Despite a problematic history, Japan and South Korea host the 2002 World Cup together. A Tibetan lama, Kyhente Norbu, makes a film about football-mad Buddhist monks that becomes an international hit at Cannes in 1999. Approximately 130,000 Bengalis attend the 1997 Federation Cup final between Kolkata’s two great rivals, Mohun Bagan FC and East Bengal FC. In 2002, the team from marginal Manipur wins the Women’s National Football Championship in India for the eighth time in ten years without conceding a goal. What on earth is all this about? The answer, of course, is that all this is about Asia.

By James Mills

E ven at a glance, it is obvious that these few football stories contain within them elements of religion, gender, class, colonialism, international relations, modernization and globalization. Importantly, the stories hint both at history and at processes of change. Japan and South Korea, two nations with a complex past of cultural and political colonialism, united to exploit the opportunities provided by the World Cup cabaret. The monks of Tibet have a history of fascination with football that stretches back to the beginning of the twentieth century and the film hits at the necessity of approaching Tibet, even of approaching its religious institutions, with fresh perspectives. Calcutta has been India’s football capital for over a century, during which time the game and the local clubs have been transformed into institutions that reflect and indeed constitute the city’s tremendous diversities. The women of Manipur draw on a fascinating history of both sporting activity and of political action to participate in a game that allows them to reverse the relationship between their state and the Indian Union and to assert, on a national stage, the unusual power of females in their region. Examining sports in these contexts reveals that local societies have shaped sporting activity. But the reverse might also be said, as sports have been central to the processes of change and of conflict that have shaped local societies. The physical intensity of participation in a sporting moment, either as a player or as a supporter, can give an immediate and a huge charge to whatever meanings are attached to that particular instance. As such, the importance of sports in processes of social change can be explained by the fact that the alliance of sports to political, social or cultural lives gives a powerful, and perhaps unique, energy to such movements or processes.

It is therefore surprising that sports have not been a more important tool of analysis for those interested in Asian societies. While scholars working with this region have been the source of important new perspectives in the last two decades, the Subaltern Studies School is just one example of this.

Sports in Korea

Unlike sports in many European countries, Korean sports do not have their roots in a club system. For youth the schools are the primary area for their physical activities and students can experience and learn various sports throughout their school life. Schools, however, merely provide Physical Education classes and extracurricular physical activities. After graduation, Koreans regularly participate in any sports facilities, just 32 per cent of sports facilities are publicly owned, only per cent of such facilities are publicly owned in Korea. As a result of the limited number of sports facilities, just sports facilities are publicly owned in Korea and there are only 90 public swimming pools nationwide. Whereas in Japan, of sports facilities are publicly owned, and a club system has yet to be properly established. The total number of public gymn in Korea stands at 283, and there are only 90 public swimming pools nationwide. Whereas in Japan, 20.8 per cent of sports facilities are publicly owned, and a club system has yet to be properly established. The total number of public gymn in Korea stands at 283, and there are only 90 public swimming pools nationwide. Whereas in Japan, 20.8 per cent of sports facilities are publicly owned, and a club system has yet to be properly established.

In many parts of South Korea, senior citizens can be observed in their early morning exercises.

By Ahn Min-Seok

I n contrast to school sports and community sports, which are on the developing stage, so-called elite sports have demonstrated a remarkable record at the world level over the past twenty years. These results have been fostered by successive governments maintaining an elite sports oriented policy. Illustrative of this is the fact that athletes who win a medal at the international level, such as the Olympics, are assured of a lifetime pension. The Korean Sports Promotion Law states that athletes winning Olympic gold are granted one million Korean won, which is equivalent to approximately USD 800. A major distinctive feature of Korean sports is the development of major sports in Korea. Although football has become increasingly popular, particularly among young urban Koreans.

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By Akinori Kaneko

O f course, the development of major sports in Korea, football, ironically, there are only limited number of public facilities available, and a club system has yet to be properly established. The total number of public gymn in Korea stands at 283, and there are only 90 public swimming pools nationwide. Whereas in Japan, 20.8 per cent of sports facilities are publicly owned, and a club system has yet to be properly established.

In conclusion, elite sports clearly maintain their dominance over grassroots sports in spite of concerns regarding status remaining idle after the World Cup. Had Korea not hosted the World Cup, these things could not have even been imagined. In conclusion, elite sports clearly maintain their dominance over grassroots sports in spite of concerns regarding status remaining idle after the World Cup. Had Korea not hosted the World Cup, these things could not have even been imagined.