

is left wondering what these experiences of, and strategies for, the New Democracy period meant for its future and how they influenced its fairly rapid demise.

*Dilemmas of Victory* is a welcome addition to the field, and it will be of interest to scholars working on a wide array of China-related disciplines: social, urban, diplomatic, and gender histories, to name but a few. It not only raises questions but also points to the possibility of a tantalizing wealth of further investigation into this newly “rediscovered” period in Chinese history, and it provides illuminating signposts as to where they may lie.

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*Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China.* By SUSAN BROWNELL. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. xv, 213 pp. \$72.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).  
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In 1987, the Chinese periodical *Sports Vision* ran a story praising Susan Brownell as “the American girl who warmly loves Chinese sports” (p. 17). During the last two decades, Brownell has lived up to this characterization, becoming the most influential American scholar in the field of contemporary Chinese sport. I was pleased to learn that Brownell would be publishing a book during the run-up to this year’s Olympic Games in Beijing, expecting (as the volume’s high-profile back cover blurbers Jonathan Spence, Bob Costas, and Allen Guttman agree) that this work would provide most Westerners with their best chance to learn more about the rich and complex field of Chinese sport and its relationship to the Olympic movement.

The work begins with a very personal chapter by Brownell on her relationship to Chinese sport as an athlete, scholar, and active participant in “China’s Olympic Dream,” and the author makes a convincing case (more than the actual Olympics ever have, at least) that a book about the Beijing Games could “reveal our common humanity” (pp. 13, 16).

Brownell is at her best when she is able to blend her athletic experience, scholarly insight, dogged researching and interviewing skills, and distinctly optimistic viewpoint to present unique and sympathetic perspectives on this Olympic dream. Refreshingly, Brownell asks us to discount notions of the Beijing Olympics as the “genocide games” or the endgame of some sinister eugenic plan. Instead, she presents the Games as a triumph of “freethinkers” in Beijing, such as artist-architect Ai Weiwei, director Zhang Yimou, and International Olympic Committee member He Zhenliang, all of whom played crucial roles in Olympic planning despite the official censure that they all experienced (pp. 2–4).

Brownell also excels in presenting sophisticated topics in clear ways, as in her discussion of the intersections between local culture, the 1980s drive to “seek roots,” the “subjective body,” and the official revival of martial arts in China

(pp. 62–64). She also explains well the bureaucratic and political processes of the International Olympic Committee, with regard, for example, to the rejection of *wushu* as an Olympic sport (pp. 67–69). (However, Brownell misses an excellent chance in her adjacent summary of Falun Gong, pp. 64–65, to explain exactly why *some* cultures of the “subjective body,” such as *wushu*, are seen in China as worthy of inclusion in the sacred Olympic canon, whereas others, such as Falun Gong, invite the most hysterical and brutal of official crackdowns.)

The author also provides a very useful service by walking the reader through commonly misunderstood facts about the national sports program of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Brownell supplies a complete and historicized discussion of the controversy over NBC Olympic television announcer Bob Costas’s remarks upon the entry of the PRC athletes during the Atlanta Games in 1996 (pp. 149–50, 158–59, 164–70), even if his commentary itself was not terribly controversial. And worth the price of admission alone is Brownell’s sustained critique of American assumptions about state-supported “abuse” and “exploitation” of young athletes in China, at the same time that we explain away so easily our own damaging obsessions with youth sport (pp. 154–60).

However, I also have several regrets about this volume. The most obvious regards the structure and organization of the book, which is more a survey of the modern sporting project in twentieth-century China than it is always about “Beijing’s games.” Because few of the chapters relate to each other in substantial ways, the volume fails to build momentum as a cohesive study of China’s Olympic mission. The author and publishers were generous in providing the reader with twenty-eight illustrations, but only eight of these are related to the Beijing Olympics, the ostensible subject of the book.

There are also moments when the book seems to read too much like an apology for nationalist or statist goals and perspectives. Brownell cites official Olympic propaganda on “the spread of universal love” to make the case that Beijing 2008 “will be a ‘people’s Olympics’ like never before” (p. 6). It is hard to understand what such a claim could mean. The author goes out of her way to make the contrarian point that these Games are not necessarily about the legitimization of PRC rule (pp. 93–94), although her argument is not served by the photo (p. 93) of the massive Olympic “countdown clock” overlooking Tiananmen Square, or by the intense struggles over the Olympic torch relay through Tibet and (not) Taiwan. Finally, the author explains how “Chinese culture” accounts for the unwillingness of PRC citizens to hear criticisms of their nation associated with Olympic bids or the Games themselves. But, if it is improper for the host country to criticize a guest, and it is also improper for a guest to criticize the host (p. 191), then all we are really saying is that the PRC can never be criticized in conjunction with the Olympics—SARS, blood doping, Darfur, and the rest be damned.

Brownell is not the first author to overplay her hand, though; this is still a very useful volume for anyone wishing to understand “China’s Olympic Dream” from both the inside and out.

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