



Introduction²

- **Slide 1 Title of Talk**

1. It is an honour to be joining you here today. With online audiences you never know exactly who you are talking too so if I simply say fellow colleagues, fellow university staff, students past and present, friends, - it is a scary honour to be sitting here before you.
2. I know I would not be here but for the kind invitation from Professor Fan Hong and Professor Fang Quichua and the organisations that they represent and have partnered with - to make this International Conference possible.
3. Thank you to *The Asian Journal of Sport History & Culture* (AJSH&C) Fujian Normal University and the Asia-Pacific Association of Sport Studies (APASS).
4. What I hope to offer you in the 20 minutes is two things:
 - (i) I want to say something about the exercise of sport in the pursuit of soft power and cultural relations. If you like a proposition to argue with or against and

- **Slide 2 Eric Liddell sitting on Chair being carried around old college quad**

- (ii) An invitation to work together on a project of mutual understanding that emanates from an interest – in the Chinese born athlete Eric Liddell who represented Scotland at athletics and rugby and Great Britain in the 1924 Paris Olympics.
5. I should add that while it is an honour to be Chair of Sport at the University of Edinburgh , more famous sports people than me have sat on Chairs at Edinburgh and Eric Liddell is one of them

Sport, Universities and Cultural Relations.

- **Slide 3 Sport, Universities and Cultural Relations**

6. The proposition I want to argue for is that sport and our universities and sport through our universities are great toolboxes, potential pillars of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue, and co-operation.
7. Sport and our universities, sport in our universities and those working with sport in our universities should not be underestimated as enablers of better cultural relations.
8. Sport after all has been given a world mandate through the United Nations to deliver against the sustainable development goals. In other words, sport has a mandate to deliver non sport things – something that some countries do better than others.

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² Talk to be delivered at 8.20am UK time on the 3rd December 2021.

9. Much has been said about in the role of sport in the exercise of soft power³.
10. On any given day sport matters to millions of people around the world, is used politically and serves political functions. Numerous accounts of sport, soft power and diplomacy have provided historical and contemporary voices about the role of sport in the exercise of soft power.
11. Universities are also cited as one of the most vibrant vehicles for the fostering of dialogue and co-operation between the nations of the world – whether this be in bi-lateral or multi-lateral terms.
12. Universities come in many shapes and sizes. University missions and visions vary widely. Many universities have existed for a long time. I believe Fujian Normal University was founded in 1907, Edinburgh slightly earlier in 1538. Universities are generally enduring sustainable organisations. In the words of one Provost “through the centuries they have focused upon the basic fact of human existence”. Universities like sport have scale and reach but they are good to build things around because many have stood the test of time.
13. International reports⁴ outlining the role of cultural relations in the 21st Century generally highlight education and in particular universities, but not just universities, as one of the most effective vehicles for building bridges between countries⁵.
14. While both sport and universities are influenced by governments and what governments do, they are also important vehicles or tools that can help to promote understanding, share knowledge, and encourage co-operation⁶.
15. This is not new nor is the use of sport as a vehicle for forging international relations. A space that can be used to communicate, hold conversations, not always good. It is more than fifty years since the British Politician Goodhart penned with Chataway their account of international sport in a *War without Weapons*⁷. It is more than ten years since Cha, the former Director of Asian Affairs for the White House penned *Beyond the Final Score* and an account of the politics of sport in Asia⁸. It is more than five years since the UK House of Lords Report, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*⁹, recognised the role of sport and the attraction hosting sporting events as useful influential

³ Grix, J. (2016). *Sport politics: An introduction*. Palgrave MacMillan; Kramareva, K., & Grix, J. (2018). War and Peace at the 1980 Moscow and 2014 Sochi Olympics: The Role of hard and soft power in *The of the History of Sport*. 35 (14),1407-1427. Murray and Price (2020). Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy. British Council Wales.

⁴ One of the most recent and comprehensive studies of cultural relations for the 21st century that included state and non-state organisations across 12 countries including China, South Korea, Japan, India, Russia, Germany, France and the UK to name a few.

⁵ Nearly every country in MacDonald’s (2021) study of cultural relations in the 21st century operated a range of public policy driven initiatives that seek to influence and or attract populations in other countries. The main activities invariably being language teaching and examinations; higher education, cultural exchanges and promotion and national promotion often organised through Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA’s) foreign, embassies and other departments usually education, culture and/or trade. The target audiences are usually the elite influencers or the future i.e., the young or the youth of a country or a nations diaspora or expatriate communities. The most active countries were seen to be China, USA, France, Germany and UK.

⁶ It might be argued that what we are doing at this conference is not just about the history of sport in Asian Cultures but about promoting understanding, sharing knowledge, and encouraging co-operation through sport in a way that is facilitated by universities and their partners.

⁷ Chataway, C. & Goodhart, P. (1968). *War without weapons*. UK Allen.

⁸ Cha, V. (2009). *Beyond the score: The politics of sport in Asia*. Colombia University Press.

⁹ House of Lords. (2014). *Persuasion and power in the modern. UK: Parliamentary publishing*.

tools that the UK could use more to support not simply national soft power outcomes but cultural relations building¹⁰.

16. Historical and contemporary studies have helped to substantiate and in most cases raise awareness of the fact that sport matters because it can (i) create influence and support forces of attraction; (ii) develop feel-good factors- albeit only temporarily; (iii) provide access to high net value networks; (iv) have an appeal that can cross linguistic and cultural barriers; (v) foster opportunities for conversations between countries and stakeholders ; and (vi) demonstrate normatively and substantively that it can intentionally deliver outcomes that are important to countries, embassies, foreign ministries and a range of national and international stakeholders and coalitions.
17. While much has been said about the role of sport and the role of universities as soft power tools, the pursuit of soft power and the pursuit of cultural relations are different things and should not be confused.
18. Soft power is usually described as the pursuit of influence through attraction. Cultural Relations is the creation of the conditions for sustainable collaboration between countries for mutual benefit¹¹.
19. These are different things and require different strategies, arrangements and skills. If you have opportunities to use the sporting tool box and a raft of sporting events, sporting ambassadors, sports organisations, sports knowledge to exchange, a growing interest in sports diplomacy then why should nations, organisations, governments not use any means at their disposal to strive to make the world a less tense, more connected and better place and why should we in sport and universities not help them.
20. While much has been said about the exercise of sport and universities in terms of soft power less has been said about the role of both in developing cultural relations.
21. The proposition is that sport and our universities and sport through our universities are great toolboxes, potential pillars of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue, and co-operation.
22. The use of sport to make a difference, carry a message, deliver statements on a scale that few other areas of public life can. Universities as key agents of cultural relations in the 21st Century¹². Those working with sport in universities should be part of the effort in advancing the common good and contribute to the fostering cultural relations in the 21st Century¹³.

The Spirit of Eric Liddell Past and Present

- **Slide 4 Eric Liddell Past and Present**

23. So having put forward the argument or the proposition that sport and universities are important vehicles for cultural relations building let me turn to the spirit of Eric Liddell and an opportunity for us to intervene in the run up to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

¹⁰ The Australians have launched their second sports diplomacy strategy and positioned this as formal part of their Australia 2030 sport strategy. The Welsh have embedded sport in the Welsh Governments International Relations through public diplomacy and Soft Power 2020-2025 Action Plan. Some newer countries in Europe have appointed Ministerial advisors for sports diplomacy.

¹¹ Both are essential (and there is overlap between them): soft power shapes perceptions and preferences and cultural relations enables long-term partnerships at times supports reputational resilience but also seeks to establish common good.

¹² Foreign diplomats, ambassadors, civil servants, cultural agencies, communities, countries and individuals need to recognise that they have a wide variety of tools at their disposal, not just to win friends but maintain and foster relationships and understanding. Sport is one of these tools and we all need to be smarter about what tools to take out this box and where and when.

¹³ Such a message can be given will still recognising that sport itself has challenges. Sport detractors often call out the dark side of sport without doing anything. As Mandela reminded us it always seems impossible until it is done. Dark calls should not get in the way of building the common good and intentionally using sport to help.

24. The Chinese born Scottish athlete, Eric Liddell whose story is so well captured by Zhang Huijie in the celebrated *Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*, edited by one of our conference hosts¹⁴. An account that talks of Liddell making a significant contribution to promoting physical education. the Olympics in modern China and becoming a prestigious sporting icon with a legacy of facilitating sustained cultural communication between China and the UK.
25. A point that was amplified by the former Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Liu Xiaoming, when he visited Scotland in 2017¹⁵. In his opening address the ambassador talked of the spirit of Eric Liddell a Scottish athlete, interned in a concentration camp in Weifang in the 1940s where he continued to support children during harsh times and where he was referred to by some as “Uncle Eric”.
26. He went on to suggest that while Liddell’s life was short, what he did was to provide an ode to China-Scotland friendship, co-operation and exchange. The athletes name and story has lived on providing a bridge for potential cultural relations building, a sustainable space for countries to talk to one another.
27. Liddell’s journey has been captured not just by the academy including historians from the west and east, political scientists, sociologists but also least we forget the Hollywood Oscar winning film *Chariots of Fire*. In 2000 it was reported as being the twelfth ranked top-grossing sports movie of all time with a take of \$62 million US dollars. A film part fact, part fiction depicting vignettes of social class, gender, religion, Olympism, amateurism and professionalism and which revolved around the life story of two British track athletes at the 1924 Paris Olympics, Harold Abrahams (an English Jew) and Eric Liddell depicted as a Scottish evangelical Presbyterian.
28. Arguably, the most complete account of the life of Eric Liddell is to be found in Duncan Hamilton’s New York Times Bestseller *For the Glory*. For sure there are many interested stakeholders in the life of Eric Liddell and the narrative that sits alongside this life¹⁶.
29. It would be remiss of me to assume that everybody knows this story so let me ever so briefly touch upon some of the milestones while acknowledging that there are many on this call who could do this better than me.
30. Eric Liddell was born on the 16th of January 1902 in Tientsin (Tianjin) North China. The second son of James and Mary Liddell who were missionaries with the London Mission Society. Returning to Scotland at the age of five he then attended Eltham College, Blackheath – a school for the children of missionaries. Whilst at school his parents returned to China where his youngest brother Ernest was born in Peking in 1912.
31. In 1920 Eric joined his older brother Robert at Edinburgh University to read for a BSc in Pure Science and graduating *after* the Paris Olympics of 1924.
32. Having launched his athletics career as a student on the grass track of Craiglockhart, Edinburgh in 1921, making his international rugby debut for Scotland one year later Liddell went on to win a gold (440yds) and bronze (220 yds) medal in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Famously the athlete refused to run on a Sunday because of his religious beliefs that Sunday was for God only.
33. After the Olympics and his graduation, he returned to North China where he served as a teacher and then missionary first in returning to the Anglo-Teaching College in Tientsin (Tianjin) in 1925 and later in Siokana.
34. In the same year as he returned to Tientsin (Tianjin) he had won three Scottish Amateur Athletic Titles and agreed to sit for a portrait in oils by Eileen Soper.

¹⁴ Hong Fan and Zouxiang, Lu (eds) (2021) *Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*. London: Routledge.

¹⁵ See https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbj_665378/t1494672.shtml [retrieved 20 November 2021].

¹⁶ Hamilton.D. (2017). *For the Glory*. London. Transworld Publishers.

35. By the 1930's Liddell had said no to competing in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, became engaged to Florence Mackenzie and joined the London Missionary Society.
36. By the middle of the same decade the Olympian had become ordained into the Ministry, lost his father James Liddell who died in 1933, returned to China where he married Florence Mackenzie in Tianjin's Union Church in 1934.
37. Two of his daughter's Patricia and Heather were born in Tianjin. The Liddell's third daughter Maureen was born in Toronto in 1941. In 1941, life in China was dangerous and the British Government advised British nationals to leave. Florence and the children left for Canada in 1941 while Eric stayed in Tientsin (Tianjin) until 1943¹⁷.
38. From 1943 he was held with other foreign nationals in Weifang where he was sent to the Civilian Assembly Centre and died of a brain tumour in 1945. His mother Mary Liddell having passed away one year earlier in Edinburgh.
39. When the former Chinese ambassador to the United Kingdom was addressing the assembled audience in 2017 and talked of the spirit of Eric Liddell, he was doing so some 72 years after the death of the athlete. He drew upon the past when he talked of Liddell writing textbooks, continuing to teach children, organising sport and displaying a sense of humanity during harsh times in harsh places.
40. At the time, 2017, and looking to the future the ambassador talked of universities, sport, educational exchange and more as a means of enhancing not so much Chinese foreign policy but a plea for mutual cultural relations.
41. At the Paris Olympic Games in 2024 it will be 100 years since Eric Liddell, refused to run on Sunday and won gold and bronze medals at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. It provides an opportunity for countries to work together for an enlarged common good.
42. The French themselves have launched an impressive *End Commun* sports intervention, funded through a collaboration of thirteen public banks, designed to enable closer working relationships through sport between France and Africa. In simple terms Sport End Commun will fund, support, connect, advocate for and promote both French soft power and cultural relations building through sport.
43. It seems to many in the UK, including the Eric Liddell Centre in Edinburgh and a number of partners, including the University of Edinburgh that the advent of the 2024 Olympics and the centenary of Eric Liddell's Olympic success provides an opportunity to enable and build upon strong existing and new relationships through the spirit of Eric Liddell.
44. In other words, sport, universities and the spirit of Eric Liddell's humanity can be effective tools for the forging of better cultural relations, building bridges and enabling an enlarged common good. Something that is much needed in third decade of the 21st Century and a project that cannot be fully understood without understanding Scottish and Asian Cultures.

So a few points to conclude with:

Slide 5 – Key Points and Thank You

45. I have tried to persuade you that that sport is a great toolbox, a pillar of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue and co-operation. A tool box that includes sport in Universities and those working with sport in universities.
46. Sport and our Universities might do some of their most effective work quietly working away below the radar over a longer period of time. We have moved well beyond the sports world simply talking to itself

¹⁷ For the later years of Eric Liddell's life, the context is one that is influenced by the consequences of the Sino-Japanese war, being held under house arrest with other missionaries in Tientsin

on the basis of sport for sports sake since sports reach and scale can help it be an effective enabler for many other outcomes.

47. Sport itself should fully grasp the opportunity to be part of building more effective international and cultural relations and be seen to be contributing further to an enlarged common good.
48. Matters of mutuality, trust, connectivity, long-term dialogue, and co-operation are important. Those working in sport and our universities are well served by the notion of sport enabling cultural relations and striving to forge an enlarged common good.
49. As Ambassador Liu Xiaoming observed “We are living in a time of mutual learning for common progress”.
50. An opportunity presents itself with the advent of the 2024 Olympic Games to do just that through remembering and activating the spirit of Eric Liddell the Scottish athlete born in China. We should grasp the opportunity.
51. Thank You.