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## The role of State Shinto and sport in integrating Singapore into the Japanese Empire, 1942–45

Kevin Blackburn 

*During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, military and civilian officials governing Singapore used a combination of State Shinto and sport to assist in culturally assimilating Singapore into Japan's Empire. A planned massive sports complex was to be located at Singapore's own State Shinto shrine, the Syonan Jinja, which was partly modelled on Japan's Meiji Shrine which regularly held on its own grounds sports events and games that mixed the rituals of State Shinto with athleticism. Participation in sport was used to assimilate local populations into an imperial identity, united under the helm of the Japanese Emperor.*

In 1942, after the fall of Singapore, the Japanese commander Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita ordered the construction of the *Syonan Jinja* (Light of the South Shrine) on the shores of Singapore's MacRitchie Reservoir.<sup>1</sup> This State Shinto shrine was partly modelled on the role of the Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, which was built in 1920 to worship the deified Meiji Emperor (r. 1867–1912). Yamashita intended that the *Syonan Jinja* would be a focus in Southeast Asia for worship of Hirohito, the Showa Emperor, in what was known as the emperor cult or system upheld by Shinto as a state religion. State Shinto used the emperor's connection to the sacred realm to justify the state's control over the minds as well as bodies of the emperor's subjects through obedient adherence to its rites and rituals.<sup>2</sup> The *Syonan Jinja* was to be like the Meiji Shrine, which was the centre of a large sports and garden complex at which the Meiji Shrine Games, beginning in 1924, celebrated the Meiji Emperor's birthday on 3 November. Both shrines were embodiments of the cult of the emperor and the divinity claims of the allegedly unbroken chain of emperors going back to the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. As will be explored in this article, during its construction, officers in Yamashita's army building the *Syonan Jinja* told the Singapore public the

Kevin Blackburn is an Associate Professor at Nanyang Technological University. Correspondence in connection with this article should be addressed to: [Kevin.blackburn@nie.edu.sg](mailto:Kevin.blackburn@nie.edu.sg).

1 The *kunrei-shiki* romanisation was adopted by Japan in 1937 and used in the 1940s. It is in many historical documents. In this article, where the *kunrei-shiki* romanisation appears in quotations and names of the 1940s it has been kept. Elsewhere, the now standard Hepburn romanisation of Japanese will be used. For example, it is common in Singapore historiography to use the 1940s *kunrei-shiki* romanisation for the name the Japanese military gave to Singapore so that it is written as *Syonan-to* (Light of the South Island) rather than the Hepburn romanisation and rendered as *Shonan-to*.

2 Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the state, 1868–1998* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 4, 6, 32, 87–8, 137, 161.

*Syonan Jinja* would be a site of a future ‘Greater East Asia Olympics’, just as the Meiji Shrine had been the location of the ‘East Asian Games’ of the Japanese Empire in 1940, which were a substitute for the cancelled Tokyo Olympics of 1940.

Sport during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore with its connection to State Shinto was the athletic embodiment of 1940s Japanese Pan-Asianism and the idea of the ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’. Japanese administrators saw Japan as the benevolent paternalistic leader of other Asian countries, assisting their development so they could emulate Japan.<sup>3</sup> In sport, the Japanese would train the peoples of Asia to follow them in order to achieve enough athletic prowess to participate one day in a proposed ‘Greater East Asia Olympics’. Sport would facilitate them absorbing *Nippon seishin*, or the Japanese nationalistic fighting spirit, which would ‘liberate’ them from Western colonial thinking.<sup>4</sup> However, as the war worsened for Japan, it became clear there would be no ‘East Asian Games’ or ‘Greater East Asia Olympics’. Nonetheless, the Meiji Setsu [Birthday] Sports Carnival, which was held in parts of the Japanese Empire in conjunction with the Meiji Shrine Games in Tokyo to mark the Meiji Emperor’s birthday on 3 November, continued in Singapore during the war, providing a mixture of State Shinto and athleticism that celebrated the state’s control over the body.

Sport historians Lai Kuan Lim, Peter Horton, and Nick Aplin suggest that sport during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore was used to promote ‘Nipponisation’, which meant the cultural assimilation of the local population.<sup>5</sup> The role of the *Syonan Jinja* as a monument to Japanese militarism and the emperor cult has also been explored by Kevin Blackburn and Edmund Lim.<sup>6</sup> What remains unexplored are the connections between the *Syonan Jinja*, State Shinto, Japanese Pan-Asianism, sport, and the idea of the ‘Greater East Asia Olympics’ of the Japanese Empire. What role did they play together in integrating Singapore into the Japanese Empire? How were they supposed to integrate Singapore? This article explores these connections by adopting a methodology which analyses and contextualises the public discourses on sport in Japanese-controlled Singapore and then evaluates the impact on the local population of these official discourses by using mainly oral history testimony from individuals who played sport during the Japanese Occupation.

3 See Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan’s War 1931–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 199–223; and Sven Saaler, ‘Pan-Asianism in modern Japanese history’, in *Pan-Asianism in modern Japanese history: Colonialism, regionalism and borders*, ed. Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–18.

4 See Ko Takashima, *Teikoku Nihon to supotsu* [The Japanese empire and sport] (Tokyo: Shobo, 2012), pp. 185–213.

5 Lai Kuan Lim and Peter Horton, ‘Sport in Syonan (Singapore) 1942–1945: Centralisation and “Nipponisation”’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, 6 (2011): 895–924; Nick Aplin, *Sport in Singapore: The colonial legacy* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2019), pp. 280–89. See also Edgar Bolun Liao, ‘Creating and mobilizing “Syonan” youth: Youth and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, 1942–1945’, *Archipel* 102 (2021): 65–97.

6 Kevin Blackburn and Edmund Lim, ‘The Japanese war memorials of Singapore: Monuments of commemoration and symbols of Japanese imperial ideology’, *South East Asia Research* 7, 3 (1999): 321–40.

### The Meiji Shrine, sport, and the games of the Japanese Empire

The role that sport played together with State Shinto and the cult of the emperor in the broader Japanese Empire provides the context for how they were connected in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. This is illustrated by the function of the Meiji Shrine in the sports of the Japanese Empire. The Meiji Shrine, which was built in 1920, was the first Shinto shrine to be conceptualised and funded as a national project of Japan rather than being established by local devotees as had other Shinto shrines. Helen Hardacre argues that the Meiji Shrine symbolised the ascent to power of Shinto as a state religion since the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and demonstrated State Shinto's manipulation by the state to indoctrinate the public and unify the nation.<sup>7</sup> The connection between sport and the Meiji Shrine was established when a sports stadium was built in the Meiji Shrine's Outer Gardens in 1924 for a national games funded by the Japanese Ministry of Home Affairs—the Meiji Shrine Games. They were set up to be held annually on the birth date of the Meiji Emperor, 3 November, in order to 'cherish the memory of the Meiji Emperor the Great'.<sup>8</sup> Sports held at the Meiji Shrine included a mixture of Western and modernised Japanese sports, such as athletics, swimming, rugby, soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis, field hockey, baseball, judo, kendo, archery, and sumo wrestling.

Sports scholars are in agreement that in Japan during the 1920s to 1940s sport at the Meiji Shrine Games upheld the emperor cult. Ikuo Abe, Yasuharu Kiyohara, Ken Nakajima have described the games held annually at the Meiji Shrine in the interwar years as a 'device for control', with the goal of leading 'working youth and students to the Emperor System' through 'a ritualistic means of spiritual mobilization of youth'.<sup>9</sup> Sandra Collins affirms this connection when she concludes that sport and physical education were used to 'rationalize and discipline the bodies of the Japanese into controlled subjects', and that the Meiji Shrine symbolically represented 'the increasing fusion between sports and nationalism as united practices'.<sup>10</sup> Katsumi Irie in his definitive study of the Meiji Shrine Games argues that the connection with the emperor cult was reinforced by having Emperor Hirohito attending with his brother Prince Chichibu as the President of the quasi-government body organising the games.<sup>11</sup> Yasuhiro Sakaue documents how sport in the 1920s was also being linked to the emperor cult in the calculating way Hirohito was carefully portrayed to the Japanese public as a sportsman engaged in many sports, in particular swimming and horse riding.<sup>12</sup>

7 Hardacre, *Shinto and the state, 1868–1998*, pp. 38, 80, 93–4.

8 Ikuo Abe, Yasuharu Kiyohara and Ken Nakajima, 'Fascism, sport and society in Japan', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, 2 (1992): 5.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

10 Sandra Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games: The missing Olympics: Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 11.

11 Katsumi Irie, *Showa supotsu shiron: Meiji jingu kyogi taikai to kokuminseishinsodoin undo* [Showa sports history: The Meiji Shrine Games and the National Spirit Mobilisation Movement] (Tokyo: Fumaido, 1991), chaps. 4 and 5.

12 Yasuhiro Sakaue, *Showa tenno to supotsu: Gyokutai no kindaiishi* [The Showa Emperor and sports: A modern history of the imperial presence] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2016), pp. 110–34.

The Outer Gardens of the Meiji Shrine were not confined to being just the venue for the Meiji Shrine Games of the Japanese Empire. Stefan Huebner suggests that the site was used to highlight how Japan saw its regional role as a fully modernised leader of developing Asian countries still under colonial rule when it hosted the Far Eastern Championship Games in 1930. Japanese Pan-Asianism was on display. Athletes from Japan, the Philippines, China, and India competed. Also known as the 'Far Eastern Olympic Games', the Far Eastern Championship Games had been held previously at Manila, Shanghai, and Osaka. At the 1930 Far Eastern Championship Games, the Meiji Shrine site symbolised Japan's modernisation which was mixed with State Shinto's reinvention of 'traditional elements of Japanese religion and culture'.<sup>13</sup>

The Meiji Setsu Sports Carnivals were replications of the Meiji Shrine Games in major cities of the empire. State Shinto and the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnivals held in conjunction with the Tokyo Meiji Shrine Games were spread across the Japanese Empire in attempts to foster obedience to the emperor and encourage the colonial subjects to emulate the Japanese. Hardacre demonstrates in her work on Shinto and the Japanese state that State Shinto shrines were established throughout Japan's colonies to 'symbolize hegemony' of the imperial state, and 'colonial subjects of the empire were expected to pay obeisance to Japanese deities as a mark of their submission to imperial authority'.<sup>14</sup> Ko Takashima has similarly documented in his study of the Japanese Empire and sport how the festival of sports held at the Meiji Shrine to mark the birthday of the Meiji Emperor was also adapted by Japanese colonial officials to further integrate the colonial subjects into the Japanese Empire. Takashima cites as evidence the speeches of Fumio Goto, Director of Administration in the office of the Governor-General of Taiwan and Taiwan Athletic Association President (later briefly Prime Minister of Japan in 1936), and Hidehiko Ishiguro, Director of the Bureau of Education in Taiwan. In 1926, they were preparing the Taiwanese athletes for the festival of sports in Taiwan to celebrate the third Meiji Shrine Games. Ishiguro told the athletes that the performances of their bodies in competition reflected the physiques of the Taiwanese people under Japan's imperial rule. He exhorted the athletes to strive through self-control and self-discipline to achieve 'a Japanese soul' (*yamato damashii*) that the Japanese themselves had inherited from 'our ancestors'. Ishiguro continued that when competing: 'We must have the fundamental spirit of the Empire [*teikoku no konpon seishin*]. If you want to be Japanese, you must grasp the heart of the Japanese'. He singled out and praised two athletes who told him and Goto they wanted to possess a 'Japanese soul and the fundamental spirit of the Japanese Empire'.<sup>15</sup>

In the Japanese imperial state's mass mobilisation of its citizens and imperial subjects for fitness and sport, Fujino Yutaka has identified a fascist aesthetic of the body fostered by the Japanese militarism of the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> The state mobilised its people so that it could not just develop healthy and strong physiques to be deployed for war, but

13 Stefan Huebner, *Pan-Asian sports and the emergence of modern Asia 1913–1974* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), p. 87.

14 Hardacre, *Shinto and the state*, p. 95.

15 Takashima, *Teikoku Nihon to supotsu*, p. 190.

16 Fujino Yutaka, *Kyosei saretu kenko: Nihon fashizumu ka no seimei toshintai* [Forced health: Life and the body under Japanese fascism] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2000), pp. 4–5.

to control the bodies and minds of its citizens. A National Eugenics Law was enacted along with the National Physical Strength Law in 1940, which ordered all young men to undergo physical examinations. Yasuhiro Sakaue and Hiroshi Takaoka have documented how millions of Japan's citizens engaged in numerous national and prefecture calisthenic exercises.<sup>17</sup> Asato Ikeda has argued that for the Japanese state, the emphasis was more on using exercise and sport to develop not necessarily a superior physical body to those in the West but to foster a superior spirit, which justified the expansion of their empire into Asia to liberate other Asians from Western colonialism.<sup>18</sup>

To celebrate on the international stage the concepts of State Shinto that were expressed in the sports held at the Meiji Shrine and throughout the empire, the Japanese state sought to hold an Olympic Games at the sports complexes in the Outer Gardens of the Meiji Shrine. Sandra Collins concludes that for Japan, the cancelled 1940 Olympics were more about the celebration of *Nippon seishin* and *yamato damashii* than any spirit of international sportsmanship. The International Olympic Committee grew worried about the nationalist tone of the discussion in Japan over the 1940 Tokyo Olympics. Hachisaburo Hirao, the Minister of Education, publicly declared the proposed Olympics in Tokyo was a way to express the spirit of the nationalistic form of *bushido* as advocated by Jigoro Kano, martial arts expert and a Japanese member of the International Olympic Committee.<sup>19</sup> However, in a move that surprised many outside and inside the country, the government of Japan decided not to go ahead and host the Olympics, as part of its 1938 'New Austerity Plan', which was conceived with the aim of devoting more resources to pursue the war with China.

The cancelled Tokyo Olympics were replaced with an 'East Asian Games' that were part of the national *Kigen* (origin) celebrations commemorating 1940 as the 2,600th year since the foundation of the 'Yamato dynasty' of the unbroken line of emperors ruling Japan since 660 BCE. The games were held in the stadium of the Outer Gardens of the Meiji Shrine from 6 to 9 June 1940. Competing were 2,000 athletes invited from Japan, Manchuria, the occupied areas of China, as well as representatives from the Philippines, Thailand, and Hawai'i. Athletes at the 'East Asian Games' competed in track and field events, baseball, yachting, hockey, wrestling, cycling, basketball, and swimming. Asian sports were also highlighted, such as Chinese and Thai martial arts.<sup>20</sup>

The Meiji Shrine Games were also held later in the year. In the *Kigen* commemorations of the 'Yamato dynasty' both games were celebrations of State Shinto and the emperor cult, but with the 'East Asian Games' having a noticeable international dimension while the Meiji Shrine Games were more national in their focus.<sup>21</sup> The

17 Yasuhiro Sakaue and Hiroyuki Takaoka, *Maboroshi no Tokyo orinpikku to sono jidai: Senjiki no supotsu, toshi,shintai* [The dream of a Tokyo Olympics and its era: Sports, city, and body during the war] (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2009), pp. 414–29.

18 Asato Ikeda, 'Envisioning fascist space, time, and body: Japanese painting during the fifteen-year war (1931–1945)' (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2012), p. 185.

19 Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games*, p. 90.

20 Sandra Collins, 'Sporting Japanese-ness in an Americanised Japan', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, 17 (2011): 2461.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 2460.

Olympic flame ceremony was replicated in the *seibo* (sacred light) relay that started on the anniversary of the Meiji Emperor's birthday at the Kashihara Shrine, where the first Emperor Jimmu was said to have ascended to the throne in 660 BCE.<sup>22</sup> Shinto priests lit the sacred fire that began the relay on a commemorative day marked by a range of sports, such as track and field events, baseball and gymnastics. In her work, Collins concludes that at these events, 'citizens of the expanding Japanese empire were invited to re-enact the imperial founding as being tied to the creation of the new order in Asia and the realization of the spirit of the ancient Emperor Jimmu'.<sup>23</sup>

The outbreak of the war in the Pacific in December 1941 did not at first stop the planned regular holding of the 'East Asian Games', but initially raised the prospects of an even bigger games in the expanded Japanese Empire. In February 1942, when Japan appeared to be easily conquering East Asia and the Pacific, expanding the 'East Asian Games' into a much bigger 'Greater East Asia Olympics' with more Asian countries just 'liberated' by Japan was expressed at an imperial roundtable of Japanese sports officials.<sup>24</sup> In August 1942, the second 'East Asian Games' was held in Xinjing, Manchukuo, to mark the tenth anniversary of the setting up of the Japanese puppet state. At the 1942 games, athletes from Japan's colonies of Korea and Taiwan competed in the Japanese team. Other countries involved were Inner Mongolia, Japanese-occupied China, and Manchukuo. The sports played included track and field events, equestrian competitions, table tennis, soccer, baseball, gymnastics, rugby, cycling, kendo, and sumo wrestling. The idea of an 'East Asian Games' became more tied to the Japanese Empire. The programme of the games, endorsed by the Emperor of Japan, espoused the idea that good 'East Asian physiques' were essential to the 'construction of the great mission of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'.<sup>25</sup> This 'construction' was taking place in the middle of a major military conflict, where healthy physiques had an obvious military connotation.

Japanese sports officials organising their 'East Asian Games' appear to have been influenced by the Pan-Asianism behind the Far Eastern Championship Games which had been held every two years from when they were inaugurated in 1913 at Manila until 1934. Often called the 'Far Eastern Olympic Games', these games were initially organised by the Young Men's Christian Association to encourage the notion that sport would help 'civilise' and 'modernise' Asian societies. They were later taken over by sports officials in the countries attending—Japan, the Philippines, and China. However, the games were dissolved in 1934 over Japan's insistence that its puppet Manchurian state of Manchukuo be included. In 1942, Japanese sporting officials seemed to be adapting ideals of these Asian games which expressed notions of sport representing the 'modernising' of Asian peoples. As Huebner suggests, these ideas had been present since the first Far Eastern Championship Games took place in Manila in 1913.<sup>26</sup> However, what had been changed by the Japanese officials was the shape of the region that was to be integrated and the addition of Japan's

22 Ibid., p. 2462.

23 Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games*, p. 181.

24 Takashima, *Teikoku Nihon to supotsu*, p. 115.

25 Ibid., p. 104.

26 Huebner, *Pan-Asian sports and the emergence of modern Asia*, pp. 1–15.



role as the leader of this regional integration of Asian countries following Japan's modernisation. Higashi Osaka, a sports official at the games in Manchukuo in 1942, claimed that Japan in the future would become the centre of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' and that a future 'Greater East Asia Olympics' would help 'educate' the peoples of the different ethnic groups of Japan's Empire into a unified, yet diverse, collection of countries guided by Japan as the leader of a 'modernising' Asia.<sup>27</sup>

The games in Manchukuo were perceived by the Japanese government as being held at an enormous cost for wartime conditions. Another 'East Asian Games' was scheduled to be held in Japanese-occupied China. However, it never occurred because the war worsened for Japan and the financial burden was felt to be not worth the propaganda rewards of putting on another games. From late 1943 onwards there was noticeably less discussion of any future 'East Asian Games' or a 'Greater East Asia Olympics'. After 1943, the nationalistic mass calisthenics-based sports that were preparation for military fitness and associated with the Meiji Shrine Games became the dominant sports events throughout the Japanese Empire.<sup>28</sup> This was despite the Meiji Shrine Games themselves ceasing after their last incarnation in 1943. In 1944, most sporting championships in Japan were stopped as the war worsened, and the state channelled the physical energies of the Japanese people into strictly war-related activities in the Japanese homeland itself.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Syonan Jinja* as a place for commemoration, State Shinto, and sport**

The events influencing the holding of empire-wide games and the Meiji Shrine Games and Meiji Setsu Sports Carnivals provide the broader context for the relationship between State Shinto, empire, and sporting events in Singapore. The rapid territorial expansion due to military conquest in early 1942 raised questions about which territories should be integrated into the empire as colonies and which should be nominally independent countries, as Japan had promised to liberate Southeast Asia from the Western colonial powers. Singapore was to be kept as a colony, and to be thoroughly 'Nipponised' through the means of education, culture, and sport.<sup>30</sup> Within a few days of the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the island was re-named by its conqueror Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita as *Syonan-to* to venerate Hirohito's 'Syowa' or 'Showa' reign.<sup>31</sup> According to Toru Yano, Yamashita and his staff officers liked the name of the existing small State Shinto shrine of the prewar Japanese community of Singapore, which was called the *Syonan Jinja*.<sup>32</sup> The name does not simply mean 'light of the south' island as is commonly assumed. 'Syo' is the first character in the 'Syowa' regnal name from which *Syonan-to* derives its meaning; it is not just ordinary 'light'. The character is not often used outside of referring to

27 Takashima, *Teikoku Nihon to supotsu*, p. 112.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 180–85.

29 Irie, *Showa supotsu shiron*, chap. 5.

30 Yoji Akashi, 'Education and indoctrination policy in Malaya and Singapore under the Japanese rule, 1942–1945', *Malaysian Journal of Education* 13, 1–2 (1976): 1–2.

31 *Syonan Times*, 21 Feb. 2602 (1942).

32 Toru Yano, '*Nanshin' no keifu: Nihon no nanyo shikan* [The history of the 'South-bound expansion of Japan': Historical perspectives of Japanese views on Southeast Asia] (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo, 2009 [1975]), pp. 104–5.

the Showa reign.<sup>33</sup> Yamashita thus chose ‘Syonan’ as the new name for Singapore in honour of the emperor cult.

Yamashita moved quickly to replace the small shrine of the prewar Japanese community of Singapore with a much larger and major State Shinto shrine for emperor worship in the new colony. Similar State Shinto shrines had been erected throughout the Japanese Empire for emperor worship, particularly in the established colonies of Korea and Taiwan.<sup>34</sup> According to the Japanese Southern Military Administration Department, which governed conquered Southeast Asia, the new Singapore shrine was intended to be the ‘general centre of the entire southern region’ for the worship of the emperor.<sup>35</sup> On 7 May 1942, Yamashita laid the foundation stones for the *Syonan Jinja* and its accompanying *Syonan Chureito* (pagoda to the loyal spirits). The *Syonan Chureito* was built to honour the Japanese war dead. It was located 6 kilometres away from the *Syonan Jinja* on top of Bukit Batok Hill in order to overlook the Ford Factory site at which the British commander Lieutenant General A.E. Percival had surrendered Singapore to Yamashita. Work on the site of the *Syonan Jinja* had already commenced in mid-April under the direction of Colonel Yosuke Yokoyama and his 5th Regiment of Independent Engineers from Yamashita’s army with thousands of prisoners of war as labour. The timber and granite building materials were sourced from Malaya and Singapore, while the shrine’s sacred symbols were sent from Japan.<sup>36</sup>

The *Syonan Jinja* was modelled on three different Shinto shrines in Japan and fulfilled three different roles in Singapore. The shrine was architecturally styled on the Ise Grand Shrine and followed its worship of Amaterasu, the divine ancestor from which the long line of Japanese emperors of the ‘Yamato dynasty’ were descended. The *Syonan Jinja* was located, like the Ise Grand Shrine, in a deeply forested area and was likewise approachable by a ‘divine bridge’, across the water. Shrines in Japan’s empire that were dedicated to Amaterasu were usually meant to encourage emperor worship among the Japanese colonialists and the local population.<sup>37</sup> However, the *Syonan Jinja* was also similar to the Yasukuni Shrine, which the Meiji Emperor had established in 1868 to enshrine the spirits of the war dead who died for the emperor. The *Syonan Jinja*’s accompanying *Syonan Chureito* enshrined the spirits of the Japanese war dead from the Malayan campaign. When announcing the laying of the foundation stones of the *Syonan Jinja* and the *Syonan Chureito*, the Japanese propaganda newspaper, the *Syonan Times* alluded to the functions of these places: ‘The purposes of erecting these is to perpetuate the memory of the Nippon heroes who laid down their lives at the battle fronts of Malaya and Sumatra; also

33 Akiyasu Todo, *Gakken kanwa daijiten* [Big dictionary of Chinese characters] (Tokyo: Gakushu Kenkyu Sha, 1982), p. 597, records that ‘Showa’ means ‘peace under good governance’ or ‘being harmonious’. The meaning originates in the Chinese classic, *Shang shu* [Book of documents].

34 Yasuto Inamiya and Michio Nakajima, *‘Shinkoku’ no zan’ei: kaigai jinja atochi shashin kiroku* [Remnants of ‘Sacred Country’: Photographic records of the sites of overseas shrines] (Tokyo: Kokusho, 2019).

35 Koji Osawa, ‘Shonan jinja: Soken kara shuen made’ [The Shonan Shrine: From its founding to its demise], in *Shingaporu toshi-ron (Ajia Yugaku 123)* [Singapore City Theory (Intriguing Asia 123)], ed. Mikio Shibata and Junkai Guo (Tokyo: Bensey, 2009), p. 160.

36 *Syonan Times*, 8 May 2602 (1942).

37 Hardacre, *Shinto and the state*, p. 38.



to enable the Nippon-zin [Japanese] and the newly attached nationals of different races in the Southern Co-Prosperity Sphere to respect the ideal of the founding of the Dai Nippon [Greater Japanese] Empire.<sup>38</sup>

The third function of the *Syonan Jinja* followed that of the Meiji Shrine as a centre for sport and controlling the bodies of the empire's subjects. The *Syonan Jinja* was located 10 kilometres out of the city area but was allocated a 15-kilometre-square area around it that was meant to be made into gardens and sports complexes in the same manner that the Meiji Shrine Outer Gardens had been designed in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Two phases of construction were envisaged. The first phase was to build the shrine itself within six months. The second phase was to commence in November 1942 to build the parks and sports facilities, but no deadline was given for this part of the project.<sup>40</sup>

In November 1942, when the first phase was nearing completion, Major Yasuji Tamura, who after May 1942 had taken over from Yokoyama the task of completing the *Syonan Jinja*, outlined at a press conference how he saw the area developing according to the model of the Meiji Shrine. He was an officer from the 5th Division's engineers regiment in Yamashita's army. Tamura, when speaking to journalists of the state-controlled Domei News Agency, the official news organisation of the Japanese Empire, described how 'in addition to the Inner Zinzya [*jinja*] grounds and the MacRitchie Reservoir, which would be dedicated as sacred ground, there would be gardens, promenades, public buildings and playgrounds.'<sup>41</sup> He declared that 'plans called for the steady development of the area' over 'a period of 30 to 50 years which would eventually make this Syonan Zinzya, second only to Tokyo's world famous Meiji Zinzya with running track stadium, swimming pool, wrestling arenas and public bandstands.'<sup>42</sup> These visions of major sporting complexes for the *Syonan Jinja* that would emulate similar ones at the Meiji Shrine were widely reported in Japan by the *Asahi Shimbun* correspondent.<sup>43</sup>

The plan among the Japanese military in Singapore was that the *Syonan Jinja* would follow the Meiji Shrine in its mixture of Shinto, nationalism, and imperialism with sport. At Tamura's Domei News Agency press conference of November 1942, it was proclaimed that 'the Syonan Zinzya will occupy a unique position in the life and development of the Southern Regions, as Nippon shrines consecrated to traditional National Gods express the underlying principles of Nippon spirit'.<sup>44</sup> In addition, it was affirmed by the Domei News Agency that 'the Syonan Zinzya will truly stand as a monument to the spirit of Nippon, and a landmark for the construction of Greater Asia.'<sup>45</sup> Tamura and the Domei News Agency also seemed caught up in the euphoria of Japan's early victories, which, as Takashima has noted, allowed Japanese sports officials and enthusiasts in the military to dream that the 'East

38 *Syonan Times*, 8 May 2602 (1942).

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Syonan Times*, 23 July 2602 (1942).

41 *Syonan Times*, 13 Nov. 2602 (1942).

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Asahi Shimbun*, 25 July 1942.

44 *Syonan Times*, 13 Nov. 2602 (1942).

45 *Ibid.*

Asian Games' would blossom into a 'Greater East Asia Olympics'. Alluding to the Far Eastern Championship Games of 1913 to 1934, which had been also known as the 'Far Eastern Olympics', Tamura promised the people of Singapore that 'someday', the 'Syonan Zinzya park would be the locale for the Far Eastern Olympics if not the international Olympic Games.'<sup>46</sup>

While Tamura outlined the design and conception of the *Syonan Jinja* as a State Shinto place of emperor worship surrounded by elaborate sports complexes, it was reported by the Singapore-based correspondent of the *Asahi Shimbun* that it had been designed this way by his subordinate 2nd Lieutenant Tokichi Ochifuji of the 5th Division's engineers regiment.<sup>47</sup> Ochifuji had graduated in 1925 from the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, at Tokyo Imperial University. He had designed and constructed buildings while working for the Osaka Prefecture and then after 1934 at Hokkaido Imperial University before he was drafted in February 1941 to be part of Yamashita's army.<sup>48</sup> Both Ochifuji and Tamura were responsible to a committee for the building of the *Syonan Jinja* and *Syonan Chureito*, which endorsed their plans and design, and according to the Japanese-controlled press, affirmed that these sites 'would reveal the lofty ideals of Nippon as the Leader in East Asia, add a bright touch of colour to Syonan-to and portray the sacred work of the Syowa era forever'.<sup>49</sup> Among Tamura, Ochifuji, and the committee, there appears to have been an awareness of the Pan-Asianism ideals of the Far Eastern Championship Games and how these had been co-opted into serving the concept of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' with Japan as leader.

Plans in 1942 for the creation of sporting complexes for a future 'Greater East Asia Olympic Games' or 'Far Eastern Olympic Games' in Singapore were not just confined to officers in Yamashita's army. Tamura's assurances about a future 'Greater East Asia Olympics' in Singapore were followed up by statements in December 1942 by Mamoru Shinozaki, who headed the *Syonan Tokubetsu-si Kosei-ka* (The Syonan Municipality's Office for the Promotion of the Well-Being of the People). Shinozaki had been a journalist for the propaganda organisation, the Domei News Agency, and then the press attache for the Japanese consulate before he was imprisoned in 1940 by the British for spying. Shinozaki also 'envisaged' that 'in the near future it may be possible for national athletes from the various centres in the Southern Regions to meet at Syonan to participate in the Greater East Asia Olympic Games'.<sup>50</sup> Shinozaki promised a \$2 million stadium that was 'to be one of the best equipped ever seen in East Asia'.<sup>51</sup> It would have a track and field venue, a baseball diamond, 13 tennis courts, two soccer pitches, volleyball and basketball courts, hockey and rugby pitches and a large swimming pool. The site for these sporting facilities, for Shinozaki, was the 28-acre Farrer Park, not the *Syonan Jinja*. In contrast to Tamura and Ochifuji, Shinozaki was part of the Japanese civilian administration of Singapore, which, as Clay Eaton has pointed out, did not always

46 Ibid.

47 *Asahi Shimbun*, 31 July 1942.

48 Osawa, 'Shonan jinja', p. 153.

49 *Syonan Times*, 23 July 2602 (1942).

50 *Syonan Sinbun*, 25 Dec. 2602 (1942).

51 Ibid.

agree with the military on how to achieve the goals of the ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’.<sup>52</sup> Shinozaki’s role as the officer for welfare meant that he was overseeing sport in Singapore. Having the principal sporting complexes for future ‘Greater East Asia Olympic Games’ at Farrer Park near the city of Singapore reinforced the existing division of civilian–military responsibilities, that the civilian administration of Singapore was in charge of sport among the people of Singapore, not the military.

The enshrinement of the sun goddess Amaterasu at the *Syonan Jinja* on 15 February 1943, the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore, showed that the Japanese military still had hopes for the *Syonan Jinja* as a centre for sports. Major Tamura again spoke of his plans for the large area around the shrine: ‘Some day, perhaps, this may be the locale for a Greater East Asiatic Olympics in post-war days of peace.’<sup>53</sup> In his press conference, Tamura spread out blueprints and drawings in front of him showing how the *Syonan Jinja*, its outer gardens, and sports complexes would look. He told the press at the dedication that ‘the Shrine itself was just the beginning’, as ‘there would later be the addition of a spacious park with recreation facilities, a stadium and swimming pool.’<sup>54</sup> For Tamura, what he called ‘the *Syonan Shrine compound*’ was ‘likely to be the focus of the new city which would naturally rise up around it.’<sup>55</sup> He described how well before holding the ‘Greater East Asia Olympics’ at the site, ‘all major sports would be held on one of the many athletic fields which would be incorporated with the spacious 1,000-acre compound’.<sup>56</sup> Tamura even planned for the Bukit Timah Race Course, which was 3 kilometres away from the *Syonan Jinja*, to ‘be incorporated in the gigantic Shrine project’.<sup>57</sup>

After the sun goddess had been enshrined on the morning of 15 February 1943, Shinozaki brought the representatives of Singapore’s different ethnic communities to the *Syonan Jinja* in the evening to demonstrate their subjugation to the emperor. Beforehand at the municipal offices, Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian community representatives and members of the Islamic, Buddhist, Christian, and other faiths objected to praying at the *Syonan Jinja*, as it was contrary to their religious beliefs. However, they had little choice as the Japanese military had ordered them to attend. Shinozaki told them that it was not a religious obligation, but a demonstration of obedience to the emperor cult:

They all followed the manner of the Japanese at prayer. I explained to them that the ceremony showed respect of the ancestors of the Japanese Emperor. ‘You can learn something about Japanese customs from this ceremony,’ I told them. ‘You do not betray your religion.’<sup>58</sup>

52 See Clay Eaton, ‘Governing Shonan: The Japanese administration of wartime Singapore’ (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2018), p. 9 and chap. 4.

53 *Syonan Sinbun*, 16 Feb. 2603 (1943).

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan—My story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Times International, 1982 [1975]), p. 118.

He affirmed that by participating in the evening ceremony that the local population would 'know the heart of the Japanese'.<sup>59</sup> Blackburn and Lim in their work demonstrate that there was systematic and sustained coercion by the Japanese administration in getting the local population to subjugate themselves to the will of the regime by praying to the emperor at the *Syonan Jinja*.<sup>60</sup> Domei News Agency correspondents were quite clear about the worship of Amaterasu and the Emperor at the shrine, declaring the shrine as the home of 'the Eternal Protector of Malaya and Sumatra, who is to be worshipped by the local inhabitants'.<sup>61</sup>

In conjunction with the enshrinement of the *Syonan Jinja*, on the first anniversary of the fall of Singapore, there was 'a miniature Olympiad' held at the Jalan Besar Stadium at which all the ethnic communities of Singapore were required to participate.<sup>62</sup> Many sporting events were planned to mark the day.<sup>63</sup> Over the next two days at the *Syonan Jinja*, martial arts competitions between various military units and sumo wrestling contests by the army and navy were held to honour the sun goddess and the emperor cult.<sup>64</sup>

### **Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival: Controlling the body of the colonial subject**

Subjects of the Japanese Empire were not just coerced into demonstrating their obedience to the Emperor at Shinto shrines, but were also compelled to participate in physical fitness activities and sports that were held as part of the empire-wide Meiji Setsu Sports Carnivals held in conjunction with the Meiji Shrine Games in Tokyo. These were festivals of sport held on the Meiji Emperor's birthday in different parts of the empire. The Meiji Shrine Games and the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnivals expressed what scholars such as Ikeda, Takashima, and Yutaka suggest was a fascist aesthetic of the body associated with State Shinto. These activities demonstrated the control over the body by the state. Does State Shinto and sport in Singapore follow the shift from elements of internationalism to a narrow nationalism from 1942 to 1943 that Takashima identified in Japan's empire in northeast Asia? He argues that when the war dragged on and worsened for Japan, imperial propaganda about the future 'Greater East Asia Olympics' faded and gave way to the type of mass calisthenic-based sport and drills associated with celebrating the more nationalistic Meiji Shrine Games. This shift reflects how mass calisthenics were supposed to encourage conformity and obedience, individual sports were the opposite, and team sports were in between.

Singapore as a part of the Japanese Empire celebrated its first Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in tandem with the Meiji Shrine Games in November 1942. To mark the

59 Mamoru Shinozaki, 'Shingaporu senryo to Shonan jidai: Watashi no senchu-shi', [The occupation of Singapore and the Shonan era: My story], *Minami jujisei: Kinen fukkoku-ban* (Singapore: Southern Cross, Memorial Reprint Editions), vol. 1, 1978, p. 63. See also the description of the ceremony in Shingaporu shiseikai [Singapore Municipal Association], *Shonan tokubetsu-shi shi: Senji-chu no Shingaporu* [Syonan special municipality history: Singapore during the war] (Tokyo: Nihon Shingaporu Kyokai, 1986), pp. 212–13.

60 Blackburn and Lim, 'The Japanese war memorials of Singapore', pp. 321–40.

61 *Syonan Times*, 23 July 2602 (1942).

62 *Syonan Sinbun*, 29 Jan. 2603 (1943).

63 *Syonan Sinbun*, 9 Feb. 2603 (1943).

64 Osawa, 'Shonan jinja', p. 153.

birthday of the Meiji Emperor, Shinozaki and the body that he had set up in 1942 to oversee and control sport, the Syonan Sports Association, organised baseball, football, hockey, basketball, and volleyball matches, which were played at the Padang, a common used for recreation, opposite the Municipality's offices.<sup>65</sup> There were no tennis courts at the Padang, so the tennis matches were held elsewhere. The prizes for the competitions were given out by Mayor Shigeo Odachi. It was not just the range of sports of the 1942 Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in Singapore that reflected internationalism. In the sports played to mark the Meiji Emperor's birthday there was the influence of the Far Eastern Championship Games, often referred to as the 'Far Eastern Olympic Games', and Japan's adaptation of them into its 'East Asian Games' in 1940. For the 1942 Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival, it was announced that the football match was 'to be played under [the rules of the] Far Eastern Olympic Games, which provides for changing of players', as opposed to rules of the game in the West at that time which did not yet fully embrace the idea of substitutes as it would after the war.<sup>66</sup> In Singapore during 1942, many sports, notably hockey, soccer, and boxing, adopted what Japanese sports officials called 'Far Eastern Olympic Games rules' in preparation for future participation in a 'Greater East Asia Olympics'.<sup>67</sup>

Celebrations of the 1942 Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in Singapore reflected the ideals of the Far Eastern Championship Games as they had been adapted by Japanese sporting officials for their own 'East Asian Games'. These ideals were an expression of Japanese Pan-Asianism of the 1940s and its embodiment in the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'. Eri Hotta demonstrates that in the Japanese Pan-Asianism of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' there was a 'pervasive conviction that Japan served as the pre-ordained leader of Pan-Asian union and that it could remake the societies in the likeness of Japan lay at the very basis of many of its policies'.<sup>68</sup> This call to emulate Japan as the leader of a 'modernising' Asia meant absorbing ideas associated with State Shinto and the emperor cult, such as *Nippon seishin*, through means such as the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival.

Shinozaki in his address in preparation for the 1942 Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in Singapore outlined how the people of Singapore were to be integrated into the Japanese Empire according to the Pan-Asianist rhetoric of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' that was being appropriated for the Japanese imperial project. On 16 October 1942, when speaking before the newly formed Syonan Sports Association at its first Annual General Meeting, Shinozaki affirmed that fighting the war meant a need for greater unity in the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', arguing that 'at present we are facing this sublime War of Great East Asia in the fullest scale which was never recorded in the past history,' so therefore, 'we Asiatics with wholehearted co-operation must combine our efforts to attain our aim of co-prosperity in Great East Asia.'<sup>69</sup> Sport would assist this objective, Shinozaki affirmed, and he stated that the 'sports spirit' would help unite 'the

65 *Syonan Times*, 1 Nov. 2602 (1942).

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Syonan Times*, 24 July and 25 Nov. 2602 (1942); and *Syonan Shimbun*, 2 Mar. 2604 (1944).

68 Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's war*, p. 201.

69 *Syonan Times*, 20 Oct. 2602 (1942).

Great Asiatic races'.<sup>70</sup> He believed, 'If we ever fail in this great undertaking the skies over Asia may lose their lights for over a thousand years.'<sup>71</sup> Shinozaki aimed to harness sport for this purpose of uniting the people of Japan's 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' to fight the war. He told his audience:

The origin of sports is the medium for the creation of a spirit of harmony and friendship between peoples, and in order to attain success in sports and games, there must be unity or combination in team work as well as ceaseless training. In this way we should uplift and imbibe the sports spirit in this newly born Malaya and by this perfect team work of all in Malaya, we should attain the complete victory towards the construction of Great East Asia ... Through this sport spirit we should deepen the understanding, affection and spirit of fraternity among the Great Asiatic races. Let us, therefore, join hands firmly to complete our honourable enterprise with fullest and everlasting passion.<sup>72</sup>

Shinozaki informed his audience in Singapore that his rallying of sport behind the war effort came just a few days after the Great Nippon Association for Sports was established in Tokyo. He referred to this sports association as being what he called 'a step towards the Great East Asia co-prosperity sphere'.<sup>73</sup> Shinozaki expressed his hope that the creation of this body and its Singapore branch, the Syonan Sports Association, would ultimately mean 'providing a splendid chance for Syonan in the near future to despatch groups of athletic champions to the Great East Asia Olympic Games'.<sup>74</sup> Sending athletes from Singapore to a 'Greater East Asia Olympics' was a hope that Shinozaki expressed throughout 1942, stressing at the same time that it helped fill 'the need for co-operation and better understanding among Asiatic communities'.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that Shinozaki's apparent optimism in late 1942 about a future 'Greater East Asia Olympics' reflected broader confidence among Japanese administrators in a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' and the outcome of the war. Satoshi Nakano in his work on the intellectual background of the Japanese administrators who arrived to take up key positions in Southeast Asia during 1942 has noted that they arrived with an extraordinary level of self-confidence that had arisen because of Japan's military success. He shows how they then began urging the peoples of the region to follow Japan's lead and transform their societies, economies, and cultures in joining the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'.<sup>76</sup>

New Olympic sports were introduced into Singapore by sports administrators who believed they expressed *Nippon seishin*. Japanese officials made attempts to introduce marathons and long-distance running, which had been absent from track and field events in British Malaya and Singapore. They ambitiously planned to have a series of marathon-length relays down the Malay Peninsula on 8 December 1942, to

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Satoshi Nakano, *Tonan Ajia senryo to Nihonjin: Teikoku Nihon no kaitai* [The occupation of Southeast Asia and the Japanese: The dismantling of the Japanese empire] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2012), chap. 2.



mark the anniversary of their attack on Malaya that began their campaign to take Singapore. The idea was similar to Japanese *ekiden* or long-distance relay running along the roads that had grown in popularity in Japan.<sup>77</sup> The 800-kilometre route down the Malay Peninsula would follow that taken by Yamashita's conquering army.<sup>78</sup> The holding of the relay marathons was to emphasise the determination embodied in the idea of *Nippon seishin*. 'The marathon race requires an iron will as well as persistence', Shinozaki told the population. 'In order to bring this historical war to a successful end this indomitable spirit is essential, and must not be forgotten,' Shinozaki added.<sup>79</sup> He trumpeted the fact that Japan had won the marathon at the 1936 Berlin Olympics and told the population of Singapore that the marathon 'is being held with a view of instilling a new Japanese spirit into sportsmen in Syonan'.<sup>80</sup> The marathons down the peninsula were to be held in conjunction with a 'marathon' race that was to be held in Singapore.<sup>81</sup> In Singapore, runners would run the 15 kilometres along the roads from the Padang to the *Syonan Chureito* shrine of the war dead. This route emphasised the connection of the spirit of the race with State Shinto.<sup>82</sup> The run out to the *Syonan Chureito* went ahead, but the idea of a relay of marathons down the Malay Peninsula and meeting up with the racers from the city at the *Syonan Chureito* does not appear to have been realised, perhaps because of a lack of runners as Japanese sports officials admitted they had just begun to train local runners to do long distance running.<sup>83</sup> Cyclists, in their displays of *Nippon seishin*, also raced out to the *Syonan Chureito* to pay homage during the October 1944 commemorations of Imperial Rescript Day, which celebrated the Japanese *koku-tai* system of government with the divine emperor at its centre.<sup>84</sup>

Having the right spirit, or *Nippon seishin*, was preparation for a 'Greater East Asia Olympics', and so was having Olympic athletes who supported Japan's Pan-Asianism. This occurred more with hockey than other sports in late 1942 and early 1943. The surrendered British Indian Army at the fall of Singapore contained two former Olympic hockey players. Major Gurmit Singh Kullar had played for India when it won the gold medal for hockey at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. Major Ali Iqtidar Shah Dara had played in the winning Indian team at the 1936 Olympics, defeating Germany 8–1 in the final. In Singapore, there were 40,000 surrendered Indian soldiers fired with nationalism and anti-British feeling who joined the Indian National Army, which was set up by the Japanese in 1942 to help them 'liberate' India from the British. Majors Dara and Singh played for the Indian National Army hockey team against the Syonan Sports Association hockey eleven.<sup>85</sup> When

77 See Thomas R.H. Havens, *Marathon Japan: Distance racing and civic culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

78 *Syonan Times*, 13 Nov. 2602 (1942).

79 *Syonan Times*, 3 Dec. 2602 (1942).

80 *Ibid.* Actually, the winner of the 1936 Olympic marathon was a Korean, Sohn Kee-chung, competing as part of the Japanese Empire team, but nonetheless Japan did have a history of strong marathon and long distance runners.

81 *Syonan Times*, 13 Nov. 2602 (1942).

82 *Syonan Times*, 7 Dec. 2602 (1942).

83 *Syonan Times*, 13 Nov. 2602 (1942).

84 *Syonan Shimbun*, 8 Oct. 2604 (1944).

85 *Syonan Sinbun*, 17 Apr. 2603 (1943).

speaking to the Japanese press about the 1936 Olympics after demonstrating his hockey skills in local games, Dara 'spoke highly of the standard of hockey displayed by the Nippon team at the Games' at Berlin in 1936.<sup>86</sup> Dara knew that it was important to praise the *Nippon seishin*, so he added: 'India met Nippon in the fourth round and although we beat them by nine goals to nil, they showed great teamwork and a keen spirit for the game.'<sup>87</sup> Dara, like many young officers of the Indian National Army, believed in Japan's Pan-Asianism, that Japan's leadership of Asia would help 'liberate' India from British colonial rule. Dara played at the Indian National Army's own Officer's Training School, inspiring the young recruits with his rhetoric as an invited dinner guest and with his hockey skills in exhibition games.<sup>88</sup>

How Japanese administrators dealt with sport suggests that there was a change in 1943, when there was a reassertion of Japanese nationalism and a downplaying of the internationalism. This resulted in much less discussion of a future 'Greater East Asia Olympics' as a reflection of the diversity of the people of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' all following Japan as their leader. The change occurred because Japan's fortunes in the war had deteriorated since the heyday of 1942. In August 1943, Shinozaki publicly conceded that there would be no stadium, either at Farrer Park or the *Syonan Jinja*, for a 'Greater East Asia Olympics' until Japan had won the war, telling the public that 'what is most important to all of us at the moment is the prosecution of the war. Everything else is of secondary importance'.<sup>89</sup> In the sport played in Singapore, the internationalist Olympic rhetoric was replaced by an emphasis on the militaristic nationalism of the Meiji Shrine Games. This trend in the relationship between the Japanese Empire and sport in Singapore seems to confirm what Takashima has argued concerning what was happening at the very centre of the Japanese Empire in 1943. The nationalism and militarism of the Meiji Shrine Games became dominant and visions of a 'Greater East Asia Olympics' and its reconstituting of the ideals of Olympism for East Asia faded.<sup>90</sup>

Celebrations of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in Singapore for November 1943 were different from those conducted in 1942. The day of 3 November began at 10 am with the members of the *Gunseikan-bu* (The Japanese Military Administration Department) attending a 45-minute ceremony at the *Syonan Jinja* and then walking to pay homage to the Japanese war dead at the *Syonan Chureito*.<sup>91</sup> Also in the morning, Japanese and local civil servants as well as representatives of the local communities paid their 'respect to the spirit of Meiji Tenno [Emperor]'.<sup>92</sup> Sports followed these ceremonies.

However, instead of having just a display of sports played by elite athletes at the Padang as there had been at the celebration of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in 1942, there was in 1943 an emphasis on mass drills, particularly in all Singapore schools.

86 *Syonan Sinbun*, 23 Feb. 2603 (1943).

87 *Ibid.*

88 K.R. Das, 'The Bharat Youth Training Centre', in Netaji Centre, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: A Malaysian perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: Netaji Centre, 1992), p. 54.

89 *Syonan Sinbun*, 6 Aug. 2603 (1943).

90 Takashima, *Teikoku Nihon to supotsu*, pp. 116, 180–85.

91 *Syonan Sinbun*, 3 Nov. 2603 (1943).

92 *Syonan Shimbun*, 31 Oct. 2604 (1944).

Boxing featured more with large numbers of amateurs and novices in a tournament that lasted all day at the Jalan Besar Stadium.<sup>93</sup> Physical tests for the youths and mass drills were held at the Padang in front of the Syonan Municipality Building. In their physical tests, youths had to run 100 metres in 15 to 16 seconds; 2,000 metres in 9 minutes 31 seconds to 10 minutes 30 seconds; long jump 3 to 3.99 metres. The militaristic nature of these physical tests was revealed when instead of throwing the shot put, the youths had to throw hand grenades to a distance of 30 to 34.99 metres. The setting of upper limits suggests that the emphasis was on military drills for physical fitness and precision rather than athletic striving to go faster and further. Youths also had to carry 30 kilograms of weight within 15 seconds and do four chin-ups.<sup>94</sup> Participants had to qualify in all six events. Of the 144 participants in the tests there were 69 successful contestants—19 Malays, 36 Chinese, 9 Indians and 5 Eurasians.<sup>95</sup> Mass drills were organised by the Syonan Sports Association, which ordered all its members to participate, wearing their uniforms of white sports shirts, white trousers, and white canvas shoes.<sup>96</sup> Members of the Syonan Sports Association were compelled to spend weeks beforehand practising their mass drills.<sup>97</sup> At the Padang on 3 November, there were still baseball, badminton, hockey, basketball, soccer and volleyball matches, but they were less prominent compared to the mass drills and physical tests. In the opening address of the celebration of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival before an audience of 20,000 at the Padang, Shinozaki emphasised: ‘I want you to follow me, because by following me you will help create Dai Toa [Greater East Asia]’.<sup>98</sup> The message of 1942 of Japan as a guide and leader had been reduced to the demands associated with the Meiji Shrine Games in Tokyo, that the bodies of the masses should simply just follow the state.

In 1944, military drills and physical tests were given even more prominence at the Singapore celebration of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival. In Tokyo, the Meiji Shrine Games were cancelled as the state heightened its mobilisation of labour into wartime industries on the home front. In contrast, in Singapore, the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival went ahead as it was still seen as useful in binding the local people to the empire. In Singapore, the Japanese press accounts describe how the 3 November ‘dawned brightly today when every home, public building and private business establishment prominently displaying the Hinomaru [the Japanese flag] all over the island.’<sup>99</sup> Japanese administrators and military personnel assembled at centres throughout Singapore to participate in Shinto ceremonies to mark the birthday of the Meiji Emperor. The celebrations of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in 1944 included what was called ‘an all-community mass rally to further heighten the spirit of the people and make them fully “defence conscious”’.<sup>100</sup> At the 1944 celebrations of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival, the Syonan Sports Association’s special Forward

93 *Syonan Sinbun*, 22 Sept. 2603 (1943).

94 *Syonan Sinbun*, 20 Oct. 2603 (1943).

95 *Syonan Sinbun*, 6 Nov. 2603 (1943).

96 *Syonan Sinbun*, 14 Oct. 2603 (1943).

97 *Syonan Sinbun*, 18 Oct. 2603 (1943).

98 *Syonan Sinbun*, 4 Nov. 2603 (1943).

99 *Syonan Shimbun*, 3 Nov. 2604 (1944).

100 *Syonan Shimbun*, 27 Oct. 2604 (1944).

Service Corps 400-strong members gave a parade of what the Association called 'semi-military drills and a march past'.<sup>101</sup> To complement this mass participation in sport, at the Jalan Besar Stadium there was an all-day gymkhana for civil servants.

A degree of coercion was also a part of the sporting celebrations as leaders of the different communities of Singapore were given speeches on the 'life and work of the late Emperor Meiji', prepared by Shinozaki, to be read out to the public.<sup>102</sup> Before their speeches what was called the 'Short History of Meiji Tenno and the Meiji Shrine' was read out in the different languages of the people of Singapore.<sup>103</sup> The speeches that were written by Shinozaki for the leaders of the local population followed the same format as illustrated in the speech given by Lim Chong Pang, a leader of the Chinese community. He began: 'Today Nippon is fighting a war not only to liberate Greater East Asia, but also to preserve the greatness that Meiji Tenno [emperor] had bequeathed to Nippon so that Nippon may succeed in this dual task.'<sup>104</sup> Lim spoke of using the day of sport to promote among 'all people who live under Nippon rule and protection' a 'defence consciousness'. Concluding, he said:

This defence-mindedness will also enable us to do our duty in the defence of Asia. If we are Asiatics, and are proud of being Asiatics, we must see to it that Asia will for ever be safe from encroachment; so that the present generation and future generations of Asiatics will be free to live and conduct their own affairs as they wish, at the same time contributing to the general well being of the world.<sup>105</sup>

Such carefully scripted speeches at the celebrations of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival from the representatives of the different racial communities of Singapore confirm Sven Saaler's observation that such Japanese-inspired Pan-Asianism, while ostensibly mobilising East Asia against Western colonialism, in substance actually legitimised Japan's hegemony over Asia.<sup>106</sup>

Hotta notes that 1940s Japanese Pan-Asianism, as expressed in these well-scripted speeches, and embodied in the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', directed fellow Asians to emulate Japan by adopting what she calls 'a Japanese mode of existence'.<sup>107</sup> The role of sport in helping fellow Asians emulate the Japanese and achieve 'a Japanese mode of existence' in order to liberate themselves from Western colonialism was still evident in the promotion of sport throughout Singapore in 1944. Boxing was an example. It was promoted extensively in 1944. The *Syonan Shimbun* on its front page told the public that 'the noble art of boxing', and 'the spirit underlying' boxing 'appeals to all Nippon-jin [Japanese] most'.<sup>108</sup> Hisao Saito, the boxing coach to the Syonan Sports Association, exhorted that boxing in Singapore 'develop on correct lines and reveal the true spirit of

101 *Syonan Shimbun*, 20 Oct. 2604 (1944).

102 *Syonan Shimbun*, 28 Oct. 2604 (1944); and Mamoru Shinozaki, *My wartime experiences in Singapore*, ISEAS Singapore Oral History Programme Series no. 3 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), p. 115.

103 *Syonan Shimbun*, 2 Nov. 2604 (1944).

104 *Syonan Shimbun*, 4 Nov. 2604 (1944).

105 *Ibid.*

106 Saaler, 'Pan-Asianism in modern Japanese history', p. 2.

107 Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's war*, p. 221.

108 *Syonan Shimbun*, 9 Mar. 1944.

Bushido'.<sup>109</sup> In its promotion of boxing, the editor of the *Syonan Shimbun* commented how Japanese administrators were still helping local athletes so they could emulate the Japanese and participate in any future 'Greater East Asia Olympics'.<sup>110</sup>

### The response of the people of Singapore

What did the people of Singapore really think about the activities of the Syonan Sports Association in using sport, the idea of a 'Greater East Asia Olympics', and the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival in integrating them into Japan's Empire and war machine? What they really thought was first systematically revealed in the 1980s when an Oral History Department was set up by the Singapore government's Ministry of Culture. Among its projects on Singapore national history was one which involved interviews with people who had lived through the Japanese Occupation. They discussed a range of topics, including sport.<sup>111</sup>

Surprisingly, Singaporeans interviewed in the 1980s expressed an appreciation of the activities of the Syonan Sports Association and its goals of promoting through sport a spirit of 'Asia for Asiatics' in the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'. This was partly because the organisation was under Shinozaki, who was popular among the Chinese in particular because he saved many Chinese men from being taken away as anti-Japanese during the Sook Ching massacres of the Chinese in February and March 1942.<sup>112</sup> Shinozaki in his job forged friendships with many local community leaders and he was known to be so helpful that Japanese military commanders in Singapore were suspicious of him.<sup>113</sup>

Significantly, Shinozaki did not staff the Syonan Sports Association with Japanese, but drew upon people from the local population. The Japanese made greater attempts than the British to allow local people into administrative positions, which encouraged the idea that they could run Singapore without a colonial power. Aplin, among a number of sports scholars, has noted that colonial sport in Singapore before the war had been organised according to race and social hierarchies.<sup>114</sup> The Syonan Sports Association's management and sports councils represented a wide range of individuals from the different racial and ethnic groups in Singapore, with G.H. Kiat as President. Shinozaki appointed as Treasurer, Eurasian water engineer, Philip Carlyle Marcus and to other positions Malays and Indians.<sup>115</sup> However, while it represented the different races, women were not permitted to be members until 1945. The Syonan Sports Association was not just about sport, but also promoted the spread of

109 *Syonan Shimbun*, 2 Mar. 1944.

110 *Syonan Shimbun*, 9 Mar. 1944.

111 Oral History Department, *Syonan: Singapore under the Japanese: A catalogue of oral history interviews* (Singapore: Oral History Department, 1986).

112 Tan Wee Eng, interviewed by Tan Beng Luan on 12 June 1985, accession no. 000566 reel 6, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, transcript, p. 55.

113 Shinozaki, *My wartime experiences in Singapore*, p. 115.

114 See Aplin, *Sport in Singapore*, pp. 7–22.

115 Philip Carlyle Marcus, interviewed by Lim How Seng on 4 Aug. 1988, accession no. 000183 reel 2, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, transcript, p. 15. For the council, see *Syonan Times*, 18 Oct. 1942.

Japanese culture, which its cultural performance groups mixed with local songs and music.<sup>116</sup>

Tan Wee Eng, a clerk and member of the Syonan Sports Association, in his oral history account remembered with fondness his time in the organisation, and how it fulfilled the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' ideals of unity of Asian peoples under Japan:

any Tom Dick and Harry, irrespective of race, creed, colour or whatever it is, anyone can join, or occupation. We had unemployed chaps, we had big shots, we had businessmen, we had rich men, poor men, everybody, tall men short men, small men, big ... everyone, irrespective of anything, no bar. That was what I said—beautiful. That certain spirit of comradeship which everybody trying to...there is no racial discrimination, no hatred, no everybody all in one—one for all and all for one, which is not easy I tell you, in any organisation to get such a spirit which I wonder why today things are not like that.<sup>117</sup>

Tan noticed that sport under the Japanese became more a mass activity with more participants; no longer was it just organised according to the Chinese, Indian, Malay, and European clubs. Sports associations were based on locations, such as his soccer team the Pasir Panjang Rovers which had Malays, Indians, Chinese, and Eurasians playing together in the same team. Although the Pasir Panjang Rovers had been formed in 1936, it was only during the Japanese Occupation that local clubs were able to flourish once the dominant ethnic club-based system had been weakened by the Japanese emphasis on mass participation in sport. Tan delighted in the many competitions in which what he called his 'cosmopolitan' soccer team played.<sup>118</sup>

Other sportsmen in the Syonan Sports Association also praised the multiracial nature of sport under the Japanese. Chia Boon Leong, who like Tan was a soccer player in the Pasir Panjang Rovers, and later became one of the dominant postwar figures in Singapore soccer administration, spoke with fondness of the change from the British colonial sport organisation: 'All these teams are multi-racial teams, unlike the prewar where football was run on a communal basis.'<sup>119</sup> Chia was less enthusiastic about the marching that he and three to four hundred members of the Syonan Sports Association were called upon to do in white uniforms for the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival. He also recalled Shinozaki's speeches on the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' at the start of the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival, describing their content somewhat sarcastically: 'Follow me or what to help achieve the Great East Asia.'<sup>120</sup>

However, in contrast to Chia, Tan Wee Eng recalled in his interview how he imbibed the rhetoric of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' that Shinozaki

116 Syonan Sports Association, accession no. 81, microfilm no. 1144, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore.

117 Tan Wee Eng, accession no. 000566 reel 6, transcript, p. 56.

118 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–62.

119 Chia Boon Leong, interviewed by Chong Ching Liang on 24 Sept. 1997, accession no. 000813 reel 5, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, transcript, p. 75.

120 Chia Boon Leong, interviewed by Chong Ching Liang on 29 Sept. 1997, accession no. 000813 reel 7, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, transcript, pp. 99–100.



had often espoused at sporting events. Tan summed up his view when arguing that ‘politically, I think the Japanese Occupation was very good, personally I think’.<sup>121</sup> He reflected on his time in the Syonan Sports Association, expressing ideals similar to those that Shinozaki had articulated:

Literally I think it was the sparkle, the dawn of awakening for Asian people, especially we, we were involved, Southeast Asian people ... The Japanese taught us that Asians can fight, can do things for themselves ... It led to the fall of the British Empire and we also got our independence. I think it was a good thing. It taught us to stand up for ourselves and not to depend on people. That’s the way I look at it. I think it’s good, it is a good thing. It was a good thing rather.<sup>122</sup>

Other sportsmen in the Syonan Sports Association were more measured than Tan Wee Eng in weighing up the impact of the changes that the Japanese brought to sport. Philip Carlyle Marcus expressed in his oral history account how he valued his time on the Syonan Sports Association council because of the multiracial nature of its sports administration as well as the degree of autonomy that Shinozaki gave them in the organisation. But he remarked on how overall control of society still was in the hands of the Japanese administrators.<sup>123</sup> Soh Teow Seng, a clerk and a member of the Pasir Panjang Rovers, too, welcomed the cosmopolitan nature of sport in the Syonan Sports Association. However, the connection between sport and the militarism of State Shinto was also felt. Soh regretted that the Syonan Sports Association doubled as a civil defence organisation known as the Special Forward Service Corps and cooperated with the Japanese military. Soh mentioned that military drills were also part of life in the Special Forward Service Corps.<sup>124</sup>

Ibrahim Isa, a sportsman before the war, who worked in the Japanese broadcasting unit during the war, recalled the relationship that the Syonan Sports Association had with Japanese militarism and State Shinto. Ibrahim remembered that he and three other sportsmen from the Syonan Sports Association were called up to be officers in the Japanese volunteer army, the *giyugun*, because the Japanese sports officials figured that because they were good sportsmen they would make good officers. However, they all invented excuses that allowed them to get out of serving. In his interview, Ibrahim affirmed that he was a ‘sportsman, not a fighter’. He mentioned with distaste the military drilling and marching they had to do in addition to their sports. This was led by Shinozaki, who also took him and other members of the Syonan Sports Association to pray at the enshrinement of the *Syonan Jinja* in February 1943. Ibrahim remembered how they were compelled to walk to the shrine from their clubhouse at the Jalan Besar Stadium in town. He rationalised participating in such State Shinto rituals:

in those days, we disciplined ourselves, to save yourself, you have to follow their request. Although, you may feel that maybe it is rubbish, but according to their way of looking at it, everything was quite serious ... Actually, it’s against Muslim custom. But in those

121 Tan Wee Eng, accession no. 000566 reel 8, transcript, pp. 77–8.

122 Ibid.

123 Philip Carlyle Marcus, accession no. 000183 reel 2, transcript, pp. 15–18.

124 Soh Teow Seng, interviewed by Low Lay Leng on 13 July 1983, accession no. 000274 reel 5, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore.

days, you see, you were under obligation by this, you have to follow in order to save yourself.<sup>125</sup>

Examining the admittedly limited oral history accounts that cover the Syonan Sports Association suggests that the Japanese administrators had mixed results in promoting the ideals of Japanese Pan-Asianism and the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' through the promise of a 'Greater East Asia Olympics' and sports festivals such as the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival.

### Conclusion

Sport seems to have had some success inculcating the ideals of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'. The propaganda succeeded in that many of those playing sport accepted that they should be free from colonialism to determine their own destiny, just that they never did come to accept that being connected to the Japanese Empire, State Shinto, and the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' was the best way to achieve that goal, as the propaganda around holding the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival told them. At the core of the Japanese polity was State Shinto from which the state derived its legitimacy through its connection to the sacred realm with Japan's divine emperor claiming descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu. In Singapore, this sacred realm of emperor worship was represented by the *Syonan Jinja*. In August 1945, after Japan's surrender but before the return of the British in September, fearing their desecration, the Japanese military themselves razed both the *Syonan Jinja* and *Syonan Chureito* to the ground. However, the impact of ideas associated with the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' and sport during the Japanese Occupation had changed the way some of the colonised population thought, particularly the young who had played sport. They would help shape the postwar world and help bring about the end of colonial rule.<sup>126</sup>

125 Ibrahim Isa, interviewed by Low Lay Leng on 7 Oct. 1983, accession no. 000242 reel 16, Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, transcript, p. 209.

126 See Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's war*, p. 223.