

Sport, Social Transformation and Political Independence: The Asian Games

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Asia is the largest continent in the world. It comprises one-fifth of the world's total land area. It is almost five times the size of the USA and is more than four times the size of Europe. It embraces some 17 million square miles of continental landmasses, mainlands, and outlying archipelagos. Asia's physical diversity is matched by an even greater cultural and social diversity. It comprises 49 separate countries and contains three main cultural areas, the Islamic, the Hindu-Buddhist and the Sinic. It is home to almost 60% of the world's population.¹

Although there are diversities in culture and society, Asian countries have taken similar recent historical journey, from political independence to social transformation and modernity. In the twentieth century Asian countries, through a triadic process of cultural continuity, assimilation of contemporary ideas and resistance to imperial power, have developed political modernity.² Modern sport has played an important role in stimulating political re-assertion, a sense of national identity and the arousal of Orientalism.³

The Asian Games was originally found by the YMCA in 1913 in the image of the Olympic Games and it ended in 1934 before the Second World War. In 1951 the revived Asian Games took place in New Delhi. Its ostensible purpose was to promote sport in Asia and to unite Asian countries through sport. Over the years it has developed into a distinguished Oriental Games. The Games now takes place every four years and the number of participating countries has increased from 11 in 1951 to 45 in 2006 and the number of participates has increased from 489 in 1951 to 9,887 in 2002. The Games is regarded as the second biggest sports meeting in the world.

This paper explores the relationship between the Asian Games, Asian sport and Asian states and focuses on the following issues:

- the origin of the Asian Games
- the Asian Games and regional cooperation
- the Asian Games and regional bilateral relations
- the Asian Games, Asian sport and regional and global politics
- the Asian Games and Asian sports organizations

The Origin of the Asian Games: from Cultural Imperialism to National and

Regional Identity

Modern sport was not a native Asian phenomenon. It came in the nineteenth century from the West, initially with missionaries, and subsequently by way of Asian students returning from Europe and the United States. Of these missionary groups, the YMCA played the most important role in organising sports meetings and initiating the Asian Games. In 1913 the YMCAs of the three countries: the Philippines, China and Japan, agreed to have a sports meeting which was similar to the modern Olympic Games. Therefore, the Games was called the Far Eastern Olympiad (FEO). The organisational body was called the Far Eastern Olympic Association (FEOA).

Elwood S. Brown, the general secretary of the Philippine YMCA and the founder of the Far Eastern Games, reported the establishment of the first Asian sports organization, the FEOA, and the success of the first Asian games to Pierre de Coubertin, the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1913. Coubertin replied that he would like to co-operate with the FEOA, but the FEOA should not use the term Olympiad for its Games since it was for use only on the Olympic Games.⁴ Accordingly, the name of the Far Eastern Olympic Association (FEOA) was changed to the Far Eastern Games Federation (FEGF); and the Far Eastern Olympiad was changed to the Far Eastern Championship Games (FECG) in 1915.

The aim of the Games, according to the YMCAs, was to train outstanding oriental athletes to participate in the Olympic Games and to spread Western morality and masculinity among those weaker oriental people. The Games was a product of Western cultural imperialism. It meant to replace traditional Eastern cultures with Western culture.

However, for the Asian countries, it was the first regional sports event which united Asian athletes together under the banner of the Asian games. As *Philippine Free Press* stated in 1913, 'The Far Eastern Olympiad is quite the most significant event that has touched Oriental peoples in united action. They have never met before for united action on any basis other than athletics'.⁵

For China, Japan and the Philippines the Asian Games provided an opportunity to train people for real competition between nations. For the athletes it was the pride and the national identity, which could be displayed at the Games that attracted most of their attention. Athletes, for the first time, experienced the pride of representing their nation under their national flag before thousands of spectators. These young men, no matter how much they were taught by their YMCA directors and instructors about Western values and morals within the imperialist framework, would still have been inspired by patriotism. The Asian Games, from the very beginning, was closely linked nationalism and national identity.

When the Chinese athletes won at the second FECG in 1915 Wang Zhengting, the Chairman of the Organising Committee, pointed out that the Games took place at the time when the country was in the Sino-Japanese crisis and people were worried about the future of the nation. China's victories at the Games gave hope to the nation. People realised the strength of the nation came from a united China. They also realized the importance of training strong bodies through sport for the future of China. His message was clear that competitive sport could create a strong and powerful masculine China.⁶

Wong-Quincey concluded the symbolic nationalist sentiment of the Games: 'Its true significance lay in the fact that the Games furnished a convenient occasion for a wild expression of pent-up patriotism, of a bruised and wounded nationalism which had no time to recover from the shock and humiliation arising from the Sino-Japanese crisis.'⁷

Following the 1841 Sino-Japanese War, the 1915 Twenty-one Demands and 1931 Japan's conquest of Manchuria, politics carried both China and Japan close to a broader conflict. This conflict also reflected on the games. Athletes fought with their athletic bodies and skills to advance political power of their own countries. The games provided the Chinese sports community with the international perspective to form conceptions of a sporting Chinese nation. It also provided real opportunities for Chinese athletes to triumph over the reviled Japanese imperialists on the sports ground. The games, on the other hand, provided Japan with a platform to show its political, military and sporting superiority over its Eastern neighbours.

Sport is politics and politics is sport. What happened in the sports field reflected what happened in the political stage. In September 1931 Japanese troops invaded Manchuria. The puppet regime, Manzhouguo, was established in 1932. The Japanese made the last Qing emperor Pu Yi 'chief executive' of the government and retained control of the area until the Second World War.⁸

The Japanese wanted the international community to acknowledge the status of its creation: Manzhouguo. The international sports stage would be an ideal place to start. Therefore, in January 1934 Japan insisted that Manzhouguo should participate in the tenth FECG as an independent nation state. When the request was rejected by China Japan together with the Philippines dissolved the FECG on 20th May 1934, and found a new Amateur Athletic Association of the Orient of which Manzhouguo became a member.⁹ Therefore, the FECG ceased in Manila in 1934. The Chinese called the 20th May the 'humiliation day in sport history'.¹⁰ The history of the FECG was always remembered as a history of political conflict between China and Japan.

When the FECG ceased in Manila in 1934, the first Western Asiatic Games took place in India that year. Four countries, Afghanistan, Ceylon, India and Palestine, from West Asia participated. The founder of the games was G. D. Sondhi, who was

inspired by the FECCG and decided to hold a similar sports meeting to unite the countries in the region of West Asia. The Games was successful and Palestine proposed to hold the second one in 1938. However, the second Games never took place due to the approach of the Second World War.¹¹

The revival of the Asian Games came after the Second World War when there was a process of decolonisation and the emerging post-colonial countries took different route to independence and modernity. The Asians saw independence and modernity as involving transformation of all kinds, political, economic and social, in Asian society.

However, those Asian states found little to bind them together. The traditional regional political system offered few models for interstate cooperation. A key element for such cooperation – acceptance of the concept of sovereign and equal states – had no political basis in the concepts of the traditional system. Superior-vassal relations and subjugation by force had been the primary means for dealing with neighbours and were the standards for conducting interstate relation. Nevertheless, their links to Europe, which were based on the residual economic and social linkages of the colonial era, and the allure of global politics, which were based on the ideologically charged cold war, were stronger than their links to each other. Therefore, their traditional and colonial experiences left Asian states with non-cooperation.¹²

An establishment of a supranational forum to unite all states in Asia to against global powers became important. In March 1947 Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, held the Asian Relation Conference in New Delhi. The Non-Aligned Movement, a defensive response to the Soviet and the USA superpowers began. It advocated to establish a ‘New Order’ based on mutual respect and peaceful co-existence.

Together with the Non-Aligned Movement was Sondhi’s vision of an “All Asian Games to unite the newly independent Asian countries through sport meetings”. The vision impressed the representatives of various countries at the conference. The Indian Prime Minister Nehru immediately offered his support. Encouraged by the success at home, the following year, Sondhi presented the proposal to some Asian countries during the London Olympic Games in 1948 and he again received positive response from the Asian countries which emerged from the collapse of the British and other colonial empires including Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Israel. On 13 February 1949 the Asian Games Federation (AGF) was born at Patiala House in New Delhi. Maharaja Yadvendra Singh (India) become the First President; George B. Vargas (Philippines) the Vice-President and G. D. Sondhi (India) the Secretary-cum-Treasurer. The AGF decided to follow the Olympics’ pattern to hold the games every four years between the Olympic Games. Athletics, swimming and diving were compulsory events at the Games. The optional sports would be decided by the host nation, provided, at least, four countries were willing to participate. The first Asian Games took place in New Delhi in March 1951.¹³

The Asian Games and the Regional Cooperation

The historical experience of Asian states may explain much of the initial lack, and subsequently slow evolution, of regional cooperation. In the 1950s regional cooperation was limited as the result of the lack of regional solidarity and common culture and common communications.¹⁴ The Asian Games provided an opportunity for the Asian states to confront the traditional system and the intraregional isolationism maintained by the colonial powers. When the first Asian Games took place in New Delhi Rajendra Prasad, India's first President, called on the Asians to forge links of friendship and understanding with all nations in order to further the cause of peace. He claimed, "I am sure that the first Asian Games will promote the realization of understanding and friendship among all nations and will start a process which as time passes, will go on cementing the friendly ties between the peoples of Asia".¹⁵

Prime Minister Nehru also stated: "Delhi and India are fortunate in holding the first Asian Games. ... There is, however, another aspect of these international gatherings of athletes. They bring together the youth of many countries and thus help, to some extent in promoting international friendship and cooperation. In these days when dark clouds of conflicts hover over us, we must seize every opportunity to promote understanding and cooperation between nations. It must be remembered always that these games and contests should be carried out in an atmosphere of utmost friendliness. Each one must try his best and winner or loser must play his part gracefully and must enter into the spirit of the games".¹⁶

There was a permanent struggle for the AGF to fund and organise the Games between the 1950s and 1970s. For financial reasons South Korea and Singapore withdrew from being host for the sixth Games in 1970 and the eighth Games in 1978 respectively. In order to maintain the symbolism of the Asian Games, Thailand, with the help of the other Asian countries, became the country which hosted the Asian Games three times in 1966, 1970 and 1978. As General Kriangsak Chomanan, the president of the organizing committee for the 1978 Games claimed: "The responsibility of organizing the eighth Asian Games within the short space of time is a challenge worthy of Thailand and one which we accept with pride. We will not let down the trust that our friends have placed in us and will do our utmost to make the Games no less successful than the previous ones so that the athletes and sports lovers in Asia will have the opportunity to meet each other on common grounds to promote further friendship and goodwill".¹⁷

Sombat Karnjanakit and Suptir Samahito stated: "The three Games during 1966 and 1978 had a great impact on the Asian sports world and Thailand. ... during this period, the Asian countries were independent from colonialism and built their nations. Sport was used as a vehicle for building national pride, mutual understanding,

cooperation and competition among the Asian countries. It also helped to strengthen the relationship between Thailand and other Asian countries. The three Games, to a large extent, showed the solidarity and unity of the Asian sports family”.¹⁸

Thus, the Asian Games not only brought regional cooperation but also brought a sense of regional identity. Since independence Asian states have developed a creditable record in the area of regional cooperation such as the formation of ASEAN, SEATO and APEC.¹⁹ Asian Games provided a cultural base that developed understanding and cooperation between the contemporary Asian regions. Political leaders and sports leaders between 1950s and 1970s throughout Asia have used the Games to defend the social, political and cultural features of the region in both national and regional contexts.

Asian Games and Regional Bilateral Relations

The cooperation in the Asian society was shadowed by international and domestic politics. This is clearly shown on the bilateral relations of Asian countries. Since the end of the Second World War some states of Asia have maintained bilateral relations. They have frequently been governed by domestic political climates, which in turn were governed by the rhetoric of the cold war. Reactions to the foreign policy initiatives among regional states were often similarly polemical or ideological. For example, Vietnam, Korea and China.

The “Two Chinas” issue is an example of how the Asian states dealt with the bilateral relations and politics in Asian sport. In 1949 China divided into two states: the People’s Republic of China in Beijing (PRC) and the Republic of China in Taiwan (ROC). Not all regional states recognised both or either. When the first Asian Games took place in New Delhi, the PRC was invited to serve the political purpose of building a bridge between India and China. However, when the second Asia Games took place in Manila in 1954 and the third in 1958 in Tokyo, the ROC was invited as the representative of China.

The situation began to change at the fourth Asian Games in Jakarta, Indonesia in August 1962, when President Sukarno of Indonesia looked on the Games as a means to strengthen his own position among the newly emerging forces of Asia, Africa and Latin America that were ‘struggling against capitalism and trying to create a new world order’.²⁰ Communist China was a useful ally in this endeavour. The PRC also used this opportunity to attempt to establish its position as a leader of the “Newly Emerging Forces” of the world through the Asian Games. The Minister of Sport of the PRC stated: “The Chinese government cannot ignore those Imperialists and their followers who wanted to use the Asian Games to create “two Chinas”. These activities will not only harm the friendship between the PRC and Indonesia, but also harm the stand of Indonesia’s fight with Imperialism.”²¹

In the light of the reaction of the PRC and some Arab countries, Indonesia decided not to allow Taiwan and Israel to attend the Games and refused to issue visas to the athletes of these two countries. The IOC and the international federations of weightlifting and athletics regarded this as a political action. They claimed that the Games would face the sanction of not being recognized. The Indonesian government discussed this with Beijing and formally announced on 24th August 1962 that it would reject Taiwan and Israel from the fourth Asian Games. The IOC and the international federations immediately stated that they would not recognize the fourth Asian Games, as they could not tolerate a sports movement whose aim was strictly political. Nevertheless, the Games went ahead and achieved reasonable success.

The fifth and sixth Games took place in Bangkok in 1966 and 1970 respectively and Taiwan represented China at the games. However when world politics started to change in the early 1970s, sport provided the opportunity for Communist China's global realignment. The moment when the Chinese and American table tennis players started to talk to each other marked a turning point in foreign relations of the PRC and the USA.²² Following in the fine example of the "Ping-Pong diplomacy" the PRC would re-establish its identity and status in the Asian world through sport at the seventh Asian Games in 1974 when Iran was the host country.

From the early 1970s China and Iran had developed a close relationship. In September 1972 the Iranian Royalty and government were invited to visit Beijing and they received a warm welcome by Chairman Mao. Subsequently at the AGF board meeting in September 1973 in Bangkok, Iran proposed to accept PRC as a member and to revoke Taiwan. The proposal was supported by Japan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, but opposed by Thailand and Malaysia. After some intense debate the AGF officially admitted the PRC as a member of the AGF and Taiwan was withdrawn. The IOC was particularly cautious about this change. At its 74th session in September 1971 the IOC stated that politics should not mix with sport. It claimed that if the AGF did not invite all the countries which were IOC members to attend the Asian Games the IOC would not acknowledge the seventh Asian Games. Other international federations warned that their member countries would be forbidden to compete with non-member countries' athletes at the Asian Games. However, 269 Chinese athletes participated all the sports events after some negotiation with the international federation, Asian sports federations and the AGF.

The eighth Asian Games took place in December 1978 in Bangkok. China began to challenge Japan's dominant position and won 51 golden medals and came second. In November 1979 the IOC voted overwhelmingly to admit Communist China as the Chinese Olympic representative. Taiwan, on the other hand, accepted the IOC's conditions for its recognition by changing its name from the National Olympic Committee to Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee. Also it had to change its flag and anthem. The change of international politics and the increasing influence of

Communist China on the sport world had given Beijing what it wanted. The AGF and the Asian Games soon adapted the same model.

Communist China's return to the Asian Games changed the power structure of the Asian Games. It challenged Japan and South Korea's dominance in the Games and established its position as the sports superpower in the Asian world. This is clearly shown at the Asian Games between 1990 and 2002. Sport has a great importance, not only for establishment of Communist China's identity, but for the prospects for eventual reunification with Taiwan. It has played, and, still plays an important part in Communist strategy to bring Taiwan back to where Beijing conceives Taiwan's proper place to be – that is, part of the Chinese motherland to be governed from one centre for the benefit of all Chinese.²³

The recent announcement of a unified team of the South and North Korea for the Asian Games in Qatar in 2006 has provided another model of how the Asian Games solve the problems of regional bilateral relations in the Asian world.

Asian Games, Asian Sport and Regional and Global Politics

In the first decade of the Asian Games the focus was on the cooperation of the Asian states. The second decade took a different direction. President Sukarno of Indonesia followed India Prime Minister Nehru's lead but competed for leadership and stature within the Non-Aligned Movement rather than develop a common regional approach. In addition, the global pressure exerted by the USA, the Soviet Union, China, the IOC and IFs, did little to draw its regional proponents together. The Asian Games in the 1960s became a battlefield of regional and international politics between the superpowers.

In 1962 President Sukarno of Indonesia positioned himself as a leader of the newly emerging nations to strengthen his own position among the newly emerging forces of Asia, Africa and America. He created the 'new world order' theory which meant to 'break down the old established forces and to reconstruct the new emerging forces. Sport was a useful tool to make his theory become reality. It was an integral national and international revolution. Therefore the ultimate goal of sport was to put he and Indonesia on the international political stage.

The confrontation between the USA and Soviet Union and China during the Cold War also affected Sukarno's attitude. Although Indonesia adhered to the Non-Alignment Movement, it was close to the Soviet Union and China. Its refusal to invite Israel and Taiwan to participate in the fourth Asian Games was regarded as against the principle that sport was apolitical and against the rules of the IOC and IFs. Therefore the IOC and some IFs suspended the membership of the Indonesian Olympic Committee and sports federations.

The IOC stated on 7th February 1963: “The IOC and the IFs are completely opposed to any interference in sport on political, racial or religious grounds, and particularly any which prevents the unhindered passage of competitors and officials between their member countries.”²⁴

Two days later, the Indonesian Sport Ministry responded: “The exclusion of Indonesia from the Olympic Games will not harm Indonesia. On the contrary, Indonesia will now have the freedom to organize a new games without the participation of imperialists and colonists. The new Games is the GANEFO - the Games of the New Emerging Forces – Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the socialist countries.”²⁵ The Sports Ministry also pointed out, “It is time that the newly emerging countries should have a revolution to destroy the spirit and structure of the international sport movement which is controlled by the imperialists and colonists.”²⁶ On 13th February Sukarto, the President of Indonesia, announced that Indonesia would hold a new world Games: GANEFO. The announcement put the future of the IOC and the international sports federations at stake. It was a direct challenge to the Olympic Movement.

From the beginning the PRC showed great interest in GANEFO. The government gathered experts from Foreign and Sports ministries to analyze the feasibility of organizing the new Games. After careful study those experts indicated that since World War II, the colonial and semi-colonial countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America had become independent countries. But imperial countries, which dominated the IOC, still deny their rights in international sports affairs. The new Games, therefore, would attract those developing countries. At the same time, the new Games could provide a unique stage for the PRC to demonstrate its power and influence over those countries. The PRC decided to give GANEFO its full support and the announcement was made on 2nd September 1962.²⁷

At the same time a preparatory conference of GANEFO was held in Jakarta. The PRC, Cambodia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Pakistan, North Vietnam, the United Arab Republic, and the Soviet Union (Ceylon and Yugoslavia sent observers) were present. The aim of GANEFO was agreed: it was to be “based on the spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference and the Olympic ideals, and was to promote the development of sport in new emerging nations and to cement friendly relations among them.”²⁸

The Games was a political games. Sukarto strongly denounced the IOC’s attitude towards politics and sport. He argued: “Let us declare frankly that sport has something to do with politics. And Indonesia now proposes to mix sport with politics”.²⁹ Sukarto stated that in Indonesia sport was used to further the country’s political aims, namely, world friendship and peace. For Sukarto and the PRC the Olympic Games was but a tool of the old established forces who engaged in discriminatory actions against Asian, African and Latin American nations. Now those discriminated nations were going to use GANEFO as a tool to oppose the old

established forces.³⁰ The PRC stated in October 1962 that GANEFO would help develop sport in Asia and Africa and combat the “forces of imperialism and sports organizations manipulated by imperialist countries.”³¹

With the joint effort of some Asian, African and Latin American countries, in November 1963, the first GANEFO took place in Jakarta. More than 2,200 athletes and officials from 48 countries and regions including France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Finland and the Soviet Union attended the Games. Most of the participating states did not send official teams for the fear of being barred from the Olympic Games. In general only athletes of less than Olympic calibre were sent. The PRC sent a delegation of 238 athletes, coaches and officials and won 66 golds, 56 silvers and 46 bronzes and broke 2 world records.³² For the first time, after the isolation from the Olympic Games and international competitions since the late 1950s, athletes from Communist China had an opportunity to show the world their talents.

Yuri Torsuyev, the Head of the delegation of the Soviet Union, explained: ‘The most powerful weapon of the liberated forces, the pledge for their victory over imperialism is their solidarity. That is why imperialists try their utmost to undermine this solidarity, to split the international trade union, women, youth, sport and other democratic organizations. This is the old policy of the colonialist: divide and dominate.’ He emphasized that the GANEFO had demonstrated the solidarity of the Third World.³³

Camara Mamadi, the Head of the delegation of the Republic of Guinea, stated: “The development of sports and relations of friendship and solidarity among the New Emerging Forces contribute in our opinion to the quest for world peace and likewise in the GANEFO, a positive contribution and original manifestation, to the struggle against colonialism and imperialism.”³⁴ Kim Ki Soo, the head of the delegation of North Korea, directly called for “developing an independent sport movement of the the peoples of the New Emerging Forces, completely free from imperialism and colonialism and from the influence of the old forces.”³⁵

GANEFO II was scheduled to take place in Cairo in 1967, with Beijing as an alternative site. However, this was not enough for Beijing. The PRC had seen the success of the GANEFO and grasped the opportunity to expand its influence through sport in Asia. In September 1965 the second session of the Council of GANEFO was held in Beijing with 39 delegations present.³⁶ A GANEFO Asian Committee was formed. Beijing played a major role in its formation and a Chinese became the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the GANEFO Asian Committee. A proposal for an Asian GANEFO was approved and it would take place in Cambodia in 1966. It was designed as an alternative Games and was strategically timed to take place at the same time as the Olympic sanctioned Asian Games in 1967.

The Asian GANEFO was underwritten in large measure by the PRC. In addition to the financial support the Chinese helped Cambodia to build a sports stadium with

100,000 seats as well as other facilities and trained 300 referees for the Games in five months. The Games took place from 25 November to 6 December 1966 and it was held virtually simultaneously with the fifth Asian Games taking place in Bangkok, from which the PRC was excluded and Taiwan included. 17 countries and regions and more than two thousand athletes participated in the Asian GANEFO.

GANEFO had posed a real threat to the IOC. Brundage, the president of the IOC, voiced this fear in a letter to the Marquess of Exeter, the President of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, the most important and influential international federation, with regard to the “Africa Games” which was proposed by some African countries. He said: ‘If we want to hold the Olympic world together we must not let these 37 countries be led into the GANEFO camp, which may easily happen. Peking, China is very active now in Africa, and Congo Brazzaville has recently received from it a \$20,000,000 loan. The Egyptians are organizing the second GANEFO Games in Cairo in 1967... the Indonesian Embassy in Switzerland is inviting the National Federations and the Swiss NOC to a reception on the anniversary of the First GANEFO Games. This is probably also taking place in other places. The Arab countries and a few others are sympathetic.... We...will probably drive them all into the receptive arms of the GANEFO crowd if we are not most careful.’³⁷

GANEFO was a clear attempt to compete with the Olympic Games. More importantly, according to its stated purpose, GANEFO was to unite the new emerging forces and to emphasize their presence on the world scene. The Soviet Union and China was behind GANEFO. Its political, financial and organizational support made the Games happen. The absence of the United States and the Western European states was a clear indication of this purpose.

The GANEFO movement was a product of the time when the nations in the Third World underwent dramatic changes: from colonial dependence to political independence and social transformation. It intended to challenge the hegemony of Western power in sport, to divide and fragment the Olympic movement, to emphasize the political realities of the new world structure, and to dramatize the political ambitions of the new and non-aligned states. At the same time, GANEFO was the product of East-West estrangement, as it existed in the early 1960s. By the time of GANEFO, the Sino-Soviet split had taken place, halving the Communist camp and creating three power blocs – the United States and Western Europe, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the PRC – each striving for the support of the non-aligned states. The GANEFO movement also proved that sport is an extremely valuable political and diplomatic resource. It enabled the Indonesian and the Third World nations to oppose Western powers and at the same time to develop and strengthen relations among regional states in Asia.

The Asian Games and Asian Sports Organizations

Between 1951 and 1981 the Asian Games was organised and governed by the AGF. It was a sports organisation without fixed headquarters and steady income. The president and general secretary of the AGF were produced from the host countries of the Games. The headquarters was changed according to the changing of the host cities. Nevertheless the AGF was a semi-independent and democratic sports body and promoted unite and co-operation in the region actively and tried to stick to its principles and rules under the pressure of superpowers of the USA, Soviet Union, China, the IOC and IFs.

In the late 1970s, when many Asian countries established national Olympic Committees and participated in the Olympic Games, a desire of a strong body to supervise and develop Asian sport and to have access to a world stage such as the International Olympic Movement grew. Simultaneously Gulf Arab states emerged with rich financial resource and were ready to play an important role in Asian sport. Their representative was Cheik Fahd Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwait sports leader, with his strong political ambition and anti-Semitic feeling which would influence the policy and practice of the Asian Games for the next two decades.

In 1978 before the eighth Asian Games in Bangkok members of AGF met and decided to establish a new Asian sports association. A committee was set up to prepare the new organisation. In November 1981, 34 Asian NOCs met in New Delhi and named the new organisation as the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). The 34 Asian NOCs became the funding members. When the other NOCs wanted to join the OCA they had to have the votes of two thirds of the members. In this way the AGF was abolished and Israel was successfully excluded from the new OCA.³⁸

In November 1982 during the ninth Asian Games in New Delhi the OCA was formally established. The election of the president and headquarters became the focus. Fahd, a son of Kuwait's billionaire ruling family, the president of the Kuwait National Olympic Committee, showed his strong interest in the position. Japan was not interested in the Asian Games in the early 1980s; China did not feel confident enough for the seat of the presidency and India was silenced by Fahd's aid of US\$15,000,000 to build a sports stadium for the New Delhi Games. Fahd also had all Gulf Arab's votes and more from some south Asian countries and, in addition, he promised US\$1 million every year to fund the new organisation along with office space, facilities and the working vehicles. Consequently, Fahd became the first president of the OCA and the Headquarters was fixed in Kuwait.³⁹ A leading Asian sports official commented: "The destruction of the AGF was masterminded by the Arab oil countries. It was an unfortunate thing, there was nothing we could do about it, but Israel was excluded from membership of OCA ... We heard on the grapevine that they had paid bribes. This is an open secret. The oil money was irresistible to people from the poorer countries."⁴⁰

Fahd had promised on his election that he would work hard to promote Asian sport in the Asian world. However, three years passed and he did a little for the development of Asian sport. His focus was on the exclusion of Israel from Asian sport at every opportunity. As M. Dhillon, the general secretary of Singapore Olympic Committee, stated: “The whole creation of OCA was aimed primarily at Israel. It was a political issue.”⁴¹

China, Japan and other South and Southeast Asian countries were dissatisfied with Fahd’s leadership. When the election time came at the 1986 Seoul Asian Games they proposed that the OCA presidency should be re-elected and He Zhengliang, vice president of the Chinese Olympic Committee and member of the IOC, was nominated as a candidate. Samaranch supported He’s nomination and stated: “It is a joke that Asian sport is led by a small country with little sports activity”.⁴²

Feeling the danger of losing his seat Fahd asked to have a private meeting with He Zhangliang. He admitted that He Zhengliang could win the election because of his reputation and experience. Fahd also admitted that he was near the edge of bankruptcy and had debt to the tune of US\$ 1 billion. His political enemy in Kuwait had launched an investigation into his financial affairs. He pleaded that He Zhengliang gave him the opportunity to be re-elected, otherwise he would be in a very difficult situation at home. He promised that he would only be president twice and would work closely with China to promote Asian sport.⁴³

He Zhengliang reported this conversation to the Chinese government and sports ministry. China considered that He Zhengliang’s election might affect China’s relationship with Arab countries and instructed that He Zhengliang should withdraw from the election. China’s decision disappointed He’s supporters. He made a speech at the election meeting and claimed: “Asia is now playing an important role in world sport and for this reason we need a united OCA. ... Fahd has expressed that he will reform and strength the OCA. ... In order to uphold the unity of the OCA I withdraw from the election.”⁴⁴ Fahd was re-elected. Nevertheless, the Assembly insisted that a new clause of no one can be president for more than two terms should be added into the Constitution and Rules of the OCA.

However, The clause was deleted in 1988 in the revised Constitution and Rules without any explanation.⁴⁵ In March 1990 when his second term came to the end Fahd visited Beijing and expressed his wish to continue his presidency in the forthcoming election. Most of the members of OCA were dissatisfied with his leadership. Man Lip Choy, the general secretary of Korean National Olympic Committee, recalled: “For nine years Sheik Fahd did nothing and although there were strong feelings among East Asian countries, like China, Korea and Japan, they could not speak up because they were afraid of the Arabs. There has been a strong feeling that there should be a new leadership because those Arab countries are small countries, ... they have little

sport and no women's sport. If they did something to improve the sports quality standard of Asia we wouldn't mind but they have done nothing. ... There are also problems with the solidarity fund from the IOC. We have to produce a programme and they just don't do it." ⁴⁶

Fahd died in August 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait. After Fahd's death, some East and Southeast Asian NOCs including South Korea, Japan and Indonesia pressed He Zhengliang, who is now the vice president of the IOC, to be the president of the OCA to lead Asian sport forward. However, the Arab countries understood the importance of sport on the international politics and that it could provide a powerful weapon to win what they had lost on the battlefield with Iraq.

On 7th September 1990 ambassadors from six Arab countries including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia met with the Beijing Asian Games Organising Committee and asked China to 1. ban Iraq's participation in the Beijing Asian Games; 2. support their proposal of ban Iraq's participation in all international sports competitions and meetings; 3. support their proposal of banning Iraq's participation in the IOC session in Tokyo in September; 4. support Fahd's son to be a vice president of the OCA and allow him to read the speech, which was written by his father before his death, at the Beijing Asian Games opening ceremony. ⁴⁷

On 8th September the board meeting of OCA took place in Beijing. Fahd's young son, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, who inherited his father's position as the president of the Kuwait Olympic Committee, asked to present at the meeting as a vice president of the OCA. The OCA rules stated clearly that a vice president should be elected by the Assembly, however, Ahmad attended the board meeting anyway. The board agreed that the OCA would ban Iraq's membership temporarily and ban its participation in the Beijing Asian Games in late September. ⁴⁸

Immediately Kuwait and the Arab contingent proposed that Ahmad should inherit his father's position in the OCA to become its president. This evoked resistance from Japan, China and South Korea and other south and southeast countries. They protested that Arabs had treated the OCA as their monarchy. ⁴⁹ In addition, the OCA rules specifically forbid anyone under the age of thirty-five taking presidency and Ahmad was only twenty-nine. Although the Arabs stated that he was over thirty-five in 1991 people pointed out that his own father died at age of forty-five in 1990. However, the Arabs found the other clause which stated that the qualification could be waived by a simple majority. All that was needed was enough votes.

Nevertheless the Pacific Asian countries had enough. They felt it was an insult to the OCA and its member states. They nominated He Zhengliang from China to stand for the election. On 11th September 1990 the Chinese government approved He Zhengliang's nomination and instructed He to stand for election of the OCA. On 12th September He Zhengliang met with Samaranch and received his full support. ⁵⁰ At the

same time Kuwait and Arab countries actively worked hard to buy votes for Ahmad. They used different unethical ways, such as bribe and threat, to win the election.⁵¹ Ahmad also met with He Zhengliang and indicated that Kuwait had provided him with US\$200,000 for the election.⁵² Nevertheless, China decided that it was time for some changes in the OCA and a fair election was necessary. He Zhengliang with his reputation in the international and Asian sports world would win most of the support of the OCA members at the Assembly in September 1991.⁵³ However, international politics can change overnight. In February 1991 China decided to bid for the 2000 Olympic Games. In order to receive all the support China possibly could have including Arab countries China instructed He Zhengliang to withdraw from the election.

When the election took place in New Delhi in September 1991 Ahmad, the young man, who had no experience of sports administration, no proper command of English, no proper knowledge of sport, beat the acting OCA president and vice president (South Asia), Roy de Silva from Sri Lanka, and became the president of OCA. Man Lip Choy was angry: “if they ... continue unjustified domination by the Arabs then I think we feel very strongly that we should not participate in the OCA. It is just a monarchy now, that’s exactly what it is. I shall never attend an OCA meeting again. I have told my staff this is not the Olympic movement anymore. Under that kind of environment there is no future. This is the dirty business of power politics”.⁵⁴

The OCA election disappointed most of the South and Southeast Asian countries, especially the East Asian countries including China, Japan and South Korea. They felt powerless in the OCA and they needed to establish their own organisational body and Games to challenge the hegemony of Arab countries and to unite East Asia in order to lead and promote sport in Asian society in general and bring some changes and progress in the OCA in particular.⁵⁵

In September 1991 the Olympic Committees of East Asian country and region held a meeting in Tokyo and China, Japan, Korea, South Korea and Mongolia attended. They signed a resolution which highly critical of the way Fahd’s management of the OCA. It stated: “OCA has fallen into disarray. Many irregularities and anomalies have arisen. The main issue are over-concentration of power in the presidency, administrative problems in the Olympic solidarity programme and weakness in procedures for agendas and implementation of decisions of the Bureau and General Assembly.”⁵⁶

Two months later China, Japan, Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan and Hong Kong met again in Beijing. The meeting emphasised the cooperation between East Asian and region sports organisations and the necessity of reformation of the OCA. It decided that the East Asian countries and region would hold an East Asian Games every four years. The Games would be organised and managed by the new East Asian Games Association (EAGA). This association and its games do not belong or affiliate to the OCA. It is an independent sports organisation. Its decision-making forum is the

General Assembly in which each member country has one vote. The Executive Committee consisted of vice presidents and officers of the East Asian sports federations. The president would be produced from the host city of the Games and the two vice presidents would be produced from the previous and next host cities/countries. A strong secretariat is set in Beijing. The main source of income for the EAGA comes from the country hosting the next Games.⁵⁷

The first East Asian Games was held in Shanghai in May 1993. The Shanghai Sport Council claimed that the Games took place without State financial support. 300 million RMB spend on the Games came from sponsorship, endorsement, lotteries and advertising. It became a successful model for Chinese sports reform. Samaranch was invited to present at the Games. He commented: “The establishment of the EAGA and the holding of the East Asian Games has met the need of the development of sport in Asia. You East Asian countries are sports superpowers in Asia and you should unite and play major role in Asian sport”.⁵⁸

When the second East Asian Games took place in Pusan in 1997 some countries from former Soviet Union became members of the EAGA. After the Pusan Games Australia was attracted by the high level of competition and applied for the membership of the EAGA. After debate in the EAGA Australia was accepted as a guest member and participated in the third EAG in 2001 in Japan.

The formation of the EAGA and EAG is the symbol of solidarity of East Asia. It serves the interests of regional states. It is an attempt to save the principle and spirit of the Asian Games and Asian sport. Its leadership with experience, confidence and common knowledge and ethics has led the new organisation and the games successfully in developing a regional infrastructure for regional cooperation. Its democratic structure has provided a model for the reformation of the OCA in the future.

In summary, the establishment of the OCA was, to some extent, a consequence of the spread of the international Olympic movement in the continents. The OCA has made some progress on the development of sport in Asian history. Apart from the organisation and supervision of the Asian Games it also initiated the Asian Indoor Games in 2005, a competition which takes place every two years including six to eight sports that are not included in the Olympic Games or Asian Games.

However, the OCA has become a racist organisation, which uses sport as a political weapon against other countries. The exclusion of Israel from the Asian Games since the 1980s has directly failed to abide the International Olympic principle: fair play and non-discrimination on the basis of race and religion, and the principle of the Asian Games: to develop the moral and physical qualities of the youth of Asia by fair competition, friendship, respect and goodwill.

The OCA has become a monarchy. The scandal of election, the change of Constitution and Rules without any explanation, the corruption, bribery and threats have washed away the principles and ethics of sport in Asia. The hegemony of Gulf Arab states has turned the modern sports organisation into a fiefdom in Asia.

He Zhengliang, a respectable leader of the International Olympic Movement and Asian sport, strongly emphasised that the OCA must reform. It should not allow Kuwait to occupy the position any longer. He Zhengliang urged that the structure of OCA must change and that the president of the OCA should be produced by the host city. In this way it could avoid corruption, bribery and power hunger.⁵⁹ The other members of the OCA believed that the OCA should change its structure and go back to the old AGF. The over-concentration of power in the president has adverse impact on the development of Asian sport.⁶⁰ He Zhengliang revealed that Samaranch had discussed the problems of leadership of the OCA with China, Japan and South Korea. He pointed out that Asia is the biggest continent in the world and its sport developed rapidly. The current president who did not understand sport very much and lack of politic knowledge was not suitable for the leadership position.⁶¹

Conclusion

The Asian Games was originally a product of cultural imperialism. It was an attempt of the YMCA to reconstruct Asia through transmission of Western ideas and values to the Asians through sport. However its historical function turned out to provide a platform for the athletes and Asian countries to establish their national and regional identity.

The revival of the Asian Games in the 1950s was the product of independence and decolonialisation. The Asian Games had enhanced the image of the Orient in the international sports arena and provided an opportunity for advancing the development of the Asian states in the global political system. It helped to break the hegemony that the Occident exercised over the Orient.

The creation of the OCA in the 1980s provided a means for Asian states to make their views known in the International Olympic Movement. It has co-opted itself into the body of the Olympic family. However, it has lost its original function as an autonomous sports body to supervise and promote sports in the Asian world. It has lost its unique position in the past to co-ordinate and unite all the Asian sports bodies (47 of them) and to use its strategic location to play its part in the major forums of world politics. The Asian Games, like the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic Games, “began to serve as a public reinforcement of the myth of Western civilization’s superiority over colonial people”.⁶²

Furthermore, the OCA is not a democratic international sports organisation. It is overshadowed by regional culture, politics and hegemony. A reformation should take

place on its policy and structure to convince its members of its credibility and to improve its institutional image to the outside world. It should implement the principles of the Asian Games and the Olympic Games: equality, fair play and non-discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, colour, religion and politics to make the Asian Games a true and distinctive Games for the whole of the Asian society and take it “Ever Forward”.⁶³

Footnotes

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⁶ Wang Zhengting, 'Guan dierci yuandong yundonghui zhi ganyan' [My Views on the Second Far Eastern Championship Games], *Jinbu*, vol.8, no.3, July 1915, pp.13-14.

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⁹ The Association would have its first sports meeting in Japan in 1938 and second sports meeting in Philippine in 1940. Due to the approach of the Second World War the meetings never took place.

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¹¹ Mithlesh K. Singh Sisodia, 'India and the Asian Games: From Infancy to Maturity', *Sport in Society*, vol. 8, no. 3., 2005, p.405.

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- ⁵⁵ Interview with a Chinese sports official and an OCA official in April 2006.
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