

period. As the Myanmar people grapple with the events unfolding elsewhere in the country, a nascent peace process and a fragile transition, researchers and policymakers would be wise to seek a fuller picture than this book alone offers. But make no mistake: this is an unusual and refreshingly unequivocal book.

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Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974.
By Stefan Huebner. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. xiv+397 pp.

In early 1913, Asia's first international sports meeting, the founding Far Eastern Championship Games, was held in Manila. The driving force behind this important initiative was Elwood Stanley Brown of the American branch of the YMCA, who, in 1910, had taken up the position of YMCA physical director in the Philippine capital. Elwood Brown's vision, clearly reflecting core values of Protestant-Evangelical America represented by the YMCA, was to promote internationalism, egalitarianism and economic progress. The last was to be achieved through increased public participation in sport, encouraged by the games, and thus to promote improved public health. In the following two decades, a further nine instalments of the Far Eastern Championship Games were held, alternating among Manila, Shanghai, Tokyo and Osaka. Until the 1930 games in Tokyo, when three athletes from India participated, all the athletes in these games came from the Philippines, Japan or China. In 1934, the year of the last Far Eastern Championship Games, held in Manila, the Western Asiatic Games were held in New Delhi and Patiala, although relatively few athletes — from India, Ceylon, Afghanistan and Palestine — participated. After the war, the major international sports meeting returned to Asia — on a substantially larger scale

— when the first Asian Games were held in New Delhi in 1951, with subsequent instalments being held in Manila in 1954, Tokyo in 1958, Jakarta in 1962, Bangkok in 1966 and 1970, and Tehran in 1974.

In this richly detailed study, Stefan Huebner is concerned not with the athletics or the athletes but with the individuals and organizations that created these events. Specifically, he focuses on the wider ambitions and purposes of the latter, and the cultural, social and political contexts for those ambitions. Thus the founding of the Far Eastern Championship Games in 1913 was for Elwood Brown and the American YMCA a central element in a “civilizing” mission, a mission to educate and “uplift” the Filipinos to American Protestant standards by providing, through amateur sport, training in citizenship and social responsibility. Into the 1920s the American YMCA sought to retain a firm control of the Far Eastern Championship Games, at least until, the Americans reasoned, a cadre of Asian sports organizers could be educated and assimilated to the point where the Americans could be confident that their ideals would be maintained. But growing anti-colonial pressure and sharper nationalist confrontations in Asia after the First World War — in particular Japan’s aggression towards China from the mid-1910s — resulted in the expulsion or withdrawal of American YMCA officials from the organization of the games. The Asian leadership that succeeded the Americans from the 1920s appropriated only certain elements of the games’ founding ideals while, naturally, pursuing its own wider ambitions and purposes.

This pursuit was most clearly evident in the organization of the series of Asian Games, beginning in New Delhi in 1951. Those first Asian Games represented, Huebner concludes, “a symbol of peaceful internationalism and of Asian modernization, repudiating discredited Western ideas of civilization” (p. 14). The 1954 Manila Games advanced the concept of amateur sport as a child of democracy and therefore something incompatible with communism: communist-ruled states were excluded. The wider ambition of the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo was to counter the image of Japan as a military aggressor and to show post-war Japan “embracing peaceful

internationalism” (ibid.). The Tokyo games would also show Japan as Asia’s most advanced nation. The 1962 Jakarta games were an exercise in nation-building, both in seeking to unite Indonesia’s different ethnicities and, through large-scale infrastructure projects, in challenging the perception that the country remained blighted by backwardness inherited from colonial rule. The underlying purpose for Thailand’s military regime in seeing the Asian Games come to Bangkok in 1966 and again in 1970 was to promote an image of anti-communist Asian cooperation.

In exploring the organization of these major sporting events, Stefan Huebner has drawn upon an exceptionally large number of archival holdings, including the Kautz Family YMCA Archives at the University of Minnesota and the archives of the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, as well as many other major holdings in the Philippines, the United States, Japan and Singapore. In its breadth and depth, the research involved here is mightily impressive. The result, as noted earlier, is a richly detailed study; indeed, it might be said, on occasion an excessively detailed study, for at times the detail and the dense argument threaten to overwhelm the reader.

Huebner is at heart concerned with the political, social and cultural contexts of pan-Asian sports in the decades that his book covers. He seeks to show the ways in which these sports movements, principally the Far Eastern Championship Games and then the Asian Games, helped to shape the “emergence of modern Asia”. But it might be argued that these movements were less a determinant than a reflection of modern Asia’s emergence, that they were simply an expression of many of the main political, social and cultural themes of the period — the civilizing mission, the rise of anti-colonial ambitions, and, later, ambitions of nation-building following the end of colonial rule. Those themes were, of course, intensely complicated and had complex determinants, but in this study Stefan Huebner has provided an original and imaginative insight into them.

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