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Running Head: INFLUENCE OF SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS ON OLYMPIC PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SERVICES

The Influence of the Chinese Sport System and Cultural Characteristics on  
Olympic Sport Psychology Services

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Running Head: Influence of Sociocultural Factors on Olympic Psychological Services

The influence of the Chinese sport system and cultural characteristics on  
Olympic sport psychology services

### **Abstract**

*Objective:* The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on Chinese Olympic sport psychology services.

*Method:* Fifteen sport psychology consultants (SPCs), who served Chinese national teams for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, participated in this study after the Olympics. Semi-structured interviews were conducted within three months of the closing of the Olympics, followed by inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

*Results:* Two general dimensions of sociocultural influence on Chinese Olympic sport psychology services were identified: (a) the Whole-Nation system and (b) Chinese cultural characteristics. They consisted of eight higher order themes, which comprised 26 lower order themes. This study revealed that Chinese sport psychology services were enhanced by recognizing the features of the Whole-Nation system (e.g., resource centralization and top-down management) and the successful blending of these features with Chinese cultural characteristics (e.g., holistic thinking style, *keeping face* and interpersonal order) into the psychological service.

*Conclusions:* Sociocultural factors had a marked influence on Chinese Olympic sport psychology services, which enabled Chinese SPCs to provide a culturally competent service (e.g., prioritizing collective interests, respecting the authority of administrative officials and coaches, and keeping face with others) for the Beijing Olympic Games.

*Keywords:* Cultural competence; Olympic Games; Psychological services; Sociocultural factors; Sport psychology consultants; Thematic analysis.

## The influence of the Chinese sport system and cultural characteristics on Olympic sport psychology services

Over the last decade, there has been growing interest in cultural sport psychology (e.g., Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003, 2005; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Ryba, Stambulova, Si, & Schinke, 2013; Schinke, Michel, Danielson, Gauthier, & Pickard, 2005; Schinke & Moore, 2011). Ever since Duda and Allison (1990) pointed out that the omission of cultural factors had resulted in a void in the field of sport and exercise psychology, cultural sport psychology has proven to be a beneficial reference for the field, especially now that researchers and practitioners are working with more ethnically diverse athletes and in multicultural settings (see Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009 for a review). Cultural sport psychology research, broadly defined, can be used to investigate the issues of cultural diversity in a multicultural framework (Gill & Kamphoff, 2009) and can “explore the experiences of athletes, consultants and coaches using critical cultural studies that focus on social differences, the distribution of power and social justice as interrelated concerns.” (McGannon & Johnson, 2009, p. 57).

With regard to the practice of cultural sport psychology, researchers have long emphasized that SPCs should consider and integrate athletes’ cultural backgrounds with their psychological services (e.g., Friesen & Orlick, 2011; Martin, Lavalley, Kellman, & Page, 2004; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). Although the issue of multiculturalism and multicultural counseling has raised researchers’ attention in the field of counseling (Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991), there is still a lack of cultural diversity research in the sport psychology field (Martens, Mobley, & Zizzi, 2000). For example, without systematic examination of the experiences of marginalized groups (Duda & Allison, 1990; Ram, Starek, & Johnson, 2004), racial and ethnic minorities may suffer negative consequences, for example, through the influence of negative stereotyping in the delivery of sport psychology services (Andersen, 1993; Beilock & McConnell, 2004). As such, cultural competence is required to deliver

effective and ethical psychological services. SPCs with cultural competence will not only be able to recognize the differences that exist between themselves and athletes, but will also be able to interact effectively with athletes from different cultures (Ryba et al., 2013).

Based on the multicultural guidelines developed by the American Psychological Association (2003), Ryba and colleagues (2013) have stressed three general areas of cultural competence. These include, cultural awareness (i.e., understanding of one's own culturally constituted beliefs, values and attitudes), cultural knowledge (i.e., understanding and knowledge of other worldviews) and cultural skills (i.e., use of culturally appropriate communication and interventions). Nonetheless, in different countries, contexts vary and knowledge and strategies might differ. For example, Kontos (2009) stated that although sport psychology remains a predominately White domain in the United States, necessary multicultural skills should be developed to provide effective sport psychology services to athletes from different cultures, especially among cultural minorities. Similarly, cultural awareness of aboriginal cultures should be developed when working with both Canadian Aboriginal athletes (Schinke et al., 2009) and Australian Aborigine (Hanrahan, 2009). Compared to these individualistic countries, cultural awareness, knowledge and skills in sport psychology services might be different in Eastern countries, which are dominated by collectivistic social customs. For example, in order to understand Japanese athletes, SPCs need to be familiar with the concept of Samurai ideals (Kozuma, 2009) and they should also be familiar with Confucianism and Taoism when working with Chinese athletes (Si, Duan, Li, & Jiang, 2011). Furthermore, Si et al. (2011) stated that effective psychological services for Chinese athletes should be integrated into two main areas: (a) The Whole-Nation system (Chinese elite sport system) and (b) Chinese cultural characteristics. As such, under the influence of collectivist cultures, both Chinese and Japanese researchers have emphasized the importance of considering the influence of sociocultural factors. Such factors include, the importance of *keeping face* (e.g., being polite and non-confrontational and behaving according to

one's social status), *social hierarchy* (e.g., the authoritative role of coaches) and *harmony of social interaction* (e.g., prioritizing the building of trust and forging relationships) (Kozuma, 2009; Si et al., 2011).

Given the differences and similarities in current cultural sport psychology research, it seems necessary to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on sport psychology services, within specific cultures and to build culturally competent practice in sport psychology (Ryba et al., 2013). SPCs are typically involved in Olympic psychological services during the whole quadrennial Olympic cycle or for at least one year of this (e.g., Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007; Si & Lee, 2008; Vernacchia & Henschen, 2008). The Olympic sport psychology service is, therefore, related to and aligned with, the regular psychology service. Additionally, participating in the Olympics is a prestigious, sporting experience, which may only occur once in an athlete's career. Accordingly, a multitude of challenges must be faced by SPCs, such as, exhausting time commitments, athletes' fluctuating emotions and goal conflicts (Hodge, 2010; McCann, 2008). Furthermore, the complexities of sport psychology services (e.g., multiple roles of SPCs) are intensified during the Olympics and SPCs' concerted effort and cooperation with many other individuals is required to keep the service on track (Andersen, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 2001; McCann, 2000). The most important factor, for some countries, for example, China, is that the macro-level government involvement in the Olympic sport psychology services cannot be neglected (Zhang, 2009). As such, the Olympic Games provide an ideal context within which to examine sociocultural influences on sport psychology services.

### **Aims of the Study**

The Chinese Olympic sport psychology services have received greater attention from athletes, coaches and administrative officials in recent Olympic Games. Increasing numbers of SPCs have been invited to join the Olympic preparation task force, for various teams, reaching a peak in the

numbers of SPC (22 SPCs) at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Zhang, 2009). There was a slight decrease in the number of SPCs (17 SPCs) for the 2012 London Olympics (Zhang, 2012). The Chinese elite sport system, under the Whole-Nation system, plays a key role in the organization of the sport psychology service. The development of sport teams and professional services, including sport psychology delivery, is directed by this top-down Whole-Nation system, with all functions operating under the same umbrella (Zhang, 2009). Despite the importance of this contribution from the Whole-Nation system to the Chinese sports science services (Jiang, 2007), no empirical research has been conducted to investigate its influence on sport psychology services. In addition, a long history and a prosperous culture have shaped various values and thinking styles among the Chinese people (see Bond, 2010 for a review) and it is therefore not surprising that Chinese SPCs have also incorporated these cultural characteristics into their psychological services (e.g., holistic/dialectic thinking, collectivism, relationship/guanxi) (Si et al., 2011). Recently, Chinese researchers have begun to advocate and examine the blending of Chinese cultural characteristics and sport psychology services, in both content and process (e.g., Si et al., 2011; Zhang & Zhang, 2011). However, to our best knowledge, there is no research that examines how the Whole-Nation system and Chinese culture influence and interact with Chinese sport psychology services, particularly in terms of Olympic preparation, which is the service for the highest level of athletes.

Cultural sport psychology assists SPCs in establishing their own cultural awareness, knowledge and skills with regard to clients' culture and situational context (e.g., Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke, McGannon, Parham & Lane, 2012; Schinke & Moore, 2011). Given the lack of cultural research related to Chinese sport psychology services, in a national context, our first aim was to examine the influence of Chinese cultural factors on Olympic sport psychology services, in the context of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Through revealing how these factors influence the Olympic psychological services, cultural awareness and knowledge related to service provisions for Chinese athletes, can be preliminarily

established. Given that we can reasonably assume that a consultant's personal service experiences are a product of complex political, economic and racial contexts (McGannon & Johnson, 2009), it would be beneficial for us to understand the sport system (e.g., Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009), in order to inform the nature and rationale of SPC work in situ. An investigation into the influence of the Whole-Nation system on the Olympic sport psychology services can provide informative knowledge related to the nature of Chinese SPC work under the Whole-Nation system. This information can serve to further extend cultural sport psychology scholarship. Therefore, the second aim of the current study was to examine how the Whole-Nation system influences Chinese Olympic psychological services.

This study is one part of a larger research project entitled: *An investigation into sport psychology services provided to elite Chinese athletes in preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games*. This qualitative investigation, conducted by the Hong Kong Sports Institute, comprised several comprehensive topics, from government policy direction to service delivery and from philosophical approach to service content. In the current study, we focused solely on the investigation of how sociocultural factors influenced Chinese sport psychology services in the 2008 Olympic Games, including the Whole-Nation system and Chinese culture.

## **Method**

### **The Whole-Nation System**

The Whole-Nation system is not China's invention, but is an adaptation of a similar training system from former Eastern European block countries (Soviet Union and East Germany) during the 1980s. Nowadays, to some extent, Russia, Japan and South Korea still embrace similar systems (Yang, 2012). The closed Chinese Whole-Nation system works through a top-down approach with four team levels (i.e., from a higher level with national professional teams, provincial professional teams, city professional teams and city/county amateur teams) to ensure the training of top quality athletes. As a

result, sizeable financial outlays are required to ensure that this system continues to run efficiently. The Whole-Nation system provides talented athletes, across the country, with a fast track to the right resources with which to hone their talents and develop the necessary competencies required to be effective in both the national and international Major Games (e.g., the All-China Games and Olympic Games). Much of these resources are concentrated on the most talented athletes, while still encouraging the ordinary, for example good performers are selected to the national second string teams, training together with athletes from the national first teams (Yang, 2012). Despite its limitations (e.g., reduced funding to sports for the general public), the power and efficiency of the Whole-Nation system is evident and its mission is to serve the collective interests of the country, namely, to win medals in major competitions (especially gold at the Olympic Games) and boost national pride.

### **The 2008 Chinese Olympic Sport Psychology Services**

In contrast to the arrangement in western countries, where sport psychology services are usually driven by client demand (i.e., teams or athletes take the initiative and seek help), through a bottom-up mechanism (e.g., Van Raalte, 2003; Vernacchia & Henschen, 2008), the Chinese Olympic sport psychology service is a top-down collective behavior, within which SPCs intervene in the activities of different sport teams through administrative assignments and service projects. Initiated by the General Administration of Sport in China (China Ministry of Sports), the Chinese Society of Sport Psychology, was officially organized as an expert group, for the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games. Expert group members were sent to various Olympic teams to deliver specific services (Zhang, 2009). Twenty-two SPCs were selected, based on their professional qualifications and frontline experience. Given that the first author of this paper is also a member of the expert team invited by a renowned applied expert from Chinese Institute of Sport Science, we were able to access the rest of the group members.

### **Participants**

Fifteen (12 male, 3 female) SPCs, all of whom served Chinese national teams for the 2008

Beijing Olympics, participated in the study. Six, of the 15 participants, were full-time applied SPCs, while the other nine were university based academic professionals. The participants, who were qualified to either, master ( $n = 7$ ), or doctoral ( $n = 8$ ) level, worked with a total of 15 national teams, including archery, badminton, boxing, diving, fencing, gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, judo, shooting, skeet, swimming, table tennis, taekwondo, trampoline and weightlifting. Each participant was required to: (a) be contracted with a sport psychology service project for the 2008 Olympic Games, with the corresponding sport Administrative Centre (e.g., Swimming Administrative Centre under General Administration of Sport in China); (b) had served with the same team continuously for at least one year; and (c) had more than three years working experience with high performance athletes.

### **Interview Guidelines**

Firstly, based on the main results presented in both the international (e.g., Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007; Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989; Hodge & Hermansson, 2007) and local (e.g., Liu, 2007; Zhang et al., 2006; Zhu, 2006) Olympic sport psychology literature, as well as sociocultural influences on counseling and psychological services (e.g., Fisher et al., 2005; Martens et al., 2000; Si & Lee, 2007), a draft of the interview question guide, for the large project, was summarized into different aspects, such as philosophy, approach, content, process, evaluation and sociocultural considerations. Secondly, confirmatory telephone discussions were conducted with four local sport psychology experts regarding the content and order of questions (e.g., Do you think the questions in the interview guide are appropriate? Do you have any additional suggestions? What do you think about the order of the questions? Do you have any comments?). Thirdly, group discussions were held regarding the content and structure of the interview guide, among members of the research team (including the three researchers who conducted the interview).

To finalize the language and item ordering of the interview guide, another SPC (not included in

the 15 participants, but involved in the 2008 Olympic Games), was invited to participate in a pilot interview. Following the SPC's agreement, the first author conducted the pilot interview whilst the other two researchers observed and made notes. Afterwards, all three researchers reviewed the pilot interview transcript to reach a consensus regarding the detailed contents of the interview guide. This procedure was replicated by each of the other researchers. Finally, all three researchers discussed the transcript, and a consensus was reached regarding the follow-up questions and question order.

The complete and final interview guide for the large project consisted of six aspects: (a) basic information about sport psychology services in the 2008 Olympic Games, including the initial contact process, working duration and previous experience related to their psychological services (e.g., could you please tell me some basic information about your psychological service in the Beijing Olympic Games? This includes your background, your previous experience and working duration); (b) the needs of the teams and how the psychological services were utilized within each team (e.g., what psychological services did the team require? How did the athletes use the psychological service?); (c) service types and organization (e.g., based on your understanding of the team's needs, what services did you offer the team? how did you organize your services?); (d) one or two case examples to illustrate features of services and approaches (e.g., could you please share with us one or two cases?); (e) experiences and suggestions regarding service evaluation; (e.g., how did you evaluate your services? which methods do you think are effective?); and (f) sociocultural considerations for delivering services to athletes, including the Whole-Nation system and Chinese culture (e.g., which sociocultural factors do you think influenced your services? how do you think the effect of the Whole-Nation system and Chinese culture improved your service?). Furthermore, follow-up questions related to sociocultural considerations were asked to deepen understanding.

### **Data collection**

After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Hong Kong Sports Institute,

the first author invited a list of qualified SPCs, via email, with an attached consent letter, to participate in the study. The interview outline was emailed to the SPCs who agreed to participate in the study, a week prior to the interview. Interviews were conducted by the three researchers who piloted the interview, including the first author (an experienced sport psychology professor) and two other researchers, with more than four years qualitative research experience and five years applied experience in sport psychology, respectively. Given that all three researchers were either serving as a vice-president at the managing council (the first author), or as general members (the other two researchers) of the Chinese Society of Sport Psychology, they had already built good relationships with participants prior to the commencement of the study. The interviews were conducted in a tight time frame after the Olympics in order to gain as much detail as was permissible. All interviews were completed within three months of the closing of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The interviews were conducted in either the participants' offices, or hotel rooms (parts of the interviews were conducted during the period of a national sport psychology symposium), to minimize any disturbances. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked, based on the information provided by the participants. With the participants' permission, interviews were recorded and each lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was chosen because it not only allows for themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding, but it also allows the conceptual proposition of sociocultural influences on Chinese sport psychology services (Si et al., 2011) to be integral to the subsequent process of deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Inductive thematic analysis was deemed an appropriate approach to unveil these service experiences within a Chinese sport psychology sociocultural context, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the sociocultural influences on the complicated Olympic psychological service experiences (Gould & Maynard, 2009). In addition, the use of inductive

thematic analysis is capable of generating cohesive, descriptive themes that closely represent genuine life experiences (i.e., Olympic psychological services) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the other hand, deductive thematic analysis is more explicitly analysis driven and allowed us to code for these two specific research questions relating to sociocultural influences on Olympic psychological services, namely, the influence of the Whole-Nation system and Chinese cultural characteristics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As it is impossible for thematic analysis to be purely inductive or deductive, Braun and Clarke (2012) contended that “In reality, coding and analysis often uses a combination of both approaches.” (p. 58).

All three researchers conducted the analysis following a six-phase approach to thematic analysis, outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). Prior to the data analysis, researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the content (phase 1). Initially, all three researchers independently examined the data from each interview in detail and made notes on possible codes. Consensus meetings were held to compare each researcher’s perspective and to devise an agreed set of codes (phase 2). After all patterns of meaning within each transcript had been examined separately, researchers searched for themes by making comparisons of patterns across transcripts (phase 3). Researchers further reviewed the developed themes to discard or relocate codes, as well as discard or revise existing themes, or create additional themes (phase 4). Finally, the themes were defined and named (phase 5) and the report was produced (phase 6). It should be noted that the analysis is an iterative process, where, during any phase, the process was repeated when necessary.

## **Results**

The influence of sociocultural factors on Chinese Olympic sport psychology services coalesced into two general dimensions: (a) the Whole-Nation system and (b) Chinese cultural characteristics. These two general dimensions consisted of eight higher order themes, which were comprised of 26 lower order themes. We will elaborate on the meaning of each lower order theme

using SPCs' quotes. Based on the actual sequence of interview, SPCs were represented from SPC1 to SPC15.

### **The Whole-Nation System**

Based on the views of the participants, the Chinese Olympic sport psychology service, for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was effectively delivered in the context of the Whole-Nation system, which is a hierarchical structure that functions as top-down administration. Four higher-order themes emerged regarding the influence of Whole-Nation system on the Olympic sport psychology service, including (a) leadership role and resource centralization of the Whole-Nation system, (b) top-down directive for sport psychology services, (c) promotion of sport psychology services and (d) effective direct communication (see Table 1). These four themes represent the trend of influence of the Whole-Nation system on the psychological services, from a more general feature of the sport system to a more concrete communication style.

**Leadership role and resource centralization of the Whole-Nation system.** Overall, the Chinese sport psychology services are directed by the fundamental, political and administrative mechanism of the Whole-Nation sport system. The directive function of the Whole-Nation system is reflected by the following quote from one SPC discussing the leadership role of the sport system:

I feel like the Whole-Nation system has exercised a very strong leading effect for the sport psychology services. By using its administrative power, it not only organizes the Olympic psychology service, but also sets a very clear goal of the service. (SPC1)

The strong leadership mentioned in the this quote, means that not only are the organizational aspects, such as the planning and implementing of the psychological services, but also the service goals are required to be in line with the management and target of the General Administration of Sport in China.

Apart from administrative leadership, the Whole-Nation system also centralized resources and

controlled the specific allocation of these resources to the elite sport and sport psychology services.

One SPC commented that the sport psychology service was enhanced by the centralization of resources:

Centralized power and ordered mobilization of human resources led to the whole country being together with one mission.... the resources for us are especially good. I feel like the Whole-Nation system has provided a lot of positive influence to the sport psychology service, not only in facilitating the work, but also in providing sufficient financial support. (SPC6)

This quote illustrates a situation in which the sport psychology service was facilitated through the centralization of resources, through the green channel, which was specifically designed for the Olympic Games, including material, financial and manpower support.

**Top-down directive for sport psychology services.** Under the Whole-Nation system, the sport psychology service is organized from the top of the administrative level, namely, by the government officials. One SPC commented on the organization of the sport psychology service:

The 2008 Olympic sport psychology service was well organized. Dr. Z, from the General Administration of Sport, was in charge of organizing and facilitating operations across the whole country. Under the Whole-Nation system, all the best sport psychology professors and experts were mobilized and assigned to various teams. (SPC1)

Another example to illustrate the above situation is that four SPCs with the China Institute of Sports Science (a subordinate unit of the General Administration of Sport in China) and how they were assigned by the institute to meet the requirements of certain teams. One SPC discussed this method of assignment: “The institute officials, after serious consideration, assigned me to work with gymnastics team and my colleague W was sent to the table tennis team”. (SPC2) In addition, at the team level, some team officials directly requested sport psychology services by using their administrative relations. One SPC provided an example of how the team officials sought the sport psychology services:

Certain team officials thought there was an increased need for sport psychology. They then searched for experienced experts around the country and requested assistance. My university was contacted and I was chosen to provide this support to athletes. This is a relatively quick and easy process for me to enter the team. (SPC11)

This top-down process seems to implement an imposed sport psychology service on the teams. In fact, some SPCs, before this assignment for Beijing Olympics, were already familiar with the teams due to their previous working experience. For those teams, who accepted SPCs for the first time, there was a continued process of interaction between the team and the consultant, to create rapport and to establish whether the collaboration would continue. The team officials and coaches evaluated the appropriateness of the sport psychology service within 2-3 months, and mutual agreement was reached once the team was satisfied with the consultant's performance.

**Promotion of sport psychology services.** The Whole-Nation system promoted and advocated the implementation of the Olympic sport psychology service through its administrative order and financial support. For example, at the initial stage, it was mandatorily required for Chinese teams and athletes competing at the Beijing Olympics. As mentioned by several SPCs, the support of psychological services for the home athletes was recognized by the Chinese General Administration of Sport, with high regard. As a result, various administrative actions (e.g., official administrative documents for promoting the psychology service, financial support for psychology service programs) were implemented to facilitate the related psychological services. The following comment is from one SPC regarding the service promotion through the sport system:

We competed in the home venue and the General Administration of Sport was deeply concerned about this issue [home disadvantage]. They provided exceptional support, including administrative promotion and financial support, to the sport psychology services. Due to such support, we were able to conduct services which couldn't have previously been conducted.

(SPC3)

Moreover, the human resource support and material demands for the Olympic sport psychology service played an important role to fully implement the service; as well as the actual delivery of the psychological services, which can only be executed efficiently with adequate manpower. The following SPC quote describes the manpower arrangement through the sport system: “Due to the Whole-Nation system’s facilitation, any manpower problems [related to sport psychology services] were resolved effectively. Professors from universities were able to arrange their schedules and take part in the services”. (SPC1)

When discussing the material support from the Whole-Nation system, another SPC mentioned, that beyond the separate psychological services for different teams and athletes, an inclusive online service, printed copies of mental training brochures, psycho-education videos and a vehicle equipped with psychological instruments (e.g., biofeedback), were available to all athletes. A detailed comment is presented below, to illustrate this manner of material support:

The General Administration of Sport first established a Beijing Olympic Psychology website, which was capable of addressing athletes’ unique situations. The website provided rich and interesting suggestions for mental adjustment or recovery. There were 12 sport psychology experts taking it in turn to provide online consultations. The General Administration also hired a professional media company to make a series of psycho-education films with the expert teams and these films were sent to each Olympic team. Furthermore, a fully funded vehicle, equipped with psychological instruments was prepared, within which SPCs could consult with athletes. All these settings helped the athletes a great deal and were welcomed by coaches and athletes.

(SPC3)

Taken together, the Whole-Nation system not only allowed sport psychology services to receive sufficient financial support, but also enhanced the implementation of this support at the institutional

and system levels.

**Effective direct communication.** Under the Whole-Nation system, administrative officials (including the directors of national sport-specific administrative centers, provincial sport administrators and team managers) had regular direct communication with SPCs, regarding service progress. As the psychological services were organized and coordinated by the administrative system, open and effective, direct communication between the top-level administrators and the frontline practitioners was crucial. For example, officials and SPCs provided feedback to each other regarding team and athlete issues and the formatting of services at the initial contact stage. The following quote exemplifies the direct communication between the officials and SPCs:

Province officials would communicate with me concerning athletes' issues. They would advise me on how to communicate better with and tackle the athletes' problems. I understood that they would like to share their previous working experiences with me in order to let me work more efficiently with the athletes. (SPC14)

Building on the establishment of trust and effective communication, officials were willing to provide assistance and share technical information with SPCs during the service delivery stages. One example is of a consultant who had requested assistance from the team manager to integrate the psychological sessions into the athletes' busy schedules, he commented, "There is a Whole-Nation system in China. This system brings a lot of convenience to our sport psychology service" (SPC15). All in all, the Chinese SPCs benefited from the different perspectives offered by the officials and additionally gained unconditional support from these officials who controlled the resources. One SPC made the following comment regarding his interactions with the administrative officials during the Olympic services:

Officials may look at problems from a different perspective than professional practitioners like us, but since the officials are serious [about our services], they implemented a lot of

organizational and planning support and they also let us do our job without much interference [they avoided arrangements that conflicted with psychological sessions and generally respected our professional ethics]. (SPC1)

The arrangement and delivery of the psychological service was facilitated based on effective vertical communication between SPCs and administrative officials. Chinese SPCs gained considerable assistance from officials and even utilized the official's authoritative characteristics to implement intervention plans, which may have been difficult to arrange otherwise.

Another notable issue, related to the communication and mutual understanding between the administrative officials and SPCs, is that both sides reached a common view regarding ideological education. Traditionally, officials, managers and coaches of Chinese teams conduct ideological education with athletes, which includes, patriotic education (love of China and dedication of oneself to China) and collective value education (putting collective interests first). Given that ideological education is an important tradition in Chinese teams, the following SPC quote describes this feature and its relationship with sport psychology:

Elite Chinese sport teams have one unique feature which is ideological education. The reputation of sport psychology services is improving globally and in China under the Whole-Nation system, ideological education is still conducted by officials, managers and coaches. This work is somehow intertwined with sport psychology services, but overall, I believe it facilitates our psychological work with athletes. (SPC15)

Ideological education has existed in Chinese sport teams long before sport psychology was accepted by the Chinese sport authorities. There has been some debate about whether ideological education is still necessary and whether sport psychology might replace it. Nonetheless, the findings from this research show that most SPCs acknowledge that ideological education is considered as an effective supplement to sport psychology services in terms of three aspects, including (a) the emphasis on socially-oriented values like winning honor for the country, (b) the focus on ethical and disciplinary education, and (c) the adoption of a persuasive approach, such as through a role model. Ideological education may help enhance athletes' performance through strengthening their achievement motivation and commitment. However it should be noted that, compared to the autonomic and supportive approach

adopted in traditional sport psychology services, the ideological education demonstrates a more authoritative and controlling style, which might only fit the psychological needs of Chinese athletes.

### **Chinese Cultural Characteristics**

Given that the psychological characteristics of Chinese athletes are embedded into Chinese historical and cultural traditions (Si et al., 2011), sport psychology services for Chinese athletes are inevitably influenced by Chinese cultural characteristics. Four high-order themes emerged from the data concerning the influence of Chinese cultural characteristics on the Olympic sport psychology services, including (a) holistic/dialectic thinking style, (b) collectivist characteristics, (c) authoritative characteristics and (d) *keeping face* (see Table 2). These four themes reflect four major aspects regarding the way Chinese SPCs provided culturally competent services, in terms of applying local cultural knowledge and skills, to Chinese athletes competing in the Beijing Olympic Games. However, we should be cognizant of the fact that these four aspects are not the only characteristics that reflect local cultural knowledge and skills in delivering Chinese sport psychology services.

**Holistic/dialectic thinking style.** According to Nisbett, Peng, Choi and Norenzayan (2001), people from Eastern cultures tend to have a holistic thinking style, namely, they focus on the relationship and harmony between a subject and its environment. Naturally, Chinese athletes have, more or less, adopted such thinking styles in order to understand their career and life development as a whole as they face Olympic competition. Specifically, with the aid of a holistic thinking style, they will be better able to adjust, or tune into, the Olympic pressure. As such, educating athletes' holistic and dialectic thinking styles (e.g., looking at problems from both positive and negative sides and the unity of both sides), so as to help them cope better with the Olympic atmosphere and reduce the pressure which could stem from a narrow focus (e.g., on the results of a single Olympic Games), was specifically emphasized by several SPCs. One SPC described how SPCs helped athletes turn their focus from Olympic results to an open attitude by adopting holistic and dialectic thinking styles in order to release athletes' pressure.

To broaden their perspective and to analyze problems, themselves, training, life, from different angles ...We used athletes' own cases and discussed them with athletes together and helped them to adopt holistic and dialectic approaches. Chinese people tend to focus more on holistic and dialectic approaches to problems....I think this Chinese thinking style is helpful to them.

(SPC8)

Based on the views of the SPCs, the purpose of cultivating athletes' holistic/dialectic thinking styles was to (a) enhance their cognition and knowledge base (i.e., the insights of their sport careers, life development and the personal relationship with the greater environment) and (b) improve their understanding of the outcome of winning and losing, allowing athletes to self-extricate from the overwhelming pressure and anxiety of losing the competition (Si et al., 2011). The following first and second quotes explain that the purpose of cultivating athletes' holistic/dialectic thinking styles is to enhance their own insights into their sport career, and to improve their understanding of the outcome of competitions, respectively. While the third quote describes a way to guide athletes to be able to view the outcome of the Olympics with an open attitude from the Eastern cultural perspective:

The level/stage of understanding/enlightening is about accepting the co-existence of winning and losing. .... Athletes have to learn to accept both positive and negative experiences in their careers; this is a kind of enlightenment for their career development that they should have.

(SPC7)

If an athlete only chases glory, he won't succeed. If he can accept winning, but not losing, he won't achieve better results. Only if he can face his loss and fight back, will he have a chance to succeed the next time. I always talk to my athletes about this kind of notion. (SPC6)

I took my athletes to visit the national astronomical museum. From this visit, the athletes understood that the universe is so vast, the human is so small and the individual is just a particle

in the universe. When you integrate yourself into the world, there is no threat to your ego, or even no ego, in your mind; therefore, you are free from any anxiety. (SPC4)

The Whole-Nation system, along with its medal target, created significant pressure for athletes. According to SPCs, athletes' personal maturation is believed to be one of the key factors required to cope with such great pressure. Therefore, some SPCs are keen, not only to help athletes improve their educational understanding of the holistic thinking style, but also to focus on improving their personal growth. One SPC described the relationship between athletes' personal growth and their performance enhancement, and what athletes needed to assist in their personal growth:

I would pay attention to athletes' personal growth. This is connected to their performance enhancement, these concepts are not opposites. Many Chinese athletes grew up in a pure sport environment; they actually need more education regarding values and world views of life and society. (SPC10)

As another demonstration of the holistic thinking style, Chinese SPCs do not view their service as a separate entity. Instead, they believe that multi-disciplinary cooperation is crucial for enhancing sport psychology services. This is in line with the One-Country-One-Mission system that was previously mentioned. The following first quote shows that SPCs believed that the effectiveness of their services was reliant on integration with other parties, while the second quote describes information sharing with other technical supporting staff that assisted psychological services:

In China, the effectiveness of the sport psychology service may not rely on sport psychology consultants alone. Within the whole system, coaches, officials and other supporting staff affect the service. The sport psychology service is about interacting with athletes through those channels... (SPC3)

There are team doctors, conditioning coaches, biomechanical staff and others. We all worked on four projects together....They often come to us with useful information and similarly we might

seek biomechanical, or EEG information from them. The sharing of information has actually supported our psychological service. (SPC5)

Moreover, Chinese SPCs were able to be congruent with certain requirements of coaches' and officials' service plans (e.g. mental training or consultation plans). In other words, Chinese SPCs preferred to be flexible and to consider the requirements of coaches and officials, rather than stubbornly sticking to their own initial service plans. In some instances, the SPCs' plans were integrated into the overall training and competition plans of the teams and athletes. This effective interaction between SPCs and coaches was discussed by one SPC:

We have been proactively interacting with the coaches...coaches really respected our service planning. They provided better timing or venue arrangements for our service delivery and required athletes to cooperate with us....we also carefully integrated our psychological sessions into the whole team training and competition schedule. (SPC10)

**Collectivist characteristics.** The ultimate goal of national pride, in the elite Chinese sport system is to value collective priorities (Si et al., 2011). Most importantly, Chinese SPCs were greatly affected by the collectivist characteristics. In a situation where there is conflict between collective and individual interests (e.g., training schedule and implementation, team selection), Chinese SPCs tend to guide athletes to prioritize collective interests, but also to understand that collective priorities would, in turn, be of benefit to them. The next quote gives an example regarding the tendency for Chinese SPCs to guide athletes to pay attention to the relationship between collective and individual interests:

An athlete, who was a gold medal contender, had emotional issues due to a previous injury. She didn't want to train...she showed indifference during training and was not focused at all. I tried to encourage her repeatedly. I guided her to be aware that if she quit, it would be a big loss, not only to her, but to her country and province. She was convinced and returned to serious training.

She did really well in the Olympics and earned great respect for her province and country.

(SPC6)

It could be argued that, in this case, the personal needs of this athlete were ignored. However, it should be understood that the collective priority is a generally accepted ethical value in Chinese culture and this particular athlete also held this value during the sport psychology consultation process.

Traditionally, in such a collectivist context, an athlete who is selected to represent China in the Olympic Games is viewed as a hero with a great honor. Therefore, there is great pressure for Chinese athletes to win glory for the country, as well as for their province. Put in another way, province officials were actively involved with the athletes' Olympic preparation. This phenomenon was mentioned by one SPC:

Where was the pressure? Athletes' pressure could be from their own province, because their performance is directly linked to the pride, glory, or even the future funding of their own province, of their own future....Athletes truly cared about their provincial officials' requests and provincial interests. (SPC14)

Notably, this gold medal strategy, derived from collectivist characteristics, may exert intense pressure on certain athletes as well as coaches. As national pride and collective honor are so important to this country, the government officials set clear targets of winning a certain number of gold medals, based on an evaluation of the competitive potential of each team. Given the overwhelming pressure caused by such requirements and various unplanned events in the Olympic Games, the Chinese SPCs had to work with this stressful reality, not only with the athletes, but also with the coaches. One SPC made the following comment regarding the overwhelming pressure caused by the gold medal strategy and the SPCs' mission:

Home court competitions are already stressful, but specific gold medal targets exert even more

pressure and this mission brought intense pressure to athletes. How could we handle it? That's the reason why Chinese sport psychology consultants came into it in the first place. (SPC1)

**Authoritative characteristics.** Over a long history of development, the Chinese have established a culture with strong authoritative characteristics, in which people tend to respect and obey people with high political and social status, authority and collective arrangements. Accordingly, social order and interpersonal relationships were monitored by this powerful value deferential system (Chan, Ng, & Hui, 2010). Likewise, officials and coaches are the leading figures in team settings under the Whole-Nation system. Therefore, Chinese SPCs are fully aware that giving these individuals respect is crucial to the delivery of the service. The following quote reflects the Chinese SPCs awareness of these authoritative characteristics:

Once we got to the national team, our main objective was to assist the coach. We had to work along with coaches' ideas. An interesting example was that the head coach asked us to help athletes accept one of his new tactic ideas *decision first analyze second* during the fencing competition, by using our psychological knowledge. You know, in this sport athletes usually do the opposite during the game. We gained the head coach's trust by completing this task for him and then we earned the next task..... if we didn't closely follow the coach's ideas, we would probably have had to go home earlier. (SPC9)

When working with officials, the situation is quite similar, that is because: "Leaders [officials] have absolute power to determine who can work with whom. You have no control whatsoever. You can only obey or follow." (SPC14) and "Officials have a lot of decision making power. Most of the time, when my work is related to team arrangements, I have to consult with him first". (SPC13)

Although this appears to be a passive approach, this is the stance the Chinese SPCs usually take to work with these powerful figures, during their service process. This is due to the authoritative characteristic in Chinese culture, as knowing one's place within the hierarchy can help Chinese SPCs to form a holistic perspective about their Olympic psychological services.

***Keeping face.*** In Chinese culture, people always follow the rule of *keeping face* to conduct social behavior, which is highly valued by Chinese people on an individual, national or ethnic basis (Hwang & Han, 2010). Under this higher-order theme, four applications of *keeping face* emerged from this study, including (a) demands of officials about the *face* of home momentum, (b) pressure induced from the *keeping face* effect, (c) high expectations and attention to performance due to the *keeping face* effect and (d) *keeping face* concerns within service delivery.

Given the value placed on *keeping face*, the whole country has high expectations for the outcome of the Beijing Olympics. The national and provincial officials demand excellent performance from the Chinese athletes in order to *keep face*, namely, to achieve respect and recognition from the international community. In particular, the athletes were well aware that their performance was under the scrutiny of everyone and that they must make sure that they can *keep face* by winning medals in the Olympic Games, especially gold medals. The following quote illustrates the demand of *keeping face* derived from the national and provincial sectors:

For Chinese athletes, this Olympics is not only about technique or tactic, it's a political mission. Athletes have to compete based on their political mission. In other words, they have to make sure it's a good show [good performance] and that the officials are satisfied. (SPC5)

For the athletes and coaches, pressure was created through emphasizing the importance of *keeping face*. That is, the pressure of *keeping face* with the public, officials, coaches and most importantly the athletes themselves is inevitable for athletes to have to deal with. One SPC made the following comment with respect to the pressure induced from this *keeping face* effect:

Due to Chinese culture, *keeping face* in front of ones' friends and family might cause athletes to experience extra pressure when competing at home. If the pressure is too heavy and they are not adjusting well, mistakes or errors may happen. (SPC2)

The effort of *keeping face* resulted in high expectations for the Chinese athletes to succeed in

their performances, which, in turn, could create high pressure for the athletes. Eventually, it became a key issue for the sport psychology service to solve. The following quote explains the disadvantage that such high expectations and the accompanied pressure would have on the athletes:

In the 2008 Olympics, all the Chinese teams wanted to achieve great results as the home nation. Athletes were experiencing heavy pressure and in order to help athletes and coaches cope with the pressure and stick to the training, we had to provide competent services ...we invented a term called “soft environment”, which means the mental setting, to distinguish it from the “hard environment” [Olympic venues], where our Chinese athletes have an obvious advantage over others. Our main task is to improve this “soft environment” and to avoid it becoming a disadvantage to the Chinese athletes... (SPC3)

Furthermore, the concept of *keeping face* is a method of managing interpersonal relationships, where allowing each other to gain *face* (i.e., showing respect) is an important factor in determining how a relationship between two individuals develops (Hwang & Han, 2010). The following quote illustrates this kind of *keeping face* concern within sport psychology service delivery:

Gymnastic team officials arranged a sport psychology workshop as a top priority, before other supporting services and they asked me if I accepted such an arrangement. I then showed great gratitude and gave them much *face* by saying, “if your athletes need me, I shall re-arrange, or even postpone all my work in other centers and help the gymnasts first”. (SPC2)

In the process of delivering sport psychology services, Chinese SPCs, officials, coaches and athletes, all interact with this covert social rule. Therefore, Chinese SPCs have to be aware of *keeping face* with all the involved officials, coaches and athletes, to establish a rapport with the coaches and athletes and to ensure that they deliver the psychology services smoothly.

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors,

namely, the Whole-Nation sport system and Chinese culture, on the Chinese Olympic sport psychology services. Following semi-structured interviews, with 15 Chinese SPCs, who were all involved in the Olympic sport psychology services, inductive and deductive thematic analysis revealed two general sociocultural influences on Chinese Olympics sport psychology services: (a) the Whole-Nation system and (b) Chinese cultural characteristics. Findings from the current study provide useful information for how culturally competent Olympic sport psychology services can be delivered in a Chinese national context. Even with the unavoidable disadvantages of the Whole-Nation system, such competent services can inform cultural awareness of the importance of respecting and taking advantage of the system, to facilitate sport psychology services; as well as providing cultural knowledge (i.e., holistic/dialectic thinking style, collectivist characteristics, authoritative characteristics and keeping face) to researchers and practitioners who are not familiar with collectivist culture and the Whole-Nation system. Elements of the results are also in line with existing conceptual propositions on cultural sport psychology from a collectivist perspective (Kozuma, 2009; Si et al., 2011), as well as Canadian Aboriginal and Indigenous athlete research (e.g., Schinke et al., 2006; Schinke et al., 2007).

As an original contribution to the cultural sport psychology literature, this study has revealed that the Chinese Whole-Nation system, not only provided administrative and financial support during service delivery, but also facilitated the initiation of the sport psychology services and the establishment and maintenance of working relationships between management parties and SPCs. Compared to the bottom-up organization of sports, *One Team-One Spirit* in the New Zealand context, proposed by Hodge and Hermansson (2007), where national team unity and cohesion are viewed as an informal by-product of various separated sports coming together, we may call the arrangement of service in our study a top-down *One-Nation-One-System* strategy, given that the planning, structure, quality and even innovativeness of psychology services are developed through the administrative and

financial support of the Whole-Nation system. Specifically, cooperation between the psychology consultants and the Olympic teams was well organized based on the Whole-Nation system top-down demands, which included frontline services (e.g., to arrange for university-based consultants to temporarily leave their academic positions for the frontline service) and financial arrangements (e.g., travelling with teams and equipment installation). Based on the findings from the current study and the service evaluations (i.e., each team provided an appraisal report of the services to the General Administration of Sport in China after the Beijing Olympics) from the Chinese teams, we may claim that Chinese SPCs have been able to make good use of and understand the influence of the Whole-Nation system on their services. In the future, the dynamic integration of sport psychology services into the Whole-Nation system should be emphasized by SPCs working with Chinese Olympic teams and athletes.

Although the strong effect of the Whole-Nation system on Olympic sport psychology services has been emphasized in the current study, its disadvantages are also obvious and should be considered. For example, under the Whole-Nation system, Chinese teams had a clear target for achieving gold medals (Wang & Shi, 2006), however, this target is fixed and to some degree inflexible. The gold medal target was mandatory for each team, which created a tremendous amount of pressure, not only for the athletes, but also for the coaches and team managers. The consequences of this absolute outcome focus might be counterproductive, if relevant measures were not carried out and support was not available. Therefore, the sport psychology services had to accommodate this and assist athletes and coaches in coping with the enormous pressure caused by a controlling rather than an autonomous environment (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011). This was actually a very challenging task for Chinese SPCs because they could not change this environment. Instead, what they were able to do was to help change, or improve, athletes' and coaches' *soft environment*, that is, cognitive and emotional aspects, by adopting holistic/dialectic and

other coping strategies. In short, the current study reveals the cultural skills (Ryba et al., 2013) of Chinese SPCs, in terms of how they communicated and intervened in a culturally appropriate manner with athletes and teams, under the context of Whole-Nation system.

The cultural factors that have been revealed in the current study, including (a) *keeping face*, (b) holistic/dialectic thinking styles, (c) authoritative values and (d) collectivist characteristics, further support the proposition of Si et al. (2011) that psychological training, for elite Chinese athletes, should be integrated into athletes' sociocultural contexts. Chinese people use the concept of *keeping face* to explain and to adjust to social behavior as well as intentionally cultivate and maintain the social mentality of *keeping face*, which symbolizes both personal and public esteem (Hwang & Han, 2010). In addition, the Chinese athletes value the acquisition and maintenance of *keeping face*, and expect good results in the Olympic Games. Therefore, striving for national and collective pride can exert extreme pressure on athletes and such pressure could also be magnified by the rule of *keeping face*, as it stems from both the province and the country levels. Accordingly, how to help athletes cope with the detrimental influence of *keeping face* was one of the main tasks for Chinese SPCs within the services delivered. The findings of Chinese SPCs suggest that one must pay attention to *keeping face* with coaches and officials when delivering their services, provides empirical support for the conceptual proposition that consultants should learn to *keep face* with those in authority, when working in a collectivist culture (Kozuma, 2009; Si et al., 2011). It also emphasizes the importance that culturally competent SPCs should be aware that *keeping face* might create pressure for athletes who are oriented by collectivist cultures.

The findings of Chinese SPCs made considerable effort to enhance athletes' holistic/dialectic thinking styles and abilities is in line with the proposition that people from Eastern cultures tend to have holistic thinking styles that focus on the relationship and the harmony between the subject and its environment (Nisbett et al., 2001) and further corroborates with findings from Canadian Aboriginal

athlete research, which states, “one’s greatest resource lies in family relationships and community connections rather than in external successes” (Blodgett et al., 2014, p. 352). Chinese SPCs assisted athletes with their approach to challenges during training, competition and life in general through a holistic/dialectic perspective. Specifically, athletes were guided to view the outcome (i.e., win and loss) of the Olympics and their life, with an open attitude. This attitude reflects (a) the Eastern cultural view of self. For example, that one SPC took athletes to visit a national astronomical museum, could be seen as the Buddhist no-self view; and (b) very similar to mindfulness- and acceptance-based approach in a sport context, which emphasize adopting a present-moment focus and an open and non-judgmental attitude towards athletic experiences (Gardner & Moore, 2004). It is hereby suggested that Chinese SPCs use this Eastern-originated mindfulness training approach to help Chinese athletes. Moreover, by adopting a holistic mindset, rather than stubbornly evaluating the proportion of the contribution from sport psychology service alone, Chinese SPCs in the current study, were able to, dynamically and flexibly, interact with colleagues from various disciplines across the Olympic taskforce (e.g., team officials, coaching staff and sport science staff), all of which contributed to Chinese Olympic success.

Given that Chinese interpersonal order and relationships are monitored by an authoritative value system (Chan et al., 2010), officials and coaches act as the leading figures in the Chinese sport system. As such, the effectiveness and efficiency of the service will be greatly affected, if official endorsement or support is lacking (Si et al., 2011). The findings from the current study reveal that by being fully aware of the leading role of officials and coaches, SPCs expressed absolute respect for officials and sometimes even chose to take advantage of this power, in order to ensure smooth and efficient service delivery. Therefore, how to effectively deal with interpersonal relationships, by respecting the authoritative roles in Chinese sports teams might be another of the main features of the Chinese Olympic sport psychology service. Most importantly, it shows that SPCs who wish to work in a

multicultural Chinese context may need to learn to closely consider authoritative figures and the fact that the team is dominated by an authoritative value system.

Researchers have discussed extensively how a consultant's values might influence his/her choice of interventions (e.g., Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas, & Maynard, 2007; Poczwadowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004). The findings of this study have shown that it is also the case for Chinese SPCs, who guided athletes to understand, dialectically, that the collective interest takes precedence over individual interests and by doing so, would also be to their benefit. The appreciation of collective interests is a strong cultural value embedded in Chinese lifestyle (Wang & Shi, 2006) and is in line with findings from Canadian Aboriginal and other indigenous athlete research (e.g., Schinke et al., 2006; Schinke et al., 2007). By contrast, the primary focus of Western SPCs may be on the health and welfare of their clients (e.g., Anderson, Miles, Mahoney & Robinson, 2002; Petitpas, 1996), which may be related to individualistic values. Given that limitations could stem from the dominant Eurocentric counseling culture, researchers and practitioners should be trained to be able to deal with conflicts of personal and collective interests of athletes in a local cultural context, such as China (Ryba et al., 2013; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009).

It is important to remain cognizant that the results of this study can only be interpreted in terms of the exploration of the socio-cultural influences on the Olympic psychological services in a Chinese context. Specifically, the preliminary findings from the current study present important characteristics and information for the development of cultural competence for SPCs working with Chinese athletes. Additionally, the findings in the current study can also be understood in the context of other Eastern collectivist countries, such as Japan (e.g., *keeping face*, interpersonal order and prioritizing harmony of social interaction; Kozuma, 2009). Finally, the current findings may provide insight for international sport psychology colleagues who may be interested in understanding the practice and application of sport psychology in China.

### **Conclusion**

Given that cultural sport psychology is an emerging area within sport and exercise psychology, the development of culturally competent research and practice in sport psychology is needed and it is important to understand how sport psychology services can effectively interact with athletes' sociocultural background. The current study can be viewed as a preliminary examination of cultural competence among Chinese SPCs and extends the position held by the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) on *cultural competence* among SPCs (Ryba et al., 2013), by framing Olympic sport psychology services in relation to a sport system, beyond the description of Chinese collectivist characteristics. In sum, the findings of this study reveal that sociocultural factors exerted considerable influence on Chinese Olympic sport psychology services and that Chinese SPCs were able to provide a culturally competent service for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

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Table 1

*Higher-order and lower-order themes of the General Dimension of the Whole-Nation System*

Higher-order Themes	Lower-order Themes
Leadership role and resource centralization of the Whole-Nation system (SPC1-15)	<p>Directive function of the Whole-Nation system (SPC1-7, SPC9, SPC15)</p> <p>Resource centralization in the Whole-Nation system (SPC1-4, SPC6, SPC8, SPC10-14)</p>
Top-down directive for sport psychology services (SPC1-15)	<p>Formation of the sport psychology expert team (SPC1, SPC4, SPC6-9, SPC11)</p> <p>Service requests from team officials, coaches and athletes (SPC3-11, SPC14-15)</p> <p>Assigned by China Institute of Sport Science (SPC2-3, SPC12-13)</p>
Promotion of sport psychology services (SPC1-15)	<p>High attention from the government given to the home effect (SPC1-7, SPC9-12, SPC14-15)</p> <p>Human resources and material support from the Whole-nation system (SPC1-4, SPC6-10, SPC13)</p>
Effective direct communication (SPC1-9, SPC11, SPC13-15)	<p>Feedback and communication between consultants and officials (SPC1-3, SPC5-8, SPC11, SPC13-14)</p> <p>Officials' assistance and involvement during service delivery (SPC2-9, SPC15)</p> <p>Administrative convenience for service arrangements (SPC1-4, SPC7-9, SPC11, SPC13-15)</p> <p>Integration of ideological-political education and psychological services (SPC1, SPC3-7, SPC14-15)</p>

*Note.* SPC refers to sport psychology consultant. The SPCs in the parentheses indicate the relevant respondents of each theme.

Table 2

*Higher-order and lower-order themes of the General Dimension of Chinese cultural*

Higher-order Themes	Lower-order Themes	<i>characteristics</i>
Holistic/dialectic thinking style (SPC1-10, SPC12-15)	Cultivating athletes' holistic/dialectic thinking styles (SPC1, SPC3-8, SPC10, SPC14-15)	
	Enhancing athletes' cognition and knowledge base (SPC2, SPC4-6, SPC8-10, SPC12)	
	Guiding athletes' understanding about winning and losing (SPC1, SPC4-8, SPC10)	
	Athletes' personal growth (SPC2, SPC4, SPC6-8, SPC10, SPC12, SPC14-15)	
	Cooperation with other support staff (SPC1-10, SPC13-15)	
	Cooperation with coaches' and athletes' plans (SPC2-6, SPC8-10, SPC13-14)	
Collectivist characteristics (SPC1-15)	Prioritizing collective interests (SPC1-9, SPC12)	
	Pressure induced from winning glory for the country (SPC1, SPC3-15)	
	Pressure induced from gold medal strategy (SPC1, SPC3, SPC5-6, SPC9, SPC11-12, SPC14)	
Authoritative characteristics (SPC1-9, SPC13-15)	Administrative authority (SPC1-4, SPC7, SPC9, SPC13-15)	
	Coach authority (SPC2-9, SPC13-15)	
<i>Keeping face</i> (SPC1-8, SPC10-12, SPC14-15)	Demands from officials about the <i>face</i> of home momentum (SPC3, SPC5-6, SPC8, SPC11-12)	
	Pressure induced from the <i>keeping face</i> effect (SPC2-3, SPC5-6, SPC8, SPC10-12)	
	High expectations and attention paid to performance due to the <i>keeping face</i> effect (SPC1-8)	
	<i>Keeping face</i> concerns within service delivery (SPC1-3, SPC5-8, SPC10-12, SPC14-15)	

*Note.* SPC refers to sport psychology consultant. The SPCs in the parentheses indicate the relevant respondents of each theme.