

# Analyzing the Negative Impact of Elite Sporting Culture behind Japanese Judo Elite Success

Wu, Ding Yi<sup>1</sup>; Nakamura, Hidemasa<sup>2</sup> and Iteya, Misaki<sup>3</sup>

1: Graduate School of Sport Sciences, Waseda University, Japan; 2: Graduate School of Business Administration, Hitotsubashi University, Japan; 3: Faculty of Sport Sciences, Waseda University, Japan  
a6z2xpoi514@gmail.com

## Aim

With growing extant literature to explore the homogeneity and heterogeneity of elite sport development system (e.g. Green & Houlihan, 2005 and De Bosscher et al., 2006), some efforts have been further made to explore that elite sporting culture might positively affect the effectiveness of sports policies. Nevertheless, the relevance and negative influence of elite sporting culture, such as conflict of values, expectations and beliefs between coach and athlete (Sotiriadou, Gowthorp & De Bosscher, 2014), to elite success is less prominent. Furthermore, few researches have been conducted to explore the process by which how has the culture may negatively influence on elite sport policy at sport-specific level towards international sporting success over a prolonged period of time. Therefore, we seek to answer the research question: *Does elite sporting culture negatively influence on elite success?*

## Theoretical Background

The literature argued that SPLISS model and elite sporting culture would have great explanation on effectiveness of elite sport system at sport specific level (De Bosscher et al., 2006; Sotiriadou, Gowthorp & De Bosscher, 2014). The ‘elite sporting culture’ is defined as ‘the shared culture from an organization having an impact on staff behavior and attitudes, and ultimately influencing organizational performance’ (Macintosh & Doherty, 2007). From a long-term perspective, this established culture often functions as ‘path dependence’: it could lock an elite sports policy on a specific trajectory and constrain subsequent policy options (Levi, 1997). However, the literature has not examined negative impact of long-standing elite sporting culture on the international sporting performance.

## Method

We analyzed 17 years (2000 to 2016) case of Japanese Judo due to its cultural characteristics and international sporting performance in the developmental process. We firstly collected the documents from the multiple resources to identify: (1) the perceptions among the decision makers, such as for Judo training and the athletes’ performance in international matches, and the number of medals and the percentage of the athletes’ using standing techniques in the Olympics and World Championships, (2) the developmental situation in the nine policy areas derived from the SPLISS model. To complement the documental analysis, we further conducted semi-structured interview with 2 senior members from the All Japan Judo Federation (AJJF) and an academic expert. Then, we analyzed a case report made from the collected data with using content analysis and pattern matching proposed in Yin (2008).

## Findings

No matter how increased the number of male participants (72 to 237) and nations (27 to 136) in Olympic Judo subject from 1964 to 2016, Japan had been maintaining a top ranking (average 40% in terms of sharing gold medal) at each Olympic Games from 1964 to 2004. However, the decline or failure situation (43% to 0%) of international sporting performance happened after 2004 to 2012.

In particular, the change of decision makers' attitude and action was limited at the period between 2000 to 2012 with regard to the athletes' winning way in the international competitions. For example, the head coaches or technical directors they kept their own mind believing that the athletes should, or to, win the matches by the standing techniques. The elite sporting culture was grown after World War II in one group and rapidly diffused into, and dominated the elite development section in AJJF late around 1970 to 2012.

Furthermore, the similar results derived from the culture happened in the other situations. Even though the new rules were adopted, the decision makers still kept the past attitude and action. For example, although the rule of the leg grabs and the IJF ranking system were adapted into Judo competition, the decision makers kept focusing on the pioneers' experience for the national team training instead of accepting the new approach by which foreign countries used during that period. They took the past attitude and action for granted. We could say that it was "path dependent".

The limited attitude and action by the decision makers in Japanese elite Judo was the most critical factor to explain the failure of Japanese Judo in the Olympics, based on the examination of influence of SPLISS factors on the Japanese Judo international performance from 2000 to 2012.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

We argue that the elite sporting culture on the development of elite sport policy can be negative. Japanese Judo sustained success in Olympics has allowed certain aspects of elite sport policy development to remain unchanged from the system, and the almost un-change could be tracked over a long period of time; hence, it could be seem as an example of path dependence. Lastly, the SPLISS approach it lack a long-term perspective to explain the influence of elite sporting culture. Consequently, we suggest that integration of the SPLISS model and the concept of path dependence would possibly provide the better insight for the investigation of long-term cultural influence on international sporting performance.

### **References**

- De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P., Van Bottenburg, M. and Shebli, S. (2006). A Conceptual Framework for Analysing Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6, 185-215.
- Sotriadou, P., Gowthorp, L., & De Bosscher, V. (2014). "Elite sport culture and policy interrelationships: The case of Sprint Canoe in Australia." *Leisure Studies*, 33 (6), 598-617.
- Green, M., & Houlihan, B. (2005). *Elite sport development: Policy learning and political priorities*. London: Routledge.
- Macintosh, E., & Doherty, A. (2007). Extending the scope of organisational culture: The external perception of an internal phenomenon. *Sport Management Review*, 10, 45
- Levi, M. (1997). A model, a method, and a map: Rational choice in comparative and historical analysis. In M. I. Lichbach & A. S. Zuckerman (Eds.), *Comparative politics: Rationality, culture, and structure* (pp. 19-41). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2008) *Case study research: Design and methods*. New York: SAGE Publications.