

Editorial introduction to the special issue: new scholarship in Japan sport studies

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The 20th-century sports world of Japan was centered on baseball and sumo, and both sports drew much of the attention of sport scholars. This special issue shows new directions in Japan sports studies—towards other sports and towards analysis of sport and broader social issues like disability, political issues like ethnicity, and historical questions of nationalism, colonial rule, and class formation.

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National sports landscapes can be roughly divided into those few countries in which a number of spectator sports vie more or less equally for attention and prestige and those more numerous countries where a single dominant spectator sport overshadows others of more limited attraction. The United States is an example of the former type, as baseball, basketball and football rival one another as ‘centre sports’ for time and resources. Japan is one of the many more numerous nations that have a single dominant sport and a penumbra of secondary sports. For much of the world, this centre sport is soccer; occasionally it is cricket (as in South Asia and some Caribbean nations); even more rarely, ice hockey (for Canada).

For Japan, like several non-cricketing Caribbean nations, the centre sport has been baseball for the past 100 years, played at the youth level as Little League and secondary school teams, in universities and in semi-pro industrial leagues, in the Japanese professional leagues and as adult recreation across the country. In participation, spectatorship and media attention, then, baseball has dominated the Japanese sports landscape as soccer dominates England and Brazil and cricket dominates India.

At the same time, this centre sport is surrounded by a vast periphery of spectator and participant sports – most notably in the twentieth century by sumo, whose year is organized around six 15-day tournaments, and more recently by soccer, especially the J.League. Beyond this, the longstanding popularity of swimming, track and field and other Olympic-inspired sports, together with tennis, golf, Formula 1 motor racing and motocross, remind us that despite national stereotypes of group consciousness, Japanese have long been attracted to individual sports as enthusiastically as team sports!

Even this does not exhaust an enumeration of sports that have been popular in education and entertainment for over a century, including team sports of limited followership at the college and company level (rugby, American football, volleyball, ice hockey); outdoor adventure and endurance sports such as mountain climbing, Arctic exploration and sailing; martial art sports such as judo and karate; and professional wrestling, both men’s and

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women's. Finally – and at many points in the twentieth century the most popular and lucrative of all – there is the shadow sector of the Japanese sportscape, the unholy trinity of gambling sports: horse racing, velodrome cycling and motorboat racing.

Sport has been absolutely formative in and for modern Japan – and for far longer and with much broader ramifications than many of the other expressions of leisure and mass culture that have received so much more scholarly attention. From the 1880s on, sport was central to the development of student culture in the elite schools, becoming the core of the extracurricular life on the national school system. It was crucial to the fortunes of the new national newspapers. Sport promotion and development were at the heart of municipal railroad company strategies that drove the major metropolitan regions. Sport was a vital, if controversial, idiom of national pride, of gender identity and of notions of youth.

After World War II, it was through baseball and pro wrestling that television quickly became the prime technology of mass culture; baseball became the premier sport in high schools, and corporations embraced and promoted a wide range of employee sports programmes to a degree unmatched elsewhere. Japan of course had been the first Asian nation to embrace the International Olympic Movement. Kanō Jigorō was the first non-western member invited to join the IOC in 1909; Japan was the first non-western nation to send athletes to the Games in 1912 and to be selected to host the Games in 1940. The 1940 bid was withdrawn, but in 1964 Tokyo hosted the Summer Games, and Japan went on to host two Winter Games and, most recently, to win the bidding for the 2020 Summer Games. In terms of participation, success and sponsorship, the Olympics have been central to Japan's sporting consciousness and the nation is now one of the most influential within the IOC.

Given all of this, it may seem odd that sport studies are still somewhat marginal in modern Japan scholarship, both Japanese and English. Odd not just because of its obvious importance, but also because for a long time, social scientists and historians have enthusiastically explored so many other realms of Japanese popular and mass culture. We have fabulous books and articles upon articles about film, about manga and anime, about J-Pop, rap, enka and other musical forms, about youth fashions and subcultures, about coffee shops and café waitresses, about motorcycle gangs and women's magazines, about television shows and TV idols – that is, about a wide spectrum of mass culture, leisure, entertainment and popular life. Indeed, in my own discipline of anthropology, in the past 20 years Japan scholars have pioneered ethnographic methods and research questions about mass and popular culture that have now been taken up in studies elsewhere in the world.

Although academic sport studies were overshadowed by these literatures, there were nonetheless several pioneering studies that have provided a solid foundation for our current work.¹ In particular, we must acknowledge the foundational survey by Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson (2001), who framed modern Japanese sports history in a very broad and influential dialectic of domestication and sportification. That is, they showed the ways in which the Japanese incorporated Anglo-American sports like baseball, rowing, soccer and the like by imbuing the *forms* of these sports with indigenous ideologies of spiritual training, body hexis and social function at the same time that institutions and individuals were altering Japanese physical pursuits and practices, especially sumo and martial arts, to be more sport-like in western form. Another pioneer study was the even earlier in-depth study by historian Donald Roden of the elite First Higher School of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Roden's (1980a, b) account of the organization of sport at the school resonated closely with those of the English elite public schools of the time, and it demonstrated nicely the domestication–sportification dynamic that Guttmann and Thompson were later to articulate.

These studies provided a useful platform for 'second-generation work' like studies of Japanese university sports by Richard Light (2008), Brent McDonald (2009), Aaron Miller (2013) and others, the work of Tom Blackwood (2005) on high school baseball and my own work on professional baseball (Kelly 2006). But the domestication/sportification framework is a very broad-brushed rubric. It is not particularly nuanced and it tends to focus our attention on the internal dynamics and features of sport rather than its wider contexts. To me, these five papers represent a new generation of scholars who are looking beyond this original formulation and trying to place sport in even broader fields of significance – and this is what earns our attention. Each paper is a very clearly bounded and focused subject, carefully developed and documented. Three are by historians, one by an anthropologist and one by a sport sociologist, but their common ambition is to analyse a moment internal to a sport in terms of the wider forces that were consequential at the time.

Choi, for instance, focuses on the Sports Purification Movement that was important in elite university circles in Japan in the 1930s, the decade of increasing government surveillance and control leading up to World War II. School sport of the time has frequently been portrayed as the antagonism of commercial and conservative government, but Choi shows that something else was at stake. Having much in common with similar controversies in the United States and in England, the movement was primarily an effort to defend the amateurism of university sport in the face of what they saw to be a pernicious commercialization and professionalization. And behind that lay the broader issue of the universities as a key mechanism of middle-class formation in the 1930s. It was essential that sport remain pure as a field of leisure for the largely middle-class student body rather than becoming a career path for those students of lesser means, who were very much in the campus minority. Japan became a broadly middle-class society in the second half of the twentieth century, but Choi's analysis is important for showing the emergence of this class formation and the role that sport played.

The paper by Lin and Chang moves us from the national centre to the colonial hinterlands of the Japanese empire in the same decade. Again, conventional scholarship has tended to see sport as an exclusionary policy of Japanese imperial rule, but Lin and Chang use the example of celebrated success of a Taiwan secondary school at the Japan national baseball tournament in 1931 as evidence of a strong and longstanding local enthusiasm for a demanding and decidedly Japanese style of 'samurai baseball'. What is equally notable about this case is the mixed ethnic composition of the team and its generally warm reception from the media and spectators at the championship tournament. As in C.L.R. James', 1983 account of cricket in the West Indies, baseball in the colonial school system in Taiwan was a means by which local boys could both emulate and contest the moral strictures of Japanese imperialism.

The historian Dennis Frost, whose 2011 book on sports celebrities, *Seeing Stars*, was an important analysis of some of the most famous athletes in twentieth-century Japan, turns his attention now to disabled athletes and Japan's sponsorship of the Paralympic Games as part of its hosting of the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. It is a fascinating story of contesting images and policies about the disabled, challenged by Japan's determination to mount an impressive Games to mark the country's acceptance in the world of nations. In retrospect, Japan's handling of the Paralympics moved the disabled athlete movement within the IOC forward significantly. The Olympics and the Paralympics are now closely tied in scheduling and this is not only beginning to showcase the achievements of disabled athletes but also producing highly charged but profound debates on the very nature of sport ability and disability.

The decade of the 1960s was also a moment when Japanese nationalism came to be defined more in ethnic and cultural terms than in political terms. Overt expressions of political nationalism still bore the stigma of wartime aggression, but pride in being 'We Japanese' and notions of ethnic homogeneity were safer expressions of a national community – and effective slogans for the country's rising economic prowess and distinctive corporate organizational structures. Again, sport was an important arena for demonstrating this cultural nationalism. Professional baseball, for example, created a new contractual distinction between 'regular' (i.e. Japanese) players and 'foreign players' and imposed a quota system on the latter.

The case of sumo was more complex. The governing association was initially highly resistant to recruiting any non-Japanese wrestlers, but this barrier was broken in the early 1970s and over the next three decades, foreign-born wrestlers rose to the highest ranks; they now thoroughly dominate the sport. Yet sumo is still seen as a quintessentially Japanese sport, and Tierney's article on the chanko pot meal helps explain why. Daily chanko commensality is the core practice in every sumo stable for moulding its wrestlers as physical, social and moral bodies. Preparing, eating and sharing the chanko pot imbues the wrestlers with the etiquette and hierarchies of the sumo world. It is the primary means, Tierney argues, of incorporating foreign wrestlers into that most Japanese of sports and allowing them to perform and succeed at the highest levels as if they were Japanese, by demonstrating that their bodies and their spirit have been socialized through correct practice.

Japan has invested heavily in the Olympics, from its early participation to its frequent medal success and its hosting of the 1964 Summer Games, the 1972 Winter Games, the 1998 Winter Games and now the upcoming 2020 Summer Games. Along the way, several Japanese cities have been unsuccessful bidders and major corporations have become prominent official sponsors. Shuying Yuan offers a comparative analysis of the 1964, 2016 and 2020 bids to draw out the very determined intentions of state and corporate interests to use the Games as a platform for revitalizing the domestic economy and national spirit and for reasserting Japan's regional and global standing. Of special interest is the difference between the unsuccessful 2016 bid, which drew considerable domestic opposition, and the successful 2020 bid (see also Kelly, 2010). The reasons for the shift in popular support are multiple – including changes in Tokyo metropolitan politics, Beijing's successful 2008 Olympics, sharply rising tensions in the East Asia region and the radically altered political landscape in Japan after the devastating tsunami and nuclear power plant crises of March 2011. It is not clear that this broader popular support and Japan's modestly improving national economy will be sufficient to ensure a successful Games (or even what 'success' will mean six years hence), but Yuan's article, like the others before his, is important for placing this key sporting issue within the wider interests and tendencies of Japanese society.

The issue concludes with a thoughtful review essay by Dominic Malcolm on a 2013 collection, edited by Raúl Sánchez García and Dale C. Spencer, on *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports*. Although the dominant narrative of global sports history charts the formation of certain team and individual sports in England and the United States and their movement to the rest of the world through circuits of imperial control and economic capital, the story of martial arts offers an important corrective. Emanating from East Asia (especially Japan, including Okinawa, but also Korea and China), judo, karate and other codifications of martial practices spread rapidly and widely in the first half of the twentieth century to the Americas and to Europe. Everywhere they were creatively absorbed, often being melded with local practices but also prompting international organizations to standardize rules and create wide competitive frameworks. Several, indeed, worked their way to recognition as Olympic

sports; others have inspired hybrid and highly commercialized sports like Mixed Martial Arts. One of the lasting lessons of the volume is that any comprehensive history of modern sport will have to begin with a multi-centric rather than mono-centric model of sport's globalization, in which East Asia figures prominently.

Note

1. I restrict myself here to English-language scholarship. For a commentary on Japanese scholarship, see Kelly (2007), 'Introduction: Sport and Sport Studies in Japan'.

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