The Soft Power of Sports in Japan’s Cultural Diplomacy

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"Catching the Wave: Connecting East Asia Through Popular Culture"
Institute of East Asian Studies, UCLA at Berkeley, October 5-6, 2007
sport in politics // politics in sport

The Idealist Perception
- no interference: **sports and politics are separated spheres**
- moral superiority: **sports may (should) impact upon politics**

The Realist Perception
- states: **dominant actors using sports for their own purposes**
- focus on power relations: **sports dominance and the Cold War World Order; sport mirrors relations of dominance and subordinance**
“effective exercise of human rights … contribution to the inculcation of fundamental human values”
UNESCO, International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, 1978

“reinforcing the bonds between peoples … contributions which sport can make to personal and social development”
European Sports Charter, 1992
sport powers

- representation (eg. national sport)
  - history
  - cultural heritage
  - distinctive contribution to mankind

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sport powers

- presentation (eg. sport mega events)
  - inward bound: national integration; reconciliation in divided societies or postcolonial relations
  - outward bound: national prowess and economic success; civil power:

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The Soft Power of Sports in Japan's Cultural Diplomacy   [5/all]
key questions

K1: Has sport played a role in bringing the countries in East Asia closer together?

K2: Has sport been mobilised for strategic goals in international relations by East Asian state actors?

- Q1: Is sport an adequate tool and promising field of cultural diplomacy?
- Q2: Is sport a viable option to establish international integration?
- Q3: In regards to sports as a tool of diplomacy, is the state a capable actor to achieve this goal?
The Japan/Korea World Cup 2002

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The Korea/Japan World Cup 2002

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Japan
- 1st Asian World Cup into the most developed country
- bidding committee: sport bureaucrats
- largely delayed government approval
  ➔ co-hosting decision: defeat

South Korea
- 1st Asian World Cup into the leading football power's country
- bidding committee: staffed by political and business elite
- immediate government approval
  ➔ co-hosting decision: victory

Implications of “co-hosting decision”
- Cooperative or competitive hosting?
- cooperation on governmental level
- regular exchange on sub-national level
- gradual improvement of bilateral relations
  ➔ turning point of Japan-ROK relations?
sport in Japan's cultural diplomacy (1)

- Soft power
  - TV series: "Captain Tsubasa" alias "Captain Majed"
- Sport development
  - Football equipment for Iraq
  - Financial support for athletes
**sport in Japan's cultural diplomacy (2)**

- **Football and people to people exchange**
  - ASEAN Japan Exchange Year 2003
  - Japan-ROK Friendship Year 2005

- **Football in war and peace**
  - Football clinics in Asia and Middle East
  - Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic Development of the Western Balkans
  - Israeli-Palestinian youth friendship football camp

→ to increase prestige on the international stage
sport in Japan's cultural diplomacy (3)

- **MP football exchange**
  - Association of MP for the Promotion of the World Cup (1998-2002)
  - Association of MP for the Promotion of Football Diplomacy (2002-2005)
  - annual match series terminated after Koizumi’s visits of Yasukuni Shrine and territorial dispute (Dokto/Takeshima)

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Asia Cup 2004: regional disintegration

- "spectator riots"
  - booing the national anthem; heckling fans; throwing things; surrounding team bus
  - Chinese hooliganism as media event

- official reactions
  - "It's deplorable" (Former Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko)
  - "Stop fans booing the anthem" (Former Vice Foreign Minister Takeuchi Yukio)
  - "We want China to firmly deal with it" (Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki)
  - "It's a sport event. Why can't we just enjoy it?" (Former Prime Minister Koizumi)
  - "… or boycott of the 2008 Olympics!" Yabunaka Mitoji, Director General from the Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau
readings of the 2004 Asia Cup in China

- Appeal to international norms: Fair Play
  - C: "bad referee robbed China from title chances"
  - J: "respect for the national anthem, fans, players"
  - C+J: "no politics, just football"

- Playing the history card (two different card decks)
  - C: "Look into history and apologize to Asian people"
  - J: "anti-Japanese sentiments derive from nationalistic education"

- international message
  - can China/North Korea control its people?
  - court of international appeal

- domestic message
  - criticism of the anti-democratic system
no fair play for North Korea
[answers]

- The power of sport in foreign policy is weak.
- Sport diplomacy: rather reactive than proactive.
- K1: Has sport played a role in bringing the countries in East Asia closer together?
  - No. Evidence is lacking.
- K2: Has sport been mobilised for strategic goals in international relations by East Asian state actors?
  - Yes. But without significant success.
- Q1: Is sport an adequate tool and promising field of cultural diplomacy?
  - No (differentiation instead of) and yes (integration).
- Q2: Is sport a viable option to establish international integration?
  - No and yes.
- Q3: In regards to sports as a tool of diplomacy, is the state a capable actor to achieve this goal?
  - No and yes.
  → contrasting answer sets demand for multi-layered, multi-level analysis.
Levels and layers of analysis

– FRONTSTAGE – BACKSTAGE – OFF-STAGE –

On the political floor: high politics
- F: official representation of national politics
- B: working level (track-two meetings)
- O: informal encounters beyond established channels of IR

On the sports ground: sport encounters
- F: Athletes, coaches,
- B: management, administration and staff
- O: grassroots exchange; spontaneous encounters

On the screen and in the tabloids: media coverage
- F: TV and print media
- B: media of restricted accessibility
- O: Internet blogs; bulletin boards

In the roads and in the pub: popular opinion
- F: what people say
- B: what they actually would like to say
- O: what they say under conditions of trust or anonymity