

Whose story counts? The place of sport discourse in relations between north and South Korea from 1978-1997

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Introduction –Research Aimsand Background Literature

This paper undertakes a critical historical analysis of the discourses of N.Korea and S.Korea in their interaction in relation to sport as evidenced in their media. The aim is to provide an account of the changes in the government's roles in terms of inter-Korean policy in sport relations, and how such 'domestic' policy is bound up with the circumstances or dominant structures of international relations (IR).

The focus of the paper is on the decades before and after the Seoul Games. It addresses the role which the global sports movement played in the debate between two Koreas. The political debate is bound up with a specific concept of nationalism one in which actors on both sides of the political divide believe that they are part of a "unitary nation", which is both ethnically homogeneous and racially distinctive (Shin, 2006) so that both sides are able to appeal to shared ethnic nationalism.

The paper draws on a constructivist theoretical frame, seeking to identify how each side seeks to position itself in relation to aspects of ethnic nationalism within the context of international political relations using sport as a vehicle (Wendt, 1999).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

This constructivist approach draws on Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA was administered to press reports of North and South sport relations with the articles of No-Dong (N. Korea) and Dong-A (S. Korea), from 1 January 1978 to 31 December 1997 for two decades. Those contents which related to inter-Korean sport relations were subject to analysis, and these related to specific international sports events which involved intensive diplomatic activity and commentary namely; the 35th World Table Tennis Championship in Pyung Yang; the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games; the 1984 LA Olympic Games; the 1986 Seoul Asian Games, the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the 1990 Beijing Asian Games, the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and two additional events which received relatively less significant treatment in the

medianamely, the 1994 Hiroshima Asian Games and the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. The S.Korean Government's published summary of formal sportstalks between the two Koreas was also analyzed.

Results and conclusions

Following the Korean War of 1950-53, N.Korea and S.Korea became locked into the political ideological conflict of the Cold War with sport as one of the important battlegrounds. Relations between the two Koreas were thus broadly viewed in the context of IR in particular the S.Korea-American alliance, and relationships between the countries in north-east Asia (Japan, PRC, and Russia) with both regimes.

The discourse in No-Dong and Dong-A constructs a set of 'diplomatic positions' drawing on the respective positions of N. Korea and S. Korea in the international sporting community in which both Koreas manifest a tendency for overrivalry while at the same time strongly emphasizing their shared ethnic nationalism. This aspect is used by the North arguing against Seoul's candidature (unsuccessfully) and subsequently insisting (unsuccessfully) on a joint hosting of the 1988 Games. In these interactions both sides sought to portray themselves as championing ethnic nationalism.

This is particularly the case after the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. Although there was détente in IR, the competition between the two regimes continued and was transformed into discussion of the unification issue symbolically represented by initiatives to organise a single team for key international sport events. The terminology used by both sides is subtly different –N. Korea tending to use the term "unification team" (Tong Il Team) and S. Korea preferring the term "one team" (Dan Il Team), with each term understood as implying a different approach to the implications of shared ethnic nationalism and its relation to political union. This presentation will elaborate on the ways in which the post-Cold War IR context forced the two Koreas to come together with sports events becoming one of the few tools for managing this process (occasionally harmoniously). The 41st World Table Tennis Championship in Japan was a significant example since the combined team gained a gold medal in the women's group competition against China, the world champions. The media discourses highlight the usage of sport in reconciliation of the divided Koreas. Nevertheless, the potential of sport events to foster unity was not always positive, since it was affected by political incidents such as N. Korean Judo players' defection to S.Korea during the international competitions.

References

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