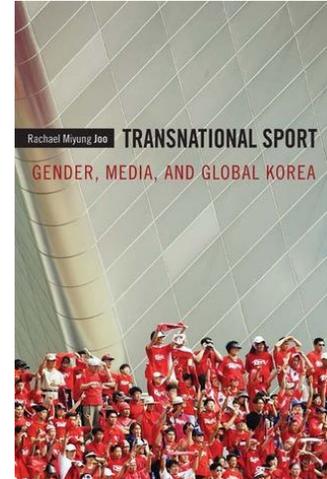


Rachael Miyung Joo, **Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea**, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012, 352 pp., \$25.95 (paperback).

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When South Korea won the 2012 London Olympics men's football bronze medal by defeating Japan 2–0, attention quickly focused on what happened on the field shortly after the match. A fan handed a placard that read "Dokdo is our land" to Korean midfielder Park Jong-Woo, who took it without hesitation and was photographed running around the field with the sign held over his head, grinning ear to ear. Soon after, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) launched an investigation to discipline Park, whose actions, it deemed, had made a political statement—strictly forbidden by statutes of both the IOC and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)—on a much-debated territory named Dokdo. Dokdo, or Takeshima as it is called in Japan, is an uninhabited island roughly equidistant from Korea and Japan and has been at the heart of much national and international debate and politics. While each country claims the land as its own, the issue remains unresolved. As for Park, he was conspicuously absent from the official medal ceremonies.



Though Park and officials for the Korean national football team assert that this was an unplanned, spur-of-the-moment reaction to winning an important game, it exemplifies how a sporting event can become and often is—even without a placard—politicized on an international scale. As an official representative of Korea, Park's body and his actions became a politicized visual ground in an international debate. In *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea*, author Rachel Miyung Joo (2012) discusses how national identities are formed, negotiated, and communicated in the genre of sports. In her study, she looks at how sporting events and national sport celebrities are engaged in the formation of a global "Korean-ness" that is much informed by Anderson's idea of an imagined community and Appadurai's notion of mediascapes.

To frame her study, Joo, taking from Berlant's notion of genre, situates media sports as a genre that can be as comprehensive as to cover "performances, television, print media, and Internet sites that feature athletes, games and teams" (p. 13). Through each medium, she looks at how the consumption of such media intersects with the negotiation of gender and identity, as particularly tied to the nation of Korea. Joo argues that "media sport operates as a highly visible context for the production and apprehension of multiple, often competing, narratives of nation, identity and belonging" (p. 10). This becomes increasingly prominent in a country that has been resilient in preserving what Shin calls a "Korean ethnic nationalism" within a globalized society (as cited in Joo, p. 11). Media sport, then, carries

both within the nation and across geographical boundaries “nationalist ideas about globalization, liberalization and Korean identity” (p. 53).

In Part I of her book, Joo situates transnational media sport in both Korean and American societies. Taking a historical approach, she identifies how mass media and sports have developed in both countries. Commercial sports and international Korean athletes such as Park Chan Ho and Park Seri play a critical role in the formation of Korea as a competitive global player; in a U.S. context, though, minority and foreign athletes have been utilized in the media in developing a multicultural discourse that is so fundamental to America’s national identity. For example, Joo illustrates how such Korean-American athletes as Toby Dawson and Hines Ward have been profiled in the American media as model minorities who give back to their communities. Also, both Dawson and Ward could claim their Korean-ness in Korea only after their high-profiled victories: Dawson as the 2006 Winter Olympics mogul skiing bronze medalist and Ward as the MVP of the 2006 Super Bowl-winning Pittsburgh Steelers team.

With her book’s foundational background laid out in Part I, Joo then develops its second section on the gendered representations of Korean and Korean-American athletes in a globalized media society. She explores both masculinities and femininities in the context of their transnational identities in a highly connected society. Joo cites swimmer Park Tae-Hwan and football player Cho Jae-Jin as examples of Korean/Asian male athletes whose hard-muscled and athletic bodies represent not only a new type of Asian body but also the competitive role that East Asia plays in global capitalism. The masculinized Korean male body, she observes, is not only athletic but also disciplined, large, wealthy, powerful, and virile (p. 102). On the other hand, Korean female golfers as Park Seri, Grace Park, Kim Mi Hyun and Michelle Wie—all of whom have dominated the LPGA scene—portray a middle-class, heterosexual, and docile femininity that complies with not only the “productive laboring subjects in the global economy through narratives of discipline, competition, and flexibility” but also with a view of femininity still tied to family kinship as dutiful daughters of Korea (p. 134).

In the final section of *Transnational Sport*, the author looks at the emerging national publics at sites of consumption, particularly the 2002 FIFA Korea-Japan World Cup. Joo illustrates how this sports event created a space where new modes of participation could be made for female crowds within the Korean national public sphere, which has historically been largely what Cho Han calls an “androcentric public sphere” (as cited in Joo, p. 17). Similarly, across the ocean, in Koreatown, near downtown Los Angeles, people celebrated Korean-ness in community-oriented spaces that allowed for the consumption of sports. Finally, Joo notes how the World Cup alleviated, even momentarily, the gaps between generations and allowed for younger generations to participate both visually and vocally in national discourses. Thus, the notion that audience participation in the production of media sports plays a significant role is one that has the potential to become political expressions on both national and transnational levels.

One of the most vivid illustrations in Joo’s work is of audience participation at the 2002 World Cup. The event allowed for a feminized practice of consumption, “one where women came to dominate public spaces with practices of fandom cultures that required little or no technical knowledge of the games, per se, but an adequate ability to perform one’s competence as a national media subject” (p. 179). As the author shows, dressing the part played a crucial role in this performance. Women whose

bodies were clothed in sexy cheer outfits and decorated with the Korean national flag became "site[s] of national pride as they became examples of the immense beauty, independence and modernity of Korean women" (p. 184). The screaming, singing, and cheering bodies, in turn, reflected a kind of liberation from their daily lives and from the Confucian tradition that denied space for public expressions of female voices. Yet their bodies remained readily available for the media to highlight and circulate, which complicated the debate over whether this new visibility actually changed the lives of Korean women.

Joo's own body—the one that is located in an all-female *kosiwon* in Seoul, a relatively low-cost temporary boarding facility for college students and young adults, or the one that is located in a shared apartment in West Los Angeles—physically experiences the way in which gender, class, and race intersect, especially as a Korean-American scholar. Her identity shifts as she travels back and forth between the two nations, cultures, and languages. As we see throughout *Transnational Sport*, Joo's idea of belonging is at times challenged when interviewees or people she encounters direct questions to her about her identity as Korean/American/Korean-American. She even notes how she was chided for not wearing a red shirt (the official color of the Red Devils, supporters of the Korean national football team) and how her choice of attire questioned whether she was a "real" Korean. Using her own experience of moving through/within/outside of cities and crowds, she is able to show how the complexity and intricacy of the negotiations of gender, race, and national identity emerge not just within the media production of commercial sports but also in the active consumption of mass-mediated sporting events.

Joo's use of ethnographic material, participant observation, and interviews are justifiably necessary and highly enriching to her study of the negotiations between gender, media, and global Korea; however, what seems less distinctively present is the idea of class in these negotiations. The questions of how representative the females in the *kosiwon* are of the youth of Korea or if there are other socioeconomic spaces occupied by female youth deserve similar attention. Also, a more comprehensive and in-depth delineation of her interviewees and how she was able to access them would further legitimize and strengthen both Joo's position as a central analytic in her theory and the study itself of media sport consumption as sites where notions of nation, race, gender, sexuality, and generation can play with/against/for each other.