



Thesis  
4003

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**Sport, Imperialism and Postcolonialism:  
A Critical Analysis of Sport in China 1860-1993**

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## **Abstract**

Over the last three decades or more, there has been a considerable interest in the sociological analysis of sport. While a number of Western sociologists and cultural critics have attempted to locate the development of sport in various societies within an analysis of their own culture, very few have made sociological accounts of the development of sport in China. This study examines the significance of sport within the broader context of social and political change in China during the period from 1860 to 1990. Primarily this work is concerned with: (i) providing a theoretical analysis of imperialism and postcolonialism; (ii) treating the analysis of sport as a tool of cultural imperialism; (iii) highlighting the development of Western sports and physical culture in modern China and (iv) contributing to the analysis of sport in China through the notion of imperialism and postcolonialism. Nonetheless, the relative strength and weakness of this thesis may be its attempt to address the interrelated nature of all of these concerns.

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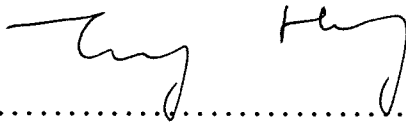
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## Declaration

I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself, and that it embodies the result of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration with and/by others included in the thesis.

Signed .....  .....

Date ..... November 2002 .....

# Dedication

*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father in law  
Ching-Tien Tzeng (1931-1998)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades or more, there has been a considerable interest in the sociological analysis of sport. The early ground clearing work of the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies has itself developed into a body of knowledge that reflects a scholarly contribution from a number of establishments, epistemologies and individuals each with their own blend of theory and evidence. A number of classical traditions of sociological thought have had to face the challenge of the “post” world with postmodernism, postfeminism, and postcolonialism being some of the many new forms of inter-disciplinary enquiry which threaten to dominate the classical multi-paradigmatic rivalry which characterised much of the sociology of sport in the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties (Jarvie and Maguire: 1994). This study acknowledges that sporting problems as social and developmental problems are real enough and yet in attempting to explain the development of sport within one particular social formation this thesis rejects forms of Western universalism and in its place suggests that the study of sport is better served by an analysis of particular and substantive sporting concerns that are rooted within a rare historical sociological approach. This specific study makes reference to a number of selected writers who have made significant contributions to the sociological analysis of sport. It draws its inspiration and direction from the historical sociological study of sport which is best characterised in the late nineteen seventies work of Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard (1979), the early nineteen eighties work of Richard Gruneau (1983) and the early nineteen nineties work of Grant Jarvie (1991).

While these texts are not exhaustive of the historical sociological literature on sport they nonetheless exemplify the points of departure that need to be made in relation to this thesis. A number of scholarly sports texts continue to flood the academic marketplace; these texts remain exceptional because of their complex blend of developmental, theoretical and empirical grounding. Purely theoretical accounts of sporting practice are as unsatisfactory as those accounts of sporting practice that exude empirical findings without any theoretical grounding. The two are inter-dependent features of a wide variety of sociological accounts of sport. While formalistic accounts about scientific method should not stand in the way of discovery, empirical work without theory facilitates only a limited access to many sporting problems and issues. It might be suggested that one of the perceived or real problems brought about by postmodern interventions has been the relative decline in those serious historical sociological accounts of sport which provide a sustained effort to relate theory to empirical or

historical evidence. Despite the different epistemological concerns that are evident in the above—mentioned three studies, the confluence of theory, data and historical sensitivity makes these works important points of departure for those interested in what is termed here the historical sociological analysis of sport. Such concerns are central to the analysis and approach to the study of sport and social change in China that is presented in this thesis.

Yet with specific reference to sociology, and I suspect the same holds true for a number of other bodies of knowledge, serious analyses of sport in China have been relatively few and far between (Brownell, 1995; Fan, 1997; Knuttgen, Ma and Wu, 1990). Like many other non-Western social formations, China in general, but also Taiwan, has only just begun to contribute to the body of knowledge which has been dominated by those cultural critics and writers from many Western metropolitan centres of the world. Only a few writers have contributed to the analysis of sport in China and Taiwan and fewer still have contributed to any critical historical sociological study of sport in China as encapsulated in the work of the five writers alluded to earlier (Brownell, 1995; Fan, 1997; Knuttgen, Ma and Wu, 1990). Alternatively, the problem might lie with convincing publishers to publish sociological accounts of sport in China or even non-Western sporting forms. Whatever the answer, the problem still remains that within the mass of sociological writings on sport, work within a Chinese context has been limited. There are a number of valid reasons for the present study but perhaps the strongest is that, in developing a theoretically informed analysis of sport in China, it makes a small contribution to literature which emanates from an interest in Chinese sport that is situated within the wider context of Chinese history and social development.

In this particular aspect of the work presented here, the thesis draws upon a number of writers who have been critical of Western universalism as a basis for explaining non-Western problems (Bhabha, 1990 and 1994; JanMohamed, 1985; Said, 1978, 1993; Spivak, 1990). The cultural critic Edward Said has made a significant and sustained contribution to this debate. Said has been critical of what he sees as cults such as post-modernism, discourse analysis, new historicism, deconstruction, neo-pragmatism, all of which afford an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the importance of history (Said, 1993:366-367). Although this study is deliberately eclectic, if there is a single strand running through this thesis it is to recall Said's attention to the historically variable, complex and distinct set of processes at play in imperial and colonial articulations of the non-Western world. The body of work that has been produced by Edward Said is itself a theoretical engagement with eclectic

practice while at the same time it does not lose sight of the particular substantive problems of Palestinian communities and cultures. Such complex explanations of such phenomena have only been made possible because Said himself has situated himself on the borders of different bodies of knowledge. His own intellectual location and representation are lived out through his feeling for and organic intervention in the Palestinian cause. In the sense that Said has always championed the cause of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the underrepresented and relatively powerless there is a mutual understanding between this thesis, in relation to Taiwan, and his work.

More specifically, this study concerns itself with the development of sport in China. As I shall argue throughout, as a focus of analysis Chinese sport is capable of providing a great deal of information about history and social development itself since one of the central tenets throughout this study is that sport both contributes to and is constitutive of Chinese culture. Sport does not exist in some social or historical vacuum isolated from Chinese history and social development. Since the focal point of this analysis is sport, it is worth noting more concretely the broad inter-connected stages of development that are outlined in this thesis. They are:

A stage that lasted from about 1860 until about 1911. During this stage of development sports in China underwent a number of significant changes. Traditional sports and pastimes were gradually influenced by the expansion of Western imperialism. A more formalized sport apparatus was introduced under the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Physical education programmes were introduced and students were sent to Western institutions for more specialized Western training.

A stage that lasted from about 1911 until 1949. At least three important processes affected the development of sport in China during this stage; (i) the continuing influence of Western imperialism; (ii) the emergence of communism and in particular the popularity of nationalism during the 1937-1945 period; and (iii) the failure of the Chinese Republic.

A stage which lasted from about 1949 until 1978, during which time sport in China experienced problems of modernity. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in mainland China in 1949, sport became an important component of the socialist state. It was a stage of Mao's socialism and the Cultural Revolution which was influenced by Marxism-Leninism. Sports development went through three stages: Mao built a new China and tried to establish a New physical culture, 1949-1957; (ii) during the Great Leap Forward and the Socialist Education Movement, China established a nationwide system to promote sports, 1957-1966; and (iii) in the Cultural Revolution, sports were discontinued twice—1966-1969 and 1974-1976.

A stage which lasted from 1978 until 1993, during which sport in China has developed under the influence of postcolonialism since at least the 1980s. This provides the context for a preliminary discussion of sport and postcolonialism in Modern China. In regard to international sports, on the other hand, the Nationalists (about one and a half million people) fled to Taiwan and re-created the network of national political institutions on Taiwan since 1949. The issue of two "Chinas" has not only created different sports under separate governments, but it has also imposed a problem to many sport organisations in promoting international sport.

Implicit within this analysis of sport in China is the belief that such a historical sociological-based study can provide insights into a number of secondary problem areas. I do not at this point intend to provide an in-depth discussion of these concerns, but merely to mention the fact that, while the analysis of sport in China in itself provides a worthwhile area of investigation, it is also capable of raising questions about imperialism, cultural identity, postcolonialism and relations between the two China's. While this study recognises the influence of Western imperialism upon the development of sport in China it also questions the conventional wisdom of accepting uncritically universal post-schools of thought which threaten to marginalise or fail to recognise emerging and residual, indigenous or traditional epistemologies that stem from within rather than from outside that which is currently China. In a world that is so often polarised between the West and the rest indigenous thinkers have a responsibility as well as an authority to ensure that universal forms of Western or post-thought do not merely travel the world uncritically as if they speak for all the inhabitants of the globe (Radhakrishnan: 1994). Perhaps postmodernism could be replaced by post-Westernism in ways that are not available to Western consciousness. The same question may be asked about the influences which have affected the development of sport in China. At this point, I merely want to pose the question in order to illustrate the potential richness of a historical sociological enquiry that is connected with the development of sport in China.

In order to address these themes, I have organised my work into six chapters. Chapters one and two are essentially theoretical. Chapter one considers some of the strengths of the sociological writings on sport and some of the weaknesses of some of the conventional wisdom about Chinese sport. This initial synthesis paves the way for a somewhat eclectic theoretical discussion in chapter two that draws upon the concepts of culture, imperialism and postcolonialism as axial principles for analysing the development of sport in China. In particular it is argued that such an eclectic framework opens up new ways of thinking about the development of sport in China and in particular China's relationship with Taiwan. Together, chapters one and two provide the necessary background for conducting an analysis of the development of sport in China. Such an analysis is developed in chapters three, four, five and six. For nearly two thousand years Confucianism provided the political, social and moral foundation for Chinese culture, including forms of physical culture. Confucianism declined under the wider and deeper impact of Western cultural imperialism. Chapter three considers the influence of Confucianism and the folk origins of modern sport in traditional Chinese feudal culture

before about 1860. It also considers the process of Western cultural imperialism and in particular the formalization of Chinese sport between 1860 and 1911. The following are merely illustrative of some of the questions posed in this chapter: What was/is the influence of Confucianism upon Chinese physical culture? What was the influence of Western sport and proselytism on Chinese sport during this period? What was the role of particular organisations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in promoting a form of imperialism? Why did Western forms of sport become more popular after about 1895 and what was the impact upon indigenous forms of sport of this expansion? Chapter four considers the stage of development from 1912 until 1949 during which time the emergence of communism led to a complete re-evaluation of China's cultural heritage. Chapter five considers the development of sport in China and the particular problems of modernity and Mao's socialism that were experienced between 1949 and 1978. Chapter six considers the issues of China's process of modernisation and postcolonialism between 1978 and 1990, in this chapter brief reference is made to the relationship between China and Taiwan. In the conclusions, the major strands of this analysis are drawn together.

## **CHAPTER ONE: SPORT, HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY AND CHINA**

When Eric Hobsbawm, the author of *On History* (1997: 80) looked to the relationship between social history and the history of society he argued that we are concerned not only with social structures and their mechanism of persistence and change, general patterns of transformation, but also with what actually happened. History had often been viewed as a simple line of development along which societies made the transition through stages from feudalism to capitalism or modernity to postmodernity or from a rude, backward and barbarous state to a polished and advanced stage of civilization. Some nations have made the transition to modernity more quickly than others did, while others have experienced different rates of development. The possible development or non-development of capitalism within imperial China is relevant in that it helps to explain the actual fact that this type of structure developed in a specific way in China. It may also be used as a basis to compare and contrast other rates or phases of capitalist development within other countries. The history of any society is thus best understood as collaboration between the general models of social structure and change and the actual or specific set of substantive phenomena that actually have occurred. This remains true whatever the geographical or chronological scale of enquiry.

Eric Hobsbawm wrote nothing at all on the development of sport in China. Indeed few historians or sociologists have addressed Chinese sporting problems at all, let alone consider what many apparently believe to be a peripheral area of enquiry, namely non-Western sporting forms and traditions. From the beginning, the position assumed in this study is that it is not necessary to view China or Chinese sport as peripheral or meaningless. Yet in order to understand the significance of sport in China it is necessary to situate sport within the broader context of Chinese history and social development. When placed within this wider context forms of sport are capable of providing a great deal of information about the patterns, arrangements, tensions, conflicts and various processes of development within any particular social formation.

### **Historical Sociology of Sport: A Brief Review**

This chapter is concerned with developing several points of departure for the analysis of sport presented in this thesis. In the first instance it will involve considering the work of several writers who have contributed significantly to the development of a rare historical sociological analysis of sport. In

the second instance it will involve a synthesis and critique of a selected number of authors who have written about sport in China. It would be misleading, and indeed incorrect, to suggest that the emphasis here on historical sociology provides a complete definition of historical or sociological enquiry into sport. Yet in the context of this study, it broadly defines the framework of analysis that has characterised a particular type of work within the sociology of sport area. In a similar vein it is not necessary or desirable to review everything that has been written about sport in China, but rather to provide an overall synthesis of thought which is consistent with the problematic that is developed throughout this study.

If the sociology of sport, more specifically the historical sociology, is to go beyond purely descriptive atheoretical expositions then accounts of sporting practice need to be located within the broader context of history and social development and to a certain extent guided by theoretical grounding. It is precisely these factors which are the strengths in the work of Gruneau, Dunning and Sheard and Jarvie to name but a few authors.

An interest in developing historical sociology, in part marked by the work of Philip Abrams' *Historical Sociology* (1982), has clearly been influenced by theoretical controversies concerning the inadequacy of those sociology accounts that have been insensitive to historical concerns. Renewed attempts to construct historical sociological models of sport have taken a number of different forms. For instance, Allen Guttman's *From Ritual to Record* (1978) develops a Weberian examination of sports transformation from its traditional to modern forms. It is interesting that Guttman argues that one of the possible advantages to be gained from the Weberian model is that it does not reduce explanation to the economic determinism which, it is argued, has characterised many Marxist interpretations of sport. An alternative school of thought which has influenced a great deal of historical research on sport has been that of political economy and Marxist cultural analysis of the 1980s and 1990s.

The strategy which Gruneau develops in *Class, Sports and Social Development* involves relocating the paradoxical features of sport into a broader understanding of human agency, cultural production and their expressions in patterns of social development and social transformation. Having laid out the ground rules, the strategy which, in my opinion, is quite brilliantly developed, involves locating the analysis of sport within these classical concerns. This involves, (i) articulating the classical concerns of social development; (ii) acknowledging the essential unity of critical, interpretive,

empirical analysis; and (iii) understanding the limits and possibilities governing human choices as they are lived or experienced in different social and cultural settings.

In stark contrast the work of Dunning and Sheard in *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* lies not so much within the confines of political economy, but within the confines of Eliasian sociology. As such the concepts of figuration, social bonding and webs of interdependence are of central importance. For instance, the development of rugby football, it is argued, has been greatly influenced by various figurations, such as the public school, the British class structure and the conflict and tensions in the amateur and professional responses to the democratisation of rugby football. The process of development is continually emphasised through the frequent use of terms, such as urbanization, civilization, modernization and democratisation.

Although the texts differ in certain problematic respects, there are a number of similarities in the work of Dunning and Sheard (1979), Gruneau (1983) and Jarvie (1991). All three texts provide serious historical-sociological accounts of sport as opposed to descriptive, atheoretical types of analysis. All three texts are sensitive to questions about social patterns and social arrangements. For Gruneau, this is explained through the idea of different social and cultural formations, for Dunning and Sheard this is expressed through the concepts of figurational development and various webs of interdependence, and for Jarvie this is accounted for in a more eclectic manner through an utilisation of the concepts of dependency, culture and development. The key similarity in all three texts is that the problems are approached from historical sociological positions. In all cases, the historical is complemented by a penetrating sociological analysis. In this particular thesis, the notions of imperialism, culture and postcolonialism provide a useful theoretical framework for an analysis of sport in China which is sensitive to both Western and non-Western bodies of knowledge.

It is to an initial consideration of the existing research on sport in China that I now turn to. In many ways it is the strengths of the works alluded to above which are the weaknesses of the literature to date that has attempted to describe the history of sport in China. It is not that existing work is irrelevant but it has to be engaged in the act of synthesis of thought. Earlier studies have provided a great deal of empirical data that need not be dismissed because of various implicit or explicit epistemological concerns which have guided the arrangement of the data. While the first part of this chapter is largely concerned with various abstract concerns, the second part is of a more descriptive



nature. The major selected works considered here are reviewed in chronological order by date of the original publication.

## **Sport in China: A Critical Review**

Published in 1990, *Sport in China* provides a substantive amount of empirical data on the development of physical culture in China (Knuttgen, Ma and Wu: 1990). The main empirical base for this text draws upon anthropological material as well as reports, national documents and letters. There are three parts to the book. Part one of the text covers in a descriptive manner the evolution and organisation of physical culture in what is now China. Chapters one and two provide an orthodox history of sport in China. Chapters three, four and five describe the organisation and administration of sport in China. Chapters six, seven and eight describe both traditional and contemporary Chinese sporting practice. Part two consists of chapters nine to thirteen and the main focus of this research is development of modern sports science and sports medicine in China. This part reviews Chinese research in physical education, sports medicine, physiology and biochemistry, biomechanics and psychology. It is interesting to note that part three is more futuristic in that the final chapter of this book looks to future directions and goals. China's involvement in the development and advancement of sport would suggest that significant progress has been made although it should be noted that the research allows the authors to speculate, like all futuristic accounts, beyond that which the evidence allows. A more congruent body of knowledge would acknowledge the processes of development that have contributed to Chinese sporting forms without necessarily speculating on future developments.

It is not necessary to discuss the whole book in order to establish the point that most of the folk origins of modern Chinese sporting culture have developed out of a number of antecedent traditional practices that existed prior to 1860. There has been a long tradition of indigenous Chinese thought that has grown out of a specific cultural context and has included both secular and non-secular philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. As chapter one suggests, there is some evidence to show that games were common many thousands of years ago. Art objects give some anthropological weight to the notion that a thriving physical culture existed before the birth of Christ. In some cases the available evidence is used to establish the ancient origins of Chinese physical culture. China not only developed and refined forms of exercise that were in complete contrast to that provided for in the West but also developed folk games similar to Western forms of soccer and hockey. It is acknowledged that

traditional Oriental sports such as Taijichuan, Qigong and Wushu have been distinctive forms of exercise that have been practiced for centuries. Yet, as I have already indicated in some instances, the authors, I believe, have attempted to hypothesise beyond the scope of the evidence provided.

More specifically, it might be suggested that ancient China had no forms of physical culture that corresponded directly to such practices as formal Western gymnastics. Yet it would be misleading to argue that ancient Chinese culture possessed nothing resembling sport. Some ancient Chinese forms of physical culture, such as *wuyong* (martial valour), *quanyong* (boxing valour), *xi* (games), *jiji* (art of attacking) and *yangsheng* (the art of keeping fit) are described in sufficient depth by Gu Shiquan (1990: 5-11) to illustrate that the ancient Chinese experienced physical culture in numerous forms. The most distinguishing characteristic of these cultural forms is that they were all closely associated with some activity, such as military training, symbolic ritual and sacrifices, medical treatment or artistic creation, to name but a few of the most common functions. Horsemanship and archery were basic military skills that developed into modern sporting forms. Running, throwing and jumping also evolved from military exercise, while wushu, or Chinese martial arts, made an important contribution to ancient Chinese culture (Speak, 1999: 22).

Physical culture in China can be traced as far back to Beijing man who lived over 500,000 years ago in the caves of Zhoukoudan (Gu, 1990: 4). Here thousands of skeletons of wild horses and deer suggest the great hunting and running ability of the ancient Chinese. In Shanxi province, pellets, bows, and arrows unearthed from the ruins of primitive settlements can be traced to anywhere between 28,000 to 40,000 years ago. The *Shang Shu* (Book of History), which records affairs in the Xia, Shang and Western Zhou dynasties (2100-771BC) claims “of the five happiness: the first is long life; the second is riches; the third is soundness of body and serenity of mind; the fourth is love of virtue; the fifth an end crowning the life” (Speak, 1999: 23). There were several schools of exercise, all which were concerned with longevity and achieving mental and physical harmony. As Speak points out, they were more concerned with internal organic function than musculature, strength and vigour (Speak, 1999: 23). The ancestral dances of the Wa nationality, who lived more than 3,400 years ago, are depicted upon cave paintings in Cangyuan, Yuannan provinces (Figure 1). Cave paintings support the existence of dance called *xiaozhongwu* (reduce-swelling dance) used in primitive times to cure both leg and foot diseases (Gu, 1990:4). From these discoveries and the study of related documents, fables and legends it might initially be suggested that numerous and varied Chinese physical and cultural pastimes

existed within ancient Chinese culture between 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. Ancient Chinese physical culture consisted of a large number of different activities and events (Figure 2) and these activities according to Gu may be classified within the following broad categories:

**Military sport:** archery, chariot races, contests of strength, wushu (martial arts), jogging, jumping, throwing, hurling, weight lifting, football (soccer), polo, hunting, tug of war and swimming.

**Medical sports:** qigong (breathing exercises), daoying (fitness exercise of which there were many forms), massage, yangsheng (keeping fit), fushi (keeping fit on a diet), taijiquan (traditional Chinese shadow boxing), yijinjing (exercises to relax the muscles), baduanjing (a set of exercises that comprised eight movements, each beneficial to a certain part of the body), manipulation of health-preserving balls, and climbing.

**Recreational games and sports:** lische (shooting arrows as part of a ceremony or for amusement), touhu (throwing darts into a pot), baixi (a general term for ancient Chinese songs, dances and aerobatics), singing and dancing, vehicle racing, horse racing, chess, kite flying, swinging, dragon-boat racing, aquatic sport, ice-skating, hiking and various other activities during festivals and at temple fairs (Gu, 1990: 5).

These sports, Gu argues (1990:5), constitute the largest collective subsystem of ancient Chinese physical culture. The most familiar modern sport that has developed out of these practices is wushu, which in earlier times was called either *wuyong* (military valour) or *wuyi* (military skill). The practice of Wushu may be divided into two categories: the art of fighting barehanded and the art of fighting with weapons. Archery, fencing, boxing, wrestling and weight lifting were all practiced by foot soldiers during the period of the Warring States (475-221 BC). Exercises were performed naturally or with implements and, as infantry supplemented cavalry and chariots, a variety of forms of wushu were employed for training artisans and foot soldiers. Forms of physical culture were also developed for personal fitness training and entertainment. Other antecedent forms of physical culture were, according to the author, closely related to the development of military skills. Gu (1990:7) emphasizes that *Jiaoli* (wrestling), for example, was actually a general term used for military weight training. Later on, it became an acrobatic exercise. The Yuan and Ming Dynasties (AD 1279-1644) developed various events that were officially categorised into “18 kinds of military skills” which represented the essence of all Chinese martial arts with various ancient weapons (Yu, 1985: 155). Following the introduction of Western guns and cannons into China in 1860s, the ancient military skills gradually lost their combat value as they developed into healthy forms of popular exercises.

During the period of the Five Dynasties (AD 907-979), a sport similar to wrestling developed. Two ball games were popular in China in ancient times: *cuju* or *taju* (a kind of foot ball) (Figure 3) and *jiju* or *daqiu* (a kind of horse polo) (Figure 4). Both were used in military training. An antecedent form

of soccer was first played in China during the period of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States (770-221 BC). In the beginning, *cuju* was probably a folk game, but it developed into a kind of military art. During the Han Dynasty (206BC- AD220), according to Cui (1998:18) and Speak's (1999:33) argument, Li Yu's (AD 50-130) poem "*Ju Cheng Ming*" (foot ball wall epigraph) *cuju* involved two teams; had two judges; was played in a square field surrounded by walls; and had six sets of goals. During the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), the number of goals was reduced to two, one for each side (Gu, 1990: 8). The game of polo was probably introduced into China from Central Asia and became a highly developed sport during the Tang Dynasty. The wars that the Tang Empire waged against the Turks and other minority nationalities facilitated the development of skillful riders. Polo provided not just a form of military training for cavalymen but also entertainment for the nobility. The evolution of *chuiwan* (a variety of field hockey) (Figure 5) was in turn influenced by polo. However, the popularity of these ancient forms of football and polo had begun to decline by the Ming and Qing Dynasties (AD 1368-1911) (Gu, 1990: 7-10).

The authors argue that for at least 3,000 or 4,000 years, the Chinese people have continually devised various forms of physical culture for enhancing and maintaining physical fitness (Gu, 1990: 4). *Qigong* is but one form of physical fitness, which has a history of over 3,000 years in China. It is an activity that is aimed at strengthening the body's vital energy and it was often attractive as a form of a popular recreation (Wang, 1990: 92). *Qigong* has been considered as an important means of curing diseases, prolonging life, and improving the skills of participants in *wushu* (martial arts). Two other activities that appeared about the same time as the *qigong* are the *jingzuo* (sitting in silence or meditation) and *daoying*, which was a healing art. A mental approach was often linked to physical exercise. Chinese physicians often recommended gentle, non-vigorous forms of exercise since vigorous exercise made it impossible to achieve the harmony of breathing, movement and mood (Speak, 1999: 23). This initial discussion of *Sport in China* has been instrumental in establishing the fact that various forms of physical culture existed within ancient China. *Sport in China* makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge about sport in China. Since most of the contributors are amongst China's leading sport authorities, this book may be viewed as providing an orthodox and authoritative official view on China's sport and physical education. It examines the evolution and organisation of China's physical education, culture and sport. It provides a vast amount of historical data and materials relevant to Chinese sports history. It focuses upon the development of research programmes in the various

disciplines of sport science and sport medicine and provides for some valuable visual evidence by providing 80 photographs which offer a rare insight into the history of sport in China.

However, there are some disappointing aspects of the research. First, since this book's contributors are viewed as leading authorities in China, most of their views can be seen to follow government statements. Therefore, the content tends to reflect the political history of governments. Second, one of the major problems that any researcher faces when trying to pinpoint the exact origin of events, such as Chinese ancient physical culture is the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Chinese tradition itself helps to explain this occurrence since so many of the legends, customs, and traditions of Chinese communities have tended to be passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth rather than being written down. In an attempt to enhance the origin of this Chinese traditional physical culture, one of the key problems that have pervaded many of the early accounts of Chinese history is that careful attention has not been given to the exact evidence (Gu, 1990: 4). For example, Beijing man lived over 500,000 years ago in the caves of Zhoukoudan, and as Gu suggests Beijing man is ancient Chinese who had a great running ability. This is questionable anthropological speculation. While Gu traces back the physical culture of the Xia Dynasty, there is in fact no careful documentation of evidence, or archaeological record to confirm this Chinese historical myth. As such this thesis might agree with Hegel who emphasized that the mythical and perhistorical is often treated by Chinese historians as perfectly historical (Hegel, 1956: 118).

The concept of detachment occupies a central place in Elias's discussions concerning the nature of scientific enquiry (Elias, 1956; 1987). He describes it on a number of occasions as standing back from reflected objects of thought, self-distancing and stepping back from something in order to look again. Existing modes of scientific enquiry, especially in the social science, have often been perverted by the various overtly ideological or political stances that various scientific establishments or schools of thought have adopted. The sociologist as a "destroyer of myths" is well equipped, argues Elias, to replace such involved practices by less overtly ideological, more scientific knowledge about human relationships (Elias, 1978: 50-70). The task of the sociologist as a relatively detached researcher or practitioner of a relatively autonomous science is to add to human knowledge by providing alternative forms of understanding which not only contribute to a reorganization of perception and thought, but cut through increasingly abstract bodies of knowledge. Keeping in mind what was said earlier concerning the use of the original documents as the real subject matter of history, the point that

needs to be made is that there is no original document of 3,000 to 4,000 years ago to verify incidents of ancient physical and cultural pastimes. This is not to say that the cave paintings within the Cangyuan and Yuannan provinces either did or did not take place, but merely that there is not enough empirical evidence to argue categorically that this was the point of origin of ancient Chinese physical culture. After the 1860s, *wushu* and other military sports were replaced by Western military drills (Gu, 1990: 15). Yet the point that this thesis wishes to establish here is that modern Chinese sport has not developed in some historical or social vacuum, but has in fact developed out of a number of antecedent physical cultural practices which pre-date the 1860s.

In other words, the fact that this thesis takes as its starting point a period from about 1860 does not necessarily imply that this was the starting point for the development of sport in China. It is precisely this type of careful consideration that was commented upon by Elias (1983: 5) when discussing the work of the historian L.Von Ranke. In agreement with Ranke, Elias insisted upon the careful documentation of original evidence. The documents, the original sources of information are in many cases the very substance of history. Without the meticulous documentation of reliable historical sources, there is a very real danger of subjective interpretation of the subject matter. The historian runs the risk of selecting from events of the past in the light of what he or she approves or disapproves in the present. Not that meticulous documentation on its own is sufficient. It needs to be guided, informed and orientated by a body of reliable theory. In other words, it is the inter-dependence of theory and data which is an ongoing exercise required in each case and it is this which is lacking in *Sport in China*.

The strength of Gu's work lies in its empirical grounding of the subject matter from the eighteenth century onwards. I have argued, though, that, owing to the lack of concrete evidence regarding the past Chinese oral tradition and a lack of detachment from the subject matter, it is impossible to establish the validity of the claim that Chinese physical culture existed as early as or before 2,500 years ago and all that can be said is that modern Chinese sporting forms have developed out of an antecedent folk culture which existed before 1860. I shall develop this position further through considering the work of Susan Brownell.

Published in 1995, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* attempts to locate an analysis of sport in Chinese culture and society within a particular framework or problematic. It draws upon a burgeoning body of literature which emanates from an interest in body culture. In the introduction the reader is led to believe that the promise of the book lies

