

Sport from Imperial Japan to Postcolonial Korea: Dr. Lee Sangbaek and his Participation in the Olympic Movements*

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Introduction

Dr. Lee Sangbaek (1904-1966) was an excellent sports athlete, manager, and administrator in modern Korean history and was often called the “Coubertin of Korea.”¹ Beginning as a basketball player and coach for the Waseda University basketball team, Lee developed his career as a

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1 Han Yŏnghye, “Isangbaekgwa gūndaech’eyuk Shingminji shidae chishiginūi Chaashirhyŏn’gwa minjokaidaenti’i Ilbonesŏi cheyukhwaldongeūl jungsimūro [Lee Sang-baek and modern sports-colonial elite’s self realization and national identity: focusing on the sports activities in Japan],” *Hallim Ilbonhakyŏn’gu* 1, (November 1996): 257.

sports administrator and member of the Olympic committee for Imperial Japan. After Korea's liberation in 1945, he was criticized for being a pro-Japanese collaborator, but he was able to regain his prestigious position by actively participating in the Olympic movement for independent South Korea. Besides his sports career, Lee was a prominent sociologist and regarded as the founding member of the Sociology Department at Seoul National University.² Lee is still remembered as an iconic figure in Korean sports, and his career throughout the liberation period resembles that of many founding fathers of various fields in South Korea, such as Byōng – do Lee in history, In-je Paik in medicine, Byōng-no Kim in law, and Park Chunghee in politics, all of whom were also elites during the period of Imperial Japan.³

Focusing on Lee's participation in the Olympic movements, this study illuminates the continuity as well as disruption between the colonial and the Cold War periods and explores the specific contribution of sports to the Cultural Cold War in Korea. Recently, a couple of seminal studies have called for developing an alternative theoretical frame that challenges the conventional idea that the post/colonial transition involved only rupture and was without continuity.⁴ As such, the review of Lee's participation in sports throughout the liberation period also provides a useful reference point for understanding the cultural politics of the Olympics in East

2 Jōng Subok, "Isangbaekgwa hanguksahoehagūi sōngnip' [Lee Sangbaek and the founding of Korean sociology]," *hanguksahoehag* 50, no.2 (April 2016): 1-39; Lee Dongjin, "Shingminji shigi ilbon yuhaksaenggwa hanguk sahoehak: Isangbaek, Kim Duhyōn, Sinjingyunul saryero [Korean Overseas Students in Japan and Korean Sociology during the Colonial Period: the cases of Lee Sangbaek, Kim Duhyōn, Shin Jingyun]," *Sahoewa iron* 33, (2018 November):281-321.

3 Kim Eūnyōng, *Isangbaegūi saengaewa Cheyyuksasang* [The life and Sports philosophy of Lee Sangbaek] (MA Thesis, Yōngnam University, 2001).

4 Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism 1866-1945* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2016); Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Asia.⁵

Periodization is one of the typical approaches to understanding history; as such, Korean modern historiography is often divided at the year of Korea's independence in 1945. Under this circumstance, most studies focus either on the colonial period (1910-1945) or the Cold War era (post-1945) rather than developing an alternative timeframe. Such a periodization often proves its effectiveness in illuminating each specific characteristic as well as differences between various periods such as the colonial, liberation, and the Cold War periods.⁶ Nonetheless, actual histories, (including historical biographies) also demonstrate as many resemblances and overlaps as disruptions and disconnections between the periods. Such an approach, which focuses on continuity, has been increasingly adapted in several areas such as literature, architecture, and the history of South Korea's technology.⁷

Sport, i.e. modern sport, is particularly useful at illuminating the structural homology between the colonial and the Cold War eras. Both in the colonial and the Cold War era, the governments actively exploited sports

- 5 Recently, East Asian countries have held or will hold the Olympic Games, including the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, 2021 Tokyo Summer Olympics, and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics respectively in South Korea, Japan and China.
- 6 Prasenjit Duara, "The Cold War as a historical period: an interpretive essay," *Journal of Global History* 6, (November 2011): 457-480. Duara highlights the Cold War "acquires its significance as a distinct period in a longer-term historical relationship between imperialism and nationalism."
- 7 Jöng Jonghyöñ, *chekuküi kiökkwa chönyu-1940nyöndaehankukmunhaküi Yönsokkwa Piyönsok* [The memory of empire-of the continuity and discontinuity of 1940's Korean literature] (Seoul: Amunhaksa, 2012); Kim Soyöñ, *Talsingminjuüi damnonüro bon haebang jöñhu hanguk göñchukgaüi jöngchesöng* [The identity of Korean architects before and after Korean liberation based on post-colonial discourses] (PhD diss., Pusan National University, 2007); Kim Taeho, *Lisüngküi pukhaneyseüi pinallon yöñkwuwa kongöphwa Singminji sigiwaüi yönsokgwa danjörül jungsimüro* [Lee Seungki's Research and Industrialization of Vinalon in North Korea: An Example of the Appropriation of the colonial Heritage] (MA Thesis, Seoul National University, 2001).

for mass mobilization, bodily discipline, and militarization of the society.⁸ As Foucault eloquently points out, sports have supplied an efficient conduit for enforcing, guiding, modifying, and encouraging the way individual people conduct themselves.⁹ However, sports are more than simple coercion or homogenization. Rather, sports also involve resistance against governments, disruption of (international) hierarchy and moral deviation.¹⁰ Meanwhile, sports, particularly international sports events, became a crucial arena in which people could construct their individual and collective identities. While governments, either of Imperial Japan or post-colonial South Korea, actively employed sports for their political purposes and suppression, sports became a highly contested arena in which people responded and acted in unexpected and controversial ways.¹¹ The establishing, dissembling and reconstituting processes of the KSA (Korea Sport Association) before and after liberation illuminates how sports, related people, and organizations respond to management, control and governing rationales in diverse and unpredictable ways.¹² To put it simply,

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- 8 Brian Bridges, *The Two Koreas and the Politics of Global Sport* (Leiden & Boston: Global Oriental, 2012). Kwak Dae Hee and Kang Joonho, "Modern sport in Korea: A Historic Perspective," in *Sport in Korea: History, Development, Management*, ed. DH Kwak, YJ Ko, IK Kang and M Rosentraub (London and New York: Routledge, 2018). 15-30.
- 9 Michel Foucault, *Governmentality: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, Trans by. R. Hurley at el (New York: New Press, 1997).
- 10 Cho Youngha, "Broadcasting Major League Baseball as a Governmental Instrument in South Korea," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 32, no.3 (August 2008): 240-254; J. Smith Maguire, "Michel Foucault: Sport, Power, Technologies and Governmentality," in *Theory, Sport & Society*, ed. J. Maguire and K. Young (Amsterdam & Boston: JAI, 2000), 293-314.
- 11 Ha Namgil and J. A. Mangan, "Ideology, Politics, Power: Korean sport – Transformation, 1945-92," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 19, no. 2-3 (July 2002): 213-242.
- 12 Jin Guoxian, *Hangukäi süp'ochijöök gūndae, chosöñch'eyuk'oerül chungshimüro* [Sporting Modernity in Korea-Through Korean Sports Association] (PhD diss., Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, 2018).

sport is a unique area in which we can observe governmental interventions and people's cultural practices, such as resistance and compliance, together.

Lee Sangbaek's legacies in sports throughout the liberation period provide valuable clues to developing an alternative framework for illuminating the continuity and disruption between the colonial and the Cold War eras as well as for examining the cultural dimension of the Cold War. In South Korea, research on Lee's legacy can be divided into two fields: one approaches him as an influential sociologist,¹³ and the other explores his contribution to sports. For the latter, research was conducted on his sports philosophy,¹⁴ his influence to Korean sports,¹⁵ and his sports activities before Independence¹⁶ and after Independence.¹⁷ In spite of the various

- 13 Kim Pildong, "Isangbaegüi Saengaewa sahoehak sasang [Sangbaek Lee's life and philosophy on the sociology]," *Hanguksahoehak* 28, (June 1994):1-34; Shin Yongha, "Isangbaek," in *han'guksa shimin' gangjiwa* (Seoul: Ilzokak 2003), 133-155.
- 14 Lee Sŭnggyu, *Isangbaegüi süp'och'ü sasang yŏn'gu* [A study on Sang-baek Lee's Sports Ideology] (MA Thesis, Korea National University of Education, 2009); Kim Eünyŏng, Kim Dongkyu, "Isangbaegüi Ch'eyuksasang- shinch'eundongül chungshimüro [The sports philosophy of Sang-baek Lee]," *han'gukch'eyukch'ŏrhakhoeji* 10, (June 2002): 225-240.
- 15 Mo Changbae, "Hanguk kündae süp'och'üüi palchŏn'gwa Isangbaegüi öp'chök [Dr. Sang-baek Lee and his contribution to the Expansion of Korean Modern Sports]." *Kyoyukkwahakyŏn'gu* 14, (September 2000):197-213; Son Hwan & Jŏng Sŭngsam, "Ch'eyuksa: Isangbaegüi Han'gukkündaesüp'och'ü hyöngsŏngge mich'in yŏnghyang [The Influence on the Shape of Modern Korean Sports to Sang Baek Lee Sang-baek]," *Han'gukch'eyuk'akwoeji* 40, (May 2001):3-15.
- 16 Kim Jinhyung, Kim Eünyŏng and Joo Dongjin, "Haebang ch'ŏn Isangbaegüi cheyukwaldonge daehan yŏngu [A study on the Sports Activity of Sang-Baek Lee Sangbaek before liberation]," *Hanguksüpochü risŏchi* 18, no.5 (October 2007): 1107-1116; Han Yunhye, "Isangbaekgwa gŭndaech'eyuk Shingminji shidaechishiginüi Chaashirhyŏn'gwa minjokaidaenti'i Ilbonesöüi cheyukwaldongeuil jungsimüro," 257-289.
- 17 Chung Tonggu and Choi Sökju, "Isangbaegüi süp'och'üoegyo mit Ch'eyuksasang [The Life, Sports Ideology and Sport Diplomatic activities of Sang-baek Lee],"

research on him, most of it tends to adopt a nationalistic approach to his career and contributions to postcolonial society. For instance, Kim & Kim's study epitomizes Lee's sports philosophy largely as amateurism, trans-nationalism, and civil rights while highlighting his apolitical position during his lifetime.¹⁸ In so doing, previous studies fail to unveil his complex and multi-dimensional attitudes toward sports and ignore any possible connections between the colonial and the Cold War eras.¹⁹ His biography, representatively, easily romanticizes his sports life as that of a (national) sports hero.²⁰

In this study, we attempt to engage with his sports activities with a focus on his Olympic movements during both the colonial and Cold War periods. Through his writings and news reportages on him between 1920 and 1965 as primary sources, and his biography and previous studies on him as secondary sources, we discuss the roles of modern sports in both colonial and postcolonial Korea as well as their roles in changing elite's convictions toward sports. While we approach Lee as the pioneering figure of modern sports in Korea, we also pay attention to the diverse dimensions between his multifaceted identity as postcolonial scholar, sports administrator, and athlete. In so doing, this study highlights the key narratives of Lee's Olympic movements before and after liberation, which are summarized as "sport for amateurism," "sports not of nation but of state," and "sport through internationalism." This study illuminates a not-so-easy passage of Lee's transition from colonial elite to postcolonial founding figure with a focus on his sports management career and negotiating his Korean identity amidst international sports movements. Ultimately, the consideration of the iconic figure in Korean sports history

Ch'eyuksahak'hojei 10, (December 2005): 81-90; Kim Eunyoung, "Isangbaegŭi ch'eyuk'waltong(2) [A Study on the Sports Activity of Lee Sangbaek (2)]," *Han-gukcheyukcheolhakojei* 21, no.4 (December 2013):163-178.

18 Kim, Kim, "Isangbaegŭi."

19 This is criticized as the problem of national-centricism in Korean historiography.

20 Lee Sönggu and Cho Dongho, *Sangbaek Isangbaek pyöngjön* [The biography of Dr. Sang-baek Lee] (Seoul: Eulyu munhwasa, 1996).

provides a clue for unveiling shared characteristics of the postcolonial elites who would later become founding members of South Korea.²¹

Sport for Amateurism: Survival of the Fittest (The Modernist Desire for Social Darwinism)

Lee Sangbaek was born in 1904, six years before Japan's colonization of Korea, to a wealthy and noble family.²² Similar to other modern elites with affluent backgrounds, he developed his sports career as athlete, manager and administrator and achieved major accomplishments as a colonial subject of Imperial Japan. As a colonial elite, he strongly and consistently championed sports amateurism,²³ in which any values of sports, including sports events and athletes, should be marked by their excellence, degrees of skill, and merit based systems, not influenced by political, ideological and even national interests. Such a narrative of sports amateurism was well paralleled with the modernizing spirit of the century, such as the idea of "survival of the fittest." During the colonial period, his advocacy of sports amateurism was symbolically reflected in his strategic position of neither emphasizing nor negating his Korean origin. After liberation in

21 Han Sukjung, *Manju modŏn: 60nyŏndae hanguk gaebal chejeiŭ giwon* [Manchu Modern: The origin of the develop model in 60's Korea] (Seoul: munhagwa jisŏngsa, 2016).

22 Jŏng Subok, *Isangbaekgwa*, 21. Although Lee's father died when he was four years old, Lee received support from his uncle Lee Ilu who was a wealthy man in the Taegu area.

23 Stanley points out that amateurism is linked to love of sports, pursued as an avocation and sacrifice. Also the image of amateurism contains the mechanism of class hegemony, an exploitive ideology, anachronism, and citadel of purity. Stanley Eitzen, "The Sociology of Amateur Sport: An Overview," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 24, no.2 (June 1989): 95-105. The term amateurism in this paper means that it is based on the merit system and not related to political or national interest.

1945, Lee also kept highlighting sports amateurism or its purity when he defended himself against the accusation of his pro-Japanese career. In this sense, the narrative of sports amateurism was not only his efficient compromise but also an inevitable, enforced choice for the survival and even development of the (post-) colonial elite who pursued his dream through sports.

While physical activities have had a long history in Korea, modern sports were introduced to Korea only between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries as an innovation from the West.²⁴ As western technology and ideology were introduced into Asia, the diffusion of modern sports overlapped with the development of modern society in Asia, including Korea.²⁵ Modern sports were usually intermingled with new technologies, mass media, the urban middle class and consumer culture, and such trends were often stretched beyond national or imperial scopes. In particular, ideologies such as nationalism, Protestantism, and Social Darwinism were simultaneously accepted to enlighten the elites and the populace. Because Korea began to be colonized by its neighboring country Japan, many procedures of modernization overlapped with the colonization process.²⁶ While sports were embraced as an efficient tool for strengthening its people as well as society, Social Darwinism, along with Herbert Spencer's idea of the Survival of the Fittest, was well embraced both by colonial modernists and by imperial officials. During the so-called cultural rule (1920s and 1930s), Imperial Japan and the GGK

24 Cho Younghan, "Double Binding of Japanese colonialism: trajectories of baseball in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea," *Cultural Studies* 30, no.1 (October 2015):1-23.

25 Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking in a Game: A History of Baseball in Asia* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Cho Younghan and Leary Charles, *Modern Sports in Asia* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014); Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

26 Lee Hyunjung and Cho Younghan, "Colonial Modernity in East Asia and beyond," *Cultural Studies* (July 2012): 601-616; Shin Giwook· Michael Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

(Governor General of Korea) not only allowed the existence of several Korean sports organizations and agents but also promoted sports activities and physical education because they believed that, through exercising modern sports, colonial Koreans would internalize discipline and perseverance, which in turn made it easy to control and govern Koreans. While both Korean sports organizations such as the KSA and GGK actively worked to popularize modern sports, their interests and goals were quite different and even in opposition to those of Imperial Japan. Through modern sports, in other words, the Korean organizations and their elites wished to modernize Korea and to demonstrate to the world that Korea was a nation capable of being independent.²⁷ While undergoing the dual process of colonization and modernization, Korean elites were also deeply engaged with modern ideologies such as nationalism and Social Darwinism.²⁸

Under such circumstances, Lee Sangbaek also played and competed with Japanese counterparts to demonstrate his modern skills and degrees of modernization, and could continue to develop his sports career by entering the Japanese education system and Japanese sports leagues. In colonial Korea, he grew up practicing modern sports and studying modern thought. As a representative of his school, he played baseball, pitching a good fastball.²⁹ As one of the promising young athletes from colonial Korea, Lee entered a university in Japan. At first, he was a runner, because running was one of the popular sports among colonial Koreans due to its low entry barriers. In particular, several rickshaw drivers, which was a common job for the colonized, became successful marathon runners, but

27 Lee Seok, *Colonial Korea and the Olympic Games, 1910-1945* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania 2016); Gwang Ok, "Nationalism, Imperialism and Colonialism: Modern Sporting Culture in Korea, 1920-1937," *Hangukcheyukchölhakoeji* 13, no.13 (December 2005):2-24.

28 Vladimir Tikhonov, "Social Darwinism as History and Reality: "Competition" and "The Weak" in Early Twentieth-Century Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* 48, no.3 (July 2016): 315-337.

29 Lee, Cho, "Colonial Modernity," 196.

their participation was soon banned in the name of the violation of amateurism in sports.³⁰ Soon after his arrival in Japan, Lee changed his career to that of basketball, and his height (184 centimeters) gave him a natural advantage.³¹ Then, his early sports career from player to captain and manager continued to be successful in basketball. At that time, basketball as an American import also symbolized American modernity, although it was not as popular as baseball.

While marathons were far more popular in colonial Korea, Lee was able to develop his distinct sports career in basketball, which was something very new and modern that even symbolized the principle of amateurism and the pursuit of equality in Imperial Japan. In 1925, Lee was named the captain of the Waseda basketball team and helped the team to win first place in the Meiji Sports Games. In 1927, based on this triumph, he led an expedition of the Waseda basketball team to the U.S., which was the first time a Japanese basketball team traveled to the U.S.³² This visit was memorialized as one of the most important events in his lifetime because he was recognized as the captain of the Japanese team and became widely known by many people beyond colonial Korea. In colonial Korea, a national newspaper described him as the pride of Korea while reporting on his visit to the U.S. as the captain of the Japanese basketball team.³³ Lee's first international trip to the U.S. left him with both domestic and international achievements: Lee and his Japanese colleagues founded the first Japanese basketball association, which was then officially accepted as a member of the JSA (Japan Sport Association). Due to his contributions, furthermore, Lee was selected as a member of the JSA at the early age of 27 and was able to actively work on the Olympic movements. While he helped to induct basketball into the Olympic Games, he came to know Avery Brundage, an American sports administrator who

30 *Donga-Ilbo*, March 19, 1924.

31 Han Yŏnghye, "*Isangbaekgwa*," 261.

32 The first international trip of the Japanese baseball team was made in 1905.

33 *Donga-Ilbo*, December 13, 1927.

was the head of the FIBA (International Basketball Federation), and later was the fifth president of the IOC (International Olympic Committee).

Lee's Korean identity as well as colonial origin could not be ignored as he continued to develop his sports career and to participate in sports administrations of Imperial Japan. For instance, during his first international trip with the Waseda basketball team in 1927, the initial responses among several Korean residents in Hawaii were hostile because they thought that Lee was a pro-Japanese collaborator. However, such reactions drastically changed when they witnessed Lee scold a Japanese player in the hotel lobby for violating his rule that players were not to spend nights outside of the hotel. After the incident, Lee was embraced as a Korean leader, and a local daily newspaper for Korean residents proudly reported that, "our [Korean] young captain leads Japan's basketball team."³⁴ In a similar vein, his biography introduced a few more anecdotes in which Lee's Korean identity stood out: Lee actively influenced decisions to include two Korean marathon runners, Ki-chōng Son and Sūng-lyong Nam, and three Korean basketball players for the 1936 Berlin Olympics.³⁵ However, contrary to the nationalist narrative in his biography, Lee neither publicly highlighted his Korean identity nor his support of Korean athletes. However, his Korean identity and colonial origin were constantly under scrutiny and could not be recognized in both Korea and Japan. In his selection of Korean athletes as representatives of Imperial Japan, he expressed that he simply wanted to select the best athletes, and therefore did not consider their nationality or ethnicity.³⁶ Whereas the people and society around him tended to view him either positively or negatively through the lens of his ethnicity, Lee seemed to be indifferent to his Korean background. Advocating the neutrality of sports, he instead strongly emphasized that his achievements in modern sports be evaluated based on his ability or sports skills. Such a complex or even contradictory circumstance might have

34 Lee, Cho, "Colonial Modernity," 206.

35 Lee, Cho, "Colonial Modernity," 256-258.

36 Han Yōnghye, "Isangbaekgwa," 273.

been what ultimately forced Lee to support the “application of universal standards” in sports.

His philosophy of sports amateurism is also manifested in his participation in international sporting events, including the Olympic Games. In 1928, Lee was involved in an international sporting event for the first time as a preparation committee member of the Far Eastern Games. For the 1934 Far Eastern Games, Japan and China were in conflict over the issue of Manchukuo’s participation in the event. While Japanese public opinions were divided, Lee supported the idea of dispatching a Japanese delegation to Manila, the Philippines in order to deal with this issue. Strongly advocating the neutrality of sports, he and his Japanese colleagues even raised their voices pushing for Manchukuo to participate in the Games.³⁷ During the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games, for similar reasons, he strongly urged the JOC (Japanese Olympic Committee) to make a statement that the Olympic medals should be awarded to the winners and not for the promotion of national pride.³⁸ In so doing, Lee strongly defended sports amateurism by advocating keeping sports free from political manipulation or governments’ active utilization of it, which later proved to be an ideal too difficult for him to hold onto during the war-like situations between Imperial Japan and postcolonial Korea.

When Korea was liberated from Japan at the end of World War II, Korea was immediately divided into North and South Korea by the 38th parallel. In August 1948, the government of South Korea was established, and during the founding process, Lee was labeled a pro-Japanese collaborator. This accusation forced him to leave his position in the sports association. In a letter to Brundage, whom he had become friends with, Lee expressed his bitterness over this situation, but he also said that he was choosing not to fight against his critics in the spirit of amateurism.³⁹ He defended his sports career in Imperial Japan by touting the purity of

37 Kim Eünyöng, “*Isangbaegüi saengaewa*,” 67.

38 Kim Eünyöng, “*Isangbaegüi saengaewa*,” 67.

39 Lee Sangbaek, June 21, 1948.

sports and the spirit of amateurism. However, his arguments often sound contradictory because, after his reinstatement to the KSA, he aggressively pushed his anti-communist stance during the Cold War, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this article.

From the colonial to the liberation period, Lee Sangbaek claimed that he was firmly committed to the spirit of sports amateurism. While it is meaningful to figure out whether or not he practiced his beliefs in sports throughout his entire career, it is more important to think of what made him an ostensibly strong follower of amateurism in sports. As modern sports such as basketball was the best area for him to excel in, his advocacy for sports amateurism was an unavoidable choice for him to overcome his colonial origin and to compete against his Japanese counterparts with (relatively) equal footing. Similarly, his allegiance to the spirit of sports amateurism functions as a solid pretext for exonerating him from the accusation of being a pro-Japanese collaborator in postcolonial society.

Sport not for Nation but for State: From Fascism to Anti-Communism

Contrary to sports ideals such as fairness, equality, amateurism and internationalism, modern sports and sporting events have often been used for political purposes. In particular, international sporting events are useful in mobilizing the masses, spreading political propaganda, and instigating collective identities mostly represented by nationalism.⁴⁰ Lee Sangbaek's wide range of sports activities also reflects such usage of sports for political purposes both domestically and internationally, such as the acceptance of North Korea to the Asian Games and Olympic Games, which reveals a contradictory dimension in opposition to his overt promotion of sports amateurism and even internationalism. What makes his political

40 Allen Guttman, "Sport, Politics and the Engaged Historian." *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no.3 (July 2003): 363-375.

engagements through sports more complicated is that his participation in sports during both the colonial and Cold War periods reflected the interests of the states rather than of nations.⁴¹

Modern sport plays a crucial role in uniting people under the name of the nation-state. Specifically, international sporting events have been effective at uniting people, with athletes emerging as national heroes or celebrities.⁴² While nationalism is regarded as a typical ideology of representing the nation-state, the colonial conditions tend to make it complicated or contradictory for any colonial subjects to represent their own colonized nations rather than the colonizers. During the 1932 and 1936 Olympics, the Korean elites made an effort to send Korean athletes to the international arena, but at the same time, they had to deal with the dilemma that these Korean athletes would be playing for Imperial Japan as members of the Japanese national team.⁴³ Therefore, the Korean athletes were obliged to represent both Korea and Japan, which often forced them to navigate between double responsibilities.⁴⁴ For colonial Koreans, their nation (*minjok*), i.e. Korea, was of course not equal to the state, i.e. Japan, and what was worse was that Imperial Japan had colonized and was oppressing their nation. Under the colonial condition, therefore, sport does not necessarily work evenly both for the nation and for the state, but, instead, sport often delivers a contradictory impact on nationalism, depending on which nationalism each athlete or each team is eager to represent.

41 In the colonial era, the “state” refers to the Japanese Empire including the whole Korean peninsula, but after liberation the “state” means South Korea, not including North Korea from the perspective of South Korea. To the contrary, the “nation” refers to Korean ethnic groups who reside both on the Korean peninsula or abroad, and after liberation, there exists one nation (*minjok*) but two states on the Korean peninsula.

42 Cho Younghan, “Unfolding Sporting Nationalism in South Korean Media Representation of the 1968, 1984 and 2000 Olympics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 31, no.3 (May 2009):347-364.

43 Lee Seok, “*Colonial Korea*”

44 *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 2, 1932 & December 4, 1935.

With his colonial origin, Lee also had to manage this dilemma when he was forced to confront the issue of his national identity and deal with the conflicts between the Koreans and the Japanese when he participated in sports as a representative of Imperial Japan. Despite his strong commitment to the neutrality of sports, his colonial origin influenced him in various ways. After he became the leader of the Waseda basketball team and won first place in the Meiji Shrine Sports Games, his team chose to visit colonial Korea to hold a series of exhibition games in 1926.⁴⁵ It is speculated that Lee may have initiated this visit to Korea in order to alleviate the burden of his Korean nationality he must have felt as the captain of the Japanese team.⁴⁶ Also, Lee was pushed to solve problems surrounding Korean athletes or between Korean and Japanese players during the sporting events. In the 1932 LA Olympics, Lee stepped up to defend Korean athletes who participated in a welcoming ceremony by overseas Koreans who were working for the independence of Korea from Japan's colonization. While the Japanese attempted to raise this issue publicly, Lee had to work hard to tamp down this problem over nationalistic confrontations. In November 1940, another incident forced Lee to solve nationalistic issues, irrespective of his own intentions: a Korean football team won a match against a Japanese football team, while the Japanese emperor was in attendance. After the emperor left the stands, the Korean players continued to celebrate their victory. This collective action was considered impolite and profane against the Japanese emperor, and Lee was appointed as the head of the inquiry team to investigate the issue. In the end, he concluded in his report that the Koreans had not known about this rule and that they had no intention to offend the emperor.⁴⁷ Although he strived to distance himself from nationalistic issues, his Korean origin inevitably entangled him in such issues all throughout his sports career. As a colonial elite, he had to act carefully in dealing with the Korean na-

45 Lee Sŭnggyu, "*Isangbaegŭi*," 19.

46 Han Yŏnghye, "*Isangbaekgwa*," 266

47 Lee, Cho, "*Colonial Modernity*," 261.

tional issue as a member of the Japanese government.

When Imperial Japan went into a state of total war, Lee was no longer able to hold onto his support for sports amateurism. His strong commitment to sports amateurism had to be negotiated with Imperial Japan, which was becoming a totalitarian regime in the 1930s. As Imperial Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and the wars expanded, the GGK changed its policies and began to control sports activities and related organizations more strictly. Also, with the second Sino-Japanese war erupting in 1937, Imperial Japan changed its policy into that of total war on both the mainland and throughout its colonies. From then on, sports, including physical education, were exclusively used as an instrument to train, discipline, and reshape the colonial subjects for the Japanese empire.⁴⁸ Under the total war conditions, sports were mainly considered a tool for building up the military reserves and for strengthening the military's physical abilities. In colonial Korea, Korean elites exerted their efforts to resist the governing force, and in particular, they wanted to unite all the Korean sports organizations into the KSA to more efficiently divert Japanese intervention and control.⁴⁹

In 1938, the GGK forcefully disassembled the KSA, which was merged into another Korea Sport Society organization (*Chosŏn ch'eyukhyŏphoe*) created for Imperial Japan.⁵⁰ When the circumstances for maintaining a distance between sports, politics and war worsened, perhaps surprisingly, Lee also actively began to advocate sport as a tool for politics and even military purposes. During the second Sino-Japanese war, Lee wrote an

48 Son Junjong, "Gŭndae ilboneseŏi haksaeŋ mome daehan gukga gwalliwa tongch'e [State's Control and Management on Schooling Bodies in the Modern Japan]," *Pigyogyoyukyŏn'gu* 14, (December 2004): 195-220.

49 *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 1, 1935.

50 Gwang Ok, "The Political Significance of Sport: An Asian Case Study – Sport, Japanese Colonial Policy and Korean National Resistance, 1910-1945," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no.4 (January 2005): 649-670; "Coercion for Asian Conquest: Japanese Militarism and Korean Sport, 1938-45," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no.3 (February 2007): 338-356.

article titled, “Upgrade physical power and its method from player-centered to physical strength increase (*ch’elyōkhyangsangkwa kū tan-lyōnchaek Gyeōnggisōnsujungsimesō Ch’eryōkchūngjinundongūro*)” for the *Dong-A Ilbo*. He argues that playing sports may help colonial Koreans be better Japanese imperial subjects. In this article, he adds that a sports player needs to develop endurance, obedience and a cheerful character inclined to self-sacrifice.⁵¹ Under the slogan of “Japan and Korea as one body,” he also thought that Korean athletes should and could have equal opportunities to participate in the Olympic Games. His sports philosophy conversion from advocating for the spirit of amateurism to supporting fascism easily overlapped with that of Korean modernists and their pro-Japan collaboration. In so doing, his vision of sport during the total war period was exclusively serving Imperial Japan and its fascist ideology, not the nation.

After Korea’s liberation in 1945, Lee returned to Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and was briefly involved in politics by following Yō Unhyōng, a very popular politician as well as excellent sports athlete.⁵² To celebrate the nation’s independence, Lee and his colleagues who worked in sports organization under Imperial Japan organized a new Korean sports association named the Chosōn Sports Association (*Chosōn-ch’euk-tongjihoe*), and held a big sporting event at Seoul Stadium on October 27, 1945. During this sporting event, people were able to experience the independence of their nation by seeing and celebrating their national sport hero, Son Ki-chōng, who finally bore his national flag, the *t’aegukki*.⁵³ This sport association selected Yō as its first president on November 26, 1945.⁵⁴ However, Lee’s political aspirations came to an abrupt halt in 1947, when Yō was assassinated. Thereafter, Lee focused his career on

51 *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 1, 1938.

52 Jōng Subok, “*Isangbaekgwa*,” 31.

53 *Jayusinmun*, October 28, 1945.

54 Daehanch’eyukhoe, *Daehanch’eyukhoe 90nyōnsa* [The 90th History of Korea Sport Association] (Seoul: *Daehanch’eyukhoe*, 2010), 166.

sports administration as well as education, but just a year later in 1948, he was forced to step down from any administration position in sports because he was accused of being a pro-Japanese collaborator. His activities during the total war period of Imperial Japan became an especially focused target. During the Korean War (1950–1953), he was able to regain his position in the sports organization due to his expertise and international networks, which he had developed during the colonial period. The newly elected government of South Korea needed his help during attempts to become part of several international sport organizations, such as the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and the AGF (Asian Games Federation). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explain how and why Lee was eager to join politics, this period seems to serve as counterevidence against his commitment to the spirit of amateurism and purity in sports.

Once he was reinstated into the sports organization, Lee worked hard to speak for the voice of the South Korean government, and he became a very committed spokesperson for anti-communism. As soon as it gained independence, Korea was divided into two, i.e. North and South Korea, and the two sides became each other's most dangerous and threatening enemy throughout the Korean War and the Cold War period. Under the influence of the U.S. and its military, South Korea firmly stood for proliferating an anti-communist stance, and in the sporting arena, the ultimate goal was to block North Korea from participating in any international events. In other words, South Korea wanted to be recognized as the sole legitimate country that could represent all of Korea. Following such government agendas, Lee also strived to block North Korea from participating in the IOC. In his letter to Brundage, Lee asserted that North Korea was only using the IOC as a platform for its political ambitions.⁵⁵

Following the typical rationale for attacking sports of the Second World during the Cold War, Lee also criticized North Korea for its political manipulation of sport, and he advocated blocking North Korea from

⁵⁵ *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 17, 1959.

7 January 1959

President Avery Brundage
International Olympic Committee
10 North LaSalle Street
Chicago 2, Illinois

Dear President Brundage:

Attached is a copy of our letter to Chancellor Mayer with reference to his cablegram pertaining to the North Koreans and the problem with which you are thoroughly familiar with. In addition we are taking this liberty to further inform you regarding that matter. Following information related to activities happened within Korea during the past year.

Early last February, the Reds "High-jacked" one of our Korean National Airlines plane with 26 civilian passengers on board on a regular flight from Pusan to Seoul. The four Hijackers are still free in North Korea but through the United Nations Armistice Commission, the passengers including a German couple and American pilots have been returned to the Republic of Korea. Another similar incident was attempted in April. Through bravery of the ROK Military plane crew that attempt was frustrated and the culprit has paid the supreme price.

Fig. 1. This is part of the letter that Dr. Lee wrote to Mr. Brundage in 1959 to block North Korea to participate in IOC. (@Photo Copy of Kim Eun-young (2001): 102.)

joining the Olympic movement because he claimed that North Korea seriously violated the principle of sports amateurism. For instance, North Korea tried to access the Olympic movement for the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, and Lee worked hard to prevent them from joining. This attempt was successful since it led to the IOC rejecting North Korea's request.⁵⁶ After the battle against North Korea joining the IOC, Lee also worked hard to prevent the acceptance of North Korea to the AG (Asian Games) for the same reason, i.e. North Korea's manipulation of sports for political purposes. South Korea successfully prevented North Korea from entering the AG's international stage until 1974. Lee's strong commitment to anti-communism reflected South Korea's very unique and specific type of state-nationalism, in which only South Korea was prioritized as

⁵⁶ Despite South Korean government's effort, North Korea was accepted into the IOC in 1957 when the IOC accepted East Germany as its member.

a state or government and North Korea was not considered and even regarded as an enemy to be conquered or eliminated.⁵⁷

Despite his ostensible commitment to sports neutrality and amateurism, Lee's various activities related to sports from Imperial Japan to postcolonial South Korea were inevitably connected with his ideologies (to some extent, it may also seem like a tactic to guide Lee's participation in sport) and even with politics. Such historical hardships as colonization, independence, as well as the Cold War left him with few choices but to advocate the relevant propaganda and ideologies through sports. His political engagements through sports are characterized as the idea of sport not for nation, but for state, which resonates with a particular type⁵⁸ of Korean nationalism under division. Lee's vision for sports represents the dilemma for sports and athletes who are caught between the nation and the state.

Sports for Internationalism: Leveraged by Western (American) Connections

As a modern invention, sport is also a mega-event that becomes an arena for international competition among sporting events—the Olympics are a true global spectacle par excellence.⁵⁹ Therefore, many nation-states strive to produce the best outcomes through the Olympics and other internationally renowned sporting events in order to show off their successes to global audiences as well as to elevate national pride among their own populace. In order to fulfill these goals, governments spend much energy

57 Cho Younghan, "*Unfolding Sporting.*"

58 After liberation, Korea has been divided into two parts. Although the people belong to one nation, the two states of South Korea and North Korea were inaugurated in 1948, and this division continues to this day.

59 Michael Mackenzie, "From Athens to Berlin: The 1936 Olympics and the Leni Riefentahl's Olympia," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no.2 (Winter 2003): 302-336.

to hold and participate in sports mega-events, and to provide the best facilities and resources for training their national athletes.

During the colonial occupation, Korean sport elites also did their best to showcase their (colonial) nation to international sports communities by training Korean athletes for international sporting events. Although the effects of these efforts were by and large limited as long as these athletes represented Imperial Japan and not Korea, such experiences became useful resources when Korea was liberated from Imperial Japan in 1945. Very soon after the liberation, these sports elites in South Korea not only organized national sporting events in 1945 for domestic audiences, but also sent off its national players to the Boston Marathon in 1947 in which, furthermore, Sŏ Yunbok, a Korean athlete, won first place with a world record of 2 hour 25 minutes and 39 seconds.⁶⁰ As relations between North and South Korea became more hostile, international sporting events emerged as another arena in which the two regimes could compete against each other for international recognition.

In his lifetime, Lee Sangbaek was committed to the Olympic movement and developed his personal connections with Western figures—connections that continued even after Korea's liberation. His involvement in the Olympic movement began in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games when he was nominated as a member of the JSA. As a representative of Imperial Japan and former basketball player and coach, he worked hard to persuade the IOC to accept basketball as an official game in the Olympics. In this process, he was able to develop a strong tie with Avery Brundage, who was also a key player as a representative of the USA, for pushing basketball into the Olympic Games. At that time, Lee made considerable contributions to making this project successful and since then, Lee and Brundage worked closely both during the colonial and liberation periods. When Korea was liberated, as mentioned earlier, Lee's position in sports administration was revived largely by his Western connections, of which, his connection with Brundage was crucial. When the newly

60 Daehanch'eyukhoe, "*Daehanch'eyukhoe*," 172.

elected government of South Korea desperately wanted to join international sports events such as the Olympic Games before North Korea, his experience and personal relations with international sports administrators from his career under Imperial Japan were very helpful, and he was also very dedicated to his country and its sports missions after his reinstatement. With the recognition of his contribution to South Korea, he was selected as the second South Korean member of the IOC, just before the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. His devotion to the Olympic movement reflected his sport philosophy of internationalism, and meanwhile, his Western connections helped him to overcome collaborationist issues against him.

As a colonial elite for Imperial Japan, his highest accomplishment as sports administrator was his contribution and involvement in the 1940 Tokyo Olympics. As a way of commemorating 2,600 years since the enthronement of the first Japanese Emperor, Imperial Japan prepared to host the 1940 Olympics in Tokyo. While Italy also wanted to bid for hosting the same Olympics, Lee suggested the idea that Japan should send national delegations to meet with Mussolini and to persuade him personally to concede. As he suggested, Italy dropped from the bidding process, and on the 35th IOC delegation in 1936, Tokyo beat Helsinki by nine votes in the bidding for the right to host the 1940 Olympics in Berlin.⁶¹ After gaining the right to host the Olympics, however, the Japanese army raised doubts in holding the sporting event, as Imperial Japan was moving into a state of total war. Lee persuaded the Japanese army that it could investigate military routes in Southeast Asia in the process of preparing for the torch relay for the Olympics. Inspired by the torch relay from Greece to Berlin for the 1936 Olympics, Lee actually proposed a plan for a torch relay and designed a route that followed the old Silk Road to Tokyo.⁶² Because the Japanese army was preparing an invasion into the Southeast Asian region

61 Sandra S. Collins, *Orienting the Olympics: Japan and the games of 1940* (PhD diss., The University of Chicago 2003): 89-121.

62 Han Yŏnghye, "Isangbaekgwa," 273-274.

at the time, his idea was able to draw the support of the army headquarters for hosting the Olympics. Against Lee's desperate efforts, however, Japan had to forfeit the right of hosting the 1940 Olympic Games in 1938, and the JSA, where he actively worked, was dissolved in 1942. In 1939, Lee coincidentally left Japan for China as a special researcher of Waseda University, funded by the JSA.

After Korea's liberation in 1945, Lee's experiences in the Olympic movements and his international connections during the period of Japanese occupation became meaningful assets for his participation in sports for South Korea. In particular, his connection with Brundage that began in the colonial period helped him not only revive his position in sports but also allowed him to thrive in the Olympic movements as Brundage later became the head of the IOC between 1952 and 1972. As soon as he was reinstated into the newly established KOC, Lee played a key role in dispatching the first Korean delegation to the 1948 London Olympics. Between 1947 and 1948, Lee wrote a series of personal letters to Brundage, asking him for monetary support from the US or even the US army in order to be able to send the South Korean delegation to London. He wrote:

*"In sending our delegation to London, the Korean Olympic Committee is facing some financial difficulties which must be solved in the shortest time possible. American currency is not easy to acquire here as the rate of exchange between U.S and Korea is still not yet fixed ... the sum of \$100,000 about the half of total expenditures..."*⁶³

Also, Lee recycled his ideas of the Olympic torch relay from his participation in the planning of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics for newly launched domestic national sporting events in South Korea. Imitating the Olympic torch, Lee designed the first torch relay for a national sporting event in

63 Kim Eünyöng, *"Isangbaegüi saengaewa,"* 93.

1955: a torch was ignited on a holy mountain in Ganghwa Island, which, according to national myth, is known as the birth place of the first Korean King (Tangun, ca. 2,333 B.C.), and Son Kichōng, a former gold medalist in the Olympic marathon in 1936 was named as the final torch bearer. This torch relay was successfully conducted and was seen as very moving by a lot of people.⁶⁴

Likewise, Lee's connection to the Olympic movements as a colonial elite helped him contribute to sports events in the newly liberated South Korea. By participating in international sports events, Lee worked on maintaining South Korea's position as well as his position in South Korean sports organizations. During his active participation in international sports events, his personal connection with key Western figures made him influential in sports organizations in both Imperial Japan and postcolonial South Korea.

Conclusion

This paper critically reviews Lee Sangbaek as an iconic figure who played important roles both in Imperial Japan and in postcolonial Korea. In order to explore both continuity and disruption throughout the liberation processes, we explored his participation in sports with a focus on his engagements as administrator in the Olympic movements. In tracing his sporting engagements, this paper summarized his major sports narratives into three categories: sport for amateurism, sport for state, and sport for internationalism. While these sports narratives are recognizable throughout his entire sports career, one narrative often emerged as dominant under a certain context compared to the others, and these narratives even revealed contradictions within Lee's sports ideology. Furthermore, these narratives were tactics or strategies that Lee had to embrace or deploy in order to survive and prosper as a post-colonial elite during different peri-

64 *Kyōnghyangshinmun*, October 16, 1955.

ods of history. His transition from colonial elite to a founding figure in postcolonial society not only reveals the dilemmas of colonial intellectuals, but also the undeniable connections between the colonial and the Cold War regimes in Korea.

Lee's continuous but changing roles in sports throughout the liberation period provide valuable clues for rethinking the relationship between the colonial period and the Cold War era in Korean history. In particular, Lee's participation in sport demonstrates a continuity of governing through sport from the colonial to the Cold War era. Also, Lee embodies a model of post-colonial elites in Korean history who had been educated and fostered in the colonial empire as a colonial elite and then continued to pave the paths for postcolonial South Korea as a founding father. Despite his overt commitment to sports amateurism, transnationalism, and civil rights, his ideas of sports were inevitably connected to other ideologies such as colonialism, nationalism, and anti-communism. Such disjunctures in his sports participation, originates from the inseparable and self-contradictory natures of sport philosophies as well as sport's connection to politics. At the same time, such contradictions reflect his complexity and dilemmas as a colonial elite and postcolonial founder, which resonated with many founding figures of the newly liberated South Korea.⁶⁵ The post-colonial sports transition of Korea and Lee's continuous involvements highlight the urgency of developing a theoretical frame of perceiving the colonial and the Cold War regimes as more than separation and therefore of penetrating the dis/continuity between the colonial and the Cold War eras.

Our analysis of Lee's sports narratives highlights the importance and necessity of taking sport seriously in elaborating both the continuity and disruption between the colonial and the Cold War eras. Among many cultural practices, sport that proves its efficiency for enlightening,

65 Jōng Jonghyōn, *Jekukdaehagui chosōnching* [Koreans in Imperial University: The origin of Korean elite, what did they do when came back from Japan?] (Seoul: Humanist, 2019); Han Sōkjōng, *Manjumodōn*.

strengthening, and mobilizing societies and their people has been a focal area of governmental intervention in various ways. As such, both Imperial Japan and the South Korean government actively utilized sports for regulating, controlling and mobilizing the population for their own political agendas, such as fascism and anti-communism. Along with Herbert Spencer's idea of the survival of the fittest, Social Darwinism continuously influenced the postcolonial elites in South Korea who had to build a newly independent country as well as prevail over North Korea.

Finally, Lee's multifaceted participation in the Olympic movements provides meaningful points for exploring the ramifications of the East Asian Olympics in the past, present and even future. While the Olympic Games as the representative form of international events may become an arena for competition, conflict, or even hatred, it is imperative to recognize both the possibility and necessity of thinking about the Olympics beyond the frame of the nation or the state. The critical engagement of Lee's sports participation may give us a hint to reaching across national boundaries, the colonial-postcolonial dichotomy, and the colonial-Cold War disruption.

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<Abstract>

Sport from Imperial Japan to Postcolonial Korea: Dr. Lee Sangbaek and his Participation in the Olympic Movements

Guoxian Jin, Younghan Cho

This study illuminates the continuity as well as disruption between the colonial and the Cold War periods by exploring the roles of sports during the Cultural Cold War in Korea. For this purpose, this study examines Lee Sangbaek's (1904-1966) sports activities with a focus on his Olympic movements both for Imperial Japan and postcolonial South Korea. By reading his writings and news reportages on him between 1920 and 1965, his biography and previous studies, we highlight key narratives of Lee's Olympic movements, which are summarized as "sport for amateurism," "sports not of nation but of state," and "sport through internationalism." These narratives were strategies that Lee had to embrace or deploy in order to survive or prosper as a post/colonial elite in different historic stages. His transition from colonial elite to the founding figure in post-colonial society reveals not only the dilemmas and disruption of colonial intellectuals, but also undeniable connections between the colonial and the Cold War regimes in Korea. The review of Lee's participation in sport throughout the liberation period provides a useful reference point for understanding the cultural politics of the Olympics in East Asia from the past to the present.

Keywords: Lee Sangbaek, sports, the Olympics, post/colonial elites, the cultural Cold War

〈국문초록〉

스포츠를 통해 본 일본 제국으로부터 탈식민 한국: 이상백의 올림픽 운동을 중심으로

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본 연구는 한국에서 문화 냉전 시기 스포츠의 역할을 탐구함으로써 식민과 냉전 시기의 연속성과 단절을 조망한다. 이를 위해 이상백(1904-1966)의 올림픽 운동 참여를 중심으로 일본 제국과 탈식민 한국에서의 스포츠 활동을 살펴 본다. 1920년에서 1965년 사이에 이상백의 글, 뉴스 보도, 전기 그리고 관련 연구를 검토함으로써, 본 연구는 이상백의 올림픽 운동에서의 주요 특징을 탐색하고, 주요 특징으로 “아미추어주의를 위한 스포츠”, “민족이 아닌 국가를 위한 스포츠” 그리고 “국제주의를 통한 스포츠”를 제안한다. 이와 같은 이상백 올림픽 운동의 주요 특징은 여러 역사적 상황 속에서 탈/식민 엘리트로서 생존하거나 변형하기 위하여 그가 활용하였던 전략이었다. 식민 시기 엘리트에서 탈식민 사회의 창립 인물로 전환한 그의 모습은 당시 식민 지식인들의 딜레마와 혼란뿐 아니라 한국에서 식민과 냉전 체제 사이의 부인할 수 없는 연관성을 보여준다. 해방기 동안 이상백의 스포츠 참여에 대한 검토는 과거에서 현재까지 동아시아 올림픽의 문화 정치를 이해하는 데 유용한 자료가 된다.

주제어: 이상백, 스포츠, 올림픽, 탈/식민 지식인, 문화 냉전

