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Japanese Sportswomen in Context

Seven-time Summer and Winter Olympic athlete Hashimoto Seiko has served in the highest level of the Japanese government, the Upper House of the Diet, for over fifteen years.¹ She has, over the course of her time in office, served with a number of other prominent female athletes, including a professional wrestler, an Olympic gymnast and currently with Japan's most celebrated female judo star, Tani Ryōko. While it is not uncommon for high-profile individuals to take government positions, it is notable that in Japan sport has been a key avenue for women to gain fame, political power and subsequently to make decisions that impact the entire nation. It is particularly important to recognize the potential power of female athletes in light of the fact that Japan is often criticized for its 'bamboo ceiling' for women in the workplace, meaning that, like bamboo, the ceiling can bend and bend but never break. That sport should provide such a path to the top for women (and men, it should be noted, as a number of male politicians including former Prime Minister Aso Tarō have also been prominent athletes) implies a certain valuing of athletes by Japanese society. This chapter will explore the role of sport in the sociopolitical history of modern Japan.

In order to better understand sport and gender in contemporary Japan, we will also look briefly at how Japanese women's involvement in sport compares with that of its neighbours in East Asia, namely China and the Korean peninsula. With each nation having its own complex sociopolitical history, the involvement of women in sport has taken different paths. As anyone who follows international sport knows, the twenty-first century has seen a number of notable Chinese and South Korean women athletes rise to fame in such events as the Olympic Games and World Championship tournaments. While these nations have their own rich histories of sport that go back well before the modern era, I will take the nineteenth century as a starting point for looking at women's involvement in modern sport. As will be elucidated in Chapter 3, the nineteenth century was the point at which women around the globe began to make the transition from recreational sport or self-defensive sport (i.e. martial arts) to competitive sport that would be carried out on an international level by the early twentieth century. In looking at the involvement of East Asia in this evolution of women's sport, we will see that women from this region did not simply join in on a Western-dominated arena of women in sport but indeed made important contributions that would shape the history itself.

Sport and the sociopolitical history of modern Japan

While an all-encompassing history of sport in Japanese history is beyond the scope of this book, a brief look at the significant role that sport has played in modern Japan can give us a good backdrop for better understanding the rise of women's sport there in the late nineteenth century. An in-depth discussion of the nation's long tradition of martial arts will not be included, as a number of sources are already available for better understanding this history and its relation to sport and body culture in modern Japan.² After considering the pre-modern ancestors of sport in modern Japan, I will provide a more thorough examination of sport during and after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The focus will be on sport and modern Japan's sociopolitical history in general, with some references made to the role of women when relevant. Greater detail about the emergence of women's sport in Japan and the individuals responsible for it will be provided in Chapter 3.

Defining 'sport': Did it exist in pre-modern Japan?

To this point, I have not yet provided a definition for 'sport', the reason being that sport, in Japan as in other parts of the world, has not had one static definition over time. Prior to the modern era, people in Japan were partaking in a number of activities which would be classified as sport today. There is very little textual evidence upon which to base research on pre-modern Japanese sport and even less about women's sport during this time. G. Cameron Hurst III asserts that the tradition of sport developed in pre-modern Japan 'did not leave a significant impact on the literary or artistic heritage [of Japan]' and that despite the archaeological and textual evidence of certain sports, 'these activities did not become the focus of literary or artistic concern until well into the Tokugawa period'.³ The lack of organized sporting activity in early Japanese history and the absence of athletes who were held up as national heroes highlight the difference between Japan's pre-modern history of sport and that of Greece, for example.

However, evidence suggests that inhabitants of pre-modern Japan *did* participate in activities that we would now consider sport-like, including wrestling, ball games and martial techniques. Whether these activities were considered 'sport' at the time they were practised remains up for debate, but their existence is irrefutable. Much of the discourse on sport in modern Japan paints a picture of it being 'introduced' into Japan by Western nations, but many of the characteristics of modern sport already had deep roots in Japanese society by the time Western-originated sports were imported to Japan in the nineteenth century.

Historian Allen Guttman, who has written several influential books on modern sport in general, and a few pieces on Japanese sport in particular, has a paradigm for distinguishing modern from pre-modern sport. This paradigm, which he relies on in several of his works,⁴ provides a simple framework through which pre-modern sport and the subsequent transition to modern sport in Japan can be understood. The distinguishing characteristics of modern sport are as follows: (1) secularism or being unrelated to a transcendent realm of the sacred, (2) equality or that the rules be the same for all contestants, (3) bureaucratization or some sort of administrative structure, (4) specialization, such as specialized roles and playing positions for participants, (5) rationalization or a 'means-ends point of view' whereby the rules are scrutinized and revised, (6) quantification or the use of numbers to qualify achievement and (7) an obsession with records, resulting from the quantification of results.⁵ This framework is especially useful for understanding how and why some of the activities of pre-modern Japan may not necessarily be categorized as 'sport', despite the fact that they share some characteristics with their modern successors. For example, a form of sumo wrestling is known to have taken place about 2,000 years ago as part of a religious ceremony praying for abundant crops,⁶ but because of the secular nature of modern sport we would not consider this ritual to be a 'sport' *per se*.

Bearing in mind this distinction, several activities from the pre-modern era can be seen as precursors to modern-day sport in Japan. In addition to wrestling, a ball game called *kemari* was played in Japan from around the twelfth century onwards, and this game shared many characteristics of modern sport, including its secular nature (it was played primarily for the enjoyment of spectators and players) and the codification of the game's rules.⁷ *Kemari* was played on a square court with a hollow deerskin ball. Eight players would kick the ball, first in order of court rank (the player with the highest rank would pass to the next highest and so forth) and then freely to one another, the object being to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible using the right foot alone. While the game was usually played only by men, the memoirs of a court lady, Lady Nijō, suggest that women occasionally played as well. In her 1307 memoir, *Confessions of Lady Nijō*, she writes that a priest suggested eight court ladies dress in the *kemari* attire and to play a game, saying, '[t]hat certainly would be a rare sight'.⁸

There is also evidence suggesting that women were involved in martial arts in the pre-Meiji era. While the modern sport of jūdō is often noted for its open acceptance of women upon its founding by Kanō Jigoro in 1882,⁹ biographies of women living in the mid-nineteenth century discuss certain martial techniques being practised by women in order to gain strength or confidence. For example, one of the pioneers of physical education in Japan, Toyoda Fuyu, became skilled in the *naginata*, or long pole sword, as a teenager in the 1850s.¹⁰ Women of all social strata would train in such self-defensive methods, typically

to be used to protect themselves if and when their husbands were away from the home in combat.

Other pre-modern Japanese sporting activities show little or no evidence of women having taken part. These male-only domains included such activities as *dakyū*, a game using sticks to propel a ball into a goal, *gitchō*, a game similar to *dakyū* but using a round disk similar to a hockey puck instead of a ball, and *chikaraishi* or the lifting of heavy stones. Combat techniques such as swordsmanship and archery have also been around in Japan for many centuries, and several of these techniques still exist today in one form or another.¹¹ In an essay on archery and the modernization of Japan, Guttmann claims that Japanese archery embodied several important characteristics of modern sport well before the modern era, which he believes can partially explain the quick and welcome diffusion of Western sport following the Meiji Restoration.¹² For example, in the ninth-century CE (the Heian period), while the practice in the West was to shoot arrows only at live targets (i.e. animals), the Japanese were shooting at standardized targets, much like the modern-day Japanese sport of *kyūdō* and Western-style archery. Guttmann posits that this link can go beyond the sports themselves and indeed suggests that Japanese modernization in the Meiji era and beyond is easier to understand because of these ‘seeds of modernity’ that had been in Japan for centuries prior.¹³ I will now turn to this period of modernization in the late nineteenth century, for modernization (and Westernization) brought with it important changes in the way the body was viewed in relation to the Japanese state, along with the first strong impetus for the inclusion of women in sport.

Sport and the Meiji Restoration

Mori Arinori, who would become the most prominent and influential education minister of the Meiji era, stated in 1882 that ‘[i]f the body is strong, the spirit will advance of its own accord without flagging. Physical training is an indispensable element for character training’.¹⁴ This mode of thinking did not get introduced to Japan from the West, as may be assumed based on the large-scale importation of Western goods, people, ideologies and trends after the Meiji Restoration. Rather, it developed indigenously from the late-Tokugawa focus on military training. By the mid-nineteenth century, private schools that taught martial arts and domain-sponsored schools that trained local samurai were proliferating throughout the archipelago. It has been argued that this infrastructure and societal reverence of physical culture strongly influenced the Meiji-era reception of Western sport, as they were seen not merely as recreational but, for a more significant purpose, like spiritual training or social bonding. Mori Arinori and other influential Meiji-era figures had themselves,

as former samurai, taken part in intense physical training in their youth and thus saw its immediate value in instilling such values as the observance of hierarchy and comradeship with one's peers, along with the physical benefits of improved health and stamina.¹⁵ Compulsory organized physical activity was therefore promoted by Mori and swiftly introduced to the Japanese education system following the Meiji Restoration.

At the same time, in the late nineteenth century, sport in the West had come to be increasingly linked to militarism, and the Japanese quickly adopted this mindset as well. Again, the samurai tradition of education in the military arts still loomed large, so it was no great leap for the Japanese elite to give primacy to physical training in the revamping of the education system. The introduction of physical activity into schools was seen as part of a larger scheme to prepare youths for war. This was the era of Social Darwinism, and so the improved physical discipline and strength promoted by adding physical education into the schools was fundamentally linked to Japan's effort to raise its status as a major military player on the world stage. Moreover, as historian Donald Roden has said of sport in this time period,

along with the notion of the rectitude of might was a corresponding fear that the mechanization of power in an industrializing state spawns moral lassitude. Routine, convenience, docility, and protruding stomachs were all alarming signs that, as [then US Civil Service Commissioner Theodore] Roosevelt declared in 1894, 'a peaceful and commercial civilization' was on the verge of forfeiting those 'virile fighting qualities' that were the source of its rise.¹⁶

Participation in sport was thus inextricably linked to the mindset that characterized Social Darwinism – that only the strongest of nations could flourish and survive.

It was during this time, only a decade or so after Japan opened its ports to the world after over two centuries of isolationist policies, that Western sport was introduced to Japan. This 'introduction' came in several different waves all around the same time (from 1860s to 1890s). The unprecedented influx of foreigners to Japan after the 1860s meant that foreign communities were being established and recreational activities from abroad were being introduced both informally and formally. Ending its long period of isolation did not only mean foreigners were coming into Japan but it also meant that the Japanese were allowed to travel abroad. This led to an even broader establishment of sport in the Meiji era by returning Japanese citizens themselves, again both informally and formally.

As foreign communities grew around port cities such as Yokohama, facilities for recreational activities quickly came to be built – often for use first by the foreigners and then by elite Japanese.¹⁷ From the outset, sport was a central component of the social and recreational lives of the foreign communities in treaty port cities. John Morris, a British employee of the Japanese Imperial

Public Works Department who was part of one such foreign community in the late 1800s, wrote a book titled *Advance Japan: A Nation Thoroughly in Earnest* (1895), in which he discusses the foreign communities of Japan's treaty ports. He writes,

Sport is pursued in all its branches with that which distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon race wherever met with. An extensive racecourse is situated not far from the public gardens, and a magnificent recreation ground – where cricket, tennis, and other games are played with a zest which amazes the native population – lies just in the rear of the business thoroughfares. Boating and yachting, rifle shooting and athletics, further tend to fill the cup of youthful happiness to the brim.¹⁸

It is clear that the foreign communities brought with them many of the recreational activities they had enjoyed in their homelands, and many of the Japanese living around them would soon be engaging in these activities as well.

The early engagement of the Japanese in Western sport came not only from their 'amazement' at the activities in which the foreigners were partaking but also from the rapid institutionalization of physical activity into the Japanese education system. Foreign teachers were invited to work in Japanese schools (among other government-sponsored locations), and there they would teach subjects ranging from English and law to calisthenics and physical education. Some of these foreign teachers, including those not hired specifically to teach physical education, have been credited with having introduced sport from abroad to their students. Perhaps most famous among these educators was Horace Wilson, an American hired by the Japanese government in the early 1870s to teach English and mathematics at what would become Tokyo University (at the time it was called *Dai ichi daigaku ku dai ichiban chūgakkō*). While Americans living in Japan had built baseball diamonds and had recreational leagues prior to his arrival,¹⁹ Wilson is credited with having established the first baseball club at a Japanese university in 1872.²⁰ The sport was played as a novelty on college campuses for the next couple of decades, but baseball did not take off as an intercollegiate sport until the 1890s, well after Horace Wilson and his baseball-promoting American contemporaries had returned to the United States.²¹ The timing of baseball's surge in popularity came not coincidentally at the same time that Japan was preparing for war and eventually defeating China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5). University students were growing more interested in sport not only as a fun recreational activity but also as a symbol of 'the collectivist ideal and fighting spirit of the nation as it prepared for war'.²² This was, again, in line with the Social Darwinist thought of the day in which the strongest nations would flourish and the weak would be destroyed.

Wilson and the other baseball enthusiasts were not the only foreigners to introduce sport to the education system in Japan, as the Japanese Ministry of Education (*mombushō*) sponsored hundreds of educators in the Meiji era

to facilitate in new teaching methods to modernize the nation. This included foreigners being brought to Japan to serve as teachers and advisors, along with Japanese educators and government employees going abroad to learn and bring back new modes of educating and governing. This would have the most direct impact on the development of women's sport in Japan, as both foreigners and Japanese sent abroad began to promote physical activity for girls and women in Japanese schools beginning in the 1870s.

The introduction of women's sport to Meiji Japan

Before the Meiji Restoration, distinctions within Japanese society tended to be based first on social hierarchy (samurai, peasant, artisan or merchant) and then on gender, but with the abolition of the class system, gender came to play a larger role in the way society was structured after 1868. The Meiji-era slogans *fukoku kyōhei* ('enrich the nation, strengthen the military'), *wakon yōsai* ('Japanese spirit, Western technology') and *bunmei kaika* ('civilization and enlightenment') sum up Japan's interest in being seen as progressive by the rest of the world at this time – an interest driven largely by a desire to counter Western threats to Japan's nationhood. Education came to be an important tool that the Meiji government used to meet some of these nationalistic goals, and this included, for the first time ever, compulsory education for girls and young women. The government believed that without a literate and 'enlightened' population, Japan would never gain international recognition.²³ As part of the education reform, physical education was introduced to the elementary curricula for both boys and girls for the first time.

Although elementary education was made compulsory for all school-aged boys and girls in Meiji Japan, the government still gave clear preferential treatment to male students.²⁴ Prior to the Meiji Restoration, the Tokugawa government had stressed Confucian learning, with an emphasis on the morals of obedience, loyalty and filial piety as being necessary for maintaining a stable society. Women were to maintain complete loyalty to their husbands (in spite of the fact that keeping concubines was a regular practice for many men), and their roles were defined as being both subservient to and dependent upon men. Women did not have any political, legal or economic rights, and their sphere of influence was limited to the family. Tokugawa women were, for the most part, expected to be illiterate and uneducated.²⁵

Following the Meiji Restoration, the priority given by the state to creating a stronger, more modern nation meant that Western notions such as individualism and equal opportunity in education came to be embraced, at least in theory. The goal of the education system was to create a stronger nation, and when it came to women, it was thought that 'the enlightenment

of future generations and the prosperity of the country rest on the nature of mothers'.²⁶ The transition was not as smooth or simple as is sometimes suggested by histories of Meiji Japan – since many families preferred to stick to their deep-rooted traditions; parents did not think that education was necessary for their daughters. Particularly in rural regions, the percentage of girls attending school remained under ten per cent throughout the 1870s and 1880s in spite of the fact that the Ministry of Education had deemed eight years of compulsory elementary education for boys and girls in the Fundamental Code of Education of 1872.²⁷

Over time, more and more girls and young women began abiding by the compulsory education rule, especially as more schools for girls came to be built and female education became more mainstreamed. From the mid-1870s to the mid-1880s, foreign missionaries began establishing Christian girls' schools, in part to compensate for what was seen as a lacking effort on the part of the Japanese state with respect to girls' education.²⁸ In addition to foreign missionary-run schools for girls, private schools for girls were beginning to open around the country as well. Like the Christian schools, these schools could establish their own courses of study, as they were not run by the state. The first of such private schools was the Atomi Girls' School, founded by Atomi Kakei in 1875.²⁹

At her school, Atomi included 'dance exercise' as part of the curriculum. This was significant because of the fact that physical education had not yet been established as part of the official curriculum for male or female students at this point. That would not come until 1878, when physical education for male students was added to public schools.³⁰ By 1880, the Tokyo Women's Normal School (*Tokyo joshi shihan gakkō*, now Ochanomizu Women's University), a government-sponsored institution, added courses in Western social etiquette, including home economics and social dance. Other prefectural-run women's normal schools added the same subjects to their curricula in the early 1880s.³¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the Meiji era had firmly established itself as one of drastic change and rapid modernization, the seeds of women's physical education in Japan had been sowed. Often trained first by foreign instructors who brought over the latest educational trends from the West, by 1900 there were a number of Japanese women who had graduated higher schools and were able to teach physical education throughout the Japanese school system. Several individuals were instrumental in the promotion and spread of this Western-influenced physical education, and they will be looked at in more detail shortly. Before doing so, I would like to further contextualize the rise of women's sport in Japan by briefly looking outward at Japan's neighbours. With such a long history of shared cultural traditions between China, Korea and Japan, one must wonder why the sporting traditions among women in East Asia have had taken such different paths to the present day.

Women's sport in East Asia

With Japan endeavouring to break from its traditional Confucian past by revamping its education system and providing more opportunities for young women, it stands to reason that other nations in East Asia went through similar transitions in the modern era. Confucianism, the millennia-old Chinese philosophy and system of social ethics has, in a multitude of different forms, had a great impact on all of East Asia. Much has been written on the ways that Confucianism (and/or neo-Confucianism) has affected gender relations in East Asia.³² It has been argued that Confucianism limits individual personalities within the parameters of prescribed roles and that virtually all interpersonal relationships are held together by a social hierarchy.³³ While this is clearly a broad and nuanced topic, one might boil it down to say that in East Asia the notion that a women's role should be both closely tied to the family and subordinate to men remains strong. While there have certainly been individuals and groups who have helped provoke change, large-scale feminist movements have not taken hold in the region the same way they did in the West throughout the twentieth century.³⁴ And yet, in China, Korea and Japan, women today comprise a large, significant and lucrative portion of their thriving sporting industries. Looking solely at sport in East Asia, one might in fact come to the conclusion that the region has some of the most progressive attitudes in the world when it comes to women.

As has already been discussed, the literature to date on women's participation in sport has been heavily focused on issues pertaining to Western women. While the study of women in sport outside of Europe and North America is still at a nascent stage, there has been some progress made towards better understanding how sport has been affected by and impacts women in the non-Western world. With respect to East Asian women in sport, the majority of the [admittedly small amount of] English-language work has focused on China, as sportswomen there have been part of an unusual trend in the world of sport at the turn of the twenty-first century, namely that of the nation's women athletes outperforming the men.

Women's sport in China

China represents the only nation in the world in which women's sport excelled so swiftly past men's sport in the late twentieth century. While the level at which women perform in sport has reached monumental heights in the present day, the history of women taking part in sport has included extended periods of marginalization, as has been the case for women's sport in most nations. While sport around the globe has also long been tied up with politics, the

extent to which political ideologies have played a role in the development and direction of women's sport remains uniquely intense in China.

Sport sociologist Hong Fan has characterized modern Chinese women's sport as having developed in three periods: birth (1840–1911), growth (1911–49) and maturation (1949 to present).³⁵ Prior to the period of 'birth', there were of course traditional forms of women's sport, particularly during the Tang Dynasty (618–906). However, once Confucianism reached its peak and became the official doctrine in the Song Dynasty (906–1279), women were marginalized in society, and as Hong puts it, 'Chinese women's sport went into a drastic and terminal decline'.³⁶ The notion that women were to 'obey the father when at home, submit to the husband when married, and listen to the son after the husband dies' took hold, and such literal acts of subservience as footbinding became common practice.³⁷ Confucianism and its suppression of women's freedoms remained the dominant ideology in China well into the modern era.

Christianity came to China on a large scale after a series of invasions in the nineteenth century, and although it was ultimately unsuccessful in converting many Chinese to Christianity, it did make a significant impact on Chinese customs and culture. By the 1860s, Western missionaries were stationed in every province in China, establishing churches, missionary schools and hospitals. It was during this time, when Western ideals began to seep into the Chinese educational system, that physical education for women came to be seen as a symbolic arena for the liberalization of women.

As Andrew Morris discusses in his article on the late Qing dynasty origins of modern Chinese sport and physical culture, the *tiyu* (translated as physical culture or body cultivation) that emerged in China in the nineteenth century was 'a totalizing and systematic ideology of personal behaviour and its physiological implications, which was invested with definite ideals of the relationships between the individual and the national body, and between the individual body and personal character'.³⁸ In other words, modern sport in China has, from its inception, been deeply entangled with politics. For example, as traditional physical activities in China have been linked more to self-cultivation and ritual than to competition, when Western sport entered China there were many who believed that the Chinese should maintain their non-competitive nature and thus not engage in Western sport. Opponents of Western competitive exercises argued that Chinese national identity and solidarity were at risk if society were to adopt this new trend.³⁹

As we know today, China did embrace Western sport (although has maintained a flourishing community of practitioners of traditional, non-competitive activities as well). Both internal and external forces led to a large-scale questioning of Confucian moral ethics by the mid-nineteenth century, which included an examination of the entrenched attitudes towards both physical activity and women in Chinese society. After a series of major foreign

invasions, domestic rebellions and wars, China at the turn of the twentieth century became more interested in strengthening itself by any means possible and less interested in holding on to those traditions that were now seen as barriers to progress in a modernizing world. The late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) government added mandatory physical exercise to the national curriculum for all primary and secondary school students. This change in physical practices was a small part of a much larger revolutionary movement. The Qing regime was overthrown by the Nationalist government in 1911, and although the new political system was fragile and volatile, the Republican period (1912–49) would see changes that would help uproot Confucian attitudes towards women and physical activity.

After the Nationalist government was founded in the early twentieth century, Western democratic ideals of equality and liberty had a radical impact on the position of women in Chinese society. This, in turn, meant that new worlds of physical education, activities and competitive sports were now opened to women. Many women, who were eager to cast off the oppressive shackles of traditional Confucian ideology, enthusiastically took part in sport as a means of expressing their new physical independence. Importantly, modern sport was a completely new phenomenon in China at this time, which meant that male domination had not been established as it had been in many other parts of the world. Chinese women took part in international competitions such as the Far East Asian Games and performed outstandingly, which thus earned them further respect and social standing in the liberalizing Chinese society.⁴⁰

The Communist Revolution that rocked the foundations of Chinese society in the 1940s and the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 had a largely positive effect on women's sport. The centralized socialist state and Marxist ideology upon which the new nation was built led to massive growth in women's sport along with a theoretical stamping out of male chauvinism. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) quickly acknowledged that sport could help the nation establish international respect, which was particularly important in light of the repeated humiliation by Western nations that China had dealt with for the past century. Furthermore, sport was a way for the government to prove the benefits of socialism over capitalism. The relationship between sport and politics in China became all the more glaring after 1949.

From the late Qing Dynasty onwards, in spite of the sweeping changes in government and state-promoted ideologies, women's bodies were of greater concern than men's. The reason for this was an ongoing desire to preserve the Chinese race by giving birth to 'strong and stately infants'.⁴¹ Women's sport after 1949 was thus aggressively supported administratively, politically and financially by the CCP. By selecting young women to endorse, the government is able to inculcate its political ideology and social values in individuals while simultaneously rearing athletes to represent China and its successful political ideals on the heavily publicized stage of international sport competitions.

This model has remained more or less in tact from the mid-twentieth century up to the present day.

Of course, an irony exists in the CCP's heavy investment in women's sport. Should not the massive investment that the government makes into an Olympic gold medal be used instead to improve women's physical education for the masses? The nurturing of a small number of elite athletes appears to go against the communist ideal of equality or sport for all.⁴² The impulse to prove its political superiority on the world stage seems indeed to have overshadowed certain facets of the very political ideology it seeks to promote, though this is only one of many contradictions in the changing face of Chinese communism in the twenty-first century.

It is impossible to discuss women's sport in contemporary China without making mention of performance-enhancing drugs. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of female athletes, especially swimmers and weightlifters, tested positive for anabolic steroids at major international competitions such as the Olympic Games. Far more Chinese women than men have tested positive. It has come to light that the government in China, in addition to those of formerly communist nations of Eastern Europe, produced and administered performance-enhancing drugs to female athletes as young as seven years old. Depending on the sport, these drugs included growth stimulants, growth retardants and anabolic steroids.⁴³

Drug tests were not carried out in China until 1988, which was when the issue came to light. In spite of supposed state-sponsored random drug tests and the formation of anti-doping organizations, Chinese athletes continued to test positive at international events through the early nineties. The height of the scandal came in October 1994, when seventeen female Chinese swimmers tested positive at the Asian Championships, which was nearly fifty per cent of the entire team. Among those who tested positive were Lu Bin, who had just won four gold and two silver medals at the World Swimming Championships the month before. Moreover, two canoeists, a cyclist, a discus thrower and a 400-metre hurdler also tested positive.⁴⁴ It remains unclear how much involvement state and/or sport officials had in the manufacturing and administering of these drugs, but the blame fell more on the shoulders of the government than it did on the individual athletes.

The heavily tarnished state-sponsored sport programme in China had to work extremely hard to regain its footing on the international stage following the Asian Championships debacle, and it could be argued that it was largely successful in doing so. Members of the Chinese Olympic Committee publicly declared lifetime bans on those athletes caught doping. Officials, coaches and medics involved in the administering of drugs were threatened with imprisonment.⁴⁵ The widely held belief that China's chequered past would inhibit it from ever hosting the Olympic Games was overturned when Beijing received the bid to stage the 2008 Summer Games.

At these Games, Chinese women appear to have regained the ground they lost after the drug scandal, winning an unprecedented forty individual gold medals and steering clear of any drug-related scandals.⁴⁶ The only blemish in these otherwise glorious Games for Chinese women came with the heavily publicized controversy over the age of some members of the gold medal-winning women's gymnastics team.⁴⁷

The gold medals won by Chinese women at the 2008 Beijing Olympics were in a diverse range of sports, from rowing to weightlifting to table tennis to diving. Having taken part in the Olympic Games for just over two decades (the first official showing of PRC women at the Olympics came in 1984),⁴⁸ the Chinese women's rise to the top in so many sports in international competitions has been rapid and dramatic. Of course, the turn of the twenty-first century and China's involvement in the Olympic Games represent only a small portion of Chinese women's involvement in sport, and clearly a strong foundation was built through their participation in domestic and regional competitions prior to the 1980s. While heavy political involvement and accusations of cheating have led many to question the 'purity' of sport in contemporary China, the high level of performance and success that their sportswomen have reached is undeniable. Moreover, the late twentieth-century global trend away from amateurism in sport, along with the constant battle against performance-enhancing drugs worldwide, makes Chinese athletes more the norm than the exception these days. To think that just over a century ago Confucian ideals were literally 'binding' Chinese women's physical freedoms makes their successes all the more astounding.

Women's sport on the Korean peninsula

Although Confucianism originated in China, the philosophy's impact on the world of women's sport was perhaps felt most strongly and for the longest amount of time on the Korean peninsula. This was because of policies adopted during Korea's longest imperial dynasty, the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1896), that would create deep-seated societal norms about gender roles in the modern era.⁴⁹ That said, by the late twentieth century Korean women had completely turned on their heads the societal attitudes towards women that had been so deeply entrenched in the early part of the century.

Sport in Korea in the modern era was initially dominated by men, as it was around the world at that time. During the 'Korean Empire' (1897–1910), however, Korean society was uniquely hostile to the reception of Western sport, as the recently fallen Chosŏn dynasty had established a social system that severely limited what was considered acceptable for women. The neo-Confucian school of *Sung-ri-hak* adopted by the Chosŏn rulers was a conservative philosophical

world view that stressed control of the individual as a means of producing virtue.⁵⁰ This school of thought established a strict division of social roles between male and female, including a rule called *Nam-nyeo chil-se bu-dong-seok*, meaning that boys and girls over seven years of age should never be in the same room together.⁵¹ The Chosŏn state sponsored the creation of instructional Confucian manuals that promoted family norms and social values, and through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, private individuals came to publish their own widely read manuals on Confucian mores.⁵² Women were defined as subordinate to men and were cut off from educational opportunities. Women were also cut off from receiving inheritance, as they became members of their husbands' families upon marriage, and legal sanctions forbade widows from remarrying.⁵³ Clearly, by the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, Korean women faced an uphill battle when it came to taking part in sport, let alone receiving support for doing so.

One of the strongest obstacles facing Korean women in the modern era was the strict Chosŏn social code that had dictated that the female body was to be hidden in public and that female physical activity was not morally or physically acceptable. At Ewha Haktang (the precursor to Ewha Womans University and the first modern girls' school founded in Korea), physical education classes were offered for the first time in the late nineteenth century. The calisthenic exercises taught in these classes were met with harsh criticism, as they required women to raise their arms and legs in the air, which was considered inappropriate and immoral for upper class women. Parents withdrew their daughters from the school in anger, and young men were told by their families not to marry any woman who had attended Ewha. The municipal government henceforth forbade physical education for girls in late nineteenth century Korea.⁵⁴

By 1911, some girls' schools had begun to offer a limited number of modern sports, such as gymnastics, basketball and tennis, all of which were globally considered to be acceptable for the feminine physique at that time. Much like what had happened in Japan after the Meiji Restoration, modern sport entered Korea following the 1876 Treaty of Kanghwa, when Korea opened its ports to the world. Foreigners began living in and pursuing leisure activities in Seoul, and physical education for boys was simultaneously introduced into the modernizing education system. The 1895 Royal Edict on Education defined the new goals of Korean education to be 'the rearing of the physical, spiritual and intellectual capabilities of individuals'.⁵⁵ Once Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910, sport and physical education became prime avenues for the colonizers to cultivate loyal imperial Japanese subjects. Thus, as the twentieth century progressed, Korea began to follow closely behind in the footsteps of Japan, which included a greater inclusion of women into the educational system and subsequently into sport.

Much can and has been written about how sport served as a stage for playing out tensions between the Japanese and the colonized Koreans, particularly with respect to (male) marathon runners Sohn Kee-chung and Nam Sung-yong at

the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Imperialist tensions and intentions aside, the period of Japanese colonization was one of growth in the world of sport for Korean men and women. Foreigners (i.e. Westerners) remained in Korea through the first part of the twentieth century, and they were instrumental in furthering the women's sport movement. The American Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) established itself in Korea in 1903, and sport was one of the central activities carried out by the Seoul YMCA.⁵⁶ The YMCA sponsored and co-hosted several women's sporting competitions. For example, in 1934 it began sponsoring a women's table tennis tournament that was organized by the Korean Association for the Promotion of Women's Sport (*Chosŏn yŏja ch'eyuk changnyŏhoe*) and also financially supported the first All-Korea Girls' Middle School Basketball Tournament in 1935.⁵⁷ The growth of modern women's sport, fuelled dually by the Japanese seeking to rear strong colonial subjects and Westerners seeking to modernize Korea, continued until the end of the Second World War and the withdrawal of the Japanese in 1945.

Through the post-war period, the number of sports and the level of performance grew higher for women around the globe, including Korea. In the 1960s and 1970s, under the dictatorial military regime of Park Chung Hee, emphasis was placed on sport as a means of unifying the nation, validating political power and enhancing the nation's prestige abroad. The government lent financial support to the Korean Sports Council in an effort to make the nation more competitive internationally, not unlike the Chinese model.⁵⁸ The government lending support to sport, which was seen as a way help to legitimate state ideology, was an increasingly common practice during the Cold War (1945–91). South Korea entered the Olympic Games in 1948 and, with the exception of the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Olympics, has sent athletes to every Summer and Winter Games since. North Korea first took part in the 1964 Winter Olympics, with women's speed skater Han Pil Hwa taking home the nation's first Olympic medal. North Korea did not compete in several Games after 1964 for political reasons (including the Soviet-led boycott of 1984) but has had a relatively strong showing in the Games they did compete in, especially at the Summer Olympics.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, women from the Korean peninsula were excelling at certain sports, beyond what anyone could have imagined only several decades prior. South Korean women have excelled in particular in archery, golf and figure skating. Interestingly, these three sports represent some of the earliest sports in which women's involvement was considered acceptable (with golf being one of the first official Olympic sports for women in 1900 and archery and figure skating joining the women's Olympic programme a few years later). This is not to say, of course, that South Korean women have not excelled at less traditionally 'feminine' sports, as they have also excelled in speed skating, taekwondo, judo and have a world champion weightlifter.⁵⁹ North Korean women have had strong showings in football and speed skating.

In the twenty-first century, South Korean women have been a growing presence in the sport of professional golf, indeed making up one of the largest national contingents of women in the sport. In 2010, of the top 100 female golfers in the world, South Korean women comprised a third of this group. According to *The Times*' sports reporter Patrick Kidd, '[i]f a Korean child, especially a girl, shows talent with a golf club at a young age, her parents will stop at nothing to ensure that her skills are nurtured with constant coaching'.⁶⁰ As golf is scheduled to return to the programme of the Summer Olympics in 2016, the global visibility of South Korean women in this sport is likely to continue to increase.

Perhaps the most publicized South Korean athlete in the twenty-first century, male or female, has been figure skater Kim Yu-na. At only nineteen years old, she bore the heavy weight of her nation's expectation of gold as she competed in the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. Not only had a Japanese skater, Arakawa Shizuka, taken the coveted gold medal in the 2006 Games, but Kim's main rivals in Vancouver were Asada Mao and Ando Miki, both also Japanese. As *The New York Times* reported, 'the competition between Kim and her Japanese rivals will also be viewed as a referendum "on which country's culture is better regarded by the rest of the world"'.⁶¹ Whether the elation over her gold medal win was fuelled by pure nationalism or tinged with a darker anti-Japanese sentiment is impossible to determine, but it is clear that it skyrocketed the sport of women's figure skating to new heights in Korea. As with what happened in Japan after Arakawa Shizuka took the gold in 2006 (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7), Kim became a media sensation and spurred a flood of commercial products related to her and her sport.

Women's sport on the Korean peninsula has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time. The successes by contemporary Korean sportswomen are particularly striking in light of the uniquely difficult set of circumstances that women there faced at the onset of the twentieth century. Likewise, the accomplishments of female athletes in the rest of East Asia make us take pause at widely held assumptions of the lasting effects of Confucian ideology on female liberation. While it may well be true that a national prioritizing of women's sport may be more linked to the 'national pride gained in the only clearly visible area where [East Asian women] can take on and beat the world's most economically advanced countries',⁶² women's liberation is nonetheless a secondary consequence. How Japanese society transitioned from one in which 'good wife, wise mother' was the official ideal for women to one in which strong sportswomen were not only supported by Japanese society but would also become influential lawmakers themselves is the subject of the forthcoming chapters.