“The Chinese nation’s status in the world, its international ranking, is not even third class. This is our Chinese nation’s greatest shame. And the reason is that our national physique is weak, causing people of other nations not to take us seriously” (p. 100). The above excerpt was part of the speech given by Chiang Kai-shek, chairman of the National Government of China, at the opening ceremony of the Fourth National Games in 1930. Chiang’s words apparently summed up China’s place in the world affairs of the time. For a century, from the defeat in the First Opium War to the end of the Nationalist rule of the mainland, China remained a subject of international humiliation by the Western powers and later its eastern neighbor Japan. With the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Chinese modernists began to search seriously for a solution that would re-establish the dignity and respect of the Middle Kingdom amongst nations of the modern world.

In *Marrow of the Nation*, Andrew D. Morris presents a comprehensive history of sport and physical culture in China during the Republican era (1912-1949), an accomplish-
ment never before seen in English-language scholarship. The book is an extensive undertaking based on the author’s 700-plus-page doctoral dissertation at the University of California, San Diego, entitled “Cultivating the National Body: A History of Physical Culture in Republican China” (1998). It covers several key issues associated with China’s nation-building effort through physical culture; they are social, racial, sexual, and political. The introduction provides an adequate framework and background information, especially for readers not well versed in contemporary Chinese history and scholarship on the subject. It also offers a crucial interpretation of the Chinese terminology “tiyu” (literally “body cultivation”) within its cultural and historical context. “Tiyu was about more than just sports, physical education, fitness, or any combination of these,” Morris writes. “Its yu (educational/cultivating aspect) was an important element that would transform modern physical culture . . . into a set of lived and played moral teachings designed to shape a new self-conscious, self-disciplining citizen” (p. 16). Never before have I seen the term so accurately translated into English. It reflects Morris’ superb command of the Chinese language as well as his solid grasp of the history and culture of China.

The rest of the book is divided into seven thematic and chronological chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the evolution of a liberal democratic tiyu in the 1910s and the 1920s. In their pursuit of a modern citizenry, Chinese modernists whole-heartedly adopted the Anglo-American “sports” along with the notion of teamwork, sportsmanship, the competitive instinct. Chapter 4 examines the transition in the Chinese tiyu movement from the liberal democratic thought of the late 1910s to the aggressive nationalistic ideology under the Nanjing regime beginning in 1928. Chapters 5 and 6 explain the dual and contradictory efforts within the new tiyu movement during the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937): one was to create a “tiyu for the masses” focused on nation-building and national defense, the other to foster elite competitive sport aimed at winning recognition and glory on the international stage. Chapter 7 is a case study of the role and reconstruction of traditional Chinese martial arts (wushu) in China’s pursuit of a new physical culture, disciplined citizenry, national unity, and modernity. The final chapter notes briefly the development of Chinese tiyu during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) years. It suggests that many of the Nationalists’ efforts and accomplishments in promoting a mass tiyu made possible the organizational and philosophical directions of the “red” physical culture under the Chinese Communist Party in the post-1949 era.

Several strengths of the book deserve mentioning. First is the quality of Morris’ research. The near-forty-page selected bibliography of mainly primary popular and scholarly sources from the Republican era, many of which Morris acquired personally through his research trips to mainland China and Taiwan, shows both the depth and breadth of his investigation of the subject. Most of the materials had never before been translated into English or used in any English-language scholarship. In addition, Morris’ interviews with several prominent Chinese athletes of the 1930s add more credibility as well as a fascinating dimension to his narrative. None of the above seems to be possible without Morris’ solid command of the Chinese language. His translation is not only accurate in content but superb in context, a clear indication of his mastery of, at least, twentieth-century Chinese history and his grasp of the nuances of the culture in general. Consequently,
Morris was able to examine many issues with authority and confidence and produce new and convincing interpretations.

The chapter on the reconstruction of traditional Chinese martial arts by itself is a masterpiece of historiography. It not only captures the pivotal role of *wushu* in the making of the new Chinese physical culture but demonstrates unequivocally *wushu*’s broad acceptance and rising popularity among overseas Chinese communities in the process of searching for a modern China. Another strength of the book is Morris’ examination of women’s role in the new *tiyu* movement, an important topic little known until the publication of Fan Hong’s 1997 monograph *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom*. While acknowledging Fan Hong’s contribution to the much needed scholarship, Morris argues against her thesis of sport’s role in “the liberation of women’s bodies in modern China” (pp. 5, 88-89, 92-93, 112-113, 126). Morris’ argument is compelling on two grounds: one is his new research findings based on primary sources; and the other his rigorous and systematic contextualization of his content (a new phrase for the old term of sound historiography).

*Marrow of the Nation* has two obvious flaws. In critiquing women’s physical fitness as a discourse of the Chinese *tiyu* movement, Morris cited a 1924 Chinese publication in which the author “discussed a ‘beauty ratio’ formulated by the American women’s health expert/entrepreneur Annette Kellerman” and an “Ideal Ratio of Femininity” credited to a “Hastings” (p. 92). This reviewer does not recognize an American health expert/entrepreneur named Annette Kellerman, although it sounded suspiciously like the famed Australian “mermaid” swimmer (1887-1975), who by the 1920s had well established herself as a Hollywood movie star. No further information could be found in the book on either Kellerman or Hastings. In discussing “nationalism and power,” Morris leaves the reader the impression that the modern Olympic games was created by its founder Pierre de Coubertin as a venue for “real competition between nations” (p. 96) and for displaying “national accomplishment [and] strength” (p. 167). The Olympics certainly have been used for such purposes by many, but this reality of the games was anything but Coubertin’s original intention.

These minor flaws aside, *Marrow of the Nation* is an invaluable contribution to the fledgling historiography of sport and physical culture of China. The book is well organized and should be a delightful read for scholars interested in Chinese history, sport history of China, and the relationship between sport and national identity. It is a must-read for anyone wanting to understand the psyche behind China’s unyielding desire to host the Olympic games.

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