

# The Aluba Subculture

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## 1. What is Aluba?

### 1.1 Definition of Aluba

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“Aluba” is the act of multiple people (perpetrators) forcibly carrying one person (the Alubae) with their legs split open and their groin repeatedly smashed into or rubbed against a pole-like object.



### 1.2 History of Aluba

The action originated in Norway in the 1980s. Originally called “Gjelling” and “Stolping”, the act was mostly seen as a very vicious form of bullying and even sexual abuse amongst students. Aluba never got really popular in the region, as it faced denunciation from educational specialists claiming that the act would cause physical and psychological damage. In the 1990s the act spread into East Asia, where it became quite popular in Southeast China, Taiwan and Hongkong, where it was practiced mainly in middle and high schools. In the 2000s it further spread throughout China, and it also became popular in the Army. However, authorities soon took action against Aluba, and banned it in the Chinese army in 2005. One year later, Aluba was banned in Taiwanese schools using the claim that it was “Anti-School”.

### 1.3 How did Aluba become popular?

When Aluba first spread into Southeast Asia, it was only relatively popular in Taiwan; through our semi-structured interviews, we found that most interviewees think that one particular person made the activity popular in mainland China using mass media. In 2008, a comedy clip maker called Jiaoshou included Aluba in one of his clips where it was portrayed in a very humorous way. Since at the time Jiaoshou was particularly popular among middle and high school students around China, Aluba quickly spread in schools all over the country.



Jiaoshou and his Aluba clip

Following that, Aluba has become more of a “tradition” in schools; students from higher grades would “initiate” freshmen into the act by performing Aluba and advertising it in front of them.

#### 1.4 Key terms you may want to know about Aluba

**Aluba-** A popular activity among Southeastern Asian students which includes multiple people taking control over one person and smashing their groin into a pole-like object.

**Perpetrators-** The people who carry the Alubaee to perform Aluba on him.

**Alubaee-** The person who gets carried and has their groin smashed into a pole-like object.

**Groin-** The junctional area between the abdomen and the legs, and contains the human reproductive organ. The Alubaee’s groin is smashed into or rubbed against a pole in Aluba.

**Filial piety-** The concept of virtue towards one’s fathers, elders and ancestors coined by Ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius; childbearing is an important part of Chinese filial piety.

**Masculinity-** A set of attributes and behaviour generally associated to boys and men. It includes both biological and social factors.

**Moral panic-** A feeling of fear spread among a group of people that something is “evil” and threatens the wellbeing of the society.

#### 1.5 Research methods

**Participant observation-** Participating in many occasions of Aluba in some schools in Shenzhen, through observing the process a suitable hypothesis was brought up and the research methods needed to prove/disprove the hypothesis.

**Questionnaires-** two questionnaires were created for two focus groups: the questionnaire aimed at students contained more questions on the actual process of Aluba, while the questionnaire aimed at adults contained more questions on general perception of the activity. Both questionnaires were distributed through social networks such as QQ and Wechat, and received 400 samples in total- 250 students and 150 adults.

**Semi-structured interviews-** For questions within our hypothesis that can’t even be explained after looking at the results from questionnaires, we conducted casual semi-structured interviews with students who had rich experiences with Aluba to obtain useful answers.

**Secondary research-** The internet was used to find relevant sociological theories that would relate to the social meaning of Aluba.

## 2. The process of Aluba

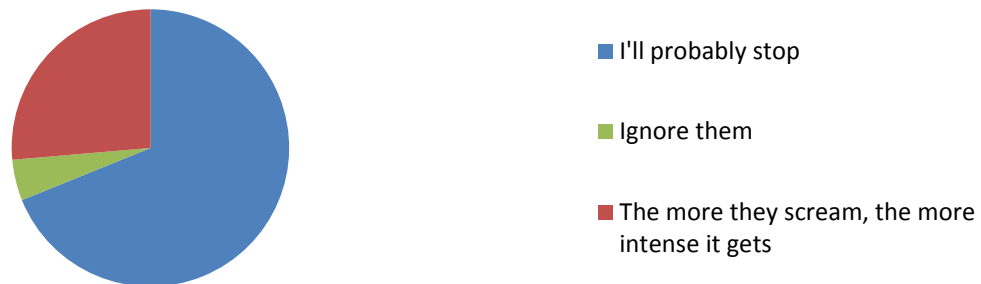
In our questionnaire aimed at students, we received results from a large range from middle school students to university graduates.

### 2.1 Force used during Aluba

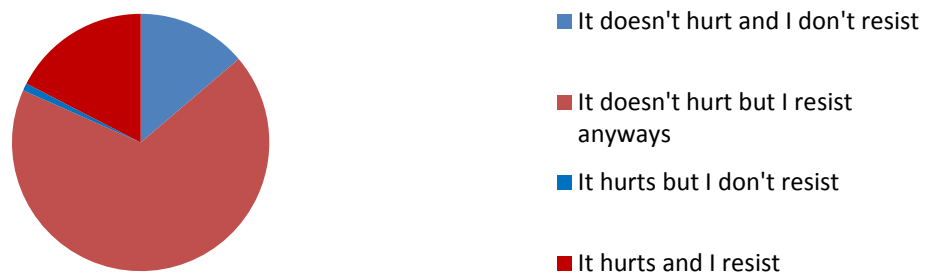
Out of the samples who have participated in Aluba as perpetrators, roughly 70% control their force during Aluba, seeing it as a symbolic act; a small percentage of the samples state that they will use their full force.



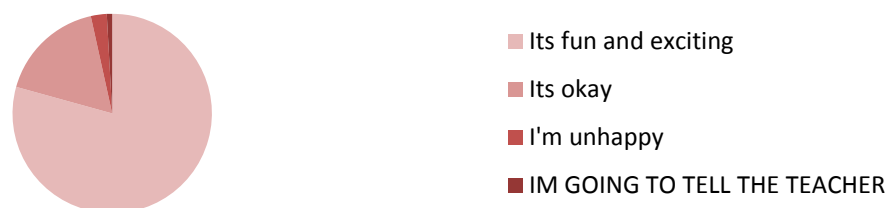
When the Alubae puts up a violent resistance, few perpetrators will ignore the Alubae's behaviour; the majority of the rest would put a stop to the activity, but there is a small percentage who decide to "become serious" with the Alubae and use more force.



Next, we asked about the feelings of the Alubae during Aluba, and received some particularly unexpected results; the majority of Alubaees stated that Aluba doesn't hurt, but many of them would still like to put up resistance such as screaming to the act. It was expected that almost all of the minority of Alubaees who thought Aluba hurt would put up resistance. We thought at first the resistance was due to humiliation, but through our next question the results show otherwise:



We asked about the perception of Aluba from people who have just been the Alubae. The results were largely positive, with nearly 80% of participants stating that they enjoyed being the Alubae; only 4% of participants showed negative emotions.



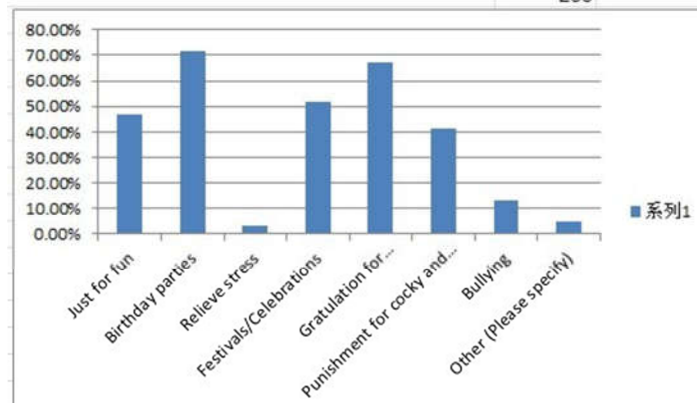
The majority of audience watching Aluba prefer an Alubae with resistance as shown below; if an Alubae doesn't put up enough resistance, he is generally seen as boring and is disliked by the audience. Therefore, we can deduce that the Alubae is expected to struggle as a form of "performance": by doing so he makes the activity more enjoyable for himself and the audience, bringing more excitement and "spicing up" celebrations.



## 2.2 When does Aluba occur?

To find out when and where people usually perform Aluba, we included a multiple-choice question containing some occasions which we speculate to be popular reasons for Aluba; the most popular reasons for Aluba were birthday parties and gratulation for high achievements (tests, offers, etc.), closely followed by celebration during festivals, “just for fun” and punishment for cocky and arrogant people. The reasons for these occasions are discussed in detail in part 3. Surprisingly, very few students thought that Aluba was a form of bullying.

When and where does Aluba usually occur according to your experience? (Students)	Number	Percentage
Just for fun	119	46.67%
Birthday parties	183	71.76%
Relieve stress	8	3.14%
Festivals/Celebrations	132	51.76%
Gratulation for achievements (1st place tests etc)	172	67.45%
Punishment for cocky and arrogant people	106	41.57%
Bullying	34	13.33%
Other (Please specify)	12	4.71%
	255	



## 3. The meaning behind Aluba

Through our research, we have found that few students see Aluba as bullying, and that it is more of an activity for students to “have fun” and as a form of celebration; Aluba has evolved to become more of a symbolic act as mentioned before. With all the “customs” during Aluba such as when should it occur and the expected behaviour of the perpetrators and the Alubae, we will now discuss some of the meanings behind the action.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on 10 people who had rich experience as an Alubae to find out the meaning behind Aluba as a form of celebration and gratulation for high achievements.

We have found that Aluba is rather popular among middle and high school students as a form of celebration for birthdays and high achievements (1<sup>st</sup> place in tests, offers, etc.).

### 3.1 The popularity of Aluba in birthday parties

It is very rare for primary school students to celebrate their birthday parties this way, who would prefer a traditional party with birthday cakes. The majority of students gained knowledge about Aluba in middle school, where it was “honoured” as a tradition, and it has been used as a form of celebration ever since. Through our semi-structured interviews we have found that Aluba in fact symbolizes some positive ideas when it is performed on the Alubae during his birthday

party.

### **Trust**

The Alubae shows that he trusts his friends by voluntarily becoming the Alubae on his birthday party. In this case Aluba is not suddenly proposed at the party; the host knows that he would become the Alubae well in advance. By doing so the host shows that he trusts his friends to only symbolically Aluba him and not use excessive force to hurt him. Great trust is needed, as the Alubae is basically putting the fate of his sexual organ in other's control; it is often seen the host begging the would-be perpetrators to "go gentle" on him.

### **Sharing happiness**

Happiness is shared among the party members by the host voluntarily becoming the Alubae; with the host being the "star" of the birthday party, his guests are merely celebrating his birthday with him. The host is often privileged during the day of his birthday, most often seen as he receives gifts and his friends giving him an upper hand in various games (e.g. first serve in badminton). By becoming the Alubae, the host can show that he willing to drop his privileges and get his guests involved in "humiliating" him with the act of Aluba. This makes the party more enjoyable for the host's friends.

### **Courage and "Guts"**

As Aluba has become a school tradition, it is a cowardly act for the host to refuse becoming the Alubae; not only he would be mocked around the school by his schoolmates as he is "going against the norm", the host would alienate his friends by showing that he does not trust them. His sign of refusal is interpreted by his friends as his worries of being hurt (which he most likely wouldn't). In addition, refusing to become the Alubae can also make the host seem like a boring person.

## **3.2 Aluba and Hegemonic masculinity**

According to the wikipedia pages and our literature review, we have identified many similar traits between Aluba and the concept of Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is a set of ideas that promote the dominant social control of men while making women subordinates. Hegemonic masculinity contains several traits which can all be found in Aluba: Sexual strength, Dominance, Violence, Competition and the exclusion of females.

### **Exclusion of females**

From our questionnaires we have found that most male students have participated in Aluba; while most female students have more or less seen the act, it is very rare for them to participate, let alone be the Alubae.

### **Sexual strength**

The Alubae proves himself to be "masculine" biologically by showing signs of pain and resistance; by doing so, he shows that his sexual organ is "hurt" in the process of the activity, showing it is present. In addition, his sexual strength is proved by showing the strength of his sexual organ, by deforming whatever object he is propelled into.

### **Competition**

While symbolically resisting the perpetrators through screaming and thrashing, the Alubae shows that he "doesn't go down without a fight", showing his competitiveness. On the other hand, the perpetrators' competitiveness is shown by the struggling, as the Alubae's resistance makes it harder for the perpetrators to perform Aluba. The perpetrators' competitiveness is

shown by “overcoming the difficulty” of controlling the Alubae and performing Aluba on him.

### **Dominance**

The perpetrators “dominate” the Alubae by establishing control on him by holding his limbs, and forcibly moving him around to “humiliate” him with the act of Aluba. The Alubae cooperates with the perpetrators by showing signs of resistance to show that he didn’t voluntarily become the Alubae; he was “dominated” into doing so against his will.

### **Violence**

Aluba is often made to seem as “violent” as possible: while the Alubae is seldom hurt, he is expected to show mock signs of pain with exaggeration, such as moaning. By doing so, he can signify that the perpetrators are performing a violent act on him and is hurting him.

## **3.3 Aluba and high achievers**

The reasons for high achievers to become the Alubae are similar to the reasons for birthday party hosts. The perpetrators for this occasion is almost always the friends of the high achiever, and in this case Aluba is often a sudden proposal; one member of the high achiever’s friends would initiate the act by proposing to perform Aluba while giving out the legitimate reason of the person achieving good grades or receiving an offer. The high achiever is prompted to become the Alubae to show his trust towards his friends as with birthday parties.

### **Preventing arrogance**

In addition to showing trust, the friends tease the high achiever by performing Aluba on him; according to the questionnaire, this is due to Aluba being a popular form of “punishment” for cocky and arrogant people. Among friends, it is usually not a good idea to speak out directly to a friend being arrogant, because one may fear that his/her friend will “lose face”; therefore, Aluba is often used as an implicit “warning” for the person to stop being arrogant. The high achiever’s friends would assume that he would speak very arrogantly of his achievement later on, so Aluba is used as a deterrent to “calm down” the high achiever.

### **Teasing and Rivalry**

Performing Aluba on high achievers means that the perpetrators “tease” him as a form of gratulation, while also expressing their jealousy and rivalry to an extent as a way of saying that they are not “convinced” of the high achiever being better than them at whatever they achieved (studying, fitness, etc.).

## **3.4 “Casual” Aluba**

The third most common choice for occasions for Aluba was that it could be performed “casually” at festivals; while there is no convincing explanation of why this is the case on the internet, from the links between Aluba and Masculinity it may be a plausible explanation that Aluba can be used as a “Ritual” of Masculinity, as it allows both the perpetrators and the Alubae to show how masculine they are, which is a very attractive aspect of the activity during tense school life.

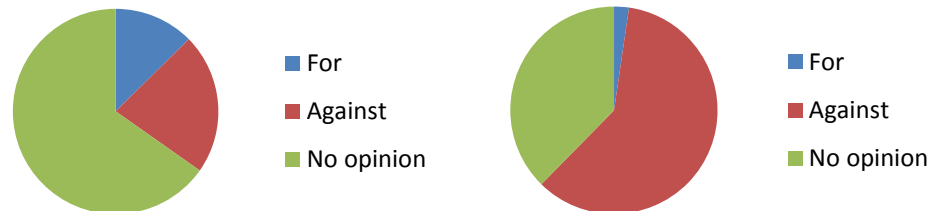
## **4. The perception of Aluba among different groups**

In our questionnaire created for adults, we managed to gather results from both adults who have children and who don’t have children. A significant portion of Adults had previous experience with Aluba.

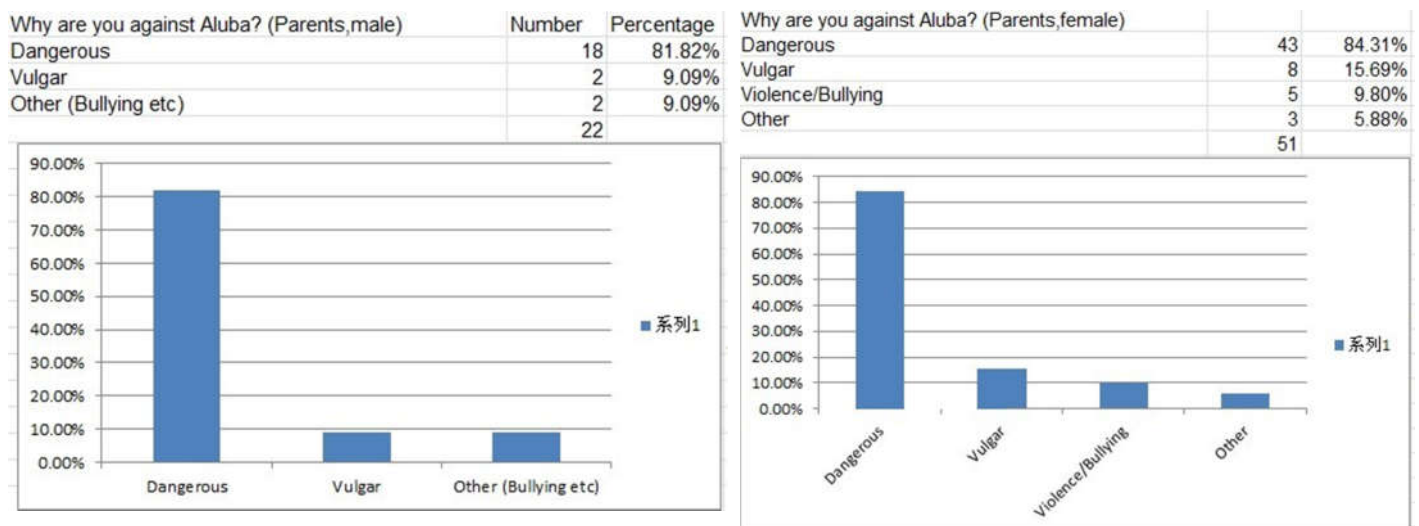


#### 4.1 Perception of Aluba and Age

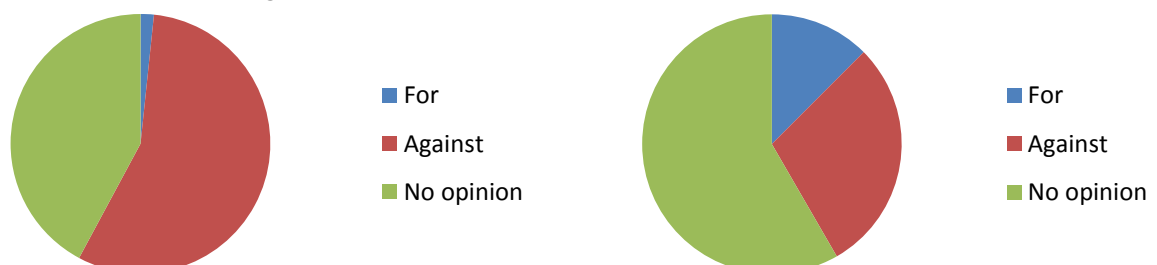
We have found very different perceptions between Adults and students on Aluba; Adults in general were much more likely to have a negative view on Aluba as seen in the charts below: (left for adults, right for students)



According to the reasons that Adults are against Aluba, we have found that the number 1 reason of rejection is that Aluba is dangerous; from more detailed responses, we see that the parents were quite worried about the Alubae's genitals getting damaged.

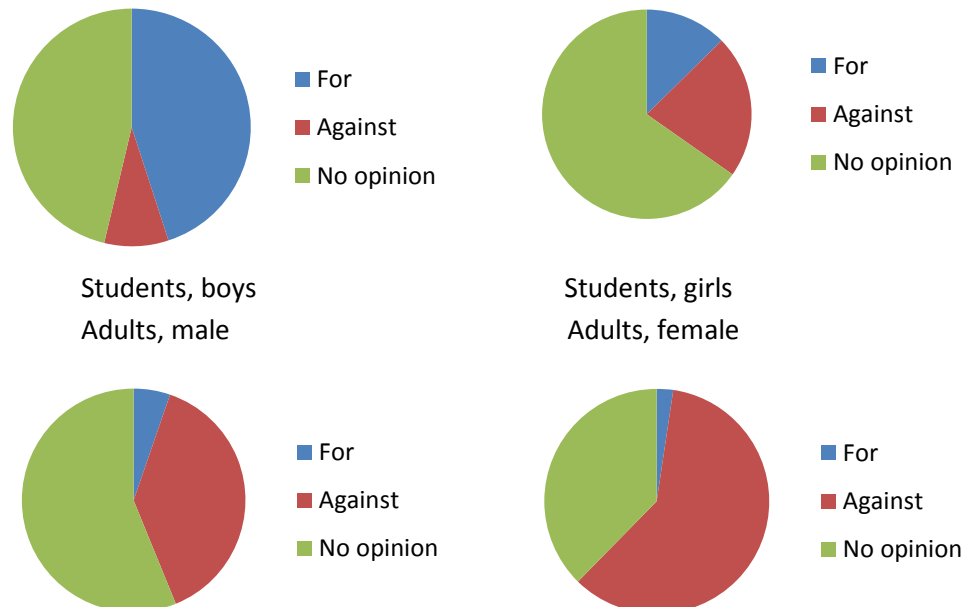


While we have now found out during the research that during Aluba the Alubae is seldom hurt, we believe that due to the portrayal of Aluba in mass media (see part 5) Adults think otherwise; the perpetrators tend to use their full force and aim to cause as much pain as possible, even going as far as choosing spiked poles for the activity, which can cause serious damage to the genitals. This is unacceptable in the current child-centered society where many parents only have 1 child due to government policies; as Chinese filial piety states that performing childbearing is a way for children to repay their parents, Aluba is seen as a dangerous activity that can potentially harm the sexual organ therefore preventing childbearing. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that adults who have children are much more likely to be against Aluba compared to Adults who don't have children; they do not want their children to get involved in Aluba in any way. (Children on left, no children on right)



## 4.2 Perception of Aluba and Gender

We have found that females were much more likely to be opposed to Aluba compared to males;



As mentioned in part 3, Aluba is a masculine activity, and males performing Aluba more or less unconsciously exclude females from participating; therefore, without a female role model in Aluba, the activity becomes much less attractive to the gender. In addition, for Aluba to show the participants' masculinity, interactional with the male sexual organ is required; while males may find it easier to accept the interaction with said organ amongst each other, it is often seen as a taboo and a vulgar act to talk about or make references to the organ in front of females; for females who unexpectedly bump into a group of people performing Aluba, it is going to leave a bad impression upon them. This is proved in our result with adults, as the perception of Aluba being vulgar is more common among females compared to males.

## 5. Aluba and Mass media

Aluba is not often portrayed in mass media; however when it is, it is often portrayed in a negative way. Aluba has been largely affected by the media's "moral panic", as they assume that such an act is dangerous to the society. Aluba has been placed among some very vicious forms of bullying in the wikipedia page "common forms of bullying in school":

### Torture and indecent assaults [edit]

"Swirly" redirects here. For the convicted child pornographer, see Christopher Paul Neil.

- **Aruba** (Chinese: 阿鲁巴): known as **Happy Corner** in Hong Kong. In Aruba, several bullies separate the victim's (often male) legs and rub his groin against a door, a corner or a pole.<sup>[9]</sup> Its name varies depending on region and era. Aruba is essentially a kind of **school violence** and sexual abuse. In March 2010, the Affiliated High School of Peking University banned it due to its potential damage to physical and psychological health.<sup>[10]</sup> Originating from Taiwan, it has become very popular in Mainland China through mainstream media. For instance, in the film *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (《那些年，我们一起追的女孩》), there was a scene of Aruba.<sup>[11]</sup><sup>[unreliable source?]</sup><sup>[verification needed]</sup>
- **Kancho**: In Japan, a bully may clasp his or her hands together so that the index fingers are pointing out and attempt to poke a victim's anal region.<sup>[12]</sup> In South Korea this form of assault is known as Dongjim.<sup>[13]</sup><sup>[unreliable source?]</sup>
- **Nipple cripple**: This form of assault is also known as "titty twister," "purple nurple," etc. The bully grasps a person's nipple between thumb and forefinger, and then twists it, often causing extreme pain for the victim.



vulgar act that will cause physical and psychological damage. On the Baidu baike page, which is the Chinese wikipedia, the first picture of the article portrays Aluba as a very dangerous and painful activity:

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On the other hand, videos in Youtube often portray Aluba in a positive way with tags such as “celebration” in quotation marks, while the videos are uploaded by the Alubaees themselves. In the videos, all the participants seem to be in a happy mood as in a genuine celebration, while the audience cheer them on:

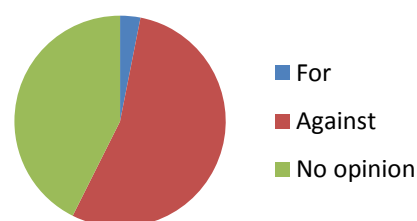
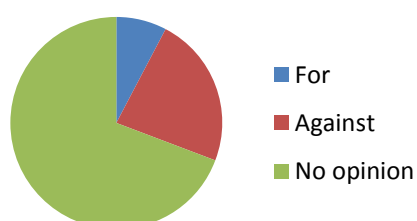


However, such videos often have negative reviews under them including scolding the participants with language such as “you shame as all”. Some others seem very shocked by replying “what the f\*\*\*”.

While rarely seen, memoirs written by adults who have experienced Aluba often talked about it in a nostalgic way, without showing either positive or negative views towards it. However, they tend to portray the activity as dangerous with language such as “We Alubaed that sucker for real. On a tree with spikes.”

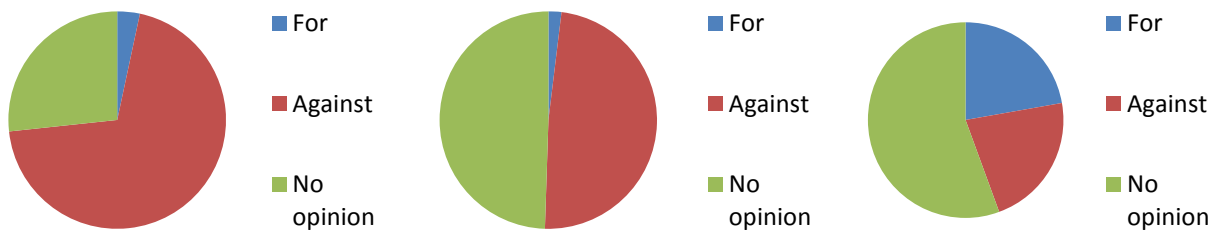
### 5.1 How media affects perception of Aluba

Therefore, combined with our findings, the media does play a large role in forming the negative perception of Aluba in many people. In our questionnaire for adults, those who have experienced or at least seen Aluba in their school are less likely to be against it, which is most likely because that they will know that Aluba is not as dangerous as it is portrayed in mass media: (left for Aluba in school, right for no Aluba in school)



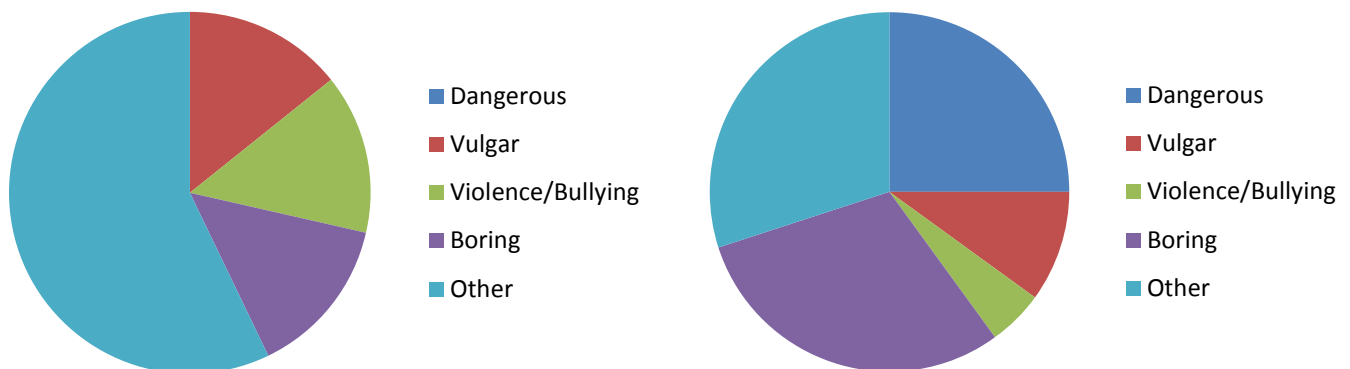
Similarly, in our second question of whether one has heard of Aluba, only “hearing” of Aluba tended to produce the most negative perceptions, even more than those who only knew of Aluba when seeing our questionnaire. In our questionnaire we only told facts about Aluba and how it was performed. Due to this, the media’s influence on people’s thoughts on Aluba can be seen; in addition to telling the process, they also add in their viewpoints such as Aluba being “barbaric” and “anti-school”.

(Left for hearing of Aluba, middle for not knowing about Aluba, right for having seen Aluba)



As most students that participated in our questionnaire have seen Aluba, we should see completely different reasons for being against Aluba if our hypothesis of the portrayal of media is correct. In the reasons for students being against Aluba, we see that few students think that Aluba is dangerous; the most common reasons were Aluba being vulgar and that the activity was simply boring.

(Left for boys, right for girls)



Notice how the perception of Aluba being vulgar is consistent in every group we surveyed; we noticed that in videos related to Aluba on the internet, during the process of Aluba “close-ups” are repeatedly given to the Alubaee’s groin and his face to show how the Alubaee is “hurt” and after the activity, more closeups are given to the Alubaee who is left on the ground most often clutching his groin. The constant involvement of Aluba with the reproductive organ has made the activity seem vulgar, as discussed earlier how it is a taboo to make references to the reproductive organ in public.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Key findings

1. Aluba became popular in China due to early portrayal of the activity on the internet around 2005 by a famous comedy clip maker called Jiaoshou; he was particularly popular among middle and high school students, and Aluba has become a tradition of many middle and high schools ever since.

2. Aluba in China is usually not used to bully; the activity itself has become more ritualistic, where certain behaviour is expected from both the Alubae and the perpetrators. the perpetrators seldom use their full force when performing Aluba, and the Alubae is expected to show mock signs of pain by screaming, thrashing and moaning. such behaviours are “socially desirable” for the ritual of Aluba, and are received by the audience as the participants (both the perpetrators and Alubae) showing off their masculinity.

3. During Aluba, both the perpetrators and the Alubae shows traits of Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) of “Male-exclusive high culture”, dominance, competition, violence and sexual strength.

4. Aluba most commonly occurs at birthday parties and gratulation for friends’ high achievements in middle and high schools, where it has become a subculture of its own as a distinct way of celebration;

-During birthday parties the host is expected to voluntarily become the Alubae; by doing so he shows that he trusts his friends and is a very effective way of getting guests involved. The host usually doesn’t refuse; if he does, he alienates his friends by showing that he doesn’t trust them.

-Aluba performed on high achievers are of similar reasons: The Alubae again shows that he trusts his friends; the perpetrators use Aluba to warn the high achiever to remain modest despite his achievement, and show their rivalry towards the high achiever in whatever he achieved.

5. Adults are more likely to be against Aluba compared to students, while females in general are more likely to be against Aluba compared to males. Adults are against Aluba due to its possible affecting the ability of their children to perform filial piety, while females in general are against Aluba due to its interaction with the male genitals being a taboo.

6. The mass media is affected by a “moral panic” towards Aluba: In many knowledge bases such as wikipedia Aluba has received a negative portrayal in the form of either denouncing it with potential dangers or putting pictures that show Aluba as dangerous.

-Fitting with our speculation, Adults who have seen Aluba in school are less likely to be against Aluba. In addition, being dangerous is a very uncommon reason for being against Aluba; students tend to be against Aluba due to it being simply boring.

## 6.2 Conclusion of research methods

### Questionnaires:

We would say that our results have high validity and reliability, as different questionnaires were made for different focus groups, included a detailed explanation of what Aluba is and the questions were asked in an objective way. The sample size was large enough, with 250 students and 150 adults from a large area thanks to mass media such as Weixin and QQ groups.

However, our results are not very generalizable; without any contacts, we had little way of knowing how Aluba is like in other SE Asian areas such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, where Aluba is popular as well.

### Semi-structured interviews and participant observation:

These methods allowed us to gather very detailed first-hand information on Aluba; we managed to interview 10 people who were very familiar with Aluba and by participating ourselves, we managed to understand the meaning of Aluba from an Alubae/perpetrator’s perspective.

However, we believe that these methods may be biased: what we gathered was qualitative

data, and relied on our own interpretation to understand the meanings behind it, where our own norms and values may get in the way. In addition, since our interviewees assumed that we as researchers were for Aluba, they may have given us positive answers to satisfy us.

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## 7. References

Aluba on its Wikipedia page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_school\\_pranks#Aruba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_school_pranks#Aruba)

Aluba on its Baidu Baike page:

[http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=36NQ6O1pC6c-MazS2rGFRvy00I4A24nM\\_rbBKZWlzlLvssEg1tOzzdiwDEkZx1dD3cEUYY3pwonigKlvGmg1A7bKipMdLNWKxtrfxtbvvgw42llqCVO7v9QO5KN0HHMVhM5Md3woIE6tRQi-nAV4tcP06RGipCsxkeTI587](http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=36NQ6O1pC6c-MazS2rGFRvy00I4A24nM_rbBKZWlzlLvssEg1tOzzdiwDEkZx1dD3cEUYY3pwonigKlvGmg1A7bKipMdLNWKxtrfxtbvvgw42llqCVO7v9QO5KN0HHMVhM5Md3woIE6tRQi-nAV4tcP06RGipCsxkeTI587)

Hegemonic masculinity: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemonic\\_masculinity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemonic_masculinity)

Jiaoshou's Aluba clip (starts from 01:40): [http://www.iqiyi.com/w\\_19rs8w4hux.html](http://www.iqiyi.com/w_19rs8w4hux.html)

Various Aluba clips on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn3-3lO39RM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYScNCm5ZA4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8Gr0vDVsf8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKWMFZ9xpW4>