

The Development of Sport in Singapore: An Eliasian Analysis

**Thesis submitted by
Lim Lai Kuan BA, Dip PE
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School of Education, James Cook University**

Declaration on Sources

I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Abstract

This thesis traces and analyzes the development of sport in Singapore since its founding in 1819 to present. Using an Eliasian approach, this thesis examines empirical evidence gathered from official documents, such as sport policies and media reports, to show how sport has developed in Singapore. An Eliasian approach focuses on examining the figuration of sport as a network of interdependencies and how its development creates more and more interconnections with other social figurations. The widening network of interdependencies shapes the culture of sport in Singapore but it also reveals similarities and differences with the development of wider Singapore society. The analysis also examines the figuration of sport in relation to Elias's substantive themes of state formation and the dynamics of established and outsider relationships.

Singapore has developed from a British colony to an independent country and over this period of time, it has also transformed from a virtually uninhabited island into a thriving first world nation. Although the seeming under-development of Singapore's sport appears to be at odds with the wider social development, parallels between the two can be drawn. Underlying both developments is the increasing regulation of practices and tightening of the chains of interdependencies. Medals may mark the level the sporting nationalism, but they do not indicate the increasing differentiation and integration of practices, identities and images of the disparate social groups. This thesis shows how sport emerged to its present form since the British colonized the practices, time and space of other social groups; how sport developed into a highly regulated practice and became intertwined with social identity formation and distinction. The development of the figuration of sport reveals the tension of the diminishing contrasts between the disparate of social groups and increasing varieties of the sport practices.

The paradoxically unifying and dividing tensions that sport embodied by the 1930s, were appropriated by the Japanese government when they colonized the island. Sport became centralized and the direction and form of its development became more and more situated in the state. Sporting practices were no longer regulated just by the players and their sporting clubs, but by the imposition, direct and indirect, of the state. This shift in the pattern of control on the sporting conduct paralleled the nexus of social control. The increase in bureaucracy and complexity in the organization of the

institution of sport widened the network of interdependencies between the state and the subjects but more significantly, the Japanese government also demonstrated the affective quality of sport in nationalizing disparate social groups.

In independent Singapore the functions of sport have become increasingly specialized as well as heightened in significance. The rise in commercialism binds more and more people together not only on the functional level but also on the level of identity and image formation. Although Singapore has developed into a first world nation, its sporting achievements are those of a third world country. This thesis discusses how the dissonance in the economic and sporting achievement has provided currency for greater centralization of sport. It also examines the role of sport in producing and reproducing the global-local tension in the establishment of a Singapore identity as the country become more and more interdependent with the rest of the world.

Whilst the trend of development of sport in Singapore suggests an increasing level of civilization, it was not a process unfettered with conflicts and tensions. The expansion of functions and rising self restraint in practices, identities and images were marked by continuities and discontinuities, civilizing and decivilizing spurts, integration and disintegration. Using an Eliasian theorisation of sport, the thesis reveals how sport has become more and more interconnected with the wider Singapore society at different historical junctures and how sport reveals the tensions of the cultural underpinnings of Singapore whilst at the same time functions both as a border and a bridge for different social groups.

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