

Multiple Margins: Sport, Gender and Nationalism in Taiwan

Ying Chiang (Chihlee Institute of Technology, Taiwan), Alan Bairner (Loughborough University, UK), Dong-jhy Hwang (National Taiwan Sport University) and Tzu-hsuan Chen (National Taiwan Sport University) *

*** Corresponding author**

Email: tzusuanchen@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to build contextualised and cross-cultural understandings of gender discourses on sport and nationalism. With its multi-colonised history and its multi-ethnic groups, modern Taiwan has a very different ‘national’ story from most western societies. The way that sport is articulated with Taiwanese nationalism is also unique. With the Taiwanese being desperate for every chance to prove their existence and worth, sport becomes an important field for constructing national honour and identity. When sports women succeed on the international stage, especially when their male counterparts fail, the discourse on women, sport and nationalism becomes unusual. In sum, the unique character of Taiwanese sport nationalism creates empowerment opportunities for female athletes. But, we should bear in mind that men still take the dominant roles in Taiwan’s sport field. Gendered disciplinary discourses, such as the beauty myth and compulsory heterosexuality, still dominate Taiwanese female athletes’ media representation and further influence their practice and self-identity.

Keywords: sport nationalism; Taiwan; gender; Beijing Olympics

Introduction

In contemporary western cultural discourses, nationalism and national identity consistently provoke controversy. Furthermore, a significant amount of research has focused on the relationship between sport and the construction and transformation of nationalism and national identity, with some research suggesting that sport stimulates patriotism, builds national identity and, in certain circumstances, leads to conflict.

Thus, modern international sport is sometimes taken as a substitute for war or, in the words of George Orwell (1970: 62), as 'mimic warfare'. With this in mind, it is worth noting that both nationalism and sport were established on the basis of a western value system and have been dominated by men. Indeed, many early feminists viewed sport as an inherently inappropriate site for their energies because of its institutionalised sexism (Creedon, 1994). Thus, as Janice Kaplan (1979: x) commented, 'sport has been a stepchild to feminism'. Furthermore, nationalism and nations are also contested and cross cultural understanding is difficult not least in relation to gender history (Blom, 2000). All of this helps to explain why both non-western and female perspectives have been relatively marginal and often trivialised in debates on sport and nationalism.

It is important, however, to build contextualised and cross-cultural understandings of gender discourses on sport and nationalism. With its multi-colonised history and its multi-ethnic groups, modern Taiwan has a very different 'national' story from most western societies. The way that sport is articulated with Taiwanese nationalism is also unique. In order to begin to address these inter-related themes, this article focuses on the ways in which Taiwanese female athletes have been represented in media

discourses of sport and Taiwanese nationalism and on the symbolic roles they have been assigned. First, however, it is worth saying a little more about the general relationship between women, sport and nationalism as evidenced in selected Western literature, not least in order to identify any potential contrast with the case in Taiwan.

Sport, gender and nationalism –western perspectives

Sport, as Bruce Kidd (1990: 32) noted, is 'an extremely fertile field for the reassertion and legitimation of male power and privilege'. Indeed, modern sport was established on the basis of the value system of western middle-and upper- class men, making it a masculinity-validation experience (Messner, 1988; Maguire et al, 2002). The connection between sport and masculinity grew out of specific historical circumstances. Contemporary conceptions of manliness and sportsmanship emerged from the economic and social context of late-nineteenth-century Europe and specifically Great Britain (Pronger, 1990). Through emigration, emulation, colonialism and imperialism, much of the rest of the world became imbued with the same ideology. In other words, sport is neither the natural, universal, and trans-historical physical activity that it is commonly thought to be, and nor is it played in the same way by all peoples in all periods of human history (Kidd, 1990).

When we talk about modern sport, our thoughts inevitably turn to the Olympic Games. Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympics, adopted the symbols of the ancient games and recast them in a modern form that reflected the qualities he admired in English sport. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, early modern sports

were becoming characterised by standard rules, bureaucratic structures, and the concept of fair play. They were fashioned by middle and upper-class males in the bourgeois institutions such as the English public schools. Sport was regarded as a preparation for male careers. It taught boys about loyalty, obedience to authority, and physical toughness. Popular nineteenth-century games and contests such as football, hockey, lacrosse, track and field, and boxing were even termed 'the manly sports' (Pronger, 1990: 16).

Thus, sport was initially a male preserve and, for boys, it became an important part of initiation into manhood, a forum in which they would situate themselves according to the orthodoxy of gender culture. Sport gave them a feel for masculinity, a sense of how they differed from girls. It also constructed some taken-for-granted conception of femininity as seen in comments such as 'girls don't like getting dirty, playing football, or competing against boys' that served to obscure the workings of patriarchy and concealed the power of compulsory heterosexuality (Lenskyj, 1986; 1987: 381). All of these myths consolidated mainstream gender expectations and social norms. Men assumed dominant roles in the sport field from which women have continued to be marginalised and their participation trivialised and sexualised (Dunning and Sheard, 1979). While sport promotes autonomy and assertiveness, the expected feminine characteristics of women as wives and mothers, such as passivity and dependence, were viewed as contrary to athletic competence, thereby producing personality disturbances termed 'role conflict' in those women who tried to combine the two roles (Lenskyj, 1987: 381). Simultaneously, the power of compulsory heterosexuality prompted homophobic reactions towards any woman who did not conform to 'real'

femininity. The story is very similar when we turn our attention to discourses of nationalism.

The nationalist ideologies which appeared in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe were associated with attempts on the part of national bourgeoisies to create collectivities in their own image. This image was itself based on a specific gender division of labour, sexual orientation and ethnicity which involved notions of respectability and appropriate sexual behaviour, 'manliness' and a complementary role for women, and ideas of racial superiority. Thus, men were represented as honourable, courageous and active in the public domain. Masculinity was the foundation of the nation and society while women were the guardians of the traditional order (Mosse, 1985). This resulted in the virtual exclusion of any focus on women *per se* – as revolutionaries, as leaders, as hidden exploited labour – or on women's resistance to domination (Nagel, 1998). Whereas brave men were celebrated as national heroes, women were erased from national narratives (Benton, 1998). As a consequence, as Cynthia Enloe (1989) argues, nationalism has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope.

In addition, nationalism is closely linked to the politics of the state and its institutions. Like military affairs, most state institutions have been dominated by men. It is therefore no surprise that the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand-in-hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism. Masculinity and nationalism complement each other very effectively. The modern form of western

masculinity emerged at about the same time and in the same places as modern nationalism (Nagel, 1998) and modern sport, both of which became major sites for 'accomplishing' masculinity.

In sum, when discussing feminist perspectives on gender, and in order to also incorporate race, ethnicity and nationality, we need to bear in mind the degree to which, both in the social sciences and in practice, women have been defined as the 'other' (de Beauvoir, 1974 cited in Allen, 1998: 55). Nevertheless, gender cannot be analysed outside of ethnic, national and race relations and nor can these latter phenomena be understood without reference to gender. They intersect in a series of dynamic relationships (Walby, 1992).

According to Eriksen (1993), sport is a benign reproduction of war. Whereas nations once fought for real, now they sublimate their aggressive energies into struggles for ascendancy on the playing field. Furthermore, sport does not merely echo warfare. It can also provide the symbolic models for the understanding of war (Billig, 1995). Thus, it is easy to see the extent to which sport, arguably more often than any other form of social activity in the modern world, facilitates flag waving and the playing of national anthems, both formally at moments such as medal ceremonies and informally through the activities of fans (Bairner, 2008).

When international sports mega-events are involved, the connections are even more apparent. For example, according to Tervo's (2001) research, large-scale sports movements could not exist as they do today without nation states and the ideology of nationalism. Moreover, much of the attention paid to the Olympic movement is based on its usefulness in promoting national sentiments and an understanding of the national 'we' in relation to the national 'other'. In the same research, Tervo seized upon Olympic sport journalism to examine the relationship between gender, sport, class and nation in Finland before World War II. She discovered that the Finnish media turned Olympic victories into national myths; successful athletes immediately became national heroes. However, striving for national glory was reserved exclusively for men, whilst women continued to be excluded and marginalised.

The United Kingdom, and in particular England, is usually credited with the 'invention' of modern sport, both in general and with reference to numerous specific sports (Bairner, 2008). With this in mind, Billig (1995) analysed the 'homeland-making process' in British press media discourses. According to his research, all newspapers, whatever their political inclination, contain a section in which the flag is waved with regular enthusiasm. That is the sports section, a section that has traditionally been aimed primarily at a male readership. 'The reader inscribed in the sports pages is overwhelmingly masculine' (Sparks and Campbell, 1987 cited in Billig, 1995). In other words, the sports pages are men's pages, although they are presented as pages for the whole nation. For the most part, the mainly male audience is invited to read about other men's exploits on behalf of the homeland. Thus, men's concerns are presented as if defining the nation's honour (Billig, 1995). Young

(1980:147) identifies the irony that 'If there is a particular female person participating in sport, then, either she is not "really" a woman, or the sport she engages in is not "really" a sport'.

In such ways do myths create and reproduce gender imagining as well as the gender division of labour in sport and nationalism. According to Billig (1995: 1464), 'If men are encouraged to emulate national heroes, women are invited to love them'.

Furthermore, war could not be fought without the contribution of women as patriotic mothers and carers, or without women answering the call to love the masculine warriors (Elshtain, 1984). Therefore, in the sport and nationalism playground, women were expected to be the bedrock of British imperial success but not its conspicuous heroes (Enloe, 1989).

Methodological considerations

As Blom (2000: 20) suggests, researchers should aim to achieve what Nira Yuval-Davis has called 'transversalism', being fully and openly aware of their own 'rooting' in their specific nation, class, race, gender and at the same time prepared to 'shift' – to understand rootedness of 'the other'. In addition, the dialogues between the researcher and the evidence of a historical past, and the dialogue amongst researchers, must be carried out with respect for two considerations. One is that none of the participants should lose awareness of her own rooting; the other is that groups taking part in the dialogue should never be regarded as homogeneous and dichotomous.

The point here is that both modern sport and nationalism are, to varying degrees, 'inventions' of modernity and are 'Western-centric'. Contextual understanding is, therefore, crucial. Blom (2000) points out that the mechanisms to avoid cultural imperialism and teleological approaches must be sought out carefully to facilitate cross-cultural understanding in the research process as well as in discussions amongst researchers of different nationalities and with different cultural identities.

In debates on sport and nationalism, according to Bairner (2008), sport acts as a window through which we are able to examine a whole range of social developments and test a variety of theoretical concepts and perspectives. Sport can also provide important insights into varieties of imperialism, the cultural politics of anti-imperialist struggle and postcolonial legacies. To expand the discussion, we would argue that sport can also begin to challenge patriarchy, and provide an arena for anti-sexist gender politics. An initial understanding of the relations between sport, gender and nationalism in a richly contextualised setting, focusing on specific nations and their histories, is therefore highly political.

In order to build a contextual understanding, the main intention of our discussion is to identify the relations between sport, gender and nationalism in Taiwanese society through focusing on how Taiwanese female athletes are represented in media discourses of sport and nationalism. We used qualitative critical discourse analysis to achieve this goal. As van Dijk (1993, 1997) proposes in his work on racism, media

representation, among other types of text, is a form of social action. Such texts must be subjected to sociological and cultural scrutiny for us to grasp the relevant ideology and its embodiment in society, instead of simply being analysed linguistically. As researchers, we seek to specify that social cognition which links social structure and discourse structure (van Dijk, 1993). In this essay, the focus is on media representation which embodies the marginalities of women and sport in Taiwanese nationalism.

We selected the Beijing Olympics as the context for our research, because China and Taiwan are, on the one hand, linguistically, racially, and culturally proximate, as well economically interdependent, but are also politically opposed and militarily hostile to the other. In such circumstances, this particular iteration of the Summer Olympics offered a unique opportunity for Taiwan to express its identity against the rival across the Taiwan Strait. In order to examine these particular circumstances, the texts were collected from 8 August, 2008, the date of the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics, to 25 August, 2008, the day after the closing ceremony. All relevant stories in three major Taiwanese newspapers, *United Daily News*, *United Evening News* and *The Liberty Times*, were analyzed by the researchers. Items from two other mainstream news agencies in Taiwan and China, the Central News Agency and the China News Agency, were also included in order to provide further evidence.

To demonstrate the uniqueness of Taiwanese female athletes' multiple marginalities, it is vital to understand the background. Thus, what follows is a review of Taiwanese

nationalism and the sport field prior to an analysis of the discourses of 2008 Beijing Olympics.

National identities in Taiwan

The concepts of nation, national identity and nationalism inevitably emerge when we talk about the Taiwan independence political/social movement. As Chen (2012) argues, Taiwan had been a colony of Spain, the Dutch, and Japan from the 17th century. In 1949, it became the base for the Kuomintang (KMT) after its defeat by the Communists in Mainland China. It also received substantial military and economic aid from the US after the Second World War. Above all, however, its historic relationship with Mainland China is arguably amongst the most complicated and perhaps intractable in the world. Seeking its own distinctive identity or identities has been an on-going mission for its government and people. Given this 'multiple-colonised' historic structure, nationalism is necessarily an ambiguous concept. Recently, indeed, because of their blurred and complex character, the narratives of Taiwan nationalism have been taken by some Taiwanese researchers as proof of 'post-modernity' (Wang, 2010: 526).

However, the 'Taiwan problem' is fundamentally one of identity. Brown (2004) has argued that, since 1987, for the obvious political purpose of justifying their distance from the People's Republic of China, people in Taiwan have increasingly claimed Taiwanese identity, an amalgam of Han culture and ancestry, Aboriginal culture and ancestry, and Japanese culture (but not ancestry).

Edmondson (2002) and Morris (2002) explore the historical roots and contemporary expressions of this nationalism of Taiwan from 1895 to 2000. After the end of the KMT's martial law era in 1987, the political atmosphere in Taiwan became increasingly liberal. A 'Taiwanese consciousness' emerged and developed gradually. In 1988, the KMT candidate, Lee Teng-hui was inaugurated as the first '*Ben-sheng-ren*' president.¹ Educated under the Japanese colonial school system, Lee had a Japanese name as did many Taiwanese of that generation. Indeed, he used to claim that he was Japanese before the age of twenty. Because of his specificity, many '*Ben-sheng-ren*' respected Lee as the 'Father of Taiwan Democracy', while most '*Wai-sheng-ren*' saw him as an enemy.

In 2000, Chen Shu-bian became the first non-KMT President. He was the 10th and 11th president of Taiwan, and became known as the 'Son of Taiwan'. Most researchers take this period, 1988 to 2008, as the crucial phase in the consolidation of Taiwanese consciousness. The 'Taiwan Independence' political claims of Chen and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is one reason; the rise of the PRC another. The urge to ascertain 'who we are' and 'what Taiwan is', created an unprecedented mental anxiety for many Taiwanese, as frequently reflected in media coverage.

Against this backdrop, Wang (1993) categorised Taiwan's nationalism into 'China nationalism' and 'Taiwan nationalism'. Both of these were established on the basis of different ethnic identities and reinforced the conflict between ethnic groups.

According to Wang, after the mid-1990s, for 'Taiwan nationalists', the enemy was no longer the KMT but the PRC. For Taiwan's 'China nationalists', on the other hand, the rival was no longer 'Chinese Communism' but 'Taiwan Holo chauvinism'. The KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou, a '*Wai-sheng-ren*', won the 2008 election, becoming the 12th president of Taiwan. Meanwhile, China was becoming a highly visible emerging global power. All of this has conspired to make this a crucial phase in the development of national identities in Taiwan.

The peculiarity of Taiwanese nationalism is the additional dimension that should now be addressed. As mentioned earlier, to avoid a western-centred approach, it is important to build contextual discourses and imaginations of sport and nationalism. We should bear in mind that in the western world, in Britain and in France for example, the rise of nationalism was predominantly a political occurrence, preceded by the formation of the future national state, or, as in the case of the United States, coinciding with it.

However, outside the western world, in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia, nationalism not only arose later, but also generally at a more backward stage of social and political development. The frontiers of an existing state and of a rising nationality rarely coincided. In such circumstances, nationalism developed as a form of protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern - not primarily to transform it into a people's state but rather to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnic demands. In Taiwan, Chen (2011:15) claims, modernity was 'belated', with

nationalism as a cultural product of modernity having only been introduced by the Japanese colonists at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Because of the backward state of political and social development, this rising nationalism outside the Western world found its first expression in the cultural field (Kohn, 1946). Furthermore, Kohn emphasised that this new nationalism, detached as it often was from political and social reality, lacked self-assurance. Its inferiority complex was often compensated for by overemphasis and even an appearance of overconfidence. There are endless discussions of its relation to the west, and musings about the 'soul' or the 'mission' of the nation. This is reflected very clearly in Taiwan. 'The glory of Taiwan' becomes a common phrase in contemporary Taiwan media coverage (Chen, 2012). No matter how trivial the issue, the Taiwanese appear desperate for every chance to prove their existence and worth. As we shall see, successful athletes also acquire this title.

Sport and national identity in Taiwan

Consistent with the Confucian tradition, academic performance in Taiwan is seen as good both for families and individuals. The result has been that the idea that 'everything is low-class work except academic study' (*Wan ban jie xia pin wei you du shu gao*) permeates the country (Yu and Bairner, 2011). Thus, it is typical for Taiwanese children not to take part in any sports. Furthermore, parents are unlikely to encourage their children to become involved in more than a minimum of physical activity (*ibid*). Students who demonstrate even moderate intellectual ability are

usually discouraged from pursuing the dream of becoming professional athletes. When the Japanese colonial government introduced physical education into the public school system in the early 1900s, many Taiwanese parents either refused it completely or adopted a negative attitude towards it. They believed that physical education would lead their children to become libertines (Tsai, 1995). The spread of physical education changed this situation slightly. However, it has remained common, even in the past few decades, for P.E. classes to be replaced by ones in mathematics, English or Mandarin, each of which is deemed a 'real class' in Taiwan's educational system. In spite of new educational theories and policies which have altered the circumstances gradually, there remains a firm belief within this cultural value system that 'physically strong but intellectually incapable' is an appropriate description of athletes.

It is ironic; therefore, that every regime in Taiwan's modern history has used sport as a way of promoting national identity and patriotism. When the Japanese took control of Taiwan in 1895, education became an important means to achieve the aims of colonisation. According to Tsai (1995), the P.E. curriculum played a significant part in promoting Japanese identity during the colonial era. Through a modernised education system, the Taiwanese were exposed to school sports and Japanese physical culture, as well as to western sports, most notably baseball. Tsai emphasizes that, for the coloniser and his military purposes, P.E. was an extremely important discipline. Students were trained not only to be physically active but to be obedient and loyal to Japan.

After Japan was defeated in World War II, Taiwan was returned to Chinese control in 1945. When the KMT decamped to Taiwan in 1949, sport became a crucial element in its propaganda. For example, whilst the post-war government initially tried to ban baseball as a remnant of colonial rule (Bairner and Hwang, 2010), after the crisis of governance (as highlighted by the 228 Incident of 1947), the KMT government started to use international sports competitions to reawaken the public's collective 'Chinese' awareness (Yu and Bairner, 2008; Bairner and Hwang, 2010). As a result, baseball became increasingly vital to the integration of KMT ideology into Taiwan's social life (Bairner and Hwang, 2010). Furthermore baseball, military education and the P.E curriculum in the school system helped to build the disciplined and modern body which conformed to the KMT government's expectations of the 'New Chinese' (Hwang, 2010). As a consequence of specific historical characteristics, therefore, modern sport plays a different role in Taiwan's cultural system than in Western societies where it is highly articulated in relation to community, city, religion and class. In Taiwan, however, nationalism is the prominent dimension associated with sport.

For various reasons, it is useful to understand Taiwanese nationalism through sport. Indeed, Morris (2011) suggests that the history of baseball in Taiwan is an appropriate and vital phenomenon for understanding the complicated histories and cultures of modern Taiwan. The game has been an important avenue through which Taiwanese people have navigated their traumatic historical relationships with the Japanese, with Chinese nationalism, and with American allies. Even in the early twenty-first century, as the search for a unique Taiwanese identity is given official sanction, baseball

remains a crucial element, in ways that by turn continue and depart from the meanings of the game's early history in Taiwan.

Recently, many researchers have focused on the relations between baseball and contemporary Taiwan nationalism (Chen, 2007, 2012; Morris, 2011). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Taiwanese baseball player Wang Chien-ming thrived in the United States' MLB. When he played for the New York Yankees during 2006 and 2007, he unquestionably became a national obsession. Some Taiwanese even jokingly called the Yankees Taiwan's new 'national team' and the term 'Taiwang' emerged. But, when the Yankees declined to offer Wang a new contract, they became the 'evil empire' (Chen, 2012). Morris suggests that, 'for most people, the triumphs of Wang and other Taiwanese players are imagined to remind Americans where and what Taiwan is in a world increasingly dominated by PRC economic and political interests' (Morris, 2011: 156). As Chen (2007) points out, after losing its seat at the United Nations to the PRC in 1971, the Republic of China/Taiwan became less and less significant in the international world. Baseball was one of the rare pieces of evidence for its existence and inevitably 'Taiwang' became a crucial indicator of a new hybrid national identity.

Sport and gender in Taiwan history

History is not a neutral narrative, but a constructed and (sometimes) extremely biased one. Homi Bhabha's 'narratives of unfolding' can help us to think about and understand 'history'. Narratives of unfolding are not history, nor are they simply a

biased interpretation of past events; they are ideologies – a conscious falsification and a conscious prioritising of some of the available evidence of the past over other evidence for political purposes (Bhabha, 1990; Brown, 2004).

Under Japanese colonisation, the ban on foot binding gradually enabled Taiwanese women to participate in physical activities. In the 1910s, more and more high school girls engaged in 'hiking' (*yuan tsu*). From the 1920s to the 1930s, mountain-climbing also became a popular physical activity for young women, with many girls' high schools establishing 'mountain-climbing clubs' (Yu, 2000; Lin, 2003). After the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Japanese colonial government stressed physical education even more. According to Tsai (1995), in this period, physical education in the normal schools became more militaristic for political purposes. Every student in the normal schools, women included, had to engage in physical training. But, there was still a gender division of labour. Male students were expected to be soldiers in the Japanese army, while their female colleagues would become pedagogues. In 1943, male students in normal schools received six hours of prescribed P.E. classes per week, whereas females had only four hours.

In 1953, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, claimed that public education for Taiwanese students aimed to implement traditional 'Chinese ethics' – fathers should be kind, children should show filial obedience, brothers should show love and respect to each other, husbands should be loyal to their wives, wives should be obedient. Hwang (2010) points out that, from 1945 to the 1990s, the KMT government used

P.E., military training (for male students) and nursing training (for female students) in the high schools and universities to make the 'public body' fit in with the political purpose of the 'Sinocisation of the Taiwanese'.

In the same period, an ROC /Taiwan female athlete won a medal at the Olympics for the first time. Born in 1944, Chi Cheng is the most famous woman track and field athlete in Taiwanese history. She won a bronze medal in the 80 metres hurdles at the 1968 Summer Olympics. The webpage of the National Museum of Taiwan History's 'Women of Taiwan' section ² describes Chi Cheng as follows:

Who achieved such a great success? The American media called her 'the fastest woman in the world'; the German press praised her as 'the Oriental Flying Antelope'; the Greek media called her 'Yellow Lighting'. She is the well-known 'Flying Antelope' – Chi Cheng. Chi Cheng was the 'glory of Taiwan' in the 1970s.

As a former 'glory of Taiwan', Chi Cheng became a political figure after retirement. She was elected as an independent legislator, serving from 1980 to 1989. In 2009, she was appointed as a National Policy Adviser by President Ma Ying-jeou. Today, Chi Cheng is not only an ambassador for sport in Taiwan, but also an important media resource when Taiwan faces international sport politics difficulties. By 2001, Chi Cheng and other athletes were rallying support for a cross-strait, long-distance run in support of Beijing's bid to host the Olympic Games. At a later point, when, for political reasons, the Olympic torch was unable to pass through Taiwan, Chi Cheng stated straightforwardly that this was a disappointment (Bairner and Hwang, 2010).

But, prior to the Games themselves, Chi Cheng herself suggested boycotting the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics expressing concern over President Ma's acceptance of China's arrangement for the Taiwanese sports team's order of appearance in the Olympic procession (Su, 2 August, 2008).

Between 1960 and 2008, whether for 'the Republic of China Olympic Committee' and 'the Chinese Olympic Committee, Taipei' or the 'Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee', Taiwan athletes won nineteen medals at the summer Olympics. Ten of these were won by female athletes. At the 2004 Olympics, female Taekwondo player Chen Shih-hsin won the first Olympic gold medal in Taiwanese history, thereby becoming the 'glory of Taiwan' for that particular year.

As noted earlier, sport plays a relatively minor role in Taiwan's value system. Nevertheless, the promotion of sport and the achievements of athletes at the international level have been shared aims for successive governments with different nationalist and political objectives. Weak performances in the international sport arena are a matter of collective anxiety and humiliation for many Taiwanese people.

In most nationalism discourses, the inclination has been to take for granted that women are defined in relation to men, particularly as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, whilst men are assumed to be representative of a non-gendered subjectivity, as non-gendered human (and national) beings (Allen, 1998). However, in the context

of Taiwan's search for a shared national consciousness, outstanding female athletes are considered to be national hero(ine)s. In 2011, Taiwanese female golfer, Tseng Yani, becomes the No.1 ranked female professional in the world. *The Liberty Times* announced that Tseng had 'won glory for Taiwan' (Chao, 14 February, 2011). *United Daily News* reported that the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister had all sent congratulatory telegrams to Tseng (Wang, 14 February, 2011). President Ma Ying-jeou's message announced that Tseng was 'the top of the world, the glory of Taiwan' and he applauded her for achieving glory for the country and global fame. It is apparent, therefore, that the relationship between sport, gender and nationalism in Taiwan is coterminous with Taiwan's distinctive cultural and political contexts. As in a majority of Western countries, there is a dominant gender division of labour in the sport field of Taiwan. However, when sports women succeed on the international stage, especially while their male counterparts are failing, the discourse on woman, sport and nationalism becomes more positive even though, as we shall see, ultimately it remains heavily gendered. The final part of our discussion will focus on the media narratives of Taiwanese female athletes at the 2008 Beijing Olympics which, we believe, was a crucial event in the history of 'sport nationalism' in Taiwan.

Woman athletes and Taiwan nationalism in 2008 Beijing Olympics

Although researchers correctly argue that baseball is closely linked to Taiwan's nationalism, the sport did not play the role of symbolic warfare between Taiwan and the PRC until 1990s. The 1985 Asian Baseball Championship was the first time that Taiwan's national baseball team even played against China. In this era, however, the PRC team posed no threat to that of Taiwan which usually won by landslide margins.

However, this situation was to change gradually. By the early 2000s, according to Morris (2011), it became far more important for the Taiwanese to beat China's baseball team than those of South Korea or Japan. The norm for Taiwanese managers was to send their best pitchers out against China - hurting their chances against other rivals but guaranteeing that they would not suffer the shame of losing to the PRC. This strategy worked for many years - until the Beijing Olympics.

On 15 August, 2008, after twelve innings, Taiwan's national baseball team lost to the PRC team for the first time ever, 8-7. This was a massive shock for most Taiwanese. The following day, Taiwan's media was calling it 'the darkest day of Taiwan's baseball history' (Huang, 16 August, 2008) and 'Taiwan's baseball worst nightmare' (Lou and Huang, 16 August, 2008). According to Tseng, Tsai and Chen (16 August, 2008), Taiwanese baseball fans were so upset that some requested that the national baseball team 'swim back' to Taiwan as a form of punishment. Some Taiwanese saw 15 August as 'a day of national humiliation'. One fan even said that 'it was just like the civil war between Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the Communists won eventually'. Some bloggers even asked the government to lower the national flag to half-mast, believing there had been 'a deathly loss of face' (Morris, 2011: 156). As a colonial cultural practice, baseball had helped the Taiwanese to imagine China as the 'other' for many years. The defeat of the national baseball team, 'the failure of men', was represented as a national humiliation for Taiwan. As a result, Taiwanese female athletes became the new 'national hope' in terms of defeating China.

In media reports of 16 August, the fact that the '**Women's softball** team plays against China tomorrow morning, seeking revenge for **men's baseball**' (Wang, 16 August, 2008) became the new topic. These female softball players were even described as 'the women's army' (*ibid*). The following day, after the women had won their game, Taiwan's media described the achievement as 'revenge accomplished' (Ma, 17 August, 2008). Chang, the Head Coach of Taiwan's National Women's Softball team, commented, 'it is about pride. We can't lose' (Huang, 17 August, 2008), 'We didn't make the semi-final, but we defeated China. We fulfilled the expectation of our people' (Ma, 17 August, 2008).

After the embarrassing failure in baseball, the dominant discourse linking male athletes to nationalism was transferred to their female colleagues. Women athletes who had initially been trapped in a marginal position within media representation became the focus of coverage and the source of national hope for Taiwan. Many other female athletes achieved good performances in the summer Olympics. So how did the Taiwan media represent their achievements?

Female athletes: The Glory of Taiwan

On 8 August, 2008, the Taiwanese female weightlifter in the under-48 kilo category, Chen Wei-ling, won a bronze medal for 'Chinese Taipei' in her debut at the Olympics. A few days later, Lu Ying-chi, a female weightlifter in the under-63 kilo category, won a second bronze. Both women caught the attention of the Taiwanese media, especially Chen who was the first Taiwanese athlete to win a medal on the first

day of the summer Olympics in Taiwan's history. 'Taiwan thanks you, Chen Wei-Ling' (Wang, 9 August, 2008) was the headline in one newspaper. Her achievement was taken to be 'a boost for Taiwan's declining sport of weightlifting. It proved that weightlifting can be promoted further in Taiwan and achieve great performances on the world stage' (Lee, 8 August, 2008). The media called Chen a 'superman' (Lu, Tseng and Tsai, 10 August, 2008) and a 'woman soldier' (Lee, 8 August, 2008). She was acclaimed as a national hero. Her achievement was valuable not only for Taiwan's 'female' weightlifting but also for weightlifting in Taiwan more generally.

The other main media spotlight undoubtedly focused on Su Li-wen, a female taekwondo player. Su did not win a medal, but she fought tenaciously and inspired the whole nation during the tournament. In one match, she fell eleven times and got up despite having damaged her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and suffering a broken toe. After the breathtaking contest, Taiwan's media described Su as 'tough', 'fierce', 'obstinate' and 'persistent', noting that although the injury 'may even end her career, [she] still fought hard for Taiwan' (Peng, 23 August, 2008). As a 'national hero', Su herself said that 'she would be proud to die at the Olympics', adding 'if I could win gold, my name would be put in the history textbooks, that would be cool' (Peng, 23 August, 2008). Su also stated that she 'had no reason to quit; I carried the national flag on my shoulder' (Ma, 22 August, 2008).

From the two aforementioned stories, we can safely say that the discourse of Taiwanese female athletes and Taiwan's nationalism is a special one. After outstanding performances, female athletes were no longer trapped in marginal positions either in the sport field or in nationalism discourses. They were now 'national heroes', 'the soldiers of Taiwan'. Perhaps Taiwanese sportswomen could now play leading roles in challenging traditional gender expectations and the gendered division of labour. However, there is another side to the argument. Stigmatisation and setbacks also characterised much of the media coverage.

On being 'the glory of Taiwan' and also a 'real' woman

As indicated at the outset, it is at least as difficult to perform gender appropriately as it is to attain high levels of sporting performance. After winning bronze, Lu Ying-chi was called 'a 23 years old fake guy' because of her muscular appearance (*China News Agency*, 12 August, 2008). One report described how 'weightlifting training made Lu's family's hearts ache. Lu's aunt said that Lu looks just like a tomboy and she was afraid that no one would want to marry her' (*Central News Agency*, 12 August, 2008). In TV coverage, Lu's masculine appearance was also the focus of much discussion:

Lu became a weightlifter since junior high school. She exercises a lot, wearing gender neutral cloths and with deep voice. People often think she is as a boy. Thus, she always needs female company when going to public toilets (*TVBS*, 13 August, 2008).

In the same coverage, Lu's grandmother said that 'Lu is afraid to wear skirts', but, in keeping with heterosexist norms, added that 'she really likes children'. Meanwhile, Lu's brother talked to the media about his sister, saying 'because of her gender neutral appearance, I don't think she can find a boyfriend', but added that 'it is good to be single' (TVBS, 13 August, 2008).

As noted earlier, inside the sport field, the power of compulsory heterosexuality constructs homophobia against any woman who does not conform to 'real' femininity. The result is what Butler (2009: ii) describes as precarity which 'is directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence'. Lu's masculine appearance troubles dominant gender expectations and the beauty myth. It makes her muscular weightlifter's body a 'problem'. Lu and her family had to try hard to prove that she was not only a good athlete but also a 'real' woman.

A number of researchers have focused on the media representation of female athletes in Taiwan (Hung, 2003; Ai, 2009; Lee, 2010). They all argue that the heterosexual 'beauty myth' and the gendered division of labour have been the dominant discourses in media coverage. In addition, Taiwanese female athletes have consistently been assigned minor positions. Take the 2008 Beijing Olympics as an example. According to Lee (2010), among 4,480 2008 Beijing Olympics stories in three major newspapers in Taiwan, only 30.67% of them focused on female athletes, despite the fact that two of the four bronze medal winners were women. In addition, Ai (2009) found that of

808 photos about the 2008 Olympics on *Apple Daily*, 'male pictures' constituted 67.9%, 'female pictures' only 29.2%. All of these researches indicate the continued marginality of female athletes in the Taiwan sport field.

Conclusion

The media treatment of Taiwanese female athletes at the Beijing Olympics was similar to that accorded to their western counterparts and perhaps resulted in even greater marginalisation. On the one hand, the marginal position of sport in Taiwan's value system challenges female athletes as it does their male teammates. Ironically though the multiple marginality of Taiwanese female athletes can be challenged when they are called upon in certain circumstances. They can be 'national heroes', participating in national narratives not simply as wives, mothers or daughters but also as soldiers, warriors and fighters, 'supermen', and they can even gain political influence as Chi Cheng did after her retirement from track and field. When Taiwan's male athletes failed in the Olympics hosted by the country's biggest rival, these women athletes seized the moment and thereby boosted their own social status. The extent of this sort of empowerment is, of course, minimal. There was nonetheless an opportunity for Taiwanese female athletes to experience a degree of upward mobility. When government officials congratulated the families of medal winners in person, the first plea of their families on their behalf was always for 'a stable job' (*Central News Agency*, 12 August, 2008; Hung, 10 August, 2008; Ma and Chen, 22 August, 2008). Indeed, many of the athletes eventually secured tenured positions in national educational or sport institutes after their glorious feats.

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that men still take the dominant roles in Taiwan's sport field. According to Butler (2009: xi), 'the theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us'. By taking nationalism into consideration, we can observe a complex set of dynamics and narratives regarding female athletes in Taiwan. It would be dangerous to be overly positive about the situation of Taiwanese female athletes in general. Most women, including most female athletes, still occupy marginal positions in Taiwan. Furthermore, the symbolic annihilation of sportswomen by the mass media remains prevalent. The representation of sportswoman is still gender-biased. Gendered disciplinary discourses, such as the beauty myth and compulsory heterosexuality, still dominate Taiwanese female athletes' media representation and further influence their practice and self-identity. After the summer Olympics, Chen Wei-lin appeared on a popular variety show to get 'revamped'. The show's producers made her wear make-up, high heels and an evening gown in order to 'transform' her masculine appearance to one of 'real' femininity. Taiwanese sportswomen can be national heroes only at the 'right' time and by way of high level sporting performances. Even then, they are represented principally as the alternates to male athletes. More damaging still perhaps is the fact that when the cheering stops, it is their sub-standard performance as women that attracts the headlines.

Finally, we have to appreciate that these women come from different classes and ethnic groups; and possess different sexual orientations and national identities.

Therefore, to more fully understand their place in Taiwanese society, or indeed that of female athletes in other societies, the task is now to provide more contextualised, nuanced and plural discourses in the future. After the discussion of their media representation, listening to these women's own voices and seeking to understand their own interpretations and practices of national identity are essential for an even fuller articulation of the relationship between gender, sport and nationalism in Taiwan.

Notes

¹ In general, there are five major ethnic groups in Taiwan's ethnic imagination. They are Aborigine, Hakka, Holo and 'Wai-sheng-ren' (external-province persons). For the aboriginal peoples, the other three ethnic groups are all 'Han Chinese'. For most 'Wai-sheng-ren', both Holo and Hakka are 'Ben-sheng-ren' (original-province persons), who have different historical memories and cultures from them.

² see

<http://women.nmth.gov.tw/zh-tw/Content/Content.aspx?para=216&Class=74&page=0&type=Content>

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