

## Book Reviews

Victor D, Cha. *Beyond the Final Score: The Politics of Sport in Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. Illustrations. 181pp. \$27.95 (cloth) ISBN 978-231-15490. Reviewed by Grant Jarvie (University of Stirling)

It is impossible to fully understand contemporary society and culture without acknowledging the place of sport. We inhabit a world in which sport is an international phenomenon, it is important for politicians and world leaders to be associated with sports personalities, it contributes to the economy, some of the most visible international spectacles are associated with sporting events, it is part of the social and cultural fabric of different localities, regions and nations, its transformative potential is evident in some of the poorest areas of the world, it is important to the television and film industry, the tourist industry, and it is regularly associated with social problems and issues such as crime, health, violence, social division, labour migration, economic and social regeneration and poverty.

The social and political analysis of sport is no new area of endeavour and scholarship but very rarely does a relatively recent serving politician or diplomat provide an insiders view into the politics of sport. *Beyond the Final Score: The Politics of Sport in Asia* is such an account and its single strength is the opportunity that it affords to understand the cultural diplomacy that surrounded not just the spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games but also the broader cultural diplomacy surrounding sport in Asia and between Asia and other parts of the world. The focus is very much around the advent of various Olympic Games and the coverage of Olympic politics in Chapters Two and Three identifies a number of well documented themes such as sports role in nation building, asserting independence in places, and the forging of identity in a number of different forms. The valuable substantive work and evidence adds to our knowledge of the politics of sport by primarily providing specific insights into the diplomacy surrounding sport and or the Olympics in China, South and North Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

The extent to which Cha acknowledges the body of work that has been published on the relationship between sport, politics and identity remains open to question [1]. It is simply appropriate at this juncture to point out the following ways in which discussions of sport, identity and politics have been framed. By means of summary it might be suggested that some or all of the following arguments have been used: (i) essentialist arguments which view identity in sport as fixed and unchanging; (ii) that sporting identities is linked to claims about culture, self and/or nature; (iii) sporting identity is relational and differences established by symbolic marking in and around sport. Sport contributes to both the social and the symbolic process involved with the forging of identities; (iv) sport simply reflects the changes that have accompanied the age of identity and in this sense identity in sport may refer to a phase or period in history; (v) identity politics in sport is reproduced or maintained through changing social and material conditions; (vi) identity in sport involves classifying people into different permutations of us and them; (vii) identity in sport involves both the promotion and obscuring of certain differences; (viii) identities in sport are not unified and contradictions within them involve negotiation; (ix) identity politics in sport when reified may lead to forms of fundamentalism and (x) the quest for identity through sport involves the quest for recognition.

At least four arguments or at least questions are raised in the beginning of the book (i) that sport matters in the world politics because it can provide opportunities for diplomatic interventions at times when other forms of international relations and mediation are not working; (ii) that sport provides a popular prism through which nation- states can and do present an image or identity to both the rest of the world and their own people; (iii) that sport can be a facilitator of change within a country and (iv) that each of these arguments is extremely relevant as background to understanding the importance of the Beijing Olympic Games to the Beijing authorities.

In order to answer these questions the research is divided into seven chapters plus a more futuristic postscript which looks forward to the London Summer Olympic Games of 2012 and the Sochi Winter

Olympic Games of 2014. The analysis of Olympic Games prior to 2008 provide for examples of the politics of sport in terms of truces, terrorism, boycotts and bans, both cultural politics with a small p and superpower politics with a large P.

Chapter four provides an exhaustive overview of the extent to which sport has helped over the years to foster forms of diplomacy. These have not always been successful Cha acknowledges and provides further insight into the extent to which sport has figured in contacts between America and Asia from the Ping-Pong Diplomacy of the Nixon era through to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The insights to the ways in which the Republic of Korea (ROK) used sport to overcome or at least assist with the breakdown of Cold War Barriers with Russia and China over the 1988 Seoul Olympics are illuminating and substantive. For example the book provides a detailed overview of the role of sport in establishing diplomatic relations between ROK and the Soviet Union between 1986 and 1990; with normalizing relations with China from 1992; the role of sport in promoting diplomatic conflict in relation to the Asian Games of 1962; the Moscow and Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984; the way in which sport was targeted and failed as a basis for forging reconciliation between China and Taiwan and the politics surrounding the torch relay for the 2008 Olympic Games. The extent to which sport can help to create change is still left open at the end of this chapter

Placed within the broader context of the existing literature on this subject it is perhaps worth noting that the issue of power is not really a conceptual driving force in this book. Power refers to the capacity of an individual or group to command or influence the behaviour of others. Power is vested in people who are selected or appointed by a socially approved procedure, is regarded as legitimate and is often referred to as authority. Power may also be exercised through social pressure or persuasion or by use of economic or even physical force. Sport has not generally been central to the issue of determining the outcome of international power struggles, of who gets what, when and how, but it has made a contribution to a number of successes and failures in international politics.

The conventional politics of sport suggests that the literature can be divided into two broad schools of thought. These are: (i) politics and sport which direct our attention to the use made by governments of sport and the process by which public policy is made and implemented, and (ii) politics in sport which lead to a consideration of issues concerned with the way in which sports organisations use power to pursue their own sectional interests at the expense of other social groups. Contained within the former group would be themes relating to the role of the state, including issues of sport and national identity, sport and economic development, sport and foreign policy and the promotion of individual state interests. By contrast, the latter would include an examination of the power of sports organisations in determining the nature of sporting opportunity, an examination of sport both as a source of profit and as a vehicle for the transmission of capitalist values and issues of equality of access to sport.

Whatever the definition of the politics/sport axis that is used, it is likely to be highly contested because there has been disagreement as to which aspects of social life are political. The content of and approach to the coverage of sport, politics and culture often emanates from a particular sense of the term politics that eschews and rejects the notion of sport as being separate from the very social forces that influence it. Beyond *The Final Score: The Politics of Sport in Asia* to its credit does not eschew such an approach. As a bare minimum the politics of sport is no longer about whether sport reflects a particular political system, but whether sport should be viewed as a set of values, or as a social movement or as political practice or all of this and much more.

Cha's research is perhaps stronger in areas such as the use of sport by governments rather than the politics of sport itself and the political values that sport often displays at grass roots level. The author does ask if sport matters more in Asia? (p.22) and then proceeds to analyse where summer and winter Olympic games have been held and the social composition of Olympic committee membership between 1894 and 2008 in terms of continent of origin. China's hosting of the Olympic Games in 2008 marked only fifth time that the Olympics had been hosted in Asia with the others being Tokyo 1964; Sapporo 1966; Seoul 1988; and Nagano 1996. The real strengths of the book lie in Chapters five, six and seven where the substantive

case for sport being an agent of change in both a physical and a political sense is presented in relation to sport in Asia. In the case of Tokyo and Seoul it is argued that the Olympics transformed the cities into ultramodern metropolises. In the end Cha argues the national project of hosting the Seoul Olympics without the transformation in physical infrastructure which the author asserts 'touched the life of every city dweller' (p.111). A detailed analysis is also provided in relation to the build up to the Beijing Olympic Games and the investment and labour associated with the physical infrastructure that included a \$200 million Olympic Aquatic Centre and a Bird's nest and Water Cube which were designed in part to be the face of New China - strong, cutting edge, sophisticated, chic and prosperous.

The advent of the 2008 Olympic Games also opened up a range of promises and possibilities relating to the environment and climate change, the relationship then and in the future of China's support for Africa. Subsidies were provided for companies that used clean fuels, parking fees were increased to make public transport more appealing, a \$16 million budget was assigned to a programme designed to avoid the public embarrassment of the smog Olympics, environmental protection agencies gave local governments the tools to enforce punishment against polluters, local banks were to deny loans to violators and provincial officials in Heilongjiang closed 100 polluting businesses that were sending industrial run off into Russia. Sceptics have argued that such short-term measures leading up to and during the 2008 Olympic Games offers no insights into the possibility of long-term environmental policy change and that pollution was just being transplanted from one part of the country to another. Yet the commitment, profile and energy behind the state's environmental protection effort, suggest Cha, far exceed anything we have seen in China's history (p.118).

It is political change that forms the focus of chapters six and seven. The question that the author asks is whether physical change can lead to deeper political change and if so how might this happen? (p.119). The history of sport in Asia that is presented here acknowledges that sporting events create certain pressures for change from host governments in terms of domestic and international policies. Sport it is suggested provides two types of pressure, namely tactical and ideational. One is dynamic in terms of the hosting of major events puts nations and cities under a spotlight while the other is a look at sport itself in terms of its values, olympism and the privileges and inequalities that sport produces. The link between Olympism and liberalism argues Cha is inescapable and yet rarely does the author consider the values attached to global sport, capitalism and neo-liberalism. The substantive aspect of these chapters focus upon Olympism and the pressure to influence Korean democratization. The catch 22 articulated in chapter six is simply that the Olympics could present ROK leadership with prestige but also the pressure to democratize. Similarly the hosting of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games also brought into question China's relationship with Africa, Sudan, Burma and in particular the influence of China in terms of acting over genocide in Darfur.

The paradox that is the relationship between China, sport and the Olympic Games is complex. Supporters of the Beijing 2008 Olympic bid argued that staging the Olympics would help to narrow the gap between China and the rest of the world. The media coverage of the event would illustrate that China had come of age as a member of the international community. A sport-obsessed younger generation in a country that contains about a quarter of the world's population would benefit from the legacy of Olympic investment. State media in China estimated that as much as \$30bn would be invested in the reconstruction of Beijing - in creating not just new Olympic district, but in basic public services such as sewers, subway lines and new roads. The Olympic factor saw the value of Beijing-based construction and real estate companies rise significantly on the stock market.

The decision to award the Games to China had several internal political consequences. The challenge of China had been to accept China into the global market-place, while at the same time enabling China to come to its own decisions about internal democracy. The hosting of the Olympic Games will encourage international engagement and open up contact with other countries. With tens of thousands of foreign visitors expected, supporters argue that the Olympics will force China to open up more to the rest of the world and generate heightened scrutiny of the government's behaviour. The pro-Olympic argument rested

upon the belief that the Olympics would accelerate social liberalisation. China had succeeded in its bid against the backcloth of unrest, social dislocation and apparent corruption and yet the Olympic backdrop, it was thought initially, would strengthen the hand of then President Jiang Zemin, who was due to step down from power in 2002, but his power, it was initially thought, would be boosted because he would be seen as the person who brought Beijing the Olympics. In effect we had a position where people had relatively little political freedom but, because of the Olympics and liberal reform, the possibility of an expansion of personal freedoms existed. Amnesty International hoped that the Olympic spirit of fair play and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles would extend to the people of China long before 2008. In the end it was accepted that China's move towards accepting commercial capitalism would not be without Chinese characteristics.

Arguably the argument for more permanent change in China is a more optimistic one as a result of the Olympics. There is no denying that China is a different place in terms of diplomacy, identity and politics following the 2008 Olympic Games. In this sense it might be concluded that sport can at times act as a resource of hope for many people. For all that it has failed to omit from the politics of sport literature *Beyond the Final Score: The Politics of Sport in Asia* is an excellent and well researched insiders account of the politics of sport in Asia.

Note

[1] Jarvie, G (2006) *Sport, Culture and Society*, London: Routledge; Jarvie, G and Hwang D. (2008) *Sport, Revolution and the Beijing Olympics*, London Berg.



# East Asian Sport Thoughts

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*Volume 1*

*October 2010*

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General Agency: Hungyeh Publishing Co., Ltd

