

# 85th Higashi Fushimi Sport Science Research Conference

Dates: Thursday, 9 November 2023 16:00 ~ 17:30

Location: Room 302 Bldg 79 (STEP22), Waseda University

## Title

### **Performing Culture Through The Sport of Ekiden Racing: Learning from the Japanese Sporting Ethos of Long-Distance Running** **Kimberley Ekstrand (University of British Columbia in Canada)**

■ **Abstract:** Academic works written about Japan and its sporting culture have tended to overlook Japan's rich history and proclivity for long-distance running. Japan's participation, spectatorship, and televised viewership ratings of running events, highlight this cultural fervor. A particular type of running race, ekiden, is relatively unknown outside Japan, even though it is considered to be responsible for the prolific running culture seen in Japan today. Ekiden is a team relay running race primarily held on various road racecourses. Each stage of the race can vary in distance, and a tasuki (sash) is passed from one runner to the next. Originating in 1917, the sport of ekiden, and in particular, the Hakone Ekiden, garners a substantial fandom in Japan.

My research investigates the historical importance, performative significance, and symbolic displays of ekiden, in order to suggest what the multiple meanings of ekiden might represent for the Japanese. Theoretical perspectives proposed by anthropologist Edward Bruner are well suited for the liminal nature of ekiden since he considers the experience of spectatorship and the site itself to be central in investigating the meaning of performances. His focus on experience and meaning suggests it is an adept methodological approach for cross-cultural research on sports.

In my project, I will conduct ethnographic fieldwork in Japan over the course of three months, through participant observation as a spectator of six professional and amateur ekiden races, at various event celebrations, training sessions, and racecourses. During this time, I will examine documentary collections, including ekiden museum material. In addition to documentary analysis of historical English and translated Japanese sources, I will conduct interviews with stakeholders of ekiden races, including runners, coaches, and spectators.

The goal of this project is to lend a voice to the Japanese experience of ekiden by seeking to understand its significance and meaning to the Japanese. My aim is to contribute to academic literature on distance running, while also nurturing cross-cultural collaboration on sporting research.

■ **Bio:** Kimberley is a PhD Candidate from the Kinesiology department at the University of British Columbia in Canada (UBC). She obtained a master's degree in Kinesiology and a certificate in Intercultural Communication from UBC. Kimberley completed a bachelor's degree in Socio-Cultural Anthropology from Dalhousie University, and Post-Baccalaureate degree in Asian Studies from Thompson University. She was a national level athlete in synchronized swimming and an international competitor in Chinese Wushu (martial arts). She is fluent in French and English. She is trying her best to learn some Japanese. Kimberley has always loved running, especially long-distances and trail running. In Vancouver, where she calls home, running is very popular. Her interest in Japanese running began when she encountered many Canadian Olympic and elite runners who spoke about Japanese ekiden and the passion the Japanese have for running. Her Master project explored the Canadian perspectives on Japanese running culture. Her current PhD project would like to understand the Japanese perspective. Kimberley has been graciously invited as a visiting research fellow at Waseda University in Tokyo, under the mentorship of Professor Kawashima in the department of Sport Sciences. She is currently conducting ethnographic fieldwork, to learn more about the cultural and social function of ekiden in Japan.

