

# **philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints**

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**Stefan Huebner's**

*Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence  
of Modern Asia, 1913–1974*

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gender, and performativity; metacriticism of cinematic and media forms and industries; and sharp social commentary, among others. These materials, avoided traditionally in the mainstream, have found form and ally in the digital format. While the mainstream persists in living out its consumerist dumbing down of the cinematic form, digital cinema in the Philippines, if we are to take Hernandez's perspective, is indeed changing the whole industry one film at a time and for the better. It may be a slow process, but one by one these films the author mentions have provided new blood to the larger cinematic corpus, often and popularly understood in terms of star power and box office records.

In this book Hernandez makes a clear and bold statement for digital film, and the digital format, as the future of Philippine visual cultures. Despite its contemporaneity, she gives it a sense of history, and thus form, borne out of an industry's need for a new lease on life, its search for "a more accessible and affordable filmmaking tool" (229), and its desire to contend not only with the technological advancements but also with the ever-changing viewing behavior of globalized Filipinos.

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STEFAN HUEBNER

## **Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974**

Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. 397 pages.

Stefan Huebner received his PhD degree from Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany, and specializes in the history of colonialism, modernization, and development policy. In July 2016 he started a Research Fellowship at the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute, where he is based today. *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia* heavily employs his earlier journal publications, such as his article on the sportive "civilizing mission" of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the Philippines.

Traditionally the academic field of sports history has been centered on Europe and North America. Although some important works exist outside of these regions, most studies trace the dissemination of modern sports by

Western colonizers across their colonial territories, leaving a gap in sports history that prioritizes non-Western perspectives. *Pan-Asian Sports* thus contributes to the field by looking at elite Asian historical actors and the politics involved in staging international sports events in the continent.

This book is not about athletic performances and does not narrate the events of individual games or matches. Rather it is about the staging of the games as international events and the intellectual debates behind them. Specifically, Huebner uses the international Asian sports events from 1913 to 1974 to analyze the different ideas of “nation” and “Asia” as conceptualized by the region’s elite. Instead of the games’ impact on sports fans or the achievements of individual athletes, Huebner focuses on the “active *spread* of sports” rather than its “passive diffusion” (6), requiring an approach centered on the actors behind the political discourses produced in the organization and staging of each event. As such, Asian and Western politicians, civil society actors, and highly trained sports professionals provide the majority of source materials, consisting of speeches, letters, journal entries, published articles, and minutes of meetings.

Huebner’s main question is: “Why and how did the early Asian Games and their predecessors turn into sites of contestation of the nation and of visions of modern Asia?” (10). With his interdisciplinary approach to international history, Huebner deploys three conceptual frameworks to analyze each of the Pan-Asian games. First, he uses James Scott’s “authoritarian high modernism” to assess elite perceptions on how sports can change society. The act of hosting international sports events is treated as part of a high-modernist agenda in which elites deploy “industrial-strength social engineering” (9) to drive societies toward their own visions of nationhood and modernity. Huebner also deploys Anthony D. Smith’s concept of ethno-symbolism to determine the organizers’ use of “traditional cultural elements of ethnic communities” (9) to portray a united nation or region. These cultural elements include the medals, trophies, stadiums, and the opening and closing ceremonies unique to each staging of the games. Closely connected to the concept of ethno-symbolism is that of nation branding, with host nations utilizing the aforementioned symbols to project a positive representation of themselves to both international and domestic audiences. The games, in this context, are theatrical displays of soft power more viable than the application of economic or military force to achieve recognition and/or respect on the international stage.

Thus, in *Pan-Asian Games*, sports events are seen as arenas where different programs for social change, diplomatic policies, and national propaganda clash with each other. These clashes produce different ideas regarding the “supranational connectedness of Asian countries and peoples” (5), but all emphasize some degree of similarity among Asia’s component nations, justifying the use of the term “Pan-Asianism” or simply “Asianism.” Given the stress on ideas of nation and Asianism, the book is mostly an explication of concepts and events in Asian sports from the point of view of the educated elite.

Huebner identifies common ideals behind the organizing and staging of international sports events and analyzes different interpretations of three of them: internationalism, egalitarianism, and economic progress. All sports events featured in the book—the Far East Championship Games (FECG, 1913–1934), the short-lived West Asian Games (WAG, 1934), and the very early Asian Games (1951–1974)—were organized by elites who interpreted (or even rejected) these three ideals, as discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

First, elites commonly saw international sports events as a means to unify Asia on the international stage, promoting “international exchange, peaceful cooperation, and regional integration” (6). Also during the games themselves, each country ideally stood on equal terms on the playing field, in the egalitarian tradition of Western Enlightenment (7). Finally, the elite organizers saw these events as opportunities to help modernize Asian economies, either by securing a physically and mentally healthy citizen workforce, as in the FECG, or through the infrastructure projects required to host events successfully, as in the Asian Games.

Huebner concludes that three key areas of differences were central in the history of Pan-Asian sporting events: differences among elites; divergent beliefs on Pan-Asianism and nationalism; and varying conceptions of modernization, development, and nation branding. These differences caused the games to become sites of contestation for different ideas of Asianism and nationalism in twentieth-century Asia.

The elite actors behind each of the games came from a variety of backgrounds. They held different motivations for staging the games and convictions regarding the utility of sports in society. Early sports professionals in Asia were usually educated abroad before working in their respective physical education departments—such as the YMCA’s Elwood Brown, the Philippines’s Regino Ylanan, and Japan’s Kano Jigoro—and possessed common beliefs about the societal importance of sports due to

their high level of education. In contrast, traditional elites—politicians and civil society actors who took part in organizing the games such as Japan’s Prince Chihibu, Filipino Jorge Vargas, and the Maharaja of Patiala in India—were more heterogeneous as a group and thus a source of wide divergence of ideas about sports and society (266).

The differences among these elites fed into different ideas on Asianism and nationalism in each staging of the games. Huebner argues that, although all elite actors—whether professional or traditional, Asian or Western—agreed on an egalitarian conception of Asia, they disagreed on the exact content of such an Asia (267). Examples include the Manchukuo/Manchuria issue in the 1930s, which created a dilemma for American FECC organizers because of Japan’s insistence that the newly occupied region participate as a colonial territory; the intense criticism Indonesia faced for its desire to invite Communist China to the Fourth Asian Games in Jakarta in 1962; and the 1966 and 1970 Bangkok Games, which did away with all anti-Western pan-Asian rhetoric, while simultaneously excluding all communist-governed states. Therefore, in each staging of the games, debates arose on the kind of Asianism and nationalism to be deployed: questions about “Asia” being anti-West, pro-democracy, non-Communist, or inclusive of the Middle East played large roles in determining the list of participating countries.

The organizers’ understanding of modernization, development, and nation branding also differed across the years. Initially American organizers and their Asian counterparts understood the staging of sports events as a form of biopolitics to spread the “Protestant work ethic” of muscular Christianity (as implemented through tenets of social control and self-improvement in physical education). Thus, the YMCA sought to use sports as a vehicle to both regulate and optimize public health toward economic progress, understood as part of the colonial civilizing mission in a backward Asia (272). Asian elites took over this civilizing task, assimilating the ideals of egalitarianism and internationalism, but rejecting the moral superiority of Western civilization. Later, international sports events became a means to project images of progress (or superiority), not only through greater feats of athleticism but also through the successful hosting of increasingly larger (and more expensive) games. Host countries used these games to showcase modernity, culture, civilization, and economic progress, as was done for the Tokyo (1958), Jakarta (1962), and Tehran (1974) Asian Games.

The scope of *Pan-Asian Sports* is wide but needs further explanation because, although Huebner justifies beginning it in 1913, the year the FECCG was founded, there is little explanation for ending the book with the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. There is also the obvious limitation of focusing on elite perspectives, although Huebner admits to this bias early in the introduction. Still, the focus is justifiable given his sources and conceptual framework. He also analyzes the social impact of the games by looking at ticket sales (when sources are available) and press coverage (broadsheet, radio, and television), but concedes that such sources cannot paint a complete picture of the effectiveness of symbols, ceremonies, and speeches.

Huebner's book provides insights into the circumstances and motivations of the people who decide when, where, and how to host international sports events. In Asian sports, the symbols and rhetoric employed in the FECCG, the WAG, and the Asian Games are shown to be products of the asymmetrical power relations between Asian and Western (and later on, among different Asian) elite sports actors. Huebner's book foregrounds sporting events in Asia, where the historical relevance of sports remains to be fully explored, making *Pan-Asian Sports* a welcome addition to the ongoing conversation on international sports history.

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WATARU KUSAKA

## **Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor**

Singapore: NUS Press; Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2017. 341 pages.

*Moral Politics in the Philippines: Inequality, Democracy, and the Urban Poor* has been a long-anticipated book since its Japanese version came out in 2013. Its author, Wataru Kusaka, obtained his postgraduate degree at the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies, Kyushu University, but his first exposure to the Philippines was doing volunteer work in Leyte as an undergraduate student. He also attended graduate classes at the University of the Philippines-Diliman (266). But above all, it was his engagement with