



China and the Olympic Movement

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1. Introduction

Perhaps there is no other term related to sport than “Olympic” having greater popularity in China. Currently, there seems no other cultural terms more known to all walks of Chinese: the Olympic Games are watched by the largest group of viewers here, Olympic champions are treated as national heroes and heroines, entertained with luxurious banquets upon their return home, hosted by state council and attended by state top leaders; IOC members are welcomed like Kings and Queens, especially its president. A great amount of TV hours, pages and pages of newspapers, magazines are dedicated to issues related to the Olympics; each Olympic Day on June 23 there have been large crowds of runners, wearing the T-shirts with the Olympic rings; a mass bicycle tournament participated in by a million cyclists is annually organised under the name of the IOC president, who sponsored the event. The Olympic Games have been watched by millions of viewers, Olympic champions, not only those home stars, but also those talents in the rest of the world are frequently talked over dinner tables in many Chinese Families.

It is not an exaggeration that the term “Olympic” has penetrated every area of society and is known to all walks of people.

It seems strange that a typical oriental country with a deep Confucian cultural heritage demonstrates more enthusiastic affection towards a sport cultural phenomenon originated in a western social context than its western counterparts who seem more closely linked with the Olympic terms historically.

Observing how a typical western original sport cultural form like the Olympics took its roots in China is an interesting issue. This paper attempts to provide an in-depth insight into the process in both historical and social perspectives.

2. Historical background of Olympic diffusion in China

One would, perhaps, never understand the Chinese attitude towards the Olympics without tracing back the sad history since the middle of the 19th century.

2.1. Social dimension

Prior to the Opium War (1840-1842), the social pattern in China was mainly a feudal one, ruled by the Qin royal court, the last feudal dynasty followed its precedents whose origin could be traced as early as the third century B.C.

The feudal society was highly centralised in political terms with all powers concentrated in one person, the Emperor. In contrast to the centralisation in the political sphere, the country's economy tended to be decentralised, with hundred of thousands of small farmer's families, in a self-sustainable life pattern, so called "husband tilling while wife weaving".

The Opium War interrupted the static social process of the feudal dynasty. A series of unprecedented events followed the war, such as unequal treaties: in 1842 the Sino-British Treaty of Nanjing, in 1844 the sino-American Treaty of Wangxia and the Sino-French Treaty of Huangpu. Sino-French War 1884-1885, Sino-Japanese War 1894-95, Treaty of Shimonoseki.

Relying on powerful gunboats and privileges entrusted by unequal treaties, the Western powers gradually established their dominance over China and turned the independent country into a sovereignty-deficient and foreign-checked international semi-colony status.

Therefore, the most urgent task for China since that time was national salvation, which is to free the country from the danger of partition by foreign powers and to save it from treacherous and exploitative government. A strong national patriotism was invoked by the cruel invasion, disappointment in the conservative and corrupted Qing court, fear of collapse of the once mighty nation. Patriotism has become the basic tone during the dynamic process of the past one and half centuries.

2.2. Sport dimension

Before the Opium War, in accordance with the lifestyle of agrarian society, the dominant forms of sporting activities in China then were traditional ones, mainly Wushu (martial arts), Qigong (a popular form of regimen), and a variety of other folk-based physical exercises, which fitted perfectly in the agrarian social setting. These traditional physical activities focused more on enjoyment instead of competition, more on moral cultivation than physical development; more on consuming scarce leisure time left by year round labour work than material gain. The lack of competition in the traditional Chinese sports resulted in less standardisation in rules and a great diversity in their forms and playing patterns. The Chinese seemed very satisfied with their sport entertainment.

The War revealed China's military weakness and the first reaction was to update physical training in order to strengthen the military force. So when the Westernisation movement (1860-1890) initiated the process of modern physical exercises being introduced to China, the first western sport form adopted was the military gymnastics. These activities which were introduced to the new army and navy, instructed by foreigners, marking the first stage of modernisation for China's sport.

Westernisation also launched education reform, mainly setting up the Western-type schools and sending students abroad to study. These new schools had similar curricula to those in the West. Foreigners were hired as instructors for military and normal gymnastics, including fence, boxing, dumbbell, football, hurdle, walking race with weight load, long jump and high jump, stick climbing, swimming, skating, wooden horse, parallel bars and horizontal bar. Students were sent to England, France, Germany, United States and Japan to study. Since 1872 four groups were sent abroad to study. The experiences of physical education and sport they obtained in their studies enabled them to play a considerable role in spreading Western sports in China when they returned back to the motherland.

Almost at the same time schools set up by missionaries from religious organisations, especially those from the YMCA, spread sport activities as a part of their educational programs. The sport games, mainly track and field events, held at the St. John School sponsored by the Christian Church in 1890 were perhaps the first sports that followed the modern pattern. Accompanied

with the spread of schools offered by the church during the early of the 20 century, the track and field events further developed. In 1910 the first National Games with track and field as their main program were held. However, prior to 1919 the modern sports were mainly confined in the schools and sports competitions were mainly organised among schools and were monopolised by male youth.

3. Review of the Olympic Movement's development in China

3.1. Initial involvement (1920s-1949)

China's involvement in the Olympic Movement can be traced back to the 1920s when Mr. WANG Zhenting, a high ranking diplomat and sports leader was selected as the first Chinese IOC member in 1922. The Olympic Games had received hardly any consideration from China mainly because the nation was engaged in other more urgent tasks in order to survive under the threat of the foreign powers. However, it did indicate that a formal organisational link between the China and the IOC was formed. The IOC's formal recognition of Chinese sport organisation, the Chinese Society for Sport Promotion, as the national Olympic body, came much later in 1931.

In 1928 when the IX Summer Olympic Games was hold at Amsterdam, Netherlands, China did not send a team to the Games but only a observer, Mr. Soon Ruhai.

In 1932, initially China did not intend to send athletes to the Games in Los Angeles, instead the original plan was to send Mr. Sheng Sitong again to observe. As a rumour spread out, Manchukuo, the puppet state installed by Japanese invaders in the occupied area in the North East of China, was trying to send a sport delegation to the Olympics, which would be a disgrace to the nation. A small sport delegation was quickly made up and the five-member-group had only one athlete, the sprinter Mr. Liu Changchun. He was disqualified at preliminary heats. That was the debut of Chinese athletes in the Olympic arena.

Four years later the 11th Olympic Games were staged in Berlin under Hitler's Nazi regime in 1936. China sent a sport delegation of considerable size: 69 athletes in the following events: football, basketball, boxing, weightlifting, track and field, swimming, cycling and Wushu (the

traditional martial arts). In addition, a sport observers group, comprising 34 members went along with the group of athletes. The poor performances of the Chinese athletes at the Games indicated a big gap not only existed between China and Western nations but also between China and Japan. However, demonstrations of Wushu by masters drew quite extensive attention and were warmly welcomed.

In 1948 when the Olympic Games were restored after the World War II in London, 33 Chinese athletes of basketball, football, track and field, swimming and cycling participated in the Games but they did no better than the previous delegation and did not win a single medal. What made things worse was when the Games ended, the delegation had no money for their return journey so they had to send a telegram back to the government for help but the reply was surprising, stating that not a penny would be sent to them and asked them to solve the problem by themselves. The delegation had a hard time to find ways to raise the money, struggling against many difficulties but finally returning home.

3.2. Controversy (1949-1979)

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 a new era began in Chinese history and a controversy period in the relationship between the IOC and China over the issue on the China's seat in the Olympic Movement also started. The IOC led by its president at the time, Avery Brundage, decided to recognise both NOCs in Beijing and Taiwan, which violated the Olympic Charter, which allowed for only one NOC per country, thus the serious issue of "two Chinas" was created. In protest the China Olympic Committee suspended its relationship with the IOC in 1958, this was most unfortunate for both sport in China and for the Olympic Movement.

After 20 years of controversy and negotiation the IOC under Lord Killanin's leadership finally recognised the legitimate seat of the China Olympic Committee at the IOC Session in Nagoya Japan November 1979 with 60 votes for, 17 against, and 2 abstentions. The resulting resolution stipulates that the name of the Olympic Committee of the People's Republic of China is the "China Olympics Committee" and that the national flag and anthem of the People's Republic of China will be used in all ceremonies. The name of the Olympic Committee in Taiwan would be the "Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee" and the flag, anthem and

emblem formerly used by them could not be so used in the future. This is referred to as the “Olympic Model” in China, which provides athletes in Taiwan and mainland of China opportunities to compete in the same Olympic arena as brothers and sisters of one motherland. It was also, in a sense, the first sign for the “One country, two systems” policy, proposed by Mr. Deng Xiaoping.

The solution of the contradiction between China and the IOC quickly opened doors to other international sports for Chinese athletes. Now with such a broad international world of sport suddenly opened in front of China, it faced both opportunity and challenge. It had to improve its athletes’ sports performances quickly to catch up with the super powers in the world sport. International competitive sports are cultural symbols closely related to the image of a nation. Although the IOC insists that the Olympic Games are competitions among individual athletes instead of countries but all the rituals at the Games, especially the medal awarding ceremonies obviously intensify national awareness and highlight national image. Major international sport events, in a sense, may be logically viewed as competitions among nations. Taking into account of the humiliating experiences in the modern history of China, recalling all the suffering and disgraces imposed by the foreign powers, China was so eager to try its best for success in the international sports arena, especially the Olympics. The Olympic effort of China had significant impact on its sport policies and management.

Before 1979 there had been hardly any serious studies related to Olympics carried out in China. As a matter of fact during this long period of nearly thirty years, only 33 articles published on Olympics and two thirds of them were translations. The fact that the Olympic study was neglected at that time might be attributed firstly, to the abnormal relations between China and the IOC and secondly to the Cultural Revolution, a terrible social disaster that isolated China from the outside world and impeded the international exchanges of Chinese sport.

3.3. A New era (1979-1988)

1979 marked a significant turning point of Olympic development in China with its returning to the international Olympic family.

During the 1980s a sport developmental strategy was proposed by the National Sport Commission, involving harmonious development between the high performance sports aiming at the Olympic Games and the mass sports, which focused on youngsters. Consequently, competitive sports in China are oriented to the Olympic Games in order to obtain the Olympic glory. As part of this developmental strategy, China readjusted its competitive sport format and adopted a series of measurements to ensure good performances at the Olympic Games. The following steps were taken: re establish the sport program of the National Games and maintain some of the sport events as those in the Olympic program with exception of Wushu, one of the traditional sports. National Games are the most important sport meeting organised every four years and the best athletes are sent by all provinces, autonomous regions and trade unions. In this way the National Games serve as preparation for the Olympics. The Olympic-orientation policy produced quite positive results in terms of the China's performances at the Olympic Games as the table 1 shows, but it also produced certain negative impacts on non-Olympic events and team sports such as football, basketball, volleyball and so on for these sports have less medals but demanding a great resources.

Table 1 - Summary of China's Participation in the Olympic Games since 1984

<i>Year</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Events Competed</i>	<i>Medals Won</i>
1984 July 28- Aug. 12	23rd	Los Angeles (US)	304 (224 Athletes)	Basketball, Volleyball, Handball, Athletics, Gymnastics, Swimming, Weightlifting, Shooting, Archery, Fencing, Wrestling, Judo, Cycling, Rowing, Canoeing, Yachting, Tennis.	15 Golds 8 Silvers 9 Bronzes
1988 Sept. 17- Oct. 2	24th	Seoul (South Korea)	445 (298 Athletes)	Athletics, Swimming, Gymnastics, Basketball, Volleyball, Soccer, Table Tennis, Tennis, Handball, Shooting, Archery, Weightlifting, Wrestling, Judo, Boxing, Fencing, Modern Pentathlon, Cycling, Rowing, Canoeing, Yachting, Badminton (Demonstration), Women's Judo (Demonstration).	5 Golds 11 Silvers 12 Bronzes
1992 July 25- Aug. 9	25th	Barcelona (Spain)	380 (250 Athletes)	Athletics, Cycling, Swimming, Judo, Wrestling, Badminton, Archery, Basketball, Boxing, Canoeing, Gymnastics, Tennis, Table Tennis, Rowing, Fencing, Shooting, Volleyball, Yachting, Weightlifting, Modern Pentathlon.	16 Golds 22 Silvers 16 Bronzes
1996 Aug.	26th	Atlanta (US)	495 (310 Athletes)	Athletics, Cycling, Swimming, Judo, Wrestling, Badminton, Archery, Basketball, Boxing, Canoeing, Gymnastics, Tennis, Table Tennis, Rowing, Fencing, Shooting, Volleyball, Yachting, Weightlifting, Softball, Handball, Football	16 Golds 22 Silvers 12 Bronzes
2000 Sept.15- Oct.1	27th	Sydney (Australia)	452 (284 Athletes)	Athletics, Cycling, Swimming, Judo, Wrestling, Badminton, Archery, Basketball, Boxing, Canoeing, Gymnastics, Tennis, Table Tennis, Rowing, Fencing, Shooting, Volleyball, Yachting, Weightlifting, Softball, Handball, Football, Field Hockey	28 Golds, 16 Silvers 15 Bronzes

Owing to the lack of necessary knowledge related the Olympic Movement among both the general public and sport specialists, most research papers and articles have been characterised by historical descriptions for the purpose of disseminating Olympic knowledge, with exception of few studies concerning professionalisation and women's participation in the Olympics.

The success achieved by the Chinese team in the 23rd Summer Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984 stimulated a great deal of enthusiasm for the Olympics in China and resulted in a Olympic fad in China.

3.4. Further development (1989-)

After the 24th Olympic Games the development of the Olympic movement in China entered a new stage for a number of reasons. Firstly, the unsatisfactory performance of the Chinese sport team at the Seoul Olympics in comparison to the excellent results they obtained four years before in Los Angeles, stimulated debate as to the values of Olympic gold medals. Secondly, the hosting the 11th Asian Games in 1990, which the first time China organise a large international sport meeting similar to the Olympic Games. It was obvious that no effort was spared for the successful large international meeting. The 11th Asian Games directed a great deal of attention to international sport issues including the Olympics from the general public. Nevertheless, no matter how important the influence the first two events had on the Chinese Olympic studies, they could not match with the impact generated by Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics.

3.4.1. The unsuccessful bid for 2000 Olympics

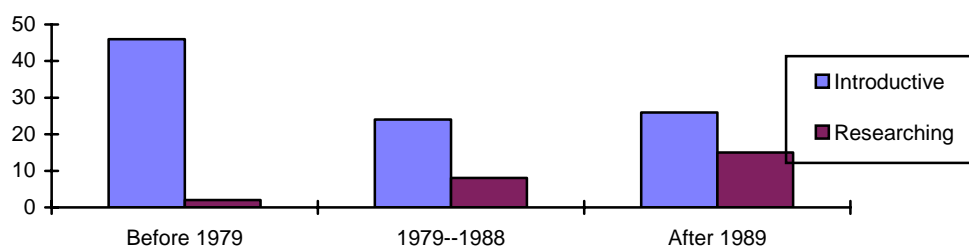
At midnight on September 23 1993, millions of Chinese were waiting in front of their televisions for the result of the IOC 101 Session vote for the host city of the 2000 Olympic Games. When the IOC president Samaranch pronounced that it was Sydney instead of Beijing many Chinese showed great emotion and some of them even cried. It was understandable for they had enthusiastically hoped for positive news. A questionnaire survey carried out by the city's statistics bureau of ten thousand residents in the city, showed 98.7% support for the city's bid. It was the first time in history that China had bid for the Games. During a period of two years, the Beijing 2000 Olympic Games Bidding Committee, set up on April 1st, 1991, consisted of the staff mainly from the National Sport Commission and the Beijing municipal

government, launched a series of campaigns, including dissemination of Olympic knowledge. Although the bidding itself was fruitless, it did inform the Chinese about the Olympic Movement, Olympism and of course, the Olympic Games.

In the sense of knowledge dissemination, Beijing's bid, undoubtedly, was the largest campaign to spread Olympic information in China's history. As a result, studies on the Olympic movement have drawn an increasing attention in China and become an emerging field in Chinese sport science. Papers on Olympic issues appeared in all sorts of academic journals related to sport, and the Olympic Movement has been offered as an important subject being taught in higher physical educational institutions. The university-based Olympic studies center also took shape; various reading materials have been produced such as *Olympic Encyclopedia* and *Olympic Mass Readings* for general public, *Olympic Stories* for the elementary students, *Olympic Knowledge* for secondary students, and *Olympic Movement* as a textbook for university students. It is not exaggerated to say that Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics brought the Olympic Movement to the social focal point of China.

This bidding was not successful and Beijing lost the chance to Sydney in a close competition. However, Beijing's bid strongly stimulated an unprecedented interests in Olympics. Since hosting the largest event in the world would be entirely different from merely participating in it, requiring detailed knowledge about the Games and all issues related. Consequently, the development of Olympic Movement in China deepened, which was reflected in Olympic studies. Figure 1 shows the ratios between research papers and the introductory articles related to Olympic subjects in the three stages, indicating the researching papers have increased rapidly.

Figure 1 - Comparison of research papers and introductory articles



Moreover, with more attention given to the Olympic study the scope of the academic area has also expanded, some issues such as Olympic philosophy, organisational structures, operational mechanism and Olympic problems had been touched, indicating the start for more rational and comprehensive inquiry on the Olympic movement. Table 2 shows a comparison of the contents of Olympic studies in China in three time periods.

Table 2 - Content change of Olympic studies in China in different periods

Time	Studying Contents
1984	Professionalisation, Women and sport
1989	Olympic ideals, Olympic studies, Olympic Movement and economy, Olympics and education, Women and sport, Professionalisation.
1992	Olympic philosophy, Olympics and society, Olympics and culture, Olympic issues (commercialisation, professionalisation and political interference etc.)

3.4.2. Success in bidding for the 2008 Olympics

Beijing's second endeavour in bidding for the Olympics was formally launched in 1999 and had a happy ending: the city was awarded to host the Games of the XXIV Olympiad in 2008 on 13th July 2000 at the IOC 112th Session in Moscow Russia. Obviously, it is a milestone in Olympic development in China, closely bonding the most populous nation with the Olympic Movement. Since China is the largest developing country with a strong Eastern cultural background and experiencing rapid social change, it is quite different from all previous host countries. Preparing and staging the Games are expected to have great impact on both China and the world sport as the IOC Evaluation Commission for the Games indicates *"It is the Commission's belief that a Beijing Games would leave a unique legacy to China and to sport and the Commission is confident that Beijing could organise an excellent Games"* (IOC, 2001). The goals for the Beijing Olympic organisers are, as they declared, to host a "Green Olympics", a "Hi-tech Olympics" and the "People's Olympics". Staging the Olympic Games is regarded as a catalyst for exchange and harmony between various cultures and peoples, strengthening public awareness of environmental protection and promoting the development and application of new technologies.

4. Potential contribution of Chinese culture to Olympics

Chinese culture is one of the most brilliant cultures in the world and has unique characteristics due to its particular natural, social environments and a long history.

One of its striking features of Chinese culture is its extreme stress on harmony that is particularly useful to the Olympics. According to Chinese philosophies harmony is a basic feature of the perfect formation of the world, as the master of Taoist teaching, Lao Zi, states: "Both of them (Yin and Yang) are unified with harmony in the invisible breath" (1993:62). A Confucian classic work Doctrine of Mean also called harmony "the universal path". (1992:27)

Moreover, harmony is even referred to as an important virtue as Confucius claimed "In the practising the rule of propriety, harmony is more important." (1992b:69). Based on such philosophical ideologies, Chinese culture stresses on the following points:

- Regarding the relation between an individual and a society, it emphasises the collective spirit rather than individualism; and
- In terms of the relationship between human society and the natural environment, it emphasises following the natural way and to integrate human beings into the natural world.

It is clear that all these characteristics could possibly compensate Western culture. With regards to the Olympics, Chinese culture is useful, as its traits may make up for some shortcomings of the current Olympics, for example:

- Its emphasis on the mental and moral aspect in comparison with the physical may strengthen Olympic ideal, which is so essential to the Olympics;
- Its emphasis on internal body training may counterbalance the external body training stressed in Western sport.
- Its emphasis on the process of sport games may help to set up a healthy relationship between the outcome and process of sport and make people more reasonable towards winning and losing; and

- Its emphasis on harmonious relationships with the natural world may help the Olympic host cities to take greater care over the ecological problem when planing and building sport facilities.

A new trend is gradually taking shape ad the human society entered a new century, suggesting that China will contribute more to the Olympics in the new era. It is not only because the Chinese culture may contribute to the Olympics, not only because China is one of the largest countries with a vast population but also because the social conditions for China contributing more to the Olympic Movement is preparing due to significant reforms that have been carried at on for the last twenty years.

A long history of five thousand years endowed China with a unique cultural heritage interwoven by Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and traditional medical theories. It would be fascinating to see how the practice and theories of Chinese sport could contribute to the Olympic Movement.

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Related web sites

Athletic China

http://210.75.208.159/eolympic/ydy/ydy_index.htm

Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee

<http://www.tpe-olympic.org>

General Administration of Sport (China)

<http://www.sport.gov.cn/>

China and the Olympic Movement

The connection of China and the Olympic Movement could be tracked down to the early 20th century. However, the initiative period of China's Olympic involvement was marginal and controversial one due to its domestic social conditions and the international political background. 1979 was a turning point for the relationship between the Olympic movement and China for the IOC Session in Nagoya ended the long political debate over the China's Olympic participation, which paved the road for China taking quite active role in Olympic affairs and at the same time its sport policies have been deeply influenced by the Olympic movement. Beijing's two bids for the Olympics, one failed in 1993 (2000 Olympic Games*) and another succeed in 2001 (2008 Olympic Games*), were the milestones for the development of Olympic movement in China. China may offer a unique contribution to the Olympic movement due to its special cultural heritage.

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