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### A history of football on North and South Korea

**Citation for published version:**

Lee, J-W 2017, 'A history of football on North and South Korea: C. 1910-2002: Development and diffusion', *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science*, vol. 6, pp. 1-3.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2017.1323613>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/21640599.2017.1323613](https://doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2017.1323613)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science on 16/5/2017, available online: <http://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21640599.2017.1323613>.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**A history of football on North and South Korea: C. 1910-2002: Development and diffusion** by Jong Sung Lee, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2016, pp 280. £55.00 ISBN 3034317395

Jong Sung Lee's recent book entitled *A History of Football in North and South Korea c. 1910-2002: Development and Diffusion* offers a comprehensive overview of the social and political history of soccer in Korea. No sport is more political than football in this Far East country. From the moment this ball game was first introduced to the nation to the most recent World Cup qualifiers in 2017, the performance of football often reflects and reinforces political climate surrounding the Korean peninsula. In fact, a turbulent historical trajectory that Korean people underwent in the twentieth century has made football a politically significant aspect of physical culture in the country (Ha & Mangan, 2002). Amongst others, notable episodes include Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, the partition of the nation, the East Asian Cold War, and the rise and fall of despotic regimes in South Korea. These occurrences, whether intended or not, have left their marks on the development of Korean soccer, and Lee's monograph succinctly describes the close connection between politics and sport in the nation.

Regarding Jong Sung Lee's approach to the history of Korean football, two noteworthy elements must be highlighted. First, this book is about football in both North and South Korea. Second, it deals with Korean soccer history from 1910 to 2002. It is certainly legitimate to examine the development of football in the two Koreas together. This is because the Korean peninsula had been a unified nation before the Korean War (1950-1953), the

consequence of which led to the division of the homeland. Hence, it is important to review social and political meanings ascribed to ball games before and after partition so as to understand the implications that football had for the construction of national and political consciousness of Korea. It is also reasonable to assess football development in Korea from 1910 to 2002. This period begins with the Japanese Occupation during which football displayed a strong nationalistic character and ends with the FIFA World Cup Finals that South Korea and Japan co-hosted wherein the South Korean side achieved the most remarkable performance in its history. Thus, this is a useful chronological demarcation that helps clarify how specific political and historical conditions have affected the development of football in Korea.

It should be noted that, at the time of writing, this monograph is the only book written in English that is entirely devoted to the history of football in Korea. Of course, there is other work in English in the form of articles in peer-reviewed journals and chapters in edited volumes, and these publications also offer social and political analyses of soccer in the north-east Asian nation. However, these articles tend to focus on specific topics in Korean football such as fan culture, national identity, and the 2002 FIFA World Cups (Bang & Amara, 2014; Oh, 2013; Whang, 2006). This means that, while one should acknowledge the valuable academic contribution that these research papers have made thus far, it is difficult to grasp a broad narrative of football development in Korea by relying on these essays alone. By contrast, Lee's monograph provides a comprehensive historical review of the sport in the nation. Thus, international researchers whose academic interests lie in Korean society and sport, especially football, will certainly benefit from reading Jong Sung Lee's volume.

The major strength of this monograph lies in the sections on North Korean football. Because Jong Sung Lee's study primarily relies on secondary resources, many other parts of the book display limited evidence of originality. For example, the sections concerning football during the colonial period and the subsequent development of the sport in the South largely consist of reviews of existing academic literature on these themes. However, the chapters on North Korean soccer show a very different character. In fact, this book provides an excellent academic discourse on the political significance of sport in the communist state. The author rigorously investigates a range of existing documents and media archives and subsequently successfully constructs a systematic historical narrative of football in the communist Korea. From North Korea's unique style of play, through their success in the 1966 FIFA World Cup Finals, to the recent development of women's football, this book offers a useful historical guide to soccer in the communist Korea. In particular, I greatly appreciated Jong Sung Lee's meticulous efforts to collect and analyse northern England's local newspaper coverage of the North Korean team's performances during the 1966 World Cup. Consequently, for the sake of making sense of North Korean football alone, this book is worthy of attention.

In spite of the book's academic merit, however, it appears that the author does not take sufficient account of football within the inter-Korean relations. This is particularly problematic considering the intended scope of this book which aims to examine the sport simultaneously in the two Koreas. Since the partition of the nation, reunification becomes one of the most significant political goals of the two Korean governments and sport has frequently played an important role in building socio-cultural ties between the two states (Lee, 2015). Football has been no exception. In 1990, football fans in Korea observed a unified Korean football championship between North and South Korea, which to all intents and purposes represented the resurrection of the intercity (Seoul and Pyeongyang) football

competition that had taken place before partition. In addition, in 1991, young footballers from the two Koreas forged a sporting union at the FIFA Youth Championship. This development was closely related to the rapidly changing world order and to the then South Korean government's "northern policy" at that time. It is necessary, therefore, to analyse how the inter-Korean football connection in the early 1990s affected relations between the two Koreas. However, the author addresses this issue only briefly without meaningful academic analysis of football in the context of North and South Korean relations.

The lack of theoretical discussion is another shortcoming of this monograph. Undeniably Jong Sung Lee presents an effective historical narrative on Korean football. Yet, this work also needs to undertake theoretical examination of football in Korean society. As a sociologist who regards theoretical interpretation as an essential component of high quality academic research, this criticism may reflect my own biases. However, the author himself states that his book attempts to examine sport in the Korean peninsula from different perspectives including nationalism, regionalism, internationalism, and globalism. In reality, however, the book hardly includes any meaningful debate on nationalism and football in the nation. Apart from noting different styles of play in the two Koreas and the regional rivalry between Seoul and Pyeongyang, it is difficult to find any constructive discussion of sport and regional identities in this volume. The monograph does contain a short section on internationalism and globalism embedded in Korean soccer but this is only a simple sketch which requires more exhaustive explanation. Had the author considered the use of theoretical concepts more carefully and comprehensively, the academic standard of this book could have been raised further.

No academic research can be perfect. As a reviewer, it is one's responsibility to point out shortcomings despite the undoubted quality that this book displays. Hence, any criticism must not be seen as an attempt to devalue Jong Sung Lee's work. Instead, it is intended to constructively stimulate critical discussion. A free flow of critical ideas is a sign of a healthy scholarly culture. Furthermore, criticisms aside, this volume is a very useful introduction to the history of football in Korea. Those academics whose scholarly interests lie in Asia Pacific regional studies and the social scientific reading of sport will find the book useful and informative. The fact that it is the first comprehensive historical overview of Korean football to be written in English gives additional value to the work. Thus, I have no doubt that ~~the~~ it is a welcome contribution to the field of sport and regional studies.

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