
Title	Olympism in Singapore
Author(s)	Nicholas G. Aplin
Source	<i>1st ICHPER.SD World Congress, Yokohama, Japan, 18-22 August 1993</i>

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

1994

Nicholas G. Aplin

Conference presentation

Olympism in Singapore

1st ICHPER.SD Asia Congress. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. November 2-6th.

Abstract

The inauguration of the Singapore Olympic Academy in 1994 brought with it the challenge of promoting Olympism in this region of South East Asia. Olympism focuses on the intellectual, moral and physical development of the individual, and therefore generates close links between the respective learning environments of the classroom and the playing field. On a broader level, it looks beyond the school to spread its philosophy to the general public as a whole and to specialist groups engaged in sport.

This paper outlines the origins of Olympism, its objectives as a philosophy of life, and the issues and problems that are its main concerns. How do the values promoted by Olympism compare with the national values of Singapore? Special consideration is given to one of the inherent contradictions within Olympism, that being the conflict between competition and cooperation. And can the promotion of a distinctive philosophy fully support the systems of sport for all and sports excellence as they exist at present?

"Olympism in Singapore: A Value Orientation"

N.G.Aplin.

Lecturer, School of Physical Education, National Institute of Education,
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and,
Academic Fellow of the Singapore Olympic Academy.

Introduction

By all accounts 1993 was a landmark year for sport in Singapore. Three key events sparked a re-evaluation of the potential of competitive sport to influence the lives of Singaporeans. First, the hosting of the XVIIth South East Asian Games generated unprecedented interest in the exploits of local stars and visiting champions. In the swimming arena, Joscelin Yeo became a household name and Ang Peng Siong celebrated a triumphant swan-song. On the track, Lydia de Vega from the Philippines and Mardi Lestari from Indonesia reigned supreme. Second, the proclamation of a long-term sports excellence programme (SPEX 2000) provided the incentive for athletes looking towards the major Games of the new millennium. The first major recipient was to be Doctor Benjamin Tan, who won a yachting gold medal at the XIIth Asian Games in Hiroshima in October 1994. And third, the announcement of the inauguration of an Olympic Academy in Singapore, spelled out a broader role for sport within the community. Olympism as an all-embracing philosophy was about to take a foothold in a country that was concerned to maximize the potential of sport for nation building. This paper outlines the origins and aspirations of Olympism, and identifies the competing value orientations, which influence both the pursuit of sports excellence and the development of sport-for-all in Singapore.

Origins of Olympism:

Ancient Greece provided the genesis of Olympism, with the evolution of the Hellenic Games at Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia and Nemea. The integration of mind, body and spirit was the foundation of the Greek conception of life, that was enthusiastically adopted by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Games (Segrave, 1988). He combined this classical symbol with the nineteenth century English Public School conception of sport. De Coubertin had observed that the emphasis placed on character building through sport by Thomas Arnold at Rugby School had contributed to the vigor and confidence of the English upper classes.

De Coubertin's immediate educational aims were to rejuvenate the French nation after a long period of physical, social, and moral decline. However the natural consequences of his idea were to spread beyond his native environment, to become an all-enveloping expression of international sport. Sport was to become a broadly based humanitarian endeavour, dedicated to the pursuit of ethical conduct and international harmony (Segrave, 1988).

Olympism Today

In the mind of the 'man in the street' the Olympic Games are probably the only representative element of Olympism today. The mention of the Games evokes a multiplicity of reactions, both positive and negative. Achievement, excellence in sport, commercialism, drugs, and nationalism receive extensive coverage, but they are merely at the head of a lengthy list of attributes. However, there is more to Olympism than the Olympics. As a philosophy of life, Olympism propounds many issues that have relevance for the promotion of the means and ends of sport. The International Olympic Committee's definition of Olympism retains the optimism and altruism of de Coubertin's early aspirations:

Olympism is an overall philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will, and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism sets out to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational values of good example and a respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of mankind, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

Fundamental Principles, Olympic Charter, 1994.

Contemporary beliefs about the role of Olympism focus on the notion of specific goals or aspirations (Segrave, 1988). These goals, which are purportedly universal, are usually stated from a Euro-centric perspective. As such they may provoke a variety of responses from a predominantly Asian assembly. Reporting

on behalf of the Chinese, foreexample, Yuen (1993) asserted that much of the traditional Chinese sport philosophy and values coincide with the Olympic ideology and that the Olympic Spirit harmonizes with Chinese civilization and culture:

The Olympic Motto (Citius, Altius, Fortius) is identical to the traditional Chinese philosophy with the processes of diligence, application, and moral incentive, and the efforts of the classic virtues of wisdom, kindness and courage.

IOA, Proceedings of the 33rd Session, 1993, p.114

1. Educational goals

De Coubertin advocated sport as the most feasible means for promoting appropriate moral values. However, the experience of 'amateur' competition was seen to have a beneficial educational impact in terms of physical, mental, and social qualities as well. The expectation was, that the athlete must abide by the ethical values such as honesty and sportsmanship. Today, the argument advanced by de Coubertin, that sport provides the opportunity for personal growth and self-understanding above all else, might well be at variance with the family and group-oriented traditional values that prevail in much of Asia.

The goal of education is also manifest in the Olympic Creed, a famous dictum, which has been attributed to De Coubertin

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.

2. Goals of peace and international understanding.

For de Coubertin, the Olympic Games were an opportunity for young people, officials and spectators to meet and understand their contemporaries from other countries. And physical competition was a means of engendering patriotism rather than nationalism, which had a negative connotation. Internationalism was the term used to encompass these ideas of patriotism, peace and international understanding. The Olympic Games today remain an

opportunity to recognize and respect the national diversity of the participants, to cultivate generosity and tolerance.

3. Goal of equal opportunity.

In order to popularize sport and to provide opportunities for everyone to participate, de Coubertin encouraged mass participation. The Olympic Games were established "*to exalt the individual athlete, whose very existence is necessary for the involvement of the community in athletic sports, and whose achievements provide an example to be emulated*".

4. Goals of fair play and equal competition.

One of the most oft quoted aims of Olympism is to aspire to fair play. The Olympic Oath underlines the primacy of the aim for those participating:

In the name of all competitors I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and our teams.

Olympic Charter, 1985, p.62

It is the abuse of the ethics of fair play that generates the most negative publicity in contemporary sport, for example the use of performance enhancing drugs. In Singapore and Malaysia, the recent occurrences of match fixing in the FAM league have figured regularly amongst the different media in this region.

5. Goal of cultural expression.

For de Coubertin, the Olympics were a vehicle for the successful integration of moral, artistic, intellectual and physical creativity. This goal is achieved in a number of ways. The performance of aesthetic events, such as gymnastics and ice dancing, is one means. Hosting a major sporting event has also become an important means of intercultural communication. 'Exhibitions and demonstrations of art' are fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter (1985). The 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul provided a notable opportunity for an Asian country to display its cultural codes and heritage. Kang (1993) described how the theme of 'Harmony and Progress' was accomplished through the performances and symbolism of the Opening and Closing ceremonies.

6. Goal of independence of sport from politics.

De Coubertin and later Avery Brundage advocated the separation of sport and politics, but it is clearly arguable that mixing two such institutions has been largely unavoidable. The principle of 'reverse deputation' of IOC members has provided the Olympic Movement with a means of "safeguarding liberty and serving democracy" (de Coubertin, quoted by Henry, 1948). IOC members are considered ambassadors of the ideals of Olympism to their home nations, rather than delegates of their respective countries to the IOC (Segrave, 1988).

7. Goal of excellence

For a person active in competitive sport, the pursuit or even the observation of excellence, is the most accessible element of Olympism. At a regional level the SEA Games and the Asian Games provide the major challenges for devotees of "Citius, Altius, Fortius". In view of the broader scope of the philosophy of Olympism, it is clear that excellence is associated with all elements of the Games festivities. Lenk (1984) proposed that the aesthetic and the humanitarian dimensions should be emphasized no less than the accent on "Faster, Higher, Stronger". He suggested the inclusion of "Pulcrius, Humanitas", to enhance the notion of progress, and social and cultural unity.

Values associated with Olympism

Some of the main issues and problems relating to Olympism focus on the values that are expressed within the philosophy itself. Lucas (1976) identified a number of contradictions that de Coubertin was unable to resolve, if indeed he was aware of them. The proposed political purity of sport, and the pejorative connotation of patriotism are two that have been debated widely. The third, which concerns the opposition of 'sport for all' and 'the patronage of elite achievers', is particularly relevant to the present situation in Singapore.

This third topic will be examined from the perspective of the values that are being expressed in the organisation and practice of sport. The definition of values used here follows that of Kluckhohn (1951), Rokeach (1973), and Schwartz (1992), which emphasises the view of values as criteria for judgement and action, rather than as qualities inherent in objects:

Values are defined as desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in sport.

Having identified that conflicting interests may exist in the values systems relating to Olympism, eg. sport for all (welfare of all individuals and groups) versus sports excellence (welfare of elite athletes), the next step is to place those values within a framework that has been validated empirically. Following Schwartz' research (1992, 1994) it is possible to relate de Coubertin's ideals to a universal constellation of values. The dimensions illustrated in Figure 1 reflect that the structure of value systems is based on conflicting motivational interests, in this case at the individual-level of analysis.

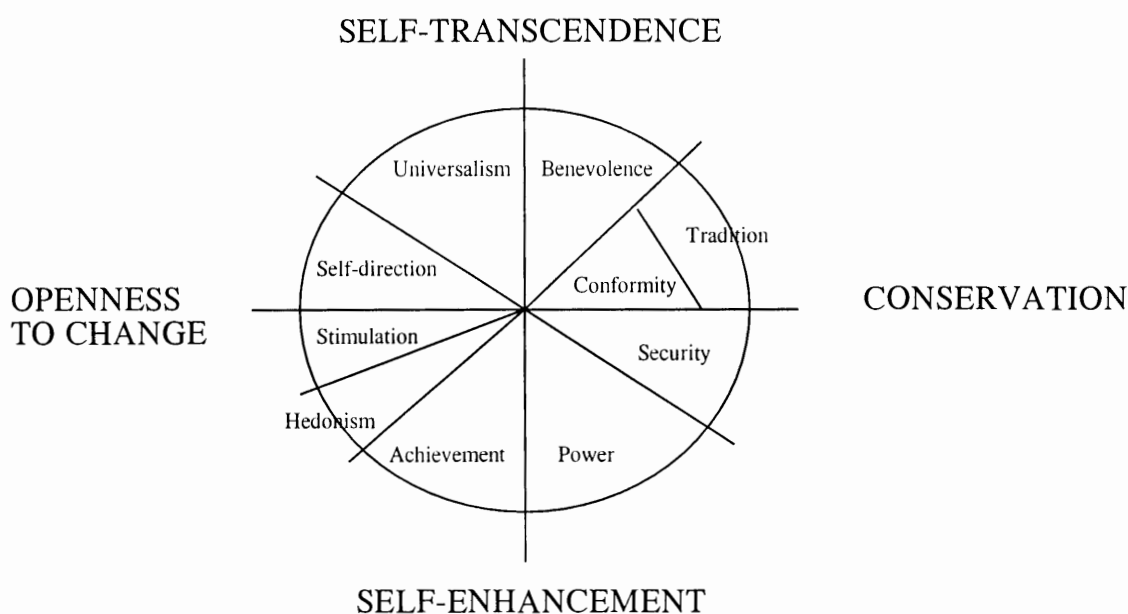


Figure 1: Schwartz' Model of Individual Level Motivational Types of Values

At the individual level, the pursuit of *achievement* by a sportsman in the Olympic Games (SELF-ENHANCEMENT) may conflict with the pursuit of *benevolence*. Theoretically, the struggle to add an Olympic medal to his recent Asian Games success, would obstruct Dr Ben Tan's vocational aims to enhance the welfare potential medical patients (SELF-TRANSCENDENCE).

To understand this type of conflict fully in the Singapore context, another factor must be considered: the role of sport at acultural level. The contribution of athletic achievement to the process of nation building is very significant (Advisory Council on Sport and Recreation, 1989). So the pursuit of individual achievement is simultaneously perceived as an enhancement of the country's developing status. This supports the notion that values in sport are operating at a

cultural level as well as an individual level. Figure 2 illustrates the equivalent value types that Schwartz (1992) identified for cultural level analysis.

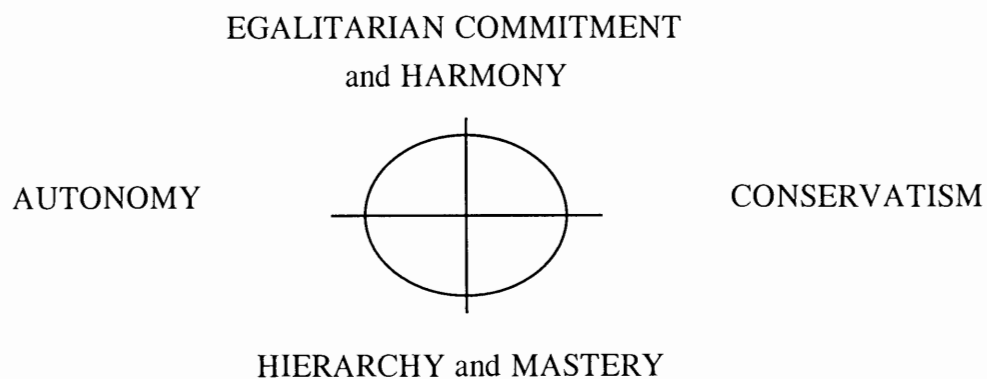


Figure 2: Schwartz' Model of Cultural-Level Motivational Types of Values

De Coubertin's aspirations for Olympism can be superimposed over Schwartz' dimensions (Figure 3) to give an impression of the equivalence of the

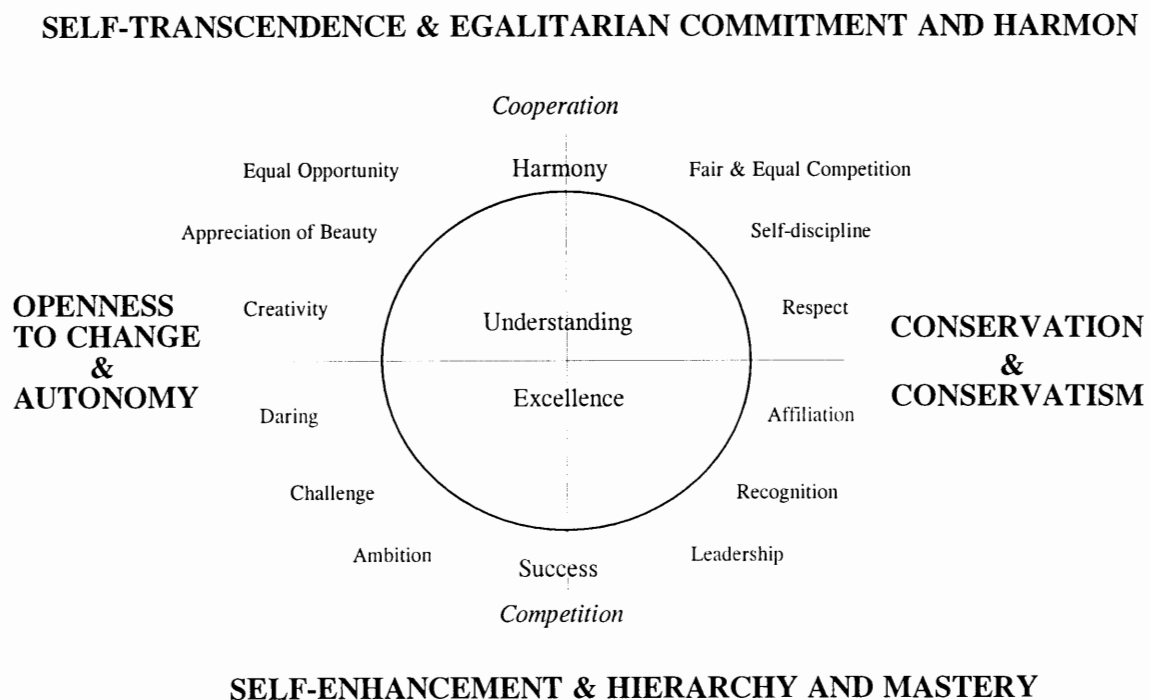


Figure 3: De Coubertin's 'aspirations' expressed in relation to Schwartz' model

respective value types. Potential opposition may also be inferred from the diagram. For example, in an extreme form, individual pursuit of success becomes incompatible with the desire for peace and harmony.

The diagram represents two competing world views of Olympism and the Olympics. On one side the acknowledgement of excellence, which may be achieved at the expense of others, and on the other side the acknowledgement of harmony and understanding in sport, which may be achieved at the expense of testing man's potential. Segrave (1988) concluded that:

...at its best, Olympism presents a noble and honourable vision of sport dedicated to ideals of universal worth. As in ancient times, Olympism is the manifestation of a fundamental dialectic between body and soul, existence and essence, individual and group, and competition and cooperation.

Adapting Olympism to the Singapore Environment

The setting for sport in Singapore has been influenced considerably by colonial influences. Its sporting heritage evolved through the diffusion of games and pastimes from Britain during the nineteenth century. The system which produced those sports was also one of sources of inspiration to de Coubertin. Also the value systems that have evolved since independence in 1965 have established the orientation towards achievement that exists today. The current economic status of this meritocratic country has been attributed to the contribution of Confucianist values by Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew. Such values are seen to be compatible with Olympism also (Yuen, 1993).

The ideology is parallel to the Chinese process of the cultivation of personal character, the regulating of the family, the ordering of the state and finally the vindication of virtue throughout the world.....

Singapore is a nation of only 2.8 million people, and it is the third most densely populated country in the world after Macao and Hong Kong. In the 20 year period since the current structure and organization of sport was established with the setting up of the Singapore Sports Council in 1973, the philosophy of

lifelong participation and sport for all has been promoted. With the main national priorities focusing on housing, defence, employment, and political stability, sport has also been harnessed to the process of nation building. Fitness campaigns, and the 'Healthy Lifestyle' through mass participation have led the way, with the successes of top sportsmen providing 'role-model' inspiration to individuals and a source of national pride to the various ethnic groups.

The Shared Values (Singapore Government, 1991) have reinforced the principles used to guide the pursuit of sporting objectives. They reflect strong communitarian ideals but nevertheless accommodate the needs of the individual:

- Nation above community, and society above self;
- Family as the basic unit of society;
- Regard and community support for the individual;
- Consensus instead of contention;
- Racial and religious harmony.

Sport for all was seen to be the appropriate philosophy to match these types of values, with Olympism recently contributing to the devolution of moral and social aspirations identified earlier. However, as there has been a shift towards the more individualistic elements of elite sport through the initiation of the Sports Excellence 2000 programme (SPEX 2000), Olympism has also been harnessed to assist with satisfying the perceived needs for international sporting success. De Coubertin's unresolved dilemma!

The Singapore Olympic Academy

The participants of the inaugural session of the Academy, held in September 1994, were students of the School of Physical Education. The employment of these trainee teachers will represent the first steps towards transmitting the goals of Olympism through the educational process in Singapore schools. Each graduating cohort of Physical Education students will experience the philosophy of Olympism during a residential course where the national and international issues are debated: the ideals promulgated by de Coubertin providing the focal point of discussion. The ultimate aims of such an Academy are to reach all members of society, not just school children but professional people, academics, athletes, administrators, and various community groups.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to illustrate some of the issues relating to the values expressed in Olympism by referring to the situation in Singapore. The similarities and the conflicting ideals that arise in a meritocratic society have

been identified with the aid of Schwartz' (1992, 1994) empirical analysis. The fundamental issue appears to be the need for a state of equilibrium, whereby opposing elements of achievement and harmony can be accommodated, with neither being compromised. The educational aims of Olympism are very appealing and they match ideologies that are officially sanctioned, ie. sport-for-all is compatible with the National Values. But just as Singapore's national success in creating a mature economy is based on sustained competitiveness within a changing environment, so there is a need to ease the balance in sport towards a system that promotes both entrepreneurial and practical skills within the sportsman. So Olympism must support the goal of excellence and the openness to change that accompanies it. Many conceptual issues arise and a particularly interesting and important one for Singapore to address, is whether a sport-for-all policy and a sports excellence programme can co-exist and each be accommodated successfully within a small country.

Bibliography

Henry, B. (1948)

An Approved History of the Olympic Games. New York: G.P. Puttnam's Sons

Kang, S.P. (1993)

Intercultural Message of the Seoul Olympic Games.

Proceedings of the 33rd Session for Young Participants, the International Olympic Academy, p.146-164.

Kluckhohn, C. (1951)

Values and value orientations in the theory of action: An exploration in definition and classification. In T. Parsons and E. Shils (Eds.) *Toward a General Theory of Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lenk, H. (1984)

The Essence of Olympic Man. *International Journal of Physical Education*, 21, 9-14.

Lucas, J. (1976)

The Influence of Anglo-American Sport on Pierre de Coubertin - Modern Games Founder. In P.Graham and H.Ueberhorst (Eds.), *The Modern Olympics*. Cornwall, NY: Leisure Press

Olympic Charter (1994)

International Olympic Committee. Lausanne: IOC

Rokeach, M. (1973)

The Nature of Human Values. New York: Free Press

Schwartz, S. (1992)

Universals in the content and structure of values: theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. Zanna, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol 25, p.1.

Schwartz, S. (1994)

Beyond Individualism and Collectivism. In U. Kim, H.C. Triandis, C. Kagitçibasi, S-C. Choi, and G. Yoon (Eds.), *Individualism and Collectivism: Theory, Methods and Applications*. London: Sage.

Segrave, J.O. (1988)

The Olympic Games in Transition
Champaign, IL. : Human Kinetics.

Singapore Government (1991)

Shared Values. A Government White Paper

Yuen, Y.K (1993)

A Comparative Study of Traditional Asian Sport Philosophy and the Olympic Ideology.
Proceedings of the 33rd Session of the International Olympic Academy, p.111-115

ERA Conference 1994