



# Olympism, the lost legacy in Thailand

Suriyan Somphong\*  
Faculty of Science and Technology  
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University  
Bangkok, Thailand  
E-Mail: [suriyan.so@ssru.ac.th](mailto:suriyan.so@ssru.ac.th)

Issadee Kutintara  
Faculty of Sports Science  
Kasetsart University  
Nakhon Pathom, Thailand,  
E-Mail: [issadee@gmail.com](mailto:issadee@gmail.com)

&

Komkrit Rattamanee  
Faculty of Science and Technology  
Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University  
Bangkok, Thailand,  
E-Mail: [komkrit.ra@ssru.ac.th](mailto:komkrit.ra@ssru.ac.th)

Corresponding author\*

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the lost Olympics legacy in Thailand so as to be consistent with the Olympic Movement. The International Olympic Committee: IOC was formed in 1894. Consequently, the IOC became the main organization to lead the Olympic movement since then. There are several documents that state why Baron Pierre De Coubertin revived the Olympic Games; some stated that it was because he aimed for international peace. Other say that the reason was to have physical education courses included in the educational system, as the youth in France at that time seem to have had problems with low level of sporting standards and abused themselves with alcohol and lacked the desire to participate in physical activities. Sport was thus utilized to help in improving the youth both physically and mentally. The results reveal that the goals of Thailand were met and that there were a large number of positive outcomes, both personal and social due to sport involvement. The article argues that Thailand should also use the Olympic idea in its educational system; Olympism could be integrated entirely into the subjects taught in schools. Other youth activities such as camping and touring could also benefit from using the Olympic ideals as their objective and this would serve to teach the youth to enjoy this value. One activity that could be used is "Olympic Studies", by taking youth into a place where they need to try hard, and need to put in an effort, such as a long walk in national parks. During this time, educational activities process could be conducted in which the youth could be taught some core subjects such as inter alia nature appreciation, goal setting, friendly competition, the joy of effort, persistence during hardiness, coordination, tolerance and team work.

**Keywords:** Olympic movement, Olympism, Olympic education, management, Olympic values

## Introduction

One of the latest pieces of work for de Coubertin's Neo-Olympism, the Unfinished Symphony in 1936, stated that Olympism is the only part of his work (Muller, 2000). To reform education or even better have it considered as the social reform, Coubertin accepted to use "Athletes" as means and "Olympism" as the object. He had no hope for any country heading to "Utopia" and saw no one wanting to give it a thought. It is obvious that de Coubertin put great effort into the education side of sports, but why? Three kinds of relationship between sport and education can be considered:



1. Sport drives education as in Latin, Juvenal's saying "*mens sana in corpore sano*"; "a healthy mind in a healthy body". The expression is widely used in sporting and educational settings to express the theory that physical exercise is a significant or essential part of mental and psychological well-being.
2. Education drives sport: education will lead people towards sport in a proper way against commercialism and corruption;
3. Sport and education are undivided and unified as one to enhance a human being.

De Coubertin's emphasis on history (Muller, 2000) as "the first of all the sciences in terms of significance and education effectiveness" brings in an idea of retrospective on history of sports and of Greek in particular, in order to appropriately appreciate the far-sighted vision of de Coubertin in the revival of the modern Olympic Games.

The origin of sport is credited to the classical Greeks. Although the earliest evidence of physical exercise takes place in 3800 B.C.E. in Memphis in Egypt (Levinson & Christensen (eds.), 1, 1996). There is no sense of competition which is the main characteristic of sport (Miller, 2004). It was the Greeks who instituted and promoted the idea of exercise and athletics in the world today. The Greeks placed far more emphasis on exercise than any previous society. The Athenians exercised and played for the sheer enjoyment of it (Levinson & Christensen (eds.), 1, 1996).

Gods are the very reason for Greeks to live, to be better, to contest and to die for. Physical and intellectual perfection are the approximation to Gods who possess all the ideal forms humans strove for (Koursi, 2003). It is said that the first patrons of the (Olympic) Games were the pantheon of Greek gods, the last, men (Powell, 1994). The International Olympic Committee (1994) asserts that "indeed, the ancient Games, from Iphitos (884 B.C.E) to Coroebus (776 B.C.E) and from Coroebus to Theodosius (C.E. 394), were usually large votive festivities dedicated to Zeus and to the other gods of Mount Oympos, even though, under Roman occupation, the cult of the Emperor also had its place. The winning athlete, a delegate of the City States, offered up his physical and moral beauty to the divinities of creation. Nothing could be more pleasing to Zeus than a tribute paid by the winner, the *Olympionike*."

Apart from gods, the Greek also had a number of heroes of which, Heracles or the Roman Hercules is the most respected. He was believed to have been a descendant of Zeus through Alcmena, and is claimed by Pindar to have commenced the Olympic Games (Poole & Poole, 1963). Being quoted by Parry (2009), Palaeologos commends Hercules that "the idea is that the sculptures of the demi-god Hercules in Olympia performed a morally educative function, standing as role models, especially for the athletes who were there to train for the Games, of physical, moral and intellectual virtue: Hercules is shown bearded, with beautiful features,...a well-trained body, fine, proportional muscles,...as a representative of the "*kalos k' agathos*" type, where the body is well-formed and harmonious, the expression of a beautiful soul, and the face radiates intelligence, kindness and integrity."

For ancient Greeks, the supreme value of life was the whole balance of one's body and mind which can't be entirely separated. It was the perfection of all that Peleus desired for his son, Achilles - to be best in words and deeds. Apollo, the God of light, is also a "far-shooting archer" and "lyre-player" and "leader of the Muses" and he is another good example of the whole balance or perfection (Koursi, 2003).

Essays of Michael de Montaigne in 1580 referred to Plato saying that "it is not a mind, it is not a body, that we are training up; it is a man, and we ought not to divide him into two parts; we are not to fashion one without the other, but make them draw together like two horses harnessed to a coach." "*meden agan*" or "nothing in excess" (Poole & Poole, 1963) and the favorite watchword for Greek - "mean of middle" or the exact point of rightness between both



ends, is among the best adjective for perfection (Powell, 1994). The Greeks were the ones who “love beauty without excess, and love wisdom without being weak” (Koursi, 2003).

To be perfect, the Greek took great pain in their formal education. According to Platonov and Guskov (1997), although education was not mandatory by law, there were no illiterates in the city of Athens by the 5th century B.C. E. Socrates voiced that “it would be a shame, because of one’s own ignorance, to get old without any chance of seeing, by observing one’s own body, what a human body can look like in the prime of one’s age and beauty.” “be educated in cities” is also what Aristotle supported in education. The Olympic Games is not a myth but a legacy, although the story of the Olympic Games shows us a combination or interaction between gods and men. Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Strabo, Phlegon, Thales, Eusebius of Caesarea, Herod the Great, Lucian, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are among the many philosophers and poets who confirmed that the Olympic Games are real, man-made, and not mythical in any sense (Powell, 1994).

It was the passion of the Greeks to practice and seek perfection and to do this is in the Olympic Games. The ‘Athlete’ and the idea of contest was used by Homer to describe the Trojan War and the labors of Hercules during the first Olympic Games. ‘Athletes’ implies a strong masculine presence and ultimately the prize for a contest went to an athlete (Powell, 1994). Miller (2004) notes that “Athlon”, a noun, and “Athleuein”, a verb, mean prize and to compete for a prize respectively; therefore, athletics is to compete for a prize. There was no sport for sport’s sake in the ancient concept. There is no team competition and there is no prize for being a runner-up. One man wins and the others lose. This was related to the concept of “arête” or virtue, that leaves no room for being merely ‘nearby’. Athletes practiced and competed nude as the word “gymnos” and “gymnazein” imply. Competitors, at Olympia, were categorized into two groups of ages, namely the Andres (men) and Paides (boys). Basic equipment and supply for athletes to exercise and practice were a jar of olive oil (rubbing body before exercise), strigil or stlegnis—a curved tool concave in section to scrape the body after exercise, a sponge, a cap or hairnet, dust or powder (konis) used for cleaning after the exercise session. The punishment during the exercise period if required, was simply flogging.

The legacy of the ancient Olympic Games has to be noted with the history of Greece itself. Although the civilization of Greece can be traced back to the Paleolithic Period (approx., 60,000-8,000 B.C.E), the Olympic Games embarked in 776 B.C.E and this made the entire Greek nation fully aware of their national identity of commonly shared language, ancestors and religious beliefs. The spirit of the Olympic Games has continuously journeyed through the never-ending war from internal states and external enemies battling the Greeks. By 432-404 B.C.E, the country was permanently divided into military camps led by Athens and Sparta. From 146 B.C.E. to 1453 C.E., Greece was subjugated by the Roman Empire. Greece was then conquered by the Ottoman’s in 1456 C.E. and was able to declare its independence long after, in only 1830 C.E. (Mavromatakis, n.d.)

In addition to the Olympic Games, de Coubertin was also very much impressed by the American dream which he believed resulted from a synthesis between the British education system of ‘unselfish mentality’, and German ‘effectiveness and discipline’ that emancipate humans to the level of a free man and that there “was a meaningful correlation between the mentality, the ambitions and practices of people on the one hand, and the way in which physical exercises were understood and organized on the other” (Maes, 2009).

With the revival of the Olympic Games in mind, de Coubertin unveiled his Olympic Idea under the strategic Olympic Movement. The first move was to set up the Olympic Congress in which the main body of the Olympic Games was created and organized. The first Olympic Congress was held in the amphitheatre of the old Sorbonne in Paris from 16th to 24th of June 1894.



Demetrius Vikelas who was then the president of the Pan-Hellenic Gymnastics Society became the first President of the International Olympic Committee.

The soul of the Olympics has transcended from de Coubertin's Olympic Idea to Olympism which was put forwarded by the International Olympic Committee (2007) as "a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." with the goal to "place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" and to assert that "the practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. The organization, administration and management of sport must be controlled by independent sports organizations. Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement."

"The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity." Fundamental Principles of Olympism, Olympic Charter. The IOC President, Thomas Bach, regularly emphasizes that "sport is not just physical activity; it promotes health and helps prevent, or even cure, the diseases of modern civilization. It also is an educational tool which fosters cognitive development; teaches social behaviour; and helps to integrate communities". The IOC cooperates with partners, including numerous United Nations agencies, as well as international governmental and nongovernmental institutions, on projects which use sport as a tool for development and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). National Olympic Committees also support these activities locally through their sports expertise and networks. Several International Federations have also developed initiatives in this field. (The International Olympic Committee: <https://www.olympic.org/development-through-sport>)

## **Olympism, the Lost Legacy in Thailand**

Combining sport with culture and education, the notion of Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the delight of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. Olympism is then a attitude of life, promoting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, determination and mind.

The Olympic Movement is actually the grand strategy of Olympism that is "the concerted, organized, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world's athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. Its symbol is five interlaced rings". Arbitration on the Olympic Movement is subject to and requires compliance with the Olympic Charter and recognition by the IOC.

From the concept of Olympism to the Olympic Games, a platform to consolidate all participants in realizing sport values, Baron Pierre de Coubertin had the primary intention to employ the movement as the tool for making peace and bringing harmony to all of mankind. The International Olympic Committee also recognizes education as the backbone of the Olympic



Movement. These are the beginnings in establishing the International Olympic Academy (IOA) in 1961 as the learning center of Olympic Education.

For 50 years, IOA has been an international sport organization which is responsible in implementing the desired missions.

1. To function as an international academic center for Olympic studies, education and research.
2. To act as an International forum for the expression and exchange of ideas among the Olympic Family.
3. To bring together people from all over the world, in a spirit of friendship and cooperation.
4. To motivate people to use the experiences and knowledges gained in the IOA productively, in promoting the Olympic Ideals in their respective countries.
5. To serve and promote the ideals and principles of the Olympic Movement.
6. To cooperate with and assist the National Olympic Academies and other institutions devoted to Olympic education.
7. To further explore and enhance the contribution of Olympism to humanity.

As an active IOA member since 2001, the Thailand Olympic Academy (TOA) has been conducting various activities in implementing IOA policy in all dimensions, for example, organizing seminars and workshops about the Olympic Movement for athletes, sport administrators, P.E. teachers, sports scientists, educators, artists and journalists, organizing the Olympic Movement and Olympic Education activities for youth, organizing culture and education activities on the 'Olympic Day' annually. The TOA also supports and promotes the Olympic Movement courses into a physical education, Sports Science curriculum in universities as well as integrating the Olympic Movement contents into physical education classes. With our long efforts and true commitment, currently, the knowledge about the Olympic Movement is widely spread all over the country which can be counted as a success story for the Thailand Olympic Academy.

According to the good memories of the International Olympic Academy's contribution to the society, the TOA would like to raise its impression about the cooperation between IOC, IOA and the Organizing Committee of the first Youth Olympic Games (SYOGOC) in organizing Culture and Education Program (CEP) during the first Youth Olympic Games in Singapore 2010. The CEP consisted of 7 main activities as follows: Art and Culture, Community Project: Evening Festival, Discovery Activities; Exhibits and Games, Chat with Champions, Exploration Journey, and Island Adventure. All the activities are highly suitable for delivering the Olympism concept, throughout 12 days of Culture and Education Programs, and the Youth Olympic Village was an excellent learning center as well as cultural exchange venue for all 3,500 Youth Olympians.

In addition, this program drives and inspires participants in developing friendship, and pushing themselves for excellence in all aspects and giving respect to each other as the Olympic Family members. The success of this exceptional collaboration program was mentioned by IOC President, Jacques Rogge during the meeting day with young athletes representative of all 205 participating countries, on August 25, 2010. The speech stated that "from today...all Youth Athletes participating in the 1st Youth Olympic Games, Singapore 2010 are accepted as Youth Olympians in the Olympic Family and Culture Education activities will be continued and be a part of future Youth Olympic Games" At this moment, everyone realized that the IOA is an educational organization which is at the very center of the Olympic Movement knowledge, and it truly accomplishes the intended mission.



## Conclusion

The first Olympic Game started in ancient Greece. It was documented that the first Olympic Games took place around 776 B.C.E which was almost 2800 years ago in Olympia, Greece. The reason for the games was to worship Zeus, the greatest god of all the Greeks. During the period of the Olympic Games, there was a truce period and thus peace was accepted among the states that participated. There were penalties against cheating and bribery, and the games had to be played with a sense of decency and utter honesty. The ancient Olympic Games had been on-going for 1200 years before they were abandoned. There were attempts to revive the Olympic Games by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French educator. The International Olympic Committee: IOC was formed in 1894 from this attempt. Consequently, the IOC became the main organization to lead the Olympic movement since then. There are several documents that state why Baron Pierre De Coubertin revived the Olympic Games; some stated that it was because he aimed for international peace. Other say that the reason was to have physical education course included in the educational system, as youth in France at that time seem to have had a plethora of problems with low level of sporting standards and they also abused themselves with alcohol and lacked participation in any physical activities. Sport was utilized to help improve the youth both physically and mentally.

The Olympic Games was also enlivened in order to promote Olympism; Excellence, Friendship, Respect, coordination and common understanding among nations was also other goal of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. He was inspired by the ancient Greek idea of using sport and competition to suppress conflict and also as the way to develop the people of the world. In pursuing the Olympic ideal, it was believed that an individual could develop into a stronger, greater, and finer holistic person.

In Thailand, Chao Praya Dharmasakmontri, was a key person who laid the foundation of the modern Thai education system almost 100 years ago. He fully comprehended and believed in Olympism. He then followed Baron Pierre de Coubertin in the path of Olympism and utilized it as the foundation in Thai education while he was the Minister of Education. He told his colleagues that the full person has to study three subjects; 1) science to gain knowledge 2) civilian subject to be able to behave correctly, and 3) physical education to be strong and healthy. This policy came from the Olympic idea that a full person has to be knowledgeable, have moral excellence, and be physically strong during that time. He founded the department of physical education and started student football tournaments. He also wrote many poems and songs about sport which include many Olympic ideas such and "The Sport Song (Kraw Keela)", Fair Play, and athletes (Nuk Keela) poem. Inspired by Coubertin's idea, Dharmmasakmontri believed that in order to lead a large society into a peaceful and progressive state, the foundation of each person in society had to be taught.

The balance between body, will and mind, have to be aimed for in educating the society. In his sport song, Dharmasakmontri reflected this idea such that "We are brave athletes who would persist", or "Strong body with great muscles", and "Stable and having dignity of the mind". In this song, he stated that all the above qualities in a person could be built through sport. In the modern society, entertainment and commercialization were involved in sport in greater extent. The true meaning of sport is not as clear in Thai society as in the past. Sport is being utilized as a tool to create fame and wealth rather than to build a person mentally and physically and to contribute to the society. The physical education subject for youth was reduced and most of the time shifted the intended aim and lost its meaning. Sport and exercise were not use to develop youth into a holistic or full person as they should be.

Observing the present Thai society, it is noticeable that people are less persistent. They tend to avoid hard work, and many try to gain more and work far less. The joy of effort seems to diminish in most people. This happens in connection with the context of the society that



emphasize commercial greed and entertainment and materialism, rather than creating a full person. Most problems currently appear in Thai society including drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and premature death from disease due to lack of exercise. These are problems that can be solved by using the Olympic ideal and carefully crafted sport programs. We could also use the Olympic ideal in our educational system; Olympism could be integrated into the entirety of subjects taught at school. Other youth activities such as camping, touring could also benefit from using the Olympic ideals as their objective, and teach youth to enjoy this value. One activity that could be used is an "Olympic Study", for example, by taking youth into a place that they need to try hard, need to put their effort, such as a long walk in national parks, this would go a long way into making them better people. During this time, education process could be strengthened. Youth could be taught some subjects such as environmentalism, goal setting, friendly competition, the joy of effort, persistence during hard times, coordination, tolerance, and also team work skills.

In the last decade, Thailand Olympic Academy (TOA) providentially began activities in Thailand. These activities include workshops and seminars as well as the youth activities that were applied in order to promote the Olympic ideal in Thailand. Olympism that was long forgotten began to be enlivened again by the TOA. In this connection, Thai people, in particular the youngsters have opportunities to acquire the idea of Baron Pierre de Coubertin and Chao Phraya Dharmmasakmontri. Their common quest is to build a peaceful society with knowledgeable people with strong bodies and minds. With the TOA lead, a goal is set to be achieved with a constructive plan.

Thai youngsters should be able to understand the values, ideas and principles of Olympism. It is aimed to inspire society by using the Olympic philosophy in developing the youth in the future. With such inspiration, the legacy that was lost long ago should then be re-installed into the society, consistent with Suriyan (2019) that concerning social outcomes, the respondents reported that after they attended the TOA, they were more involved with speaking to others, both formally and informally, about sport and the Olympic Movement. They also participated in, or were involved with, the administration of other programs and activities dealing with the Olympic Movement as well as activities that promoted social change.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the Faculty of Science and Technology and the Research and Development Institute, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand for supporting this study.

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