

SPORTS IN CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY: COMMODIFICATION AND DE-COMMODIFICATION OF SPORTS

KAZUO UCHIUMI

Preface

Goods are products produced for the purpose of exchange, which in ancient times were used instead of money by human beings whose primitive communities were based on the barter system. On the other hand, although the origin of sports and their development also date back to ancient times, it was only after entering a capitalistic society that they themselves were commodified, and “sports as goods” will question the relationship between capitalism and sports. The author would like to touch briefly on the history of sports participation before moving onto the capitalistic theory of sports. Sports, which developed from hunting in a primitive community system into a form of recreation, became a primitive right of the community constituents and a public and socially cooperative activity in past times. Although athletic sports meetings were established in the ancient Greek and Roman Empires, participation in sports was restricted to the people who had Greek and Roman citizenship, and in particular, to only aristocratic adult men. Therefore, not only slaves, but also women and children of the aristocracy could not participate in them. Eligibility for the ancient Olympic Games was limited to the former. In this way, sports were the privilege (special right) of the ruling classes. And athletic meetings were national, namely public, events.

Feudal system societies were also grounded in the religious world, based on the ideology of spiritual predominance and flesh subordination. And thus, athletic meetings disappeared from history. However, feudal aristocrats enjoyed sports including Ju-de-paum, which was the prototype of tennis, and their serfs also were eventually allowed to enjoy primitive football on an irregular basis. Although athletic meetings as such disappeared on a huge scale, feudal societies became a hotbed for the birth of modern sports. In the process, sports became the privilege of feudal aristocrats and were a public event within their class.

In the forming of a capitalistic society, modern sports were born in the public schools in Britain. The bourgeois in Britain through the Industrial Revolution became the center of a colony scramble and wanted their children to learn within the capitalist system to become bourgeois, soldiers and civil servants with adequate leadership qualities. Sports quickly spread not only throughout England, but also throughout Europe because the proliferation of railroads, the development of a communication means etc. in the Industrial Revolution enabled people mutual visits and cultural exchange. Amateurism was born in such a process.

I. *Amateurism and its inconsistency -two exclusions-*

Amateurism was the ideology of privileged monopolistic participation in sports by the capitalists, namely the exclusion of the working class from sports that emerged with the formation of capitalistic society. Amateur rule was an institutionalized expression of the ideology. It consisted of three elements, "class-rule," "economic rule" and "ethical rule." The bourgeois depreciated and excluded the participation of the working class with expressions such as "the working class is not amateur," "the pro who earns money, goods and prizes from sports is not an amateur, and it is not a true sport." Moreover, the bourgeois individualism in capitalism was adjusted, forming the ideology that "the person who receives assistance is not an amateur." Therefore, the construction of sports facilities, which required a large amount of money for construction and maintenance, was neglected, and the working class was eliminated from the popularization of sports. As a result of this, mass consumption of sports was also denied. In this way, amateurism and amateur rule eliminated the working class from sports on two sides, excellence and popularization, and denied the expansion of commodification. Therefore, from the beginning, amateurism was a concept and rule, which had fundamental inner inconsistency because it was born in capitalistic society but denied the commodification in it.

Since its birth, history has often revealed these inconsistencies. And one of the greatest concerns of Pier de Coubertin, whose efforts led to the birth of the modern Olympic Games at the end of the 19th century, was this amateur problem. Incidentally, when questioning why amateurism and amateur rule were only applied to sport, it was impossible for the working class to participate and enjoy the top tiers of other cultures, for example music and so forth. Therefore, amateurism was unnecessary in other cultural domains. However, in the case of sports, because everyday corporal labor forms were diverted to sports, the working class could also participate in them.

II. *Collapse of amateurism -collapse of the two exclusions-*

The inconsistency of amateurism appeared several times and was corrected in the 20th century, and amateurism collapsed in the high economic growth period of the 1960s in advanced capitalistic countries not only in the excellence, but also in the popularization of sports. Namely, the inconsistency of amateur rule could not exist anymore as an inconsistency in those countries because capitalism exists on commodification and marketization, and amateurism had confined both of these to sports. Moreover, the confrontation between bourgeois individualism and the public sphere of sports, in which the latter had been developing recently, was becoming more severe and could not be supported any longer. Thus, the collapse of these advanced with the following opportunities.

(1) **Collapse of pro exclusion**

Professionalism is a concept in opposition to amateurism, and it refers to a job which produces sports and demonstrates them at a high level. Now, at open matches without the

pro-amateur boundary, the terms athlete or player are more appropriate than pro and amateur. A pro's formation is premised on the existence of many supporters, and professionalization in Western Europe had already started in the second half of the 19th century. Professionalization gradually permeated into many sports events and subsequent amateur sports competitions such as the Olympic Games, one of the main arenas, were characterized also in the history of competition by professionalization. However, this inconsistency was blown to pieces during the high economic growth period in advanced capitalistic countries in the 1960s.

① The participation in international games and the predominance of socialist countries after the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952 compelled capitalistic countries to raise the sporting standards of their countries on national levels. Simultaneously, as a reflection of national power and an enhancement of national prestige, the results on the world stages including the Olympic Games began to become a more important means for the upsurge of national morale and national integration. The more the states advanced and the national consciousness diversified, the more the governments at the time worried about creating ideologies to control the national integration. The Olympic Games and various World Cup games are strong tools for this. Therefore, national assistance also became indispensable within capitalism, and amateurism became an obstacle for them.

② Such external pressure and also the inner inconsistency of amateurism, which was discussed previously, pressed for change. That is, the importance of company advertisements increased much more after the period of high economic growth. Therefore, it became much more important to use sports as an advertising medium, and it became contradictory for amateurism to forbid the commercial use of sports. Especially with the spread of television, sports and star players as a medium of company advertising became indispensable, and amateurism became an obstacle for them as well.

③ A state-amateur's predominance supported by socialist countries pushed the limits of amateurism, which was capitalistic individualism. The athletes of Western capitalistic countries participated in games through individual qualification, and had been accepting daily allowances, transportation expenses, etc. to join athletic meetings since the beginning of the 20th century. However, an appearance fee was forbidden, since this would constitute being a pro. (Pre-war athletes in Japan were mainly college students, and they were dependent on parents and supporters' associations. After the war, most Japanese teams were company employees-company amateurs- and companies supported them totally including paying them a salary, so that the severe inconsistency found in the Western style was non-existent.) The excellence of postwar sports began to require a large amount of money for its achievement and maintenance compared to the prewar days. This was already an impossible stage in individual responsibility, and amateurism, which was prohibited from receiving assistance from others, was also still providing an obstacle to the athlete.

④ The excellence of sports themselves, while being closely connected with the popularization referred to in the following clause, had gradually come to be regarded as a public sphere from the previous old individualism. This was because top athletes in the pursuit of excellence in sports became pioneers of sport culture and produced and offered this know-how in the establishment of national sport culture; thus, the role was an important one and contained public responsibility. Therefore, the assistance given to top athletes in capitalistic countries depended on a theoretical basis such as the public sphere.

⑤ Under the concept of amateurism, being a pro was regarded as a "low and mean"

existence. However, simultaneously with the collapse of amateurism in the process of professionalization, competent athletes began to earn large amounts of money and began to be admired as a national stardom. Fundamental conversion concerning the view of a pro occurred. (Commodification of sports themselves and a pro's commodification will also be described.)

(2) Collapse of the exclusion of people from participation

The high economic growth experienced during the 1960s in advanced capitalistic countries drastically changed people's life styles, work styles and mentality. Those countries were asked to promote national sports participation under their own initiatives. When sports policy was realized as part of a welfare state, amateurism as individualism in particular collapsed through inner pressure called the popularization of sports.

① The birth of "sport for all" policy was a historical necessity. The decrease in movement by laborsaving in everyday life at large and the rise of the importance of nutrition have rapidly increased lifestyle diseases, and as such, a rise in labor intensity, the complication and alienation of human relationships accompanied by urbanization began to produce new problems, which had been left for states to solve. Furthermore, with the recognition of new human rights in nations, the growth and demands of new cultures began to arise. Sports were regarded as an indispensable policy. Although immediately after the postwar period, the welfare state aimed at the fullness of domains such as medical treatment, education and housing, after the 60s, "sports for all" developed as an element of the second stage of welfare states along with culture, art, etc. The international ideological and legal convergence of the historical trend was the "European Charter of Sport for All" of the Council of Europe in 1976, and UNESCO's "International Charter of Physical Education and Sport" in 1978. Namely, "to play sports is a fundamental right for all people," and becoming a main provider of the facilities and equipment to achieve this, which is the basis for securing the right and opportunity, was made the public duty of states and local governments. This very concept constitutes the fundamental negation of amateurism.

② However this "sport for all" was not necessarily promoted from only the perspectives of welfare mentioned above. There, the commodification of sports as an economic policy also had to be focused on, because it was included in the domestic demand stimulation policies of each state. The high economic growth and the welfare state of Western European countries were combined through the growth of such new welfare policies. Welfare state policies were intended mainly to secure and equalize the minimum level for all people by the re-distribution of income (that is, a certain amount of equalizing as a result). This meant that a new economical base was formed for adopting a "sport for all" policy in Western European countries after the high economic growth of the 60s, which as a new dimension of capitalism, enabled states to disseminate the idea to all people. Anyway, such public policies stripped amateurism from the popularization side of sports. (In Japan, although the "first welfare year" in 1973 gave serious consideration to some welfare, before and after that year, the government's main policy gave priority to high growth by the promotion of public works at the expense of welfare. Welfare has been poor in Japan, which has prided itself on its GDP ranked second in the world to the United States, because of the inevitable result of such economic policy.)

③ The “sport for all” policy was also a product of the cooperation between capital and labor as neo-corporatism, and an important measure for the national government to integrate people, like in Britain during the Thatcher era. This accomplished the state’s integration of people through top-level sports. Simultaneously, sports policy is also a certain product of confrontation between welfare promotion and an integrating means generally similar to other social policies.

III. *Commodification and de-commodification of sport*

As mentioned above, the development of high economic growth and the welfare state in capitalistic societies buried the individualism in amateurism, the bourgeois “right and public sphere” as the privilege of capitalists and the confined commodification of sports. And then a rapid expansion on both sides of the excellence of sports and popularization, i.e. the diffusion of sports occurred and in connection with this, we had commodification (commercialization) on the one hand and the strengthening of public responsibility for sports on the other, on a level previously never experienced before. And ideologically, the widely permeated individualism in amateurism was converged in a part of professionalization, and the concept of “the right and the public sphere” of sports for all was generalized and raised in the greater portion of excellence, which was not professionalized, and in almost all areas of popularization. In this way, a new era of sports participation was welcomed. In other words, the commodification and the de-commodification of sports, and the relationship between them are shown in the following table.

	Commodification	De-commodification
Excellence	I Pro (labor conditions) Portrait rights Semi-professional Facility management Mass media Events	III Facilities Training facilities Assistance
Popularization	II Commercial facilities Instruments Classes Events information	IV Public facility Assistance Classes Events Information

(1) “I — Excellence and commodification”

This domain covers pro and semi-professional sport. Professional sports need to be supported by an admission fee, television broadcasting stipend, players’ portrait rights and so on. In Japan, professional sports consist of sports such as baseball, sumo wrestling, bicycle

racine and horse racing. The latter two are enjoyed as gambling sports, as well. In Europe, professional sports are mainly soccer, volleyball, rugby and in the United States, major league baseball, American football, basketball, ice hockey, tennis, skiing etc. In addition, a degree of professionalization at minor events exists in each country. Currently, the influence of television is huge for the people who watch TV and also for the athletes and governing bodies. Most people are familiar with those sports, because they come across well on television. Moreover, their participation in sports is also influenced by this. Recently, TV programs have become digitized and multi-channels are on offer, and this has begun to spread out the favored sports events. In connection to this, the jump in a star player's contract money and the broadcasting right fees are continuing to rise even today. Moreover, now, including the revision of sports rules along with the televising time, commodification of sports from the television side has become increasingly strong. The Olympic Games once called the high temple of amateurism also admits the participation of pros in order to maintain the highest level in the world, and the proliferation of programs of various athletic meetings sponsored by television money is just the tip of this globalization. The top athletes including the pro who aims at a high standard have often been forced to compete while injured or sick, and their lives after retirement do not have any security, which makes for a very unstable lifestyle. Moreover, with no respect paid to their conditioning, participation in matches is often forced for the convenience of companies or the mass media, so that their lives as athletes are shortened. So, improvement of the working conditions of athletes, life security after retirement, etc. have been big subjects. The "semi-professional" could also be put into this category. Company teams in Japan especially have not been symbols of the welfare program in companies, but rather a symbol of the consciousness integration of the employees in companies and ad pillars for the companies, which were promoted during the period of high economic growth and beyond. And it has been maintained at top levels in Japan. However, many such company sports teams have been driven into suspension and the clubs abolished through company restructuring that has been practiced since the 90s. And this has brought about the relative decline of Japan's international competitive ability in some sports events. Incidentally, although the J. League (professional football league) is aiming at independence for the pros, they have not yet attracted sufficient supporters and many clubs are now actually confronting severe problems. Many J. League clubs have received huge funding for local development from local governments; therefore, many clubs cannot be said to be completely independent as pros. In this sense, the J. League is also concerned with the domain of "III, "de-commodification," even though it is "an excellence." In the field of the pro and semi-professional of this "excellence and commodification," it cannot correspond to individualism as it once could. Like the previous statement, the necessity for a labor union for security of the working conditions of a pro and a semi-professional, and the cultivation and maintenance of top level conditions are not within the capability of an individual and make collective and systematic participation indispensable. Thus, it can be said that a new collective ideology has been formed.

(2) "II — popularization and commodification"

This domain is a popularization sport domain mainly promoted by the so-called private sector profit companies. Here, sites for sports facilities, sports classes and sports events etc. are offered for profit purposes by companies. Certain sports events are confined to this domain, for

example, golf, which requires expensive membership fees, and ten-pin bowling, which has a high turnover of customers. Moreover, private sector profit sport facilities decreased by 30,000 in the 90s under the influence of a prolonged depression following the collapse of the bubble economy, the rapid decline of people's consumption, emasculation of the domestic industries by multinational companies, increase in the unemployment rate and the rise in the consumption tax to 5%. Naturally, the sports classes planned by them also decreased in number. And the number of people participating in sports and the expenditure from household economies assigned to several areas of sport also decreased. The inconsistency of this domain with "IV" is also large. The diffusion of sports in this domain is sports as individual consumption. Although it is mainly a form of sports development and diffusion, it indicates not only the collective type of local sports clubs touched on in "IV," but also the individual consumption type.

(3) "III — excellence and de-commodification"

De-commodification is a technical term from Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare states. He classified welfare states into three groups in the 80s. The first one is the Northern European Type, namely the Social Democracy Type, and it is characterized by equal distribution from the state with a market mechanism seldom introduced into welfare. He called this the de-commodification of welfare. The second type, typified by the United States etc. is the Liberalism Type where welfare has been taken into the market mechanism to a great extent. Here, the expansion of the gap between the wealthy and the poor was pointed out after the 80s. (Britain, which is called the founder of the welfare state, is thought to be a form somewhere between the Social Democracy Type and Liberalism Type.) And the third is the Conservatism (neo-corporatism) Type, which basically places parishes in charge of welfare in states such as Germany and France. And the dependence on the family type in Italy and Spain in Southern Europe or in East Asia has also recently been pointed out as the fourth type, taking gender into consideration. (On this point, Japan may be considered to be somewhere between a Liberalism Type and a family dependence. Anyway, the complete development of a welfare state has not been accomplished in Japan as Esping-Andersen points out.)

Now, like the previous statement, de-commodification does not mean an offer of welfare by the direct market mechanism, but public employment is expanded, service goods are considerably offered through a market in the process, consumption is stimulated and the economy activated. This is because the services are offered in a capitalistic society. Therefore, public responsibility and de-commodification is not completely unrelated to commodification at all. Now, the public sphere and public responsibility in an excellence of sports is concerned with "excellence and de-commodification." Although national assistance in capitalistic countries has been expanded in recent years, the reason for this is stated here. States and local governments (public) offer sports facilities and training facilities, and provide assistance to athletes and coaches, etc. Moreover, they present commendations and provide monetary compensation, etc. to top athletes that obtain excellent results in international competitions. Many athletes in sport events, which are not professionalized, are positioned in this category. Analysis and comparison of the public support organizations of each country, which are behind their competitive abilities throughout the world, are also important. If there is no public support, a certain level of excellence is not maintained.

(4) “IV — popularization and de-commodification”

This is the domain of “sport for all.” Here, the public facilities, sports classes, sports events and sports information given to local residents are offered free of charge (or at the minimum amount). Sports are enjoyed by local clubs, independently and autonomously and collectively, which mean a central diffusion form of sport given to the people. Therefore, the facilities, sports classes and the reality of assistance, which secure the activity of the local sport clubs, require examination. The “sport for all” of Western European countries took the lead in the construction of sports facilities after the 60s. As mentioned previously, in these countries, there was a greater injection of social capital into the national welfare domain than into public works and that fiscal structure promoted high the economic growth and the welfare state. Japan, since the 60s, has invested social capital as “public works 2.5 vs. social security 1,” therefore, Japanese welfare is poor and Japan as a highly developed industrial country has been labeled an immature welfare state until now. In this way, the gap between sports facilities and other welfare areas in Japan became decisive. Although the abundant sport facilities of Western European countries are the products of high economic growth policy that has been promoted since the 60s and the welfare state policy, there were not necessarily abundant sports facilities before then.

IV. *Confrontation of commodification and public sphere of sports under neo-liberalism*

Under amateurism, the privilege of sports participation was monopolized by the capitalists, and there was no great commodification of sports either including watching games, mass media, sports goods and sports classes, etc. However, the high economic growth since the 60s and the growth of the welfare state on the basis of this brought about the proliferation of sports on both sides of excellence and popularization. This also extended the commodification of sports greatly on both sides of excellence and popularization, and at the same time, it brought about the “market defect.” Conversely, it also generalized de-commodification in excellence and popularization and created the idea of equal participation for all nationals in sports. And this created a new inconsistency caused by the commodification and de-commodification of sports in capitalism. Until the beginning of the 80s, equalization of sports participation had not expanded to the degree that the Sports Council had planned and to that expected in Britain’s welfare state. There have been some arguments as to whether the cause was due to the limit of capitalism itself or to the methods within welfare state policy. The Sports Council started to make special policies to enable sports participation for the socially weak, especially for the unemployed, women with small children, the aged, racial minorities, the disabled, etc. However, neo-liberalism swept across the advanced capitalistic countries after the 80s. Fundamental ideas of neo-liberalism are based on “liberalization, marketization, competition, efficiency and unequalization,” and function as a theory for multinational corporations. Although some corrections went into this type of marketing in the advanced capitalistic countries in the 90s, in Japan neo-liberalism has yet to be applied to all domains, such as politics, economy, administration, education and welfare, etc. of the state and municipalities under the present Cabinet structural reform policy. All administrative regulations and protective public policies, which are inefficient for the promotion of multinational

corporations etc. are deregulated and marketed. By this, old welfare areas were forcibly marketed, commercialized and commodified under the name of "fiscal structural reform." Therefore, also in Japan, the income differential after the 90s expanded similarly to that of the United States and Britain. Curtailment of sports administration on the one hand, and commodification (marketing, privatization), which have been advanced by the state and the local governments so far on the other, have been promoted. In a previous table, the commodification, marketization in the "IV — popularization and de-commodification" domain, namely forcing policies in the direction of "II" have been accelerated. However, in Japan's case, sports which are used to marketing are those such as golf and ten-pin bowling, whereas most others have some problems keeping public support from the many local governments and therefore, maintaining the public sphere of sports. Incidentally, is it possible to raise Japan's sports policy up to the level of welfare states in Western Europe? It is possible because Japan already has sufficient GDP for this purpose. It is necessary to invert or at least, equalize the "public works 2.5 vs. social security 1," which has been maintained since the high economic growth period. It is just honest fiscal structural reform. If it is not conducted, it cannot but depend on "public money" from gambling such as the soccer lottery, etc. Or the suppression of sports participation of the people who have already participated may be promoted much more. Anyway, further explanation of each development and the increased confrontation between the excessive commodification (marketing) and de-commodification (public sphere) of sports under neo-liberalism after the 80s, will be described in a future article.

HITOTSUBASHI UNIVERSITY

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