than anger. Kendo training will remind me how I can learn I am wrong and find the ways to change.

I miss my father's flute midnight concerts. He played at his farmhouse alone. My mother was sleeping soundly next to him after working hard all day. He made his flute from a water pipe left on the ground for his crop. The sound was like a human voice confessing difficult things. Sad, but beautiful. I could hear my father's regret over what he had done wrong during the day. I could hear his promise to make a change for tomorrow. The dark of the night was getting deeper and deeper. He opened up his feelings more and more. He did not even know that he had an audience. I was glad that I could hear all about him that night. Bless him. I wish that he could play for me tonight.

Chapter 5: Gender, Bodies and Violence – Lessons about Masculinity in Kendo

In the early 2000s, Brent McDonald participated as a rower, advisor and coach at a Japanese University rowing club, while also studying the other members of the club. Through this experience, McDonald found that each male junior club member learnt about masculinity from a senior club member that they modelled themselves on. While empathetic masculinity was valued, "hard" masculinity – where rowers showed their physical toughness and ability to suffer – was most important. The resultant men had hard bodies, and an appreciation of hierarchical relationships, collective effort and harmony.

In this chapter, I would like to follow McDonald by exploring through my years as a kendoka what I have learnt about masculinity in the kendo dojo. In particular, I would like to examine the forms of masculinity that I developed – and quickly came to love – along with the effects that these had on my body, and how I thought of myself. In accordance with the rest of this thesis, masculinity is explained in the terms that I understood it at the time I am referring to. For example, during this period when I was outside the dojo I was like the rowers that McDonald studied: I also felt that it was "natural" for women to be positioned in a gender hierarchy below men. Inside the dojo, I was happy for my body to become as 'hard' as the male kendoka. As part of my masculinity within the dojo, talking about certain aspects of pain, especially violence, was not difficult for me. Young notes that "male and female athletes become noticeably, and understandably, guarded around" issues of sports-related violence that involve other people (2012, 177). Indeed, writing this chapter was demanding because I was wrestling with moments where the masculinity of other kendoka failed to live up to the masculine ideals of kendo.

"Japanese popular culture has emphasised a particular brand of masculinity based on a mythologized Samurai identity" notes McDonald (2009, 427). I adored this masculinity. It fascinated me as much as my father's lesson on masculinity. I wanted to protect the samurai masculinity of my idols stories and legends. Dying for the master, dying for the nation, dying for justice. Respect sensei, listen to sensei, follow sensei, become own sensei and become an example to others. I loved to learn how they learned. I think that it is for these reasons that it is so hard for me to think about what happens when samurai masculinity goes wrong.

To criticise kendo was to criticise me. Examining the flaws in kendo masculinity felt like a betrayal. I did not want to damage kendo. Instead, I wanted to preserve the myths of kendo forever. My role was to defend the kendo, not to highlight its weaknesses and problems. So this chapter was painful. However, sadly, I need to admit that there are contradictions in samurai masculinity that exist in kendo. Especially since an awful experience I had made me realise that there could be problems with how some men use violence in kendo. This disgraceful experience led me start the difficult process of questioning samurai

masculinity when it fails in kendo. In my defence, I feel that such questioning is my obligation as one of the most senior female sensei.

Nevertheless, I still fear that this story might ruin kendo's reputation, in particular for women. There is a proverb in Korean, "*누워서 침 뱉기 (Nuwoseo chim baetgi*: *lying down and spitting).* I am frightened that I am making kendo look like it is not a wonderful place for women. I am also concerned that I am contributing to the masculine view that women are weak, illogical, and unable to cope with martial arts. I worry that I am using my gender to complain because I am a woman. I feel ashamed. This is not a topic that I am delighted to make public.

Yet my hope is that this story makes us all think about what modern kendo can offer to everyone, not just to men of the old samurai myth. I still believe strongly in the positive side of samurai masculinity as taught through kendo. These aspects of kendo have given me the most beautiful moments in my life. The philosophy of kendo of samurai masculinity has inspired me as much as the Bible. But it is important to also have the strength to acknowledge when something has failed. Indeed, what I learnt in surviving the violence from a man who tried to humiliate me was one of my greatest lessons. Here it is important to make a distinction between samurai masculinity and normative masculinity, which as Evans notes, is often "based upon violence, domination, and invulnerability" (2019, 1). After being wounded through a brutal experience of normative masculinity, I experienced real resiliency and undertook a journey of recovery that built my own masculinity in a new way. It was through this that I discovered what true masculinity means to me as a kendoka, a woman and a person.

Lesson 1 – The Joys of Strong and Competitive Masculinity

Dekšnytė says that women have started to challenge the hegemonic masculinity of sports like kendo (Dekšnytė, 2013). But when I started kendo I did not set out to challenge hegemonic masculinity in kendo. Instead, I embraced it and tried to make it my own. Kendo taught me how to be sensei, a leader, and keep me a decent human. This endless learning journey has offered me an opportunity to gradually create my own masculinity. As Sylvester observes, "Paradoxically, because kendo is seen as a representation of masculine identity, kendo women do have the opportunity to express masculinity and experience intrinsic rewards that men do not." (Sylvester, 2015, 2). Indeed, Sylvester shows that women can get a taste of masculinity in kendo. However, I wanted more than just a taste. I wanted the whole cake. To become the best, to conquer everyone in the "right way" of kendo. What I did not realise at the time was that this was itself a transgressive act, as by making this masculinity my own, I was challenging the many men who thought that the masculinity of kendo should only be available to men.

One of the first things that I learned in kendo was how to fight. How to be tough, strong and dominant, just like the men or even better than the men. It seemed easy at first. The journey escalated with my second sensei. He pushed me far harder than any of the men in the dojo. On the first day, I had a keiko (sparring practice) with him, he did not get a point for twenty minutes. I was determined not to lose. He was the same age as me, but had already been in the national team three times and was going to be in a national team again.

The next day at the dojo one of the dojo members told me, “Sensei is waiting at the cafe.” He was drinking coffee by himself. He said, “Please, take a seat.” I sat down on the chair. He finished his coffee and said, “Do you want to represent Korea?” I froze. My ordinary male kendo friends had asked me this before, but now a member of the famous national team was asking me if I wanted to try to be like him. He was waiting, but I could not give to him an answer because it felt very arrogant to immediately say “Yes I want to be part of the national team”. He continued calmly, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for you to become a national team member in Korea.” (Matthew 19:24). I nodded. I did not know what to say. We remained silent. He ordered one more coffee then I opened my lips very carefully, “If I could…!” He finished his second coffee and stood up, “Let’s go.”

My real hard training started on that day. There were no breaks. No time to drink water. No time to talk. I trained early in the morning before work, and then again in the evening after work. Five to seven hours per day. Six months later, I participated in the national competition. It is called the SBS Kendo Championship. The quarter-final was my biggest hurdle. I was alone. Suddenly, I felt tension but tried not to show it. I was holding my breath and saying to myself, “I am strong! I can do this! God helps me!” Unexpectedly, someone started tightening my Men himo (the string that holds the head protection in place). I did not look back. I knew immediately who it was. I closed my eyes and then I heard a single sentence, “Let’s do one more.” He tapped my right shoulder twice. I proceed straight forward like a machine. There was no feeling in my body. I just wanted to complete my task. Then the miracle came.

I was on the broadcast. Fortunately, my parents did not miss it. On that day, they were farming in the field. My third sister approached them to watch tv. They did not know until then that I was doing kendo. Before I entered the semi-final, I looked at the corner where my second sensei was leaning against the wall and crossing his arms by himself, hiding from the camera and everyone. After I won and came out from shiai-jo (competition area), I saw the moment he raised both arms towards where thousands of audience sat. Three of my male dojo friends were there. They were my sparring partners most of the time.

I went to the final. I did not jump around this time. I did not want to. I kept victory in my mind, it was a beautiful moment. I was waiting for the final alone. Then, suddenly, my fighting spirit disappeared. I

lost the sense of fight. I felt satisfaction and I was very happy already with what I had achieved. This self-satisfaction turned out to be my enemy. In the final, I was leading the match and got the first point, but my opponent equalised late in the bout. There was no time to continue. In rare moments like this the referee has to decide who won. The referee decided that my opponent had won. I had lost. However, on that day, my second sensei and I made a big step forward. It was not a dream anymore, we both believed by my result, we could make it come true. Since then he made my body like an ironwoman.

One day, he told me to smash the column one hundred times. I answered, "Yes, sensei." When my sensei went outside to smoke a cigarette for his break, every other man there tried to stop me. "You cannot get pregnant if you damage your womb." I looked at them, completely ignored them and strove to collapse the pillar harder. I threw my body against it with everything I had. My determination scared them. A few days later, my sensei made me compete with one of the biggest men in the dojo (around 193cm, 120kg). He was so much bigger than me. But I found it very easy to make him fall over. No one could believe it. Even I could not believe it, yet after then I could do it against other men and women as well. I loved defeating big guys. I loved to see male kendoka with their eyes full of fear in front of me. Everyone called me a superwoman. But I did not understand why they called me a superwoman, it was all normal to me as a kendoka. Male kendoka did things like this to each other all the time. I was just like them, not an exception.

My male friends mistakenly wanted to protect my female body in kendo and were worried about my fertility like Western doctors who used to believe that vigorous exercise would make women infertile (Vertinsky, 1994). I would have appreciated this care outside the dojo, but not inside the dojo. I wanted to be stronger than any human. I was *고삐 풀린 망아지* (*Goppi pullin mangaji: a foal has been released from halter and doing what she wants to*) (Cho, 1977). I just wanted to win. When I won, I truly believed that I was the best and strongest of any kendoka. It was not true but this belief, ego and pride undoubtedly made me fight with great joy. My second sensei did not try to stop me. Actually, he uplifted my fighting spirit, encouraging me to be wilder than ever. This freedom made me fight mightily and remarkably with my hard body which had become a weapon.

Wacquant (1998) mentions that professional boxers conceive of their body like a machine that they kept well-oiled and clean. It becomes their tool, a weapon used for fighting. They work on their bodies, turning them into the equivalent of armoured shields. This kind of thinking and language is very alien to me. I have often received the compliment that I had unusual muscles and a good body shape. People asked me what I was doing. It was good to hear these compliments, but I did not train to make my body look good or shine from kendo at all. My shield was my armour. Not my body. Yet, similar to a boxer, I looked after my armour. I made it look dark, sharp, serious and scary, but also elegant. My perfect

armour made my opponents nervous, not my body. Even kendoka do not know what the muscles of other kendoka look like until we take a shower together. We are all covered with cotton (training clothes) and armour.

The broadcast made me suddenly famous in kendo. Before then nobody knew who I was. I was even given a nickname, 복병 (*bogbyeong: ambush: an unexpected competitor*). My second sensei pushed me harder than before because he saw the possibility that I might become the best female kendoka in Korea. Compared to professional kendoka, training at the dojo was not enough. Therefore, I extended my training. I restarted to cycle for commuting, I also started to train by myself every lunchtime at the office. My office became a place of physical exercise, the corridor and stairs were for footwork, the seminar room for kihon (basic strikes) thousands of times when my colleagues went for lunch. I did not care that I was wearing a skirt or trousers for work, I grabbed the shinai (bamboo sword) and ran and ran. Afterwards, I would sleep on the floor for ten minutes behind a sofa to rest my tired body.

The money I spent on training fees meant that I could only afford to eat kimchi and rice. But I was not hungry for food. I was hungry to become an ironwoman and champion. All day, I was waiting to finish work. Going to training was heaven because there were only a few men left to defeat at the dojo. I knew that I was not far away from beating them all. These moments were the most entertaining time in my kendo life. The rewards were plentiful. In just two years I had gone from starting kendo to finishing 2nd (and almost equal first) in the national championship. Selection for the national team followed quickly.

Spencer (2013) mentions that "MMA [Mixed Martial Arts] is an emergent sport where competitors in a ring or cage utilize strikes (punches, kicks, elbows and knees) as well as submission techniques to defeat opponents." (232) This style of fighting did not exist in kendo. Personally, I dislike MMA because of how they fight. It seems too violent to me and it reminds me of a real war. However, in kendo, there are some similarities to MMA in how we fight. The same as MMA, we are training to dominate and defeat our opponent based on respect, but also there is no danger unless someone breaks the rules.

I loved honourable fighting in kendo. I understood physical masculinity from a very young age by fighting with boys on the ground. Kendo was safer than fighting with boys. I adored kendo because of that. Kendo truly offered me a way to fight freely. Every second there was a thrilling chance that I might win or lose, but there was no threat of death. We fight with joy rather than fear because of the armour and rules which also protect our body. What a true martial art I have found in my life. Thank God.

The joy of a fair fight resonates with what Messner found among some American football players who embrace the idea that fighting like this creates discipline and a true, strong masculinity (Messner, 2005). These footballers enjoy the excitement of hitting against each other without a "cheap shot". The opponents who fight in a similar manner gain their respect. Kendo is like that. Masculinity here is equated to seeing who is best at fighting within the rules. Sylvester found that women in Japan enjoy the chance that kendo gives for them to experience this form of masculinity (Sylvester, 2015, 186). However, the masculinity that I enjoyed through kendo in Korea is not made available to everyone. Sylvester notes that:

> what Japanese kendo does allow that hegemonic masculine sports in Australasia do not is a space to express masculinity, not only in personality traits but also in physical appearance without being monitored and criticised. As such, women have space to express a 'bi-gendered' identity in kendo, as an expression of masculinity is central to good kendo and character development. (Sylvester, 2015, 210).

This matches my experience in Korea entirely. When I was in Korea, I was allowed to do anything that other male kendoka did. Yet living more recently in the UK, Australia and travelling Europe for kendo, I have often been criticised for being too tough on female kendoka. For example, I often heard that in the official events women and children are supposed to be protected as if they are too vulnerable to fight equally. When I heard that I was shocked. The value of kendo is that people can train and compete without any level, gender, size or age discrimination (Dekšnytė, 2013). I proved this lesson through my kendo journey. Actually, in Japan and Korea, some kids are far stronger than many adults. Kendo is the best place to celebrate youth and develop their masculinity, in particular, for women and children because it allows them to challenge narrow, restrictive constructions of gender. Instead of being "protected" and "cared" for in a patronising way, they get to test their skills and strength on equal footing, with their armour and the rules protecting them from real danger. The refusal to allow this in much of the Western world makes me very sad. When and how can women and children experience toughness and masculinity like me?

Another problem that I found is that some women and children in the West also feel like they need to be protected. I believe that when you treat people as weak, they become weak, but when you treat people as strong, they become strong. As a sensei, I work to try to make them less afraid of a fair fight. Therefore at the Tora dojo in London and then in Melbourne women can fight like men and with men as I did in Korea. I created the London (Kendo) Cup to have an open team competition women and men can fight together. When I read Messner (2005), I identified with the strong tough men and their physical masculinity, although they seem to enjoy being more violent than me. On the other hand, when I read Nash's (2015) paper, I understood her pain and humiliation, but I wanted her to become stronger

and tougher like my kendo students. I felt a stronger connection with Merz because she seemed to enjoy seeing the blood and bruises like me (Merz, 2011). Merz not only celebrates the toughness and roughness of boxing, she also believes that women can conquer the boxing world in the future. I do not believe that entirely, but I love the challenge of that belief. Perhaps there will be a woman to equal Muhammad Ali if we keep believing in women and train them as much as men to be strong physically as well as equally skilful. My life can fully demonstrate that.

This first lesson about masculinity that I learnt through kendo was the joy of aggressive fighting within the rules. Learning how to be aggressive in the right way, was the best part of kendo later on. Often, my sensei pushed me down on the floor and challenged me with aggression. I never took a step back. I endeavoured to overcome him, to become stronger than ever before. Even when overly proud or arrogant men tried to give me a lesson with unnecessary physical contact, this also became my challenge and joy because, in the end, these whole lessons made me solid like timber, or maybe more than that. I became solid like a rock.

Lesson 2 – Hard, Bruised and Injured Bodies

The journey of learning aggressive masculinity left marks on my body. I took these as evidence of my hard work and was proud of them. My bottom turned dark purple-blue like an aubergine from the hits of my second sensei. Was this violence? To me it seemed more like a form of strong, physical coaching that I consented to and loved. It drove me to improve so quickly. Harsh physical treatment from senseis and coaches is part of Korean culture. Jeon and Lee (2019) note that the Korean film *4th Place* shows both how violent coaching in Korea has been very effective in achieving high results, but can also be abusive and lead to trauma. I am grateful for what my second sensei did to me, but I would not do it to my students. Instead, I encourage them to challenge their pain.

There are longstanding beliefs that that men are more capable of dealing with the kinds of physical exercise activity that causes pain and sometimes serious injuries (Kavoura et al., 2018). Therefore, demanding training standards are seen as suitable for men but not women (Pfister, 2010). I totally disagree due to my experience in kendo. The following story provides one example.

One training, my dear husband broke my little toe. I was limping for nearly six months, but none of my students including my husband noticed. My spirits were high as usual, I had trained as much as I could and taught madly, I felt sore when I got home. On the street, when I was limping, strangers looked at me with pity for nearly six months. Never mind.

Damm it! My hubby broke my little toe again just before the first London Cup kendo competition that I had created. I was still teaching and did gentle training. No one noticed again. One night, my husband

said, "Wow, we have a great turn up for the women's match." His excited voice continued, "I love to see you fighting. I am going to say to everyone, this is my wife." I looked at him, "My dear, you did not notice how much pain I have been in when walking almost for six months? I did not want to make you worry so I did not say anything. I can barely train and teach. I cannot fight this time." My husband's eyes were so disappointed, "Oh no, many women and men would be disappointed if you did not fight (with the Korean ex-national team)." I wanted to be the ironwoman for my husband. I said, "Alright! Alright! I will fight." He hugged me tightly and kissed me everywhere on my face. I wiped it and he did more. We both laughed in the kitchen.

The London Cup commenced. After the opening ceremony, I took off my official suit, made sure everything was moving smoothly, and went to cleaning the toilet and changing the bin. One of my students approached me and said, "Sensei, you need to be ready." I changed again to put on my gi and hakama (fighting clothes), and entered my first match. After I won, I went back to managing everything then went to my next match. This went on again and again and again, until I was in the final. After arranging everything, I put everything else out of my mind except the shiai-jo (competition area) and only thought about winning. A few minutes later, I heard that whistle blow in the air. I became the champion.

The first London Cup had been a great success. I could breathe. I went to the corner and sat on a yellow chair and looked at my poor little toe. It was now the same size as my big toe, but somehow I loved to see it. My gold medal was hanging around on my chest. I felt good. The Spanish team passed me as I took off the bandage. They looked at my toe and said, "Oh my god!". I joked, "It is big." I was smiling brightly. They looked at me like a hero. It was just a broken toe.

I was not always this way with bruises. It was one of the lessons of masculinity that I learnt. When I saw my first bruises during the shower, I was a little bit upset because it did not look pretty on my body. Joncheray and Tlili (2013) state that people are more likely to find it difficult to accept injuries when the body is a woman's rather than a man's. This was true for me when I was a beginner. I was more concerned about losing the feminine aspect of my body because I love to be womanly. I did not want to sacrifice being a woman in any way. Then during the breakfast after training, a male kendoka said that bruises were part of kendo. I felt embarrassed about my previous thought. On that day, my attitude changed. Male kendoka neither showed off or worried about their bruises. Instead bruises were just normal. I liked this kind of attitude. My father used to say those things to my brother about true masculinity. I overheard this when I was a little girl. So when male kendoka showed me how to react to their bruises, I shook off my bruises the same way. Since then I had plenty of bruises on my arms, legs, ribs and throat, but I even did not look at them. I wanted to be a real kendoka. I related to Adjepong's observation that "All athletes, regardless of gender, may perceive their bruises as a sign of

how hard they played." (2016, 1491). Indeed, I started to be sort of proud of my bruises because they were evidence that I was training hard. Since then even when my blood was spilt in kendo, I was calm. However, other male kendoka were more worried and concerned about me, in particular in Western countries. I felt strange when they treated me as special in the dojo, like I needed to be protected. Like I was inferior to them. Ironically, when I saw the blood, I became the champion. Since then I loved to see the blood. I was waiting to see it.

I learned more samurai attitudes as my training continued. One day I was doing keiko with my third sensei. His strike was so hard, I showed a little bit of pain and frustration. He immediately stopped the keiko and advised me about the real warrior's attitude, "Never show any of your emotions." Since then, I did not show any pain. This simple change of attitude drove me while I competed. I was able to engage with my opponent's mind and movement rather than my pains and emotions. Later I learnt one of my favourite kendo concepts from my husband: "Seme" never stop whatever happens. Seme is defined as:

> The state in which an unrelenting, determined position of advantage is maintained on the opponent. There are some examples of seme, Kiryoko-ni-yoru-seme (to attack with "fighting spirit"), Ken-sen-ni-yoru-seme (to attack with the sword) and Datotsu-ni-yoru-seme (to attack by hitting) (British Kendo Association, 1964).

My problem was no longer bruises or pain. Instead the difficulty was dealing with other people's eyes and society's reactions as a woman. They regarded me as shameful. Bruises stayed on my body for a few weeks and they came regularly. This was considered unwomanly to other people, particularly other women. For example, when I went to the public sauna in Korea, the eyes of all the ladies turned immediately to me. One lady approached me and she clicked her tongue. "Tut! Tut! Tut! Your husband or boyfriend has beaten up you?" All the naked ladies stopped scrubbing and looked at us. I replied quickly and loudly, "No! No! No! It is from kendo training." Their eyes became sadder. I did not say anything else. They would not believe me anyway. In the Korean proverb, *콩으로 메주를 쑨다 하여도 곧이 듣지 않는다* (*Kong-eulo mejuleul ssunda hayeodo god-ideudji anhneunda'neun sogdam: people did not want to believe that soy paste made by soybeans: people did not believe what you say no matter how true.)* (Jang, 2019). So I learned to not mind other voices or opinions or the eyes of strangers. Instead I felt confident in myself.

However, a few months later, my bruises became scandalous. My training was getting tougher and tougher. My third sensei would harshly tsuki (throat strike) me almost every training. My whole throat was covered up with marks. The problem was not me, again it was others. But this time, they were not strangers. They were my colleagues. When I went to work, my colleagues looked at me strangely. Finally one of my female colleagues approached me and said, "It is so embarrassing to look at your

throat. You should wear a scarf or put the foundation (makeup) on it, then it would not be that bad." I answered promptly, "Do you think that it is a kiss mark! No, it is from kendo." But no one believed it. The scandal was ongoing. I learnt again to completely ignore it. Then when I was selected for the national team, they believed me. Finally.

Spencer (2009) notes that men training in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) are proud of their bruises which symbolize hardness and masculinity. Yet although men are more likely free to indulge in their injuries as a show of their masculinity, some women athletes are also proud of their bruises (Adjepong, 2016). Adjepong (2016) for example, mentions that all white female rugby players have "referred to their bruises as "badges of honour" because for them these bruises were a signal of their muscular capability and a refusal of the norms of upright heterosexual femininity." (1494) Thus sportswomen can see their bruises as a symbol of their toughness (Adjepong, 2016). Broad (2001) also notes that when sportswomen display their sports bruises outside of a sports environment they are engaging in unapologetic behaviour that challenges the logic of gendered expectations. In other words, sportswomen who decline to cover up their bruises can challenge normative ideas of women's bodies, sexuality and violence (Adjepong, 2016).

Nevertheless, these ideas felt alien to me when I first encountered them. Particularly, when I was reading about other women's reactions to bruises, I felt strange and disconnected from my own experiences. I was not showing my bruises as a badges of honour that showed my muscular capability and challenged gender normative ideas of gender and women's bodies in particular. Yet on reflection, it felt to me that kendo had created a space where I could move past those gendered ideas, I didn't need to challenge them because I did not feel like they affected me. I was just being a kendoka like my male friends.

As my kendo journey has continued, I have had to keep learning how to deal with pain. My throat has been damaged from yelling the wrong way, I have started having terrible muscle pains, stomach pain, and many other pains. I have decided to live with these forms of physical suffering rather than resist them. It is part of the costs of the beautiful moments that kendo gives me. Yet as the following chapter shows, I also have had to learn to find a more sustainable way of practising kendo.

Lesson 3 – Gender Biases and Hierarchies

Hierarchies are a part of Confucian life in Korea. I adored learning hierarchies and masculinity from my father since I was a very little girl. Particularly, *위계질서 (Wigyejilseo: the order should be in the relationship between the ranks of officials and positions)*. My father emphasized this lesson repeatedly, which is a crucial part of Korean Confucian culture (So, 2010). Much of kendo culture is also shaped

by hierarchies. Even the way you drink alcohol can be influenced by rituals of hierarchy and masculinity as McDonald and Sylvester have shown (2014; Sylvester & McDonald, 2020; see also Anderson et al., 2012). I was very happy to pour alcoholic drinks to the sensei, it felt fine and natural as part of a respectful act from a student to the sensei. McDonald terms this the "naturalization of a gendered identity" (McDonald, 2019, 432). However, later I had an uncomfortable experience with my first sensei that showed me the way alcohol could be linked to sexual abuse and violence (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002). So instead of building my masculinity through feats of drinking, I focused on training as hard as I could.

The men who could conquer everyone else were celebrated by me along with everyone else. I wanted to be like them, to conquer everyone as well. Perhaps this would have been more possible in a place like Finland where Dekšnytė found that women could train with and compete against men largely without gender biases (Dekšnytė, 2013). In contrast in Japan there was still a rigid gender hierarchy in kendo despite the seemingly gender-neutral ideals of kendo (Sylvester, 2015). While there has been no study regarding hierarchies of masculinity and gender in South Korea, my experience was that I was not always treated equally.

My third sensei was influenced by Japanese ideals of kendo and Confucianism in Korean culture. He believed that women were not supposed to rely on their strength or to be as aggressive as men. I understand now where these ideas come from. However, at that time, I could not understand his views. I did not know how to control the aggression of my body. My kendo was wild. I was determined to be as hard and aggressive as the young men around me were. Nevertheless, I had developed some important skills. In particular, my second sensei had taught me how to do body attacks correctly. The body attack (taitari) is one of the crucial skills to learn and needs to teach properly in kendo. Otherwise, I could hurt someone or someone could hurt me. Yet despite me having learnt body attack skills correctly, my third sensei endeavoured to introduce me to his idea that female kendoka should focus on beautiful movements rather than on being a warrior. It was frustrating because he loved the dynamism of my kendo, and because of this had invited me to train with him. Yet when I trained with him, I felt like I was wearing a ballerina's clothes rather than my own gi and hakama. It did not feel right.

Mennesson found that female boxers "were keen to confirm their feminine identities both in and out of the rings. This affirmation involved choosing appropriate attire for the ring ('something sexy'), wearing mini-skirts after a competition, and having long hair." (2000, 28). Outside of the dojo I also loved dressing in ways that emphasised my femininity like these women. But inside the dojo, I was different from the female boxers that Mennesson studied. In the dojo, I did not want to be treated differently in any way.

Hence, training with my third sensei was very confusing at that time. Being strong was the best part of my kendo. Being a warrior in the dojo had made me the second-best female kendoka in Korea. Every day my third sensei focused on skills in his lessons, yet when I participated in a competition, he insisted that I must perform beautifully. The result was that I lost in the first match. It was the worst result in my kendo career so far. However, I followed his lesson without any words of complaining. I strived to do everything his way. Because I wanted to show my respect to him, and that was the way hierarchy worked in kendo in South Korea.

Looking back, I can see that my third sensei taught me vital skills. Lessons that would be essential to the development of my kendo later. Yet he endeavoured to stop almost everything that I enjoyed most about kendo. So at that time, I could not trust his lessons. Misgivings kept coming into my brain, and then this doubt drove me to start doubting myself and my kendo. The next World Kendo Championship was a good example. I could not betray my sensei's teaching, but also I could not do what I wanted to – what I did best – at those championships. I was knocked out in the quarter-finals. I could have done much better, even though I was ill. If only he had let me fight like a young strong warrior at the time. If only he had waited until after the World Championships to teach me those beautiful skills. Two decades after, he told me that he regretted the way he had taught me for WKC. I was glad to hear that.

After the Championships were over I started to adapt to my third sensei's lesson slowly as clothes become wet with dew (Lee, 2012). My body could not cope with sustained aggression any longer. After a slump, I realised that his lessons were for a lifetime of kendo. I used his lessons at SBS Kendo Championship in 2001. I finished second again (again because a referees made a decision to award my opponent the Championship after a tie). But the result was not important for the first time in my kendo life because I truly started to understand my third sensei's lesson. I proved to myself on that day how to win without relying only on the strength of my body and will. I received big compliments from many 8th dan sensei and my third sensei gave me a compliment for the first-time after the competition.

Now my kendo is no longer full of aggression like a mad (young) person. I do not want to fight any more like that. Yet, I am still a fierce warrior inside my mind even though I am striving to fight with beauty and skill like a skilful boxer as well as like a ballerina: flexible, soft and sharp. I am reminded of the Korean proverb, *빈 수레가 요란하다 (Bin sulega yolanhada: empty vessels make the loudest noise, which means that a person who has nothing, pretends there is more.)* (Jeong, 2020). I was an empty vessel before I met my third sensei. He taught true winning with the right spirit, and directed me to enter a mature kendo practice. I owe a massive amount to my third sensei. In the end I gained a lot from following the kendo (Confucian) hierarchy and learning the skills that he was able to teach me. At

the same time, it is a pity that he could not value and also harness the aggressive, masculine strength of the kendo that I had when I first came to him.

Later I lost the trust of my third sensei. This was due to several reasons, but I can now see that my doubt was one of the reasons that made our relationship discontinue. After more than a decade, I visited him again with my husband. When I met him, my third sensei told his students that my fierceness and determination had scared him more than any kendoka. This was his way of indicating his respect for me, and how he had come to be proud of my warrior's attitude to kendo. Yet when I visited him again he doubted my ability to fight well against strong Japanese men, and was surprised by my successful 7th dan trial in Japan. This made me very sad.

Lesson 4 – The Revenge of Angry, Humiliated Men

I adored the aggressive masculinity of much of kendo because it was based on fighting like honourable warriors to see who could be the best. In kendo you can try to dominate with strength, but you are not supposed to try to actually seriously wound or humiliate your opponent. To do that is what I understand to be a form of violence. This is where I make the distinction between kendo's samurai masculinity and normative masculinity, that I mentioned at the start of this chapter. Yet unfortunately, sometimes violence by men against women is part of kendo culture. Even in Finland, Dekšnytė found that some men seem to be struggling to deal with interactions with strong and skilled women (Dekšnytė, 2013). As a result, female kendoka more often confront violent experiences more than male kendoka in kendo. For example, one Finnish female kendoka recalled that: "The first time I thought what it is to be a woman in kendo was when I encountered in the match with a man who had overwhelming physical power and determined attitude to give a lesson to a 'girl'" (Dekšnytė, 2013, 45). It was enough to make her consider quitting.

Aggression offers fun and toughness, but violence leads to humiliation. Frequently nobody understands unless you are in the situation (Nash, 2015). It is very hard to explain. To be hurt by violence can make you seem weak. It can damage your masculinity. This is why I have not talked publicly about the violence I have experienced. I do not want to be told that I am weak. Instead, like the sportswomen that Adjepong discusses, I wanted to disprove that long held views that women are physically weak and incapable of confronting violence (2016).

Nevertheless, despite falling in love with kendo's samurai masculinity, I have found that some male kendoka and male sensei are threatened by women good enough to beat them. Thus, part of what I have learnt about masculinity, is how it fails to live up to its own stories. Instead of allowing equal competition, some kendoka and sensei seem too attached to a hegemonic form of masculinity where men always have to be better than women. Drawing in the work of Raewyn Connell (1987), Kate

Sylvester notes that "Hegemonic masculinity is one form of masculinity that embodies the cultural specific ideal form of being a man, requiring all other men to position themselves as the masculine ideal, legitimising the subordination of women to men." (Sylvester, 2015, 95).

Ozawa mentions that many female kendoka are stronger and more skilful than their male counterparts and have higher grades (Ozawa, 1997). Unfortunately this can lead to discrimination. When I became a senior and a sensei, sometimes my skill became my enemy. If I showed that I was more skilful than certain men, it seemed that I embarrassed male kendoka. When I was strong aggressive junior, men said over and over again how I was amazing. I was rewarded by them. Yet, when I became sensei and tried to be equal to them or better than these men, they seemed uncomfortable. On one occasion a demonstration of my skills led to me being subjected to awful violence.[7]

Not long after my husband and I came to Australia, I heard that there was an international shinpan (referee) seminar in another city. I packed all my armour and attended the seminar, which was excellent. I met one sensei there who had moved from Japan. I will refer to him as sensei X. He was nice enough the first time. He started calling me "sakura", which was a Japanese national flower. He said to me, "You are pretty, so I will call you sakura." We laughed together.

After the seminar, there was a dinner with a group of Japanese senseis who were living in Australia. One guy talked about my kendo to sensei X. I overheard the mention that I did tsuki (throat strike) to a senior sensei. There was a reserved expression on sensei X's face when he heard this. I did not say anything at the dinner table, because I was new in Australia. I wanted to be diplomatic in order to keep a good reputation.

It was true, I did tsuki a few times in two decades. My third sensei had taught me this high level of skill. You need to wait for the perfect (zen) moment. I did not plan to do tsuki to senior sensei. The skill just came out from the middle of nowhere. One tiny spot opened and my body reacted. I only concentrating on the sensei's delicate movements. I could not see any aperture of the movement. The senior sensei was so still, calm and settled in their position. I tried to engage their eyes to read their mind, but they only showed comfortable confidence. When I tried to make them move, it did not work. I struggled to

[7] What sensei X should have done in this incident was to make me practice kakarikeiko (continuous striking) like other sensei. It is the hardest training. If he felt that I needed the lesson on how to be humble in kendo, this is the way of teaching and this is the way of improving me positively rather than using humiliation. If he had done like this, then this violence would have turned out to be a true lesson and the best lesson for me on that day.

destroy their sharp spirit, their shinai (bamboo sword) and their movement, but I could not shake any of these either. Then suddenly, I saw a huge empty spot in their posture. I did not hesitate. I put my shinai on their throat. It landed at the right spot. I was shocked at myself. It was not perfect, but I almost shook them. I was proud. Afterwards, immediately I showed respect with a bow to the senior sensei. The throat is a very sensitive target so if I do tsuki to someone senior, I always show my respect straight away. My third sensei told me to do so. The most senior sensei accepted my bow and we continued our keiko. Still, when I train very aged sensei, I only try to cut men (head strike) most of the time or very basic cut to learn rather than win.

A few months later, the Australian Kendo Championship was held in another city. I went as a shinpan (referee). All the kendoka reunited and seemed to have a great competition except for me. I met sensei X in the sports hall where volunteers were preparing. He called me "sakura" loudly, repeatedly. Suddenly, he grabbed my collar tightly and said hello to me. It was quite strange. Firstly, we were not that close, we just met once before and I was not his student, and even close friends did not greet each other this way. Secondly, I am also a sensei, he should not behave in this way in the kendo venue.

However, I took it as a good thing, I felt that I had become one of his favourites. I liked it. When I bumped into him during the Championship, he kept asking me to do keiko with him. I felt some tension even though he was smiling at me. I just said "Yes", I could not refuse because he was a higher grade than me, yet something felt very wrong. I tried to avoid this situation through previous experiences, so I went to the guest Japanese sensei for keiko.

Sensei X was doing keiko with another guest Japanese sensei. I saw his kendo was very good. When sensei X finished his keiko, he used his authority to do keiko with me. He took me to the corner of the dojo. I thought "do not be silly, he is alright". But when the keiko started he immediately ran into me to push and smash everywhere without regard to kendo regulations and rules. For a while, I thought that he was just playing with me rather than doing kendo. Hence, I tried to be calm and do keiko again. But I ended up on the floor, being endlessly smashed by his shinai (bamboo sword). I tried to get up, but I did not know how. Somehow, I stood up, then I was pushed toward the wall, attacked by a hard body, I was confused for a second, "Am I attacked by a stranger on the street?" I was not. I was attacked by the sensei. I kept trying to do kendo, but he did not want to do kendo. I was like a rat being toyed with by a cat. A shinai had been turned into a weapon, a powerful sensei had turned into a violent stranger. My brain went to black. I did not know what to do.

Hundreds of kendoka were training next to me. Kiai (yelling), fumikomi (stamping) and shinai crashing sounds like lightning and thunder. Anyone hardly noticed my trouble. No one stopped it or said anything about it while it was happening. I could not rely on anyone or anything to help me. Fortunately, when

someone blew the whistle, it saved me. "Hmm, whistle." It sounded like God's voice, "It is enough!!!" I looked at the ceiling with a big sigh and silently said, "Thank god!" After the keiko finished the sensei had a big smile on his face. When I came out from keiko, I was broken. A few juniors asked me, "Sensei, are you ok?" I smiled back at them and said, "It is ok. Do not worry." When I passed them, I heard them say that the other sensei had been a "cunt!"[8]

Why I was broken? I felt humiliated and shamed. The attack felt like such a betrayal, such a violation of kendo. It felt like he just attacked me to hurt me and teach me the lesson and avenge the supposed insult that I had given by doing *tsuki* successfully to a senior Japanese sensei. It seemed that he was trying to force me to learn that "Kendo is the Japanese world, a man's world and my world." To remind me of the power of Japanese masculinity (Bozkurt et al., 2015). This sensei had fought honourably when he did keiko with the guest Japanese sensei. His violence was only directed at me. He did not give me a chance to do any keiko. Aggression and power had become violence and dominance. I felt dishonoured, weakened, stupid and useless.

I had never experienced this kind of situation in kendo or in my life. I had met rough kendoka, but they did some kendo. I quite enjoyed the aggression of strong male kendoka when I was young. This time, I could not explain how I felt. I was even not aggressive or rude towards senior Japanese sensei, I just used my skills and strived to remain basic cuts for being student rather than being warrior. He had not even seen me t do tsuki. I still did not understand sensei X's intention. A few years later, when I visited his city, I wanted to ask him directly and visited his dojo, but he was in Japan.

If someone had unexpectedly attacked me from behind on the street, I would have defended myself or attacked back or made them calm down. Yet in this situation, I could not do any of those things. And he knew that I could not attack him back. I did not want to dishonour him, even though what he did was completely wrong. I did not want to show bad kendo attitudes or behaviour, especially in front of people who called me "sensei". Therefore, I just tried to do kendo back while he was attacking me. However, one side of my brain was saying: "You were so stupid! You should have done something!" I inhaled and exhaled deeply a few times when I came back to my friend's house where I was staying. But I could not control my feeling of being betrayed. I cried alone in the little girl's room when I was changing my clothes for the *Sayonara* party (farewell dinner after the seminar). Afterwards, when I came back home to Melbourne, I stayed in bed for one month doing nothing. I tried to forgive sensei X, but it was very hard to do. I was very tired emotionally and physically. I kept visiting my physiotherapist and massage therapist to recover my body and low spirit.

[8] In Australia cunt is used as a broad term of abuse that is often applied to men as well as to women.

What was particularly dreadful about what sensei X did to me? He damaged my body and spirit. For a while he also damaged my masculinity. He had tried to make me seem weak and frail. Mierzwinski et al. (2014) observe that "Aggressiveness in women is considered to be unusual, undesirable and *particularly* uncivilized." (80) It felt like this sensei was trying to punish me for my skill towards the senior Japanese sensei. But I had done that with respect and civility within the rules, traditions, and hierarchies of kendo. It was he who was being uncivilised. Indeed, he behaved in a monstrous fashion, using violence to increase his power at my expense, and to try to illegitimately uphold the power of other men (Evans, 2019).

Since this incident happened, I cannot use *tsuki* anymore. Even in my dojo with my students when there is nobody to stop me, I cannot do it. I have lost my favourite, most delicate, pure skill. *Tsuki* is the most difficult skill that can be performed in shiai (competition) or keiko (sparing practise). I had only managed it successfully once in competition on the day of my 5th dan grading. It just came out naturally, beautifully at that moment. But since I was attacked by sensei X I cannot even do it during keiko. I am determined to practise every session to bring it back.

Lesson 5 – Being Stronger by Surviving and Being Resilient: Winning in the End

Sensei X's violence damaged my body and my spirit. However, in the end I found a way to recover positively and to take positive lessons from it into my kendo life. "Sporting violence and sexual violence come into conversation with one another through sportswomen's bodies facilitates one interpretation of how women's visible injuries can both empower and victimize them" (Adjepong, 2016, 1491). I was a victim of violence, I must admit that. But afterwards, I was empowered spiritually by myself. I have turned that awful experience into something powerful and good. In doing this, I tried to follow the Korean proverbs: *오뚜기 (Ottogi: even if you fall, get up again and again and again)*, in other words, *칠전팔기 (Chiljeonplagi: if you fall seven times, you will get up eight times)* (Lee, 1999; Borello, 2019). Those were my father's favourite phrases. He proclaimed that almost every day. I had forgotten this lesson because I did not need to fight my life like before to survive, in particular, when I became sensei and married. I had become used to hearing that I was fantastic from students.

At the Sayonara party I was invited by the Japanese guest sensei to his dinner table. He kept mentioning how strong my keiko was in front of the senior Australian sensei, but the sensei X kept denying that my kendo was good. I smiled back because I brought back very strongly my father's lesson *오뚜기 (Ottogi)* and *칠전팔기 (Chiljeonplagi)* on that day. The next day before the final set of competitions began, sensei X approached me again and declared that, "Japanese people only understand real kendo. Your 7th dan can be recognised if you pass in Japan only." I did not say anything, just smiled gently. But my sleepy warrior fighting spirit began to awaken again. After I began to recover physically from the attack,

I started to travel to Japan again to practise and understand what I agreed was the best kendo in the world. I started to learn again by just watching and doing keiko with Japanese sensei who were the world champions and legendary. Then I went to Japan by myself to take my 7th dan. In my second trial, I passed in Kyoto. I thank sensei X for the motivation. It turned out beautifully.

Although I decided to never make a formal complaint, other kendoka complained on my behalf. Sensei X was sanctioned and had to send me a letter of apology. And he also might have known that he was in my debt – if I did complain he might lose everything that he had gained in kendo. After some time I came out of my humiliation. I was not broken any longer. When he passed me at the next kendo event, I bowed to him out of choice. The final match came and were assigned to referee it together. I walked closer and I could hear his voice getting louder. Junior referees surrounded him listening closely to his words. He looked very confident. There were so many empty chairs around him. I sat next to him and did not say anything, waiting for the match to begin. He looked at me uncertainly, I gave my bright gentle smile, showing respect and forgiveness. But my smile was also a statement that I was stronger than he was. I was not afraid. He no longer called me "sakura". Instead he referred to me with proper respect, calling me, "Cho sensei". He had been violent to me, and I had not stopped it because I had followed kendo rules and traditions, even if he was breaking them. At the time he thought he had won, but in the end I was the winner of the fight that he had started. I was the samurai warrior who had the strength to forgive, learn, and grow, but not forget.

When I was thinking about writing this chapter, I found something very new about myself. I learned something significant and profound from the incident with sensei X. I started to see what kind of sensei I was, which made me strive to be a better sensei than before. I am starting to recognise my frustration (passion) toward my students. Since then I am better at controlling my mind because of this experience. Likewise, I learned how to control situations patiently rather than losing my temper when I saw injustice or unfair decisions generally. Moreover, I started to understand that losing is a winning game (Kim, 2016), which my mother tried to teach me whole her life. I also realised that sensei X was the person who made me see my blindness with regards to damaging gender relations in kendo. Now I am determined to make kendo a better place for female kendoka.

I found forgiveness and strength out of shame, and also began to understand how gender relations and discrimination had worked in my life. Despite my best endeavours, I was always dependent on men in Korea, the UK, and Australia. They determined if I was allowed to belong, and reacted negatively when I challenged male positions. I needed their permission to be successful (Sylvester & McDonald, 2020). Autoethnography has helped me to begin to wrestle with these puzzles. I was banging the glass ceiling without knowing why I kept hurting my head. I didn't understand why men could get some things that I never could. For a long time I put it this way, it was God's plan, the law of nature, the destiny of being

born as a woman. Now for the first time in my life, I think differently. Therefore I am strangely grateful for this experience of violence.[9]

Conclusion – Creating My Own Masculinity by Learning those Lessons

Looking back over almost three decades of training in kendo with men has taught me what strength, masculinity, courage, honour, and resilience mean. In particular, I started to collect different shapes of what strength can mean. And I discovered that my own resilient masculinity started from broken masculinity. The violence of sensei X encouraged me to think more about my own masculinity and how I need to rebuild and recreate it. In doing so, I showed that women can indeed fully access the samurai masculinity of kendo both through their bodies and spirits. I now strive for kendo to treat masculinity in the way that is like *Game of Thrones* where, in the words of Evans, "Female, disabled, and queer masculine characters make violence a visibly masculine act and use it in ways that are coded as heroic or horrifying, depending on whether it empowers or disempowers others." (Evans, 2019, 1).

The orthodox image of martial arts is that they symbolise that men's power and capability exist everywhere. This pride creates issues for women. Kavoura et al. (2012) wrote that female participation in martial arts is often restricted, as men strongly believe that martial arts belong to them. Many women quit combat sports with the minority of surviving women receiving fewer opportunities to improve and develop their techniques through training (Halbert, 1997). Those surviving women can become so strong that men start to feel threatened. These men are attached to forms of hegemonic masculinity with clear hierarchies that see men as always stronger and better than any woman. When these hierarchies are challenged, they often respond with violence.

I would like to end this chapter with the following note. Some of my female students when they joined, complained about being treated aggressively in kendo. Now, they complain of the opposite. One of the female students says, "I do not need men to turn to be gentlemen in keiko (sparing practise). It really annoyed me. I want to fight. Look at my bruises sensei?" I was upset to see the bruises (my students are like my children), but she said that it is nothing. Another female student says, "I must say that kendo

[9] By chance at another event I later met both of the guest Japanese senseis who had been there when the incident happened. One insisted on buying me a drink. We sat silently drinking as hundreds of kendoka passed. Strange, but very good. The other sensei came to my competition and tightened my Men himo (head string) in front of everyone. Then he invited me to dinner with important and famous Japanese senseis. It was also wonderful. Later I heard that someone had reported sensei X's attack on me to these two senseis. Apparently they disciplined him in kendo fashion with kakarikeiko (continuous attacking). I greatly appreciate their support.

made me no longer frightened in my male-dominated workplace. I was banging with male bodies in kendo every training, I surprise myself that I can be strong as a man. This is normal to me now." It was wonderful to hear these reflections from people who never believe in the ability of their female bodies and spirits to be strong. I was well pleased and proud of them. If women start to believe in themselves and men understand what this means for women, these changes make kendo glorious for everyone.

Chapter 6: Experiences of Becoming and Being a Nanadan – Growing Old with Kendo

I had achieved true masculinity. I had no fear. Beating strong men every day made me into a brave and courageous warrior. *Or so I thought*. Then in 2006, when I migrated to England, I discovered that I was fragile. I experienced deep fear (I was shitting myself). And I had to go through a journey of finding out how to live with actual braveness. I struggled to find "the sense of continuity of the self" (Goldin, 2002, 2), but also I was battling to reconstruct my identity in a new country, in particular, in kendo. Justine Goldin notes that "Migration is one of the most enduring themes of human history." (2002, 4). "It is one of the most drastic life changes and transitions an individual can face." (Goldin, 2002, 4). This was true for me. "Each person's reaction to migration is unique; migrants may either experience stability and opportunity or a sense of emotional uprootedness, or in fact, all." (Goldin, 2002, 4). I was facing all of that.

Living in London was beautiful. The city had everything that I loved. The best ballet, classical music, architecture, fashion, and so much else. Even weather was so dramatic, raining occasionally, comfortable in summer and mild in winter. But I lived *창살 없는 감옥살이 (changsal eobsneun gamogsali: prison life without bars)* (Hong et. al., 2018). If I had a job, family and friends like in Korea, London would be heaven. But all I had was my husband, and I did not feel able to go out without him, despite having enjoyed my previous visit to London by myself. So I endured my own lockdown far earlier than those triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. I identify strongly with Goldin's observation that "The consequence of the fierce encounter with the new country, combined with the mourning process triggered by the loss, causes a threat to the migrant's identity." (Goldin, 2002, 5). Far away from my home, my family, my friends, and my previous job I experienced the "ordeal" of migration (Simon & Rizzi, 2020).

I turned to kendo to replace everything that I had lost. The unique interaction of sport and place (Shipway & Jones, 2007) was able to ground me in the city. The Tora dojo became like my house, my new students became my family and my husband became my best friend. I started to call London "My home". But then I had a crisis with my own kendo. The problem was that I started to lose the things that I loved most about kendo. Not only was I no longer surrounded by the same high level of competition to fight against and strive to beat, I began to struggle with the question of how to grow old in kendo. In particular I was confronted with the awful discovery that the glorious kendo masculinity that I cherished – being able to smash everyone as a strong, loud, brash and energetic warrior – was not sustainable as I grew older. In Korea I might have been able to find a sensei to guide me through this difficult process, but in London I experienced "the difficulty of growing old far from home" (Simon & Rizzi, 2020, 1). As a result I lost the intense joy that kendo gave me. No longer did my heart flutter

before training. Instead packing my armour for training was miserable, the drive there was agony, and the teaching became hard work. I actually started to hate kendo in secret. Absolutely hate it.

Scholars of masculinity tend to "black box masculinities – black *vs* white, fertile *vs* infertile, gay *vs* straight for example." (Light, 2007, 663). Various other forms of masculinity have been the subject of scholarship such as: dominant traditional masculinities, oppressed traditional masculinities or new alternative masculinities (see more Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2021); hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005); hyper masculinity (Vokey et. al, 2013); and ordinary masculinity (Edley, 2001). But despite this significant scholarship, most of it focuses on the masculinity of relatively young men. As Saxton and Cole (2012) note, "contemporary scholarship on masculinity in *later life* is beset with significant limitations that mirror social and cultural aspects of the very subject that it is meant to study." (97) Canham (2009) notes that elder men are portrayed in terms of diminished masculinity, primarily as ordinary and nonsexual, moreover, unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. Masculinity, in other words, is frequently framed as the province of youthful men – as something that is lost by those who grow old and fragile. But when I look back at my struggles, I see that I was trying to find a way of growing old that continued to be grounded in the joys of masculinity. In being courageous, finding strength, and fighting like a warrior.

I knew that getting older in kendo is seen as a privilege rather than something to be ashamed about. Kendo embodies the Confucian perspective that the elderly should be venerated (Chang et al., 1984; Chen, 2002; Tuckett, 2016). In both Japan and Korea it is also expected that people will continue to remain active and exercise as they get older. Indeed, Sipos argues that an active engagement with the aging process is part of why rural Japanese are more likely to live longer than other countries (Sipos, 2008). "A rural Japanese community believe they *should* live as they get older to maintain their health or address undesired symptoms of senescence." (Sipos, 2008, 5). Likewise, in Korea, exercise is seen as extending longevity (Kim et. al., 2014). The Korean National Blueprint promotes "increasing physical activity among adults ages 50 and older" to remain healthy lifestyle (Chodzko-Zajko et al., 2005, 2).

Nevertheless, as a junior in kendo I had believed that I should learn from those with the best skills rather than paying close attention to elderly kendoka. This chapter charts the journey I followed in learning to redevelop my kendo masculinity as I grew old. It begins with the youthful masculinity that I embraced, before exploring how I came to learn alternative forms of kendo masculinity. It also returns to my parents and to the forms of strength and courage that they embodied as they grew older and faced the end of their lives.

The Joy of Youthful Masculinity

Kavoura et al. found that female Judoka in Finland resolved the problem of Judo being seen as a masculine activity that was a man's domain, by understanding themselves as "naturally born fighters" (2018, 26). This allowed them to access the masculinity of Judo, and to claim it as their own. I was the same. I adored the masculinity of kendo and wanted to make it my own. The masculinity that I loved was the strength and wildness of youth. I loved testing myself, showing how strong I was, trying to conquer everything and everyone. I was so full of reckless energy that people frequently spoke about me as if I was crazy.

I was middle of 수락산 (Suraksan) Winter mountain. My breathing was getting faster. One stranger passed me and whispered to her husband, "Oh my God, she is not wearing shoes. Is she mad?" Yes, I was mad at that time. Just after I started kendo, I turned up to my workplace and found out that everyone was going on a trip to climb this mountain. I only had high heels. Yet my determination persuaded my boss to let me come, and he gave me a challenge. "If you want to be the Korean national team, you must show your fortitude." He was sort of teasing me, but I ended up climbing the mountain in bare feet.

I climbed up that mountain for over three hours without shoes. My bright red blood was everywhere. I wiped the blood on the snow. I could not feel anything on my feet, but I was smiling like a flower and I was talking like birds. All my colleagues insisted that I put shoes on, but I refused. My boss did not say anything. At lunchtime, we collected wet branches and made a fire. We all sat around fire, my boss was watching the fire and eventually opened his mouth and quietly said, "Put shoes on." I continued staring at the fire and said quietly back to him, "I will finish." I took off my stockings and wiped my blood again and throw it into fire. I was not smiling or laughing like a foolish girl anymore. My boss's face went RED.

It took almost ten hours of battle before I finished. The large snowflakes started falling and filled the space. Everywhere was covered with snow in a second. The cold and harsh wind stopped. Everything became silent. It was miracle, and it was beautiful. It was a warm feeling like a mum's womb. The mountain wrapped around me. It was the most pleasant moment and I felt real comfort. I looked at the sky, I closed my eyes and then snowflakes touched my face gently and I heard an unspoken voice, "You can." I opened my eyes, "Can I?"

After that moment I ran until the bottom as if I was floating like a cherub. My body was so light. Finally, I reached the bus. I sat next my boss and cleaned the all blood and mud. I put my colleague's shoes on. I felt as if I was in heaven. My boss did not say anything. I did not say anything either. But when he

passed tissues, I saw a gentle smile. I knew what it meant. I had earned that smile with my mad bravery and ferocious effort. On that day, I had conquered the mountain and earned the esteem of my boss and my colleagues. Afterwards, I extended my kendo training to three to five hours per a day.

Around much of the world gender stereotypes continue to structure what women believe they can and cannot do, think, and feel (Butler, 1990; Elleners, 2018). As Kavoura et al. note, "A plethora of research has revealed that certain physical and psychological attributes (e.g., intellect, assertiveness, strength and competitiveness) remain persistently associated with male biology" (2018, 239). Indeed, women are still frequently viewed as naturally incompetent and as "innately incapable of enduring the physical and mental challenges and hardships of military life." (Kavoura et al., 2018, 239). However, when my boss jokingly asked me to undertake a hard challenge I found that I could go beyond what I thought were my limits as a woman. And I loved doing so. Since then, I started to habitually challenge myself. My body became stronger, as did my mind.

In kendo my embrace of youthful masculinity meant that I became known as a mad female kendoka. Sport and metaphors of madness has been a site of research in terms of fans (e.g., Gubar, 2015; Klugman 2009), yet those athletic women who adopt the madness of machismo have not been a focus of study. Therefore, I would like to share one story that encapsulates my initial passionate and wild energy in kendo.

I was mad with kendo. No time to break, no time to drink water or no time to talk at the training. When I waited for the bus, I practised foot work. When I walked or ate, I was only thinking about winning. Whatever I did, even when I slept, I did not take a break from focusing on kendo. Monday to Sunday, in the early morning and the evening after work, I was in the dojo. I did not understand people drinking in the pub and eating at restaurants after work. Those were crazy (a waste of time) to me.

One day, I heard some very exciting news from my friend, who said that one of the famous and strongest professional kendo teams was open for keiko (sparing practice) for any kendoka once per month on Sunday morning. Eventually, that Sunday came. I woke up early morning, wearing high heels as usual, and ran to my little car and opened the door. Then other side door was smashed against the ground. Someone crushed my car and ran away that night. Bastard!

I ran into the house, grabbed the black tape, plastic black bin bags, and string. I picked up the broken door, and I fixed it. I was ready to go. When I got in the car and I closed the door, I saw the back mirror was broken. I could not stay any longer. My one hand held the broken door, another hand held my steering wheel. I departed.

I entered the motorway, the heavy rain started and then the rain was falling inside the car. The strong wind was almost blowing my black plastic bag away. It was now hanging on the window like a flag, creating enormous sounds that made me more nervous. And then, a few minutes later, I could not see outside because of the window frost. It was as if I was in a steam sauna room. I wiped the window with a cloth, and afterwards, I held my broken door again. I repeated this action almost every second. Yet still, I could not see clearly so I opened my side of the window then the rain started to come into my face, I wiped my face with my hand. Then I missed the exit. Oh no!

I did not know how to get there. I called Jesus, who was still sleeping. The storm was getting rough. My hands and face were soaked, but I did not care. I was only thinking, "I must go." This time, I called God. A few minutes later, somehow, I arrived. Hallelujah.

The training started. I had never been to the dojo of a professional kendo team. Oh no, I did not know what to do. All the legendary Korean kendoka were there. They all were amazing. I practised with only five kendoka. The postures of some of them were gorgeous. They were very big, young, energetic, dynamic and super-fast. It was like they were fired out of a cannon. I saw that they were coming, but then they were already behind me. How can it be? They were like a ghost. I was smashed like a table tennis ball, but I held up very well. I surprised myself. Even though I lost a lot, what a joy. How can I not love this? I had never experienced anything like that. So loud, so dynamic, so vibrant, so lovely. The sounds of intense practice were drumming on my heart. I was floating on the air. I had always wanted to see real youthful masculinity. I saw it that day. Hundreds of examples. How lucky a woman was I?

At the end of training, the sensei smashed the drum. Everyone sat down on the floor in a line immediately. The sensei's voice popped out of air like God and broke the silence. "Would you like to compete?" I looked around to see who he was asking, and then realised that everyone was looking at me. "Me, sensei?"

I stood up, I fought, I won. Yet, as soon as it finished I could not remember what I did. I just yelled and smashed my opponent endlessly. I came back to my empty spot to fill the line with wild breath. Suddenly, the sensei said to everyone, "Everyone must learn her spirit. You all must take kendo seriously with passion like her." I was shocked, uncomfortable, but very proud inside of my mind. Everyone was incredibly strong. Much stronger than I was. But it was me who was anointed as "the spirit of example". How surprising. How glorious.

Yet I must confess that from around 35 years old I could not do this anymore. Losing power and speed is inevitable when getting older in kendo, as in other sports (see more Metter et. al., 1997). I fought against this process with as much determination as possible. I felt shame when I could not easily beat juniors. Eventually I realised that I had to learn a new way to do kendo. I had sacrificed the development of skills in favour of the passionate power that won me so many fights. But now those skills were more important for me, and I was embarrassed by what I couldn't do despite my seniority in kendo. My youthful masculinity needed to grow up.

Discovering New Transformed Masculinity by Aged Sensei

My most cherished masculinity was gone. Did it mean that I gave up aggressive, dynamic, energetic exciting kendo? Yes, I did. Why had I let go such things that I adored the most? The reason was very simple. I could not take kendo anymore physically (fortunately, my husband is still going. Lucky man.).

When they lose their strength the majority of kendoka leave kendo like other sports. However, I did not want to leave kendo. This was my problem. Older bodies are frequently related with weakening, injury, reliance on others, disease and inability (Blaikie, 1999). Therefore, "It is likely that growing older presents a unique challenge to be able to have a fit, functioning body in the domain of sport." (Dionigi et al., 2013, 371).

I needed to start the transformation before it become too late. But I did not know how to do it. This new journey (transformation) without a sensei to guide me was brutal. One day, I (sensei) did not want to go kendo. Oh dear me. Because when I lost my physical strength, I found it hard to beat even juniors (students). I was a former member of the Korean national team. It was embarrassing. No one said anything, but…

As a woman I did not mind getting old. Although in Korea, like many other places, "society sets young women's appearances as the standard for general women" (Choi, 2005, 109), I did not mind getting wrinkles. I was different to the "Middle-aged women" who "come to think that the conflict of age and femininity can be solved by cosmetic surgery." (Choi, 2005, 109). Kendo training made me young externally and mentally. Drummond notes that the advantages of exercise to functional health cannot be denied when people get aged (2008), and kendo certainly helped me a lot as I grew older. But it was still unpleasant to see myself as an old kendoka.

I wanted to train constantly with young stars, not only to help me remember my youth, but also so that I could learn how to be young again with my aging body. I also wanted to celebrate my aged kendo by beating the young stars and influencing their kendo. I wanted to be an example to them. These were my

desires, but I did not know how to make this happen. I did not know how to transform my kendo and masculinity into something sustainable. Fortunately, one particular event opened my eyes as to what was possible. Therefore, now, I would like to share a short narrative story, of the powerful, influential and memorable awaking moment that I experienced in Kyoto. This event introduced me to new masculinities and also had offered me the hope and faith that striving to change my kendo was the right thing to do.

It was six o'clock in the morning. My spirit was low and my body was so stiff, but I grabbed my shinai (bamboo sword) and went to Kyoto Budo Centre. When I arrived, the dojo was packed with kendoka (over a thousand people) ready to practise. My numbed heart immediately started moving. I was nervous, but super excited. It was like I came to a ball. I saw my kendo heroes were a few inches away, I loved to talk them. I could not. Instead, I put on my Men (head protector) faster than anyone else, and queued to keiko (sparing practice) with my favourite sensei (he was around sixty). I had wanted to fight with him since I became a kendoka. One naughty Japanese guy squashed in front of me. I let him do it because I would like to calm down my heart a little bit. I saw the sensei's movement in front of me, I did not want to miss any of it. My eyes became like a camera shutter, I took pictures of it all and stored them in my brain.

My keiko with the sensei was only for a few minutes keiko but it was still amazing. I queued to spar with another hero and then another. There were so many. All of them looked much stronger than me and older me. It stimulated my frozen brain. One hour just disappeared. I had only three practices for a total of nine minutes, but it was one of the best periods of kendo that I ever had experienced. Fantastic.

I saw plenty of examples of a different form of kendo masculinity that day. The sensei remained strong, they acted differently. They had a humble manner with enormous presence and dignity. They were settled and matured rather than wild and aggressive. This was the kind of masculinity that I wanted to see very much in my own kendo. On that day, I saw it and I met it. I knew from that day what I need to do in my own daily kendo training.

Sadly only one more day was left. I sat in the corner and watched all day the hachi (8^{th}) dan sensei competition where my heroes were fighting in front of my eyes. I learned a lot as the day progressed. Finally, one last match was left. I was thinking that I might leave to get to the airport, but a Japanese guy said to me, "This is the best match." I strongly doubted this. He continued, "A 101 year old sensei will fight against a 95 year old sensei." The small dojo was packed with more people than any of the previous matches. I did not understand. I was not excited. It could be a very boring shiai (competition). A kid's shiai would be more fun I thought. I wanted to go home, but, when I started to stand up the

Japanese guy looked at me as if to ask what I was doing. I looked around. I was surrounded by people and there was no way to get out. I sat down again and waited for the last match to finish.

Both sensei started to do songkyu (seating fighting position). First, I was surprised by it. I looked at the Japanese guy with astonished eyes. He nodded. If you do kendo, you understand why it is impressive, especially when you get older. I started to become curious. The 8th dan sensei commenced the final shiai.

"Hajime (start)!"

Complete silence. Then shinai (bamboo swords) were sharply smashing each other to keep the centre while also trying to create the opportunity to cut,

"Ttadas! Ttadas!"

The 95 year old sensei attacked first. He was quite rough, but the 101 year old sensei sustained himself against aggression. Then, I heard that kiai (yelling).

"Y~~~a~~~"

The 101 year old sensei's kiai covered all space, echoing through the air. The 95 year old sensei did not want to lose the control. Besides, he wanted to show off and control situation with his youth, "I am stronger than you, sensei (old man)!" He looked very young compared to the 101 year old sensei. Both started to cut and attack each other, but this time, the 101 year old sensei could not resist it. He started to go back a few steps. Everyone in the audience took in their breath sharply.

"Ooooou~~~"

Fortunately, the 101 years old sensei kept his balance, we all sighed,

"O~~hyu~~~"

And then everyone clapped for 101 years old sensei. Behind me I heard a Japanese person utter

"Yogata! Yogata! (thank god)"

This time 101 year old sensei wanted to recover his dignity. It seemed that he wanted to revenge himself and to give the 95 year old sensei a lesson, "I am still stronger than you, sensei (young man)!" He attacked more strongly. His fumikumi (stamping), his kiai (spirit), his shinai sound were getting sharper. Not as strong as that of my heroes, but it impacted me more than that of any my heroes. "How?" I thought. Then I started to see something new. His body could not show what I had previously valued – the strength of a real warrior – but I saw the immense warrior spirit in his spirit within his aged body. His fighting attitude was phenomenal. He was 19 years older than my 82 year old father who was lying down all day, waiting for the end of his life. I felt amazed and truly humble. His energy was inspiring. It was more than touching and moving. I started to really get into this shiai, but shinpan (referee) announced,

"Yame (stop)"

Although I had not realised it before, this final shiai gave me a lesson of masculinity that I had been looking for decades. Everyone stood up and clapped their hardest for the two sensei. I joined in.

Unfortunately, relatively little attention has been paid to later-life masculinities. Connell (1995) observes that, "Viewing masculinity through the lens of age, the old man does not measure up to the hegemonic standards of masculinity typically associated with younger men's lives" (Thompson, 2006, 646). Nevertheless, Thompson has found that there is evidence of distinct-late life masculinity expectations that are not necessarily associated with loss of strength or the failure to live up to the hegemonic standards of younger men: "People seem to hold clear stereotypic beliefs that differentiated older and younger men, including beliefs that highlight old men's masculinities" (Thompson, 2006, 646). And "The positive images of how aging could affect an old man - by being a 'gentleman' and an 'accomplished old man' - certainly contain evidence of later life masculinities and the continuities of expectations for men to be "successful" in whatever they do as men." (Thompson, 2006, 643). The two sensei that I had just seen certainly showed that they were "accomplished" older men.

Truthfully, the kendo demonstrated by these two aged sensei's kendo was nothing special compared to the physical and skilful sparing that I had just experienced with sensei aged between 50 and 80. So what was so special about their *shiai*? There were many reasons. They had survived in kendo through injuries, weakening bodies, the continual loss of youth, strength, power and speed, as well as the confronting experience of losing to their own students and juniors during practise. It is so easy to leave kendo when this happens, but they had the courage and strength of spirit to remain. They did not live in the past, nourishing their pride and egos with memories of triumphs long ago, they embraced the present moment and its possibilities. At the centre of their kendo was the extraordinary ability to transform their

weakness into their strength. As I watched them, they introduced me to the clearest example of mature masculinity. I pursue that form of kendo to this day.

For the first time in my life, I saw humans use kendo to challenge and win against old age. I saw that true masculinity did not live in bodies, it lived in their spirit. When they train with a weakened body, it could be agony, but when they were fighting in kendo their minds were still those of strong warriors, and they enjoyed the thrill of being warriors in that moment. I was filled with the strength of the message that they conveyed. I saw that my kendo might need to change, but I could continue to be driven by courage, bravery, and fierce inner strength. I could continue to experience the joy of fighting through kendo.

The Dilemma of Solid Masculinity

The fight between the two elderly sensei also reminded me of my parents and led me to reflect further on their lives, beginning with my father. Thompson and Langendoerfer mention that men with traditional masculinities seem to struggle as they get older (2016). I wonder what it is like for hyper-masculine men like my father when they get old and their body loses its strength. This has not been studied very much (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016). Most studies of hypermasculinity and sport focus on the way young adults, boys and fathers embody masculinities (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016). The description of thinking about men and masculinities in these narrow contexts is challenging because it reduces the masculinities that exist in later life (Hearn, 1995).

So I want to consider what happened to my father's masculinity when he was over eighty. Rock-solid masculinity was being shaken, confidence turning to fear and tied with a shame and humiliation in front of his youngest daughter (me). I was just coming back from the competition in Kyoto where I had seen the old sensei who transformed their youthful masculinity into an enduring proud ferocity of will as they aged. They had retained their inner strength, but my father seemed to have lost his. I felt sorry for him. For the first time in my life, I regretted not introducing kendo to my father to give him something to work with in terms of his strength and bravery. As a kendo sensei, I had previously advised my father when he was around seventy to maintain his life without stopping. He truly wanted to listen to the advice that family members gave him, but no one knew how to guide him properly, so he tried to just keep doing what he had done when he was young. Sadly, it did not work.

It seemed that my father was suffering from the lack of guidance for aging men that Thompson and Langendoerfer have identified (2016). His gendered presence as a hyper-masculine man had been central to our lives. But the dilemma for men like this is that "In later life, men's gendered behaviour is often performed outside public spaces and away from most other's recognition." (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016, 120; see more Smith & Winchester, 1998). "The cumulative effect is that the

cultural guidelines for older men and the masculinities they perform are largely unacknowledged." (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016, 120). I felt extremely sad seeing him lying down on the floor since he had left his farm – the work place where he dominated and celebrated his strength and masculinity. Now his main battle was with my mother because he did not want to wear his nappy as that was a sign that he was losing his control and his dignity. It made me awfully upset and tremendously sorry for him.

When my father turned eighty, he said to me three times, "I am dying." I laughed the first time because I did not know how to react. The second time and third time I said to my father, "We do not know tomorrow who is going to die first. You or me!" It was very strange to hear this from my father, a man who had never been scared of anything. Yet his fear covered his whole body. I saw it. Like the fear, I released when dogs were around me. A few seconds later, he regretted what he just mentioned to me. I tried to help him out from this fear without hurting his ego and pride. I sent to him to elderly school – and made him keep going for the rest of his life – and made him to walk with wheelchair around his old farm. He made a fire and sat there and had his lunch which my mum packed for him and came back to his new home in the early evening. He did what I suggested and it became his routine.

One day he did not come back home until late at night. Some strangers found him on the street lying down by himself. One day, my brother found him on the street, then a little later one of my sisters found him on the street. Another day, he had a poo on his clothes, which caused a scandal. Everyone said to my mum that he had dementia. I said to my father, "Do not give up." He walked and walked every day with his wheelchair because he wanted to show me and prove to himself that he was alive. He was fighting to retain his masculinity with his aged body. What a hero. What a warrior. However, he fought against everything the wrong way. He was alone. Since he lost his old house and farm, together with his strength, he lost his masculinity, identity and dignity.

Early one morning when I was visiting, my mum called me with a desperate voice. I have never heard her voice like that before. That day, she needed me. My mum shouted at me, "Wake up! Wake up!" My father was out of breath and screaming. I had never cooked for my father, but now I felt I should do so. I quietly made soup in order to calm down his upset stomach. I gave my father five tea spoons of vegetable water from the soup. Each spoon when I gave to him, he opened his mouth as if little bird waiting for food. Desperate to live.

I called the ambulance, but my father hated to go to the hospital. He was so scared. Two big men came to our house and laid down my father on the hard small bed. He looked shaken. I kept smiling at him, "You will be ok, dad! I will be with you." I held his hand and he looked at me like a boy. He had not been outside for a few months. The sky was blue. He seemed a little bit lost, but I said, "Look at the sky, dad! It is blue today. Wow, it will be a great day, dad." I smiled him again. He calmed down and looked

at the sky with relaxed eyes. The driver turned on the loud siren. My father lost his centre again. I asked them to turn it off. They did. I played my father's favourite songs. I was singing in the ambulance like a little girl. He looked at me and found the comfort.

Three days later, my father's life in this world ended forever. He had wrestled with the demands of youthful masculinity until he turned 80, trying to live as he had before. After 80, he could not even fight. It made me very sad. For a man like my father, giving up masculinity meant losing his dreams and desires. There was no life left for him. Giving up masculinity was as dangerous as hyper-masculinity. I learned this expensive lesson through my father's death. The masculinity he showed me at the end of his life was shaken by fear. His once untouchable masculinity had become fragile, breakable and unstable. I was glad that I could help him out a very little through kendo longevity lessons at the end of his life. I wish he had been able to learn more from the lessons that kendo can give about aging, as I recently had.

There is a need for men like my father to receive guidance from stories that show aging in a positive light, rather than the current celebratory stories of men as never-aging characters (Spector-Mersel, 2006; see also Coles & Vassarotti, 2012). Of course it is possible to understand how masculinity can be embodied in different ways as people age (Slevin, 2008). Indeed, scholars have now "begun to map the ways in which masculinities and aging are jointly embodied." (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016, 121). Hearing the stories of old men negotiating their masculinities (Alex et al., 2008) is vital and further scholarship is necessary to direct attention to men's aging bodies (Turner, 2008). My father could not understand how to make changes even though he was willing to. If he learned how to transform his masculinity like the kendo sensei I had recently seen, he would be able to enjoy his life more as he grew older.

Meeting with a New Enduring Masculinity through My Mother's Death

It was only recently that I started to understand just how strong a person my mother was. Men's identities are expressed based on their capability to sustain "the expectations associated with manhood, earn other men's respect, and distinguish himself from all women." (Thompson & Langendoerfer, 2016, 121). My father's identity was built with regard to a Confucian version of these expectations through the stories and rules of how Korean men were supposed to behave. Growing up, I did not think of my mother's strength or of her as a *seonmeoseuma (tomboy).* She hid it well from the world. My mother did not live in a time or place where her strength could shine brightly like my father's did. As a woman in Korea, she had low status, and was expected to behave in a feminine way, sacrificing herself for almost everything (Eagly and Steffen, 1984). I am not sure if my mother would have considered herself to have a masculine identity. I don't think that she did. But now, looking back, I can see that actually in many ways she was a *seonmeoseuma* with a fierce inner strength and determination to do what she

wanted, regardless of what my father and others said. Indeed occasionally, people (men and women) and my father described her as a 여장부 (*yeojangbu: brave women, heroic, amazon)*. I saw it, but I could not properly perceive it until now. In this section, I want to explore her hidden life as a ferocious fighter and what I learned from her deep strength and courage.

My mother went to school for only two months, but she had to give up her study in order to look after her whole family (four sisters, younger brother and parents). As the second child in her family, she started to work instead of attend school. She was around seven years old. Therefore, in the early stages of her life, my mother had to develop her strength just like men did. As I wrote this chapter, I realised that she was even more of a *seonmeoseuma* than me. I can learn about fierceness from her, not only from my father. Now, I think I understand why my mother did not say anything when my aunt told me off for not being a lady (Chapter 1). She had grown up with many more obstacles in her way, which is how she became so skilled at hiding her strength. That was why I could not see her properly. As someone with a low gender status, my mother built up other, less-recognised and celebrated strengths, such as those of embracing, accepting, adapting, being patient and stable. But she was also so physically strong, loved working with her body outside, and was capable of amazing feats of physical strength even in her seventh decade.

After marrying my father, then a wealthy man, my mother became the second leader at my father's orchard. Her leadership was beautifully balanced between directing the work and sharing her fortune.[10] She carried food around in the 바구니 *(Baguni: basket)* on the top of her head for people less fortunate on Thanksgiving's Day and New Year's day. I used to follow behind her, and my father was well proud of her. But when my father lost the orchard and his all fortune, my mother also lost her position where she led alongside my father. This loss resulted in additional *han (deep sorrow)* in her heart.

My father's loss was also my mother's. He lost his orchard, money, and associated high status. She lost not only the status of being his wife, but also of being able to publicly lead others. Her *han* might have been greater than his, because my father – as a man – could seek to rebuild his life and fortune. As a woman, my mother could not be seen to fight for her rights to live as she previously had. She had to find another way to live life. Yet she fought fiercely, just quietly, and continued to lead others (just not as publicly), and to share whatever fortune she had. When I think of her strength now, one of the key parts of her life that comes to my mind, is the way she approached her death. She was a shining example of firm and fearless masculinity (also Christianity) expressed through her strength in overcoming and

[10] My mother said to me often without my father's masculine character, she could not be a leader. My mother's and father's character were very different, but they worked together as a team, it created wonderful example of leadership for me when I was young.

adapting. I realise now that she was the one showed me the true masculinity of maintaining a passionate, courageous inner strength more than anyone else, even the kendo sensei in Kyoto. She was one inspiring and brave warrior.

When I told her that the doctor had said would die within the next six months, my mother amazed me and everyone else by reacting with great calm. She was so strong. But her strengths were so subtle, delicate and sophisticated, it was hard to see visually. Fortunately, I was just becoming mature enough to see her underlying power and force. I stayed with my mum in the hospital for nearly one month, but she had never showed weakness or fear. She was same as before. She woke up, did morning prayers for everyone including her neighbour's dog, and waited for the breakfast with full gratitude. Nothing had changed, which made me forget all sadness. Then, my mum sent to me back home (rather than keep me near her) where my husband is and my students are (Melbourne). I gave my mum a hug. We both knew it was the last one.

I was with my mum every day on the video phone. She was happy as a usual and whatever happened in her body, she did not react. She was so bravely stable. Indeed, my mother was so resilient that she even tried to care for the doctors and nurses who were looking after her. Her first question after waking up from ten hours of surgery, was to ask if the surgeon was ok after all that work. She devoted her fierce endless energy to trying to care for everyone.

My mother's body was incredibly strong as well, built from a lifetime of carrying heavy baskets for hours, and other intensive labour. But she was still human and even her forceful nature could not stop death. After three months and four very long surgeries, on 28th of September 2016 at 10:25am on her birthday, my mum followed my father. I watched her last breath with my husband in Melbourne on video phone. She gave me the last eye contact. It was so peaceful and comfortable. That night, I lit all the candles in my house. I wished that she might drop by on the way to heaven. My husband and I bought little white flowers for my mum. When my mum was buried, we also buried little white flowers on peach tree (my birthday gift from students). I turned off the video phone straight way, I packed my kendo armour and went to my dojo and taught kendo and trained as usual. The next day, the first ever bright pink flower appeared on the peach tree like my mum's character.

My mother's death was beautiful and powerful even though it remains the most painful memory. How was she unshaken at the hospital for three months of intense care? How did she remain so calm after four intensive surgeries in one month? How did she accept her death with no fear? My third sister held my mum's hand and cried, but my mother remained powerfully steadfast and let my sister's hand go. How did she have not one word of complaining or fear in front of her child? She handled everything by herself, even caring for those who were looking after her. I saw something new in her death. Noble

spirit, true bravery, embracing and enduring care. I had always known on some level that my mother was strong, but I had not realised that she was stronger than my father. His masculinity shone brightly in the world, but its vigour was not sustainable, and my father became fragile and scared as he aged.

I have seen this with other men in both Korea and the West. In thinking about this, my opinion of women has changed. Through reflecting on mother's life, I can see how women have found ways to be as strong or stronger than men in a world that dismisses them as weak. This discovery made me feel safe the rest of my life. And I could see how the aggressive, dominating masculinity that I adored, cannot last, even though it can still be glorious. I can also see how this form of masculinity can create anxieties for the men who believe they fall short of it (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020), as had happened to my father when he grew old.

Strong mothers make strong children (Goellner et al., 2012). It felt right to do kendo after my mother's death. I started to see that she was like the two old sensei (95 and 101 years old) that I had seen fighting in Japan. She had a strength that could last while her body changed and grew old. A way of fighting quietly, but still with immense power, even if most people in the world could not see that power. I see now that my mother created her own most wonderful form of strength. She had the courage and energy to try to care for everyone, and the fierceness to battle and fight with the world as well. She has become my inspiration both in terms of her feminine and masculine qualities. This revelation helped me transform my kendo from vigorous and wild, to something that was calmer, purer, caring, compassionate and more sustainable but still strong, fierce, courageous, and powerful on the inside. Like my mother.

Energetic Masculinity Transformed into Calm Masculinity in 7th Dan Grading

Every year since 2006, I packed my luggage full of gifts from England to take to my parents. Ten years later, I did not need to. I lost my reason. Because both of my parents had died. I decided not to visit Korea anymore for a while. However, life does not always follow our decisions. I needed to go more often to take my kendo grading and competition in Japan via Korea.

I packed my armour for my 7th dan kendo grading in Japan. No woman had achieved this level in kendo in Australia. No one said as much, but I was expected to fail. On the grading day, I did not show anyone how I felt, but my tongue was completely dry like leaves in the Australian summer. If someone lit a match, my mouth would burn straightway like a perfect fireplace.

My first attempt at 7th dan had been a nightmare. I booked the wrong flights – they were all at midnight. I thought that I could deal with it. I could not. Then not only was my initial flight delayed for over five hours, but also I had been crazy enough to organize to go to Shanghai first for some additional kendo

training and teaching. Everyone was excited to keiko with me. I shared the excitement, but enjoyed myself too much during two hours of non-stop keiko with all the kendoka. Next day, I discovered that I had injured myself during the keiko. I landed in Korea and my three male students almost carried me to get the venue. Then I watched the World Kendo Championship and hosted guests from around the world. I was absolutely exhausted. A few weeks later, I repacked my armour and went to Japan. Again, the flight was delayed, I had to sleep in the airport. I stayed in Japan for one month for training by myself without my husband. The place was empty without him. I got tired emotionally and physically. Still, I attended kendo training as much as I could. I was burnt out, but I ignored it because I felt that I had to make the most of this trip. Every night, I enjoyed kendo too much in Japan. By the time grading day arrived (last day of my trip), I was so exhausted that I could not hold my shinai (bamboo sword) and I could not stand still because I was ill again like in my second World Kendo Championship. Earlier during my training in Japan, the 8th dan sensei and other kendoka asked me which grade I was. Some of them thought that I was already 7th dan. I was ready to pass, but I failed. I was very disappointed.

I went to Korea to see my siblings' families once more and a few days later, flew back to Melbourne. Once again, I had to sleep at the airport. Lying down in the airport and looking at the high ceiling, I felt that I would never make it to 7th dan. Then I changed my mind and reflected deeply on why I failed. Suddenly, I realised that whole trip was an utterly stupid idea. In my ignorance and arrogance I was acting like a twenty-year-old warrior, trying to do everything, to battle everyone. Now, I knew why I failed. The problems were all solved. For a moment everything seemed so easy. The answer was, next time, I must do the complete opposite. What a simple solution. I am a genius!!!

Six months later, I repacked my armour for my second attempt of 7th dan grading. On the 30th of April in 2019, the last day of Emperor Akihito, the Heisei generation, I passed my 7th dan. I did very well. It was beautifully done. I know that sounds big-headed. Yet on that day, I was in the zone. I sat surrounded by around a thousand Japanese men there as kendoka. I only saw one woman near me. Nevertheless, I was very comfortable and calm like my home ground. As I watched the other gradings, my confidence grew. Although big waves visited my heart every now and then, I floated past them almost effortlessly. Then my turn came.

I pulled out my shinai very slowly. I sensed that my opponent followed my pace. I was in control. I was aware of each of my movements and my mind. One and a half minutes seemed more than enough time to fight. I did not need to rush. I was leading and reading my opponent's movements and their mind every second. My first opponent was a very uncommon grading partner. He was like a mad hungry tiger. He could not control his own body and mind. It was like I was fighting a younger version of myself. Now I was in charge of myself, and I tamed him with softness and calmness rather than entering into the battle that he wanted.

My second opponent was like me. He controlled his mind and movement. It was much easier to perform with him. We both were fighting to conquer the centre. Outsiders might think that we were waiting. We were not. We were settling our position in the right place without any movement in order to create the opportunity. I put myself in a zen space (calm, but ready). Then I saw my opponent break the moment! He could not endure the pressure. He tried to cut, but as soon as he moved, I had my opportunity. I cut his Do (waist) and flew away like a butterfly. It was perfect. Very elegant. I held my pose for a second to show my kigamae (spirit) towards my opponent. Then I heard, "Yame (stop)" All the judges picked up their pens confidently. It was my day. I walked out with dignity like I was a successful man, among other successful men. The male kendoka were all looking at me. I did not look at them. I just walked passed them and kneeled on the floor. Inside amidst the calm I felt more glorious than ever.

I had been told that I could only get my 7th dan if I found a sensei to train me. But I had learned from teaching and training with my beginner students in Melbourne. I had also learned from the one moment of being able to watch the old Japanese sensei's keiko in Kyoto. And I had learned from my parents from reflecting on their lives and deaths. Through all of this I had found something as powerful as the aggressive masculinity of my youth. I had found a strength that was grounded in discipline with flexibility, acceptance and embrace. I was not physically stronger than before, I was not faster than before, but I was more settled than before. I was sharper than before. I was softer than before. I was filled by spirit, yet at the same time I controlled my body and mind. It made me steadier than before. I was still a warrior, but a very different kind of warrior that day. A calm, quiet warrior able to cleanly kill with one perfectly timed cut. For the first time ever, I had tasted true patience, calmness, mind-control and mature masculinity at the grading.

What a wonderful discovery. The process of transformation had been confusing, unclear and painful. Very painful! But I prevailed. Because I was stubborn enough to hang around in kendo, treating kendo as a daily meal. I benefited from the ongoing support of my kendoka husband, the continued determination of male kendoka around me, and by taking the responsibility of being a sensei, which also made me stand with dignity. I had accepted the pain of my parents' deaths, and the teachings of many sensei. The sometimes thrilling, sometimes agonising battles of my life as I struggled and survived life by holding to my fierce inner strength – like my mother – had made me who I now was.

Revolution of Confucian Masculinity in My Parents Cemetery 2017

In this last section, I would like to write about the dramatic changes that came after I passed my 7th Dan. From the first day, there was a fundamental change in my thoughts and attitudes. Getting the 7th dan made my eyes open. For example, I started to see what I previously could not see or notice or did not want to previously see. I began to see my blind side, the stubbornness and impatience. I also began to see the problems with the masculinity that I had adored.

In the beginning of this thesis, as a big fan of masculinity, in particular, masculine men, I found it very difficult to criticise men. I was very tolerant of men. I accepted their mistakes easily because almost of my heroes are men – perhaps in part because I could not find women to look up to on the top as models (they were hidden from me, just like my mother had to learn how to hide her strength from the world). I was very willing to forgive men, even when they did some awful things. The power of men seemed very natural. However, now I started to see the failings of hegemonic masculinity and the damage that it can cause. I recently experienced more structural sexism when my application for the title of Kyoshi (master teacher) was denied in Australia. This time it was much more painful because I was more conscious of the role of the fragile masculinity of the kendo officials (men and women) who feel intimidated by my achievements, rather than celebrating them like they would if I was a man. I was actually upset. I could not sleep properly for one month because I could not handle this sexism. However, I would like to end this section by sharing another story of the first time that I recognised the absurd power that men can try and give each other.

It was very odd feeling visiting Korea after I passed my 7th dan. My home was no longer my home. A stranger has already moved into flat 1004 where my parents last lived. I used to count to the 10th floor to see my mum's blanket, which was hanging on the balcony when I arrived or left. There was no more blanket hanging outside anymore. I cannot call "mum and dad" anymore. It felt like I became an orphan. Am I? I was confused.

I could not live my life as before so that I decided to believe that "My real home is where my parents are." The cemetery. Every year of my life, I had visited this place. This cemetery is where we held family gatherings, ate some food in front of my grandparents grave and heard about my ghost ancestors' story from my father, uncles and aunts. It was a place of perfect autumn picnics for me. Of food and stories of the amazing men. Generally the women of my broader family stayed home, cooking and chatting. But I came, squeezing in among the boys, eager to hear the stories that men told of the feats of our male ancestors. The stories of heroes. More interesting than the stories of princesses.

Now since my parents had been buried here, this became my new home. A strange home for someone like me who was still alive. I can only talk to my parents through the empty air. Skipping around their grave like a little girl. I saw my father's work. My father looked after this whole mountain because he knew that this was his last destiny and real home with real comfort. Since, my parents passed away, this place also offers me strange comfort like my father when I visit here. On the way to see my parents, my heart became paralysed, my brain became numb. Actually, I started to feel the pain physically, I could not breathe. However, when I arrived at their grave, my deep sorrow ceased. How peculiar. My heart opened as if I was watching the open ocean sea from the front of my house in Melbourne, and my

brain started operating in happy mode. Sometimes, I saw rainbows. Sometimes, a hundred birds were singing a welcome. Sometimes, the sun shone directly on my parents grave when we prayed for them.

Yet visiting my parent's cemetery is also awkward. It brings complicated feelings. It feels like I am going to have a funeral again. When does the funeral ceremony stop? How long will it take not to feel anything? It is so cruel. But very strangely, I felt real peace such as relief and true happiness. I cannot explain these agony and comfort. How ironic.

After I passed my 7th dan, I wanted like to tell my parents like a little girl. I wanted a moment to celebrate and let it all out. My parents would not mind whatever I said. I can be arrogant, proud and big-headed. My 7th dan certificate was evidence of fortitude. As a woman, outside of her homeland, living in a different culture, speaking a different language, without a family or a sensei, I had made history in kendo. The first female 7th dan in Australia. I survived with kendo in a strange place. When I felt low, kendo reminded me that I was worthy. When I was high, kendo brought me down to earth. When I was lost, kendo gave me an identity. All of this, I wanted to tell my parents.

This time my husband was with me. He was staring at the gravestone for a while. I was planting some flowers and weeding around my parents' grave. I did this as my parents did for their parents and ancestors. I climbed up to the top of my mum's grave, where her head was lying down. I started to sing like my mum when her mind was heavy. She did not want to weep in front of her child. She tried to sing a bright song instead, but I heard and felt her pain through the bright positive songs. She could not hide it from me. I could feel her pain even when I was very little.

I was singing more brightly than my mother because I did not want to make my husband worry while I kept weeding and planting. As I was fighting with tears, my husband stood up by the gravestone and said to me, "I am honoured to see my name is on your parents' gravestone." I was surprised. To me, it was very obvious. But just then I saw something new and weird on the gravestone. Something that astonished and shocked me. It had always been there, but this time I noticed it properly. What is this? I moved closer to the gravestone. Loudly, I said to my husband, "This is not right" All my complicated emotions disappeared. Something was seriously wrong. I rubbed my eyes a few times and double checked over and over again. For the first time, I had seen that my brother's name was first before the names of my sisters and me. My brother. The fifth child.

It was as if someone had slapped my face. Something clicked. What a waking moment in my life. The truth is that my brother is the 5th child, but his name was the first line on the gravestone, whilst my 1st sister's name was the second line. Why is his name is not above me? Why does it work like that?

Since I commenced my PhD, I had started to see different angles than before. When I passed my 7th dan just a few days earlier, I began to rethink so many things. For example, questioning myself, my family, gender relations in kendo. These things, I had accepted previously as natural. Yet, now, my mind and eyes clearly recognised something that I had never truly seen before: "Confucianism". My oldest sister could be head of the family when my parents were gone. My brother is the second last child. Why is he the head of the family? Oh dear. How much was I still so affected by Confucianist ideology?

After we left the cemetery, my husband's eyes were still full of delight from finding his name on the gravestone. He felt privileged to be part of our family. But my eyes were full of questions. It was unusual for me. I was the person that had always adored tradition, classic customs and practices. Now a revolution had commenced in my brain.

Conclusion

To be masculine felt natural to me. I had consciously followed my father, and received support from many people around me. I challenged as much as men (maybe more), I failed as much as men, but in the end I also I attained as much as men. I did not know that I was lucky until now. It should not be lucky thing. This obvious life style should be possible for anyone who wants it regardless of their gender. If other women had a freedom to live like me and trained and educated like me in the beginning of their life how to be independent and strong, and express and cultivate masculinity through athletic or other sectors (Cahn, 2015), the consequence would be very different. There should be no need to hide your strength like my mother felt she had to. Yet through this chapter I realised that my mother was not only in the end stronger than my father, she also had more to teach me about to adapt and develop while growing old in a way that retained your strengths.

My mother's force was like a gentle wave that never stopped. She was quietly relentless. In contrast, my father's flashy stormy wave stopped short in the end. In my 20s I celebrated my father's masculinity. In my 30s, I was still fighting to keep his masculinity and this made a few impressive results in my life. However, in my 40s, I was battling endlessly in order to survive and prove that I was good enough as much as men. However, in the end I must admit that I could not do it any longer. Training eight to ten hours per day, climbing the winter mountain with bare feet or driving on a stormy day with a broken car was glorious but not sustainable. It wore me down until I found another way. I made a decision to pursue my mother's way with real strength. I would embrace patience through kendo training. Passing 7th dan was easier than becoming true 7th dan, this journey has just begun. The strength that I now have in kendo is not as flashy as the youthful masculinity that I had. Now I triumph through softness, flexibility, focus, and the inner fierceness of enduring warriors like my mother. I want to ask those male kendoka (and other hyper-masculine men) struggling to grow old, "What does masculinity mean?" This big question made me rethink my own masculinity. But I am concerned that this question will seem

insulting coming from a woman. Nevertheless, I am happy with the path I am on. I can keep adapting and developing as I reach my 50s, remaining strong through kendo. There are examples if you look hard enough to find them. For instance, the 76 year old Meenakshi from northern Kerala, South India, who has preserved the martial art of *Kalaripayattu* (Mandakathingal, 2021) is now one of my role models. Along with my mother.

Chapter 7: My Life in Kendo – Conclusion

One winter night, a film crew arrived at my dojo. I asked them to set their camera in one particular spot. I picked the three best fast, tall, fit, handsome, dynamic and energetic students to practise in that spot so that they could show off what real kendo looks like. Of course, they were all men because they were the best students that I have. When the training began, these three kendoka conquered space and air. I saw the crews faces light up. I smiled, then put on my Men (head protector) on, walked to the side and started keiko (sparring practise). Soon the crew began packing all their equipment. Already! I was very disappointed. Nevertheless, I continued my keiko. Then, they came to my spot to reset the camera. I did not understand what they were doing.

They started filming my keiko. It was not my plan. I planned to show the glorious kendo of youthful masculinity. The kendo that I had loved since I first entered into the basement of the building with the red sign. But by this stage my kendo was different. I hardly move now in keiko. I thought that would be very boring for them. Yet the film crew was fascinated by my stillness. By the strength in my postures. The power of my calmness. They kept filming me until I finished. Then they turned their lens to the tiny girls still training. I said to myself, “Oh, no!”. However, they loved that as well. They were thrilled with dynamic powerful kendo, but also they were astonished at the sight of little women fighting against masculine and aggressive men. They could not believe that these little women handled themselves well against strong men and sometimes even beat them. They kept saying that they had never seen anything like that.

The filming brought together three key elements of my journey with kendo. There was the thrill of youthful, aggressive masculinity, the important space that kendo creates for women to be able to practice with and compete against men, and the (at times painful) transformation that my own kendo has gone through. But still I had questions. I think that the film crew were so amazed by the three little women because their expectations were so low. Maybe my expectations were also too high. When writing about this I started to wonder if I was wrong not to give any opportunity for my female students when the crew was shooting the video. Perhaps I should have put the best woman on camera even though she was not the one of the best students in the dojo because this experience might make her better and stronger in kendo?

It is the opening up of questions like these through the process of self-reflection that has been one of the key benefits of this thesis. Yet initially it felt like using auto-ethnography as a method would be a disaster for my scholarly life. It seemed to have low status. I even considered giving up my PhD study and keeping the high status that I had earned using qualitative methods in my MA at the most prestigious university in South Korea. In addition, I was uninterested in the literature around women and sport. The

scholars seemed to complain too much while using unintelligible words. At the start Hargreaves was a nightmare to try to read and understand. And Sylvester was even harder because I am a senior to her, and I was very defensive of the kendo and male kendoka that I loved.

However, after a little bit of time I realised that only way I can approach this thesis was with auto-ethnography because it enabled me to critically reflect on the stories that shaped my life. I started to learn so many things that I did not know before. What a fascinating moment. I love learning, it's better than teaching. Now, finally, I'm convinced that auto-ethnography is the perfect methodology for people like me who want to keep learning about themselves as well as the world. After struggling and fighting intensely with myself, I started to love writing. Now, I am an advocate for autoethnography, especially when I meet people who like me, had never heard of it: my friends, students, even Professors, I talk to all of them about how great this method is.

Coming to the end of this thesis, I feel privileged to be a scholar using this unique methodology. It feels like the future of scholarship. Scholars need to be able to critically engage with themselves as well as the world. Those who look down on this methodology in South Korea need to reconsider, otherwise they might miss the chance for their own crucial reflections. This methodology can help make the familiar strange and let us use our critical curiosity to understand more of the strangeness of the world. The main example for me in this thesis has been how autoethnography has helped me make sense of masculinity which I used to feel I knew everything about. In so-doing, it has also advanced the study of kendo by providing a detailed account of how one woman has experienced masculinity in kendo over a number of decades.

Masculinity

This thesis has explored, wrestled, and grappled with my experiences of masculinity in kendo. Indeed, the overarching theme has been my changing relationship to masculinity. I was lucky enough to grow up with the freedom to embrace the masculinity that my brother had access to. The days I spent playing outside with him and his friends remain some of my best memories. And the lessons I sat in with my father have continued to inspire me. The masculinity that I learnt was shaped by Confucianism. I loved the emphasis on courage and respect, bravery, calmness and honesty, along with the magical adventure of playing outside with my brother and the other boys. My body became strong and fit, my heart was filled with delight, and I was able to put my father's lessons to good use, maintaining an iron face when the boys expressed disappointment that I had managed to join them once again. At night I slept deeply, restoring my body, spirit and soul for the vigorous, joyful escapades that would come the next day.

But as I grew older those days became more limited. South Korea's strict gender roles and hierarchies were enforced more at primary school. The segregation increased at middle and high school, and I lost

the greatest joy that I had. No longer could I play with boys and act in accordance with the rules of masculinity. As a young adult I felt adrift. And then in kendo, I found a masculine world that I could be part of again. Where I could be the strong woman that I felt born to be. It changed my life. That first evening I slept soundly in contented exhaustion.

Kendo became my life. It was the centre of my passions, the place where I harboured my dreams. Then, most unexpectedly, I got married and moved to London. I was very happy with this – I would make my husband very happy by becoming the best housewife in the world. Like many migrants, however, I underestimated just how hard it was to move from one culture to another. I felt like a child again, but not in a good way. Instead, I was like a helpless baby. I had lost my words, lost my ability to express myself, to be understood and to function independently as an adult. It was dishonouring. And my Confucian values around gender (among other things), clashed with the expectations of my husband and others around me in London.

For the first time in my life, anger became a regular issue for me. Anger is often associated with masculinity, but it was not part of the masculinity that I adored. Although my father was renowned for being angry, I had tried to follow my mother in being calm and loving. The masculinity that my father preached, and which I adopted, was about being able to control my emotions. Yet in London I felt angry all the time. Being unable to communicate properly like was so frustrating. When my husband did not follow the Confucian rules of behaviour that I had grown up with I became even more frustrated. In the first year of our marriage, I exploded with rage at him like a volcano a few times.

After a time we started a kendo dojo together. This gave me an excellent outlet for my passions, and a new dream. I would become the best kendo sensei in the world! But being a sensei also turned out to be very frustrating. It was hard to communicate effectively to the students in English, and they often seemed lazy. They had high ambitions to become samurais but did not seem willing to commit to the work that involved. My scornful anger rained down on them during classes. Very accomplished manly men became visibly afraid of me. My anger became legendary (my students made a cup for me which says, “Don’t mess with Sensei!”). Over time my students learned that I was trying to help them get better – that my harshness was there to improve them. Yet I also needed to find a way to be more gentle and compassionate at times. To not only be like an iron man. It was important, I realised, to not just be strong in kendo as a sensei.

The kendo dojo had already taught me that the masculinity that I adored did not always live up to its ideals. Yet I did not want to criticise it. That felt like it would be a betrayal. Kendo had offered me an amazing space in which I could train with and against men, fighting them regularly and often beating them. This had implications for my body. In particular, I received the kind of bruises that women were

not supposed to get in South Korea. I learned not to care. I was living my dream. But this dream seemed to threaten some men. While my second sensei embraced my strength, my third sensei tried to tame me and make me more into a feminine kendoka. I tried to follow him, but for a while it ruined my kendo, along with my chances in the World Kendo Championship.

The masculinity that I loved was Confucian, but the associated hierarchies of Confucianism worked against me as well. Later, in Australia, another sensei seemed to think that I had rudely broken the hierarchical rules of kendo, and tried to punish me for my supposed disrespect. I behaved with honour, refusing to fight back. He wounded me badly, and I experienced a different kind of humiliation. My masculinity – and the masculinity of kendo – felt broken. I lost my favourite skill, *tsuki*. However, I found a way to regain my strength out of shame, to the point where I was able to forgive him for my actions. Through this I found an inner strength, along with the determination to try and change kendo so that it is better able to live up to the ideals of its masculinity.

The final lessons that I learned about masculinity – and gender more broadly – through this thesis, came through the painful process of aging. Growing old is frustrating. The dynamic youthful aggression that I so adored, started to become impossible in the kendo dojo. What to do? I was lost again, especially since after I left South Korea I was without a sensei of my own. The lessons came from aged kendo senseis, as well as my parents, especially my mother. The senseis showed that it was possible to keep fighting with a fierceness that was part of the spirit as well as the body. I had to find the inner strength of aging warriors rather than the flashy aggression of young women and men. The more I thought about my mother, the stronger I realised that she was. But she had to hide this strength from the world. My father, who is still my inspiration, did not have the support or role-models to be able to approach the loss of his physical capacities, and death, with courage. My mother, in contrast, remained so incredibly strong, caring for everyone, even those who operated on her. Was this a form of masculinity? She had so many forms of strength. She was physically strong in a way that astounded my husband when he met her. She was able to work incredibly hard with her body as much as my father. Her mental fierceness was extraordinary. And she also had the strength to care for so many women around her as well as looking after her family. Her deep masculinity had to be largely hidden from the world, while her femininity was strong as well. What an inspiration to us all.

I finish this thesis still adoring masculinity. I love watching the aggressive kendo of those youthful men and women who are able to accomplish it. Sometimes it feels like my own kendo has become boring. But I have developed a critical awareness of aggressive masculinity and Confucian masculinity. I know more of their limits, of how they can be abused and used to exclude and harm. And I know more about other forms of strength that have been less celebrated. The kind of strength that allows me to be so still in kendo until I strike at the moment that my opponent cannot hold the centre anymore. The fierceness

of the warriors who are able to fight even after their body cannot do what it once could. The courage to become supple and light, to embrace what is possible with your body and mind. This is my masculinity now. I love it also. Yet to be a good sensei, I cannot only be strong in a masculine sense. I have had to become brave enough to be compassionate and sometimes even gentle with students. To listen to those in the hierarchies below me. As well as to challenge my peers and those above me.

There is much research still for me and others to do. How can we build a world in which the joys of masculinity are truly available to all of those who seek them? How can kendo become better at this? What role can I play in this transformation? How can we think about the possibly productive as well as negative roles of anger in martial arts? What roles can martial arts like kendo play in creating models and pathways for active forms of aging? At the centre of all of this remains my dream and mission for kendo to be able to become a blessing for other women, as well as everyone, like it has been for me.

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