

The Olympics in East Asia

Nationalism, Regionalism, and Globalism
on the Center Stage of World Sports

Edited by

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and

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Preface

William W. Kelly

For over a century, the Olympic Games have stood at the apex of what is now a global sportsworld, marking the world sports calendar in a quadrennial rhythm. They summon the largest single gatherings of humans on the planet to a host city and host nation for several weeks of what the distinguished Olympics scholar John MacAloon reminds us are sporting games, festivals, rituals, and grand spectacle—all wrapped up in one intense, colorful, and often controversial extravaganza. On the auspicious day of 8/8/2008, the Games of the XXIXth Olympiad opened in Beijing, the fifth Asian venue in Olympic history, and these Games in their East Asian context are the subject of this collaborative volume.

When our group of authors first met in March of 2008 in Hong Kong, looking ahead to what might unfold later that year, I was sure that the 2008 Beijing Olympics would be an apt instance of what Gary Whannel (1992) so strikingly identified as “vortextuality.” By this clever neologism, he meant the power of certain events to so dominate media coverage and public focus as to preempt our attention to other developments. Whannel coined the term to signify not only the intensity of coverage and the hyperbole of reporting and commentary. He also identified a “feed-off” effect by which the media (and public commentary and scholarship) are drawn into a self-referencing maelstrom of mutual attraction and competitive influence. In a frenzy of rivalry, media follow one another in coverage, and the coverage itself becomes a topic of further coverage. Major natural disasters like the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, public events like the death of Princess Di, and global economic events like the 2008 financial crisis can monopolize media and suck the air out of coverage and concern for other events. Global sporting extravaganzas like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics can also become vortextual, and in 2008, as events moved towards the Beijing Games themselves, Olympics-related issues again dominated many national and international media-scapes by the journalistic and scholarly scrutiny of the protests, the publicity, and the propaganda.

From the vantage point of 2010, did the Beijing Games generate such intense vortextuality? The Olympics certainly consumed a lot of air time and commercial resources and popular consumption. From the lighting of the Olympic Torch to the street clashes in Lhasa to the fireworks over the Bird’s Nest Stadium at the Opening Ceremony to the extinguishing of the Olympic Flame to close the Games, the events of the Olympic year garnered continual, broad media coverage and public attention. We Americans heard more about Michael Phelps, the poster child, and his physique and his mother and the most famous photo finish in Olympic history than about much else that was going on in the sportsworld or elsewhere during August (e.g. Dyreson 2010; Min & Zhen 2010.)

Media saturation (and, some argued, management) was even more complete in China, but attention was remarkably widespread through the globe. The most comprehensive analysis to date has been the 26 articles in the special issue edited by Luo (2010), reporting on an IOC-sponsored international research project that coordinated 13 research teams around the world, analyzing media coverage of the Torch Relay, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and the Games themselves in 10 countries on four continents. This project also demonstrates the academic scrutiny as well as media exposure garnered by the 2008 Games. The run-up and aftermath of the Games has produced an outpouring of conferences, special journal issues, and books (see particularly Brownell 2008, Caffrey 2009, Cha 2009, Close et al. 2007, Hong and Mangan 2010, Jarvie et al. 2008, Mangan 2008, Martinez 2010, Price and Dayan 2008, Qing 2010, and Xu 2008). These studies manifest multiple ways of analyzing the Beijing Games and of assessing their consequences for China and for the Olympic Movement, and they constitute an invaluable archive for the contemporary Olympic Movement.

The particular contribution of our volume lies in assembling a group of East Asian sports scholars to place the Beijing Olympics in an *East Asian* context. The Olympics are indeed “Games,” but these Games are as much about economics and politics as about play, and they are as much about patriotism and profit as about sportsmanship. The Beijing Olympics were a potent opportunity for China to bring an Asian dimension to the Olympics and for the world community to cosmopolitanize China. They were a means by which Beijing could claim its place as a global city, and they were a stage on which regional political and economic rivalries could be played out or played up or played down in a sporting idiom. Because they took place in multiple geopolitical and historical contexts, any assessment of their effects must appreciate them as the fifth such Games held in Asia, held after a century of Asian connections to the worldwide Olympic Movement. That is what we seek to emphasize in bringing together scholarship on the Olympic experience in five East Asian settings.

This project began with a conversation that I had in early 2007 with my fellow anthropologist, Susan Brownell, who is well-known for her writings on sport in China and on the Olympic Movement and who was then preparing for a year as a Fulbright Senior Researcher at Beijing Sport University in the run-up to the 2008 Games. Together, we sought out as diverse a group of scholars as we could, both to represent the academic traditions of the East Asian countries, Europe, and the US, and to bring together multiple social science disciplinary perspectives. We were delighted with the response, and we are deeply grateful to the scholars who agreed to participate.

We came together as a group together on two occasions. The first conference was held in March of 2008, as popular disturbances were taking place in Tibet and on the eve of the Olympic Torch Relay. We met at the University of Hong Kong under the sponsorship of the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and So-

cial Sciences. We are deeply appreciative to the director of the Institute, Professor Helen Siu, for the Institute's generous funding and to Ms. Emily Ip and the entire Institute staff for their impeccable arrangements. At these meetings, we all benefitted greatly from the commentaries of two invited discussants, Ms. Dong Qian, a reporter, commentator, and host on CCTV (and former World Fellow at Yale) and Mr. Yu Bu, an executive editor for CCTV Sports, then working for the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee. We also thank several local scholars, who offered astute and supportive feedback, especially Dean Kam Louie and Professors Paul Abernethy, Frank Dikötter, and Ng Chun Hung of the University of Hong Kong and Professor Leung Mee-Lee of Hong Kong Baptist University.

The second workshop was held at Yale University in October of 2008, in the aftermath of the Games. This was funded through the extraordinary generosity of the Council on East Asian Studies and its Sumitomo Fund. The Council staff of Abbey Newman, Melissa Keeler, Anne Letterman, and Alan Baubonis collaborated to provide a very hospitable venue for our public presentations and working group meetings. Mr. Yu joined us again and our colleague, Deborah Davis, in the Department of Sociology, offered support and wise commentary.

After the group's papers from the second workshop were revised and edited, the Council accepted the finished collection for publication in its Occasional Monograph Series, and we are very grateful that its publication was made possible by a special subvention grant from the Sumitomo Endowment Fund. In producing the volume, it has been a pleasure to work with Jason Driscoll of New Haven's Phoenix Press, a family company which is dedicated to being a national leader in environmentally-sound business practices among commercial printers in the United States.

A note on orthography and proper name order. The contributors to this volume are from East Asia, Europe, and the United States, and we are referring to authors and works in multiple languages. For consistency, we have adopted American English spelling throughout, and we use the American Anthropological Association citation conventions of in-text and endnote bibliographies. In displaying and alphabetizing personal names, we follow the East Asian convention of "FAMILY NAME First name" and the Western convention of "First name FAMILY NAME."



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Beijing 2008 and the Limits of Exceptionalism

William W. Kelly

For over a half-century, the nations of East Asia have been as crucial to the Olympic Movement as the Olympics have been significant to those East Asian nations. This volume analyzes this mutual interaction at multiple levels—within these nations, among these nations, and for the global Olympic movement itself. The recent Beijing Olympics have been the starting point for our collective endeavor, but the volume seeks to place this Olympiad within the long East Asian presence in the Olympic Movement.

Through the long endeavors of the Frenchman, Baron de Coubertin, an Olympic Games festival was convened in Athens in 1896, marking the beginning of the modern Olympic movement. By the late 20th century, the Games (which from 1924 were divided into quadrennial Summer and Winter Games) had become the largest regular sports gathering in the world. The massing of athletes, spectators, media, and commercial interests makes the Olympics a true “mega-event,” a vortex of individual effort, civic pride, national sentiment, and global fellowship.

The first Olympic Games scheduled for Asia were those planned for Tokyo in 1940 (with Winter Games to be held that year in Sapporo). The outbreak of World War II forced the cancellation of what Sandra Collins (2007) has characterized as the “missing Olympics,” and it was not until 1964 that the Olympics came to the region, when the Summer Games were hosted in Tokyo. Since then, the Winter Games have been held twice in Japan (in Sapporo in 1972 and in Nagano in 1998), and the Summer Games were held in Seoul in 1988 and now in Beijing in 2008. Worth noting too have been the many unsuccessful bids by Asian cities in recent decades. Most recently, Tokyo mounted a strenuous bid to bring the Games back to that city in 2016; it lost out to Rio de Janeiro, but the Tokyo mayor vowed to continue his efforts. Pyeongchang, South Korea is bidding for a third time to host the Winter Olympics, this time for the 2018 Games.

Each time the Games have returned to Asia, the region has loomed larger on the world stage, and the Olympics themselves have vastly increased in magnitude. For the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the degree of planning, the level of investment, the scale of the events, and the extent of media coverage exceeded even those of the previous Games in 2004 in Athens. In the buildup to the Beijing Games, public and scholarly interest focused on two major questions. In what ways and to what extent was Beijing 2008 changing the Olympic Movement as a global sports governance and the Olympic Games as a world mega-

event, and, conversely, in what ways was the experience of hosting the Olympics changing China?

It is not surprising that these questions should have so engaged the world's attention. The critical significance of East Asia for the Olympics and the Olympics for East Asia comes from two paradoxes that have been at the heart of the modern Olympics for over a century. The first is the paradox of a movement with very particularistic origins in late nineteenth-century Western Europe whose philosophy nonetheless aspires to universal values. Is Olympism simply a Western spiritual athleticism that claims a global salience, or have Asian athletes and Asian host nations been able to expand Olympism to a truly global vision?

Secondly, the Olympic movement contains a fundamental tension between the joy of participation and the drive for competition and between the athletes as individuals and as representatives of nations. Cities and countries vie fiercely for the right to host the Games and attempt to add their own special flavor and themes to their venue. National sport federations and national media always threaten to turn the Games into contests for national prestige. Are the Olympics a joyous gathering of world athletes or a fierce tournament of national squads? In what ways have the various Asian-site Olympic Games played roles in the capital-city development, national politics, and regional relations of Japan, South and North Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan?

All of the contributors to this volume address dimensions of these questions, and in this opening chapter, I want to focus on one issue that underlay much of the coverage of the Beijing Olympic year and is still with us as the post-Games legacy-making continues. Were these 2008 Olympics special and unique, or did they fit within the normal range in the history of other Olympics Games?

Overwhelmingly, media coverage and public commentary have emphasized the uniqueness of the Beijing Olympics. Examples abound. For instance, Nicolai Ouroussoff, the noted architecture critic for the *New York Times*, arrived in Beijing a month before the Games to assess the new Olympic buildings and began a long and lavishly illustrated article that appeared on the front page of the paper on Sunday, July 13, with rather breathless prose:

BEIJING — If Westerners feel dazed and confused upon exiting the plane at the new international airport here, it's understandable. It's not just the grandeur of the space. It's the inescapable feeling that you're passing through a portal to another world, one whose fierce embrace of change has left Western nations in the dust. [Ouroussoff 2008: A-1]

Such a sensationalist tone was not at all uncommon in the pages and airwaves of the world media as "8/8/2008" approached, and it worked to create an aura of unique significance and suspense. Indeed, it produced a strong the-

matic of *difference*. These were unlike all previous Games, we were told and shown, and the repetition of this thematic, from the Opening Ceremony to the Closing Ceremony, from so many angles and with so much vertiginous spin, came to provide its own self-referential support.

The uniqueness of Beijing 2008 was, for some, a radical difference of culture—the radical alterity of Asian-ness, or the effect of “...passing through the portal of another world...” as Ouroussoff put it. But beyond such casual journalism, there is also serious scholarship that proposed that from Greece, the font of Western civilization (Athens 2004), to China, the cradle of Asian civilization in 2008, the Olympics were finally transiting from the parochialism of its Eurocentric philosophy to a more truly global philosophical foundation.

To others, the uniqueness of Beijing 2008 was a difference of politics, not culture. Politics have permeated the Olympics from the very first Games in 1896, as Mandell (1976), Smith (2004), and other scholars have detailed. However, many commentators have argued that Beijing 2008 represented an altogether new level of politicization and national social engineering. The crackdown in Tibet and in Ürümqi, the arrests of domestic Olympic critics, the rather heavy-handed marginalizing of protesters to obscure park zones, the traffic and factory restrictions, the preemptory razing of old city blocks to make way for Olympic construction, the widespread blocking of internet sites—these and more were evidence to many that the efforts of the Chinese government to manage the events, to dictate the reporting, and to control the internal and world reception of the Olympics qualitatively exceeded any similar efforts in past Olympic history. As the sharply contested peregrinations of the Olympic Torch Relay showed, the greedy propaganda ambitions of the Chinese state met the equally determined and strategically savvy oppositional protests from many quarters of the world on an unprecedented scale.

However, in hindsight, I think it is valuable to revisit this question of exceptionalism and to reflect again on whether the XXIXth Olympiad really was so divergent from the previous twenty-eight, culturally or politically. Did the Beijing Olympics prove to be a radical departure from and thus a transformative moment in the historical trajectory of the Olympic movement? Were the levels of official abuses and popular protests through the year so far beyond previous Olympic experiences? Were the possibilities of a new Asian sports vision that drove the programming of the Chinese hosts sufficient to reframe the structure and the meanings of the Olympics? What did the Olympics do to and for China, and what have the Beijing Olympics done for the Olympic Movement?

My own view is that the Games are not likely to prove such an exceptional and transformational moment in Olympic history, and I believe that because I see four factors that have operated to normalize and to routinize this Olympiad and its Games.

- First are the ways that participation in the Olympic Movement and its constituent elements have become regularized over a century of procedural refinement.
- Second are the constraining effects of what I call Olympic temporality.
- A third element is the rather long and under-appreciated history of East Asian involvement in the Olympic movement, into which Beijing 2008 must be placed and which should make us skeptical about the current claims of novelty and the prospects of transformation.
- And finally, there are the multiple, intersecting paradoxes upon which the Olympic Movement is built and from which even the excesses of Beijing 2008 will not likely escape.

In this chapter, I will expand upon these points in order to question the claims of exceptionalism and to situate the Beijing Olympiad within the larger institutional world of the Olympic Movement and the longer historical trajectory of East Asian involvement in this Movement. I hasten to note at the outset, however, that characterizing the Beijing Olympics as “normal” may seem odd, even perverse, to some readers. In part, this is because the Olympic Games themselves are far from normal sporting events and the Olympic Movement is unlike any other sporting organization in the world. The Olympics may be at the center of our global sports consciousness, but as a multi-sport extravaganza of global scope mounted by a supra-national governance body, they are a most unusual sports phenomenon to have such a hold on us. Unlike the FIFA World Cup or the American football Super Bowl or Wimbledon or the World Figure Skating Championships or the Cricket World Cup, the Olympics are the only such “mega-event” that is a multi-sport gathering. And unlike these other world sports championships, it is as much a festivity as a competition, and it is as much about the assembly of participants as the crowning of winners.

The power of the Olympics comes from the fact that it is so different from the usual modern sports events that have such popular appeal and commercial interest. And the complex articulation of a self-replicating International Olympic Committee (its board and Commissions) with international sports federations, national Olympic committees, and local host organizing committees is a unique pattern of global governance. In fact, I will argue, it is the very abnormality of the Olympics that makes it so difficult for anyone and anything that comes within its orbit to escape its force field. In these terms, Beijing 2008 was not an exceptional Olympics; it had many distinctive—and disturbing—elements but because of four features of modern Olympic history that I now turn to, it was far less exceptional than many believe.

“Olympic participation”: A normalizing trajectory

The Beijing Olympics demonstrate what we may appreciate, retrospectively, as a common pathway by which countries (and world regions) now move from the periphery of the Olympic Movement to its center. We may schematize the gradient of commitment and standing as following a common sequence:

- a. A country's initial ambition is simply to participate in the Olympic Games and in the IOC governance, symbolized by having a delegation that can march in the Opening Ceremony and by organizing a National Olympic Committee and gaining a vote in the IOC assembly. Media coverage of the Ceremony will inevitably include shots of one or several athletes marching behind the flag bearer and name placard holder of a new or marginal IOC country that has scraped together just enough resources to send a minimal representation. By 2008, there were 205 National Olympic Committees, exceeding in number the 192 United Nation member states.*
- b. Initial participation usually brings both the incentive and the pressure to begin winning medals at the Games. Competitive success becomes the benchmark of countries with increasingly robust participation, and joining the rivalries for top medal totals is a measure of becoming a leading Olympic power.*
- c. A further sign of rising status in the Olympic Movement is having a national sport accepted as a demonstration sport and, even better, as an official Olympic Games sport. For the 1964 Tokyo Games, judo was given demonstration event status and in 1972 was granted official status (women in 1992). For the 1988 Seoul Games, Taekwondo was given demonstration event status and in 2000 became an official Olympic sport. Proposals to introduce wushu (a derivative of Chinese martial arts) as a recognized sport or even as a demonstration sport at the 2008 Olympics were turned back by the IOC, although the Beijing organizing committee was allowed to present an unofficial tournament.*
- d. Of even greater prestige, of course, is hosting the Games, and the host countries form a very select set of IOC member nations. The 30 Summer Games (through 2012 London Games) have been held in only 18 countries, and 22 Winter Games (through 2014 Sochi Games) have been hosted by a total of 10 countries, seven of whom have also hosted the Summer Games.*
- e. Finally, as several chapters in this volume discuss, the issues surrounding the Beijing Games bring into focus what is perhaps the highest form of IOC standing, which is the capacity to influence Olympism philosophy itself. To casual spectators, the mottos and*

slogans generated by each Olympics and the Olympic Education campaigns that host countries must organize seem like rhetorical dressing for the athletic competitions on the field, but within the IOC movement, they have come to be taken with utmost seriousness. The strenuous efforts by China in promoting its mascots and its slogans and its version of Olympic Education and in funding scholarly conferences and other initiatives are part of an important campaign to get the Olympic Movement to embrace a more “multicultural” sports humanism.

This trajectory has been followed as successfully by the Asian nations of Japan, Korea, and China as by the major Euroamerican nations at the center of the Movement. That is, participation in the Games and OM governance, competitive success, national sports promotion, Games hosting, and philosophical influence is a trajectory of deepening involvement and acceptance that China, like Japan, Korea, and many other Olympic core nations, has now largely completed. To put it differently, however, seeking status in the OM also has severe standardizing effects on a nation’s sports development as it must conform to the organizational, financial, and ideological demands of the IOC.

“Olympic time”: A normalizing temporal process

Time organizes the Olympic experience in other ways as well, and of equal importance are the implications of its unique quadrennial unit that it calls the Olympiad. The IOC formalized this in the 1930s and imposes it upon its organizational process, its sporting agenda, and its commercial promotions. It is both a cyclical four-year interval between Summer Games and also a linear chronology, which began with the 1896 Athens Games as the Ist Olympiad (always rendered in classical Roman numerals!). The 2008 Beijing Olympics were the Summer Games of the XXIXth Olympiad, which, in accordance with the Bye Law to Rule 6 of the Olympic Charter, began on January 1, 2008.

However, the calendar of requirements and responsibilities for every Summer Games and Winter Games has created a far longer and more elaborate temporality than the four-year Olympiad itself; in fact, the Beijing Games began many years before that Games’ Olympiad and they continue long afterwards. The effect is to engage countries that aim for Olympic hosting in an extended process of standardizing requirements, which we may briefly characterize as the following.

First, there is the bidding period. Winning the opportunity to host an Olympic Games can take years of local mobilizing and IOC lobbying. Successful bids often follow unsuccessful campaigns, and the initial failures provide valuable learning experiences and image-building credentials. Japan began its postwar effort in the early 1950s, a dozen years before its eventual Summer

Games. China lobbied hard but unsuccessfully in the 1990s before winning the 2008 Games. Every Games now requires a long campaign to create a rationale, construct a persuasive narrative about the virtues of one's bid, and develop a detailed economic and construction plan. The campaign must be waged domestically, to gather local political, economic, and civic support, and internationally, to persuade the IOC membership.

Once a bid is accepted and a host city designated, real preparations begin as cities and a country are mobilized for massive and intensive infrastructure development, broadcasting and other commercial rights and forms are negotiated, and a Games aesthetics and merchandising plan are developed. The Games are now awarded about seven years in advance, but a second time cycle is marked formally as the four-year run-up from extinguishing the flame at the Closing Ceremony of one Games to the Opening Ceremony of the next Games.

The Games themselves constitute a third Olympic temporal unit. In recent decades, the Games have been held during a two-to-three week period; one of Beijing's slogans was "The world gives us 16 days; we give the world 5,000 years." Formally, they extend from Opening Ceremony to Closing Ceremony—even more precisely, from the declaration of opening by the host nation leader to the extinguishing of the Olympic flame. However, the Movement's embrace of the Paralympics and the ever-closer scheduling of the Paralympics to follow the Olympics are extending "Games time" to about six weeks. For instance, the Beijing Olympics were held on August 8-24 and were soon followed by the Paralympics, using the same facilities on September 6-17. It is now required of bidding cities that they include commitments and plans for staging the Paralympics so there has in effect been a lengthening of Games temporality.

The contests and celebrations of the Games may conclude at the Closing Ceremony, but extinguishing the flame only begins the open-ended time of writing the histories and building the legacies of those Games. There is the required work of completing and publishing official and unofficial records of the Olympiad (reports, documentaries, financial accounts, etc.), but there are also the many subsequent efforts to fashion a retrospective theme and narrative, to protect and burnish the public memories, to locate the Games within the larger sweep of Olympic and national history, and so forth.

These four time cycles constitute a generic chronology, and of course the rhythm, the intensity, and the content of each Games have varied significantly. In part, such variations depend on the historical moment and in part there are differences because each Olympiad is connected to and influenced by the trajectory of its preceding Olympiads. Nonetheless, as we are well into the fourth phase of the Beijing Games, the second phase of the 2012 London Games, and the first stage of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, it is clear that the Beijing Games have followed a fairly predictable temporal format, normalized by the constraints of the frame.

Asia and the Olympics: A century of mutual involvement

In the run-up to and aftermath of the Beijing Games, there were many claims by the Chinese organizers themselves and in both the popular and scholarly literature about the novelty of this Asian Olympics. This was, many felt, the occasion when the Olympic Movement had to acknowledge, finally and fully, the East Asian world region and to embrace East Asian tenets within its Olympic philosophy. It was a moment when the East Asia region itself could at last become a regular participant in the Olympic Movement.

There is, however, a healthy dose of historical amnesia in such a perspective because Asian nations and athletes have been involved in the Olympic Movement for close to a century, well before much of the rest of the non-Euro-American world was drawn in. This is clear from many of the contributions to this volume (and from a wider literature of East Asian Olympics), and even a brief timeline of Asian involvement demonstrates the region's longstanding familiarity and engagement with Olympic organizations and Games.

1908-1910: Early on, Baron de Coubertin and the IOC made contact with Chinese and Japanese individuals about participation. The Japanese educator and founder of judo, Kanō Jigorō, became the first Asian member of the IOC in 1908, serving until 1938 and leading most Japanese delegations to the Games during those decades. YMCA sports educators and missionaries in East and Southeast Asia also encouraged Western sports and knowledge and enthusiasm for the Olympic Games.

1913-1934: The Far Eastern Championship Games were originally sponsored by the YMCA to foster sports competitions among Japan, the Philippines and the Republic of China, three countries in which the YMCA was active. The American E. S. Brown, who had the original idea, christened them the Far Eastern Olympic Games, but the nascent IOC objected and the name was changed to the Far Eastern Championship Games. The Games were held every two years (and later, every four years), rotating among the three countries, until Japan's 1937 invasion of China brought them to an end, and they provided regular experience in organizing multi-sport international competitions.

1936-1940: Japan was the first non-Western country to be awarded the Games, when its bid for the 1940 Games was accepted in 1936. Two years later, Japan cancelled its hosting following the outbreak of war with China. Nevertheless, the nation had already made extensive plans and held its own national games to celebrate what it considered the country's 2,600th anniversary. The "lost" Tokyo Olympics are integral to the 1930s history of the IOC (Collins 2007).

1951 to present: The Asian Games are a regional, quadrennial multi-sport gathering sanctioned and supervised by the IOC. The first Asian Games were in New Delhi in 1951, and they have broad Asian membership, more sports-inclusive than the Olympic Games themselves and used by countries and sports federations for a variety of national purposes. It was from the 1950s, too, that the “two China” question (the status of Taiwan and the mainland PRC) created several decades of debate about the politics of representation to the IOC and its deliberative bodies.

1964-2008: The Summer Games in Tokyo in September of 1964 marked the first actual Asian Olympics, the lobbying and planning for which had begun in the previous decade. This was followed by a series of Asian hosts—at least once in every decade since: the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo, the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, the 1998 Winter Olympics back in Japan in Nagano, and finally a decade later, the 2008 Beijing Games.

2001-2009: Tokyo began a spirited bid to host the 2016 Summer Games from 2001. In 2007, the IOC designated it as an Applicant City, and in 2008, Tokyo was chosen as one of four Candidate Cities, vying with Chicago, Rio de Janeiro, and Madrid. In 2009, Rio was selected as the host, although Tokyo may reinstate its bid for the 2020 Summer Games, along with several other Asian cities.

A number of the chapters that follow will elaborate on aspects of this history. The point of this timeline for me is to make clear that the Beijing Olympics were not the occasion when Asia burst onto the Olympic center stage. They took place precisely one hundred years after Kanō Jigorō joined the IOC. Over that century, the East Asian countries, separately and regionally, sometimes in concert and sometimes contentiously, have made their way to the forefront of the Olympic Movement—as member nations, as athletic powers, as Games hosts, as instigators of political issues, and as a powerful audience of television viewers and lucrative market for Olympic merchandise. What has been the weight of this regional history and how did it bear upon the Beijing Olympics? This is one of the principal themes running through many of the volume chapters—the significance of this long but under-recognized East Asian involvement in the Olympic Movement for the shaping of the Beijing Games as design, as performance, and as legacy.

Olympic contests are not only about who wins but about what is at stake

A fourth way in which the Beijing Olympics fall within the “normal” trajectory of the Olympic Movement takes us to the heart of the Olympic Move-

ment, where there has always been far more at stake than determining athletic champions. I do not underplay or condone the serious actions of the Chinese government associated with the Olympic year, including human rights abuses, press censorship, environmental pollution, repression in Tibet, support for oppressive regimes like Sudan, and so on. Nor do I deny the profoundly important debate about whether and how such disturbing policies and practices should be addressed by the Olympic Movement and by the participating (or, it seemed earlier in 2008, boycotting) national teams and individual athletes. But it is important to appreciate these actions within more than a century of international and national Olympic politics.

There are many who view this Olympic history as a long and ultimately losing struggle in which de Coubertin's visionary ideals of amateur effort and global fellowship were gradually but inexorably tarnished by partisan nationalism and crass commercialism. This, I believe, is a serious misreading. While the scale of controversies surrounding the Beijing Games may have exceeded those of many earlier Olympics, political and economic controversies have been part and parcel of the modern Olympics since arguments about Greek funding of the 1896 Games and debates shortly after 1896 between moving Olympic venues or remaining in Athens. The expulsions of Taiwan and of the apartheid regime of South Africa, boycotts led by the US in 1980 and the USSR in 1984, terrorist killings of Israeli Olympians in 1972, mass student demonstrations and police killings at Mexico City, Hitler's ostentatious politicization of the Berlin Olympics, the corruption and kickbacks leading up to the Salt Lake City Olympics—these and many more render moot any attempt to locate an earlier period when the Olympic Movement existed beyond politics. Avery Brundage, during his long term as IOC president, often loudly insisted that “The cardinal rule of the Olympics is no politics,” prompting the incisive sportswriter David Zirin to respond irreverently, “. . . which is like saying the cardinal rule of boxing is no punching” (Zirin 2007)!

The Olympics never had a pristine past. We accord them center stage among world sports not because the message of Olympism is so clear and so unambiguous but precisely it is unclear, so contestable to rival interpretations, so convenient to multiple purposes and agendas. We value the Olympics not for their purity but for their imperfections, not because they are above the fray but because they constantly confront us with fundamental debates about politics, economics, and culture that agitate individuals and nations. Are the Olympics a field of play or a battleground of nations? Should the Olympics foreground individual achievement or national prestige? Who is being exhorted to run faster, to jump higher, and to be stronger? That is, do the Olympics showcase the strongest individuals or the most powerful nations? Certainly the medal race among national teams would suggest how often the scale has tipped to the side of patriotic fervor and nationalist competition.

And have the powerful commercial interests—both inside the IOC (one of

the most vigilant holders of lucrative intellectual property rights), among the world's biggest media and largest corporations, and from the local and national host interests themselves—now completely overwhelmed the spirit of sportsmanship and captured the organization and the ethos of the Games? However, there is as little that is new about commercial pressures as there is about political ambitions. The Olympics are not threatened by an ever-widening gap between lofty ideals and crass realities. They have always been suspended between the two, and striving for purity, pride, and profit has given a perpetual instability to the rhetoric and actions of the Olympic Movement.

Politics and economics have been the core controversies in the Olympic Movement, to be sure, but we must not forget that the Olympics have also been the most important world platform for the most intractable and perpetually unresolved debates about the nature of modern sport itself. Of these, the most enduring has been question of amateurism and the fraught boundary with professionalism. Elite performance at the highest levels of competition always tests whatever measures of amateurism are designed and enforced. This conundrum preceded the Olympics themselves—soccer, rugby, cricket, baseball, and American football all were wracked with controversies about amateurism in the nineteenth century. But throughout the twentieth century and up to the present, it has been the Olympics that have brought together the most elite amateurs in such a range of team and individual sports across the spectrum of spectator interest and commercial potential. Thus it is the Games that have been the highest profile venue for defining what has been a constantly shifting line, often drawn quite differently among the Olympic sports and their international federations. From athletes barely above recreational skills to NBA basketball professionals, the 2008 Games juxtaposed the full spectrum of sports, from leisure to livelihood.

Other questions, too, have put sports at the center of fundamental questions. For a half century, determination of athletes' sex type, specifically female sex, roiled the Olympics. It will never end because the male-female dichotomy that modern sport imposes upon what is really a cline of human physiology and endocrinology forces constant reconsideration of the meaning of sex identity.

Similarly, with the IOC embrace of the Paralympics, the Olympic Movement more and more dramatizes the arbitrariness of our efforts to distinguish the "able" and the "disabled." In 2008, we saw several efforts of athletes to qualify for both the Olympics and the Paralympics, and the most prominent case, the South African runner Oscar Pistorius, raised for scientists, lawyers, and sports administrators alike the fundamental divide between humans and cyborgs. Running so fast with his "Cheetah" prosthetic legs, he posed dramatically what many sports face on a routine basis: where does human end and machine begin? How do we distinguish between fair and unfair technology in skis, blades, racquets, balls, and all the other accoutrements of sports?

Yet other conundrums are showcased across the range of Olympic sports.

What is an appropriate minimum age for elite sports competition, a question that has generated rancorous argument in sports like gymnastics, tennis, and ice skating? And when does medical rehabilitation and pharmacological assistance become unfair performance enhancement? Substance abuse and doping have been tragedies and scandals from the earliest Games; what is new is not the fact of looking for any competitive edge but the ever more intense struggle between deceit and detection. In this too, the Beijing Games were only the latest chapter.

What the Olympics bring to global attention is not just a politics of the sporting body but also of the sporting spirit. Indeed, they present us with perhaps the most fundamental paradox of all modern sports. Do we play to win or do we play to participate? No other major sports gathering on the world stage juxtaposes these fundamentally different human dispositions towards physical games. FIFA, Wimbledon, the Super Bowl, whatever the event—it is all about winning. Only the Olympics offer equal time and equal worth to the many who come not for medals of victory but for memories of fellowship. Despite the elitism of the Olympic motto (“Faster, Stronger, Higher”), the Games always draw out our empathy for “the slower, the weaker, and the shorter.” Let us not forget that almost half of the 222 nations which have competed at the Games since 1890 have never won a single medal. The sternly formal processional of nations in the Opening Ceremony contrasts markedly with scenes of the athletes relaxing together in the Olympic Village and their friendly, chaotic mingling at the Closing Ceremony. These are the two faces of the Olympics and they are the two faces of modern sports, and no other sporting event in the world so vividly dramatizes the pressures of competition and the pleasures of participation.

An equally fundamental philosophical tension—and that which has been most on display in the three East Asian Summer Games—is the apparent contradiction between the pronounced and proud Western classical inspirations for the modern Olympics and their equally insistent claims to represent universal aspirations and values. If the “Olympic spirit” is one of “friendship, solidarity, and fair play,” is that just a Western parochial value, or is it a universal humanism? As we will see in a number of the chapters to follow, this perplexed Coubertin himself, who envisioned participation from all the nations of the world, and has motivated the East Asian nations, at least since Japan’s plans for the 1940 Games.

In sum, sports as play or as politics, as festival or as competition, as individual accomplishment or as national pride, as amateur or professional, human achievement and the limits of enhancement, the shifting divide between the able and the disabled, and the universalist claims of Olympic values—all of these have been both divisive fault lines and constitutive elements of every recent Olympics.

The Olympics are so popular and powerful and profitable precisely they have always been a stage where some of our most important tensions and strug-

gles—about sports, about politics, about diplomacy, about business, about race and gender, about what it is to be human—are displayed and dramatized—and only precariously resolved—from Olympiad to Olympiad. They are a lightening rod for controversy and a touchstone for our deepest anxieties as well as our soaring hopes.

It is precisely the un-resolvability of these conundrums that perpetuates what we might a “permanent instability” at the heart of the Olympic Movement and that returns me to my central claim in this chapter. The year of the Beijing Games certainly had breath-taking moments of grandeur (e.g., the Opening Ceremony) and troubling incidents of state repression and popular protest (e.g., the actions in western China and the multi-continent demonstrations against the Torch Relay); the Games themselves broke records for broadcast rights, media attention, commercial revenues, construction costs, local volunteers staffing, and other production elements. And of course, the sporting events themselves produced athletic accomplishments that continued to push the limits of human physical endurance and achievement. The extent and intensity of media and scholarly coverage were surely justified by the dimensions of this mega-event. Nonetheless, it was in fact an Olympic Games, the forty-seventh such Games (counting Winter and Summer venues), and the persistent claims that 2008 was a year of Olympic exceptionalism, that the Games would transform the Olympic Movement, and that its excesses exceeded even Olympian proportions have proved to be misleading. For all of the reasons that I have outlined here, it is crucial to appreciate the distinctiveness of the Beijing Olympics within the modern Olympic Movement and as the latest testimony to the continuing importance of East Asian nations in shaping our most global sporting experience. This is what the chapters that follow seek to provide.



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