Colonial Korea and the Olympic Games, 1910–1945

Seok Lee
University of Pennsylvania, seok2@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations
Part of the Asian History Commons, and the Kinesiology Commons

Recommended Citation
http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1836

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1836
For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.
Colonial Korea and the Olympic Games, 1910–1945

Abstract
This dissertation examines how Koreans received and consumed the Olympic Games under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). Although a growing body of research on colonial Korea addresses a range of topics beyond politics and economy, sports is still a relatively neglected topic in this field. By exploring Olympic fever in colonial Korea, this study shows how multifaceted aspects of Korean society became a part of the global sports world. Korean athletes participated in the 1932 Summer, 1936 Winter, and 1936 Summer Games as part of the Japanese delegation, attracting much attention from members of all walks of life in colonial Korea. Public figures as varied as political leaders, intellectuals, sport journalists, and athletes recognized and promoted the Games through the burgeoning mass media. As the Olympic Games were a powerful tool for promoting Korean nationalism, Korean athletes’ performance was in the spotlight of Korean vernacular media, which also pursued commercial interests in featuring scandals of athletes. Nevertheless, many advocates of public gymnastics criticized what they perceived as the bourgeois-oriented, if not elitist, nature of the Games. Ahead of the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, Koreans were not passive spectators, but active participants and consumers eager to promote their nation to the world. The occasion also allowed the Japanese colonial regime and Korean collaborators to praise Korean athletes in the context of Japan’s official policy of “harmony between Japanese and Koreans” (naisen yūwa) and “assimilation” (dōka). Indeed, sports played a powerful role in propagating Japanese assimilation policies in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Overall, the Olympic Games during the Japanese occupation of Korea were a contested space in which a variety of discourses clashed, reflecting the variegated nature of colonial Korea as it interacted with global commodities and cultural influences. Embracing the international mega-sporting event fueled debates about nationalism, racism, commercialism, class conflict, and collaboration, among others.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
East Asian Languages & Civilizations

First Advisor
Eugene Y. Park

Keywords
Colonialism, Japan, Korea, Modernity, Nationalism, Olympic Games

Subject Categories
Asian History | History | Kinesiology

This dissertation is available at ScholarlyCommons: http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1836
COLONIAL KOREA AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES, 1910–1945

Seok Lee

A DISSERTATION

in

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2016

Supervisor of Dissertation

Signature _________________________

Eugene Y. Park, Korea Foundation Associate Professor of History

Graduate Group Chairperson

Signature _________________________

Paul R. Goldin, Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Dissertation Committee

Eugene Y. Park, Korea Foundation Associate Professor of History

Frederick R. Dickinson, Professor of History

Arthur Waldron, Lauder Professor of International Relations
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many for their guidance, encouragement, and friendship throughout my graduate studies. I would like to first thank my advisor and committee chair, Eugene Y. Park, whose mentorship and enduring supports has been indispensable for me to finish my dissertation. I thank other committee members, Frederick R. Dickinson and Arthur Waldron, for their insightfulness, generosity, and patience. I also thank David Spafford for his encouragement in the early phase of this project.

I like to specially thank institutions for the funding of my doctorate program. The James Joo-Jin Kim Program in Korean Studies and grant programs of GAPSA generously supported my field and conference trips. In Korea, I am especially indebted to everyone at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University.

I am deeply grateful for my fellow Penn graduate students who enabled both the production of this dissertation and the completion of my graduate training through their friendship and encouragement: Holly Stephens, Alexander Martin, Rolf Siverson, Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein, Jamyung Choi, and Robert Hegwood.

Finally, my greatest thanks are reserved for my parents, whose unwavering belief and tireless support saw me across the finish line.
ABSTRACT

COLONIAL KOREA AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES, 1910–1945

Seok Lee
Eugene Y. Park

This dissertation examines how Koreans received and consumed the Olympic Games under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). Although a growing body of research on colonial Korea addresses a range of topics beyond politics and economy, sports is still a relatively neglected topic in this field. By exploring Olympic fever in colonial Korea, this study shows how multifaceted aspects of Korean society became a part of the global sports world. Korean athletes participated in the 1932 Summer, 1936 Winter, and 1936 Summer Games as part of the Japanese delegation, attracting much attention from members of all walks of life in colonial Korea. Public figures as varied as political leaders, intellectuals, sport journalists, and athletes recognized and promoted the Games through the burgeoning mass media. As the Olympic Games were a powerful tool for promoting Korean nationalism, Korean athletes’ performance was in the spotlight of Korean vernacular media, which also pursued commercial interests in featuring scandals of athletes. Nevertheless, many advocates of public gymnastics criticized what they perceived as the bourgeois-oriented, if not elitist, nature of the Games. Ahead of the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, Koreans were not passive spectators, but active participants and consumers eager to promote their nation to the world. The occasion also allowed the Japanese colonial regime and Korean collaborators to praise Korean athletes in the context of Japan’s official policy of “harmony between Japanese and Koreans” (naisen yūwa) and “assimilation” (dōka). Indeed, sports played a powerful role in propagating Japanese assimilation policies in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Overall, the Olympic Games during the Japanese occupation of Korea were a contested space in which a variety of discourses clashed, reflecting the variegated nature of colonial Korea as it interacted with global commodities and cultural influences. Embracing the international mega-sporting event fueled debates about nationalism, racism, commercialism, class conflict, and collaboration, among others.
Contents

List of Tables ........................................................................................................... v
List of Illustrations ................................................................................................. vi
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................... vii
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1
Chapter 1. The Early Olympic Movement in Colonial Korea ........................................ 10
Chapter 2. Colonial Korea’s First Participation in the Olympic Games (1932) ......... 38
Chapter 3. Koreans and the Japanese National Football Team ............................. 77
Chapter 4. A Consumed Hero: Son Kijŏng and Colonial Korea ...................... 112
Chapter 5. The 1940 Tokyo Olympics: Introducing a Rising Korea to the World .... 145
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 178
Bibliography .............................................................................................................. 185
Index ......................................................................................................................... 213
List of Tables

Table 1. Korean athletes as members of the Japanese Olympic Team

Table 2. Football Team Tryouts in Tokyo for the 1936 Olympics

Table 3. 1936 Berlin Olympic Games competitors by continent
List of Illustrations


Picture 2. The Olympic Games and Albert I (1875–1934), King of the Belgians.


Pictures 5a and 5b. *Tonga ilbo*, 1 October 1932 (above) and *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, 6 July 1979 (below).

Picture 6. Braven Dye, reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, interviewed Kwŏn T’aeha and described his life on the campus of the University of Southern California.

Picture 7. The Japanese marathon team from the country of rickshaws [Japan] ahead of other foreign athletes.

Picture 8. A newspaper advertisement shows the price of football (4.50 yen–8 yen) and football boots (7.50 yen–10 yen).

Picture 9. FC Kyŏngsŏng after winning the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament in 1935.

Picture 10. Son’s second-class train ticket from Tokyo to Berlin, used in 1936.


Picture 12. Park Chongu held up a sign reading “Tokto is our territory” while celebrating his team’s 2-0 win over Japan.
List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Football Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECG</td>
<td>Far Eastern Championship Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GGK</td>
<td>Government-General of Korea (<em>Chōsen sōtokufu</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAAF</td>
<td>International Amateur Athletic Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOC</td>
<td>International Olympic Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFA</td>
<td>Japan Football Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTB</td>
<td>Japan Tourism Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFA</td>
<td>Korean Football Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

During the interwar period, the Olympics served as a means for Koreans to confirm their national identity and as such enjoyed enormous popularity. This was so notwithstanding the fact that Korean athletes, as colonial subjects, could only participate on the Japanese national team. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) first participated at the Olympics in, respectively, 1948 and 1972. Of course, this fails to reflect that ethnic Koreans’ participation in the modern Olympics predates World War II (1939–1945), as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Olympics</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932 Los Angeles Summer Games</td>
<td>Kim Ŭnbae</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kwŏn T’aeha</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hwang Ŭlsu</td>
<td>Boxing (Lightweight)</td>
<td>Eliminated in the 1st round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 Garmisch-Partenkirchen Winter Games</td>
<td>Kim Chŏngyŏn</td>
<td>Speed skating</td>
<td>1500m: 15th 5000m: 21th 10000m: 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yi Sŏngdŏk</td>
<td>Speed skating</td>
<td>500m: 16th 1500m: 23th 5000m: 27th 10000m: 25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chang Usik</td>
<td>Speed skating</td>
<td>5000m: 27th 10000m: 26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 Berlin Summer Games</td>
<td>Son Kijŏng</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nam Sŭngnyong</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Result</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Yongsik</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Eliminated in the 2nd round</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Kyuhwan</td>
<td>Boxing (Welterweight)</td>
<td>Eliminated in the 1st round</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Sŏnggu, Chang Ijin, Yŏm Ŭnhyŏn</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Eliminated in the 3rd round</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Korean athletes as members of the Japanese Olympic Team

This study examines a variety of agents who enjoyed, consumed, and exploited the Games in colonial Korea. In participating in the Olympics, it was Korean athletes’ burden and privilege to represent a nation’s hope of independence. Intellectuals driven by nationalistic aspirations for independence would praise the victories won by their compatriot athletes as proof of the potential strength of the Korean nation albeit under the Japanese colonial rule. They thereby sought to rekindle the then-flagging Korean nationalistic sentiment. The Korean vernacular mass media generated an Olympic boom that appealed to both nationalistic and commercial interests. Enterprising businessmen would use the Olympic festival to amass a sizable fortune every four years. Coping with discrimination and homesickness, the Korean diaspora in Manchuria, China proper, Japan, and the United States were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Korean athletes. At the vanguard of the cheering spectators of Korean athletes were the ordinary people, most of whom were unfamiliar with Western sports. On the other hand, for pro-Japanese collaborators and colonial authorities alike, the Korean participation demonstrated the success of Japanese assimilation policy.

For various reasons, historians have not given adequate coverage of sports in Korea. One is a general disinterest on the part of scholars in Korean studies toward
For much of the twentieth century, there was an unstated agreement among Korean history scholars is such that research on modern Korea in the postcolonial period should promote democratization and unification, focusing on political and economic history. It was not until the 1990s that many historians interested in micro-history began to examine colonial Korea in terms of its everyday life. A myriad of neglected topics outside the purview of politics, economy, and law emerged as ways of looking at colonial Korea, including tourism, music, film, food, fashion, department stores, and leisure.¹

Despite the rise of cultural studies as a scholarly discipline, the role of sports in colonial Korea has received little attention. History of sports as a scholarly field emerged as a branch of the discipline of social history focusing on “history from below,” which has, since the 1960s, made formerly marginalized topics more popular.² Its brief history to date notwithstanding, the subfield of sports history has seen the publication of numerous books and articles covering not only the Western world but also Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In particular, Chinese and Japanese studies have produced numerous significant works of sports history examining the pre-World War II period. In contrast, sports in colonial Korea remain relatively neglected. Critical debates tend to center around the 1936 Olympics and Son Kijŏng (a gold medalist in the 1936 Olympic

¹ Recent works dealing with these topics are as follows: Cho Sŏngun, Sisŏn ŭi t’ansaeng: singminji Chosŏn ŭi kāndae kwan’gwang (Seoul: Sŏnin, 2011); Tan’guk taehakkyo, Modŏnnaip ŭ ônp’aredu: 2, 30 yŏndaes ilsang munhwa (Seoul: Minsogwŏn, 2008); Kang Yŏngsim, ed., Ilche sigi kāndaejok ilsaeng kwa singminjī munhwā (Seoul: Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2008); Han Ch’ŏrko, ed., Singminji Chosŏn ŭi ilsaeng ŭl mutta (Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2013); Kong Cheuk and Chŏng Kūnsik, eds., Singminji ŭi ilsaeng, chibae wa kyunyŏl (Seoul: Munhwa kwaḥaksa, 2006).
marathon race), and historians tend to treat the colonial era as merely a background for discussing issues that are more current, such as the 1988 Seoul Olympics.\(^3\)

In addition, nationalist narratives emphasizing a uniquely coercive Japanese rule have dominated Korean sports historiography. The handful of studies on the history of sport in Korea tends to reduce the complex trajectory of Korean sports to nationalist narratives juxtaposing heroic Korean resistance and ruthless Japanese repression. Such studies contend that sports served as a powerful vehicle for Koreans to channel their nationalistic sentiment into an anti-Japanese movement as the colonial state stifled overtly pro-independence movements, including armed resistance. In such nationalist readings of colonial Korea, sports stadiums symbolize a battlefield for the Korean people’s anti-colonial struggle.\(^4\)

Some of the more recent studies attempt to escape from such politicized master narratives by examining colonial history from more inclusive and pluralist approaches. Criticizing the binaries of imperialist repression versus national resistance, colonial exploitation versus national development, and Japanese versus Korean culture, Michael Robinson and Gi-Wook Shin view colonialism, modernity, and nationalism as mutually


reinforcing frames. There is no doubt that sports served as a catalyst to foster Korean national identity among a populace suffering the inequities, brutalities, and discrimination that accompanied Japanese rule. Nevertheless, modern sports created by new technologies, mass media, an urban middle class, and a consumer culture stretched beyond national or imperial boundaries. Through a system of institutionalized sports, the Japanese empire incorporated many Korean sports agents and agencies.

Some recent studies reject any simple dichotomy between Korean resistance and Japanese oppression as accounting for Korean participation in sports. Koen De Ceuster notes that by the 1930s, sports in colonial Korea were no longer under the control of the Korean national leadership but had entered the realm of mass culture providing commercially-driven entertainments for a growing urban middle class. In addition, Ch’ŏn Chŏngwan’s groundbreaking, multifaceted research examining colonial Korea and sports in terms of nationalism, commercialism, racism, and fascism has opened a new horizon for Korean sports historians, focusing on the 1936 Berlin Olympics and Son Kijŏng.

Scholarship on history of sports in Korea has also suffered from a disregard for primary sources published during the colonial period. Most studies tend to rely on

---

publications from quasi-governmental sports organizations of South Korea such as the
Korean Olympic Committee (Taehan ch’eyukhoe), the Korea Sports Promotion
Foundation (Kungmin ch’eyuk chinhŭng kongdan), the Korean Football Association
(Taehan ch’ukku hyŏphoe), and the Korean Basketball Association (Taehan nonggu
hyŏphoe). A number of scholarly articles on Son Kijŏng use his autobiography rather
uncritically without proper verification of various details. Such materials are valuable
sources in informing us of sports in colonial Korea, as the vernacular mass media were
subject to colonial censorship. All the same, they also tend to romanticize Korean sports
as a crucial conduit of nationalist resistance during the years of colonial rule.

This thesis examines the Olympics in colonial Korea largely in terms of the role
of the mass media at that time. The late nineteenth century saw rapidly developing
modern mass communication systems that promoters of the Olympics were able to utilize
in the context of an increasingly global capitalist world system. Even though still
rudimentary in form and style, cinema newsreels provided visual images for audiences
who could not observe sports performances live, and various companies began to sell
photographs of the 1912 Olympics. By 1924, radio technology had developed enough to
transmit live radio broadcasts of Olympic events, although the broadcasts were then
limited to audiences in the host nation. The television era for the Olympics began in 1936
in Berlin, with pictures of some events being relayed to local Berlin cinemas, while

---

newsreel films of the Games were distributed via airships. In line with the burgeoning global sports-media industry, Korean vernacular papers reported sports news every day, and big sporting events such as the Olympics took up the front page or were the subject of a special edition. In addition to daily papers, other media including magazines, radio, motion pictures, film, phonograph recordings, and literary works were attracting popular attention. Furthermore, Korean-language publications on Korean Olympians appeared not only in colonial Korea but also in the Korean diaspora.

Avoiding a celebration of anti-Japanese resistance or an apologia for Japanese rule, this study considers the complex and multi-dimensional character of Korean sports during the colonial period, focusing on the Olympics. Chapter 1 situates the early Korean Olympic movement within broader global and regional contexts. The modern Olympics were one of the major developments in international sports in the late nineteenth century, and they remain among the most successful and popular sporting events for audiences around the world. In spite of a huge gap between the West and Korea in skill levels, the latter saw keen interest and much national passion for participation in the newly-created mega-sports event. Further, chapter 1 will examine Korea’s active response to the Olympics in the context of Japanese imperialism.

The 1932 Los Angeles Olympics featured the first three ethnic Korean athletes competing as Japanese representatives, and Chapter 2 explores the complex meanings of their participation. The first-ever Korean Olympians fueled nationalistic passion in

---

colonial Korea, as many Koreans expected that the 1932 Olympiad would be their great chance, as a forgotten nation in East Asia, to come onto the world stage. However, not all Koreans were happy with their nation’s athletes in Los Angeles that year. A large segment of the Korean-American population did not embrace the three athletes’ presence under the Japanese flag, seeing this as a sign not of national glory but of shame. In addition, some advocates of more mass-oriented sports considered the Olympics as an event of little value for the majority of poverty-stricken Koreans. Moreover, under the scrutiny of their compatriots, the three athletes were under tremendous pressure to win.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the internal conflict within the Korean football (soccer) community amid the 1936 Olympic football tryout. As one of the most popular and nationalistic of sports, football played a more pivotal role in boosting national sentiment among Koreans than any other sport. All the same, the longstanding antagonistic regionalism between two representative cities in the Korean football world, Kyŏngsŏng (Ja. Keijō, present Seoul) and P’yŏngyang (Ja. Heijō), exploded even before the tryout for the All-Korean team. Furthermore, the Korean football community was divided over whether or not Korean players should agree to join the Japanese squad, especially in the face of blatant Japanese discrimination against Korean footballers. Before long, factional conflict based on regional identity and the incompetence of the Korean leadership lay open in public’s view.

Chapter 4 discusses the popular Olympic fever sparked by Son Kijŏng’s gold medal in the 1936 Olympic marathon race. Largely due to Son’s status as the biggest national sports hero in Korean history even in the post-liberation period, his image as a
representative of Korean resistance against Japanese colonialism has allowed little room for investigating the full meaning of his victory and lionization of him beyond the nationalistic frame. The chapter will demonstrate how a wide array of agents took advantage of Son’s victory and image for their own agendas, especially in terms of racism, commercialism, colonialism, and nationalism. Dennis Frost aptly notes that “sports stars are socially constructed phenomena, the products of both particular historical moments and broader, cumulative discourses of celebrity that became transnational in reach.”

Chapter 5 assesses the impact of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics on colonial Korea. Japan launched its official bid to host the 1940 Olympics in 1931 with the Tokyo Municipal Diet passing a resolution to seek the staging of the event. In 1936 the IOC awarded Tokyo the 1940 Summer Games. The Games slated for 1940 in Tokyo attracted much attention not only in the Japanese metropole but also in Korea. Indeed, the news of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics ushered a joyous and celebratory atmosphere in colonial Korea, especially in the tourism and sports sectors.

Every four years when the summer Olympics takes place, discourses about the international sports event suffuse the media, involving a broad array of experts in various scholarly disciplines. Accordingly, thoughts and opinion that emerged in the colonial period linked the colonial situation and responses to the global sports arena. In its conclusion, this dissertation reflects on the multidimensional character of the Olympics and its uses in colonial Korea.

---

Chapter 1. The Early Olympic Movement in Colonial Korea

While a wide variety of ludic physical activities existed historically, only in the late nineteenth century, people over the world began to enjoy organized sports bound by a set of rules and structures. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, “the last three decades of the nineteenth century marked a decisive transformation in the spread of the old, the invention of the new and the institutionalization of most sports on a national and even international stage.”11 More specifically, international sports began to gain popularity between 1870 and 1920. Joseph Maguire notes that this phase was “the international spread of sport, the establishment of international sport organizations, the growth of competition between national teams, the worldwide acceptance of rules governing specific sport forms and establishment of global competitions such as the Olympic Games.”12 For Korea, the year 1896 saw not only the first modern Olympics but also athletic gatherings (undonghoe) with flags of all nations in Seoul. The occasion symbolized the dawn of a new age of Korean sports.

Korea was ready to join the Olympics at the very moment when sports began to attract vast audiences over the world, and its enthusiasm continued to grow after the Japanese annexation of Korea. Far from isolated, the early Olympic movement in colonial Korea was closely entwined with other Olympics-oriented global phenomena.

Under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), Korea remained out of the attention of the rest of the world in these years of Olympic history, but the interest of many Koreans in the Games and their desire for participation in them was growing. Even before Korean athletes’ first foray into the Olympics in 1932, Olympics-related news spread rapidly through the burgeoning Korean mass media, which keenly participated in the global trend of highlighting sports events since the 1920s. Korean intellectuals and nationalists were encouraging young Korean athletes to dream of someday becoming Olympians and competing with their world-class counterparts on behalf of their nation on the biggest international sports stage.

The Introductory and Driving Forces of Sports in Korea

With the “Eastern ways, Western implements” (Tongdo Sŏgi) reform adopted by the monarch, Kojong (king, 1864–1897; emperor, 1897–1907), in 1873, a dramatic transformation of Korea began accelerating. By the 1890s, Seoul featured electricity, trolley cars, telephone and telegraph lines, and a water system, before any other major Asian city.¹³ Not only the tangible infrastructure but also Western ideologies such as nationalism, Protestantism, and Social Darwinism all held the limelight in Korea under the rubric of “enlightenment” (kaehwa). Entwined with these new ideas and various technologies from outside Korea, another transformation that would have been unimaginable several decades earlier took place in a country where the Confucian elite

---
¹³ Yi T’aejin, Kojong sidae ŭi chaejomyŏng (Seoul: T’aehaksa, 2000), 26–73.
tended to hold physical activities in low regard—including martial pursuits. An increasing number of Koreans began to play “sports.”

In the tumultuous process of modernization, Koreans were increasingly concerned with the new somatic culture. From the mid-nineteenth century to the Japanese takeover, Korea was burdened with two tasks, the reform of its traditional Confucian society and fending off imperialist forces. Herbert Spencer’s idea of the “survival of the fittest” provided the intellectual framework for a somatic view of Korean society, in which the valorization of physical strength and competitiveness was directly linked to state power and imperial rule. One of the many reformatory actions undertaken to build up the physical strength of Koreans was launched by Kojong himself, who played a critical role in transforming Korea into a modern nation-state. His “Rescript on National Education” (kyoyuk ipkuk chosŏ), issued in 1895, formally recognized physical, intellectual, and moral dimensions of education intended to integrate national subjects into the modern state system. Many Korean intellectuals indulged in the traditional slogan of “Rich Country, Strong Army” (puguk kangbyŏng, Ch. Fuguo qiangbing) that enabled Qin (221–206 BCE) to conquer the Chinese continent 2,000 years ago and was resurrected by Meiji...

---

14 In the late Chosŏn dynasty, the degree of the military examination was accessible to a diverse pool of marginalized local elites. More nonelites who turned to the military examination failed to get into a small group of the true aristocracy. See Eugene Y. Park, Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600–1894 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

15 Whether or not the role of Kojong was positive in the modernization of Korea is still a controversial issue. See Yi T’aejin and Kim Chaeho, ed., Kojong hwangje yŏksa ch’ŏngmunhoe (Seoul: P’urŭn yŏksa, 2005).

era Japanese leaders. Influenced by Chinese and Japanese social Darwinist reformism, they began to argue for the importance of physical education, suggesting various plans: the establishment of schools providing physical education, building of public stadiums, formation of academic associations, the training of physical education teachers, and the dispatch of students to research foreign physical education programs and public stadiums. An implicitly militarized subjectivity linked to notions of vigorous, adventuresome soul became essential to Korean “independence/modernization.”

Western influence played a substantial role in the development of physical education and sports in the turn-of-the twentieth-century Korea. Including diplomats, businessmen, teachers, and missionaries, a growing number of Westerners were the harbingers of modern sports in Korea. The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was the West’s most active exporter of modern sports to China, Japan, and Korea. The YMCA played a powerful role in introducing modern Western sports such as baseball, basketball, volleyball, and others and in organizing national competitions based on standardized rules.

Another major influence in the expansion of Korean sports was Imperial Japan

---

17 Taehan maeil sinbo, 5 February 1909.
20 Kim Chaeu, “Kwangbok chŏn Han’guk YMCA üi süp’och’ū toip e kwanhan yöŋ’gu,” Han’guk ch’eyuksa hakhoe chi 19 (June 2007), 99–113.
(1868–1945), Korea’s colonizer. Much of what Koreans came to consider “modern” to a large extent originated from Western civilization filtered through a Japanese prism. As in China, the very terms of Korean physical culture, that is physical education (ch’eyuk), calisthenics (ch’ejo), and exercise (undong), were direct translations of the terms that the Japanese coined (taiiku, taisō, undō) in the Meiji era (1868–1912). In Korea, the modern education system and sports organizations which disseminated information on sports arose under Japanese influence. In particular, Korean students studying in Japan before the 1910s played a vital role in promoting the importance of sports in the interest of their homeland through exhibition matches and lectures on sports held around the country. Japan was the natural training ground for the new generation of Koreans who began their careers as athletes in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Amplification of Interest in the Olympics in Korea

Coping with intense political ferment as well as threats against its national sovereignty, Korea started to make inroads into the world’s fair before the Olympics. Beginning with London’s Great Exhibition in 1851, a series of world’s fairs provided a competitive site for each nation to showcase its advances in material culture. Ostensibly, international cooperation and peaceful competition among nations were the major themes of these events, but they shared with the Olympics distinct undercurrents of violent nationalism and racist humiliation of the weak. The fact that the second, third, and fourth Olympics were each held in conjunction with an international world’s fair suggests an

---

21 Andrew D. Morris, Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.
intimate connection between the world’s fair and the Olympics.

Korea was keenly aware of the importance of international events in getting recognition of Korea’s theoretical sovereignty on the part of Western imperial powers. This meant that participation in the world’s fair functioned for Koreans as a staging ground for new forms of subjectivity and a desire for inclusion in the nation-state system dominated by the West that then subjugated roughly two-fifths of the earth’s population.22 Beginning in the 1880s, various Korean officials and writers presented to a domestic audience the idea of expositions like the world’s fair as instruments of enlightenment. In 1881, Kojong assigned a mission to Japan to visit the Second National Exposition. The first Korean Embassy to the United States (Pobingsa) attended the exhibit at the 1883 Boston Exposition. Then the Korean government sent representatives to the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 and the Paris Exposition of 1900, but the poorly organized displays were not well received.23 There was little chance of the Korean delegation meeting Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937), the founder of the modern Olympic Games, during their visit to the Chicago World’s Fair or being recognized in the second modern Olympic Games, which were held as a sideshow of the Paris Exposition of 1900. Nonetheless, the visit marked the beginning of Korean presence on the international stage, albeit to end soon with loss of national sovereignty.

Korean documents published around 1910 suggest that at the turn of the twentieth century many Koreans began recognizing the importance of the Olympics. The mystic Greek philosopher Pythagoras of Samos (c. 580–500 BCE) distinguished three kinds of men: seekers of knowledge, seekers of honor, and seekers of gain. He matched these categories with the kinds of men he found at the ancient Greek Olympic Games, respectively: onlookers, athletes, and hucksters. Pythagoras declared men of honor to be the highest class of men; they represented the raison d’être of the ancient Games.24 The T’aegŭk Educational Association Journal (T’aegŭk hakpo), published by Korean students in Japan, introduced to Koreans his thoughts on the ancient Olympics (776 BCE–393 CE).25

The Industrial Promotion (Kwŏnŏp sinmun), the organ of the Industrial Promotion Association (Kwŏnŏphoe) organized at the New Korean Village (Sinhanch’ on) in Vladivostok, ran a long article on the Olympic Games in 1912. Travelling to every corner of Europe, a Korean writer using the pen name Sŏyusaeng (lit. “Student travelling in the West”) heard about the 1912 Olympic Games and reported on them. He pointed out that Ancient Greece, the cradle of the Olympics, was strong enough to defeat Persia’s larger military forces in the Greco-Persian Wars (492–449 BCE). He attributed the Greek strength to Olympics, the training for which had helped Greece develop its military power. He also claimed that Greece declined after first ignoring and then abolishing the Olympics. The Olympic spirit in the Western world was, he asserted,

25 Hakhae chuin [pseud.], “Ch’ŏrhak ch’o’bo,” T’aegŭk hakpo 21 (May 1908), 42.
the impetus for producing such towering military figures as Julius Caesar (c. 100–44 BCE), Hannibal Barca (247–182 BCE), Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821), and Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898). While the Olympics led the West to the development of knowledge and reinforcement of national strength, Korea was full of derelicts, gamesters, and lascivious people due to the widespread ignorance of the Games, Sŏyusaeng lamented.  

On the other hand, Sŏyusaeng also stressed the similarity between Western civilization and Korean tradition. He noted that the Hwarang, groups of young upper-class males in the state of Silla (trad. 57 BCE–935 CE) in ancient Korea, travelled together to discuss philosophy, sing and dance in famous scenic places in pursuit of an ideal they called the “way of the wind and the moon” (p’ungwŏldo). In fact, the Hwarang were not just military but primarily a religious organization and successor to a large mass of tangled beliefs such as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and shamanism. The modern Olympic Games also included arts competitions, or a “pentathlon of the Muses”: architecture, dramatic art, choreography, decoration, literature, music, painting and sculpture—all with a sporting theme. Such competitions were held from 1912 in Stockholm to the 1948 games in London. Sŏyusaeng proudly hailed the “way of the wind and the moon” as “the Olympics of the East,” while at the same time bemoaning the

---

26 Kwŏnŏp sinmun, 4 August 1912.
extinction of older Korean traditions he thought comparable to the Olympics.\textsuperscript{29} As Ernest Renan famously suggested, knowledge of “common glories in the past” is as crucial in forming a nation as “a common will in the present.”\textsuperscript{30} For Sŏyusaeng, “way of the wind and the moon” was a case in point.

In the 1920s, Japanese colonial policies in Korea became more favorable to Korean sports. Globally, conclusion of the World War I (1914–1919) brought about a new multilateralism, increased interest in democracy, and a trend towards disarmament. Japanese statesmen began to express a more lenient attitude towards the colonies in a bid to promote Japan’s new status as a world power.\textsuperscript{31} After massive uprisings in the spring of 1919, the Government-General of Korea (Chōsen sōtokufu, hereafter GGK) shifted from its previous policy of coercive “military rule” (budan seiji) to a “cultural rule” (bunka seiji) meant to lessen Korean resistance and co-opt Korean elites by encouraging active participation in the cultural and political affairs of the colony. A vibrant print industry that included a burgeoning number of newspapers, magazines, and literary works offered forums for nationwide debates about sports and served as a catalyst for an often diffusion of knowledge about sports into every corner of Korea. Major newspapers such as the Tonga ilbo became important agents in hosting and supporting sports.

\textsuperscript{30} Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” in Nation and Narration, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.
competitions nationwide.

GGK’s permission for the formation of civil organizations made possible the birth of Korean-led organizations popping up throughout the peninsula. They proliferated at a phenomenal rate, jumping from 985 in 1920 to 5,728 by September 1922. Within the guidelines of the new cultural policy, the vast majority of the groups centered on depoliticized social or cultural activities.\(^{32}\) Established in July 1920 as a reaction against the Japanese-dominated Korean Sports Confederation (Chosŏn ch’eyuk hyŏphoe), the Korean Sports Association (Chosŏn ch’eyukhoe) aspired to promote sports in colonial Korea by means of research, publishing, and the organization of sporting events. Founded in 1919, the Japanese-dominated Korean Sports Confederation contributed to better infrastructure such as building stadiums and hosting national games. Most importantly for Korean athletes, local tryouts hosted by the Korean Sports Confederation provided a gateway to the higher levels of sports events held in the metropole. In particular, the Meiji Shrine Games held fourteen times between 1924 and 1943 were the main annual national sports competition in the Japanese empire. Its venue (the Meiji Shrine) and date (the Meiji emperor’s birthday, November 3) epitomized exploitation of sports for mobilizing youth and nurturing loyalty to the state and emperor.\(^{33}\) On the other hand, it was one of the most valuable opportunities for Korean athletes to compete with talented Japanese athletes on equal terms.

Returning Korean students educated in Japan also contributed to the development


of sports in colonial Korea. The number of Korean students studying in Japan increased from 500–600 in the 1910s, to 1,141 in 1920, to 3,945 in 1926. Encountering sports earlier than their fellow countrymen at home, they helped to popularize sports in Korea through national sports tours and took the lead in founding the Korean Sports Association. Numerous articles about sports written by Koreans who had learned about them in Japan appeared in the mass media. An article of Pyŏn Ponghyŏn (n.d.–1922), who had been a baseball player for Waseda University and assisted in the formation of the Korean Sports Association, showed how Korean youth exposed to sports at Japanese universities used sports and the Olympics to express their nationalism:

"It is a very competitive era when nations and countries are trying to develop further. At such a time, the Olympic Games, the world sports competition, is going to be held in Brussels, Belgium this August. The Olympic Games! Alas! The Olympic Games give us measureless thought and the fullness of the heart. A dolorous feeling in our heart of hearts wells up and there is no way to fight back scalding tears when looking back upon ourselves and reflecting on where we are now. Why can we not participate in the Olympics? Do we have no right? No. It is because we did not exercise our right. Wake up. Even though valuing sports lightly in the past, we have to be bent on sports today when a new era and a new world is emerging. We should study and train hard for the improvement of our competitive skills and encourage the promotion of sports. In Korea, we have to touch off a sports boom."

The once strange word “Olympics” appeared often in papers and became widely familiar beginning in the 1920s. Sports organizations and newspaper companies in Korea

---

34 Chŏng Miryang, 1920 nyŏndae chaeil Chosŏn yuhaksaeng ŭi munhwa undong: kaein kwa minjok, kŭ yunghap kwa punyŏl ŭi kyŏnggye (P’aju: Chisik sanŏpsa, 2012), 78–79.
35 Chŏng Miryang, 1920 nyŏndae chaeil Chosŏn yuhaksaeng ŭi munhwa undong, 270–84.
36 Tonga ilbo, 10 April 1920. It is not clear that Pyŏn seriously wanted the Korean Sports Association to serve as the Korean Olympic Committee separated from the Japanese Olympic Committee.
37 Antwerp, not Brussels, hosted the 1920 Games.
began to advertise a plethora of domestic competitions as being closely associated with the Olympics. The First All-Korea Track and Field Championship in 1924 hosted by the Korean Sports Association and sponsored by the Tonga ilbo urged Korean athletes to train in this competition in preparation to be crowned with laurel wreaths in the Olympics. The competition’s organizers suggested that it was time for young Korean athletes to not be satisfied with a trivial victory at home but to compete in the international arena.\textsuperscript{38} The Sixth All-Korea Track and Field Championship in 1929 was the first attempt to host multiple sports events (track and field, baseball, soft tennis) in one place like at the Olympics. The three-day competition with 800 athletes was widely advertised as the first Korean “Olympics.”\textsuperscript{39} Local sports clubs in small and medium-sized cities widely promoted minor sports festivals as local “Olympics.”\textsuperscript{40} Mass media in 1920s Korea provided international sports news from the Olympics. Famous athletes, Olympic records, tables listing medals awarded by country, and candidate cities for hosting the Olympics were frequent topics in Korean-language papers. Colonial Korea’s first sports journal, \textit{Korean Sports World (Chosŏn ch’eyukkye)}, published between 1924 and 1925, featured a myriad of articles about, and pictures of, winners in the 1924 Paris Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{41} The colonial government relied on visual media, including photograph and documentary film, to popularize the Olympics. Given the low level of literacy at the time, the visual media, which was closely connected with the colonial propaganda system, was a more effective tool to disseminate information on

\textsuperscript{38} Tonga ilbo, 3 June 1924; 15 June 1924.
\textsuperscript{39} Tonga ilbo, 13 June 1929.
\textsuperscript{40} Tonga ilbo, 20 September 1924; 15 August 1927.
\textsuperscript{41} Ch’oe Tŏkkyo, \textit{Han ‘guk chapchi paengnyŏn}, vol. 2 (Seoul: Hyŏnamsa, 2004), 487.
the Olympics. On the occasion of the Fifth National Sports Day (Zenkoku taiiku no hi) in 1928, a film on the Amsterdam Games was scheduled to be screened in front of the colonial capital’s City Hall Square.

Beyond informing the importance of the recent global trend of the Olympics, the Korean sports community and mass media wrestled with the question how to compete with the world’s sports powerhouses. Korean newspapers and magazines supplied information on the status of European and North American sports, including their organizations, facilities, and number of sports clubs. In particular, Korea’s special attention to Finnish sports is worth noting. In the Olympics medal statistics as of 1932, Finland ranked fourth in the world with 172 medals, after the United States (498 medals), Great Britain (293), and Sweden (242). Especially noteworthy are Finnish long-distance runners, dubbed “Flying Finns,” who excelled in Olympic Track and Field since 1912 with numerous superstars, including Hannes Kolehmainen (1889–1966), Ville Ritola (1896–1982), and Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973). The great success of athletes from this country of small population, cold weather, and barren soil became a role model for colonial Korea with its many handicaps in the area of sports. The decisive role of

---

42 For the colonial authority’s focus on visual media, such as photographs and documentary films, for propaganda, see Chŏng Kŭnsik, “Ilbon singminjuŭi ŭi chŏngbo tongje wa sigakchŏk sŏnjŏn,” Sahoe wa yŏksa 82 (June 2009): 41–82.
43 Tonga ilbo, 25 September 1928. The Japanese government decreed the third of November (the birthday of the Meiji emperor) as a National Sports Day in tandem with the first Meiji Shrine Games in 1924. See Wolfram Manzenreiter, Sport and Body Politics in Japan (New York: Routledge, 2014), 73. In 1926, however, the colonial government moved National Sports Day to October 1 due to cold weather in November. This nationwide celebration included numerous sports meets, information on physical education and hygiene for children, viewings of motion pictures of sports, and displays of sports posters. See Tonga ilbo, 18 August 1926.
government and an excellent inspection team studying sports in other countries were mentioned as the secret of Finland’s success, which colonial Korea could emulate.\textsuperscript{45}

Though marginalized in the domestic sports community, women played roles in the early Olympic movement in colonial Korea. Physical education in colonial Korea became a vital part of the women’s school curriculum, and young women avidly participated in large-scale sports tournaments.\textsuperscript{46} Chosŏn sinmun, which was founded by

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{45} Chimbŏn, “Minjok pogŏn kwa ch’eyuk changnyŏ (1),” Samch’ölli (April 1931), 66–67; Chimbŏn, “Minjok pogŏn kwa ch’eyuk changnyŏ (2), Kumi kakkuk ŭi hyŏnse wa oin ŭi kago,” Samch’ölli (May 1931), 44–46.
\end{flushleft}
Inch’ŏn-based Japanese in 1888 and moved to Kyŏngsŏng in 1920, hosted the Korea Women’s Olympics, including such sports as track and field and basketball, since 1924.\textsuperscript{47} Korean vernacular newspapers introduced many foreign female athletes to colonial Korea, creating public opinion in favor of women’s participation in sports. In particular, Hitomi Kinue, one of the best Japanese female athletes in track and field, attracted the attention of many Koreans. After her success as Japan’s sole delegate to the Second International Women’s Games held in Sweden in 1926, Kinue became a role model for young Korean females seeking to become top athletes.\textsuperscript{48} After she won a silver medal in the high-profile 800 meter race in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, where she was Japan’s first female Olympian, Hitomi Kinue’s lecture on the Olympics held at the offices of Maeil sinbo was a huge success supported by a large audience.\textsuperscript{49}

Another influence on the growing interest in the Olympics in colonial Korea was the perspectives of Koreans on the political left. Amid the March First Movement in 1919, colonial Korea was swept by a “proletarian wave.” Numerous young writers affected by radical ideologies expressed their thoughts in burgeoning left-leaning Korean-language periodicals such as Creation (Kaebyŏk), Light of Korea (Chosŏn chi kwang)

\textsuperscript{48} Tonga ilbo, 26 May 1928. Hitomi Kinue received a gold medal for the long jump (and set a new official world record), a gold medal for the standing long jump, a silver medal for the discus throw, and a bronze medal for the 100 yard dash. She also received an honorary prize from Alice Milliat, president of FSFI, for the most individual points at 15 years old. See Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson, Japanese Sports: A History (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 75.
\textsuperscript{49} Maeil sinbo, 2 October 1928. For a fascinating analysis of the changing image of Hitomi over time, see Dennis J. Frost, Seeing Stars, Chapter 3. For a comprehensive Japanese women’s sports history from past to present, see Robin Kietlinski, Japanese Women and Sport: Beyond Baseball and Sumo (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).
and Criticism (Pi’p’an). In particular, Korean agrarian nationalists paid abundant attention to “rural areas as a source of distinct ethnic identity” and “treated the cultivators, or nongmin, as a self-evident natural category that embodies the essence of the Korean nation.” In this context, the Olympic Games represented the corruptive influence of modern European urban culture, which was considered a by-product of Western imperialism. In the eyes of the progressive Korean nationalists, capitalists in the wealthy Western countries were exploiting the blood and sweat of colored people. The Olympics, along with literature, philosophy, luxurious urban life, and free love, merely represented a bizarre, morbid, convoluted, and ridiculous modern culture incompatible with colonial Korean values. In colonial Korea, where its largely peasant population was constantly threatened with starvation and there was no real middle class able to enjoy these leisure activities, the only role of the Olympics was to corrupt Western-oriented Korean students.

**Korean Athletes and the Olympics in the 1920s**

Most scholars studying the history of sports in Korea take it for granted that Korea had to participate in the Olympics under the name of Japan before the 1945

---

52 Noaja [pseud.], “Nongch’on puro rŭl taehaya, chaehak hanŭn chanyŏege,” *Kaehyŏk* 50 (August 1924): 18–19. *Creation*, one of the most popular magazines in colonial Korea in the 1920s, sold up to 8,000 copies a month. The main readers of this magazine were young intellectuals who played a major role in the formation of public opinion and cultural change. See Ch’oe Su’il, *Kaehyŏk yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2008), 332.
liberation because the former was a colony of the latter. Throughout Olympic history, however, whether nations without sovereign status could field their own teams in the Games remained a controversial issue. Before the 1908 London Olympics, many competitors entered individually or as a member of a club of sometimes mixed nationalities. After most countries had established their own National Olympic Committees to organize their participation in the Games, the question as to which nations qualified as independent entities for the purpose of representation in the Olympics emerged. In the Courbertin era, under the slogan “All games, all nations,” the participation of territories dependent on other states caused intense debate. Some high-profile cases were Finland vis-à-vis Russia, Bohemia vis-à-vis Austria-Hungary, Iceland vis-à-vis Denmark, and Ireland vis-à-vis Britain, among others.53

Japan did not allow Korea to field a separate team, pure and simple. In the 1920s, a new atmosphere of political liberalism in the metropole saw the rise of party politics which brought into power Prime Minister Hara Takashi (1856–1921), a long-standing critic of heavy-handed rule in Korea and an advocate of civilian rule in the colonies. Hara’s vision of liberal reform in the colony, though, was comparable to French Algeria or German Alsace and Lorraine, not the British notion of colonial self-rule. His policy of “extension of the mainland” (naichi enchō) envisioned the full integration of Korea into

Japan through the gradual extension of Japanese law and enfranchisement.\(^{54}\) While dominions of the British Empire—including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India—were semi-independent polities and participated in the Games under their own nations’ names before World War II, colonial Korea did not receive this autonomy under the “extension of the mainland” policy.

For sure, Koreans had earlier expressed aspirations for participation in the Olympics with their own delegation. During the 1912 Games in Stockholm, in which Japan participated for the first time, Sŏyusaeng argued, while also calling attention to the imminent Olympic debut of China, that Korea should send its athletes to the Games in tandem with Japan.\(^{55}\) During the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, even ordinary readers of Maeil sinbo believed that Korean athletes ought to participate in the Games as Japanese Olympians.\(^{56}\) One year before the 1924 Paris Games, Pak Sŏgyun (1898–1950) expressed both his envy of foreign Olympians and his hope for developing an indigenous Korean sports community.\(^{57}\)


\(^{55}\) Although few scholars have noticed, China sought to be associated with the IOC as early as the 1910s. China was one of 33 countries to receive permission to take part in the 1916 Games scheduled to take place in Berlin. The China National Amateur Athletic Federation was recognized by the IOC as the Chinese Olympic committee and Wang Zhengting, Foreign Minister in the Chinese Government, became the first Chinese member of the IOC, and the second member from Asia, in 1922. Guoqi Xu, Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895–2008 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 30–31.

\(^{56}\) Maeil sinbo, 12 May 1920.

\(^{57}\) Tonga ilbo, 1 January 1923.
Korean athletes wishing to secure their spots for the Olympic Games had to pass the same tests as Japanese athletes. First, they had to compete in the first tryout, at the time held in Kyŏngsŏng and hosted by the Korean Sports Confederation; then, they had to get through the fiercely competitive final trials held in Tokyo in which they were pitted against local representatives of Japan from Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kantō, Chubu, Kansai, Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu, as well as Taiwan, among others. In the 1920s the performance of Korean athletes lagged far behind that of the colonizer. Except in long-distance races, Koreans were overwhelmed by even a small number of Japanese settlers accounting for less than three percent of the total population of colonial Korea. In the 1924 Olympic tryouts in Korea, the Korean Sports Confederation picked only one Korean athlete, Ch’oe Kyŏngnak (n.d.), to represent colonial Korea in Tokyo. Korean athletes became more skillful by the time of the 1928 Olympic tryouts, when four ethnic

---

*Tonga ilbo*, 17 December 1923.
Korean athletes defeated Japanese settler athletes in the 1500m and 5000m races, the marathon, and the javelin throw, but their performances were still far inferior to those of Japanese athletes from the metropole.\(^\text{59}\)

The Olympic tryouts held in the capital of colonial Korea attracted a large crowd of Korean fans and athletes. No less than four hundred athletes participated in the 1924 Olympic tryouts, which were attended by Governor-General Saitō Makoto (1858–1936), and the stadium was filled with excited fans and cheering squads.\(^\text{60}\) Much to their disappointment, many Korean athletes were unable to meet the Olympic standards for participation. Yet, No Chwagŭn (n.d.), the captain of athletic club of Paejae High Ordinary School, expressed his prescient hope for Korean track and field: “Track and field in Korea has been depressed to no good purpose, but a crack player for the Olympic Games will come to sudden prominence in the future. That is because the present shows much more improvement than the past with regard to the extent of encouragement for sports and trying to achieve the best record. Thus, Korean sports will sweep the whole world and Korea will be known for sports in the future.”\(^\text{61}\)

**The Far Eastern Championship Games as an Olympic Kindergarten**

East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century was not without its own international sports events. The first off-shoot of the Olympics in Asia was the Far Eastern Championship Games (hereafter FECG), held from 1913 to 1934, usually among China,
Japan, and the Philippines. Of the ten occasions on which these Games took place, four were staged in Manila, three in Shanghai, two in Tokyo, and one in Osaka. While World War I put most international sports competitions in Europe and North America on hold, the FECG continued promoting the sports in East Asia.

FECG organized by YMCA physical directors in the three Asian nations were in tune with universal Olympism put forth by the founder of the modern Olympic Games. It was Coubertin’s wish to see the Olympic Games established on a global scale, with universal participation transcending regional, ethnic, political, or religious criteria. Eager to facilitate the expansion of sports and Olympism, Coubertin and the IOC worked closely with the YMCA in cultivating relationships with newcomers to sports. Organizers of the FECG described the championships as an “Olympic kindergarten” whose aim was “to bring every country in the Orient into the competitions.”

The initial responses of East Asians to the YMCA-led FECG varied considerably. The motivation of the FECG included racial elements based on West-centered white American Protestant and amateur sports values. Initiated by Elwood S. Brown (1883–1924), the first Physical Director of the Philippine YMCA, the FECG were meant to spread “the benefits of Western morality, masculinity, and the nation-state system to places still mired in more backward folkways.”

Chinese sports insiders enthusiastically promoted the FECG to break the “Orientalist” discourse of physical weakness and

---

63 Andrew D. Morris, Marrow of the Nation, 22–23.
“degeneration” consolidating their image of “Sick Man of Asia.” The Japanese, who fancied themselves as being fully modernized, did not feel the need to join an American-led sports event seeking to civilize Asians. For Korean athletes under Japanese colonial rule, the racial hierarchy between white “teachers” and Asian “pupils” was not an issue as their colonizer was the same Asian. Their major concern for the FECG was more nationalistic (Korean versus Japanese) rather than racial (Westerners versus Asians).

From its outset, many Koreans were fervent about participating in the FECG in order to help demonstrate their national prowess. After Pang Tuhwan (1892–n.d.) sat in on the 1917 Third FECG in Tokyo as a member of the Kyŏngsŏng YMCA, he seemed full of sorrow and humiliation as a non-participant hearing from other spectators asking “Why didn’t you [Koreans] come? Because of the small stadium, lack of opponents, or a busy schedule?” He concluded his article presenting his impressions of the Games with an expression of great bitterness: “I have nothing to tell you about why I went there or what makes me interested or what I have to report to you about the Games. I have no feeling except for a deep chagrin that we could not have a seat at this kind of event.”

Korean nationalism burst out at the 1921 FECG in Shanghai. Shanghai emerged as the epicenter of the Korean independence movement as nationalist activists established the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in 1919 following the March First Movement. Yŏ Unhyŏng (1886–1947), a prominent independence activist, inquired of

---


the organizers of the FECG whether or not Koreans in Shanghai could participate as an independent team. J. H. Gray, one of the honorary secretaries of the Far Eastern Games, informed another honorary secretary, Franklin H. Brown in Japan, of Korean’s intention, but the negotiation failed in the face of Japan’s immovable objection. Given that the Philippines, a colony of the United States, was a one of the three main participants in the FECG, Koreans’ request for participation was not unreasonable. To achieve its ideal of “internationalism,” the FECG invited various dependent states to the Games, including Ceylon, India, Java, Malaysia, Siam, the French Indies, and the Dutch West Indies. The Maeil sinbo, in promoting the Korean team’s participation, referred to the independent participation by the British Dominions such as Canada and South Africa in the 1920 Antwerp Games. Exhibition games open to all foreigners, including Westerners living in Shanghai, provided the Shanghai-based Korean residents with their only chance to participate. Nonetheless, even their participation in these minor contests was highly praised as conferring national glory by Korean mass media, as Koreans now had, for the first time, the chance to compete with other nations.

The trials for the FECG constituted another site of competition between Koreans and their colonizers. In the ten mile race at the 1921 FECG tryouts held in Kyŏngsŏng,

---

66 J. H. Gray arrived in China in 1920 after twelve years at a similar post in India, and was a leader of the Chinese YMCA Physical Education Section for several years. See Andrew D. Morris, Marrow of the Nation, 59.


69 Maeil sinbo, 7 February 1921.

70 Tonga ilbo, 31 May 1921.
Kim Sunhak (n.d.) came in first, but one Japanese athlete complained to the Korean Sports Confederation that Kim was a current rickshaw man. Introduced to Korea in the 1890s, rickshaw became one of the most popular public transports vehicles in the 1920s. In fact, the number of rickshaw in colonial Korea reached 4,600 in 1923. Although exact number is not available, rickshaw men were active in the long-distance races in the early days of Korean sports. According to the tryout regulations, a person engaged in a job using leg power could take part in the tryouts at least six months after quitting his job. When Kim was disqualified, the atmosphere in Kyŏngsŏng began to turn ugly. Appealing to the Korean Sports Confederation to have the good judgement, Maeil sinbo raised several issues. First, the appeal against the final result was lodged after the race had ended. Secondly, the most excellent athletes should be sent to the next tryout in Tokyo and it was unreasonable for anyone to bring this kind of minor rule violation into question. Finally, rumor had it that this unpleasant situation transpired because the winner was Korean, evoking the implacable hatred of Koreans for the Japanese.

Such controversies over the sportsmanship affected participants in international sports events such as the Olympics and the FECG all over the world. Organizing bodies drew a sharp line between gentlemen amateur and working-class professional. Only amateur athletes who played sports as a hobby were allowed to represent their country in these international competitions, as professional athletes engaged in manual labor were considered to have an unfair advantage. In Japan, the earliest distance races were often

---

71 Yi Sŏngwŏn, Sarajin chigŏp ŭi yŏksa (Seoul: Chaŭm kwa moŭm, 2011), 139–49.
72 Maeil sinbo, 19 April 1921.
73 Maeil sinbo, 21 April 1921.
dominated by unusually well-conditioned laborers such as milk deliverymen, newspaper carriers, and rickshaw drivers, all of whom were categorized as professionals. In the face of constant dispute, the Japan Amateur Sports Association (*Nihon taiiku kyōkai*) created two divisions, amateur and professional, with only amateurs, mostly elite college students, permitted to represent Japan abroad. The overt class conflict between amateurs and professionals turned into an ethno-national fight between Korean and Japan at the time of the marathon trials for the 1921 FECG.

The first ethnic Korean athletes who participated in the FECG were Korean students in China. The participation of four Koreans as members of the Chinese delegation in the 1925 Manila Games became a bitter memory both for Korean fans and for athletes. Hyŏn Chŏngju (1899–1970), one of the four, expressed his chagrin, observing that Japanese and Chinese athletes were hailed by their compatriots in Manila while there was no similar welcoming from Koreans. When one Japanese athlete asked him if he was Chinese, Hyŏn recalled that he had to answer with a hesitant “yes.”

Beyond Korea’s national humiliation and blatant discrimination on the part of the Japanese colonial government, this event also provided an arena for Korean athletes to improve their skills and advance into an international sports event. The track and field trials for the 1921 Games held in Kyŏngsŏng attracted no less than 50,000 fans. It included 300 athletes from not only the Korean peninsula but also major cities in

---

75 Yun Sanggil, “Sangsang toen Asia ŭi hwahap chukje, Kŭktong Ollimp’ik—Kŭktong Ollimp’ik kwallyŏn sūp'och’ŭ ibent’ŭ e taehan Chosŏnin ŭi insik ŭl chungsim ŭro,” *Han'guk minjokmunhwaw* 47 (2013): 484.
76 *Chosŏn ilbo*, 11 August 1925; 12 February 1926.
Manchuria, such as Dalian and Shenyang. The 1923 FECG tryout drew around 420 athletes to a stadium filled with Korean fans. Thanks to the growing popular interest in sports, Korean athletes achieved great success at the 1934 FECG Games. There, three Korean athletes—Yu Changch’un in the 10,000m, Kim Ch’angyŏp in the bantamweight division, Pak Yongjin in the featherweight division—clinched the championships.

The FECG were a microcosm of the Olympics. Brown even wrote to the founder of modern Olympism, reporting that the objective of his initiative was to train “Oriental” athletes for participation in the Olympics as the first FECG was named the Far Eastern Olympiad. But Coubertin’s insistence on reserving the word “Olympic” for the original championship meant that the Far Eastern Olympiad would have to change its name to the Far Eastern Championship Games from 1915 onwards. Most newspapers in colonial Korea did not follow the new nomenclature. Instead, they treated the FECG as miniature Olympics in East Asia, sticking with the Far Eastern Olympiad (Kŭktong Ollimp’ik). Until Korean athletes’ debut at the Olympic Games in 1932, the FECG served as an the precursor for the Korean sports community preparing for the world sports stage.

Summation

Modern sports originated largely from the British Empire fulfilled a twofold role. As a symbol of Western civilization, organized sports provided a convenient means for colonizers to control and discipline the colonized. A throng of colonial administrators,

77 Chosón ilbo, 19 April 1921.
78 Maeil sinbo, 30 October 1922.
merchants, educators, and Christian missionaries made use of sports to westernize “barbarian” peoples through a kind of cultural and religious indoctrination that was thought of as fulfilling the “white man’s burden,” in the words of the English poet Rudyard Kipling. On the other hand, when colonized sportsmen sometimes defeated those of the colonizer, the moral supremacy of the colonizer appeared to fade. The colonized appropriated modern sports as a tool for instilling national identity in their countryman. An understanding of this duality is crucial for examining the implication of sports culture in the process of nation-building in Asian societies, including those of colonial contexts such as that of Korea.\(^80\)

The rapid global expansion of sports seemed obvious as many newcomers outside the West made forays into international sports events in the early twentieth century. European and American sports officials shared the prejudices of many of their contemporaries in regarding Asians and Africans as backward peoples in need of tutelage in the ways of civilization. All the same, they believed sports were suitable for everyone, just as Coubertin thought competition could transcend regional, ethnic, political, or religious criteria, an idea symbolized by the Olympic flag with its five intertwined circles.

The 1920s saw a prodigious change in the Korean social environment in relation to global sports and the Olympics. The “Roaring Twenties” that emerged in the wake of the devastation of World War I was not only an American phenomenon. Throughout the world, a newly emergent urban middle class listened to jazz, cut their hair short (for

women), agitated for woman’s suffrage, and reveled in the spirit of the modern age.\textsuperscript{81} During the interwar era, sports flourished enormously, enjoying a “golden age” driven by growing wealth.\textsuperscript{82} In many countries at this time, there was an emerging sports industry nourished by sports celebrities, reporters, and an enormous number of fans. Korean sports community was one of the beneficiaries of this booming era in sports.

In the early twentieth century, the Olympics would grow in size, diversity, and organization, entering the maturity phase (1914–1932).\textsuperscript{83} For colonial Korea, wanting to be recognized by other countries as a proper actor on the world stage, the Olympics were the perfect venue to do so without overtly challenging its colonizer. After what may be seen as a preparatory stage, Korean athletes would embark on a new chapter with the first three Korean Olympians playing on the Japanese team in the 1932 Games in Los Angeles.

\textsuperscript{82} In the United States, per capita income increased 30 percent between 1922 and 1929. Steven A. Riess, \textit{Sports in America from Colonial Times to the Twenty-First Century: An Encyclopedia} (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2011), 35.
Chapter 2. Colonial Korea’s First Participation in the Olympic Games
(1932)

Yi Kiryong (1899–n.d.), a renowned Korean sports reporter for the *Tonga ilbo*, said: “The year is 1932. This year is a red-letter day when the tenth Olympiad, the biggest goal and the greatest stage for our sports community, is scheduled to be held in the United States.” The Olympics, he continued, “are where every movement of the world’s sportsmen signifies their national vigor. They will become the “world battlefield” without gun and sword.”

In fact, the year 1932 was a crucial junction for Olympic history in East Asia. While the Great Depression heavily reduced European countries’ participation in the 1932 Games, East Asian nations participated aggressively in the Games held on the West Coast of the United States. Since its Olympic debut in the 1912 Stockholm Games, Japan had increasing numbers of Olympians and medals, and it was ready to use the world stage provided by the 1932 Olympics to display its substantial sporting advances. In Los Angeles, the Japanese Olympic team of 131 members, second in size only to that of the United States, achieved unparalleled success taking seventh place with 18 medals after the United States (103), Italy (36), Finland (25), Sweden (23), Germany (20), and France (19). Japanese athletes’ great performance in Los Angeles provided a sound basis for its

---

successful bid for hosting the 1940 Olympics. China’s first Olympic delegation—a lone athlete along with a coach and four bureaucrats—showed up in Los Angeles to become a member of the Olympic family. When ethnic Korean athletes participated for the first time, they were representing Japan. The three Korean athletes, Kim Ênbae (marathoner), Kwôn T’aeha (marathoner) and Hwang Êlsu (boxer), participated in the 1932 Games for the first time in history, along with one Taiwanese athlete, under the Japanese flag. In addition, two Korean executive officials participated in the Games—Sin Kijun (1896–1965) on the Chinese and Yi Sangbaek (1904–1966) on the Japanese team.

The first Olympics for colonial Korea has attracted little attention, not even in the field of Korean sports studies. Passing comments tend to be nationalistic, focusing on Japanese discrimination against Korean athletes. To remedy this shortcoming, this chapter seeks to proffer a more nuanced, multidimensional analysis of the sociocultural impact of the 1932 Olympic Games on colonial Korea. Many Koreans at the time saw the Olympics—a modern, international, Western mega-sporting event—as an ideal setting for demonstrating, if not proving, the prowess of Korea, even as a nation forgotten by the world since Korea’s colonization by Japan in 1910. Not surprisingly, the three Korean athletes who participated in the event immediately became national heroes.

All the same, the reception of the 1932 Olympic Games varied among Koreans—including the athletes, fans, national leaders and the diaspora. The tenth Olympiad disappointed many Koreans’ expectations of the Games’ role in Korean nation building. During the 1932 Olympics, a significant number of Koreans living in Los Angeles

---

dismissed the three Korean athletes as traitors. The athletes poignantly suffered from the demand to live up to Korean fans’ expectation in terms of ranking. In addition, for some Korean intellectuals committed to promoting public health, propagating calisthenics among the general population was more important than a few elite athletes competing in the Olympics, especially given that the vast majority of Koreans were suffering from poverty and inadequate medical care.

The Birth of the First Korean Olympians

A long-cherished desire of Koreans under Japanese colonial rule was to see their compatriots compete successfully with the best on the world stage regardless of field. It was none other than Kim Ŭnbae, a diminutive, teenage marathon runner from Yangjŏng High Ordinary School (Yangjŏng kodŭng pot’ong hakkyo). Kim set a new world record at the seventh Korean Shrine Games in October 1931, running the 42.195 kilometer (26 miles and 385 yard) race in 2:26:12, nearly six minutes faster than a legendary Finnish long distance runner, Hannes Kolehmainen, who set a world record at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. As colonial Korea had hardly anyone regarded as an international figure, Kim and his record excited the entire Korean peninsula. The Maeil sinbo reported that Kim’s achievement could instill the confidence needed to open the world arena to Koreans worn out by disappointment and desperation, proclaiming, “Kim is the first Korean to achieve an ecumenic triumph in the twentieth century.” Korean nationalistic sentiment was also expressed by the Tonga ilbo, then the largest vernacular newspaper. It declared that

---

87 Maeil sinbo, 20 October 1931.
Kim’s world record had thrust the historically old-fashioned and passive Korea, often referred to as the “hermit kingdom,” onto the world stage in a single bound and had proven that “There is no flaw in the Korean’s character or disposition.”

At the sixth Meiji Shrine Games held in Tokyo on November 3, 1931, Kim verified that his world record was not merely fortuitous, coming second in the race with resounding cheers from the many Koreans then living in Japan. Once again, the Korean media highly—and clandestinely—praised his achievement in Tokyo as Korean victory. Whereas the Yomiuri shimbun recorded Kim’s ranking as fourth and nationality as Japanese in an article on the world 1931 marathon records (Picture 3), quoting the Yomiuri article, Yi Kiryong dared to change Kim’s nationality from Japanese to Korean (Picture 4). Since the Library Department of the colonial government was established in 1926, it was carefully overseeing Korean-owned printed mass media under the Publication Law. Yi’s manipulation did not cause a trouble, probably because the Japanese censorship at the time generally focused on issues surrounding domestic politics.

---

88 Tonga ilbo, 20 October 1931.
89 Maeil sinbo, 8 November 1931. As soon as he came home, Kim apologized for failing to win the race by a head. He was unfamiliar with the marathon course in Tokyo and had spent his final burst of energy prematurely.
Kim’s feat provoked instant, fervent responses from national leaders, authorities in the sports community, and the public. When Kim came back from Tokyo after the sixth Meiji Shrine Games, a commendation ceremony was held for him hosted by the Kyŏngsŏng Sports Reporters Corps, Yangjŏng High Ordinary School’s alumni association and several nationwide sporting organizations such as the Korean, Kwansŏ, Taegu, and Hamhŭng Sports Associations. This was in tandem with a congratulatory address delivered by nationalist leaders and a crowd of nearly a thousand.⁹¹ Taking

⁹¹ Tonga ilbo, 17 November 1931.
advantage of this opportunity, the Korean Sports Association decided to raise funds from
the public to advertise sports extensively nationwide.\footnote{Maeil sinbo, 23 October 1931.} Korea was a colony of the
Japanese empire from Tokyo’s perspective, whereas Koreans had no intention of
supporting Kim as a Japanese athlete, even before the 1932 Olympics had begun.

In contrast to the huge celebration in Korea, Kim’s establishment of the world
record received little attention from the international sports community. The marathon
distance for the Olympics—42.195 kilometers, or 26 miles and 385 yards—was
standardized at the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) convention in
Geneva in 1921.\footnote{David E. Martin and Roger W. H. Gynn, The Olympic Marathon (Champaign, IL: Human
Kinetics, 2000), 113.} The marathon route of the Korean Shrine Games had not been
authorized formally as a full course of 42.195 km by any international sports
organization; thus, Kim’s record did not gain official approval.

Regardless, Kim’s impressive performance led the Koreans to pay unprecedented
attention to the Olympic Games, calling Kim the “the world’s king of the marathon.”\footnote{O Susan, “Segye kirok tolp’a han marason sŏnsu Kim Ênbae kun,” Pyŏlgŏn’gon (December 1931): 12.} Before the Korean participation, the growing quadrennial mega-sports event was largely
ignored by colonial Korea. With Kim’s world record, Korean perception of the Olympics
changed to the point that the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics was no longer a “fire far off in
the distance from the Pacific.”\footnote{Tonga ilbo, 2 January 1932.} As mentioned in Chapter 1, to participate in the
Olympics, Korean athletes had to get through the preliminaries held in Kyŏngsŏng before
competing with Japanese counterparts from each region of the Japanese empire. Between
1920 and 1928, Korean athletes were no match for Japanese athletes in the Olympic trials, but the 1932 Olympic marathon tryout was different. Above all, the Japan Amateur Sports Association’s acknowledgement of Kim Ŭnbae’s great performance in 1931 allowed him to run at the final tryout held in Tokyo without running the preliminary race in Kyŏngsŏng.\footnote{Tonga ilbo, 9 May 1932.} In addition, since Kwŏn T’aeha, who was a Meiji University graduate and long distance runner, came in first with a decent time (2:35:12 in the 1932 Olympic trial held in Kyŏngsŏng), the Korean sports community was infused with new hope of having its first Olympians. Compared to Ma Pongok’s record (3:15:00) four years ago set in the 1928 Olympic trial, the record of Kim and Kwŏn showed that Korean marathon runners had caught up with the advanced world level in a short period of time.\footnote{Tonga ilbo, 8 May 1928.}

At last, two Korean marathoners had achieved the highest measure of success in the Olympic marathon tryouts in Tokyo, in which three athletes would be selected as Japan’s national representatives.\footnote{In the 1932 Games, the marathon entry quota for each country was reduced to three. See David E. Martin and Roger W. H. Gynn, The Olympic Marathon, 113.} Kim moved from fourth place to second due to a miraculous sprint in the final moments of the race. More joyful for Koreans was Kwŏn T’aeha’s unheralded win because he, once a captain of Meiji University’s athletic club, had little prior experience in marathon running. It was remarkable that two Koreans beat Japanese competitors, given that the interwar era was a golden age of Japanese marathon running featuring many world-class athletes: “nine different [Japanese] runners ranked among the world’s five fastest for one or more years between 1925 and 1930” and “five
Japanese times were listed among the top nine worldwide for 1930.”99 The Japanese marathon community continued to produce top-tier runners to the point where, right before 1932 Games, “Japan could have fielded several teams of three Olympic-caliber athletes.”100

The final outcome was a perfect ending for Koreans. In the 1932 Olympic Marathon Trial held in Tokyo, Kwŏn took first place and Kim second place, followed by other Japanese competitors. Kim T’aeho, a sports writer, struck a common chord in Koreans’ hearts, valorizing Kwŏn’s superhuman will and calling Kim’s last sprint a “bloody race risking death.”101 When the two runners returned to Kyŏngsŏng and had a car parade, they received a thunderous applause from overjoyed onlookers.

To praise the two athletes’ feats, Korean intellectuals constructed a discourse redolent of glorious, militaristic Korean history. In the face of the onslaught of global imperialism since the nineteenth century, Korean intellectuals’ efforts focused on retrieving glories of the past to instill a sense of autonomous collective identity and pride into the mind of Koreans. In particular, the kingdom of Koguryŏ (second century BCE?–668 CE), which dominated a large swath of Manchuria as well as the Korean peninsula, and its warrior’ ethos, emerged as a symbol of the glorious past of Korean masculinity. On the other hand, Korean journalists, historians, and reform-minded activists such as Sin Ch’aeoho often scathingly criticized what they saw as effete and effeminate the notions of

99 Thomas R. H. Havens, *Marathon Japan*, 46.0
100 David E. Martin and Roger W. H. Gynn, *The Olympic Marathon*, 147.
the ideal man as shaped by Korea’s Confucianism. In this context, the *Tonga ilbo* described the birth of the first Korean Olympians as “Korean youth’s expansion into the world” rekindling irredentist voices like this one: “Although Korea was doomed to national pauperization and has fallen into the evils of seclusion, literary indulgence and the neglect of the military arts in the past several centuries, these hidden world-class athletes prove that the blood of a continental nation is romping around Koreans’ blood vessels.” The *Tonga ilbo* likened the two athletes to the Koguryŏ warriors and praised their achievements as “the pride of Korea and the glory of Korea.” Colonial Korea’s press deployed the commonly-used rhetorical parallelism between military and athletic heroism to identify the two athletes as heroes resuscitating Korean masculinity.

Koreans hailed another Olympian, a boxer, with acclamation immediately after Kwŏn and Kim earned their slots as members of the Japanese national contingent. Hwang Ŭlsu, already well known as a lightweight boxer at Meiji University, got through the preliminaries as the Kantō representative. As much support for Hwang as for Kwŏn and Kim came from Koreans on a national scale. Hwang wrestled with economic hardships and the serious injuries he sustained in the preliminary matches. People of all walks of life joined a fund-raising campaign launched by the *Tonga ilbo*, including a supporters’ association organized by Korean students studying in Tokyo, the Korean Boxing Club, and even every sixth-grader in Ch’ŏrwŏn Public Ordinary School (Ch’ŏrwŏn kongnip pot’ong hakkyo) Hwang attended. Eventually, Hwang received a sizable sum of money.

---

103 *Tonga ilbo*, 2 June 1932.
(270 yen) before the Games.\textsuperscript{104} A farewell party served as another occasion to affirm the Olympians’ Korean identity. When the first main Japanese squad marched to the Meiji Shinto Shrine to pray for victory, continuing on to the Imperial Palace, many Japanese supporters sang the national anthem, “Kimigayo,” and cheered “Banzai!” (Long Live the Emperor!).\textsuperscript{105} Before joining the Japanese company and the ceremony held in Tokyo, Kim and Kwŏn attended a farewell ceremony at Kyŏngsŏng train station hosted by Koreans. The two Korean marathon runners left with the words of encouragement, “Win and by all means, come back as Koreans.” The atmosphere was effervescent and trembling with excitement.\textsuperscript{106} Embarking on the Taiyo Maru in Yokohama leaving for Los Angeles, Hwang found his cabin filled with garlands, fruits, and snacks from his compatriots. He was also deeply moved upon receiving a number of cheering telegrams and letters from Korea.\textsuperscript{107} The Tonga ilbo solicited encouraging letters from the public, and delivered 75 letters to the three athletes by international mail.\textsuperscript{108}

When a large crowd saw the Japanese Olympic team off at the Yokohama port, the hearts of the athletes of Korean ancestry were replete with sorrow as members of a subjugated race.\textsuperscript{109} In particular, Kwŏn’s antipathy towards Japan is noteworthy in light of two unfortunate events involving the police in colonial Korea during the Olympic

\textsuperscript{104} Tonga ilbo, 30 June 1932; 1 July 1932.
\textsuperscript{106} Tonga ilbo, 14 June 1932.
\textsuperscript{107} Tonga ilbo, 14 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{108} Tonga ilbo, 20 July 1932.
\textsuperscript{109} Tonga ilbo, 1 January 1936.
trials. He was brutally beaten by Japanese policemen during a practice race in Myŏngdong, downtown Kyŏngsŏng, a day before the Korean trials for flouting a traffic signal.\(^{110}\) Further, when he was about to get on the Pusan–Shimonoseki ferry (Kwanbu yŏllaksŏn) to join the Japanese team after becoming a Japanese national athlete, three drunken policemen (one Japanese and two Koreans) beat him up quite badly because of his poor attitude during questioning.\(^{111}\) Kwŏn, with his deep-rooted rancor towards Japanese colonialism, resolved to win at any cost and with good reason felt that “No one gave us a hearty send-off among the crowds of Japanese in Yokohama.”\(^{112}\)

**A Meeting between Korean Athletes and Koreans in the United States**

In the summer of 1932, the Japanese-American community in Los Angeles was swept by fervent nationalism. They eagerly participated in the Olympiad to make it a success for Japan. The first generation (*issei*) and second generation (*nisei*) of Japanese residents in the United States suffered from virulent racism against Asian immigrants. A series of legal actions such as the Naturalization Act of 1906, the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907–1908, the California Alien Land laws of 1913 and 1920, and the Immigration Act of 1924 reflect the escalation of anti-Japanese discrimination. The first-generation immigrants were barred from owning land, marrying whites, or sending their children to schools attended by whites. Even the American-born second generation faced legalized discrimination in employment, civic activities, housing, and at public venues.

\(^{110}\) *Maeil sinbo*, 8 May 1932.

\(^{111}\) *Maeil sinbo*, 15 June 1932. American papers, as well as Korean and Japanese papers, reported on the incident. See *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1932.

\(^{112}\) *Tonga ilbo*, 25 June 1932.
such as restaurants, stores, and hotels. In this context, the Japanese-American community was looking forward to Japan’s Olympic victories as proof of Japanese excellence and a refutation of white America’s racial prejudice against them. Simultaneously, the Olympics, as a cosmopolitan peaceful undertaking, were viewed by them as a great opportunity to improve the Japan–United States relationship, which had been deteriorating since Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931. By doing so, they sought to coexist more comfortably with American society’s dominant whites.  

The United States was also important to the history of the Korean diaspora. After a small number of Koreans, including merchants, diplomats, and students, entered the United States in the late nineteenth century, between 1903 and 1905, approximately 7,400 Koreans immigrated to work on Hawaiian sugar plantations that sought new sources of cheap labor. Korean laborers were to replace the Chinese and Japanese. Chinese immigration to the United States had come to an almost complete halt after exclusionary legislation first enacted in 1882. Japanese strikers more frequently demanded higher wages and better working conditions. Korean migration continued between 1906 and 1924. Among the migrants were approximately 600 political refugees from Japanese colonial rule and over 1,000 “picture brides” marrying Korean males already in Hawaii. Searching for better living conditions, from 1905 to 1907, approximately 1,000 Koreans migrated from Hawaii to the mainland. The United States Census of 1930 records 1,860 Koreans residing on the mainland who had migrated from Hawaii. A total population of approximately 10,000 Koreans in America remained

---

113 Eriko Yamamoto, “Cheers for Japanese Athletes.”
relatively constant until the 1950s. The Korean population was a small fraction of the size of the Chinese- and Japanese–American communities in America’s West Coast. All the same, among the mostly Western host cities of the Olympics until the 1964 Tokyo Games, Los Angeles and its vicinity had the largest Korean fan base for the three first Korean Olympians.

As did other immigrants to the United States, Korean immigrants encountered much adversity. In general, Korean immigrants coped with racism, cultural differences, privation and a generation gap between the first and second generations. Fundamentally, the most serious hardship, however, was the loss of their country as a defender of their interests, as Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910 transformed Koreans in the United States into “international orphans.” This “double colonization” by American racism and Japanese imperialism had effectively left Korean-Americans on their own to survive in a strange land. As Korean-Americans directed much of their energy and resources toward nationalistic activities, the United States remained an important base for the Korean independence movement until the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945. The foundation of the Korean National Association (Kungminhoe) in 1909 as a representative organization for all Korean residents of the United States initiated the United States-based Korean independence movement’s efforts to undo Japan’s grip on their homeland.

Before and after the 1932 Olympics, the nationalism of Korean communities scattered across the United States was running high. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria sparked anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, and Korean nationalists saw this as a development that could contribute to the liberation of Korea from Japan. In addition, two incidents—one in Japan’s metropolitan center (Tokyo) and another in the core of its expanding empire on the continent (Shanghai)—became a huge rallying point for Koreans in the United States. On January 8, 1932, a young Korean revolutionary named Yi Pongch’ang (1900–1932) threw a grenade at the passing horse carriage of the Japanese emperor, Hirohito (r. 1926–1989), outside the palace gates in Tokyo (referred to as the Sakuradamon Incident) but failed to kill his target. On the afternoon of April 29, Yun Ponggil (1908–1932) hurled a bomb onto the dais at a triumphal Japanese military review to celebrate their victory in the “Shanghai Incident of January 28” and the emperor’s birthday (Tenchōsetsu) in Hongkew Park, Shanghai. General Shirakawa Yoshinori (1869–1932), the commander-in-chief of Japanese forces, and Kawabata Sadaji (1874–1932), the head of the local Japanese community association, died. Shigemitsu Mamoru (1887–1957), the Japanese minister plenipotentiary to China, Admiral Nomura Kichisaburō (1877–1964) and consul-general Murai Kuramatsu (1888–1953), to name a few, were seriously wounded. Masterminded by Kim Ku (1876–1949), a prominent Korean independence activist based in the French Concession of Shanghai, the two incidents were pivotal moments in the history of continuing anti-Japanese activities of Koreans after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Many Koreans in the United States provided financial support for Kim Ku, both before and after the
incidents. In 1932–1933, most Korean communities in the United States from coast to coast were reportedly celebrating the attacks and held memorial ceremonies in honor of the assailants after their executions by Japanese authorities.

Before the 1932 Olympics, Koreans in both Korea and Los Angeles expected this international sports event to serve as a meaningful reunion of Koreans in Korea and the United States. On their departure for Los Angeles, Kim T’aeho said, “We wish Korean Olympians all the best as we anticipate their participation in the tenth Olympiad where athletes converge to battle for the honor of their homeland and present remarkable performances on behalf of their Korean compatriots in the United States.” From Hawaii to Los Angeles, the three Korean athletes received hearty welcome from Korean immigrants. In Hawaii, Tatsuta Maru’s midway stopover, local Koreans greeted Kim and Kwŏn with such enthusiasm that both regretted the brevity of the encounter with their compatriots. An even more welcoming atmosphere was awaiting them in Los Angeles, even though the Great Depression had hurt many Korean immigrants financially. Hwang was thrilled that “the Paegŭi minjok” (Koreans, literally ‘white-clad folk’), without regard to age and gender, cheered him with all their might.” Young second-generation Korean-Americans asked him every day if he was in good shape by phone or phone.

---

118 Sinhan minbo, 20 October 1932; 22 December 1932; 29 December 1932; 12 January 1933; 19 January 1933; 2 February 1933; 23 February 1933; 16 March 1933.
120 Tonga ilbo, 26 July 1932; 14 August 1932.
121 Reportedly, Korean students in America were experiencing the worst time amid the Great Depression for three reasons: one, the exchange rate was not in favor of the yen; two, most colleges had abolished the loan system; and three, the immigration office had strictly banned international students from working. See, “Sin’gu sinmun, Miguk yuhaksaeenggye sosik,” Tonggwang (September 1932): 13.
even in person by travelling a long distance to the Olympic Village by car. Korean athletes especially appreciated the Korean food delivered to them, including kimchi.\textsuperscript{122} Except for some who could not afford tickets or independent businessmen who could not leave their shops, most Koreans in Los Angeles went to the games to see firsthand the Korean athletes they hoped would bring honor to Koreans in this faraway foreign land.\textsuperscript{123}

The Los Angeles Korean community sincerely welcomed Korean athletes with open arms. While Japanese-Americans were united in cheering for all Japanese athletes, receptions and other activities were often based on prefectural origins, and thus Korean and Taiwanese athletes were not beneficiaries of their hospitality, even though they represented Japan.\textsuperscript{124} National camaraderie across the Pacific Ocean between the Korean peninsula and the West Coast climaxd with the welcoming ceremony hosted by the Korean National Association and other United States-based Korean groups as shown in Pictures 5a and 5b. They invited the three athletes, along with Yi Sangbaek and Sin Kijun, several days before the marathon races and boxing matches began. A welcoming speech by Ch’oe Nŭngik (the president of the Korean National Association) was followed by remarks by the three athletes. A mirthful dance party for the young men and women created an emotional gathering of Koreans in a foreign land so far away from home.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{122} Tonga ilbo, 28 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{123} Sinhan minbo, 18 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{125} Tonga ilbo, 30 August 1932. Philip Ahn (1905–1978), the eldest son of An Ch’angho, was the emcee of the party.
Pictures 5a and 5b. *Tonga ilbo*, 1 October 1932 (above) and *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, 6 July 1979 (below). In the *Tonga ilbo* picture, the Korean flag was allegedly erased by Yi Kiryong, who was mindful of Japanese censorship. See Chae Pack, *Sarajin Ilchanggi ŭi chinsil: ilche kanggiŏngi Ilchanggi malso sakŏn yŏn’gu* (Seoul: K’omyunik’eisyôn puksû, 2008), 96–97.

The Olympic Games gave United States-based Koreans a golden opportunity to let others know how eager Korea was to become a full member of the community of nations. The three athletes spoke on the KHJ radio, one of Los Angeles’ first radio stations founded in 1922. Chŏn Kyŏngmu (n.d.–1947), who was engaged in the anti-Japanese movement in the United States and played a major role in the entry of South Korea into the IOC after liberation, served as the interpreter. Their appearance on the broadcast was meaningful, given that only nations participating in the Los Angeles Olympics were granted this opportunity. Due to donations from the Korean community in Los Angeles and Chŏn Kyŏngmu’s negotiation with the organizers of the Games,

---

126 *Tonga ilbo*, 31 August 1932.
Korean reporters received a press table and made an effort to introduce Korea to correspondents from other countries.\footnote{Sinhan minbo, 18 August 1932.} At an Olympic ball held at the Shrine Auditorium with the participation of 48 countries, an entourage of Korean women wearing traditional costumes (\textit{hanbok}) arrived with Korean flags to proclaim that the Korean national spirit had yet to die, despite Japanese oppression.\footnote{Sinhan minbo, 25 August 1932.}

All the same, a significant number of local Koreans were outraged by the fact that the Korean athletes were wearing Japanese uniforms. As Ch’oe Nŭngik mentioned in the welcoming ceremony, it was true that some Koreans in Los Angeles excoriated the three athletes for coming to the Olympics under the Japanese flag. Although he asked the Korean athletes to understand that “Their anguish came from anti-Japanese sentiment” and Kwŏn T’aeha and Sin Kijun stressed their Korean identity during the welcoming ceremony, some Koreans in Los Angeles treated these Korean athletes with suspicion.\footnote{Sinhan minbo, 4 August 1932.}

For instance, Kim Sun’gwŏn dipped his pen in vitriol for the three athletes’ participation in Japan’s Olympic team. Disparaging the three athletes and Yi Sangbaek as “the Japanese warriors,” he was censorious about their participation in the Olympics as

\footnote{It seemed that the Olympics were closely related to the Independence movement in Shanghai. According to a Japanese authority in Shanghai, the purpose of Sin’s visit to Los Angeles seemed to be to discuss the Korean independence movement with Korean residents in Los Angeles and to organize Kim Ku’s escape from Shanghai to the United States. See, Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, \textit{Hanminjok tongnip undongsa charyojip}, vol. 42 (Kwach’ŏn: Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, 2000), 103–104. With French cooperation, the Shanghai consular police executed a raid of the Korean Provisional Government headquarters in the French Concession of the city right after the April 29 bombings. French authorities were troubled by the violence brought to their concession by militant Korean revolutionaries in the early 1930s. In return for French help, Japan provided French authorities with intelligence regarding Vietnamese political refugees such as Prince Cường Để in Tokyo. See Erik Esselstrom, \textit{Crossing Empire’s Edge Foreign Ministry Police and Japanese Expansionism in Northeast Asia} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 116–17.}
Japanese athletes. According to Kim Sun’gwôn, they were simply “living corpses” without Korean national spirit and represented a blot on Korea’s escutcheon. He also saw them as instruments of an adroit Japanese campaign promoting the empire. By including several Korean athletes on the team, the Japanese administrators were giving a false impression to foreigners that their assimilation policy in Korea had realized success.\footnote{Sinhan minbo, 1 September 1932.}

In contrast, Hwang Sayong, one of the representative nationalists in the United States, defended the three athletes, regarding them as patriots. First, they were obliged to be members of the Japanese national team, since Korea had lost its sovereignty as a nation. Second, given that Koreans and the Korean Sports Association in Korea had contributed to the three athletes’ participation in this grand competition of nations, their spirit as Koreans was not to be questioned. Third, the Olympics were a chance to show the whole world that the intellectual, physical, and moral excellence of Korean people was comparable to that of the Japanese. Fourth, the Olympics could instill confidence in Koreans to strive toward achieving independence.\footnote{Sinhan minbo, 28 July 1932.} Similar arguments in defense of the Korean Olympians stressed that blaming the three athletes for wearing the Japanese uniform was unfair, comparing them to Koreans using a Japanese passport to move to the United States and still being welcomed by local Koreans.

Some writers even likened the three athletes with Yi Pongch’ang. When Yi first showed up in Shanghai speaking Japanese and wearing Japanese clothes and clogs (*geta*), the Korean residents viewed him with suspicion and tried to kill him. Contrary to his appearance, his attempt to assassinate Japanese Emperor Hirohito by throwing a grenade...
at his horse carriage in 1932 proved his sincere nationalism. By the same token, supporters of the three athletes argued that Koreans had to disregard their appearance and notice the firm Korean identity in their hearts.\textsuperscript{132}

The three athletes were disappointed with and felt threatened by the hostile reception from their compatriots. Yi Kiryong had warned Hwang Úlsu in advance about the hostile sentiment in Los Angeles. Thus, Hwang felt intimidated when Paek Ilgyu, the president of \textit{Sinhan minbo} (a US-based newspaper for Korean Americans founded in 1909) dropped by at the hotel to meet him while Paek offered words of encouragement, requesting that Hwang exhibit “the Korean spirit worldwide,” which touched him deeply.\textsuperscript{133} In fact, before their arrival in Los Angeles, in several incidents Korean residents in Hawaii had expressed feelings of hostility toward them, regarding them as collaborators. When Kyŏngsŏng YMCA baseball team came to Hawaii to play a friendly match with Korean residents there, some Korean compatriots upset with his pro-Japanese activities threatened Pak Sŏgyun, the leader of the team, with death.\textsuperscript{134} Yi Sangbaek also encountered hostile Koreans in Hawaii when, as a manager, he led the Waseda basketball team to the United States in 1927.\textsuperscript{135}

Even after the Games’ closing ceremony, tension between Korean residents and a Korean athlete persisted. Kwŏn stayed on in Los Angeles as an athlete at the University of Southern California under the guidance of Dean Bartlett Cromwell (1879–1962), who

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Sinhan minbo}, 4 August 1932.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Tonga ilbo}, 19 August 1932; 20 August 1932.

\textsuperscript{134} Taehan yagu hyŏphoe, \textit{Han’guk yagusa} (Seoul: Taehan yagu hyŏphoe, 1999), 39–40.

would become the assistant head coach at the 1936 Berlin Olympics and head coach for the American track team at the 1948 Olympic Games in London, to improve his skills after the Olympics. In order to defend his participation in the Olympics as a Japanese teammate, Kwŏn argued that he had to wear Japanese uniform not due to the fault or the failure of himself and twenty million Koreans under Japan’s harsh colonial regime but the shameful five-hundred-year history of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Declaring that he would wear Korean uniform in the future as an effort to let the entire world know about the excellence of Korean sports, Kwŏn scorned those Koreans asking why he was wearing a Japanese uniform—calling them “ignorant.”

Compared to their Chinese counterparts, Korean athletes were in a more difficult situation in terms of letting the world know about the plight of Korea. At first, the financially strapped Chinese National Amateur Athletic Federation was not planning on participating in the 1932 Games. This changed with the news that the state of Manchukuo, established under Japanese auspices in 1932, intended to send two track and field athletes of Chinese ancestry: Liu Changchun (1909–1983) and Yu Xiwei (1909–1980). Actually, their participation was not feasible even though Japanese propaganda falsely claimed that the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee had accepted this plan. The United States would not recognize Manchukuo under the terms of the Stimson Doctrine, a policy of the American government, enunciated in a note to Japan and China in early 1932, of non-recognition of international territorial changes effected by force. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, backed by the IOC, did not allow the

136 Sinhan minbo, 6 October 1932.
Manchukuo government to send a team. In any event, the news sparked a campaign in China to send an athlete, Liu Changchun, who was then living in Beijing, to Los Angeles, as a Chinese representative. Once Liu’s participation in the Olympics was confirmed, many Chinese social elites played a leading role in a public fund-raising campaign. Among them, Zhang Xueliang (1901–2001), one of Manchuria’s major warlords, donated large sums of money. The Chinese government’s decision to send Liu from northeastern China to Los Angeles was intended as a political impediment to Japan’s attempt to legalize its Manchurian puppet state. With this backdrop, Americans understood the significance of China’s one-man team. When Liu and Song Zinfu, his coach, arrived in Los Angeles just one day before the games started, many excited Chinese residents in California greeted them and went to the Los Angeles Colosseum to watch the Chinese delegation in the Olympic procession. Even though he was quickly eliminated from competition in his two races (the one-hundred- and two-hundred-meter sprint heats), his dignity as a Chinese athlete representing four hundred million people suffered no slight. Liu’s participation led Americans and mass media to show sympathy for China’s plight vis-à-vis Japan.

---

While the mass media treated Liu as a Chinese athlete, they recognized the three Korean Olympians as Japanese athletes. This reflected the Official Report, in which “The Games of the Xth Olympiad Los Angeles 1932” registered the three Korean athletes as Japanese nationals, using Japanese versions of their names: Kin Onbai (Kim Ŭnbae), Gon Taika (Kwŏn T’aeha), and Otsu Shu Ko (Hwang Ŭlsu).\(^{139}\) When Kim was attracting great attention from the American press as a young Japanese high school student athlete, the subtitle of an article about the arrival of the Japanese Olympic delegation in San Francisco was “Baby Marathoner is a Hero in San Francisco” and went on to say: “Kin Onbai, 18-year-old Marathon runner and the youngest athlete on the Japanese squad, came in for much attention.”\(^{140}\) When Kwŏn T’aeha participated in a half-marathon held in New York as a student at the University of Southern California, one American paper


\(^{140}\) *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1932.
reported as follows: “The entry of Taika Gon, the Japanese distance runner who finished ninth in the Olympic marathon, in the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States 10-mile championship at Lewisohn Stadium Saturday gives the race an international flavor,” under the headline of “Japanese Star in 10-mile Race.” As Picture 6 shows, Kwŏn appeared in the Los Angeles Times as a Japanese athlete.

Compared to their compatriots in colonial Korea, some Koreans in the United States could not readily accept the reality of the three athletes competing in the Olympic Games as Japanese. For many, all that mattered was the fact that the athletes’ ancestors and parents were Korean was enough. Having been away from home for quite a long time, however, some Korean immigrants could not tolerate Korean athletes representing the Hinomaru (the Japanese flag). To them, representing Korea as a Japanese athlete was simply a betrayal of the nation. Evidently, such an attitude did not fully take into consideration the fact that the Koreans in the United States had far greater freedom to articulate their nationalism than did those in a Japanese colony.

More importantly, the controversy over the three athletes was to be a reflection of a divided Korean immigrant community. The Korean independence movement was tormented by chronic internal conflict early on, riven by discrepancies in ideology, strategy, the regional backgrounds of national leaders, and factions scattered throughout the Korean diaspora. The division was evident by the mid-1920s when the enthusiasm of the 1919 March First Movement had cooled down, and the Provisional Government in Shanghai dissolved amidst partisan infighting, dwindling donations from rank-and-file

\[141\] The Christian Science Monitor, 2 November 1932.
Koreans, and reports of corruption. Each faction had its own leaders, organization, newspaper, and church, enabling them to establish supporters in the Korean communities in the United States. In particular, the rivalry between the two most prominent leaders, Rhee Syngman (1875–1965), who would later become the first president of South Korea, and An Ch’angho (1878–1938), was one of the main roots of division in the Korean-American community.  

Indeed, some circumstantial evidence does indicate that the controversy surrounding the three Korean athletes was linked to existing internal conflicts entrenched in the Korean community. An’s followers, Paek Ilgyu, Chŏn Kyŏngmu, Ch’oe Nŭngjin, Philip Ahn, and the members of Korean National Association, rolled out the red carpet for the three athletes, while Kim Sun’gwŏn, a member of the Comrade Society (Tongjihoe), founded in 1921 as Rhee’s own political party, gave them the cold shoulder. The historic meeting between Korean athletes and Korean-Americans at the 1932 Olympics ended in an awkward atmosphere. The Korean community in Los Angeles began to cover up the internal conflict immediately after the Games.

Olympic Fever in Colonial Korea

The eyes of colonial Korea were on the 1932 Olympic Games to root for the three Korean athletes in Los Angeles. Newspapers and magazines paid special attention to the event to increase their circulation. The Tonga ilbo in particular was delivering the latest

---

143 Kim Sang’ae, “’P’yŏngando chiyŏk ūi kŭndaejŏk pyŏnhwa wa kuksa kyogwasŏ sŏsul naeyong kaesŏn pangan,” Chibangsa wa chibang munhwa 8, no. 2 (November 2005): 179–232.  
144 Sinhan minbo, 18 August 1932.
news about Korean athletes. Two correspondents for the Tonga ilbo reported news about the Olympics and three Korean athletes in detail. The three athletes themselves also served as correspondents for the paper, describing their daily activities and feelings to Korean subscribers.

Radio, a cutting-edge media in colonial Korea, also played an important role in generating Olympic fever among Korea’s population. From the 1920s, sporting events on radio were popular in most countries due to radio’s ability to broadcast live programming to large audiences. With increasing sales of radio receivers to Koreans (from 386 in 1926 to 95,153 in 1940), radio in colonial Korea “created a unique cultural space using the diverse informational, educational, economic, and pure entertainment programming it sent over the public airwaves.”\(^\text{145}\)

After the first broadcasting of the All-Korea High Ordinary School Baseball Tournament in 1928, radio broadcasts of sporting events such as baseball, boxing, and basketball were among the most popular programs. Radio came to the fore during the Games, although this was not live broadcasting due to a dispute concerning broadcasting rights. Broadcasters later transmitted accounts of sports events by Japanese announcers in Los Angeles by shortwave radio to Tokyo and colonial Korea.\(^\text{146}\) The Kyŏngsŏng Broadcast Corporation (Kyŏngsŏng pangsongguk) not only delivered the Olympic news transmitted from the metropole, but also produced its own programs in which Yi Kiryong introduced the Olympics to audiences and described the


huge welcoming ceremony for Kim.\textsuperscript{147}

When Kim came in sixth and Kwŏn ninth in the 1932 Olympic marathon, the unprecedented Olympic hype overcame colonial Korea. Even though the two did not win medals, their performance meant a lot to the Korean sports community. While the IOC has never acknowledged a general point score by country, some major participating nations were devising their own scoring systems to show off their performance in the Olympics. The two most popular systems in the international sports world offered points for six places, differing as to whether first place should be greater than second and third combined or less than the two combined: 7–5–4–3–2–1 or 10–5–4–3–2–1.\textsuperscript{148} Either system confirmed for Korean fans that Kim’s achievement brought 1 point to Korea. The story that Kwŏn had finished the course despite being completely exhausted was taken as a sign of true sportsmanship and garnished rave reviews from the international press.\textsuperscript{149}

The welcoming ceremony held in Kyŏngsŏng for Kim was nothing short of a sacred ritual for celebrating his success in the name of “Korea.”\textsuperscript{150} Thousands gathered at the landing pier in Pusan to see Kim, and after a car parade and two Olympic briefing sessions, he managed to depart Pusan for Kyŏngsŏng. The situation on the train was no different. Kim was besieged by his fans, from first class passengers to the train’s sanitation crew, as they wanted to listen to every word about the Olympics. In particular, a group of twenty poor farmers from a small village, Simch’ŏn township in North

\textsuperscript{147} Tonga ilbo, 19 September 1932.
\textsuperscript{148} Alfred Erich Senn, Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games, 42.
\textsuperscript{149} Tonga ilbo, 11 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{150} After the Games, Kwŏn came back to Korea in June of 1933 while Hwang in December of 1932.
Ch’ungh’ŏng province, brought all passengers and Kim close to tears by apologizing for not having no way to adequately express their gratitude to Kim. Eugen Weber argued that the French peasant was nationalized from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century by the emergence of modern state structures such as roads and railroads, universal schooling, military conscription, industrialization, and interregional labor migration, all of which weakened distinctive and local social, political, and linguistic practices. In 1930s colonial Korea, the Olympics and a teen athlete inculcated a collective Korean identity in Korean peasants’ minds.

When Kim arrived at Kyŏngsŏng station, the biggest city in colonial Korea temporarily became an outlet through which Koreans expressed their nationalism to the fullest. A crowd of thousands carried Kim on their shoulders to the municipal hall to have a briefing session. On the same day, a hundred prominent Koreans held a celebration to reward the eighteen-year-old high ordinary school student for his success in the Games and to give three cheers for his health. Another guest of honor at the scene was Theodor Schmidt, Austria’s IOC delegate, who was visiting colonial Korea on his way to home from Los Angeles. When he praised Kim as a great athlete and expressed sympathy for Korea’s ill-fated history, comparing it to that of his nation after World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, many in Korea appreciated the remarks of this blue-eyed foreigner. Kim’s schedule remained full afterwards, including an

151 Maeil sinbo, 16 September 1932.
153 Syumit’ŭ [Schmidt], “Pando yŏ, pŏnyŏng hara, Samch’ŏlli rŭl t’onghaya Chosŏn hyŏngje ege tŭri nora,” Samch’ŏlli (October 1932): 49–50. He was a strong supporter for 1940 Tokyo Olympics. See Sandra S. Collins, “Conflicts of 1930s Japanese Olympic Diplomacy in
interview on the radio and a commemorative lecture that was heard not only in Kyŏngsŏng but also in each local district where people were becoming aware of the Olympics. As his father declared, now Kim was not someone’s son but “a son of the Korean nation.”

Along with Kim, what grabbed the attention of the Korean public was the marathon and boxing, the sports in which the three Korean athletes had participated. The year 1933 was so crowded with marathons, an around-the-nation marathon and local marathons in each region, that it earned the sobriquet of the “era of marathon mania.”

The marathon boom turned many children into aficionados of the longest race in track and field. For instance, children from Tongnae county, South Kyŏngsang province, were asking how to participate in Olympic marathon races, and a twelve-year-old boy from Kangwŏn province boldly declared that he would be a future Kim Ŭnbae after flinging down the gauntlet to adult athletes in a local marathon.

A new way of looking at boxing, an emerging sport in the late 1920s, also came to the fore. Formerly dismissed as a sport for street hoodlums, Hwang Ŭlsu’s participation in the 1932 Olympics changed perceptions. Members of the Korean Boxing Club increased from a few score in 1928 to five hundred in 1934. Tongyang Boxing Hall established in 1935 was swamped with trainees, including children as young as twelve and thirteen and letters asking about becoming a trainee both from the local area and all

---

154 Mael sinbo, 16 September 1932; 17 September 1932.
155 Tonga ilbo, 21 October 1933.
156 Tonga ilbo, 8 December 1933; 2 June 1933.
over Kyŏngsŏng every day.\footnote{158} After Hwang’s participation in the Olympics, children and rural farmers fought in a manner emulating boxers.\footnote{159} As the Chosŏn ilbo was clamoring, men had to know boxing to be modern and “[b]oxing definitely holds the premier position among sports since 1933.”\footnote{160}

Discontent with the First Olympics

As much as international success in sporting events such as the Olympic Games could become a symbol of a nation’s virility, poor results often produced disappointment and frustration. The final result of Japanese marathon team—Tsuda (fifth), Kim (sixth), and Kwŏn (ninth)—disappointed Japanese sports fans. As Kishi Seiichi (1867–1933), president of the Japan Amateur Sports Association, mentioned with regret, Japanese track and field team had to focus on long distance running given Japanese athletes’ inferior physical condition vis-à-vis foreign counterparts in the short and middle distance races and throwing sports. The two Japanese marathon runners, Yamada Kanematsu and Tsuda had taken fourth and sixth place at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games. A year before the 1932 Summer Games, the Japan Amateur Sports Association sent Tsuda to Los Angeles to train and prepare hard for good result. Notwithstanding many efforts, the Japanese marathon community’s hope of reaching the Olympic podium crumbled to dust once again in 1932.\footnote{161}

\footnote{159} Tonga ilbo, 9 June 1935.
\footnote{160} Chosŏn ilbo, 12 January 1933; 1 January 1934.
\footnote{161} Kishi Seiichi, Dai 10 kai kokusai Orimupitsuku taikai ni tsuite (Tokyo: Dainihon taiiku kyŏkai, 1932), 18–19.
Even though it was Korea’s first participation in the Olympics, expectations were so high that they were not satisfied with just seeing Korean athletes in the Games but clamored for news of victory. Because Kim and Kwŏn beat top-notch Japanese marathon runners in the tryouts, the Korean mass media presented rosy prospects that the two Korean marathon athletes could win Olympic medals.\textsuperscript{162} Another piece of good news was that Paavo Nurmi, a clear favorite in the 1932 Olympic marathon, could not compete in Los Angeles because he had been banned by the IAAF in a dispute over his amateur status. The dream of a gold medal was realistic on the eve of the Games.\textsuperscript{163} Thus, the news of Kim’s sixth and Kwŏn’s ninth places disappointed many Korean fans.

The kernel of the question was who should take a full responsibility for the tactical failure of the three athletes in the Japanese marathon team: Kim, Kwŏn, or Tsuda? First, Tsuda argued that the original tactic for the Japanese team was to sprint at the last minute after chasing down the other competitors, but Kwŏn T’aeha did not heed this instruction and conceitedly went ahead too early. On this basis, Tsuda put the onus on Kwŏn for his recklessness, which he claimed had put him off his stride.\textsuperscript{164}


\textsuperscript{163} Between 1920 and 1928, he won a record nine Olympic gold medals and three silver medals in long-distance races, such as the 1,500 meter, 3,000 meter (team), 5,000 meter, 10,000 meter, steeplechase, and cross-country run.

\textsuperscript{164} Maeil sinbo, 10 August 1932.
Most Koreans blamed Tsuda’s passive race pacing strategy as preventing Kim’s dash for a better result.\textsuperscript{165} Facing Tsuda’s carping strictures, Kwŏn demurred at Tsuda’s pretext for anticlimax.\textsuperscript{166} Kim was too dejected by the result and had a grievance against Tsuda. At first, he blamed his own insufficient experience and knowledge of marathons for the poor achievement but later confessed that Tsuda had tried to use him as a pacemaker. It is not easy to tell who was right and wrong. All that is certain is that Tsuda, who had already participated in the 1928 Olympics, had the authority to give Kwŏn and Kim strategic directions, but he went beyond his commission from the Korean perspective.

\textsuperscript{165} Tonga ilbo, 10 August 1932.  
\textsuperscript{166} Tonga ilbo, 1 January 1936.
Hwang Ŭlsu was placed in more difficult circumstances than either Kwôn or Kim. In spite of his firm determination, he lost to Franz Kartz, a German boxer and went out of the tournament in the first round. In his letter to Tonga ilbo from Tokyo, he could not help feeling sorry for the Korean fans who had given him their full material and emotional support.\textsuperscript{167} He expounded his state of mind, saying that he would be willing to become an object of ridicule as long as Koreans understand that he gave his all in his fights.\textsuperscript{168} As Coubertin argued, “The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning, but taking part.”\textsuperscript{169} However, nothing could free him from the pressure he felt due to his poor performance. Allegedly, after the Japanese Olympic team returned home, Hwang stayed in Tokyo for about three months because of his injury and came back to Korea in December of the same year. The disappointing outcome must have made him choose a belated homecoming.

As mentioned above, marathon and boxing became the focus of Korean sports in colonial Korea due to the three Olympic athletes, but many treated the two sports with disdain, largely underpinned by social distinctions. Social class is one of the most important influences on predilections for and participation in specific sports. After its introduction in the 1890s in the United States, the marathon became the sport of blue-collar athletes from minority groups such as the Irish, Italians, and Jews. Increasing numbers of working-class men had found recreation, identity, and even monetary gain in

\textsuperscript{167} Tonga ilbo, 11 September 1932.  
\textsuperscript{168} Tonga ilbo, 28 August 1932.  
\textsuperscript{169} David C. Young, The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 112.
marathon running. Similarly, boxing, having once been a predominantly middle class sport, particularly in English public schools, became primarily a working class sport around the world. A necessary precondition for boxing to take root and thrive was the existence of an impoverished working class population in industrialized urban towns since the nineteenth century. The majority of the boxers in the United States have been minorities the Irish, Jews, Italians, blacks, and Hispanics.

In addition, the winners of two sports in the Olympic Games were not from privileged class or nation in many cases. For instance, Ahmed Boughèra El Ouafi (1898–1959) from Algeria (representing France) in 1928 and Juan Carlos Zabala (1911–1983), invariably labeled the “20-year-old Argentine newsboy,” won Olympic gold in the marathon in 1932. Medals for boxing in the 1932 Olympics went to marginal nations in the sports world, such as South Africa and the Philippines. In this sense, the first Korean marathoners and boxer in the Olympics symbolized the poor condition of Korean society rather than Korean national physical strength. Winning athletes in these sports came from lower socioeconomic strata and the periphery of the sports world. The following comment by an anonymous reader of the Tonga ilbo reveals the skeptical views on Korean athletes’ participation in the marathon and boxing of the 1932 Games: “A

---

naysayer for the Olympics lamented that other nations fight with guns and swords. However, Koreans, lacking even kitchen knives, penknives, and firecrackers, are necessarily good at fistfighting. According to this logic, are we only good at running for want of airplanes?

In colonial Korea, some intellectuals, if not many, were skeptical of the Olympic Games’ claim to epitomize fair play and amateurism. For instance, *Samch’ölli*, a Korean-language popular magazine, reported that a civic group sent a questionnaire to ask the *Tonga ilbo* why it was so crazy about Kim Ŭnbae and the Olympics. The *Tonga ilbo* replied as follows: “We did that solely for the spirit of sports.” *Samc’ölli*’s cynical article probably was intended to reveal that the *Tonga ilbo*’s nationalism was thinly disguised vulgar commercialism. In addition, Yi T’aejun (1904–n.d.), a famous writer of the colonial era, counterposed undue concern for a few Olympic athletes with the ordinary mass of laborers who are never in the public eye:

Some people make a living or perform a glorious deed with their feet. The mailman or willowing-machine worker. People of that ilk depend on their feet for a living, and these days the Olympic athletes are attracting a great attention around the world. They render great services not only for themselves but also for the nation using their feet. These feet are particularly worthy of gratitude but most of all, the willowing-machine worker’s feet are so thankful that I am in tears. Their feet are not treated very carefully, while a minor injury to the feet of Olympic athletes bring medical doctors and sympathetic tears and telegrams of encouragement right after the sad news are transferred to the homeland by a wireless telegraph and called “honorable injury.” In spite of working hard enough to get cramped, their feet take a rest in the patchwork quilt with socks without anyone’s patting…. The difference is reasonable because one is only in charge of a household’s livelihood, while the other assumes an honor of a nation, but the effort of the willowing-machine worker is very desolate compared to that of the Olympians. Thus, I feel more compassion and thankful for willowing-machine workers’ feet. Lonely effort! Hidden remarkable activity!

---

172 *Tonga ilbo*, 22 June 1932.
173 “Chongno negŏri,” *Samch’ölli* (December 1932): 41. On the other hand, *Chosŏn ilbo* ran no articles on three Korean athletes during the Olympic Games.
Concealed virtue! There is nothing that makes me more tearfully thankful.174

Such critics regarded the Olympic Games as a luxury for poor colonial Korea, which lacked the resources to disseminate sports nationwide. Many intellectuals in Korea’s physical education and medical circles differentiated an elite sphere of competitive sports for the privileged from public health for the masses who lacked the time and money to do sports. In this context, calisthenics drew the most attention from the supporters of physical activities for the masses. Often triggered by military defeat, the primary form of physical education and recreation on the European continent were noncompetitive, collective gymnastic activities unlike England’s “sports,” which aimed to instill moral and patriotic values. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852) saw Turnen as the best way to chase Napoleon’s French troops out of the Rhine Valley, and the Slavs resorted to Sokol Movement to extract themselves from the political yokes of German and Austrian rule.175 Similarly, passion for gymnastic exercises excited many of the Korean nationalists who were critical of fostering small numbers of elite athletes.

Colonial Korea saw a gymnastics boom when Niels Bukh (1880–1950), a Danish gymnast and educator, visited one year before the 1932 Games.176 In 1931, during Bukh’s world tour of Danish gymnastics from the Soviet Union to the Japanese empire to North America, the Japanese empire lionized his troupe. In particular, Bukh’s team drew the largest crowds, with 30,000 to 35,000 spectators in Kyŏngsŏng. In fact, he was passionate

about Japan’s becoming a militarist and imperialist state, in accord with his later fascination with Nazi Germany, South American dictatorships, and white-dominated South Africa. Later, as part of the general militarization of Japanese society, Bukh’s gymnastics gained ground in Japan in the 1930s through radio gymnastics, company gymnastics, a warm-up program for sports, and in official curricula for school gymnastics.177

Bukh’s gymnastics left a deep impression on Korean medical doctors and physical educators who were oriented towards the masses. Yi Yongsŏl (1895–1993), a professor at Severance Medical College, claimed that gymnastics rather than sports such as baseball, softball, tennis, or football were easier to disseminate and had proved their health benefits since Denmark’s life expectancy was twenty years longer than Korea’s average of 30.178 Kim Poyŏng, an executive secretary of the Korean Physical Education Research Institute (Chosŏn ch’eyuk yŏn’guhoe), which was organized by physical education instructors, also maintained that it should not be Korea’s priority to raise world-class athletes for the Olympics considering the small number of students and athletes and shortage of sports facilities. Collective physical exercise should be practiced by ordinary people for a variety of reasons: it is safe, good for the whole body, and not limited by time, place, or facilities.179

In a similar vein, Yu Sanggyu (1897–1936), an independence activist and

surgeon, was skeptical about the benefits of the Olympics for colonial Korea. From his perspective, even though most media and sports organizations were making a great fuss about Korean players’ participation in the 1932 Olympics, this was just hollow pageantry and in no way mitigated the fact that most Koreans were suffering from hunger and disease. Korea was overly steeped in Olympic fever, and this heroism had devolved the land into nothing more than “a psychiatric hospital with mental patients.” The most pressing issue, he continued, in Korea replete with people suffering from conditions such as knock knees, crooked backs and asthma among others, was to disseminate calisthenics, which everyone could do anywhere and anytime at almost no cost. The Olympics were a party for superpowers such as Japan or the United States but were incongruous for Korea, which was awash with paupers.180 For intellectuals such as Yu, gaining the reverence of the world’s powers in the realm of international competition had little meaning for the majority of the Korean population, who lacked access to expensive and time-consuming competitive sports.

Summation

Allegedly, the city-states of Ancient Greece welcomed Olympic winners after demolishing their ramparts because having Olympic winners proved that they could defend themselves without castles. Just before the marathon in the 1932 Olympics, in which the tension and anticipation of the Korean runners came to a climax, the Tonga

*ilbo* introduced this ancient Greek welcoming ceremony for the winners by declaring:

“Our castle has already been torn down, so we are fully ready to let you [Korean athletes] march through town in a victory parade.”\(^{181}\) Although Japan had wrecked the castle, Korea, more than two decades ago, Koreans kept imagining Korea as a true nation eligible for international competition in the hope of restoring its sovereignty. Under the Japanese colonial regime, Koreans were not interested in Olympism seeking world peace through sports, but were eager to see their athletes standing on the victory platform.\(^ {182}\)

The Olympics did not always serve as a catalyst for national unity of colonial Korea. A variety of actors—athletes, reporters, nationalist leaders, Korean immigrants in the United States, and supporters of mass-oriented gymnastics, among others—participated in and observed the Olympics from various perspectives. Although most Koreans hoped that the vitality gained from sports would be able to help revive the sagging spirit of the jaded Korean peninsula, what the Olympics meant and how to best represent colonial Korea in the Games remained a contentious issue to Koreans of every political hue.

\(^{181}\) *Tonga ilbo*, 8 August 1932.

\(^ {182}\) The 1932 Olympic Games were the first Games with proper victory ceremonies like today, as medal winners stood on a podium and had their national flags risen while the victor’s national anthem played.
Chapter 3. The 1936 Berlin Olympic Trials and Colonial Korea

The sports included in the Olympics, from their beginning to the present, have changed quite often due to politics among nations and global sports behemoths. The first modern Olympics in 1896 featured nine sports, but the most recent summer Olympics in 2012 in London showcased twenty-eight. Some sports have kept their positions since the first Games. Some have been added to the Games but then excluded with no apparent prospect of reinstatement while others have been excluded temporarily but later reinstated.\(^{183}\)

Football, one of the most popular sports around the world, was the last case among the Olympic sports. First included in the 1900 Olympic Games, the sport has been played at every Olympics since, except for the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. FIFA–IOC disagreements pertaining to broken-time payments (compensation for loss of earnings while attending the Games) could not find middle ground and the IOC meeting at Barcelona in 1931 excluded football from the 1932 program. The IOC received support of the powerful IAAF, with its firm adherence to a strict code of amateurism. FIFA did not want anything to detract from the luster of the World Cup, the first of which had taken place in 1930 with the best professional players.\(^{184}\) The American organizers made the American version of football a demonstration sport in the land of gridiron as a one-

---

\(^{183}\) For instance, one of the keenly contested sports at every Olympics from 1900 to 1920 was “tug of war.”

time Olympic sideshow that failed to draw any worldwide attention. Meanwhile, German organizers successfully lobbied for football to be reinstated for the Berlin Games for money: football was one sport guaranteed to fill stadiums, having generated one-third of the total admission receipts in the 1928 Amsterdam Games. In 1935, at the 34th IOC Session in March in Oslo, it was announced that a football tournament would be staged for the Games in Berlin in 1936, since FIFA had accepted the IOC’s rules concerning amateurism.

Football’s return to the Olympics and the Japanese football community’s decision to participate for the first time was big news in colonial Korea’s sports world. Football was unparalleled in popularity among any other Western sports in Korea. In addition, Koreans expected many Korean footballers to be selected as Japanese national team athletes for the Nazi Games. Contrary to Korea, Japanese football did not gain significant popularity during the interwar era. While Korean athletes were inferior to Japanese counterparts in most sporting events during the colonial period, they were dominating their colonizer in football matches.

All the same, sports in colonial Korea were not always conducive to shaping collective national consciousness. Numerous embroilments due to violent athletes, controversial judgments, illegal players, and hooliganism, among other problems, were

---

plaguing various sports competitions. At this juncture, disputes abounded in sporting events such as intercollegiate athletics and in the local and the national sports festivals where most Koreans sought a vision of a harmonious Korean nation. On account of the variegated features of internal malaise lurking in the sports community of Korea, sports venues often afforded a battleground for fights among Koreans as well as between Koreans and the Japanese, resonating with a comment by Sugden and Alan Bairner: “It is a truism that all societies are divided. There are divisions between racial and ethnic groupings, between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, between men and women, adults and children, the healthy and the sick and so on. All of these, and numerous other divisions, impact on the world of sport.”

The conflict surrounding the football tryouts for the 1936 Berlin Games is just one case among the many sports scandals in colonial Korea. Many studies note the Japanese discrimination against Koreans during the tryouts. Only a few, however, have attempted to address the factionalism and incompetence of Korea’s football community surrounding the 1936 Berlin Olympic trials. This chapter examines the ambivalent role of Korean football, which both strengthened and debilitated Korean nationalism in the 1936 Olympic football trials. In spite of the excellent abilities of Korean football players, only one, Kim Yongsik, made it onto the Japanese national football team for the Nazi

Olympics, as the Japanese selection process was biased against the colonized. All the same, a dispute not only between Korea and Japan but also between Kyŏngsŏng and P’yŏngyang, the two largest cities in colonial Korea, over the question of who should represent Korea in the trials in Tokyo also deserves scrutiny. In addition, when the biased Japanese selection of football players rejected most of the Korean players who were better than their Japanese counterparts in the 1936 Olympics trials, the Korean football community could not come to an agreement on whether or not Korean football players should participate in the Olympics, regardless of the Japanese selection policies. The glorious nationalistic resistance against Japanese colonialism was to be juxtaposed with the dark aspect of internal struggle in Korean football.

Football: The Pride of Colonial Korea

Introduced in the late nineteenth century, it did not take long for football to take hold with Koreans. The burgeoning modern education institutions spread the seeds of football in and around the capital. In 1902, a football club was established at the Paejae School, the first Western-style secondary school in Korea. The Hansŏng Foreign Language School (Hansŏng oegugŏ hakkyo), which played an important role in teaching modern sports in Korea, provided a good football coach from France, Emil Martel, for students eager to learn the new game. The first exhibition football match was held in 1906 between the Korean Sports Club (Taehan ch’eyuk kurakpu) and the Hwangsŏng YMCA in Seoul. Before other ball games, such as baseball, basketball, and volleyball

190 Taehan ch’ukku hyŏphoe, Han’guk ch’ukku paengnyŏnsa (Seoul: Rasara, 1986), 142.
among others, took their first step, football played a special role in giving Koreans the confidence that they could catch up with other world powers in the near future, as the *Tongnip sinmun* stated:

> These days students in English class at the Foreign Language School learn how to play football, and they play it on the playground in the afternoon. Their running, enthusiasm for victory and a cheerful demeanor is a hundred times better than that of Japanese students and as good as that of American and English students. Judging by this, Koreans will be a race as competent as others across the world and certainly better than the Japanese if well-guided.¹⁹¹

Football’s high place in Korean sports can be explained by its widespread dissemination. During the twentieth century, football emerged as the world’s most popular team sport. The reasons for its success are not difficult to find. Certainly football has some essential components that have advanced its global diffusion. The sport has a particularly simple set of rules, and its basic equipment costs for players are relatively low since balls can be manufactured from bundles of rags or paper, if necessary.¹⁹² In a similar vein, Kim Wŏnt’ae, later a captain of Korean Football Club, aptly argued that football best suits Korea for several reasons. It is more entertaining than other sports with no equipment. Koreans can play football even in severe cold due to its dynamic character, while baseball players often wait for their turn at bat wearing thick coats. It is enough to have just one durable ball worth 10 yen for more than 22 people to play the game. Playing football enables Koreans to develop all parts of the body, especially the crooked legs caused by some traditional practices; most Korean babies are carried on their

¹⁹¹ *Tongnip sinmun*, 3 December 1896.
mothers’ back all the time with legs folded inside a baby carrier, and children should
often sit kneeling. Youngsters can enhance their spirit of cooperation by playing football,
which is a team sport unlike kendo or judo.\textsuperscript{193} For these reasons, football was a rapidly
and widely propagated sport, even in the most remote corners of the country.\textsuperscript{194}

Some intellectuals and sports writers argued that traditional physical activities
should be promoted to popularize sports in colonial Korea. Yi Kiryong claimed that while
only small numbers of students were able to enjoy most sports imported from the West,
the majority of the Korean population, in particular farmers in rural areas were familiar
with ssirŭm, the traditional Korean wrestling.\textsuperscript{195} The Tonga ilbo ran an article arguing
that ssirŭm should be a national sport since it was easy to teach and learn and develops
people’s entire body.\textsuperscript{196} In urban areas, though, ssirŭm gradually lost ground to the

\textsuperscript{194} Tonga ilbo, 28 June 1936.
\textsuperscript{196} Tonga ilbo, 5 January 1928.
modern, Western sports increasingly popular among students. Some tradition-oriented intellectuals placed a high premium on other traditional physical activities such as *kukkung* (traditional Korean archery), *sŏkchŏn* (stone fighting), and *t’aekkyŏn* (traditional Korean martial art), but none could seriously challenge football for the position of most popular Korean sport.

It is not entirely clear how football became the most popular sport in colonial Korea under the heel of American or Japanese imperialism, neither of which favored the sport. In fact, in Korea, football became more popular than baseball, the top sport in both the United States and Japan at the time. Football secured the dominant position not only in Europe but also in Africa and South America due to the extensive influence of British colonialism. In some colonies of the British Empire—namely Australia, India, and Pakistan—football was not the most popular sports, as other British sports such as cricket or rugby were the number one sports, following their imperial metropolis. In spite of America and Japan’s heavy influence on Korean sports, Korea chose a different trajectory from those of other colonies such as the Philippines and Taiwan where baseball became popular. General opinion has it that Korea’s baseball community collapsed without producing highly promising high ordinary school athletes. In Korea’s poor

---

197 *Tonga ilbo*, 17 February 1930. Since the early twentieth century, there had been serious debates surrounding Wushu in China. The pro-tradition side argued that China should restore national dignity by promoting traditional Chinese sport, while anti-traditionalists argued that China should follow the Western sport model. See Lu Zhouxiang and Fan Hong, *Nationalism and Sport in China*, 74–77.

economic situation, baseball, which requires expensive sports equipment, could not develop or even maintain a status quo.  

The 1920s saw Korean football taking a leap forward in administrative capacities and football skill. The shift of Japanese colonial policy from harsh military rule to a more lenient cultural one after the massive March First Movement in 1919 gave some momentum for the Korean sports community to organize the Korean Sports Association, which held the inaugural national football tournament in 1921. Subsequently, myriad football tournaments supported by local sports associations and newspaper companies were held every year with players ranging from ordinary school students to adult athletes. Not only domestic matches but also international matches with teams from China, Japan, and Manchuria brought large Korean crowds to football fields. In the main football events of the 1920s, the Korean Football Club recorded four wins out of six matches against football teams in Shanghai, which was considered the powerhouse of Asian football in 1928. Korea dominated Japan in football, defeating leading Japanese football clubs such as the Osaka Football Club and the Rijō Shūkyū Club. Waseda University, the team representing Japan in the 1927 Far Eastern Championship Games, lost to the Korean Football Club by three goals to one, and to Yŏnhŭi College 4-0. As Yi Kiryong noted, these victories confirmed a firm belief that football is the ideal sport for Koreans.

---

199 Kim T’aeho, “Undong sip’yŏng,” 72–74. The price of the cheapest baseball glove or two bats was the same as that of a bag of rice (weighing around 80 kg), and all sporting goods were Japanese imports. See Taehan Yagu Hyŏphoe, Han’guk yagusŏ, 18.
200 Taehan ch’ukku hyŏphoe, Han’guk ch’ukku paengnyŏnsa, 189–96.
201 Yi Kiryong, Suhwak manhŭn illyŏn iyŏta, kŭmnyŏn illyŏn Chosŏn saram ŭi saenghwal ŭn ottŏha yŏnna, yŏrŏ pangmyŏn ŭro moa pon changnyŏn kwa kŭmnyŏn ŭi pigyo,” Pyŏlgŏn’gon (December 1927): 157.
Younger Korean footballers from Sungsil High Ordinary School (Sungsil kodŭng pot’ong hakkyo) in P’yŏngyang went to Osaka in 1928 and won the All-Japan High School Football Tournament.202

Goksoyr suggests that one of the crucial conditions for the status of a “national sport” is “how well the country has been doing in [that] international sport.”203 If not competing at the highest levels internationally, the strong performances of Korean teams won football its stature as the “national sport” (kukki) in colonial Korea in the late 1920s. As Pyŏn aptly points out, in the struggle for recognition on the international stage, Koreans sought to endow football as a national sport since it played a significant role in boosting Korean confidence in the face of the world powers.204 Korean football teams won consecutive victories over foreign teams (in particular, the Japanese), and for many Koreans these triumphs confirmed football’s role as the national sport, regaling Korean fans with thrilling performances. Of course, improving Korean athletes also began to defeat their Japanese counterparts in sports such as track and field, boxing, and basketball, but never as surely as they did in football. In sports history, it has rarely been possible for the colonized to surpass the colonizer in sports, and Korean football is a rare case. The special affection towards and pride in football were enticing a wide swath of Korean sports fans well before the Berlin Olympics, as reported in the Tonga ilbo:

“Football, with the longest history and a considerable strides, has been best suited to

202 Tonga ilbo, 10 January 1928; Chungoe ilbo, 9 January 1928.
Korea and Koreans. As our football clubs won consecutive victories over formidable nemeses from outside, the sport is recently internationalized and furthermore, became dignified as Korea’s national game." 205

The Emerging Rivalry between FC Kyŏngsŏng and FC P’yŏngyang

The Korean football community had a variety of problems as did many other sports, since disputes in connection with football were frequent in proportion to its popularity. As Yi Kiryong mentioned, even though Korean football had been widely disseminated, recurrent clashes associated with the game became a grave concern for most fans in the Korean sports community. 206 Most of all, compared to contemporary disputes in other sports, Korean football had a more serious, peculiar bane: regional rivalry between the “Kiho region,” that is Kyŏngsŏng and the vicinity, and the P’yŏngyan region centered around P’yŏngyang.

The history of football at the club level is a story of rivalries and oppositions that are too numerous to mention by name. The game provided a ready conduit for the expression of deeper social and cultural antagonisms that are present everywhere. 207 The origin of rivalry games, usually called “derby matches,” is complex, including issues of location, class, race, history, religion, and political orientation among others. For

205 Tonga ilbo, 31 October 1927.
207 For instance, Armstrong and Giulianotti’s book covers the case of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), the European continent (Italy, Hungary, the Basque region, Norway, and Malta), Africa (Cameroon and Mauritius), the Middle East (Yemen), Central Asia (India), Latin America (Argentina and Mexico), and Australia. See Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti, Fear and Loathing in World Football (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
instance, the Old Firm derby in the city of Glasgow between Celtic FC (Irish Catholic) and Rangers FC (Scottish Protestant) is one of the oldest in the world. The fiercest derby in football history between Real Madrid C.F. and FC Barcelona, dubbed El Clásico, is a proxy battlefield that represents the persisting sentiments of Spanish nationalism (Madrid, Castille) versus separatism (Barcelona, Catalonia). The Turin derby in Italy between Torino FC and Juventus FC is entangled with the class divide. Juventus is “the team of gentlemen, industrial pioneers, Jesuits, conservatives and the wealthy bourgeois,” while Torino is “the team of the working class, migrant workers from the provinces or neighboring countries, the lower middle-class and the poor.” South America, another football powerhouse, also has many ferocious derby matches including the Superclásico between the Buenos Aires rivals; Rio Plata’s support traditionally comes from the high-fliers, while the Boca Juniors supporters tend to come from the working classes and migrant communities.\(^{208}\)

The Kyŏngsong–P’yŏngyang rivalry seems to fall under the category of a rivalry between the nation’s two biggest cities. For comparative perspective, the derby match in the Netherlands called the *Klassieker* (the Classic) between Ajax of Amsterdam and Feyenoord of Rotterdam, which remains the most important match on the Dutch footballing calendar, is noteworthy. Since the 1920s, rival matches between Holland’s two largest cities have been accompanied by hooliganism and have not been just a footballing clash but also a clash of different cultures and attitudes. Rotterdam is the industrial heartland of Holland, while Amsterdam is its tourist magnet and cultural

---

capital. Thus, the popular clichés commonly articulate the clash based on the prevailing images of both cities: “Feyenoord’s hard workers versus the sophisticated, technical game of Ajax.” Politically, the cities vary, with Amsterdam liberal to socialist, whereas Rotterdam has more right-wing voters. The rivalry between the two cities shows “second city syndrome”: the less successful city’s antagonism (Rotterdam) against the dominant counterpart (Amsterdam). In comparison, P’yŏngyang’s adverse historical experience as the second city in colonial Korea was more intense than Rotterdam.

Above all, a collective history of the antagonistic relationship between the two regions sustained the football rivalry. In the Chosŏn period, the central government and the establishment in the Kiho region centered in Hansŏng (present-day Seoul) discriminated against P’yŏngan province. The central government tended to see the north with its relatively low productivity land as a territory of military outposts. The policy of relocating people of meager means from the south to the north to populate the frontier region ruined the image of this area. More mixed than other parts of the peninsula, the northern population earned a raffish reputation with no yangban, the ruling class of Chosŏn Korea. Thus, the central and southern provinces saw the north as a distant and barren area with a lack of Neo-Confucian culture. In this atmosphere, even the most talented northerners could not attain the highest, most important posts (senior third rank and above, known as the tangsanggwan), notwithstanding the sharp increase in the number of successful candidates for the civil service examination (munkwa). The

---

antipathy spawned by regional discrimination did not remain limited to the elite unable to rise to a high rank, and the people of the region from all walks of life internalized the sentiment as demonstrated by the 1812 Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion.\textsuperscript{211}

Ironically, discrimination contributed to unforeseen development of this region beginning in the late Chosŏn period. The invasion by Qing China in 1627 and again in 1637 ended with Korea’s transfer of its allegiance as a vassal from the declining Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the rising Qing dynasty (1616–1912). After the war, the stable tributary relationship between the Qing and Chosŏn brought peace in northern provinces of Korea. The relative weakness of the traditional ruling order and ideology in this region facilitated the development of commerce, in particular active trade with Qing China.\textsuperscript{212}

More importantly, many northerners whose sense of a stake in the Chosŏn sociopolitical order evidently was not strong were receptive to Anglo-American institutions and thoughts, including Protestantism, when Western imperialism hit Korea in the late nineteenth century. The northerners found Protestantism appealing for its messages of love, equality for all, and the sacredness of labor. Commoner self-governance in P’yŏngan province tried to foster new modern individuals and an autonomous civil society free from state interference. As a result, along with Hansŏng (colonial Korea’s Kyŏngsŏng), P’yŏngyang became an early epicenter of Protestantism and Western

\textsuperscript{211} Sun Joo Kim, Marginality and Subversion in Korea: The Hong Kyŏngnae Rebellion of 1812 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); O Such’ang, Chosŏn hugi P’yŏngando sahoe palchŏn yŏn’gu (Seoul: Ichogak, 2002).

culture in Korea.\textsuperscript{213}

The collapse of an existing order dominated by the Kiho region since the twilight of the Chosŏn dynasty gave new opportunities for upward mobility to marginalized groups such as the elite of P’yŏngyan province.\textsuperscript{214} Even when Japan had become a common enemy of the Korean nation, the people of P’yŏngyan province did not forget the earlier discrimination by the Kiho region and challenged Kiho’s dominance over Korean society at home and abroad. An Ch’angho from P’yŏngyan province and Rhee Syngman based in Kiho, arguably the two most prominent national leaders during the colonial period, vied for leadership of the Korean independence movement abroad in Shanghai, Manchuria, Primorsky Krai, and even far-flung places such as the United States.\textsuperscript{215} The Corps for the Advancement of Scholars (Hŭngsadan) led by An Ch’angho clashed with Rhee Syngman’s Comrade Society abroad. On the domestic front, in conjunction with the overseas feud between An and Rhee, the Self-Perfection Fraternal Association (Suyang tonguhoe), mainly consisting of people from P’yŏngan province, confronted the Promotion of Industries Club (Hŭngŏp Kurakpu), led mostly by those from Kyŏngsŏng and its vicinity. Disputes between conservative Presbyterians from P’yŏngyan province and liberal Methodists from Kyŏnggi province centered in Kyŏngsŏng became endemic.\textsuperscript{216} Regionalism affected even the journalism community.

\textsuperscript{213} Kyung Moon Hwang, \textit{Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), Chap 6.
\textsuperscript{215} Yun Taewŏn, \textit{Sanghae sigi Taehan min’guk imsi chŏngbu yŏn’gu} (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2006).
Pang Êngmo (1883–1950?) from Chôngju, P’yôngyan region, who gained sudden wealth thanks to a Kyodong gold mine, took over the Chosôn ilbo in 1933 after it ran into financial difficulties, and built a P’yôngyan-based faction, luring a number of fellow provincials away from the Tonga ilbo.217

Against the backdrop of regional conflict, the fierce football rivalry between the two cities began as early as the 1910s. Kim Sŏngŏp (1886–1965), an anti-Japanese activist as a member of Corps for the Advancement of Scholars, recalled that the football rivalry had existed since the P’yôngyang-based Taesŏng School (1908–1912) had its football club.218 The rivalry between the two cities animated their first official meeting on the football field in the first All-Korean Football Tournament in February 1921 under the auspices of the Korean Sports Association. During the match between All-Sungsil School Team from P’yôngyang and Paejae Club from Kyŏngsŏng, the pro-P’yôngyang crowd, discontent with the referee’s decisions, became unruly, leading to a brawl. Finally, Ko Wŏnhun, then chairman of the Korean Sports Association, had to discontinue the competition, lamenting: “The reason why this tournament came to a halt is nothing but regional conflict.”219 The fight between the two cities broke out in another All-Korean Football Tournament hosted by P’yôngyang YMCA in May 1921, only months after the mishap in Kyŏngsŏng. The diary of Yun Ch’iho (1865–1945) accurately recorded the football tournament, including how the game between the Young Men’s Buddhist Association from Kyŏngsŏng and All-Sungsil School Team from P’yôngyang ended in

219 Maeil sinbo, 16 February 1921.
violence. He bemoaned the deep-rooted regionalism hampering Korean unity:

….When the Pyong Yang [P’yŏngyang] team saw that they were going to be beaten they and their friends, the Pyong Yang [P’yŏngyang] people rushed the referee Hyŏn [Hyŏn Hongun], stopped him, stoned him and shouted to kill the man from Seoul. The police had to draw their pistols to protect the referee and barely saved him from the infuriated mob. What a sad comment on the patriotism of the Pyong Yang [P’yŏngyang] people! To invite people to their city and then pelt them with stones—striking the referee, trying to kill him! Yi Pyong Sam [Yi Pyŏngsam] who used to be a physical director in Seoul Y. and who acted as co-referee with Hyŏn made no efforts to pacify the fury of his people, but slipped off when the storm broke out. The meanness of the Pyong Yang [P’yŏngyang] people on this occasion beggars description. During the five centuries of the Yi Dynasty, the people of [the] Northwestern provinces [P’yŏngan, Hwanghae, and Hamgyŏng] were placed under political disqualifications and subjected to humiliating discrimination. That the North Westerners had a just cause for hating the Southern Koreans—especially those of the ruling caste—goes without saying. But is this the time to harbor and practice the spirit of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth in a plan for revenge? If everybody wants to get even with their enemies in Korea, when shall we ever become a united race?220

The official Kyŏngsŏng–P’yŏngyang Annual Football Match held in 1929–1930 and then 1933–1935 was one of the most popular and ferocious football events in colonial Korea. This historic football series was not initially intended to foment conflict between the two cities. Instead, the competition was intended to promote amity between the two cities and demonstrate the ability of Korea as a nation.221 Before long, however, the football stadium during a game frequently became a seething cauldron of extreme emotion, and clashes between fans or players from the two cities precipitated by rough play and arguments over referee decisions regularly marred the matches. Although it was the most popular football event, contributing to rapid development of Korean football, the then current opinion was that the uproarious Kyŏngsŏng–P’yŏngyang Annual Football

---

220 Yun Ch’iho, *Yun Ch’iho ilgi*, vol. 8 (June 4 1921) (Seoul: T’amgudang, 1986), 264–65.
221 *Chosŏn ilbo*, 7 October 1929.
Match was aggravating the rift between the two cities, and it ended in 1935 for this reason.²²²

When football, which had not been included in the 1932 Olympic Games, was reinstated for the 1936 Olympics, vociferous Korean football fans naturally welcomed the news with open arms, eager to see their football players show off their ability before a world audience.²²³ The road to Berlin, though, was not smooth, even in the initial stage, when colonial Korea had to select Korean players to compete with Japanese local teams in the Olympic trials held in Tokyo. Due to predictable squabbling between Kyŏngsŏng and P’yŏngyang, the Olympic football trials got off to a shaky start well before any match with a Japanese team.

The Dispute over Who Should Represent Colonial Korea in the Trials

As soon as football was adopted as a formal game for the 1936 Olympics, the Japan Football Association (hereafter JFA) began player selection for the first Japanese Olympic football team. The main idea of the JFA’s selection policy was to organize a national team by drawing most of its members from one single local team or provincial football association for two reasons. First, the so-called pickup team, comprising the best players in each position from various teams, did not do well in the 1934 Far Eastern Championship Games. Second, it was difficult to arrange for players from different parts

²²² Pak Kyŏngho and Kim Tŏkki, Han’guk ch’ukku paeknyŏn pisa (Seoul: Ch’aek ingnŭn saramdŭl, 2000), 87.
²²³ Tonga ilbo, 2 March 1935.
Thus, the JFA decided to conduct local qualifying rounds in each region, including the colonies, Korea and Taiwan. Subsequently, the much-anticipated final tryouts among the local representatives were supposed to be held three times in Tokyo (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tournament</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Final</th>
<th>Winning Team (Score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All-Japan Football Championship Tournament</td>
<td>June 1935</td>
<td>FC Kyŏngsŏng (Korea) vs. Tokyo College of Arts and Sciences (Kantō)</td>
<td>FC Kyŏngsŏng (6-1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meiji Shrine Games</td>
<td>November 1935</td>
<td>FC Kyŏngsŏng (Korea) vs. Keio University BRB (Kantō)</td>
<td>FC Kyŏngsŏng (2-0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kantō-Kansai Annual Football Match</td>
<td>December 1935</td>
<td>Waseda University (Kantō) vs. Kwansei Gakuin University (Kansai)</td>
<td>Waseda University (12-2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Football Team Tryouts in Tokyo for the 1936 Olympics

Prior to tryouts held in Japan, the first task before the Korean Football Association (hereafter KFA) was to organize the best Korean team, including players of Kyŏngsŏng and P’yŏngyang. Before the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament, a column in the *Tonga ilbo* noted that the rivalry between the two cities’ football communities was a serious obstacle to forming an All-star Korean team for the All-Japan

---

Football Championship Tournament in 1935. Korean football could not become active on a world stage in the same way as marathon running, boxing, and speed skating unless representatives of the two cities ended their discord and singled out the best players from the two cities, along with Ch’ŏngjin Football Club, a strong team from Hamgyŏng region.225 Yŏ Unhyŏng (1886–1947), a noted nationalist leader and then president of the KFA, was also keenly aware of this discord by this time. In March 1935, when FC P’yŏngyang was set to play in Shanghai, Yŏ exorted the two cities to come together in a congratulatory speech:

Let us talk about the power of unity. Our [football] players should live in harmony, saying things like, “It is okay” and “It is my fault.” Even when someone else makes a mistake, you should say, “Leave it to me” or “It is my fault.” Although other colleagues have messed up, readily acknowledging one’s own mistakes is good sportsmanship. In no way should we blame each other for what goes wrong. We should not say, “I did a good job, but why did you blunder?” You are from Kyŏnggi province, and I am from P’yŏngyang. Let [these] dashing boys surmount all difficulties with unity, abandoning this kind of regional conflict.226

As noted, a single college or club team was supposed to represent each region in the Japanese empire for the 1936 football tryouts held in Tokyo. At the behest of the JFA, the KFA held a preliminary round to pick a team to go to the final tryouts in Tokyo. The two top football teams founded in 1933, Kyŏngsŏng Football Club (hereafter FC Kyŏngsŏng) and P’yŏngyang Football Club (hereafter FC P’yŏngyang), competed with each other to be the representative team for colonial Korea. FC Kyŏngsŏng beat FC P’yŏngyang 1-0, earning the ticket to Tokyo. Regardless of the result of the game,

---

225 Tonga ilbo, 5 April 1935.
however, the KFA had a pickup team in mind. That is, it tried to send not just FC Kyŏngsŏng but an FC Kyŏngsŏng–FC P’yŏnyang joint team to secure the best result in Tokyo and announced a roster comprising the best players from the two teams with alacrity. JFA opposed this and only the FC Kyŏngsŏng players competed as the representative of colonial Korea in the final tryouts in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{227}

On the other hand, besides the JFA’s opposition to the KFA’s plan, internal conflict between Kyŏngsŏng and P’yŏnyang in the colonial Korean football community had negative effects on the plan to create the best Korean team. Before the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament in June 1935, the KFA planned to select five or six FC P’yŏnyang players as members of the Korean team made up of seventeen players.\textsuperscript{228} However, given the fact that players of the two teams had almost identical skill levels, this was a difficult assessment for FC P’yŏnyang to accept. In their view, the choice of players for the Korean team seemed completely arbitrary since Yi Yŏngmin (1905–1954), the captain of FC Kyŏngsŏng, chose many more members from his team, especially his maladroit protégés from Yŏnhŭi College. In the end, all the FC P’yŏnyang players except for Kim Sŏnggan refused to join the Kyŏngsŏng–P’yŏnyang joint team for the first 1936 Olympics football tryouts.\textsuperscript{229}

The selection for the Korean team triggered trouble again before the second tryout, the Meiji Shrine Games, in November. After the JFA called on the KFA to send the final roster of the Korean team for the competition, the KFA decided to include eight

\textsuperscript{227} Chosŏn ilbo, 25 May 1935.
\textsuperscript{228} Tonga ilbo, 23 May 1936.
\textsuperscript{229} Yun Kyŏnghŏn and Ch’oe Ch’angsìn, Kukki ch’ukku kŭ ch’allanhan ach’im (Seoul: Kungmin Ch’eyuk Chinhŭng Kongdan, 1997), 91.
players from FC P’yŏngyang for the 17-member Korean team, which was quite well-balanced between the two teams. Soon thereafter, a scurrilous rumor that most players from FC P’yŏngyang would only play as substitutes in the tournament sparked FC P’yŏngyang’s strong opposition. Hence, the FC P’yŏngyang players staying in Kyŏngsŏng to join FC Kyŏngsŏng declined to go to Japan for the Meiji Shrine Games and returned to P’yŏngyang. Ultimately, FC Kyŏngsŏng had only two players from FC P’yŏngyang, Kim Yŏngggŭn and Kim Sŏnggan, and had to play against Japanese teams without some of the best Korean players.

Although the nationalistic atmosphere was disturbed by the fight between FC Kyŏngsŏng and FC P’yŏngyang before the two trials, FC Kyŏngsŏng players confirmed their determination to beat the old foe, Japan, in the Korea–Japan games. The Korean fans’ expectations were so high that some players felt too much pressure. On the train heading to Pusan on the way to Tokyo for the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament, the Korean football athletes described their feelings as follows:

Hyŏn Chŏngju (Manager): The players are in good shape, and your [the public’s] resounding cheer will be a great encouragement to us as we cross the Korea Strait.

Yi Hyebong (Goalkeeper): Leaving Kyŏngsŏng station, several prominent figures grabbed my hand tightly and asked me not to permit even one goal so that I will be crowned with a laurel wreath. I became strong at heart to hear that and will put up a last-ditch fight until my bones are shattered into pieces. God bless us.

Yi Pongho: A heavy responsibility and great expectations forced me not to enjoy the natural beauty, which looks so beautiful…. That is right. We are soldiers. We are soldiers going to the battlefield without weapons…. I will demonstrate our Korean spirit, doing everything in my power and running until my blood dries

---

230 Tonga ilbo, 10 October 1935.
231 Yun Kyŏnghŏn and Ch’oe Ch’angsin, Kukki ch’ukku kŭ ch’allanhan ach’im, 92–93.
up.

Chŏng Yonymsu: I will fight with redoubled courage, even if it means losing my life….\textsuperscript{232}

Fortunately, FC Kyŏngsŏng was very successful. It won first place in the two tournaments in Japan, the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament (Picture 9) and the Meiji Shrine Games. FC Kyŏngsŏng pounded the representative teams from Kantō, the contemporary powerhouse of Japanese football, in the finals, beating both Tokyo College of Arts and Sciences and Keio University BRB. Since FC Kyŏngsŏng was not eligible to play in the Kantō–Kansai Annual Football Match, the two victories were the best FC Kyŏngsŏng could accomplish. Buoyed by these two wins, the Korean football community was excited by the prospect of many Korean players going to Berlin. As it turned out, they were under an illusion, since Japan had formalized discrimination against colonial Korea and would block Korean players from becoming members of the Japanese national team.

\textsuperscript{232} Chosŏn chungang ilbo, 1 June 1935.
Korea’s Division in the Face of Japanese Discrimination after the Trials

One of the most nefarious aspects of the 1936 Olympic trials and the related discrimination is about the Nazi regime, which excluded Jewish athletes from the German team. For instance, the noted female high jumper, Gretel Bergmann, was eliminated from the German team despite holding the German record, and other Jews could not demonstrate their usual level of ability because of intimidation and lack of access to facilities.233 Unarguably, Japanese discrimination against Koreans was not as dire as that of the Nazi’s against the Jews, as the goal of the Japanese empire was not so much to exterminate ethnic Koreans as to turn them into loyal second-class subjects. All the same, it was obvious that Korean football athletes were not on an equal footing with their Japanese counterparts in the tryouts and a line of demarcation between the colonizer and the colonized was clear.

Contrary to the sanguine prospect that a number of Korean football players would be going to Berlin, the JFA’s selection process did not favor FC Kyŏngsŏng. The Korean football community began to sense Tokyo’s biased attitude toward the selection process. Before the formal announcement, discussion rumbled on over the number of Korean players going to Berlin, and there was still some hope in colonial Korea that at least several Korean athletes would be selected by the JFA, since it asked the KFA for a background check on five players: Kim Yongsik, Kim Yŏnggŭn, Chŏng Yongsu, Ch’oe Sŏngson, and Pae Chongho.234 Yet, Chŏng Mungi, the director of the KFA, publicly

---

233 David Clay Large, Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936 (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 85–86.
234 Chosŏn ilbo, 5 December 1935.
voiced his concern about the rumor in the Japanese press that the JFA would not select many Korean players for the Japanese national team in the 1936 Olympics, putting more emphasis on the Kantō–Kansai Annual Football Match than the two tournaments in which FC Kyŏngsŏng had clinched the title. For one reason or another, the clannish JFA intended to pick a majority of players from Waseda University, the winner of the Kantō–Kansai Annual Football Match, in lieu of FC Kyŏngsŏng. No wonder JFA’s preposterous scheme, from the perspective of the KFA, provoked public indignation in Korea against the unfair selection process:

FC Kyŏngsŏng won two tournaments this spring and autumn, in the Olympic tryouts, with the speed of a whirlwind, so it is natural that Koreans should be the core of the Japanese national team. But the JFA committee in charge of selection does not seem to want to form a national team including Korean players in spite of their excellent performance. The JFA’s commentary on the Korean team, which proudly won the championship, focuses on its weaknesses instead of its strengths, claiming that the Korean team lacks brains and teamwork. The JFA clearly intended to use Waseda University, the leading team in the Tokyo student football community, as the centerpiece of the Japanese national team for the Olympics.

On top of this, the Japanese football community professed not to think highly of Korean team’s ability. For instance, Yamada Gorō, a Japanese football reporter, caviled at a lack of team chemistry and offensive power, while acknowledging that the FC Kyŏngsŏng players had excellent individual skills after the All-Japan Football Championship Tournament. In a similar vein, immediately following the Meiji Shrine Games, many, though by no means all, Japanese football critics cited poor teamwork on

---

235 Tonga ilbo, 15 December 1935.
236 Chosŏn ilbo, 1 January 1936.
the part of FC Kyŏngsŏng, suggesting that most Korean players would not be eligible for the Japanese squad of the 1936 Olympics. In fact, FC Kyŏngsŏng prevailed over the underdog, Hakodate Football Club, from Hokkaido, by a nose (2-1) in the second round and failed to overwhelm Keio University BRB from Kantō (2-0) in the final of the Meiji Shrine Games. As Yi Yŏngmin admitted, the Japanese team was much better than before technically, to the extent that FC Kyŏngsŏng had to focus on defense throughout the entire game. Indeed, the Korean team was not at its best without the talented P’yŏngyang players, as mentioned above, providing more fodder for the JFA’s underestimation of Korean players.

The JFA’s finalized roster for the Olympic football team was enough to frustrate the Korean football community. The ominous rumor was confirmed, as the JFA chose only two Koreans—Kim Yongsik and Kim Yŏnggŭn—for the first roster of twenty five players, which was replete with twenty-one Kantō players from Waseda University (12), the Tokyo College of Arts and Sciences (1), Keio University (4), and the University of Tokyo (4). The Kantō-dominant roster of sixteen players was fixed in the final roster for the Olympics after training camp. It included players from Waseda University (10), the University of Tokyo (3), the Tokyo College of Arts and Sciences (1), and Keio University (1). Kim Yongsik was the lone Korean.

The JFA’s decision was clearly biased against FC Kyŏngsŏng, was based on two nonsensical justifications. First, the JFA argued that Korean players did not demonstrate

---

238 Chosŏn ilbo, 5 December 1935.
239 Tonga ilbo, 5 November 1935.
240 Asahi shimbun, 11 March 1936.
241 Asahi shimbun, 23 April 1936.
prodigious talent during the two tournaments, studiously ignoring FC Kyŏngsŏng’s two victories. Even so, there was no plausible reason for Waseda University, which was demonstrably less capable than FC Kyŏngsŏng, to take a central role on the Japanese national team. Another excuse was that the JFA had already decided not to make the Korean team a main pillar of the Japanese national team on the nebulous grounds that the KFA had joined the JFA only recently. However, when the KFA, along with other Japanese local football associations, had attended a meeting held by the JFA in May 1935 to discuss the composition of a Japanese national football team, no such comment was to be heard. Without knowing all the details, the Korean football community had been lured into a misguided dream of going to Berlin.

The Kantō-centered decision grew into internal conflict between Kantō and Kansa. The Kansai football community flew into a rage at the JFA’s Olympic selection’s preference for its arch rival, Kantō. The Kansai Football Association issued a statement that the JFA, composed mostly of committee members from Kantō, had made an arbitrary selection in favor of their hometown, ignoring the Kansai region, which was just as talented as Kantō. Moreover, the Kansai Football Association cogently argued that this move was intended to radically restructure the Japanese football community and bring Kantō to dominance. Eventually, the Kansai players selected as Japanese national team members declined to join the training camp.

The rivalry between Kansai and Kantō was embedded in Japanese society and

---

242 Yomiuri shimbun, 11 March 1936.
243 Chosŏn chungang ilbo, 11 May 1935.
244 Asahi shimbun, 29 March 1936.
sports. Kantō, anchored by Tokyo, was truly the national power center as the capital and home of the leading political, economic, and cultural institutions. As the second city, Osaka in Kansai maintained a strong regional identity with its own dialect and reputation as a commercial hub and industrial center.\textsuperscript{245} During the interwar era, many East–West (Kantō–Kansai) sports competitions contributed significantly to local and regional identity formation, since many athletes played for their hometowns as well as schools or clubs.\textsuperscript{246} The regional rivalry is still dynamic, as the baseball games between Tokyo’s Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers with their large anti-Giants fan base in Kansai have shown since the league’s launch in 1936.\textsuperscript{247}

At all events, this conclusion was not tolerable to the Korean football community, but the problem was not simple. JFA’s unfair selection polarized the Korean football community into two camps, moderates and hardliners on whether the two Korean players selected by the JFA should join the Japanese national team despite their cold reception. First, FC Kyŏngsŏng, as a hardliner, opened fire on the JFA’s exclusion of Korean players. After an emergency session, it announced at an informal talk that FC Kyŏngsŏng would not allow Kim Yongsik or Kim Yŏnggŭn to join the Japanese national team, because the JFA had never acknowledged FC Kyŏngsŏng’s victory in the two


tournaments and had invited the two players without first consulting FC Kyŏngsŏng.\textsuperscript{248}

Even if they understood FC Kyŏngsŏng’s hardline stance, most of the leaders in the Korean football community reluctantly accepted the two players’ participation in Japanese team as a \textit{fait accompli}. Even the KFA was not outspoken in criticizing the JFA’s unfair decision and took up an equivocal position. They presumably feared that rash remonstrance against JFA would beget a cancellation of the selection of two Korean players ready for “the final battle,” or the Olympics, several months ahead: “Even though the KFA opened a meeting of board of directors with regard to this issue, various kinds of delicate matters lurked and are fundamental. Thus, we need to keep cautious and cool in a transition period in order to work towards the final battle.”\textsuperscript{249}

Embroiled in the controversy surrounding the idea of their participation as Japanese nationals, the two selected players themselves may have felt even more anxiety. In particular, Kim Yongsik, who became the only Korean football athlete to go to Berlin, allegedly was at first loath to join the Japanese national team, but decided after careful consideration to participate in the training camp for several reasons. Above all, as he had such a strong desire to be in the Olympics, he had participated in speed skating tryouts for the 1936 Winter Olympics.\textsuperscript{250} In addition, his well-known zeal to learn advanced skills from global football powerhouse nations led him to comply with the JFA’s biased selection.\textsuperscript{251} Thus, when his two teachers at Posŏng College, Hong Sŏngu and Ok Sŏnjin,
advised him that a great performance at the Olympics would be a way to win over the Japanese, he decided to join the training camp.252

Not all Koreans put a positive spin on the two Kims’ participation in the training camp in Japan, and their motives for joining the Japanese national team were held suspect. Many asked whether they were going to Japan for the sake of Korea or for personal honor as Olympians. Certain segments of the public supported FC Kyŏngsŏng’s boycott of the JFA’s Olympic selection and, accordingly lambasted the two athletes. For instance, in the Tonga ilbo, a long anonymous letter to the editor, in which the writer seemed to have an axe to grind, made scathing remarks on the two Korean footballers. Furthermore, it raised more fundamental questions on sports and elitism: why should elite sportsmen be treated better than ordinary people in sports? According to this article, the Olympic football trials featured depraved elite sports stars whose desires trumped those of the entire Korean community:

An Olympian becomes an object of envy. It is to the glory of the developing Korean sports community as well as of the two Mr. Kims that they were chosen as Olympic football players. Understanding what true sportsmanship involves, however, we want to have one player of high caliber rather than just sending more players, since the Olympics is a stage for every country or nation to demonstrate its amateurism and superior ability, that is, its national traits. With regard to Japan’s unfair selection of players, FC Kyŏngsŏng’s demand that the Olympic football team should be centered on the Korean team, winner of the two tournaments, was not unreasonable, and its refusal to send Korean players to the training camp was the right decision to take as a genuine sports team. We often see some players only seeking personal honor with reckless bravado and a superiority complex without sportsmanship. Are those two Kims the kind of players who would have joined the [Japanese] training camp even though their team has insightfully declined to send its players? If so, it is a disgrace to Korea and reveals the disadvantage of the Korean sports community, in which players only focus on physical ability and lack the team spirit needed for social life and being true sportsmen. From this day forward, I would like to cry out that the

252 Pak Kyŏngho and Kim Tŏkki, Han'guk ch'ukku paengnyŏn pisa, 65.
Korean sports community should not be engrossed in sending several players to the Olympics. Public health, the availability of sports to most people, and substantial mass training for eternal national prosperity are the most urgent issues, recalling the teachings of our elders at this moment.253

Notwithstanding the enthusiastic farewell ceremony, an embattled Kim Yongsik seemed to be keenly aware of some Koreans’ pessimistic view of his participation in the Olympics as a member of the Japanese team. Thus, he felt guilty about leaving his colleagues, who could not go to Berlin with him. He articulated a nationalistic motivation:

I am really sorry to go by myself, leaving my FC Kyŏngsŏng colleagues behind. But I will carry out my duty to the fullest and show our power and spirit on the world stage.254 These Olympics will be a good chance to test the abilities of Korean football, which have completely conquered the Japanese football community. I am going only to learn skills and tactics from countries that are advanced in football.255

After the 1936 Games, Koreans had a mixed view of his participation. The Olympic Games provided a precious opportunity for him to see top-class footballers from all over the world. Korean fans marveled at his excellent football skill that he learned from the Olympic Games. At the same time, much to his regret, he remained a target of a bitter diatribe for some time after his return from Berlin. For example, according to an article in Sinsegi, a popular magazine published in the colonial period, three years after the Berlin Olympics, “The Personality of the Sports Community” (Undonggye inmullon),” Kim’s participation epitomized the general malady of the Korean football

253 Tonga ilbo, 24 April 1936.
254 Tonga ilbo, 28 June 1936.
255 Chosŏn ilbo, 23 June 1936.
community which, albeit remarkable in skill, suffered from a lack of team spirit.\footnote{Ssangmuntongin [pseud.], “Undonggye inmullon,” Sinsegî (September 1939): 78–80.}

Besides such strong criticism from their compatriots, Kim Yongsik and Kim Yŏnggŭn had to cope with Japanese discrimination against them even after being selected as members of the Japanese national team. After much indecision, the two Korean players joined the Japanese national football team, but one of them, Kim Yŏnggŭn, left the training camp in preparation for the 1936 Olympics. The ostensible reason for his early withdrawal was that he had joined FC P’yŏngyang, going to Tianjin to play away games; however, his friction with the Japanese coach, who did not recognize his ability, was the more likely reason why he left the camp.\footnote{Pak Kyŏngho and Kim Tŏkki, Han’guk ch’akku paengnyŏn pisa, 49–52.} Many ebullient Korean football fans felt a sense of frustration at the bad news that Kim Yŏnggŭn was eliminated from the final roster, for he was beyond dispute the best Korean player. For Korean fans, his elimination undoubtedly attested to Japanese discrimination against Korean players during the trials and camp training.\footnote{Tonga ilbo, 13 June 1936.}

Kim Yongsik also resented the Japanese coach for not thinking highly of his talent. During the camp training, it seems that neither KFA functionaries nor Korean reporters had many opportunities to contact their JFA counterparts. Chŏng Sangyun (1908–1992), a basketball coach for Yŏnhŭi College and a reporter for the Chosŏn chungang ilbo, jumped at a rare opportunity to talk with Koichi Kudo, an assistant coach for the Japanese national football team, as a result of Kim Yongsik’s introduction when the train heading to Berlin with hundreds of Japanese national athletes passed through
Korea. Koichi’s excuse about Japanese discrimination against Korean players rubbed Chŏng the wrong way. In Chŏng’s view, there was not even a modicum of truth in Koichi’s underestimation of Kim Yongsik:

After greetings, when I asked about the selection of football players he [Koichi] spoke ambiguously, saying that, “The selection centering on Waseda University was JFA’s prearranged plan.” I did not want to ask more. But I asked about Kim Yongsik’s physical condition. He said that Kim Yongsik’s different style of play, like Kim Yŏnggūn’s, was a problem, and that it is hard to say whether he can be in the starting lineup in the Olympic Games, given the fact that he does not cooperate with the other players, even though we thought that he, as a halfback, would be getting better after the second or third training camp. His answer sounded plausible, but I took umbrage at his comment. I was sitting absent-mindedly in a foul mood and rose from my seat after saying goodbye to him halfheartedly.259

A lacklustre Japanese result in the Olympics further enraged the Korean football community. In the first round, the Japanese squad won one of the biggest upsets of the 1936 Olympic football tournament, defeating Sweden 3-2, and the Japanese media hailed this as “the miracle of Berlin.”260 In the second round, however, the Japanese team was shut out by Italy with a disappointing 8-0 score. In particular, Kim Yongsik’s bland performance resulted from teamwork issues and caused consternation to a good number of Korean football fans. In a belated effort, Yi Yŏngmin spoke publicly after the Olympics about Japanese discrimination in the tryouts and strongly argued that Japan’s ignominious defeat by Italy would not have happened if FC Kyŏngsŏng had led the Japanese national team.261

259 Chosŏn chungang ilbo, 25 June 1936.
261 Maeil sinbo, 8 January 1937.
Summation

Football has always been a hotbed of (invented) nationalism. In the wake of the Moscow Dinamo Football Club’s legendary tour in the United Kingdom right after the nationalist-inspired genocides of World War II, George Orwell wrote oft-cited words in an article entitled, “The Sporting Spirit.” His idea that serious sport is “war minus the shooting” was based on this observation about football:

If you wanted to add to the vast fund of ill-will existing in the world at this moment, you could hardly do it better than by a series of football matches between Jews and Arabs, Germans and Czechs, Indians and British, Russians and Poles, and Italians and Jugoslaws, each match to be watched by a mixed audience of 100,000 spectators. I do not, of course, suggest that sport is one of the main causes of international rivalry; big-scale sport is itself, I think, merely another effect of the causes that have produced nationalism. Still, you do make things worse by sending forth a team of eleven men, labeled as national champions, to do battle against some rival team, and allowing it to be felt on all sides that whichever nation is defeated will “lose face.”

In line with George Orwell, Hobsbawm argued: “The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself.”

Colonial Korea was an ideal venue for football to serve as catalyst for the invention of imagined community given the character of the game, the extent of its propagation, and resentment towards the colonizer. Today, the homepage of South Korea’s Korean Football Association comments that “During the decades of colonial rule by Japan, football contributed to alleviating the frustrations of the subjugated Koreans

---

and fostering the hope of liberation.” Football, festooned with appeals to national ideals, played a special role in colonial Korea’s nationalism. During the Japanese colonial rule, football became widely popular in Korean society, and Korean football teams regularly outplayed their sworn enemy in open competition, living up to Korean sports fans’ expectations. Ambitious Korean national leaders considered football a useful vehicle for militarizing Korean youth; for this reason, they actively promoted it as a national sport. According to them, the spirit of adventure and unity instilled by football could inspire the Korean youth to become soldiers as intrepid as their European counterparts, as shown by World War I.

Even so, the existence of the internecine squabbling inherent in the regionalism of the Korean community during the colonial period affected the football tryouts for the Olympics. The historically rooted intransigence of Kyŏngsŏng and P’yŏngyang stymied efforts at organizing the best Korean national team for the tryouts. Football as a national sport in colonial Korea was a source of both unity and division in Korean society, bespeaking the fragility of Korean nationalism at the time. Competing identities did not always allow national identity to be a top priority during the colonial period.

The Korean response to Japan’s unfair selection for 1936 Olympic football team reveal the limits of the Korean football community’s ability to pursue Korean nationalism through sports. Arguably, the presence of more Korean football players in the Olympic Games would have elevated the status of Korea, but all the same, under the Japanese flag,

it symbolizes the success of Japanese assimilation policy. After all, is Korea’s status indeed elevated if no one but Koreans recognizes Korean players as such? Deeming Korea still not ready for independence, Korean cultural nationalists stressed gradual reform based on western models, education, and economic development as a base for future independence under Japanese governance. Gradually estranged from the Korean masses, many of western- or Japanese-trained cultural nationalist would become loyal subjects of the Japanese empire. Within the colonial parameters, the Korean sports community sharing cultural nationalism with moderate nationalists played no part in subversion of the Japanese imperial system.

With the advantages of hindsight, the view that ascribes every problem in Korean sports to Japanese colonialism seems to be erroneous. After the Japanese colonial government rule ended in 1945, and Korean teams began showing up in international sports extravaganzas representing two independent Korean regimes, few Olympics have been free from controversy in connection with trials. The issue of Olympic football trials was, in part, not so much related to national unity as often mingled with the individual interests of a variety of actors, including football associations, teams, leading lights, fans, and players.

---

Chapter 4. A Consumed Hero: Son Kijŏng and Colonial Korea

The new sports-saturated transnational phenomenon of mass adulation surrounding outstanding athletes started to become the norm in many countries at the turn of the twentieth century. The 1920s marked the so-called “Golden Age of American Sport,” producing a number of extraordinary athletic heroes in virtually every sport: baseball, American football, tennis, golf, and the Olympics. They included Babe Ruth, Bill Tilden, and Jack Dempsey, to name a few.267 In Japan, as Frost points out, in addition to Western sports celebrities, an ever-increasing number of Japanese sports stars comparable or even superior to their foreign counterparts were coming into the spotlight, introduced by Japanese mass media. The period from the mid-1910s to the late 1930s marked “Japan’s own golden age of sports, an era of critical development in the institutionalization and popularization of sports.”268

As a part of the Japanese empire, colonial Korea also embraced the phenomenon. Korean mass media not only reported news about foreign sports stars based on mostly Japanese sources but also commonly ran feature articles about Korean athletes competing with foreign counterparts for the Korean public. In the 1910s, Ōm Poktong (1892–1951), a cyclist who excelled above his Japanese counterparts, emerged as the first sports hero for Koreans. Yi Yŏngmin (1905–1954), a renowned baseball player, achieved great fame, in particular when he hit a homerun at Kyŏngsŏng stadium in 1928 and joined an all-

Japanese team playing against an American team that included Major League stars such as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, and Connie Mack during their historic tour of Japan in 1934.\textsuperscript{269} Sŏ Chŏnggwŏn, a bantamweight professional boxer ranked sixth in the world, was defeating foreign opponents in California, and his tremendous prize money won him stardom.\textsuperscript{270} Several Olympians participating in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics and the 1936 Olympic Winter Games held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen were hailed as national heroes, despite having participated not as Koreans but as Japanese.

Among colonial Korea’s sports stars, Son Kijŏng, the winner of the 1936 Berlin Olympic marathon, stands out. As is well-known, under the sway of Japanese rule, Son was coerced into running as a member of the Japanese national team. When he became the first ethnic Korean to win an Olympic gold medal, the rabid national sentiment in his fatherland had never been higher. Moreover, the “Japanese Flag Erasure Incident” (Ilchang’gi malso sakŏn) in which the Tonga ilbo and the Chosŏn chungang ilbo, the representative Korean vernacular newspapers of the time, blotted out the Japanese flag on his sweatshirt in a photograph of Son on the awards podium, reflecting most Koreans’ national sentiment. The incident provoked the brutal punishment of the reporters by the Japanese colonial government. Many of them were tortured, put in jail, and laid off.\textsuperscript{271}

\textsuperscript{269} Joseph A. Reaves, \textit{Taking in a Game: A History of Baseball in Asia} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 123.

\textsuperscript{270} He said he earned 30,000 yen in fight money for one match in the United States. Sŏ Chŏnggwŏn, “Na nŭn wae segye mudae e nasŏttna,” \textit{Samch’ŏlli} (October 1935): 177. Given the monthly wage of a medical doctor (75 yen) and a banker (70 yen), his fight money was a shocking amount. For more information on occupational wage, living expenses, and working hours in colonial Korea, see Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, \textit{Kŭndae ŭi ch’aek ilkki: tokcha ŭi t’ansaeng kwa Han’guk kŭndae munhak} (Seoul: P’urŭn yŏksa, 2003), 492.

\textsuperscript{271} The most recent reliable research on the incident is Ch’ae Paek, \textit{Sarajin Ilchanggi ŭi chinsil: ilche kangjŏmgi Ilchanggi malso sakŏn yŏn’gu} (Seoul: K’ŏmyunik’eisyŏn puksu, 2008).
This story resonated with heroic Korean nationalism and became a part of Korean (sports) history. Indeed, it is still engraved in Koreans’ memory today as the culmination of Korean resistance against Japanese colonialism through sports.272

Conventional nationalistic historiography perpetuates Son as a national hero, but various agents in colonial Korea consumed him for a range of purposes. For many intellectuals drawn to Pan-Asianism, his victory highlighted a triumph of the yellow race over whites. Son’s victory gave astute businessmen seeking to maximize commercial profits an opportunity to promote their products. Competition in coverage surrounding Son was so intense that mass media reported even trivial items about Son’s private life, particularly his marriage life. Although Son’s victory stoked the colonial government’s nerves about Korean nationalism, his cachet as a sports star ironically turned into an instrument of propaganda for the colonialists’ effort, mobilizing human and material resources in colonial Korea after the Second Sino–Japanese War (1937–1945). On the other hand, what Son wanted most after his return from Berlin was to remain in the sports community as an athlete or a coach. To his disappointment, the underdeveloped colonial Korean sports world without sports facilities and institutions could not accommodate

him, and the unprecedented sports hero had to give up his sports career against his will much sooner than expected.

Son is Korea’s Son

On the 10th of August, 1936, at 3:30 in the morning, a clamorous bell signaled the distribution of an extra edition of newspapers to let all Korean people in Kyŏngsŏng know about Son’s victory: “These are the glad tidings of victory. The dream of the town was swept out into effervescence in a flash. For the first time victory came to [Korean] people who have never enjoyed triumph.”273 Most of the biggest names in colonial Korea were intoxicated with the triumph and could not help making remarks about Son’s victory. Yun Ch’iho, then president of the Chosŏn Sports Association, who stayed up all night despite his poor health, waited for the news of victory, telling a reporter: “There is nothing above our joy and thrill as our young Korean man has beaten the world’s population of two billion.”274 An Ch’angho, another prominent nationalist leader, sent a message of congratulations by telegram to Son and Nam in Berlin.275 Even these who more sincerely bought into the assimilation rhetoric of the colonial regime were touched by Son’s victory. For Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950), Yu Ōkkyŏm (1895–1947), and Kim Tonghwan (1901–n.d.), all of whom, along with Yun Ch’iho, would later be stigmatized

---

273 X kijja [pseud.], “Marason Chosŏn segye chep’ae–Son Kijŏng punjŏn’gi.” Chungang (September 1936): 120–21. Son’s race, which took place between 11 p.m. and 1:30 a.m., was not fully broadcast because colonial Korea’s radio broadcast time ran only from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. and from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Around 2 a.m., Koreans finally heard that Son had won the gold medal. See Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 46; Kazuo Hashimoto, Nihon supōtsu hōsōshi (Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1992), 52–55.
274 Tonga ilbo, 10 August 1936.
275 Tonga ilbo, 23 August 1936.
as collaborators in liberated Korea, the young Korean’s gold medal was such an ecstatic event that they could not stop crying. Pak Yŏngch’ŏl (1879–1939), the president of the Korean Commercial Bank, delivered an emotional speech tinged with anger in which he cited Son Kijŏng’s victory for Japan in the Berlin Olympics as an example of the kind of greatness of which Koreans were capable and entreated the Japanese businessmen present to eschew discrimination and hire as many qualified Koreans as possible in their banks, companies, and factories.

In addition to the upper echelons of society and intellectuals, subaltern agents also joined the national celebrations. For instance, a blacksmith thrilled by Son’s victory readily donated ten yen, a sizable sum of money for him, to the Yangjŏng High Ordinary School’s teacher who had taught Son. The rally in celebration of Son’s victory, which started in Kyŏngsŏng, spread all over the nation, particularly at the instigation of local sports organizations. Irrespective of ideology and class, Son’s victory attracted all Koreans, ranging from the top elites to the powerless such as leprosy patients, together in the name of Korea, eliciting an unprecedented national celebration of achievement.

Son’s victory enabled the colonized Korean people to see their nation as a full-fledged member of the Olympics. While the Maeil sinbo, the daily Korean-language organ of the Japanese colonial government, mostly referred to Son as the virile son of the

---

278 Tonga ilbo, 12 August 1936.
279 Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 12.
280 During the main stadium broadcast, the German announcer referred to Son as “Koreanischer student” (Korean student) and “der Koreaner” when passing the finish line. See, Tonga ilbo, 9 August 2004.
Peninsula (pando) to attenuate his national identity, the big three Korean vernacular papers—the Chosŏn chungang ilbo, the Chosŏn ilbo, and the Tonga ilbo—did not hesitate to exclaim that Son’s win demonstrated Koreans’ triumph over the world. Son’s victory, along with Nam Sŭngnyong’s bronze medal in the same race, reinvigorated nationalism in Korea to a significant extent, giving citizens a firm belief and spirit that the world would be within their reach were Koreans to bravely stand up for themselves.\(^{281}\) Even though Koreans were not in a position to express freely their nationalistic sentiment because of strict censorship, some voices deliberately attempted to inflame popular passion to stand up against the colonizers of Japan. For instance, Ch’oe Sŭngman (1897–1984) argued that Son’s victory had been possible due to mental strength and a fearlessness of death. Son’s spirit of self-sacrifice, he continued, is the noblest sportsmanship, implying that Koreans should not lose their fighting spirit against the enormous colonial government.\(^{282}\)

Son’s triumph, described in *Olympia*, a 1938 German documentary film documenting the 1936 Summer Olympics directed by Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003), evoked latent Korean nationalism even among youngsters.\(^{283}\) After watching the film, Kang Sanggyu, a high ordinary school student, felt great indignation against Japanese colonialism advertising Son and Nam as Japanese athletes. Later, he had the temerity to tell his friends that he would make Korea independent and soon hold the Olympics in Korea.\(^{284}\) Kang exemplified the youth who accepted the film

\(^{281}\) *Tonga ilbo*, 11 August 1936.


\(^{283}\) The film *Olympia* gained enough popularity to draw tens of thousands of viewers and earn about eighty thousand yen. “Hŭnhaeng kimilsil,” *Samch’ŏlli*. 12 (1940), 18.

\(^{284}\) For the contents of the questioning about Kang and his life, see Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, *Han minjok tongnip undongsa charyojip*, vol. 67 (Kwach’ŏn: Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, 117
as a sign of Korean triumph regardless of the film’s original purpose as Nazi propaganda.

Free from censorship, overseas Korean papers openly expressed nationalistic sentiment. Papers published in the United States such as the *Sinhan minbo* and the *Kungminbo* reported that the Japanese fed the two Korean marathon runners, Son and Nam, spoiled food. Although unable to practice, the runners overcame adversities due to help from a member of the Chosŏn Sports Association who followed them to Berlin.285 This garbled episode with its alarmist tone on Japanese discrimination may have amplified Korean animosity towards Japanese. An article published by the Korean National Party Youth Association (Han’guk kungmindang ch’ŏngnyŏndang), which was founded by Kim Ku in Nanjing in 1936 and targeted at attacking key Japanese figures and the destruction of strategic facilities, made explicit outbursts of Korean nationalism after Son’s win. It declared that Son’s victory should be celebrated on a national level to make Koreans even more eager for “complete independence,” a pair of words that had already been banished in the fatherland.286

Although not overtly, Son also expressed his grief about Japanese colonialism in Berlin. As soon as he finished the race, he wailed, embracing Nam and Kwŏn T’ae-ha, the marathon athlete from the 1932 Olympic, and kept crying after going back to the lodge as the landscape of his hometown and compatriots flooded his mind.287 In a phone interview

---

285 *Sinhan minbo*, 4 February 1937; *Kungminbo*, 23 February 1937.
conducted by the Chosŏn ilbo’s Tokyo branch manager, Kim Tongjin, after the race, he voiced his sadness despite the many congratulations, reflecting the state of mind of the Korean people who had to conceal their national pride. A postcard Son sent to a friend living in Naju after winning the gold medal had only one word scrawled on it: “Sad.”

Son’s victory certainly did not spark any massive independence movement comparable to the March First Movement in 1919. A small number of nationalists involved in a stubborn armed resistance for independence had already left their homeland. Most Korean nationalists in colonial Korea in the 1930s stopped short at advocating cultural nationalism, which supported autonomy or improvement in the rights of the colonized population, focusing on less overtly political venues to boost Korean nationalism such as sports. An Olympic gold medal is not a weapon for overthrowing the authority of the colonial government, which remained an insurmountable barrier to cultural nationalists without political and military leverage.

Son’s Victory and Racism

No modern Olympics has been immune from racism, and one of the notorious examples of racism, as expressed through the venue, is none other than the 1936 Berlin Games. The Nazis believed in Aryan racial superiority and showed explicit contempt for black and Jewish athletes before and during the Games, provoking an Olympic boycott movement around the world. East Asians, including the Japanese, were also targets of racial prejudice. With respect to its power in politics, diplomacy, economy, and military,

---

288 Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 67–69.
289 Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 77.
Japan had already emerged as a dominant force in Asia but not as a prestigious race in the Olympics.

The Olympics were a racially contested venue where Western media depicted the Japanese as a sinister, weak, and sometimes threatening race. Kanaguri Shizō, one of the only two Japanese Olympians in the 1912 Olympics, articulated a eugenicist argument in 1916 that since “the Japanese, no matter what, do not match the Western physique,” robust couples should marry and have children so that Japan can progress toward greater parity.  

In the 1932 Olympics, most American mass media described Japanese athletes based on racial prejudice while their impressive athletic performance and good-natured dispositions attracted the notice of the Olympic fans. Their great athletic success was regarded as a “menace” achieved by the team’s fascistic cohesiveness, contrary to American individualism. American newspapers consistently referred to Japanese athletes as a harmless and exotic people, labeling them “little brown men” or the “baby entrants” to emphasize their small frames and the similarity of their skin color with African-Americans.  

By the same token, in 1936 Nazi Olympics, the German media kept describing Japanese athletes as “short.” Japanese athletes’ wins came across as a “surprise,” although they had already proven to be world-class athletes in other sports competitions before the Games. The mass media in Germany regarded Japan, the host country of the 1940 Olympics, as a “student” that needed Germany’s tutelage in order to

---

learn how to hold a successful Olympics.²⁹²

For colonial Korea, too, the Olympics were a venue to fight the white race. Based on biological concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest, social Darwinism, under which the western white race is superior to others and meant to dominate the world, gained currency in the nineteenth century. In the face of the arrival of western colonial forces, a significant number of Korean Pan-Asianists considered the world an arena of competition between the white and the yellow races. Contrary to nationalists regarding Japan as another imperial power, such Koreans argued that cooperation and solidarity among the members of the yellow race—Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. The same race and shared cultural heritage was essential to defend not only the region, but also Korea itself, against western imperialism.²⁹³

However threatening, Westerners also had enviable bodies in the view of Koreans. Their physical prowess drew admiration as much as their advanced modern systems such as democracy, capitalism, and scientific technology. Westerners’ robust physique and virility had been regarded as superior to ugly and inferior Koreans.²⁹⁴ While Westerners’ big bright eyes, high nose, large ears, and thick lips had led Koreans to believe rumors of Western cannibalism, Koreans had also begrudgingly praised the beautiful bodies of Hollywood stars and American athletes from an aesthetic point of

²⁹⁴ Tonga ilbo, 16 July 1920.
view since the 1920s. Most Korean physical educators and sports writers produced numerous articles on Westerners’ bodily superiority to Koreans, raising the conundrum of how Koreans could have long legs or strong muscles like them. Thus, Son’s victory was a dramatic moment when the colonized population in Korea overcame its feeling of racial, bodily inferiority to Westerners.

From a racial perspective, Korean intellectuals and mass media were unsparing in their praise for Son. For instance, Yun Ch’iho declared Son’s triumph as a victory of all the yellow race (Hwanginjong) and Cho Yongman, a feature editor in the Maeil sinbo, reported that “a young boy with a yellow face and flat nose” had conquered the world. Most prominent figures of the time in colonial Korea interviewed by Samch’ölli, a popular magazine, were thrilled with Son’s victory, saying the short yellow race had finally won the competition with its tall white counterpart. The story is not verified, but Son was said to be revered by whites in the Korean media: “Son triumphed with a new world record and did a victory lap with his remaining energy.” Another man as strong as an ox fell with a thud at the finish line. Watching him, all the white people whispered that he was not a human being.” The meeting after the marathon race between Son and Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was a matter of great concern to Koreans and in the headlines of Korean papers. Son greeted Hitler with the Nazi salute and was impressed by his

296 Ch’ón Chônghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 13.
297 Maeil sinbo, 11 August 1936.
298 Maeil sinbo, 12 August 1936.
299 “Hwanyŏng!! Ch’ôngch’u 10 wŏl e Son sŏnsu kwirae,” 34–39.
When Yi Aenae, a famous Korean pianist studying in Berlin, returned to Korea in 1938, she said Hitler was moved by Son’s victory and tried to learn about Korea. What Koreans wanted from Son’s gold medal was recognition by Westerners, including Hitler, for Koreans’ racial excellence.\textsuperscript{302}

In addition to Korea’s overcoming of its inferiority complex, Son and Nam’s interviews after the Games reflect many Koreans’ racist perception of other members of the yellow race. When the Japanese empire was expanding to Manchuria, China, and Southeast Asia under the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” ideology, the Koreans who had bought into the ideology eagerly sought a status similar to the Japanese, denigrating the people more recently incorporated into the Japanese empire. In lieu of deconstructing racism in cooperation with others in the same boat, such Koreans asserted that they had been promoted to be first-class citizens nearly identical to the Japanese, who saw other members of the yellow race, including Koreans, as uncivilized and primitive under white colonial rule. In this atmosphere, Son and Nam denoted racial prejudice, which distinguished the civilized from the uncivilized just as Westerners usually did. Before and after the Olympics, they visited renowned cities on the way to and back from Berlin as a member of the Japanese squad and marveled at the finely paved European road system as well as the parks and splendid buildings in Moscow, Berlin, Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, and London. In contrast to Europe, India and China were objects of contempt in their view. Nam despised India based on his experience in Bombay, pointing out its poor attire, housing, customs, and culture, all of which he

\textsuperscript{301} "Minjok ŭi chejŏn," \textit{Samch’ölli} (September 1940): 55–56.
\textsuperscript{302} \textit{Tonga ilbo}, 23 November 1938.
deemed lagging behind Korea’s: “It was like confronting a savage Manchu.” Son, along with Korean interviewers, also taunted the Chinese Olympic team at the Games, which was composed of 49 athletes selected from 400 million people but who had returned empty-handed.\(^{303}\) Even though colonial Korea was worse off than China or India in the sense that both at least took part in the Games as independent teams, Son’s victory indicated civilized Korea’s racial superiority over them. Such a Korean perception of China and India was a variant of Orientalism.\(^{304}\)

**Son Kijŏng in the Japanese Empire**

Not only Korea but also Japan rejoiced over the news of Son’s win. Japanese newspapers made no distinction between Son’s victory and those of the Japanese. Son’s marathon victory was given headline treatment in the Japanese press when it announced on August 10: “Japanese Athlete Realizes Our Long-Cherished Hope” (*Jijishinpo*);

“Japanese Marathoner Finally Wins Race” (*Houchi*); “Japanese Marathoner Conquers the World” (*Yomiuri*): “Our Heart’s Desire for 24 Years Now Realized” (*Yomiuri*);

“Marathon, the Cherished Desire of 24 Years Realized” (*Tokyo Asahi*); and “Son Kitei:

\(^{303}\) Kim Yŏsil, “Int’ŏ/ Naesyŏnŏllijŭm kwa Manju,” *Sanghŏ hakpo* 13 (August 2004): 389–423. In fact, China sent quite a large delegation to the Berlin Olympics; it consisted of 69 athletes for swimming, basketball, football, weightlifting, boxing, and cycling, 34 observers, and 11 demonstrators of the traditional Chinese martial art of Wushu. With no medal and a poor performance, the Chinese teams were under harsh criticism after the Games, especially in comparison to the Japanese delegation’s excellent achievement. See, Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 180–81.

Our Pride before the World” (Tokyo Asahi). According to Hamada, the Tokyo Asahi, the Tokyo Nichinichi, and the Yomiuri shimbun featured as many articles on Son and his family, friends, teacher, and acquaintances as it did for the Japanese Olympic heroes of the 1936 Summer Games. Japanese reaction to Son’s victory was quite different from the French reaction to El Quafi’s victory in marathon of 1928 Amsterdam Games. When El Quafi, an Algerian long distance runner, won the marathon at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games as a French athlete, his triumph received scant press coverage in France compared to the coverage of wins by native French athletes. Most French mass media described his win as a victory for France but not as the victory of a French sportsman, bringing his Arab ancestry into relief as a beneficiary of France’s advanced sporting system. On the contrary, Japanese papers devoted their columns to Son as much as Japanese Olympians without making racist comments.

On the whole, there is little evidence that the colonial government harassed or discriminated against Korean sports athletes ahead of the 1936 Olympics. Around the time of the 1936 Olympics, the colonial government demonstrated a commitment to Korean Olympians, including Son. Ikeda Kiyoshi, the head of the Central Police Bureau (Korea Sôtokufu Keimukyoku), held a luncheon meeting for him, along with other Korean sports officials and athletes, to obtain their opinions about the future of Korean

---

sports. With the Olympics approaching, the GGK announced its plan to send a motion-picture cameraman to shoot Korean athletes’ performance at the Olympics.308

Although Son’s victory became a threat to the vigilant colonial regime at first due to the Japanese Flag Erasure Incident, his fame could also be used as a propaganda vehicle by the GGK as long as Son’s triumph was celebrated in the name of Japan. Whereas the immoderate welcoming ceremony was kept under control, the colonial government never neglected the Olympic marathon champion.309 The colonial government was fully prepared to celebrate Son’s gold medal and used the Olympics as a festival to display a harmonious colonial Korea devoid of conflict between the colonizer and the colonized and latent Korean nationalism. When word surfaced that Son had won, the dignitaries of the colonial government expeditiously joined celebrations to use his victory for their own sake. The mayor of Kyŏngsŏng sent a congratulatory telegram to two Korean marathon runners, Son and Nam, to highlight the pride in the Korean peninsula. The governor of North P’yŏngan province including Son’s hometown, Sinŭiju, gave celebratory drinks to all congratulators from Son’s neighborhood.310 The Japanese-dominated Korean Sports Federation was preparing a welcome event for the two athletes, Son and Nam, befitting their great achievement.311 In front of reporters rushing into his house in Kamakura at early dawn when the news of Son’s win arrived, Minami Jiro (1874–1955), who was ready to take up his new post as Governor-General forthwith, expressed his delight, saying that the two athletes had earned the highest praise of the

308 Maeil sinbo, 16 February 1936.
309 Ch’ŏn Chŏngiwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 301.
310 Maeil sinbo, 11 August 1936; 12 August 1936.
311 Tonga ilbo, 12 August 1936.
Japanese sports community.312

Amid the boisterous atmosphere, the celebration was confined to the ambit of the colonial government’s power. As soon as Son’s plane landed at the Kyōnsōng airfield jammed with thousands of well-wishers on October 17, 1936, Japanese police guards quickly took him to the sacred place for their Japanization policy. He, as a Japanese public figure, worshiped at Chōsen Shrine (Chōsen jingū), honoring the Imperial Grand Ancestress (Amaterasu Ōmikami) and the Meiji emperor.313 Another symbolic event to show the authority of the colonial regime was the meeting between Governor-General Minami Jiro and Son. During their meeting, Minami was all smiles and said: “I think winning on the splendid stage [Olympics] for the Japanese is happy news,” but urged that Son should fulfill his duty in a modest way as a student and not become too satiated with ego. Son answered that he was deeply touched by Minami’s advice and would devote himself to his duty.314 At first glance, this was an amicable meeting between a benevolent father figure and a young high ordinary school athlete. All the same time, perhaps, the message that Minami intended to send Koreans was about the abiding hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized. His admonition of Son to “behave prudently” seems to have been aimed at reminding all Koreans that they were Japanese subjects.

312 Maeil sinbo, 11 August 1936.
314 Maeil sinbo, 20 October 1936.
Contrary to the pursuit of a Korean celebration of nationalism, at the time Son made remarks ascribing his victory to the Japanese empire or praising of the power of the empire. Son’s voice was recorded by Japanese Columbia Records in September as soon as he arrived in Tokyo. Not hesitating to state that that Japanese flags on the street gave him great strength during the tough race, he declared: “This victory is not my personal victory but a victory for all Japanese.”

The Manchurian Resident Korean Dispatch (Chaeman Chosŏnin t’ongsin), a mouthpiece of the Hŭnga Association (Hŭnga hyŏphoe), formed by the Kwantung Army in Shenyang to mitigate the nationalism of Korean people in Manchuria and to strengthen Korean society’s cooperation with Japan, described how the two athletes appreciated the support of overseas Japanese during the Olympics: “We [Son and Nam] realized the power of Japan only after leaving our homeland. When we Japanese walked down a street shoulder to shoulder in Berlin, they made way for us.”

The wartime mobilization of 1937–1945 fetched Son in adroit expedients such as celebrity campaigns to marshal Koreans and their material resources, which were vital to the survival of the empire. From April 1938 onwards, the GGK launched the National Savings Promotion Campaign to spur Koreans to deposit a certain amount of money with the goal of price control and financing for military expenditures. Reportedly, Son, a

315 The record was found in 1992 by the Sinnara Record Cooperation. Along with Son’s voice, the song titled “Marason chep’aega (Song of win in marathon)” was recorded by the vocalist Ch’aee Kyuyŏp. See Yŏnhap nyusŭ, 13 August 1992.
317 Mun Yŏngju, “1938–45 nyŏn ‘kungmin chŏch’uk chosŏng undong’ ŭi chŏn’gae wa kŭmyung chohap yeŏgm ŭi sŏngkyŏk,” Han’guk sahakpo 14 (March 2003): 387–413. Following Britain’s centrally organized National Savings Movement, the savings campaign in Japan emerged in the 1920s. It became more aggressive during Japan’s war with China and the Allied powers. The campaigns were closely linked with various kinds of mass media and social organizations,
new employee of Chōsen Industrial Bank (Chōsen shokusan ginkō), effortlessly attracted savings of fifty-thousand yen due to his fame, much more than experienced managers usually did. When the Korean Special Volunteer Soldier System (Koreajin tokubetsu shiganhei seido) began in 1938, as a member of the Association of Seniors of Students (Hakto sŏnbaedan)—comprising influential individuals and organized to encourage Korean students to volunteer for military service—Son went to encourage enlistment in North Hamgyŏng province.

Japanese colonial propaganda did not leave even Kang Poksin, Son’s wife, alone. During the war effort, the housewife in the rear guard (Ch’onghu puin) was the main agent of the household liable for the labor force and material enlistment, and the colonial state’s wartime propaganda treated the housewife as equally important to the soldier at the front. In particular, the wartime propaganda exalted women willing to sacrifice their sons and live thriftily, while disparaging New Women (Sinyŏsŏng) contaminated by liberal individualism. In this social atmosphere, Kang contributed an article to a magazine arguing that Korean women are responsible for peace in the East and should rear children in a good environment for the nation (Japan) in view of the emergency situation. Wartime shortages required women to cooperate in giving up luxuries and

---

318 Maeil sinbo, 5 July 1940.
319 Maeil sinbo, 15 November 1943.
320 Kwŏn Myŏnga, Yŏksajŏk p’asisjūm: cheguk ŭi p’ant’aji wa chendŏ chŏngch’i (Seoul: Ch’aek sesang, 2005), 159–290.
leading a frugal life. In the tightened wartime economy, she, along with other wives of social celebrities, revealed how much Son’s family were spending on food, clothes, housing, tax, education, and savings to show they were following the state policy.\footnote{“Uri kachōng ūi chōnshi saenghwal kagyebu konggae,” \textit{Samch’ōllī} (January 1942): 108–109.}

In conjunction with colonial Japanese authorities, some Koreans celebrated Son’s victory not as a Korean national victory but as a Japanese one. In his book entitled, \textit{Koreajin no susumu beki michi} [\textit{The Path That the Korean Must Take}], Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp (1906–n.d.) argued that Koreans should discard “Koreanness” and embrace Japanese culture thoroughly to become complete imperial subjects. He reminded Korean readers that Son was raised as Japanese and that his victory should, thus, not be celebrated as a victory for Korea.\footnote{Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp, \textit{Koreajin no susumu beki michi} (Keijo: Ryokki renmei, 1940), 119–23.} During its inaugural meeting, the Taedong Association of the People’s Friends (\textit{Taedong minuhoe}), which consisted of Marxists-turned-collaborationist supporters of “imperial subjectification” (kōminka), claimed that Son’s victory was not only for the glory of Korea but Japan, Asia, and the world. Koreans, it continued, had to recognize that Son participated in the Olympics as a Japanese athlete and welcome him with triumph without ulterior motives against the colonial government, saying the Tonga ilbo’s Japanese Flag Erasure Incident was not a proper objective for Koreans, athletes, or even Son.\footnote{\textit{Maeil sinbo}, 2 September 1936.}

Regardless of Son’s motive, the Japanese colonial regime used Son’s fame as a convenient tool to govern the colonized during the wartime period. The Japanese praised his victory, which, to any advocate of the Japanese empire, symbolized the harmonious
relationship between the colonized and colonizer. His celebrity, along with his wife, drew
the Korean populace to cooperate with Japanese wartime mobilization once he
collaborated with the Japanese authorities. At around the same time, baseball star
Sawamura Eiji (1917–1944) was regarded as “an advocate of nationalism and
militarization in Japan” and Joe DiMaggio (1914–1999) was a symbol of American
national military commitments.\textsuperscript{325} Son was no exception in the face of the global total
mobilization campaigns involving sports celebrities.

**Son’s Privacy**

The gold medal in the 1936 Olympics not only catapulted Son to become a
national sports personality but also changed his personal life, which no one had been
concerned about before. As a sports star under intense public attention and scrutiny,
sometimes minutely detailed information, seemingly about every aspect of his life, was
overabundant in the newspapers. The *Maeil sinbo* printed the story that Son, the prince of
the land or the king of the marathon, went to the Han River and paddled to stave off the
hot summer.\textsuperscript{326} When his hometown house in Sinŭiju was submerged because of a flood,
the *Tonga ilbo* reported that Son was compelled to watch the muddy stream on the dyke
to reveal the seriousness of the flood by juxtaposing his superhuman image as a marathon
runner to his powerlessness vis-à-vis water.\textsuperscript{327} Even his first paycheck of around 130 yen

\textsuperscript{325} Dennis J. Frost, *Seeing Stars*, Chapter 4; Anthony Yoseloff, “From Ethnic Hero to National
Icon: The Americanization of Joe Dimaggio,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 16,
\textsuperscript{326} *Maeil sinbo*, 22 June 1937.
\textsuperscript{327} *Tonga ilbo*, 10 August 1937.
received coverage when he graduated from Meiji University and found a job at the Chōsen Industrial Bank.328

Most of all, with regard to his privacy, the public’s main interest was related to his age and gender. In an era when a great athlete popular with the ladies must be a sportsman,329 he became one of the most eligible bachelors in colonial Korea. Interviewed by Yŏsŏng, a popular women’s magazine, after the Games, Son and Nam faced a torrent of queries not about the marathon but about dating and relationships with women. Son continued to insist that he was busy training, had never talked to girls until then and did not dare to dream of socializing with girls as a high ordinary school student. Nonetheless, the interviewer harassed Son and Nam with repeated interpellations on behalf of fans, embarrassing the young athletes by asking: “Do you have a girlfriend? Who is your best female friend? Did you have any letters from girls from your stay in Berlin? Which country’s girls did you like the most in Berlin? After returning home, did you have any letters or visits from girls? When are you going to marry? Describe your ideal woman.”330

No wonder the news of Son’s wedding garnered a lot of attention in Japan as well as in Korea. In addition to Son’s reputation, the career of his wife, Kang Poksin, as an elite athlete herself, also played a major role in making their wedding big news. Born to a

329 Paegaksŏnin[pseud.], “Hyŏndae changan hogŏl ch’annŭn (Chwadamhoe),” Samch’ōlli (November 1935): 86.
330 Ilgija [pseud.], (Son Kijŏng, Nam Sŭngnyong) Yang kun ŭi kyŏrhon’gwan,” Yŏsŏng (December 1936): 58–59. According to Nam, the only woman who sent a telegram to him and Son was none other than Ch’oe Sŏnhŭi, a prominent Korean dancer of the mid-twentieth century known internationally under her Japanese name of Sai Shoki.
wealthy family in P’yŏngyang, she was working as a teacher for Tongdŏk Girls’ High Ordinary School after graduating from the Women’s College of Physical Education in Tokyo. As a student of P’yŏngyang Girls High Ordinary School, she became widely known as a talented sprinter. Though not as popular as male athletes, the emergence of sportswomen in colonial Korea since the 1920s was a noteworthy phenomenon. The growing number of female athletes was gaining popularity in a variety of sports such as track and field, basketball, and tennis. Not only the current female players but also retired athletes and their married life attracted much attention.331 Marriages among big-name players became headline news and caused a nationwide wave of interest from time to time.332

Indeed, the love story between Son and Kang before marriage was not some special or romantic event that drew public interest. They met for the first time during the Korean Shrine Games as early as 1931, and as an athlete, Son had no close acquaintance with her until 1938 when the couple had their third encounter in the All-Japanese Basketball Games held in Tokyo. The couple tied the knot in large part due to the aggressive persuasion by Ko Pongo (Son’s friend) and his wife (Kang’s friend). To make their love story more dramatic, throngs of stories were presented, such as the episode in which Son met a ballet dancer from a wealthy family with a view to marriage, while Kang was also proposed to by someone before the marriage. After the marriage announcement, the news that Kang’s father had died a few hours before Son, then a

331 “Na nŭn we sŭp’och’ŭ yŏsŏng kwa kyŏrhon hayŏtna,” Sinkajŏng (September 1933): 23–27.
332 Before the stories of Son and Kang, the most sensational news on a sports star couple in colonial Korea was probably the marriage between Yi Yŏngmin (baseball player) and Yi Pop’ae (soft tennis player) in 1929.
student at Meiji University, hurriedly came from Tokyo to meet his future father-in-law and became the talk of the town.333

As sport stars, it was Son and Kang’s fate to become public figures, willingly or not, as celebrities. A slew of phone calls and people including reporters came to her school right after the wedding announcement to the point where she could not teach her students.334 Their marriage generated so much talk that it was described as the marriage of the century and compared to that of Edward VIII (Duke of Windsor, r. 1937), who abdicated the British throne to marry Wallis Simpson (1896–1986), an American divorcee.335 Certainly one of the most sensational weddings held in colonial Korea, it did not last long. In 1944, Kang died, leaving behind two children.

A Hero Victimized by Commercialism

The symbiotic relationship between Olympic organizers and the business entrepreneurs emerged at the very inception of the Olympic movement. In spite of the Olympics’ amateur spirit distant from the evils of commercial ventures, the business community jumped onto the Olympic bandwagon for their own sake in cooperation with Olympic administrators struggling with tight budgets. For example, Kodak helped fund the official results books with a page of advertising for the first modern Olympics of 1896. Official licensing of products at the Olympics began in 1912, while the inside of

334 Ilgija [pseud], “Son Kijŏng aein pangmun’gi, kŏdŭl ūi roomansŭ nŭn òttŏga,” Samch’ôlli (December 1938): 166–70.
335 “Changan chaeja kain, yŏnghwa wa hŭngmanggi,” 108.
the stadium at the 1924 Games in Paris was bedecked with many advertisements from Ovalmaltine, Dubonnet, and Cinzano, to name a few. Local organizers of the 1928 Amsterdam Games raised money by selling on-site concessions to many entrepreneurs such as Coca-Cola Company. The 1932 Games had strong support from the Piggly Wiggly supermarket chain as well as oil companies such as Standard Oil of California and Union 76 which used the Olympics as a venue for their advertisements. By the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, the Olympics had become a site for corporate entertaining and deal-making as companies such as Coca-Cola invited large entourages to attend the Olympics.336 One of the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic suppliers, Helms Bakeries, shrewdly registered Olympic trademarks and symbols and held them exclusively before voluntarily giving them up to the IOC in 1950.337

As new mass symbols, the Olympics and Son were heralded as an attractive medium of advertising for the business world. In particular, the biggest competition took place in the pharmaceutical industry. Medicine and medical supplies were the products that appeared the most frequently in newspaper advertisements from the late nineteenth century to the colonial period.338 The image of Son’s healthy body fit well with these products: Hihumi (a medicine for skin diseases), Myohu (an external medicine), Paekbohwan (health food) made by P’yŏnghwadang Company, Neos A (a tonic) made by Arusu Pharmaceutical Company, Neoton Tonic from the Yuhan Corporation,

338 Kuksa p’yŏnch’ăn wiwŏnhoe, Kwanggo: Sidae rŭl ikta (Seoul: Tusun Tonga, 2007), 141–42.
Hwalmyŏngsu (a digestive medicine) made by Tonga Pharmaceutical Company, Herup (an obstructant), and Kaija (a virility formula), among others. Regardless of the size of the company, numerous products such as toothpastes, bicycles, fountain pens, electric phonographs, hats, powered formulas, and Morinaga caramel used Son in their advertising or mentioned his victory in their commercials to boost sales. Japanese companies, too, such as Asahi Beer, Kikkoman soy sauce and Okeh Records, to name a few, also scrambled for Son’s endorsement.\textsuperscript{339} Indeed, in the 1930s, Japanese companies accounted for more advertising space in Korean vernacular papers than their Korean counterparts did.\textsuperscript{340}

Many saw excessive commercialism surrounding Son. At the time, the sports community strongly praised pure amateurism’s immumity from money, especially with regard to Olympians around the world. In such an atmosphere, Min Kyusik (1888–n.d.), president of the Tongil Bank, donated large sum of money (300 yen) not directly to Son but to Korean Sports Association, citing the ideal of amateurism.\textsuperscript{341} The \textit{Chosŏn chungang ilbo} criticized the appearance of canny general stores and barbershops promising unlimited free service to Son as a fiendish, money-blinded phenomenon.\textsuperscript{342} Yŏ Unhyŏng, the president of the \textit{Chosŏn chungang ilbo}, pointed out that celebrating Son’s victory with money had no social meaning and was not what Son wanted. Instead, building “Son Kijŏng Memorial Gymnasium” could be a meaningful project to develop

\textsuperscript{340} Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, \textit{Kwanggo, sidae rŭl ikta}, 177.
\textsuperscript{341} \textit{Tonga ilbo}, 12 August 1936.
\textsuperscript{342} \textit{Chosŏn chungang ilbo}, 14 August 1936.
Korean youth’s physical strength, Yŏ suggested.\textsuperscript{343} His proposal was in vain, as sports commercialism had become seemingly unstoppable.

Ultimately, Son became not a beneficiary but a victim of the commercialism fueled by his own achievement. To begin, he did not receive any money or goods from the various mass media outlets, businessmen, or sports associations that advertised huge donations to Son. For instance, he earned nothing from P’yŏnghwadang Company, which had run a classified ad in the newspaper soliciting money, ginseng, and Paekbohwan for Son before the Olympics and claimed he finally won due to their miraculous medicine.

Hankyŏngsŏn Shoe Store connived with a newspaper company,\textsuperscript{344} which needed a dramatic story about Son’s victory, and advertised that it would provide a lifetime supply of shoes for Son, but, in fact, did nothing of the sort. His only financial gain was a small stipend (45 yen) each a month for his tuition from the Chosŏn Scholarship Association. As Son mentioned, he was used as a mannequin in the shop window by the press and advertisers who were outright lying. What especially annoyed him was that the media driven by commercialism portrayed him as a beggar. In an attempt to increase the salience of their alleged donations to Son, mass media and advertisers highlighted Son’s poverty-stricken family background.\textsuperscript{345}

Son’s life as a gold medalist was not as lucrative as it seemed. After graduating from Yangjŏng High Ordinary School, he entered Posŏng College in Kyŏngsŏng but

\textsuperscript{343} “Hwannyŏng!! Ch’ŏngch’u sipwŏr e sonsŏnsu kwirae,” 35.

\textsuperscript{344} Chosŏn chungang ilbo reported that Hankyŏngsŏn Shoe Store would donate shoes for Son. See Chosŏn chungang ilbo, 13 August 1936.

\textsuperscript{345} K kija [pseud.], “Marason wang–Son Kijŏng kun ŭl tullŏssan sangbae ŭi choeak,” Pip’an (September 1937): 84–88.
soon dropped out, moving on to Meiji University in Tokyo. In a discomfiting question raised by a reporter about why he left Korea, Son articulated his frustration with selfish people seeking to exploit his fame: “Please, do not ask me this question. It seems that the value of a person is nothing in Kyŏngsŏng. So I went to Japan dreaming of new prospects.” He continued to express his disdain at social negligence to him a year after the Olympics when flood waters engulfed his hometown:

With that being said, I cried on the ninth of August [in 1937], the first anniversary of my victory. At that time I was in Sinŭiju and just then, our house was submerged under the water, and my family spent several days in a tent along the Amnok River [Ch. Yalu River] because of the flood. I had a hard time not starving. Arrogant as it may appear, but how can I, as a world champion, curb my temper in this situation? So I even drank booze, which I usually never touch.\textsuperscript{346}

Although there were so many rumors surrounding Son and money that most people believed he had become an overnight millionaire, he struggled financially. Son’s wife, Kang, was busy both working as a teacher and doing house chores without a housemaid, whom most affluent people had. Their home was so small that the visiting interviewers were shocked. Kang had to prepare an assortment of household goods without Son’s financial help. Understandably, Son said he hoped that their children would take lucrative jobs such as medical doctors when he was asked about his ambitions for the children. After expressing his consternation about his fatherland’s apparent disregard for him, he said his ardent desire was to return to Berlin and live there, if only

\textsuperscript{346} Ilgija [pseud.] “Taŭm segye Ollimp’ik chep’ae rŭl kiha nŭn marason wang Son Kijŏng ŭi simgyŏng,” \textit{Chogwang} (May 1938): 304–308.
he could afford it.\textsuperscript{347}

As Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan aptly points out, “The syndrome, which appeared as a result of Son Kijŏng, was created, amplified, and maintained by nationalism and capitalism.”\textsuperscript{348} Ironically, the element of surprise was that the protagonist of the syndrome had little to do with money. While maintaining a true sportsman’s spirit as an amateur Olympian,\textsuperscript{349} Son suffered from the lack of money. He realized that money talks in the shadow of inexorable commercialism in colonial Korea.

**The Crux of Son’s Concern as a Sportsman**

Son’s gold medal was an unprecedented symbolic triumph for colonial Korea, but it certainly did not mean that capacity of Korean sports had reached a global level. At the time, some sports officials reflected dispassionately on the reality of Korean sports, and Chŏng Sangyun was one of them. In his view, the unprecedented phenomenon—nationwide celebration, confidence in competing with other nations around the world in sports, mawkish poems lauding Son, a plethora of cover stories in papers, and money or products donated on behalf of Son—resulted only from Son’s gold medal, having nothing to do with sustainable progress of Korean sports from a long-term perspective. In order to raise a second and third Son, the most urgent issue for the papers was to reflect on the poor support for Son before the Olympics while not embellishing a recital of Son’s

\textsuperscript{347} Paegunch’o [pseud.], “Son Kijŏng ssi sinhon kajŏng pangmungi: Paengnim ka salya tŭn kŏt ŭn kongsang irago,” Samch’ŏlli (May 1940): 132–35.
\textsuperscript{348} Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara, 81.
\textsuperscript{349} Tonga ilbo, 4 January 1938.
Sufferings into a moving story. Son’s victory was not a consequence of development of Korean sports but a fleeting anomaly in the humble Korean sports infrastructure, Chŏng concluded.

Chŏng’s condemnation of the Korean sports scene was clearly mindful of Son’s life in general. In spite of his remarkable athletic aptitude, Son’s impoverished household could not help him remain committed to running. He had to work a part-time job to pay for his ordinary school tuition and could not proceed to high ordinary school. His move as a teenager to Japan to search for learning and running opportunities ended fruitlessly. Even after Son entered Yangjŏng High Ordinary School in 1931 and continued to grow as a top athlete, the Korean sports community was remiss in supporting him. Thus, during his school days, the lack of basic necessities such as clothing, food, and lodging remained a constant source of worry.

Understandably, Son felt disappointed at the Korean sports community. As soon as he had won the marathon race of the Tokyo Shrine Games held in November, 1935 with a world record (2:26:14), he cited Korean society as the reason for his tears of frustration and loneliness in spite of the hearty cheers of fans. According to him, for ten years after he started his career as an athlete, he had received no benefit whatsoever from his nation, unlike his Japanese counterparts who were fully sponsored by schools and sports organizations. The most embarrassing moment in the marathon tournament held in Japan was when a Japanese reporter asked him about how he could practice without a

350 Chosŏn chungang ilbo, 15 August 1936.
351 About Son’s poor childhood, see Kim Yongje, (Segye cheil) Marason wang Son Kijŏng usŭnggi (Kyŏngsŏng [Seoul]: Myŏngmundang, 1936), 44–71; Son Kijŏng, Na ŭi choguk, na ŭi marat’on, 28–81.
coach. As a sportsman of colonial Korea, he declared that the only thing that he felt was “grief” and “letdown,” and, thus, that the 1936 Berlin Olympics would definitely be his last race. In addition, concerns for his livelihood already had him at the end of his tether before running in Berlin. 352

Son’s poor performance after the 1936 Olympics as an athlete or a coach indicates colonial Korea’s lack of long-term support for its sports heroes. In fact, noticeable news items on his races reported in mass media after his return from Berlin are rare. At the center of the suspension of his career was not just the cancellation of 1940 Tokyo Olympics but also the unfavorable conditions for athletes after graduating from high ordinary school and university. 353 After obtaining a banking position in the Chōsen Industrial Bank, he found no time to run. In addition, members of the sports community did not much care about Son at this time, and even his alma mater where a physical education teacher was in charge of the athletic clubs, could not give him any coaching position. Son remonstrated with the Korean sports world about policies to further promote sports in colonial Korea: building a big stadium comparable to the Mussolini Stadium in Italy supported by the rich, founding a college of Kinesiology, and invigoration of sports competition among workplaces such as banks, factories, and department stores. 354 To his disappointment, colonial Korea could not take up his

353 Even the Japanese Olympic team comprised mostly students who accounted for 60–70 percent of athletes between the 1920 and 1936 Games. In the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the percentage of students on the Japanese team was just 16.8 percent. See Fumio Tsukahara, “1912 nen–2008 nen kaki orinpikku Nihon daihyō senshudan ni kansuru shiryō: shozoku soshiki to saishū gakureki o chūshin ni,” Supōtsu Kagaku Kenkyū 10 (2013): 247.
suggestions for creating a sports-friendly environment where athletes with flair would be able to maintain their careers even after leaving their schools. Given that British-born Ernest Harper (1902–1979), a silver medalist defeated by Son, was thirty-four years old in the 1936 Olympics, Son, ten years younger than Harper, arguably could have remained an active marathon runner much longer had circumstances allowed.

In the sports community as an athlete or a coach, his existence faded slowly. The most he could do was to inform the Korean populace about marathons in the local media.\(^\text{355}\) Acknowledging that Kim Ŭnbae and Kwŏn T’aeha were great stimuli to his success in the Games, Son pilloried colonial Korean society for its apathy toward the first two Korean Olympians who had tried to introduce Korean sports to the whole world.\(^\text{356}\) His position was not different from that of Kim and Kwŏn even before he knew this was so:

> It looks like that his [Son’s] worldwide win was not closely related to our actual life, so I assume it was temporary emotional outburst. He received so much love and support. Even though there were reasonable conditions, it is sad not to analyze the mania. When we make such a fuss in order to make a kind of artificial hero before paying reverence to him as a sportsman, is he not practically being suffocated? Why did he not enter a race after the Olympics? Instead of talking about his cautiousness and composure, we are concerned about his health. Therefore, we will not ever see his valiant appearance. Bow to necessity.\(^\text{357}\)

### Summation

The Olympics provoked a strong sentiment of Korean nationalism akin to Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” by creating a sense of

---

\(^\text{355}\) Son Kijŏng, “Marason kyŏnggi nŭn ĕrok’e yŏnsŭp hara,” *Sinsidae* (June 1941): 90–94.

\(^\text{356}\) “Minjok ŭi chejŏn,” 52.

\(^\text{357}\) Ssangmundongin [pseud.], “Undonggye inmullon,” 78–79.
interrelation among their members, most of whom did not know each other personally.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics, commonly dubbed “the most controversial Olympics,” provided a great opportunity for colonial Korea to boost Korean nationalism due to a young marathoner, Son. Son’s victory served to unite Koreans in media-saturated 1930s colonial Korea in papers, magazines, radio, and film. Ordinary Koreans vividly saw and felt Son’s victory which strengthened an imagined national community. Even though most Koreans had never seen Son in person, the news delivered by mass media was sufficiently powerful for them to feel a collective sense of belonging to Korea. The salient trait of Korean sports in the twentieth century was a pathologically collective enthusiasm for sports stars’ victories on the international stage, in particular, in the Olympics Games. Son’s triumph and the subsequent fervent celebration on a nationwide scale is incontestable proof of the mutual affinity between Korean sports and nationalism.\(^\text{358}\)

On the other hand, his victory, despite being an epoch-making event, benefited him little. Once a poor young boy struggling to make a living, Son rose to the top of the Olympic victory stand. After that, he was not just an athlete but joined the ranks of the most influential figures in politics, business, education, religion, media, and other circles in colonial Korea. His fatherland was not interested in what he wanted. Son desired a career as an athlete but had to quit, not because of surveillance or oppression by the colonial government but, instead, public apathy after exploiting his victory for their own sake. As an interviewer told Son, colonial Korea was a “tough and chilly place” even for

an Olympic gold medalist.\textsuperscript{359}

In his seminal work, Boorstin, concerned with the delusions shaped by media that manufacture events to serve their own ends, defined the difference between the hero and celebrity as follows: “The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness…. The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero is a big man [sic]; the celebrity is a big name.”\textsuperscript{360} Without a doubt, Son appeared to be a hero when he won the Olympic marathon but quickly devolved into a celebrity, subsequently absent in the stadium.

\textsuperscript{359} Ilgija [pseud.], “Taŭm segye Ollimp’ık chep’ae rŭl kihanŭn marason wang Son Kijŏng ŭi simgyŏng.” 306.
Chapter 5. The 1940 Tokyo Olympics: Introducing a Rising Korea to the World

Several days before colonial Korea was waiting with impatience for the results of the 1936 Olympic marathon race where Son won the gold medal, another news report sent the Japanese empire into raptures. The IOC awarded the 1940 Summer Olympics to Tokyo one day prior to the opening of the Games in Berlin in 1936 and later confirmed the winter games for Sapporo on March 1938.\textsuperscript{361} The news of Tokyo as the future site for the 1940 Olympics caused a great sensation in Japan. All the stores in Ginza flew five-ring Olympic flags. Fireworks lit the sky and new commemorative stamps celebrated the occasion.\textsuperscript{362}

As Collins shows, the Japanese had high expectations of the 1940 Olympic Games for both external and internal reasons. They yearned to secure Japan’s status as a top-notch modern power and leader of the non-Western world by staging the Games. Against mounting international condemnation of Japan’s bellicosity on the Chinese continent, the Olympic Games were to implement “people’s diplomacy” based on international friendship. Domestically, the 1940 Tokyo Olympiad was to serve as part of celebration for the 2,600th anniversary of the legendary founding of the Japanese empire

\textsuperscript{361} Swantje Scharenberg, “Sapporo/St. Moritz/Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1940,” in Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 309. According to an IOC decision in 1926, the country hosting the Summer Games had priority for the site of the Winter Games, since the first Winter Olympics began in Chamonix, France in 1924.

by Emperor Jimmu in 660 BCE in order to enhance nationalism. The Japanese authorities designed the Olympic Games to mobilize the Japanese masses for national causes. Thus, the dual purposes of the Tokyo Olympics were compatible with modernity and tradition, as well as internationalism and nationalism.\textsuperscript{363}

Colonial Korea was closely monitoring the Japanese Olympic bidding from beginning to end. Tokyo’s Olympic bid already started as early as 1930 when Tokyo held a “Reconstruction Festival” to celebrate its recovery from the Kantō Earthquake of 1923. The mayor, Nagata Hidejirō (1876–1943), tried to use the 1940 Olympic Games to showcase Tokyo as an international tourist destination, “a land beyond Fuji Mountain and geishas.”\textsuperscript{364} After that, Korean mass media kept reporting the news surrounding the 1940 Olympic bid. As soon as Tokyo won the bid, colonial Korea was quick to make the best use of the Olympics for its own sake as part of the empire. The Olympics were not only about sports, but also involved a variety of social issues in colonial Korea: transportation, national security, tourism, and sports facilities, among others. The colonial government and Japanese leadership took the initiative in designing a master plan for welcoming visitors from outside to propagate a positive image of its colony. At the same time, Koreans were not just passive spectators but also aggressive supporters of the Games for many reasons: expectations of income and economic development, participation in the Games as athletes and tourists, and simple curiosity.

\textbf{Transportation: Prompt, Comfortable, and Safe}

\textsuperscript{363} Sandra S. Collins, \textit{The 1940 Tokyo Games}.
\textsuperscript{364} Sandra S. Collins, \textit{The 1940 Tokyo Games}, 26.
Japan’s geographical location in Asia was a double-edged sword during the bidding process for the 1940 Olympics. The Olympic Games had been, since their inception in 1896, a symbol of universal peace, fair play, and global understanding through sport; however, only the major cities in Europe and the United States had a privilege to host the Games. In order to promote Tokyo for the 1940 Olympics, Japan argued that the Olympic movement would become international only by staging the games in Japan, the only modern country in the non-Western world. This was a persuasive contention that appealed to many members of the Olympic organization. Therefore, when the IOC voted, in July 1936, on the venue of the 1940 Olympiad, Tokyo’s candidacy was supported not only by such Western countries as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy but also by China, India, Egypt, and Iran. On the other hand, as Finland, as Japan’s competitor for the bid, argued, expensive journeys and huge loss of time for all participants from Europe would reduce interest in the Olympic Games if the Games were held outside the European continent where most participating nations were located. The Finnish argument suggestion echoed the apprehension of many European IOC agents about travelling to a place on the other
side of the globe.\textsuperscript{365}

For sure, accessibility for European countries determined the success or failure of the Olympics. Although a growing number of nations outside Europe began entering the Games, Europe still had the largest stake. Many European nations boycotted the 1904 St. Louis and 1932 Los Angeles Summer Games, the two Games held outside of Europe before the World War II. This caused a significant reduction in the numbers of nations and athletes: the 1900 Paris (26 nations, 1,118 athletes) and 1904 St. Louis (12 nations, 627 athletes) Olympic Games, and between 1928 Amsterdam (46 nations, 3,014 athletes) and 1932 Los Angeles (37 nations, 1,328 athletes) Olympics.\textsuperscript{366} Most European athletes dreaded the prospect of a long and expensive transatlantic crossing followed by a 1,000-mile train ride to St. Louis, a backward outpost in the American Midwest.\textsuperscript{367} Similarly, Los Angeles on the West Coast was even farther from Europe. Travel expenses placed a large burden on nations hit by the Great Depression, and they sent smaller contingents.

The geographical location of colonial Korea took on significance as the mass transportation of athletes, officials, and tourists from Europe became a big issue, in particular for railroad networks. Advanced air transport was yet to be deployed on a commercial scale, and air routes were limited around the world. In 1938, Deutsche Lufthansa realized the first non-stop flight between Berlin and Tokyo in 46 hours and 18

\textsuperscript{365} Sandra S. Collins, \textit{The 1940 Tokyo Games}, 51–75.
\textsuperscript{366} Statistics on participating nations and athletes in early Olympic history is not free of discrepancies. I refer to Daniel Bell, \textit{Encyclopedia of International Games} (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2003), 245.
minutes on November 28, 1938, and daily flight service was available between Tokyo and Kyŏngsŏng, via Fukuoka, with a flight time of less than six hours by 1940. All the same, these flights with a handful of seats were only available to the wealthy and had little to do with mass continental passenger traffic. A maritime voyage between Japan and Europe via the Suez Canal took at least 40 days. The most efficient way to cross Eurasia in terms of expense and convenience was by rail, which meant Europeans heading for the Tokyo Games had to pass through Korea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continent</th>
<th>Africa and Asia</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>North and South America</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officially represented countries (athletes)</td>
<td>Egypt (53), Union of South Africa (25), Afghanistan (13), China (54), India (27), Japan (154), Philippine Islands (28), Turkey (49),</td>
<td>Austria (176), Belgium (121), Bulgaria (24), Czechoslovakia (163), Denmark (116), Estonia (33), Finland (107), France (200), Germany (348), Great Britain (205), Greece (41), Holland (129), Hungary (209), Iceland (12), Italy (182), Latvia (24), Liechtenstein (6), Luxemburg (44), Malta (11), Monaco (6), Norway (71), Poland (111), Portugal (19), Rumania (52), Sweden (151), Yugoslavia (90),</td>
<td>Argentina (51), Bermuda (5), Bolivia (1), Brazil (72), Canada (95), Chile (40), Colombia (6), Costa Rica (1), Mexico (32), Peru (40), Uruguay (37), U.S.A. (312),</td>
<td>Australia (32), New Zealand (7),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9 countries, 403 competitors</td>
<td>26 countries, 2,824 competitors</td>
<td>12 countries, 692 competitors</td>
<td>2 countries, 39 competitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. 1936 Berlin Olympic Games competitors by continent

---


Colonial Korea was an important juncture in the transportation system that had linked Europe to Japan since the early 1910s due to Japan’s expanding imperialism propelled by political, military, and economic goals.\(^{370}\) Since 1905, the Pusan-Shimonoseki ferry had plied between the two port cities across the Korean Strait between Japan and the continent. The urgent mission of Japanese administrators waging war against Russia in 1904–1905 hastened the establishment of a railway link to Manchuria from the southern port in the Korean peninsula. Entrepreneurs eager to expand the market for Japanese goods and obtain Korean agricultural products and natural resources began to set up business branches in Korea’s major cities. As a result, Japan opened the Kyŏngsŏng–Pusan railway and Kyŏngsŏng–Sinŭiju railway in 1905 and 1906 respectively, which went all the way through the Korean Peninsula.\(^{371}\) In 1911, the Yalu River Iron Bridge, between Sinŭiju and Fengtian, connected the Korean railways with the South Manchurian Railway and the Trans–Siberian Railway system, and, thus, to the European continent.\(^{372}\)

The 1940 Olympics prompted Japanese administrators to improve the rapidly developing railway system in the Japanese empire. It announced an ambitious plan to cut travel time from Tokyo to Xinjing, the capital of Manchukuo, which took around fifty-


\(^{371}\) During the construction of the railway, there were many cases of Japanese exploitation of Korean laborers, including low wage and poor treatment. For a detailed comprehensive history of the Korean railway during the colonial period, see Chŏng Chaejŏng, *Ilche ch’imnyak kwa Han’guk ch’ŏlto: 1892–1945* (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1999).

\(^{372}\) The bridge was renamed “The China-North Korea Friendship Bridge” in 1990.
three hours. The transportation project aimed to shorten the travel time between Tokyo and Shimonoseki by three hours and thirty minutes, between Shimonoseki and Pusan by thirty minutes, between Pusan and Andong by three hours and thirty minutes, and between Andong and Fengtian by an hour and a half.\(^{373}\) The speed of transportation connecting the Japanese empire encompassing Korea and Manchuria already boasted world-class levels comparable to any other advanced countries. Visitors to Korea traveled from Pusan to Kyŏngsŏng (four hundred fifty km) in six hours and forty five minutes in 1936 aboard the Akatsuki super-express train.\(^{374}\) Built in 1934 and equipped with cutting-edge facilities such as air conditioning and a glass-enclosed observation deck, the Asia Express ran, from 1934, from Dalian through Xinjing to Harbin at a top speed of one hundred forty kilometers per hour (eighty-seven mph) and quickly became “a symbol of the technological mastery of Mantetsu and the modernity of Manchukuo.”\(^{375}\) The Olympics added one more stimulus to speed up the web-like transportation network of the Japanese empire.

In addition to speed, reducing travel expenses was an urgent issue to draw many foreign athletes and tourists into the 1940 Games. Japan arranged a financial package to subsidize the travel expenses of foreign athletes, a generous offer on the part of host nation unprecedented in Olympic history.\(^{376}\) Japanese authorities allocated one and a half million yen (approximately 500 yen per athlete) to mitigate the travel expenses of foreign

\(^{373}\) Maeil sinbo, 6 August 1936.
\(^{374}\) Kenneth J. Ruoff, Imperial Japan at Its Zenith, 11.
\(^{375}\) Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 246–47.
\(^{376}\) Sandra S. Collins, The 1940 Tokyo Games, 68, 74.
athletes. The subsidy would reduce the probable cost of the journey for European athletes from around 2,200 yen to 1,700 yen. The Organizing Committee considered offering a discount traffic charge for foreign athletes. Negotiations regarding special Olympic reductions were in the pipeline among the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Railways, and Communications, N.Y.K. Steamship Company, O.S.K. Steamship Company, South Manchurian Railway Company, and the Japan Tourism Bureau (hereafter JTB).\(^{377}\) The railways crisscrossing the Korean Peninsula would offer special reduced rates for Olympic athletes, officials, and tourists with an increase in the number of special trains to accommodate Olympic families.\(^{378}\)

Public security risks in the border area were a serious challenge to Olympic preparation, while the military expansion of the Japanese empire looked swift and inexorable in East Asia in the 1930s. In the beginning of the outbreak of the Second Sino–Japanese War (1937–1945), Japanese troops swiftly captured the major cities of China such as Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Nanjing. Nonetheless, the Japanese imperial army was struggling to defend the cities and railway lines in the occupied regions with little control over the countryside and faced the constant threat of guerrilla attacks. Terrorizing the population with atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre (December 1937–January 1938), one of the worst massacres of World War II, failed to pacify the Chinese people and instead triggered more resistance.\(^{379}\) In addition, beginning

\(^{377}\) The Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo, Report of the Organizing Committee on Its Work for the XIIth Olympic Games of 1940 in Tokyo Until the Relinquishment (Tokyo: The Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo, 1940), 92–96.

\(^{378}\) Chosŏn ilbo, 5 May 1937.

in 1932, a series of Soviet–Japanese border conflicts, with no formal declaration of war, were escalating in frequency and scale. These included the Halhamiao Incident (1935), the Battle of Lake Khasan (1938), and the Battle of Khalkhin or the Nomonhan Incident (1939) in Inner Mongolia and the border region between the Soviet Union and Manchukuo.\textsuperscript{380} In particular, the Battle of Lake Khasan in 1938 near the Korean–Soviet border shocked the residents of northern Korea, a significant number of whom were convinced that a full-scale war between Japan and the Soviet Union was coming, leading to Japan’s fall.\textsuperscript{381}

Korea had been a Japanese colony for nearly three decades when preparations for the Olympics were underway, but the security situation in Korea was still unstable. Even though the nationalist movement had been completely thwarted in the homeland, Manchuria and later China proper were the main theaters of émigré nationalist activity, mainly led by communists. In Manchuria, Korean guerrilla forces grew rapidly and by 1933 had established several liberated districts in mountainous areas near the Korean–Manchurian border. The strength of the guerrilla forces grew to such an extent that they carried the battles into Korea proper. Among the Korean guerrilla group were three hundred men or so led by Kim Ilsung (1912–1994), the future founding leader of North Korea. Kim carried out numerous raids both in Manchuria and across the border in Korea, including an attack on a Japanese police garrison in the village of Pojŏn (renamed “Poch’ŏnbo” after 1945 by the North Korean government) in South Hamgyŏng province


\textsuperscript{381} Pyŏn Ŭnjin, \textit{P’asijŭmjŏk kŭndae ch’ehŏm kwa Chosŏn minjung ŭi hyŏnsil insik} (Seoul: Sŏinin, 2013), 358–74.
in June 1937.\textsuperscript{382}

Communists remained vigorous in labor, peasant, and anticolonial movements within Korea and worked in communist parties abroad in the Soviet Union and China. In some areas, especially along the border with China in Korean’s northeastern Hamgyŏng region, domestic and exile activities remained closely linked. The border between Korea and Manchuria was porous. In particular, the Korean community in Jiandao (Ko. Kando), the area just across the Tuman River (Ch. Tumen River) from Korea, was a de facto extension of Korea itself, so that anti-Japanese activities in southeastern Manchuria and northeastern Korea were closely linked until the late 1930s. The Hamgyŏng region adjacent to Manchuria had the highest incidence of radical peasant and anti-Japanese activities in the 1920s and 1930s, largely in the form of Red Peasant Unions; in addition, both information and the activists themselves moved easily back and forth between Hamgyŏng on the one hand and Manchuria and the Soviet Far East on the other.\textsuperscript{383} In addition, connected with the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and even the United States, colonial Korea was a contested stage where espionage activities continued until the end of the Japanese empire. For instance, Japanese authorities arrested 168 Soviet spies (25 Japanese, 142 Koreans, 1 Chinese) between 1934 and 1943, and 158 CCP spies (152 Chinese, 5 Koreans, 1 Japanese) between 1937 and 1944 in the jurisdiction of the GGK.\textsuperscript{384}

\textsuperscript{384} Yukiko Koshiro, \textit{Imperial Eclipse: Japan’s Strategic Thinking About Continental Asia Before August 1945} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2013), 140–46.
In this context, the GGK had to take extraordinary measures to tighten security and protect foreign guests. The unstable international situation and active espionage could be worsened by the Olympics where an unprecedented number of foreigners were expected to pour into Japan proper. The Central Police Bureau announced the establishment of a foreign affairs section in each province of colonial Korea by means of expansion of the Special Higher Police (Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu). Kyōnggi province, which included Kyōngsŏng, and North Hamgyŏng province, the region most vulnerable to attack by Korean communists, would be the first two provinces for the project. Then, the GGK decided to establish a foreign affairs section in North P’yŏngan province and South Kyŏngsang province, the northern and southern gateways to Korea, respectively.385

Olympic Tourism in Chosŏn

In the nineteenth century, Japan’s state-level effort to attract foreign tourists had already begun to enhance the national image and obtain income. The Welcome Society of Japan (Kihinkai) at the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce was established as Japan’s first tourism board by high-ranking foreign ambassadors, dignitaries, aristocrats, and leading entrepreneurs of the Meiji Era. Taking on the mission of the Welcome Society of Japan, the JTB played a major role in building tourism infrastructure and promoting tourist destinations including the colonies. Japan needed a new source of foreign currency to alleviate the severe financial drain caused by warfare expenses during the Russo–Japanese War. In addition, Japanese authorities considered international tourism to be

385 Chosŏn ilbo, 15 September 1936; Tonga ilbo, 24 August 1937.
conducive to improving Japan’s image which the war had tarnished as one of barbarism and war-mongering in the foreign press.\textsuperscript{386}

In the 1930s, tourism remained one of the main industries in Japan. The Great Depression, beginning in 1929, turned the tourism industry into a useful tool for obtaining foreign currency. The Ministry of Railways established the Bureau of International Tourism (1930), the International Tourist Committee (1931), and the Association of International Tourists (1931).\textsuperscript{387} In 1915, roughly nineteen-thousand foreigners visited Japan, but this number increased to 50,159 in 1930 and to 154,086 in 1937. In 1936, visitors to Japan spent approximately 107,688,000 yen, making the industry was Japan’s fourth most important source of foreign exchange revenue, behind cotton, raw silk, and silk products that year.\textsuperscript{388} War had negative effects on tourism as the Japanese authorities classified numerous areas of the coastline as “strategic zones” and forbade the taking of photographs. Nevertheless, inbound tourism remained so important that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in charge of the quality of tourist operations was willing to challenge the Foreign Ministry’s fanatical interrogation of new foreign arrivals.\textsuperscript{389}

The preparations for the 1940 Tokyo Games also proved that tourism was one of the most crucial sectors for achieving the capitalist goals of the Olympic organizers.

\textsuperscript{388} Nihon kōtsū kōsha, \textit{Nihon kōtsū kōsha shichijūnenshi}, 25–59.
Japanese authorities had high expectations of tourism compensating for the financial costs of preparing for the Olympics. The idea of Tokyo hosting the Olympic Games, first announced by the Tokyo mayor in 1930, encountered opposition from most Japanese government and Olympic officials, as they deemed Japan and Tokyo not sufficiently modern to host the Olympics. Despite negative feelings about the Olympic bid, the first official to endorse the campaign was the railways minister who oversaw the Bureau of International Tourism and recognized the impact that the Olympics could have on tourism in Japan.\textsuperscript{390} The Olympic Supporters Association, which comprised 29 influential figures, such as future IOC member Count Soyeshima Michimasa, had the stature and the clout needed to promote the Olympic Games in Japan. This association expected the 1940 Games to draw 100,000 foreign tourists to Japan, each expected to spend 1,000 yen (300 dollars).\textsuperscript{391} An August 6, 1936, news article clarified that the Japanese Tourism Bureau predicted 80,000 foreign visitors.\textsuperscript{392}

As a part of the Japanese empire, “The peninsula’s geographic proximity to and strategic location at the crossroads of three empires, China, Russia, and Japan, made Korea an early target for the emerging Japanese tourist industry in the early twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{393} The first documented tour group of private citizens eager for Russo–Japanese War memorabilia to visit the new frontier in Korea and Manchuria set sail in 1906, the year after Japan’s much celebrated victory over Russia. The “Cruise Touring Manchuria

\textsuperscript{390} Sandra S. Collins, \textit{The 1940 Tokyo Games}, 25–27.
\textsuperscript{391} Sandra S. Collins, \textit{The 1940 Tokyo Games}, 32.
\textsuperscript{392} \textit{Asahi shimbun}, 6 August 1936.
and Korea” was an auspicious start for a first-time commercial pitch to market Manchuria and Korea as tourist destinations within Japan’s empire.

The Government Railways of Korea (Chōsen sōtoku tetsudō-kyoku), in collaboration with the branch of the JTB that was established in Korea in 1912, began marketing Korea as a tourist destination, both to Japanese people and to Westerners. In 1913, it published “An Official Guide to Eastern Asia” in English.394 The JTB started distributing 3,000 maps printed in English and selling packaged tours of the colonies for domestic consumers and foreigners from China, South Asia, Australia, the United States, and Europe.395 Although patchy, statistics on prewar Japanese tourism to Korea confirm that at least, thousands of visitors from Japan proper made the trip annually by the late 1930s. For instance, 15,500 visitors from Japan and 3,200 from Manchukuo visited colonial Korea between January and November of 1935, with the Government Railways of Korea operating in the black.396 Round-the-world tourists, mostly from the United States, although few, stopped in colonial Korea on luxurious cruise ships such as Hamburg–America Line’s Resolute, spending a day sightseeing and visiting tourist attractions in Kyŏngsong.397

396 Tonga ilbo, 28 November 1932.
The 1940 Tokyo Games spurred the development of tourism in colonial Korea. The GGK had expectations that the many visiting tourists from Europe and America would bring revenue and offer a great chance to present a true picture of a burgeoning Korea to the world. A broad array of agents began to discuss and jumped into the tourism industry to take advantage of the Olympics. Several Japanese businessmen, including the owner of Sanyōken, one of the most upscale cafés in Kyŏngsŏng, planned to invest collectively three million yen to establish the Pukhan Mountain Recreation Area Corporation. Their proposal included the construction of a hotel, swimming pool, restaurants, and cable cars to take tourists to the top of Pukhan Mountain to see the Yellow Sea. Eight individuals—a male, record company executive, a female manager of tea house, three kisaeng (female entertainers), a barmaid, and two movie actresses—submitted a jointly signed petition to the chief of the Central Police Bureau requesting that a dance hall should be permitted in Kyŏngsŏng as in any other city in the Japanese empire. One of the reasons for opening a dance hall was the numbers of foreigners expected to pour into Kyŏngsŏng due to the 1940 Games. A significant number of the Government Railways of Korea staff in direct contact with foreign tourists began to learn Esperanto, an international auxiliary language devised in 1887 by Dr. Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof (1859–1917).

---

398 Maeil sinbo, 2 August 1936.
399 Tonga ilbo, 2 July 1937.
401 Maeil sinbo, 12 November 1936. On the topic of how Korean intellectuals accepted Esperanto as an international language during the colonial period, see Sŏ Minjŏng, “Ŏnŏjŏk ch’ŭngmyŏn esŏ pon Ilche kangiŏmgŏ úi Esŭp’erant’o wa K’osŭmop’ollit’an,” Uri mal kŭl 58 (August 2013): 417–36.
As the gateway to the capital of colonial Korea, Inch’ŏn’s tourism was growing, too. After the Annexation in 1910, Inch’ŏn lost its former status as the interface between the world and Korea, as the nation’s major portal through which Western culture flowed into the traditional society. Instead, the port city adjacent to the metropolis Kyŏngsŏng had become a beach recreation spot for the colonial capital city dwellers’ casual visits and leisure. In particular, in the late 1930’s, Inch’ŏn’s status as a resort attracted the attention of metropolitan city planning, which saw Kyŏngsŏng and Inch’ŏn in one zone to such an extent that it undertook the project of building a highway between them.402 In 1936 and 1937, more than 120,000 visitors enjoyed Wŏlmido Pleasure Ground, a comprehensive amusement and entertainment park equipped with many elements of both Western and Japanese amusement parks such as exotic buildings, a beach, a public playing field, and a zoo.403 Awaiting the 1940 Olympics, Inch’ŏn city council members were intensely urging their mayor to spark an Olympic tourism campaign, specifically mentioning defective road pavements, drain systems, and amusement facilities in Wŏlmido.404

Of the landmarks featured in Korean mass media, Kŭmgang Mountain attracted the most attention as a tourist spot. In the Chosŏn period, literati visited the mountain to appreciate the beautiful scenery, harden the body and purify the troubled mind, and have

404 Tonga ilbo, 15 March 1938.
a first-hand experience with Korea’s cultural and historical heritage. Kŭmgang Mountain was promoted by the colonial regime and JTB’s branches as the peninsula’s must-see destination with spectacular vistas for modern tourism. The accessibility to the mountain improved rapidly when the Kyŏngsŏng–Wŏnsan railway was built in 1914 so that travelers could get to the mountain by a combination of train and car. When Kŭmgang Mountain Electronic Railway Corporation opened a railroad line from Ch’ŏrwŏn to Kimhwa in 1924 and then to Naegŭmgang station (116.6km) in 1931, Kyŏngsŏng citizens could readily access the entrance of the mountain by train. In the holiday season, night express trains with slumber couches carried many tourists from the capital of colonial Korea to its most popular mountain.

Beyond railways, the colonial regime had already built or planned a variety of convenience facilities for the mountain. The Government Railways of Korea built two resorts deep in the foothills of the mountain, one at Onjŏngni Station (1915) and one at Changansa Temple (1924), to imitate the high-class ski resorts and spa hotels in Switzerland, France and Germany. In fact, the GGK already planned to develop Kŭmgang as a national park in the 1920s, even before the Japanese government enacted the National Parks Law (Kokuritsu Kōen Hō) in 1931, and the Setonaikai, Unzen, and Kirishima National Parks opened in 1934. In 1938, approximately 100,000 tourists

---

406 Kongŏsan denki tetsudō, Kongŏsan denki tetsudō kabushiki kaisha nijūnenshi (Ch’ŏrwŏn: Kongŏsan denki tetsudō, 1939), 1–6.
407 Hyung Il Pai, Heritage Management in Korea and Japan, 156.
408 Alishan, Taroko, and Dadunshan, totaling 4,668 square kilometers or 13 percent of Taiwan, became national parks by the Governor-General of Taiwan, Seizō Kobayashi, in 1937. For more information on the national parks project of the Japanese empire on Korea and Taiwan, see
visited the mountain.\textsuperscript{409}

The Kŭmgang Mountain development plans gathered momentum thanks to the Olympics. On behalf of local residents, the Kangwŏn provincial assembly asked the GGK to develop Kŭmgang for the Olympics.\textsuperscript{410} With the Olympics three years ahead, the GGK announced that it would spend 23,000 yen to investigate the mountain area to decide on the kind of facilities to be established without affecting the natural environment.\textsuperscript{411} The Government Railways of Korea’s development plan for Kŭmgang included the maintenance of a roadway to the mountain, the improvement of hotel facilities, the establishment of a teahouse, and a guidance board.\textsuperscript{412} Around ten thousand posters of the beautiful Kŭmgang written in Japanese and other foreign languages were printed for distribution by the Government Railways of Korea.\textsuperscript{413} Even Ōno Rōkuichirō, Vice Governor-General, crisscrossed the mountain for a field survey.\textsuperscript{414}

Even so, not everyone benefited from the Kŭmgang Mountain tour boom, and, in fact, international mega-events such as the Olympic Games have often been the rationale behind large-scale evictions. In preparation for the 1936 Olympics, the Nazis purged the homeless and slum-dwellers from areas of Berlin likely to be seen by international visitors. Subsequent Olympics have been accompanied by urban renewal and evictions nearly without exception. The 1988 Seoul Games were truly unprecedented in the scale

\textsuperscript{409} Tonga ilbo, 4 July 1939.
\textsuperscript{410} Maeil sinbo, 23 March 1937.
\textsuperscript{411} Chosŏn ilbo, 26 May 1937.
\textsuperscript{412} Tonga ilbo, 29 October 1937.
\textsuperscript{413} Tonga ilbo, 6 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{414} Chosŏn ilbo, 1 October 1938.
of the official crackdown on poor homeowners, squatters, and tenants. As many as 720,000 people were relocated in Seoul and Inch’ŏn, leading a Catholic NGO to claim that South Korea vied with South Africa as “the country in which eviction by force is most brutal and inhuman.”\textsuperscript{415} Before the 1988 Olympic tragedy, the first relocation in Korea caused by the Olympics took place at Kŭmgang Mountain prior to the 1940 Games. The Kangwŏn provincial government drove out 788 households of slash-and-burn farmers living in Hoeyang, Kosŏng, and Kimhwa counties near Kŭmgang. The first targets for eviction were farmers wresting a living in 738 hectares of swidden that could be seen from the window of the Kŭmgang Mountain Railroad’s trains. Slash-and-burn farmers were seen as ignominious subjects to be hidden from foreign tourists.\textsuperscript{416}

The 1940 Olympic tourism made Koreans tourists as well as hosts. Amidst preparation for the reception of foreign visitors, some Koreans were also looking forward to seeing Olympic Games on the spot. Special saving programs for travel expenses to Tokyo Olympics were launched by the post office and financial associations (\textit{kŭmyung chohap}) nationwide between August and October in 1936.\textsuperscript{417} For instance, the South P’yŏngyang Financial Association announced that more than 600 members had joined the Olympic savings program.\textsuperscript{418} Unlike the 1920s, when most customers of financial associations were Japanese settlers, many more Koreans joined financial associations in

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{416} Chosŏn ilbo, 21 August 1937.
\item\textsuperscript{417} For a comprehensive history on financial associations in colonial Korea, see Yi Kyŏngnan, \textit{Ilche ha kŭmyung chohap yŏn’gu} (Seoul: Hyean, 2002); Ch’oe Chaesŏng, \textit{Singminji Chosŏn ŭi sahoe kyŏngje wa kŭmyung chohap} (Seoul: Kyŏngin munhwasa, 2006).
\item\textsuperscript{418} Maeil sinbo, 25 September 1936.
\end{itemize}
the 1930s. Thus, it is likely that many who joined the savings plan for Olympic tourism were Koreans.419 Cosmopolitans (Sahae kongnon), a popular magazine (1935–1939), ran a survey of 15 famous writers’, film stars’, and theatre actors’ views on the 1940 Tokyo Olympiad. A good number of them, if not all, were eager to get in line as tourists to see the 1940 Games. Here are some of their statements:

Paek Ch’ŏl (critic): I will go by all means.

Yi Ik (movie person): I don’t want to go to see the Games, for I dislike boisterous places.

Sin Ŭnbong: I am sad not to be well-off like that.

Ch’oe Yŏngsu (cartoonist): I am not saying I can’t go, but I won’t go for fear of being trampled to death.

Hong Hyomin (critic): I don’t like sports by nature. Sports are a kind of circus if beyond the confines of public health. So I don’t want to go there even when the Games will be held nearby.

Chŏng Raedong (scholar of Chinese literature): I surely want to go if I have enough time and travel money.

Min Pyŏnggyun (poet): I will certainly go. Instead of watching the Games, I will make some money from Yangkee. So, I am searching ways to make money. What about selling eggs? As soon as I collect money, I will donate all of it to the Korean literary world [laugh].

Pak Kosong (theatre actress): I really want to go, but have no means of going there, given my current situation.

Kim Irhae (movie man): I am definitely going. I would like to meet sports film artists from all over the world. I also want to watch the sports and root for athletes.

Yang Seung (cinematographer): Of course! As a cinematographer, I will

---

carry my movie camera to shoot live action.\textsuperscript{420}

Not only upper class or influential figures but also ordinary people knew about the 1940 Olympic Games and wanted to join as spectators, as seen in one of the \textit{Tonga ilbo}’s saturation coverage. Amid full-scale war against China, illegal tungsten robbery plagued mountains, including the Kŭmgang, due to the sharply increasing price of raw materials to the point where the problem of deforestation became a serious social issue.\textsuperscript{421} A reporter of the \textit{Tonga ilbo} explored deep into the Kŭmgang to interview robbers and asked them a question, “What are you going to do with the money you make?” Quite unexpectedly, one of them answered: “I am performing this dangerous job to afford to journey to Tokyo Olympics.”\textsuperscript{422} As ardent supporters of the Tokyo Games like the Japanese people, some Koreans actively participated in relieving the Olympic Organizing Committee of financial troubles. The total budget for the twelfth Olympic Games, to be held in Tokyo from the last week of September until October 6, 1940, was 20,142,427 yen, and general subscriptions and donations were to contribute 1,500,000 yen of this total.\textsuperscript{423} The Japanese Olympic Organizing Committee was touched by letters of

\textsuperscript{420}“Munin, yŏnhwain, kŭgin yasim ŭl türŭm: tae Ollimp’ik mundap,” \textit{Sahae kongnon} (November 1936): 170–73.

\textsuperscript{421}Denton shows the origins, development, and consequences of Japan’s exploitation of tungsten from 1910 to 1945 through a case study of how these Korean resources fit into the larger resource base of the so-called “Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Chad Denton, “More Valuable than Gold: Korean Tungsten and the Japanese War Economy, 1910 to 1945,” \textit{Seoul Journal of Korean Studies} 26, no. 2 (2013): 361–95. Colonial Korea was already in the grip of the first tungsten fever during World War I. See, Chŏn Ponggwan, \textit{Hwanggŭmgwang sidae: singminji sidae Hanbando rŭl twihindŭn t’ugi wa yongmang ŭi in’gansa} (Seoul: Sallim, 2005), 241–42.

\textsuperscript{422} \textit{Tonga ilbo}, 25 July1938.

\textsuperscript{423} The Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo, \textit{Report of the Organizing Committee on Its Work for the XIIth Olympic Games of 1940 in Tokyo Until the Relinquishment}, 124.
encouragement and financial donations from frugal households. For instance, the news that a Korean living in Kyŏngsŏng donated 100 yen to the committee was reported as a patriotic deed and inspired the Japanese officials preparing for the Games. Rather than mere submissive spectators, but the colonized were vigorous participants in the preparations for the first Olympics in Asia.

The Korean Sports Community Floating on Air

The most enthusiastic segment of colonial Korea before the 1940 Tokyo Games was probably the Korean sports community, which desired international exchanges with foreign athletes. From the 1920s to the 1930s, a growing number of foreign athletes from China, Japan, Manchuria, and the Philippines visited Korea for baseball, basketball, boxing, football, and skating matches. In addition, some venturesome bands of Western athletes visited colonial Korea. The Herb Hunter All-American baseball team including three Major League Baseball players stopped in Kyŏngsŏng in 1922 on a winter tour of Asia and routed the Korean All-Star team, 21-3. In 1925, some young female baseball players, the Philadelphia Bobbies, had a friendly match in colonial Korea. When naval fleets from European countries such as the United Kingdom and France called at a port in Korea occasionally, football matches took place. Overall, though, Korea did not attract

---

424 Maeil sinbo, 17 February 1937.
425 Joseph A. Reaves, Taking in a Game, 121.
world-class athletes to Korea, regardless of sport. The best athletes from the Western world often competed against their Japanese counterparts but had no interest in visiting Korea. Thus, the sports community of colonial Korea saw the Olympics as a great chance for Korean athletes to face off with Westerners to develop their skills, since most European athletes were expected to have practice matches in Korea before and after the Games.

Modern sports facilities with a hefty price tag have been one of the prerequisites for athletic exchanges with important foreign athletes. The Olympic host nations spurred the rapid development of sports facilities to make the Games magnificent spectacles. The first three Olympics in Athens, Paris, and St Louis did not involve many new facilities. The 1908 London Games saw the first piece of Olympic architecture, the White City Stadium, and until the 1920s every host city featured “an Olympic stadium (for most of the competitions) + small rented halls (for a few essential indoor events) + improvised adapted water courses for aquatic sports.” The Los Angeles Games of 1932 were another milestone in the Olympic sports facilities journey with the epic 105,000-spectator-capacity Memorial Coliseum, which would remain the largest Olympic arena ever built until the Sydney Games of 2000, along with a swimming arena and a fencing pavilion. The 100,000 seat new stadium, swimming center, open-air amphitheater, sport forum, large assembly, and service buildings that the Nazi regime built were superb enough to surpass the efforts of any other host cities up to that point. Of course, Kyŏngsŏng was only a stopover on the way to Tokyo, but Japanese colonial authorities

---

and the Korean sports community were overwrought that Kyŏngsŏng Stadium would be an international embarrassment given the previous host cities’ up-to-date training and leisure facilities.

In particular, Kyŏngsŏng Stadium, the mecca of Korean sports and a symbol of colonial modernity, was a matter of great urgency for the Korean sports community. Japanese authorities originally constructed the main stadium of colonial Korea in congratulatory commemoration of the wedding of the crown prince, the future Emperor Hirohito, in 1924. The original site of the Chosŏn dynasty’s Military Training Agency (Hullyŏnwŏn) became Kyŏngsŏng Stadium in the name of Kyŏngsŏng’s 300,000 residents. It featured more than 3.3 hectares of athletic fields, 1.65 hectares of baseball fields, 0.33 hectares of tennis courts, and other modern facilities. Calling the complex “number one in Asia” was no hyperbole.428 In the late 1930s, however, when the 1940 Olympics were in the offing, concerns were mounting that the current stadium might shame Kyŏngsŏng as an international city.

In spite of the large budget needed, colonial regime and sports personalities in colonial Korea pushed for the remodeling of Kyŏngsŏng Stadium. First of all, Kyŏngsŏng Sport Reporter’s Club and the Mayor of Kyŏngsŏng held a symposium and decided to expand Kyŏngsŏng Stadium. The GGK was supposed to shoulder half of the financial burden, which was too much for Kyŏngsŏng’s city government on its own. A ruinous

---

428 Paktori [pseud.], “Kyŏngsŏng ŭn ilyŏn kan ŏlmana pyŏnhaenna,” Kaehyŏk (December 1925): 74–75. The writer complained about excessive stop-and-search actions by police, and the expensive entrance fee for the stadium. For detailed information on the facilities of Kyŏngsŏng Stadium, see Son Hwan, “Ilche ha Han’guk kŭndae sŭp’ŏch’ŭ sisŏl e kwanhan yŏn’gu: Kyŏngsŏng undongjang ŭl chungsim ŭro,” Han’guk ch’eyuk hakhoeji 42, no. 4 (July 2003): 33–43.
budget of up to 1,390,000 yen for new construction made the colonial government resort to a remodeling plan, which cost around 430,000 yen. The remodeling project included the improvement of light facilities, enlargement of the fields, and stands reinforced with concrete to accommodate approximately 17,000 spectators as did the Meiji Jingū Stadium. In 1937, after the outbreak of war with China, the Temporary Fund Control Law (Rinji shikin chōsei hō) banned capital from flowing into industries manufacturing “non-urgent and unnecessary goods.” The remodeling project of the Kyōngsŏng Stadium would continue as planned to save the honor of the capital of colonial Korea, while GGK pigeonholed or delayed most new or existing governmental schemes.

The 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games made Korean youngsters want to be Olympians. Son’s Olympic gold medal stirred a distance running boom as he became an object of admiration for young aspirants to the title of world marathon champion. Whatever their motivations—enhancing national prestige, gaining personal honor, or just having fun—, so many Korean youths spilled into the streets to run after Son’s victory that they became a public nuisance for traffic control in major cities. The Maeil sinbo reported that a nine-year-old boy, who ran every night to be a marathon runner like Son, was run over by a car and injured in the crossroads of Kwanghwa Gate, the capital’s old main gate of the royal palace. The Police Security Office of Kyōnggi province designated a part of the main streets in Kyōngsŏng as a “no distance running zone” after consulting with

---

429 Maeil sinbo, 31 October 1936; Tonga ilbo, 13 June 1937.
430 Tonga ilbo, 5 December 1937.
432 Maeil sinbo, 26 October 1937.
433 Maeil sinbo, 10 September 1936.
authorities in the sports community.\textsuperscript{434} Plagued by many young runners training on running trams with the goal of being in the 1940 Tokyo Olympics, P’yŏngyang Police Station was also seriously concerned with directing the downtown traffic.\textsuperscript{435} Son Kijŏng observed that, nowadays, even women on farms knew about the Olympics, and the Koreans were showing impressive improvement in most sports, with notable exceptions such as swimming or yachting. This proved that Koreans’ character was second to none, Son concluded.\textsuperscript{436}

Colonial Korea was keen on the largest possible number of its athletes participating in the Olympics, even if representing Japan. Host countries tended to send the largest teams to the Olympics, since they have no travel expenses for their delegations. At the same time, they want to live up to their populace’s expectation to show off their athletic prowess to the world. As Yi Sangbaek mentioned, every informed observer knew that Japan would make the largest-scale and the best national squad for the 1940 Games as the host nation, which meant more chances for Korean athletes in Japanese uniforms to become Olympians.\textsuperscript{437}

In the late 1930s, the overall competitiveness of Korean athletes was improving by leaps and bounds. Korean athletes and sports personalities participating in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games learned scientific strategies and skills of advanced sports powerhouses and their experiences became valuable assets for Korean sports

\textsuperscript{434} Maeil sinbo, 18 October 1936.
\textsuperscript{435} Maeil sinbo, 7 October 1936.
\textsuperscript{436} Son Kijŏng, “Ch’aeho Olimp’ik kwa Chosŏn undonggye ŭi chŏnmang,” Chaeman Chosŏnin t’ongsin (August 1938): 49–50.
\textsuperscript{437} Chosŏn ilbo, 5 January 1938.
community. More Korean athletes emerged as competitive candidates for the 1940 Olympic Japanese squad from a variety of sports. In track and field, not only marathon but also other sports such as the 100-meter dash, the long jump, the triple jump, and the shot-put featured Korean athletes defeating world-level Japanese counterparts. Six Koreans joined the camp training for the Japanese national football team. Colonial Korea also produced ten basketball players for the Olympic team of 25, five cyclists on a team of 20, and ten skaters on a team of 15. For weightlifting, an emerging sport in the 1930s, Korea turned out seven members, the majority of the entire team of Japan. Handball, wrestling, and dressage were also sports in which some Korean athletes surpassed the Japanese athletes.

Korean and Japanese mass media classified several Korean athletes as Olympic favorites. Ko Tongu won the marathon at the Meiji Shrine Games in 1939 with the best time in the world that year. Kim Wŏn’gwŏn, a student of Posŏng College, emerged as a top-tier athlete in the triple jump, an event that Japan had dominated in the Olympics: Oda Mikio (gold medal) in 1928, Chūhei Nambu (gold medal) and Kenkichi Ōshima (bronze medal) in 1932, and Naoto Tajima (gold medal) and Masao Harada (silver medal) in 1936. Kim’s record in 1938 was second, just behind Jack Metcalfe from Australia, and finally, in 1940, the best in the world. In weightlifting, Nam Suil set the

---

439 Chosŏn ilbo, 7 July 1938.
440 Chosŏn ilbo, 10 March 1938.
441 Chosŏn ilbo, 26 January 1938.
442 Tonga ilbo, 18 January 1938.
443 Tonga ilbo, 14 April 1938.
444 Chosŏn ilbo, 21 March 1938; Tonga ilbo, 3 January 1938.
445 Tonga ilbo, 4 January 1939.
world record in featherweight weightlifting in the tenth Meiji Shrine Games in 1939. His world record earned him the Asahi Sports Prize which honored Japanese athletes setting world records or winning Olympic gold medals.\footnote{Son Kijŏng won the prize in 1937 as well.}

In spite of tremendous improvement of its top-level athletes, Korea’s sports community was wary vis-à-vis Japan. Koreans still remembered the raw deal they suffered in the football and boxing trials for the 1936 Olympics and felt that a repetition of that kind of discrimination was unacceptable. From such a perspective, the Olympic tryouts had to be fair to colonial Korea, beyond political interests and based on true sportsmanship.\footnote{P’yŏnjipkuk [editorial department], “Che 12 segye Olimp’ik hoe Tonggyŏng taehoe,” Sahae kongnon (October 1936): 156.} Yi Sangbaek also pointed out that colonial Korea, with its population of 24 million, deserved to fill one-third of the sports on the Japanese Olympic team, given the population ratios of the Japanese empire.\footnote{“Sŭp’och’ŭ wa chŏnjaeng”–kangjiwa Chosŏn ch’eyuk chinhŭng ŭi tangmyŏn munje,” Ch’unch’u (April 1942): 83.} Placed in the category of “peripheral colonization,” most Koreans hardly had a sense of oneness with their colonizers. In spite of official assimilation policy backed by the slogans of “Japan and Korea as one body” (Naisen ittai) during the wartime period, the ever-present Japanese sense of superiority over Koreans undermined the effort to convince most Koreans to consider themselves Japanese.\footnote{Mark Caprio, Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).}

Nonetheless, the lingering questions over why more Korean athletes should participate in the Olympics as representatives of Japan and whether winning spots on the
team would promote Korean independence remained. The more frequent appearance of Korean athletes under the Japanese flag in international sports arenas did not symbolize Korean resistance to Japanese colonialism. For instance, in the late colonial period, the fierce nationalistic football match between Korea and Japan looked different from before, now that the Japanese squad included a significant number of Korean footballers.\footnote{Takeo Gotō, \textit{Nihon sakkāshi: Nihon daihyō no 90 nen: 1917–2006: shiryōhen} (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2007), 18–20.} Most Korean athletes were playing for Japan without any reluctance, while some of their seniors, if not many, had refused to take part in international sports event as members of the Japanese team in the 1920s as an expression of their nationalist sentiment.\footnote{For instance, Ma Chunsik passed the first 400 meter tryout held in Kyŏngsŏng but refused to participate in the final tryout for the 1923 Osaka Far Eastern Championship Games. Yi Kiryong praised Ma’s decision highly as a nationalistic choice, saying “this was the sports spirit back then.” \textit{Tonga ilbo}, 3 January 1929.}

On the other hand, the cohesion between sports and wartime mobilization emerged. When two Korean college athletes in football and weightlifting, respectively, applied to the Korean Special Volunteer Soldier System, the *Maeil sinbo* expected their physical strength and courage as sportsmen to play a crucial role in destroying American and British soldiers.\(^{452}\) During the full-scale war against the Allied Powers, Yi Sangbaek was arguing that sports would help Koreans be prepared to fulfill their duties as Japanese imperial subjects on the battlefield for several reasons. First, sportsmen with proactive personalities would join a suicide brigade. Second, they have the endurance to overcome various kinds of ordeals. Third, they are more obedient and cooperative than others. Fourth, they readily advance with a cheerful character, even in perilous environments.\(^{453}\) The war spurred the state to utilize the athletes’ vaunted physical prowess towards the needs of the battlefield.

**Summation**

Korea’s reaction to the 1940 Tokyo Olympics shows a more nuanced picture of the period of heavy-handed Japanese wartime mobilization. The 1940 Tokyo Olympics’ organizers were eager to draw foreigners to promulgate the new image of the Japanese empire with up-to-date capital city.\(^{454}\) The first Olympics outside the West were to provide an exceptional chance to attract many foreigners to colonial Korea. Most

---

\(^{452}\) *Maeil sinbo*, 20 November 1942.

\(^{453}\) “Sŭp’och’ŭ wa chŏnjaeng”–kangjiwa Chosŏn ch’eyuk chinhŭng ŭi tangmyŏn munje,” 86.

Koreans were actively laying the groundwork for a successful Olympics in the hope of cashing in on Olympic tourism. The sheer number of Korean athletes with vastly improved skills was supposed to help them win more slots in the Japanese Olympic team.

In the end, the Second Sino–Japanese War caused the cancellation of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics. The international community, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Scandinavian countries, threatened to boycott the Tokyo Games, and domestically, Japanese militaristic segments did not allocate social resources to the Olympic Games. In July 1938, the Japanese government abruptly cancelled the competition, sending a telegram to that effect to the IOC on July 16, 1938. The IOC reassigned the 1940 games to Helsinki but later canceled the Games in April 1940 in the face of the Soviet invasion.455

In the meantime, the extensive celebrations to commemorate the 2,600th anniversary of the enthronement in 660 BCE of the mythical first emperor Jimmu were booming. A number of publications discussed the founding of the nation, the state renovated the sacred imperial sites to welcome thousands of visitors, businesses such as department stores sponsored expositions and contests, and mass media took the lead in the last boisterous national festival—all before the fall of the Japanese empire in 1945. While official wartime ideology underscored self-sacrifice and the restraint of individual desire, the authorities encouraged consumption if it had the welcome side effect of strengthening “one’s sense of nation and national mission.”456

456 Kenneth J. Ruoff, Imperial Japan at Its Zenith, 80.
Korea had the Great Keijō Exposition in 1940, which coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of Japan’s rule over colonial Korea. The colonial authorities and mass media widely advertised the event and aimed to subject the “unassimilated” Korean masses to a hasty process of “imperialization” in an empire still controlled by ethnic Japanese.\textsuperscript{457}

Despite the failure of the 1940 Tokyo Olympiad, its cancellation did not dampen enthusiasm for sports across the empire, including colonial Korea. Undoubtedly, physical education under the late colonial rule turned individual sports into militaristic training and drills to create Korean bodies geared towards fighting alongside Japanese imperial soldiers against the Allied powers.\textsuperscript{458} Nonetheless, sports did not come to an end. The 1940 East Asian Games replaced the abortive Tokyo Olympics and took place in June, with over 700 athletes invited from Japan, Manchuria, the Philippines, Thailand, Hawaii, and Japanese-occupied areas of China and colonial Korea. The Eleventh Meiji Shrine Games in the same year, which coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the shrine, attracted more spectators on a grander scale than the East Asian Games. The event featured a long-distance race between Miyazaki and Unebi as well as a celebratory relay race originally planned for the Tokyo Olympics as a torch relay.\textsuperscript{459} All these events symbolized Japan’s transformation from cosmopolitanism to militaristic pan-Asianism.


and saw the participation of a number of ethnic Korean athletes, not only from Korea but also from Manchuria, China, and Japan. Evidently, sports facilitated an ongoing assimilation. Not surprisingly, Son was among the torchbearers for the Eleventh Meiji Shrine Games.\(^{460}\)

\(^{460}\)Son Kijŏng, “Ch’eyuk taejejŏn ch’amgwan kwa chosŏn ch’eyuk chinhŭng e ŭi chŏnmang,” 190–95.
Conclusion

The entire picture of Korean sports in the Olympics changed around eighty years after the ethnic Korean athletes’ participation in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Whereas only three Korean athletes participated in the 1932 Olympics as a part of the Japanese delegation, in the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games a total of the 248 (135 men and 113 women) competed in 22 sports and won 28 medals (13 gold, 8 silver and 7 bronze), finishing fifth in the medal standings based on the gold first method. South Korea certainly has become one of the world’s sports powerhouses.  

The most emblematic tournament at 2012 London Olympic Games for Korean sports history and its connection with the legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism was football. In the quarter-finals, South Korea defeated Great Britain, which had introduced the ball game more than a century ago, in a dramatic penalty shoot-out. After losing its semi-final match against Brazil, South Korea claimed its first-ever Olympic football medal, seeing off none other than its formal colonizer, Japan, to secure the bronze. Korean players gave three cheers as a second-goal ceremony during the match, since National Liberation Day (August 15) was approaching. Immediately after the game, one of the Korean players, Park Chongu, ran a lap with a sign reading, “Tokto is our territory,” which was handed to him by a Korean spectator. Since both South Korea and Japan claim the South Korean-administered islets (Ja.Takeshima), the dispute has

461 North Korea sent 51 athletes and won 6 medals (4 gold, 2 bronze).
been a thorny issue for decades.462

Undoubtedly, sports are “vehicles of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others.”463 Stadiums remain battlegrounds between Korea and Japan, replete with national sentiment in a post-liberation era deeply entrenched in colonial memories. Korean athletes, South or North, at any level must play with clenched teeth and win the match with Japan without exception. To Koreans, a match victory against Japan is about national pride—a

462 Deeming his celebratory action political, FIFA and the IOC barred Park from attending the medal ceremony. Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter states, “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”
compensation for thirty-five years of colonial rule. Sports in East Asia tend to be more nationalistic than in Europe because of the turbulent histories caused by controversies and conflicts surrounding territorial or textbook issues. The relationship between Korea and Japan is a case in point.\textsuperscript{464} In the face of Japanese teams, even the fierce post-liberation division between South and North Korea evaporates, sharing collective memories and constructing their pan-Korean identity.\textsuperscript{465}

As argued in this study, though, the booming popular culture of the Japanese empire presents a more complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Originating in the Taisho era (1912–1926), and embracing a wide array of ideas such as liberal democracy, internationalism, idealism, fascism, and communism as well as even anarchism and eroticism, the 1930s Japanese empire maintained a pluralism connected with international society.\textsuperscript{466} Even during the wartime era, media and mass culture thrived. The war provoked an unprecedented demand for information, so that radio ownership and newspaper readership climbed dramatically. Japanese citizens shrewdly found loopholes in tight state control and enjoyed the jazz and films of their western enemies, even while Japanese forces were bleeding to death on battlefields. The Japanese bureaucracy in the late 1930s affected by Nazi media policies initiated a national campaign to put a radio set in every home for the total mobilization of the people’s spirit. Cinema was an imperative medium for government propaganda, even though movie

\textsuperscript{464} Victor D.Cha, \textit{Beyond the Final Score}, 23–24.
theaters closed early in the evening and moviegoers paid heavy taxes on tickets.\textsuperscript{467}

Thus, the 1930s mass culture of colonial Korea as a part of the Japanese empire reached a level of modernity in a wide range of genres encompassing music, film, and literature, backed by capitalist production, advertising, and consumption. Not only print media but also state-of-the-art radio, theaters, and phonographs met the public’s expectations for dazzling modern culture linked to the transnational forces of global capitalism up to the height of World War II.\textsuperscript{468}

Colonial Korean sports in the 1930s reflected the maturity of a mass culture deeply connected with Japan’s empire. Korean athletes caught up with the metropolis and performed at international sports events in many sports. Most Korean Olympians were by-products of colonial modernity. Education, sports facilities, a sizable fan base, and the mass media constructed by colonialism played a major role in producing world-class Korean athletes. Being connected with the Japanese empire gave Korean athletes many opportunities to compete with their Japanese counterparts and enter universities where their athletic careers could continue in the one of the best sports environment in the world. Japan’s Olympic delegation provided favorable conditions for Korean Olympians to train in Olympic sites. Korean mass media used news articles and pictures of Korean


Olympians in Japanese papers with foreign correspondents and advanced technologies.

For instance, Korean reporters featured Son’s picture with the Japanese flag on the uniform of Son’s chest expunged, and this photograph of Son’s triumph came from none other than the *Osaka Asahi*.

All the same, not all was well with colonial Korea vis-à-vis sports. Historians examining colonies such as Korea are tempted to think that every significant element of the miserable colonial past is only a stepping stone toward the present, following modernism’s linear conception of progress. To the contrary, serious debates among intellectuals, reporters, and educators have never found ways to develop Korean sports. For instance, not everyone agreed with or cheered for the increasing number of Korean Olympians. Some Koreans construed the frequent presence of Korean athletes in the Olympics as individual athletes’ self-promoting collaboration with Japanese authorities, or a luxury for a minuscule number of elite athletes far removed from the suffering Korean masses. A significant number of nationalist leaders and intellectuals expressed their displeasure with the intrusion of Western sports into their homeland and the hooliganism caused by excessive competition between colleges or local clubs. As is true elsewhere, the Korean sports community has never been free from corruption, incompetency, and factionalism, even to this day. The unnecessary commercialism and sensational journalism surrounding sports celebrities and the Olympics is a shadow of modernity.

The growing number of Korean Olympians during the colonial era symbolizes neither the success of Japanese assimilation policy nor the realization of Korean
nationalism through sports. Statistical figures during the latter part of colonial Korea under the banner of “Japan and Korea as one body” offer a glimpse of colonial Korea in the course of assimilation by Japan: increasing numbers of Koreans visiting shrines, adopting Japanese-style names, volunteering for military service, and making financial contributions to Japanese government’s war effort. It is uncertain whether these Koreans were willingly joining the Japanese empire as proud subjects of empire, including the Korean Olympians as the Japanese gaze at the colonized was always ambivalent and cautious. On the other hand, a thinly veiled national sentiment was not the only motivation for Korean athletes in their late teens to early twenties to play for their nation under Japanese rule. The conclusion drawn from elaborate inquiry into the lives of each individual debunks the myth that all Koreans fought for national independence around the clock.\(^\text{469}\)

The athletes and sports personalities of colonial Korea played a major role in the emerging Korean sports community after liberation. Having their nationality restored, they entered the 1948 London Olympic Games under the flag of the Republic of Korea led by Son Kijŏng, flag bearer. Kim Sŏngjip, a once promising Japanese weightlifter for the aborted 1940 Games, won the first Olympic medal (bronze) for South Korea in weightlifting in the 1948 and 1952 Games and served as the chief of T’aeŏng National Training Center, which was founded in 1966 to produce elite national athletes. Yi

Sangbaek, a former JOC official, became the second Korean IOC member (1964–1966). Most athletes, coaches, administrators, and reporters in the post-liberation Korean sports community had been engaged in colonial Korea. Affirming causality between the colonial experience and the present success of South Korean sports in the Olympics is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, a better understanding of sports in colonial Korea can shed more light on the trajectory of sports in contemporary Korea.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Asahi shimbun


*Chaeman Chosōnin t’ongsin* [The Manchurian resident Korean dispatch].

*Cheilsŏn* [Front Line].

*Chogwang* [Morning light].

*Ch’ŏngch’un* [Youth].

*Chosŏn chungang ilbo* [The Chosŏn chungang ilbo].

*Chosŏn ilbo* (The Chosunilbo).

*The Christian Science Monitor*

*Chungang* [Center].

*Chungoe ilbo* [The Chungoe ilbo].

*Hooe* [Extra].

*Hyesŏng* [Comet].

Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp. *Chōsenjin no susumu beki michi* [The Path Koreans must take]. Keijō: Ryokki renmei, 1940.

Kaebyŏk [Creation].

Kim Yongje. (Segye cheil) Marason wang Son Kijŏng usŭnggi [(The best in the world) The victory of Son Kijŏng, the Marathon king]. Kyŏngsŏng: Myŏngmundang, 1936.


Kungminbo [National news].

Kwŏnŏp sinmun [Industrial promotion newspaper].

Los Angeles Times.

Maeil sinbo [Daily news].

Man’guk puin [Universal women].


Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo. Report of the Organizing Committee on Its Work for the XIIth Olympic Games of 1940 in Tokyo until the Relinquishment. Tokyo: Organizing Committee of the XIIth Olympiad Tokyo,
1940.

*Pip’an* [Criticism].

*Pyŏlgŏn’gon* [The Meridian].

*Sahae kongnon* [Cosmopolitans].

*Samch’ŏlli* [The three thousand ri].

*Sin Tonga* [New East Asia].

*Sin kajŏng* [New family].

*Sin segi* [New century].

*Sin sidae* [New era].

*Sinhan minbo* [New Korea newspaper].

*T’aegŭk hakpo* [T’aegŭk educational association journal].

*Taehan maeil sinbo* [The Korea daily news].

*Tonga ilbo (The Dong-A Ilbo).*

*Tonggwang* [Eastern light].

*Tongnip sinmun (The Independent).* Seoul.

*Tongnip sinmun* [The Independent]. Shanghai.

*Yomiuri shimbun.*

*Yŏsŏng* [Woman].


**Secondary Sources**


Ch’oe Kyujin, Hwang Sangik, and Kim Suyŏn. “Singmin sidae chisigīn Yu Sanggyu ŭi salm ŭi kwejŏk” [A life of Yu Sanggyu, a modern intellectual in the colonial


______. Chosŏn ŭi sanai kŏdŭn p’utppol ŭl ch’ara: sūp’och ’ŭ minjok chuŭi wa singminji kŭndae [If you are a man of Korea, kick a football: sports nationalism and colonial modernity]. Seoul: P’urŭn yŏksa, 2010.


ch’ulp’anbu, 1999.


Chŏng Kŭnsik. “Ilbon singmin chuŭi ŭi chŏngbo t’ongje wa sigakchŏk sŏnjŏn” [Japanese colonial information control and visual propaganda]. Sahoe wa yŏksa 82 (June 2009): 41–82.


Chŏng, Miryang. 1920-nyŏndae chaeil Chosŏn yuhaksaeng ŭi munhwa undong: kaein kwa minjok, kŭ yunhap kwa punyŏl ŭi kyŏnggye [The Cultural movement of Korean students in Japan in the 1920s: the individual, the nation, and the border between the fusion and schism]. P’aju: Chisik sanŏpsa, 2012.


Garon, Sheldon M. “The Transnational Promotion of Saving in Asia: ‘Asian Values’ or the ‘Japanese Model’?” In *The Ambivalent Consumer: Questioning Consumption*


Han Ch’ŏrho. *Singminji Chosŏn ŭi ilsang ŭl mutta* [Interrogating daily life in colonial Korea]. Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2013.

Han Kyumu. “1900–1920 nyŏndae Migugin Han’gu kwan’gwangdan yŏn’gu” [A Study on American tourist groups to Korea from the 1900s to the 1920s]. *Sŏgang inmun nonch’ong* 36 (April 2013): 149–187.


Hashimoto Kazuo. *Nihon supōtsu hōsōshi* [The history of sports broadcasting in Japan].


Ikuo, Abe. “Historical Significance of the Far Eastern Championship Games: An


Kang Yŏngsim, ed. *Ilche sigi kündaejŏk ilsang kwa singminji munhwa* [Modern daily
Kim Sangt’ae. “P’yŏngando chiyŏk ŭi kŭndaejŏk pyŏnhwa wa kuksa kyokwasŏ sŏsul
naeyong kaesŏn pangan” [Modern changes in P’yŏngan province and plans to revise the contents of national history textbooks]. Chibangsa wa chibang munhwa 8, no. 2 (November 2005): 179–232.


Kimura, Masato, and Toshhiro Minohara. “Introduction.” In Tumultuous Decade Empire,


Martin, David E., and Roger W. H. Gynn. *The Olympic Marathon*. Champaign, IL:


________. “1920–1930 nyŏndae tosi kūmyung chohabwŏn kusŏng ŭi minjokchŏk kyech’ŭngchŏk sŏngkyŏk” [Nationality and class characteristics of members of urban financial associations in the 1920s and 1930s]. Han’guk sahakpo 19 (2005): 123–149.


———. *Heritage Management in Korea and Japan: The Politics of Antiquity and...*
Pak Kyŏngho and Kim Tŏkki. *Han'guk ch’ukku paengnyŏn pisa* [The secret history of one hundred years of Korean football]. Seoul: Ch’ae’k ingnŭn saramdŭl, 2000.


Robinson, Michael E. *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925.* Seattle:


Sin Chubaek. “Ilche malgi ch’eyuk chŏngch’aek kwa Chosŏnin ege kangje toen kön’gang-ch’eyuk kyoyuk ŭi kunsahwa kyŏnghyang kwa silchong ŭl chungsim
ũro” [Late colonial physical education policy and the militarization of health and fitness training for Koreans]. Sahoe wa yŏksa 68 (December 2005): 252–280.


______. “Son Kijŏng ūi saengae wa sŭp’och’ŭ hwaltong e kwanhan yŏn’gu” [A study on life and sport activities of Son Kijŏng]. Han’guk ch’eyuk kwahak hoeji 13, no. 2 (August 2004): 3–15.


Taehan ch’eyukhoe. Taehan ch’eyukhoe 90-nyŏnsa [Ninety years of the Korean Sports


Tikhonov, Vladimir. See Pak Noja.


_______. *Ŭnbanwi ŭi chilchu* [Sprinting on ice]. (Seoul: Sŏul Ollimp’ik kinyŏm kungmin ch’eyuk chinhŭng kongdan, 2000.)


Index

A

Adolf Hitler, 118

Amsterdam Olympic Games (1928), 6, 21, 23, 64, 75, 120, 129, 142

An Ch’angho, 59, 86, 87, 111

B

Battle of Khalkhin, 146

Battle of Lake Khasan, 146

Berlin Olympic Games (1936), 5, 55, 74, 76, 82, 102, 109, 112, 109, 137, 163

C

Ch’oe Nŭngik, 51, 53

Ch’oe Sŭngman, 113

Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan, 5, 133

Chang Ijin, 2

Chang Usik, 2

Chŏn Kyŏngmu, 52, 59

Chŏng Sangyun, 103, 134

Chōsen Industrial Bank, 124, 127, 136

Chosŏn sinmun, 23

Chūhei Nambu, 164

commercialism, 5, 8, 69, 129, 131, 132, 133, 174

213
Corps for the Advancement of Scholars, 87

*Creation*, 24

*Criticism*, 24

Dean Bartlett Cromwell, 55

D

Dennis Frost, 8, 108

E

Elswood S. Brown, 29, 34

El Quafi, 120

Eric Hobsbawm, 10, 105

Ernest Harper, 136

F

fascism, 5, 172

FC Kyŏngsŏng, 82, 90-97, 99, 101, 104

FC P’yŏngyang, 82, 91, 92, 93, 102

FECG (Far Eastern Championship Games), 28-34

FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Associatio), 74, 75

Finland, 21, 22, 25, 37, 141, 143

France, 37, 62, 68, 77, 120, 139, 141, 143, 155, 160

Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, 70

G
Garmisch-Partenkirchen Winter Olympic Games (1936), 1

Germany, 37, 70, 116, 141, 143, 155

GGK (Government-General of Korea), 18, 121, 123, 148, 149, 152, 155, 162

Gi-Wook Shin, 4

Great Britain, 22, 141, 143, 170

H

Hannes Kolehmainen, 22, 39

Halhamiao Incident, 146

Hansŏng Foreign Language School, 77

Hara Takashi, 25

Hawaii, 47, 48, 50, 55, 169

Herbert Spencer, 12

Hitomi Kinue, 23

Hong Hyomin, 157

Hwang Sayong, 54

Hwang Ŭlsu, 1, 38, 45, 55, 58, 64, 67

Hwarang, 16, 17

Hyŏn Chŏngju, 33, 93

I

IAAF (International Amateur Athletic Federation), 41, 65, 74

Industrial Promotion, 16
Industrial Promotion Association, 16
IOC (International Olympic Committee), 1, 9, 29, 52, 56, 61, 74, 75, 130, 139, 141, 142, 151, 168
Italy, 37, 83, 104, 136, 141, 143

J

Jack Metcalfe, 164
Japan Amateur Sports Association, 32, 42, 64, 65
Japanese Flag Erasure Incident, 109, 121, 125
Joe DiMaggio, 126
Joseph Maguire, 10
JTB (Japan Tourism Bureau), 146, 149, 151, 154

K

Kanaguri Shizō, 120
Kang Poksin, 129, 132
Kang Sanggyu, 117
Kenkichi Ōshima, 172
Kiho, 86, 88, 90
Kim Chŏngyŏn, 1
Kim Ilsung, 153
Kim Ku, 51, 118
Kim Poyŏng, 74
Kim T’aeho, 45, 52
Kim Ŭnbae, 1, 39, 40, 43, 44, 60, 66, 72, 142
Kim Wŏn’gwŏn, 172
Kim Yŏngggŭn, 97
kisaeng, 159
Kishi Seiichi, 67
Ko Pongo, 133
Koen De Ceuster, 5
Koguryŏ, 45, 46
Kojong, 11, 12, 15
Korea Sports Promotion Foundation, 6
Korean Basketball Association, 6
Korean Football Association, 6, 94, 109
Korean Olympic Committee, 6, 20
Korean Sports Association, 19, 20, 21, 43, 56, 84, 91, 136
Korean Sports Confederation, 19, 28, 33
Korean Sports World, 21, 23
kukkung, 83
Kŭmgang Mountain, 161, 162, 163
Kungminhoe, 54
Kwŏn T’aeha, 1, 39, 44, 55, 60, 68, 118, 142
Kyŏngsŏng Stadium, 112, 168, 169

Light of Korea, 24

Liu Changchun, 58, 59

London Olympic Games (1908), 26, 167

London Olympic Games (1948), 1, 17, 58, 183

London Olympic Games (2012), 77, 178

Los Angeles Olympic Games (1932), 7, 43, 54, 58, 113, 135, 178

Manchukuo, 58, 59, 151, 153, 158

Manchurian Resident Korean Dispatch, 128

March First Movement, 24, 31, 61, 84, 119

Meiji Shrine Games, 19, 41, 42, 94, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 171, 172, 177

Michael Robinson, 4

Min Kyusik, 136

Minami Jiro, 126, 127

motion pictures, 7, 22

Nagata Hidejirō, 146

Nam Suil, 172

Nam Sŭngnyong, 1, 117
Nanjing, 118, 152

Naoto Tajima, 172

nationalism, 4, 5, 9, 11, 14, 20, 31, 48, 51, 57, 61, 65, 72, 79, 87, 109, 110, 111, 114, 117, 118, 119, 126, 128, 131, 139, 142, 143, 146, 178, 183

Niels Bukh, 73

No Chwagün, 29

O

Oda Mikio, 172

Ŏm Poktong, 112

P

Paavo Nurmi, 22, 68

Pak Sŏgyun, 27, 57

Pang Tuhwan, 31

Pierre de Coubertin, 15, 30, 35, 36, 70

Posŏng College, 137, 172

Promotion of Industries Club, 90

Protestantism, 11, 89

P’yŏnhwadang Company, 135, 137

Pyŏn Ponghyŏn, 20

R

racism, 5, 9, 48, 50, 119, 123
radio, 6, 7, 54, 63, 66, 74, 143, 180, 181

Rhee Syngman, 62, 90

S

Saitō Makoto, 29

Sawamura Eiji, 131

Silla, 17

Sin Kijun, 39, 53, 55

Sŏ Chŏnggwŏn, 113

Social Darwinism, 11, 13, 121

sŏkchŏn, 83

Son Kijŏng, 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 112-118, 124, 128, 132, 134, 136-144, 170, 172, 177, 183

South Manchurian Railway, 150, 152

Soviet Union, 73, 153, 154

Special Higher Police, 155

St. Louis Olympic Games (1904), 148

Sweden, 22, 24, 38, 108, 149

T

*T'aegŭk Educational Association Journal*, 16

t’aekkyŏn, 83

Taedong Association of the People’s Friends, 130

Temporary Fund Control Law, 169
Theodor Schmidt, 65

Tokyo Olympic Games (1940), 9, 141, 145, 146, 163, 165, 169, 170, 175, 177

Tongjihoe, 62

tourism, 3, 9, 146, 152, 155-161, 163, 164, 175

Tsuda Seiichiro, 67, 68, 69

U

United States, 2, 15, 22, 32, 38, 48, 49-58, 61, 62, 70, 71, 75, 76, 83, 90, 118, 147, 154, 158, 159, 175

W

Waseda University, 20, 57, 84, 94, 100, 101, 102, 108

Y

Yangjŏng High Ordinary School, 40, 42, 116, 137, 140

Yi Kiryong, 38, 41, 54, 57, 63, 82, 84, 86

Yi Kyuhwan, 2

Yi Pongch’ang, 51, 56

Yi Sangbaek, 39, 53, 55, 57, 170, 172, 174, 183

Yi Sŏngdŏk, 1

Yi Sŏnggu, 2

Yi T’aechun, 72, 73

Yi Yŏngmin, 96, 101, 108

Yi Yongsŏl, 74

221
YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association), 13, 30, 31, 57, 80, 91

Yŏ Unhyŏng, 34, 101, 145

Yŏm Ŭnhyŏn, 2

Yŏnhŭi College, 84, 96, 107

Yu Sanggyu, 74

Yu Xiwei, 58

Yun Ch’iho, 91, 115, 122

Yun Ponggil, 51

Z

Zhang Xueliang, 59