Part IV

The Pivot

Where diplomats have failed, where the spirit of Christianity itself failed . . . these games have wrought a most happy and auspicious accomplishment.[1]

Ramon Navas, 1921

The people of the Far East will be bound together not by diplomatic ties and international treaties but by the cord of mutual understanding which, if you please, I shall call it the placenta of sportsmanship.[2]

Felipe Laguatan, 1934

Introduction

A few days before the start of the Fifth Far Eastern Championship Games on May 30, 1921, Filipino athletes found themselves stranded midstream in the always-crowded Huangpu River, which dissects the metropolis of Shanghai. Not literally stranded, mind you, as people could technically disembark from the chartered coast guard vessel that would serve as their home for the next several weeks, the *Bustamante*. However, it would still be two days before officials in Shanghai cleared space for them at the China Merchant's Lower Wharf and contracted trucks to transport athletes to and from the practice facilities.[3] Some on board the vessel might have interpreted this delay as an ominous portent of things to come, but then again, not all athletes are so superstitious. In Shanghai, after finally docking, these Filipino athletes and coaches, along with the many delegates, spectators, and sports-writers who make a memorable Olympics possible, prepared to join

[1] Ramon Navas, "How They Came and Saw and Conquered," *Philippines Free Press*, June 18, 1921.

[2] Felipe Laguatan, "The Far Eastern Games – Its Origin and Significance," in *Tenth Far Eastern Olympiad* (Manila: The Sports Review, 1934), 85.

[3] "Osias Wrote on Filipino Athletes' Prospects of Victory," *The Manila Times*, June 4, 1921. See also Camilo Osias, "The First Victory of Filipino Athletes on Foreign Soil," *The Philippine Review [Revista Filipina]* 6, nos. 8–9 (August–September 1921): 393–397.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207

their peers from Japan and China in what would prove to be a key moment of coalescence.

Historian Paul A. Cohen describes how the "coalescence" of individual lives combine into the collective actions that we refer to as "events."[4] The Far Eastern Championship Games, a monumental event that brought people together and dominated the news cycle for two weeks over the summer of 1921, reveals the depth and durability of Sino–Philippine interactions that we have slowly documented over the course of this book. Sports arenas, lecture halls, and business boardrooms blended together as athletes acted as cultural ambassadors, educators served as politicians, businesspeople became lobbyists, and pundits turned into soothsayers. Sport transformed into a nexus for nationalism and a conduit for transnationalism, connecting people and their divergent social and political agendas.

However, whereas the 1921 Games acted as a moment of coalescence, the 1934 Games encapsulated an era of disintegration. In 1934, the intense conversations in the boardrooms in Manila that would eventually lead to the dissolution of the Far Eastern Athletic Association and the end to the Games sidelined the action on the courts. But it did not have to end this way. The years in between the Fifth and Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games represented a period of possibilities when physical education specialists from China, the Philippines, and Japan, many of whom were veterans of the Games, journeyed to Springfield College to study sports and health in the United States before returning to Asia to carry the baton of sports leadership. This period of overlapping trajectories and missions no doubt brought these Asian students together, but any good will they might have built during this time came to naught as war approached, the Games unraveled, and destinies diverged in 1934.

The chapters that follow complete our tour of the Sino–Philippine link by journeying through the arenas, classrooms, boardrooms, and stadiums that brought everyone together and eventually tore everyone apart. They argue that, while contact between China and the Philippines remained robust, bilateral, and multifaceted throughout the early twentieth century, 1921 marked a highpoint of cooperation and possibilities, and 1934 marked a turn toward disillusionment and disengagement.

[4] Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 65.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207

Sports, Events, and Area Studies

Famous sports historian J. A. Mangan once described how Victorians viewed sports as the "imperial umbilical cord" of the British Empire that linked together a "white imperial fraternity."[5] Felipe Laguatan, who served as the physical director of the Far Eastern University in the Philippines, were he a contemporary of Mangan, might have responded with the equally gendered metaphor that starts this section, emphasizing instead regional and trans-imperial connections. Curious metaphors aside, sports historians have shown how athletics connected people through lofty ideals of sportspersonship, a sense of shared struggle, and flawed notions of superiority and destiny, and the chapters in this part draw from and extend these interventions.

Sports brought a stadium of cheering fans from different walks of life together to join in a shared mission and passion. Yet sports historians are torn when addressing the location of sports in life and society in Asia. Some scholars, such as Fan Hong, portray sports as a fundamentally liberating force, especially for Asian women, whereas others, such as Andrew Morris, focus more on the role of sports in national awakenings.[6] More broadly, when theorizing sports, scholars tend to privilege "the 'Western civilizing mission' and Asian resistance" to that mission in their research.[7] Nonetheless, sports historians have carried critical race and gender studies, and inquiries into nation and empire, to new theoretical lengths, and this part takes advantage of the good field position they have established. Furthermore, by focusing on the Japan–China–Philippines sports triangle, this part pivots across not just imperial boundaries, but what has become another ingrained but controversial geographical and disciplinary division separating the Philippines from its "East Asian" peers: area studies.

[5] J. A. Mangan, "Prologue: Britain's Chief Spiritual Export: Imperial Sport as Moral Metaphor, Political Symbol and Cultural Bond," in *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society*, ed. J. A. Mangan (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

[6] Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang, "Introduction: The Asian Century and Asian Sport," in *The Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*, ed. Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–7; Fan Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (London: F. Cass, 1997); and Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[7] For the quote, see Stefan Huebner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2016), 3. For other examples of sports as imperial resistance, see Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 203–235; C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); and Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207

Scholars of Southeast Asia from Japan, the United States, and Australia have defended the coherence of Southeast Asia as a region in a push for funding and relevance, but many recognize the inherent contradictions and limitations of this formulation.[8] The original impetus behind area studies lies in the creation of specialized knowledge and interdisciplinary programs to support geopolitical objectives.[9] Most scholars will point to Cold War political considerations when identifying the entrenchment of "Southeast Asia," and sometimes "East Asia," in academia, but others, especially from China and Japan, point to the much longer history of *Nanyang* (南洋), or South Seas, research.[10] Either way, the artificial constructs of "Southeast Asia" or "Nanyang," which lack the same political momentum and imperatives that nations possess and empires possessed, have produced influential and foundational transnational research.[11] The objective of the chapters that follow is not to reject this research, but to build on and incorporate it into a revamped and boundary-flexing playbook.

Curiously, despite their many contributions, area studies specialists and sports historians have devoted considerable space to second-guessing their own relevance.[12] Nonetheless, they have largely agreed

[8] For a defense of the concept of Southeast Asia, see Paul Kratoska, Remco Raben, and Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Locating Southeast Asia," in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, ed. Paul Kratoska, Remco Raben, and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), 1–19; and Anthony Reid, "Southeast Asian Studies: Decline or Rebirth?" in *Southeast Asian Studies: Pacific Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Reid (Tempe, AZ: Monograph Series Press, Arizona State University, 2003), 1–23. Outside of political organizations in Southeast Asia, the concept has largely failed to take hold among Southeast Asians themselves. Critiques generally boil down to some version of Arjun Appadurai's observation that "histories produce geographies and not vice versa." See Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 66. See also Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 742–743.

[9] John Bowen, "The Development of Southeast Asian Studies in the United States," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 386–425.

[10] See, for instance, Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland*, 48–74; Bernards, *Writing the South Seas*; Leander Seah, "Between East Asia and Southeast Asia: Nanyang Studies, Chinese Migration, and National Jinan University, 1927–1940," *Translocal Chinese: East Asian Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (2017): 30–56; and Zhou Yuhong 周玉红 and Zhang Yinglong 张应龙, "Li Changfu xiansheng dui Zhongguo Huaqiaohuaren yanjiu de xueshu gongxian 李长傅先生对中国华侨华人研究的学术贡献 [Li Changfu's Contribution to Chinese Overseas Research]," *Bagui qiaokan* 八桂侨刊 *[Overseas Chinese Journal of Bagui]*, no. 4 (2009): 12–16.

[11] For examples from Southeast Asia, see Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988–1993); and James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[12] For more on this debate, see Amy Bass, "State of the Field: Sports History and the 'Cultural Turn,'" *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (2014): 148–172; Sebastian Conrad and Prasenjit Duara, *Viewing Regionalisms from East Asia*

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207

on the necessity of fostering links with related subdisciplines, latching their research to the literary turn, cultural turn, affective turn, and transnational turn.[13] This section follows this interdisciplinary path by tying the rope of sports history to the carabiner of area studies and latching it to the three key events along the pitch. It follows other area studies scholars who have explored and imagined new regions, such as highland Asia, or Zomia, littoral or maritime Asia, the Asia-Pacific, and inter-Asia.[14] It also draws inspiration from Willem van Schendel, a critic of area studies who argues that "one practical way of strengthening cross-area intellectual engagement is to 'follow the Southeast Asians' to the non-West."[15] This part likewise ascends to new heights by following athletes and their entourages across and beyond the East–Southeast Asia divide.

Events and event history are the bolts that allow for the safe execution of this methodological maneuver. Event historians key in on points of inflection, often narrowing the temporal scope to a single year, if not a single day, to slowly climb the mountain of history.[16] Ray Huang, for instance, in his detailed account of day-to-day activities in the Wanli court, outlines subtle signs of disarray and corruption during what otherwise might have been considered a "year of no significance," 1587.[17]

(Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2013); Natalie Koch, "Is a 'Critical' Area Studies Possible?" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 5 (2016): 807–814; and Willem van Schendel, "Southeast Asia: An Idea Whose Time Is Past?" *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia and Oceania* 168, no. 4 (2012): 497–510.

[13] For a brief summary of these "turns," see Cahn, "Turn, Turn, Turn."

[14] See, for example, Barbara Watson Andaya, "Oceans Unbounded: Transversing Asia Across 'Area Studies,'" *Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 4 (2006): 669–690; Ho, "Inter-Asian Concepts for Mobile Societies"; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Anti-Area Studies," *Communal/Plural* 8, no. 1 (2000): 9–23; van Schendel, "Geographies of Knowing"; Wolf Schäfer, "Reconfiguring Area Studies for the Global Age," *Globality Studies Journal* 22 (2010): 1–27; and Wong, "Comparing States and Regions in East Asia and Europe." Although China and the Philippines might not be what Jeppe Mulich has in mind when he writes about the "inter-imperial microregion," his idea about this amorphous space and interactions within it also informs my thinking in this part. See Mulich, *In a Sea of Empires*, esp. 21–22.

[15] van Schendel, "Southeast Asia," 502. See also Kenneth Pomeranz, "Presidential Address: Histories for a Less National Age," *American Historical Review* 119, no. 1 (2014): 1–22; and Schäfer, "Reconfiguring Area Studies for the Global Age," 1–27.

[16] Other historians narrow in on "episodes" or cases. See, for instance, Furth, Zeitlin, and Hsiung, *Thinking in Cases*; and Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[17] Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981). The this-year-in-history narrative has almost evolved into a genre of its own. For other examples, see William K. Klingaman and Nicholas P. Klingaman, *The Year without Summer: 1816 and the Volcano that Darkened the World and Changed History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005); Charles C. Mann, *1493: Uncovering the Near World Columbus Created* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Tian Yuan Tan,

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207

Heather Streets-Salter similarly focuses on a relatively understudied and brief Indian mutiny in Singapore in 1915 to write a compelling narrative of World War I in a global frame.[18] Perhaps the most extreme example of this chronological squeezing comes in James Carter's *Champions Day*, which grabs onto a single day in 1941 to tell the story of a rapidly changing city during World War II.[19] This temporal narrowing allows for a more careful and precise climb through seemingly mundane events, transforming them into symbols of broader changes.

As Paul A. Cohen observes, events "acquire lives of their own, partly as symbols and metaphors, partly as organizing concepts that enable historians and other scrutinizers of the past to describe and analyze 'what happened.'"[20] If we leverage the interventions of sports historians and area studies scholars to focus on the Far Eastern Championship Games of 1921 and 1934, as well as the Springfield interlude that fell in between, as events, we can better appreciate their historical locations and implications. This part attempts to bring us to the mountaintop, offering a panoramic view of the Sino–Philippine link and the vast oceans of history and historiography that surround it.

Paul Edmondson, and Shih-pe Wang, eds., *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's China* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); and John E. Wills, *1688: A Global History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

[18] Streets-Salter, *World War One in Southeast Asia*. [19] Carter, *Champions Day*.

[20] Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 65.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 04:01:14, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207