

THE PERSPECTIVES OF ASIAN SPORTS 亞洲運動前瞻

DR. FRANK FU

傅浩堅博士

香港浸會大學體育系主任

亞洲是由一群廣佈東西南北的國家組成。它一向受著其他國家和勢力的影響。例如，較早期的英國，法國，葡萄牙，西班牙以及荷蘭等殖民勢力以致較近期的美國浪潮。第二次世界大戰後，正當大部份國家享受著和平和繁榮生活之際，戰爭卻在韓國、越南和中東相繼爆發。亞洲某些地域又告進入烽火期。到了一九八八年在韓國漢城舉行的奧林匹克運動會，運動員和主辦單位的成功又再顯示出亞洲擁有廣大有待發掘的資源。從這點我們可以說，亞洲各國現正處於既受殖民勢力和天然遺產的影響以及對現代化不同反應的過度期。

Asia is composed of a large number of countries spread over a long distance from east to west as well as north to south. It has been traditionally influenced by the colonial powers of Britain, France, Portugal, Spain and Holland and more recently, the U.S. After World War II, while most countries were enjoying a period of peace and prosperity, wars broke out in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East. The 1988 Olympics at Seoul was so successful that people again realised that Asia has many hidden resources. It is therefore fair to say that Asia is in transition with different countries responding differently to the impact of modernization and the influence of their natural heritage and past colonial power.

Asian as the leading region in economic growth in the world in the coming decades

During the past five years, the world economy was suffering from a mild recession in most countries in Europe and America. There was, however, a steady growth rate in the Asian countries. Investments from overseas increased and many U.S. companies were involved with joint ventures with native companies, especially in the People's Republic of China.

Many business firms were convinced that Asia would be the continent for major economic growth in the next Century. They were impressed by the various untapped natural resources at different regions as well as a very industrious workforce. Once the obstacle of transportation and communication are resolved, the potential of the Asian economy and market will be tremendous.

While Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were among the most developed and affluence countries in the region, others such as Thailand and Malaysia were striving hard for modernization. With the Open Door policy of mainland China, the climate for business was very optimistic and euphoric.

A by-product of economic prosperity is a rise in the standard of living of the general public and increased level of government and commercial sponsorship in the promotion and development of sports. Many countries became conscious of the values of sport in nation building and have provided special administrative and financial support for that endeavour. Professional sport teams were formed in Japan, Korea, Philippines, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China with varied levels of success. However, it appeared that the trend would be the



introduction of more and more professional sport teams in the region. With the bullish outlook on the potential for economic growth in the Asian region, the development and promotion of sports will also benefit from this optimism. The government and the commercial community will play a vital role in this endeavour.

Asian athletes coming of age as world champions

The improvement in the telecommunication technology has contributed significantly to public awareness and support of athletes' success in major Games and World Championships. While it took weeks to learn of the success of the Japanese marathon runner in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the winning of the Chinese divers in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics was witnessed by millions of their countrymen live on television. The impact of both historical moments were obviously quite different. People are now more supportive and involved in sports because of the coverage in live of so many sporting functions.

The success of the Asian countries in international competition started with the dominance of India and Pakistan in field hockey in the 1950's, followed by Malaysia and Indonesia in badminton in the 1960's, and the People's Republic of China in table tennis in the 1970's. By 1980's, the Asian countries, especially South Korea and Japan, were also producing many world champions e.g. in judo, boxing, and archery. In most sports, the females appeared to have performed better than their male counterparts. As a whole, Asia has produced world champions in athletics, swimming, boxing, taekwondo, shooting, archery, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, football, weightlifting, gymnastics, diving, squash, and Wushu. This was due to a commitment of the government as well as importing western personnel and technology in sports medicine and sports science areas. While the success by Asian athletes are often received with suspicions and scepticism by the western press, Asian athletes will continue to produce world champions in sports which they can excel. Their success is contributed to better coaching, availability of better training environment, increased opportunity to compete with world class athletes, improved self-concept, total dedication and commitment, and higher standard of living. With time, the achievements of the Asian athletes will eventually be firmly established and accepted.

Asia - integrating Western ideology and technology with traditional social system

While there are many indigenous sports in different parts of Asia, they are not popular and played only during special ceremonies and occasions. With the exception of a few countries such as People's Republic of China, Japan, and Thailand, many Asian countries were colonies of Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, and the U.S. The present popular sports in these countries were imported from the West during the past 100-150 years. Thus, sports per say, has a relatively short history in the Asian countries compared to their heritage and traditions. The opening up of Asia to the West resulted in a change of lifestyle - agricultural communities are slowly changing to industrialized societies, especially at the over-populated cities. The struggle between the new and old ways of living, thinking, and making a living has plunged many Asian countries into chaos. The strive for modernization was attributed to cause the breaking down of the family unit, political unrest, uncoordinated social developments, uncontrolled inflation, and brain drain.

Despite the various obstacles and difficulties faced by the Asian countries, sports was slowly being accepted as an important part of the society. The level of government and community support has risen significantly during the past 20 years. Western sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, squash, and swimming attracted a large number of spectators and participants of all age levels and gender.



In some countries, they performed so well in international competitions that these “sports” became their national sports e.g., field hockey in India, squash in Pakistan, judo in Japan, taekwondo in Korea, badminton in Indonesia, and table tennis in China.

It is difficult and improper to generalize. However, no one will disagree that Asia is in transition - torn between the desire to modernize and to retain their cultural heritage. Sport is playing an increasingly important role in the Asian societies. As there are always positive and negative aspects to it, one must always try to adapt these “western” sports into their native countries and to learn from the mistakes of their “importers”.

Increased opportunities for regional and international exchanges and cooperation

The 19th Century left a memorable page in the history of Asia. In the early part, we witnessed an expansion of western influences in most regions, which slowly gave way after World War II to the doctrine of self-determination. Many countries were able to gain their independence from their colonial powers e.g. India, Malaysia, Singapore, while regional conflicts and civil wars persisted in China, Korea, and Vietnam until 1970's. China's Open Door Policy in 1978 opened the opportunities to exchanges in the region and in the international arena. Seoul was awarded to host the Olympics in 1988, the second Asian City to do so after Tokyo (1964). The end of the Cold War also signalled the beginning of a new era in which the desire for peaceful coexistence once again dominated the ethos of people all over the world. While there are still tension in certain corners of the world, the threat of another World War which would annihilate the human race no longer exists. There were also more and more regional Games and world champions held in Asia e.g., the Asian Gams, the NE and SE Asia Games.

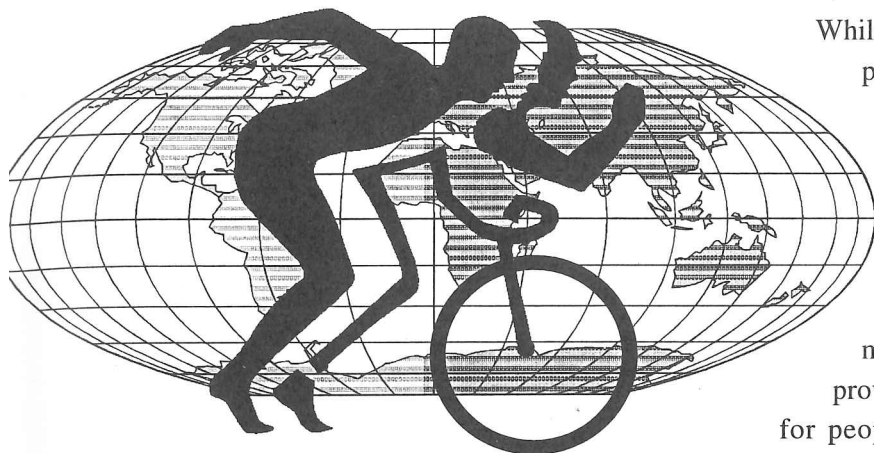
Another encouraging sign was the interchanges of not only athletes and coaches, but also university faculty and students between Asian countries and the rest of the world, especially with the U.S. and the U.K. Such opportunities facilitate technology transfer as well as better international understanding between the East and West. The tourism industry joined force with the government in capitalizing this chance to show off their countries.

As more and more countries in the region improve their standard of living, the desire to interact with others will also increase. This in return will promote better understanding among Asians and contribute to the overall stability in the region.

Limitations in the delivery of physical education and sports in the region

As Asia is composed of mainly developing countries, there are still many limitations for them to overcome in the process of developing and promoting sports. Some of the typical limitations are as follows:

1. Lack of good sport facilities.
2. Lack of trained teachers, coaches, and administrators.
3. Lack of government support.
4. Lack of community support.
5. Lack of a good network of transportation and communication.
6. Lack of good job opportunities.
7. Lack of an overall sound economy.



While there is no single solution to the various problems faced by Asian countries to improve their delivery of sports programmes, there must be a conviction by the government to set that as one of its top priorities. A long range plan which includes improving the standard of living of its citizens, introducing modern technology at a controlled rate, providing adequate educational opportunities for people to learn and better themselves, and having a stable government and economy.

Some would argue that sports and politics must be separate. In reality, if politics are played for the advancement of sports and improvement of the overall livelihood of the people, there is little reason to ban politics from sports. After all, sports can be invaluable in nation building in developing countries.

The challenges ahead

The future of sports in Asia is very encouraging. The strive towards economic growth must be realistic and kept under control so that changes in the society can cope with them. If sports is a mirror of the society, due emphasis must be given in the delivery and promotion of sports so that the overall quality of life of the general public is improved. The increased opportunities to interact must be preserved so that there will be more regional cooperation and harmony among Asian countries. Last but not the least, countries must not sacrifice their heritage and identities in the process to modernization.

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