

Sports in Asia in the era of globalization

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I am teaching sports sociology and sports culture at the Faculty of Education, Shiga University. Today I'd like to talk about sports in relation to the three themes of "Birth, diffusion and dissemination of sports," "Sports in Asia: their history and current status," and "Sports in times of globalization: their future and problems."

Modern sports began around the mid-19th century. British sports began as a sort of recreational activity for the nobility and a unique value developed called "amateurism." However, this value did not spread in Britain because it was an idea rooted in exclusion. In contrast, U.S. sports were born in the arenas of education and citizens' social intercourse. American football was developed and spread as a game at colleges, baseball as a recreational activity for urban residents and basketball as a winter sport.

In light of this, although the British approach may appear exclusive, in fact this is not always the case. The role Britain has played in modern sports is outstanding because it has not only invented sports but also spread them throughout the world. Meanwhile, the United States was growing strongly from the middle of the 19th century through the 20th century. Therefore, baseball, football and basketball born in that country went on to spread more widely at home than abroad. The U.S. is an immigrant country and so people play these sports to identify themselves as Americans. Thus, these sports have become popular as a symbol of the America.

As I mentioned, sports spread mainly from Britain to other parts of the world, but the ways in which they spread and were accepted varied widely among countries. This is related to the globalization of sports, one of today's themes. In short, it is the networking of sports on a global scale. Sports used to be rooted in their places of origin and were mostly played there. In those days, there were naturally fewer opportunities to participate in sporting events between countries and regions or across national borders and to exchange information.

The globalization of sports began from around the latter half of the 20th century. What does this mean and what effects has it had? One significant feature is that the American approach, not British amateurism, has become the world standard. The American approach is rational and attaches importance to the material side of things.

This has enabled people who gain fame in sports to earn money in compensation for their efforts. This tendency has been gradually accepted in America and across the world.

The age of imperialism ran from the late 19th century through the 20th century. Sports in suzerain states had a great influence in that period and this has continued until today. For example, sports spread by the British have long been actively played in British colonies.

Japanese sports were taken to Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria when they were under Japanese rule. Baseball was the most popular sport, with schools in Taiwan and Korea entitled to enter Japanese baseball championships and play games in Koshien Stadium before World War Two.

The Spanish did not make a serious effort to embed their culture and sports in the Philippines, a former Spanish colony. Instead, the influence is noticeably American as a result of America colonizing the Philippines after Spain. Baseball, basketball and boxing are the most popular sports activities there. Horseracing is a popular sport in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, former British colonies. Thailand has never been colonized by a European country or America, but some European sports have become popular because the upper classes, mainly members of the royal family, brought them back from Europe where they had been to study.

A noteworthy feature of Asian sports is the existence of social clubs in various places mainly designed for British people. They catered for residents in foreign countries who gathered there for a break or to exchange information as well as to enjoy cultural activities, foods, and the sports of their homelands. Sports activities undertaken there had a great effect on the development of sports in that country. Another important contribution was made by the activity of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The YMCA has played a key role in spreading American sports.

The state of affairs in Asia underwent a great transformation after the end of the Second World War. Asian countries were poor in those days. Their economy and sports were below world levels. With the growth of the national economy and the stabilization of the national system, people's attention becomes focused on sports as a way to demonstrate national power or unite the nation. One typical example is the hosting of the Olympic Games.

Japan, Korea and China have reached a level where they can compete favorably with the other countries of the world. But many other Asian nations have not yet reached that level. Although it is not realistic to expect one these Asian countries to win at the Olympics or in the World Cup, Asian athletic meets and the Southeast Asian (SEA)

Games are heating up because sportsmen and women vie for the title of No.1 in each region.

Soccer is the foremost sport in terms of the numbers of players and spectators, media coverage, including TV, and political and economic impact. We can say that soccer is the sport whose globalization is proceeding at the fastest pace. Most of the football games broadcast in Thailand are from the British Premier League. Because big Asian companies are aware of the value of advertising in the football league, many of them now sponsor British football clubs. They try to create the image of a global corporation by having their company names on players' uniforms.

A soccer team playing in the J League called Albirex Niigata has the second or reserve team in Singapore. In fact, Albirex is no exception because Korean and Chinese teams have done the same. In this respect, Singapore is a country that is not particularly concerned about nationality.

There are some baseball players from Taiwan who are doing well in Japan. The audience for professional baseball in that country has declined due to the bankruptcies of baseball teams and rigged games. Some baseball players have already moved to Japan and the U.S. If these baseball players from Taiwan are successful, the fans will appreciate them. Professional baseball in Taiwan is now in crisis.

Yao Ming, who plays for the NBA's Houston Rockets, is a star basketball player from China. He has such a great influence that using him for a commercial contributes immensely toward boosting a corporation's image and product sales in China. Toyota Motors purchased the right to name a stadium in Houston and called it "Toyota Center" to emphasize their presence in the US.

Niseko in Hokkaido is a well-known destination for a large number of overseas tourists, most notably visitors from Australia. Nearly half of those who stay in Niseko's lodges are Australians. Although the town of Niseko is hard to reach by public transport, it has become widely known for the quality of its snow. Coupons distributed in Niseko have descriptions in both Japanese and English. This alone shows the importance of the presence of non-Japanese tourists. The seasons in Japan and Australia are opposite because Australia is in the southern hemisphere. Australians used to go skiing to New Zealand, Canada and European countries. A casual visit to Niseko by Australian youngsters has triggered a steady flow of overseas tourists to the town, and its infrastructure has improved. Niseko has now become a high-profile sightseeing spot for both Australians and Asians.

The globalization of sports is welcome because it helps greatly to popularize them. It carries with it diverse information about the world and may benefit the training of athletes, sports-related industries and the economy. Globalization is also considered

beneficial because it promotes sports exchanges and helps us to know each other better.

However, the downside is the degradation of human resources management technology and the level of domestic sports. Baseball in Taiwan is a good example. In Japan, a growing number of good baseball players seek to go abroad. Sports fans then become overseas oriented. This will cause a decline in players' revenues, and accelerate their departure. Money invested in sports business will also find its way to foreign countries. This is not good from a long-term perspective.

Based on the assumption that this is a current trend, we need to consider how the players, spectators and those who manage sports should respond to these changes. The most important thing is not to lose sight of the essence of sports. Certainly today, participating in sports is not an end in itself, and it has now become a way to achieve something. In my view, this trend is growing stronger. However, sports will be ruined someday, if we forget the essential qualities of sports that give us joy, improve our health and help us make friends. May I repeat the importance of not disregarding the essence of sports?

It is also extremely important to see sports as a cultural and social phenomenon. As I mentioned earlier, sports have their histories and are closely related to the land and culture of an individual country. Sports are being reshaped by them and this has a deep significance for us when dealing with them. We must always be conscious of the globalization of sports and its potential problems.

Furthermore, we need to make effective use of sports as they become globalized. It will become necessary to provide information from one's own side and take action instead of waiting for information from places where sports activity is high. A good idea would be to create an opportunity for meeting people from abroad through club activities at school or at the grass-roots level. This will enable us to learn more about sports in other countries and to get to know each other. This would be a benefit of the globalization of sports.

Learning from sports activities is also important. Although what we mean by sports and why we play sports are essential questions, we can nevertheless learn the culture of a country in other areas of activity. With the expansion of the sports environment, there are many chances of associating with people from all walks of life, enjoying sports with them and watching the sports of various countries. In this sense, we have a lot to learn from sports.

I hope this opportunity will provide you with some clues about how to feel or think about sports.

Thank you very much.