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Sport and Politics: The Cultural Revolution in the Chinese Sports Ministry, 1966–1976

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ABSTRACT

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) was one of the most violent political movements to have taken place in modern Chinese history. Sport was not immune from this political storm. In the first phase of the revolution (1966–1972), the country's sport system was brought down by the Red Guards and revolutionary rebels. Athletes, coaches and officials who dared to challenge the Maoists were arrested and tortured, and suffered greatly as a result of their 'counter-revolutionary' status. In the second phase of the revolution (1972–1976), the Sports Ministry became a battlefield in the power struggle within the PRC leadership. This paper studies the relationships between sport, politics and power struggle during the Cultural Revolution. It points out that what happened in the Sports Ministry demonstrates how China's sport system was linked to and affected by top-level power struggles and ideological conflicts. It also reflected how ordinary people's lives were affected by the revolution.

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The Cultural Revolution was launched by Mao Zedong (1893–1976), Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in early 1966. The objectives of the revolution were twofold. The first was to regain control over fundamental Party decisions, which were increasingly being influenced by right-wing CCP leaders headed by Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969). In addition to this power struggle, Mao wanted to use the revolution to re-establish the ideological purity of communism, which he believed was being threatened by 'revisionists' and 'capitalists', and to recreate Mao Zedong Thought accordingly. The strategy was to mobilize the Chinese people, especially the students, to follow the Maoist road and fight against anybody who opposed this road/ideology. The Cultural Revolution lasted for 10 years. It led to purges, persecution and social chaos, and brought the country to the verge of collapse.

In recent decades, historians, social scientists and political scientists have conducted a considerable amount of research to examine the impact of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese society and to study its legacy from different perspectives. The current works of literature and research have covered a wide range of topics. The majority of the published works have focused on the country's major sectors and industries, for example, politics, the

military, the economy, education, culture, agriculture, and so on. Only a limited number of works have offered some perspectives on the relationship between sport and the Cultural Revolution.¹ These studies have concentrated on the influence of the revolution on China's sports policies and practices, while the impact of the revolution on the lives of the athletes, coaches and cadres has been neglected. This paper studies the relationships between sport, politics and power struggle during the Cultural Revolution. It tries to explain how the Sports Ministry, the country's governing body for sport and physical education, and its members were linked to and affected by power struggles and ideological conflict during the revolution.

The Beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the Sports Ministry

The Cultural Revolution reached every corner of Chinese society and the sport system was no exception. Answering the call of Chairman Mao, in May 1966, Red Guards from Beijing Sport University and staff members from the Sports Ministry began their offensive against 'authorities' and 'experts' who were 'hiding' in the Sports Ministry and its local commissions. Cadres at all levels were attacked. By August 1966, sports commissions at provincial, municipal and county levels could no longer function normally. At the headquarters of the Sports Ministry in Beijing, Rong Gaotang (1902–2006), Vice-Chairman of the All-China Sports Federation and Vice-Minister of the Sports Ministry, became a target for the Red Guards.

The onslaught against Rong started when a letter was sent to the Central Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP by a provincial sports commission, accusing Rong of betraying the Maoist road because he used to argue in a seminar that the mistakes made by Chairman Mao could fill up a truck.² After Mao initiated the 'Bombard the Headquarters' campaign in August 1966 and launched the Revolution nationally, the Red Guards from Beijing Sport University and rebels from the Sports Ministry began attacking Rong Gaotang.³ They condemned Rong as a 'capitalist roader' and revisionist with Big-Character Posters.⁴ The slanderous letter was presented as solid evidence of Rong's 'crime' and his house was ransacked by the Red Guards and rebels. Rong's daughter recalled:

One day, I was sleeping. Suddenly, someone knocked brutally at the door and shouted: 'Rong Gaotang, come out! Confess to the people!' My father opened the door and let them in. They shouted at my father and smashed the television and furniture ... Our house was ransacked several times by the rebels from the Sports Ministry and Red Guards from universities and secondary schools ... even today I can still become easily frightened by someone knocking at the door.⁵

Marshal He Long (1896–1969), the Sports Minister and the Vice-Premier and the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC, was worried about what was happening in the Sports Ministry and wanted to assuage the revolution. At the National Day Parade on 1 October 1966, he talked to Mao Zedong about Rong's situation in the Sports Ministry and expressed his concern. Mao instructed: 'Rong Gaotang has made contributions to the national table tennis team and therefore should be protected ...'⁶ Consequently, athletes and staff members in the Sports Ministry who supported Rong circulated this encouraging news.⁷ However, the Red Guards and the rebels did not stop their campaign against Rong. They marched to Zhongnanhai to make appeals to the Central Government, hoping to gain support.⁸ Even though Mao had said Rong should be protected, due to chaos brought about by the revolution, struggle sessions against Rong and other 'capitalist roaders'

and ‘counter-revolutionaries’ in the Sports Ministry continued.⁹ Li Furong, a former world table tennis champion, recalled:

During that period, no one dared to go to sports training any more. Struggle sessions became the priority. The sessions were held every day. Many officials and athletes became targets of the Red Guards and the rebels. One day [31 October 1966] we heard that there was a struggle session against Rong Gaotang. We supported him because he used to lead us in attending and winning at the World Table Tennis Championships. Some teammates told us that Rong had had nothing to eat for the whole morning. We were worried about him, so three of us interrupted the struggle session and delivered a pot of dumplings to Rong. The participants of the session were shocked by what we had done. In the evening, we were condemned by the rebels. Later, Big-Character Posters against us appeared in the Sports Ministry. They called us as ‘royalists’ and ‘capitalist roaders’ because we had delivered dumplings to Rong Gaotang at the struggle session. Thereafter, struggle sessions against Rong also became struggle sessions against us. We were forced to admit that we were wrong. But personally, we have never admitted that ...¹⁰

At the time, the Asian edition of the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEF0) was scheduled to take place in Cambodia in November 1966. Rong was the Chairman of the Organizing Committee and was supposed to attend the Games.¹¹ However, following protests from the Red Guards and the rebels in October 1966, the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee decided not to send Rong to Cambodia. Rong’s supporters were not happy about this decision. On 2 November 1966, athletes from the national table tennis, swimming, badminton and gymnastic teams organized an oath-taking meeting (for Asian GANEF0 participants) in support of Rong. More than 1,000 people took part in the event. He Long and Rong Gaotang had been invited to attend.¹²

The national team planned to travel to Cambodia on 4 November. The trip was delayed because some athletes refused to get on the bus to the airport and went instead to Zhongnanhai to protest. They claimed that if Rong Gaotang was not allowed to go abroad (to attend the Asian GANEF0 in Cambodia), they would not go either.¹³

The oath-taking meeting and the athletes’ protest at Zhongnanhai were seen as serious political incidents by the Central Government.¹⁴ As a result, Rong Gaotang was banned from leaving the country. One month later, he was condemned as a revisionist who had implemented counter-revolutionary policies and practices in the Sports Ministry.¹⁵ Sports Minister He Long did not interfere this time because any small move on his part would have invited the wrath of the rebels. People who used to support Rong had to keep silent. No one dared to ally themselves with a revisionist/counter-revolutionary. On 24 December 1966, the Red Guards and the rebels brought Rong to a struggle session at the Beijing Gymnasium. After the session, Rong was put under house arrest for ‘investigation’, followed by more and more struggle sessions and brutal physical torture. He was then put in prison in December 1967 for eight years.¹⁶

After the fall of Rong Gaotang, He Long was in danger. He Long’s close relationship with Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) and several of the marshals who controlled the army had caused troubles. When Mao initiated the ‘Bombard the Headquarters’ campaign in August 1966 in an effort to oust Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and other CCP leaders, He Long supported Liu and Deng. He offended Mao in August 1966 by refusing Mao’s request to denounce Liu and Deng at a session of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee.¹⁷ During the session, He discussed the Cultural Revolution with his colleague General Xiao Hua (1916–1985) and complained: ‘What is going on? It seems that they are purging the Party ...’¹⁸ In response, Mao and his supporters launched an attack on He Long in August

1966.¹⁹ He was condemned as a careerist who wanted to gain full control over the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and received a warning from Mao through Vice-Premier Lin Biao (1907–1971) in September 1966.²⁰

In October 1966, Mao initiated a new campaign entitled 'Sweep Out the Barriers and Fight Against the Capitalist Road' at a meeting organized by the Central Government. This time, the PLA was affected. Many officers in the army were attacked by the Red Guards and rebels. In order to secure the army from the chaos brought about by the Cultural Revolution, PLA leaders summoned the staff and students from PLA universities to attend the first 100,000 People Congress on 13 November 1966. At the congress, He Long urged the staff and students not to join the rebels: 'Do not join or intervene in local revolutions. Do not take to the streets to join any political movements or protests in relation to Bombard the Headquarters.'²¹

The Congress was soon attacked by Mao's closest allies, Lin Biao and Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (1914–1991), who condemned speeches by He Long and other PLA leaders at the congress as 'counter attacks from the capitalist roaders.'²² He was denounced as a bandit who was against the Maoist road and was attacked by the Red Guards and rebels. He was forced to leave his residence and was put under house arrest in January 1967. An investigation group was established in September 1967 to collect evidence to prove him guilty of the charges against him. In June 1968, He Long was denounced as the fourth-highest ranking counter-revolution revisionist in the Party.²³

The house arrest was accompanied by physical and mental torture. The water supply was cut off. Only one pot of drinking water was provided for each day. He Long had suffered from diabetes mellitus for many years. After being put under house arrest, his health deteriorated.²⁴ From January 1969 onward, the investigation group stopped providing medical services. His private doctor was replaced by a nurse who was selected by the investigation group. The amount of medicine provided to him was limited.²⁵ Due to this poor medical treatment, He Long developed diabetic acidosis on 8 June 1969. Before he was forced into the ambulance that would take him there, he told his wife, 'I know that they are going to murder me.'²⁶ He died in hospital on 9 June 1969, making him the first marshal to be tortured to death during the Cultural Revolution.

You Are on the Wrong Side! The Sport System as Victim of the Revolution

After He Long and Rong Gaotang were condemned as leading capitalist roaders in December 1966, the Sport Ministry descended into chaos. Athletes and coaches were forced to declare their loyalty to the Maoist road. Li Furong recalled:

Some comrades in the national table tennis team became 'representatives of the right road'. We, in contrast, were expelled because we had followed the wrong road ... We became targets of the revolution. We were abused, beaten and tortured, and suffered a lot.²⁷

The national table tennis team, which had been held up as a role model for all the sports teams in the early 1960s, was condemned and leading team members, including Zhuang Zedong (1940–2013), Xu Yinsheng, Li Furong, Rong Guotuan (1937–1968), Fu Qifang (1923–1968) and Zheng Minzhi, were decried as 'the seeds of revisionism'. They were forced to self-criticize and admit that they had been on the wrong side of the revolution. They were also mentally and physically abused by the Red Guards and rebels.

Zhuang Zedong, who had won three world titles at the World Table Tennis Championships in 1961 and 1965, was condemned as a 'capitalist loyalist' because he had helped organize the oath-taking meeting and the appeal campaign outside Zhongnanhai in November 1966. He was forced to confess by composing a Big-Character Poster entitled 'I've Joined the Rebels' in early 1967. He declared in the poster that he had been cheated by the capitalist roaders and should not have supported Rong Gaotang. He promised to convert to the Maoist road.²⁸ However, the rebels did not stop their offensive. In May 1967, Zhuang came across a few Red Guards on the street and was asked to shave his head into the 'Yin Yang Head' style.²⁹ He refused and argued: 'Why do you ask me to shave my head? Chairman Mao has not shaved his head!'³⁰ His words became yet further evidence of his crimes against the Maoist road. Big-Character Posters soon appeared in the Sports Ministry, accusing him of attacking the 'Red Sun' – Mao Zedong. Zhuang's ex-wife, Bao Huiyang, recalled:

Zhuang was very depressed. He told me that Big-Character Posters against him were everywhere. People avoided him and refused to talk to him ... He mentioned that he had confessed to his 'crime' but the rebels refused to let him go ...³¹

Mao believed that, with Marshal He Long as the Minister of Sport and because of the latter's close relationship with Liu Shaoqi, the Sports Ministry could not be trusted. He therefore decided to use the rebels to regain control over the sport system. The Cultural Revolution in the Sports Ministry was brought to a new height by an editorial entitled 'Rebels in the Sports Ministry Initiate the Final Attack on the Chinese Khrushchev and His Agents. The Revisionist Sport Road Has Been Harshly Criticized,' which was published in the *People's Daily* on 23 September 1967. This editorial was a call from the Maoists to drive He Long and Rong Gaotang's supporters out of the Sports Ministry and to convert the sport system to the Maoist road. It stated:

The capitalist roaders who held power in the Party and their agents in the field of sport promoted the revisionist road. They tried to revive capitalism and committed serious crimes. The proletarian revolutionaries in the Sports Ministry have decided to study Chairman Mao's literature and to use the Maoist ideology to carry out mass movements. This is the most urgent and important issue. They will use public struggle sessions and special struggle sessions carried out by athletes and coaches to sweep away the revisionist sport road. The objective is to let Maoist ideology dominate the field of sport and make the Maoist flag fly forever!

The aim of the Cultural Revolution was to get rid of anything regarded as revisionist, bourgeois or capitalist. It opposed elitism and advocated the rise of the proletariat. Therefore, the ideological confrontation in the Sports Ministry ultimately concerned the relationship between elite and mass sport. Was sport for some elite athletes or for the masses? Was sport for medals or for the health of the people and the defense of the country? The former was regarded as a facet of bourgeois ideology and the latter as communist idealism. This coincided with the slogan of the revolution – unite the masses of workers, farmers and other exploited classes to reinforce communism. As a result, elite athletes and celebrity coaches were condemned as representatives of bourgeois and capitalist ideology.³² Xu Yinsheng recalled:

Top athletes and coaches were condemned as proponents of revisionism, chauvinism and championism, which went against the Maoist road. They [the rebels] said that the trophies and medals won by the national team were named after the bourgeoisie.³³

Winning medals at international sports competitions came to be seen as a practice of the capitalist road. World champions and their coaches became targets for the rebels.³⁴ In

addition, athletes, coaches and cadres in the Sports Ministry who had foreign relations or who used to have connections with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s were identified as counter-revolutionaries and spies.

On 16 April 1968, Fu Qifang, head coach of the national men's table tennis team, hung himself in the Beijing Gymnasium. Fu was born in mainland China. He migrated to Hong Kong with his parents when he was a child. He represented Hong Kong at the 19th World Table Tennis Championships in India in 1952. He also won the Asian title by defeating Japan at an Asian Tournament in Singapore in 1952. Fu went back to mainland China in 1953 and represented the PRC at the 24th World Table Tennis Championships in 1957. He began coaching the men's national table tennis team in 1958 and made great contributions to the development of table tennis in China. Fu coached Rong Guotuan, who won the first world title for China at the 25th World Table Tennis Championships. In the following years, the national team won the gold medals in the men's single and men's team events at the 26th, 27th and 28th World Table Tennis Championships. The Sports Ministry awarded him the prestigious 'Sports Medal' twice, in 1961 and 1963. However, from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he was accused by the Red Guards and the rebels of supporting Rong Gaotang. He was also falsely accused of being a spy for the KMT and was tortured before he made the decision to end his life.³⁵

Fu Qifang's death was only the beginning. A few days after Mao had officially condemned He Long as a 'counter-revolution revisionist', the Central Government issued the No. [68] 71 Order, placing the Sports Ministry under the control of the army. The Order stated:

The Sports Ministry has been corrupted by counter-revolution revisionists including He Long, Liu Ren (1909–1973) and Rong Gaotang. It is a copy of the Soviet revisionists' sport system. The Sports Ministry has refused to follow the leadership of the Party and the proletariat. It has become an independent kingdom controlled by gangsters ... The decision has been made. The Sports Ministry and its local commissions will be taken over by the People's Liberation Army [which by then was under the control of Lin Biao].³⁶

Consequently, cadres at all levels were replaced by PLA officers and soldiers. Most of the sports officials were attacked by the Red Guards and revolutionary rebels. The violence spread to provincial and local sports commissions. Thousands of cadres, coaches and athletes were sent to May Seventh Cadre Schools to be 're-educated' through hard labor.³⁷

He Zhenliang, Secretary General of the Chinese Gymnastics Association, was one of the victims. He was forced to leave his family in 1969. He and his son were allocated to a May Seventh Cadre School in Tunliu County, Shanxi Province, where he worked as a farmer and a night-watchman. His wife and daughter were sent to another school in Hengchuan County, Henan Province.³⁸

In Shanghai, 702 out of 1,800 staff in the municipal sports commission were sent to the countryside to be re-educated. More than 300 staff were targeted by the rebels and tortured at violent struggle sessions.³⁹ In Heilongjiang Province, the provincial sports commission and the municipal sports commission in Harbin (capital of Heilongjiang) were controlled by a military commission. Cadres, athletes and coaches were sent to a May Seventh Cadre School in Tonghe County. More than one-third of the cadres and coaches were investigated by the rebels. Some of them were tortured to death; others were put in prison. In Shanxi Province, 97 of the 588 members of staff in the provincial sports commission were identified as 'capitalist roaders' and 'revisionists'. More than 100 staff members were investigated for

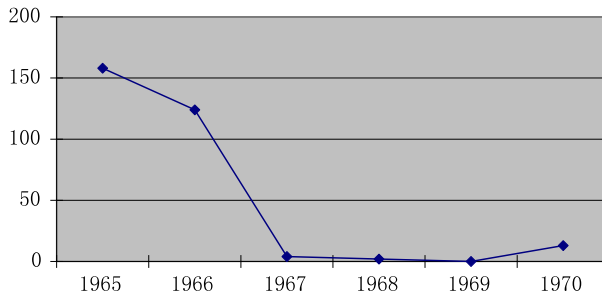


Figure 1. International competitions and sports exchanges attended by the Chinese national team between 1965 and 1970 [Times]. Source: Shaozu Wu (ed.), *The History of Sport in the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: China Book Press, 1999).

'family/history problems.' Fourteen staff and 152 athletes were sent to factories and May Seventh Cadre Schools.⁴⁰

The Chinese sport system and its administrative divisions collapsed. Many national, provincial and regional sports teams were disbanded. Sports schools were closed down. National teams stopped participating in international competitions (see Figure 1) and sports competitions ceased to take place. Taking soccer, for example, 47 provincial and municipal level soccer teams were dissolved. In total, 1,124 footballers and 115 coaches were forced to retire.⁴¹

The No. [68] 71 Order was also a death sentence for a number of top athletes, coaches and cadres who were identified by the rebels as 'counter-revolutionaries,' 'loyalists,' 'capitalist roaders,' 'gangsters' and 'spies.' Many of them were arrested by the rebels' investigation groups. Some committed suicide.

In addition to Fu Qifang, two other famous world-class table tennis players committed suicide during the purges in the sport system. Four days after the Order was issued, Jiang Yongning (1927–1968), China's first national table tennis champion and head coach of the national table tennis team, committed suicide as he could no longer endure the physical and mental abuse inflicted on him during the struggle sessions. One month later, on 20 June 1968, Rong Guotuan, China's first world table tennis champion and head coach of the women's table tennis team, hung himself beside the Dragon Lake in Beijing. Like Fu Qifang, Rong and Jiang had been condemned as spies because they had previously lived in Hong Kong. Rong addressed his family in his last words:

Dear Father, Zhen Xiu and Xiaoqiu,

I feel guilty that you were involved. Please curse me and hate me! Forget me forever.

Tuan⁴²

Rong's death did not end the attacks on him. The rebels believed that Rong had committed suicide to escape punishment and ransacked his house again. He did not have a funeral and his father refused to receive his ashes because he did not want the whole family to be called 'counter-revolutionaries.' Neighbours did not dare to talk to Rong's family any more.⁴³

Yan Fumin (1928–1968), General Secretary of the International Office of the Sports Ministry, also committed suicide. Yan's father had studied in a Catholic school in the Republic of China era and was working in Southeast Asia during the Cultural Revolution. This 'evidence' was used as proof that Yan was a 'gangster' who had connections with the

capitalist world. He was arrested by the rebels and was tortured. He put an end to his life by lying on a railway track in late 1968.⁴⁴

Zhuang Zedong, who had been condemned by the rebels for ‘attacking’ the ‘Red Sun’ (Mao Zedong) in 1967, was arrested by an investigation group. Zhuang’s ex-wife recalled:

Zhuang Zedong was arrested by an investigation group in May 1968. A few days later, several men from the Sports Ministry ransacked our home. They shouted at me, ‘Zhuang Zedong is an active counter-revolutionary! We have already applied the Dictatorship of the Proletariat against him. You must reveal his crime!’. I wanted to find out why my husband was accused of being an active counter-revolutionary. On my way to the Sports Ministry, I bought a newspaper to find related information. What I found was shocking. An article stated, ‘Zhuang Zedong is a dutiful son of the bourgeoisie. He used to be a key figure in the He Rong [He Long and Rong Gaotang] Counter-Revolution Group. His sister worked for the KMT and escaped to Taiwan. Zhuang Zedong hates the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. He even shouted a counter-revolution slogan in May [1967] in front of the rebels and attacked our greatest leader – the Red Sun, Chairman Mao! He has committed a serious crime and deserves to die!’

The other day, a group of rebels barged into our house and shouted at me, ‘Bao Huiyang, your counter-revolutionary husband has committed a serious crime and there is no way out for him. We will isolate you and investigate you. If you do not make a clean break with him, you will be punished for covering up for a counter-revolutionary!’. Then they took me away and questioned me in a small room in the Central Conservatory of Music for four days. I refused to provide any useful evidence against my husband. A few days later, I was told that my husband had been forced to march in the street every morning with other counter-revolutionaries, bearing banners on their backs that read ‘Active Counter-Revolutionaries.’ Struggle sessions against them were held every day. He was frequently beaten by the Red Guards and the rebels, who used their fists and feet and even wooden sticks, which left his body swollen and bruised.⁴⁵

A Short Recovery

Zhuang Zedong and his colleagues were lucky enough to survive the purge in the sport system. After hearing of the ongoing deaths of top athletes, coaches and high-level cadres, and especially shocked by the death of world champion Rong Guotuan, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) instructed in late June 1968 that elite athletes must be protected and be kept away from struggle sessions. Zhuang and other top athletes and coaches were temporarily set free.⁴⁶ Training sessions slowly began to take place again in early 1970.⁴⁷

At the same time, the engine of sports diplomacy was restarted thanks to changes in the PRC’s foreign policy. The elite sport system was revived to meet Beijing’s need to conduct diplomacy through sports exchanges and competitions, a sea change that was triggered by the famous ‘Ping Pong Diplomacy’ in the early 1970s.⁴⁸ Wang Meng (1920–2007), Political Commissar for the PLA’s Beijing military region, was appointed by Zhou Enlai as the new Sports Minister in July 1971.⁴⁹ A journalist recalled:

Wang Meng was very active. His first action was to bring the cadres back from the May Seventh Schools and revive training activities. I attended two meetings held by him. One was for the promotion of basketball, volleyball and soccer. The other was a board meeting of the Sports Ministry. Wang Meng stated at one meeting: ‘Bring 600 cadres back from the Cadre Schools and the situation will change.’⁵⁰

Cadres and coaches were released and returned to their posts. Athletic teams at all levels began to be re-established and sports competitions were revived. The Central Government decided to withdraw PLA officers and soldiers from local sports commissions in 1972.⁵¹

The whole sport system finally went back to normal after suffering seven years of disorder. In the same year, the Sports Ministry held a work conference to promote athletics training programmes and restore the spare-time sports schools training system.⁵² The *New Sport* journal, which had been suspended from publication for six years, resumed publication in October 1972 and set out the mission of elite sport: 'Improve the standard of performance and catch up with the world level.'⁵³ More and more regional- and national-level sports competitions were being held. On 9 June 1972, the National Ball Games Tournament was held in Beijing. It was the first national-level sports competition to be held since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In 1974, 15,806 regional and national sports meetings were held around China.⁵⁴ The spare-time sports school system also experienced rapid recovery. By the end of 1974, 1,459 sports schools had been reopened. The number of students exceeded 100,000.⁵⁵

Although most of the elite athletes, coaches and cadres had been freed from the May Seventh Schools, the sport system was still under the shadow of the proletarian revolution, class struggle and road struggle. The Cultural Revolution in sport had not yet ended.

The Continuation of the Cultural Revolution in the Sports Ministry, 1972–1976

The Cultural Revolution faced a downturn in mid-1970 when Vice-Chairman Lin Biao, who was recognized by the public as the successor to Mao Zedong, believed that he was losing power and thus began to plan a secret coup against Mao.⁵⁶ A report entitled 'Project 571 Outline' was drafted to condemn Mao's policy and his Cultural Revolution.⁵⁷ Plans were made to assassinate Mao. However, the coup ended in failure. Lin Biao and some of his family members were killed in an airplane crash on 13 September 1971 while attempting to escape to the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ Their supporters, including General Huang Yongsheng (1910–1983), General Wu Faxian (1905–2004), General Li Zuopeng (1904–2009) and General Qiu Huizuo (1914–2002), were arrested.⁵⁹ This became known as the '9.13 Incident'.

The '9.13 Incident' shocked the CCP and the whole country. People began to question the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong was greatly disturbed by the incident; he became depressed and his health deteriorated.⁶⁰ In late September, the Central Government launched the 'Anti-Lin Movement', which aimed to fix the damage the '9.13 Incident' had caused to the Party by eliminating any vestiges of Lin's influence in the government, converting Lin's supporters and undoing the effects of 'Project 571', which had threatened Mao and the Central Government's reputation.⁶¹ Mao changed his policy and blamed his mistakes and some of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution on Lin Biao. Many high-ranking government officers and scholars who had been ousted (by Mao and Lin) as revisionists and counter-revolutionaries in the second half of the 1960s were released from local May Seventh Schools and returned to power in 1972 and 1973.⁶² Despite this reversal of position, Mao's prestige within the PRC leadership declined.

Zhou Enlai began to take charge of the Central Government. Policies were applied to try to repair the damage the Cultural Revolution had wrought upon the country. Cadres were set free and went back to their posts. The State Council held meetings to discuss how to restore agriculture, industry, the economy and education. Zhou also initiated a campaign in 1972 criticizing 'ultra-left thinking'. The objective was to call into question the theory and practice of the Cultural Revolution and moderate the campaign.⁶³

However, Zhou's attempt to quell the Cultural Revolution threatened the fundamental interests of Mao Zedong. In May 1973, Mao launched the 'Anti-Confucius Campaign' to secure his authority and consolidate the Maoist road. An assault on Zhou Enlai was launched. The Cultural Revolution was revived. By early 1974, the 'Anti-Confucius Campaign' had been combined with the 'Anti-Lin Campaign' and had become a nation-wide political movement directed against Zhou Enlai and his right-hand man, Deng Xiaoping. Big-Character Posters against revisionism appeared on the streets. Rebels attacked Zhou and his supporters in the Party and the Central Government. Struggle sessions were revived, and many cadres and scholars who had been set free in 1972 and 1973 were again cast out. Society descended into chaos. Factories closed; many government branches ceased to function; the food supply was in danger. A power struggle within the PRC leadership took shape, with Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, on one side, and Mao Zedong and his supporters, on the other. Both sides strived to gain control over the Party, the ministries and local governments.⁶⁴

The changes that took place in the Sports Ministry between 1973 and 1976 reflected the ongoing power struggle within the PRC leadership. As mentioned in the previous section, Zhou Enlai had appointed General Wang Meng as Sports Minister in July 1971. Marshal Ye Jianying (1897–1986), an influential leader in the army, also gave his backing to General Wang. By the time the struggle between Mao and Zhou had begun in 1972, the Sports Ministry was firmly on Zhou's side.

Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Deputy Director of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, began to look for opportunities to take over the Sports Ministry. 'Sport is a form of national popular culture, a forum for the creation, expression or maintenance of senses and ideals of identity, a form of business, and a central point of focus for groups within and outside any given society or nation.'⁶⁵ Jiang Qing believed that sport could be used to propagandize Mao Zedong Thought and serve the implementation of the Maoist road. She made placing the Sports Ministry and its local commissions under the Maoists' control a priority, visiting the Ministry frequently from early 1971 and establishing relationships with some cadres and leading athletes.⁶⁶ Zhuang Zedong, who had made a great contribution to the 'Ping Pong Diplomacy' in early 1971, became her main focus. Jiang's first move in courting Zhuang was to release his wife from a May Seventh Cadre School and appoint her a pianist in Jiang's revolutionary arts troupe.⁶⁷ Later, Zhuang joined a special intensive class organized by Jiang Qing. Students in the class were leading rebels from all over the country. They were being trained to become high-ranking central and local government officials.

By 1972, Jiang and her supporters in the Sports Ministry had gradually established control over the sport system and had begun to use sport to increase the influence of Mao's proletarian ideology and counter the blandishments of revisionism. In 1972, the Sports Ministry called for the promotion of mass sport in the countryside. It argued that the development of sport among peasants was an important goal of the Maoists' sports policy.⁶⁸ In 1973, Jiang launched a campaign called 'Learn from Xiaojinzhuang' to further promote Mao Zedong Thought in rural China through sports and cultural activities. Villages were required to have their own sports teams. Sports meetings became an official demand on the agendas of local authorities. Sport had become a tool for furthering proletarian ideology, and promoting sport among farmers became an important mission for provincial and county sports commissions. Farmers were mobilized to participate in physical exercise and sport activities. Participation in sport was usually connected with the peasants' political attitudes, for example, active participants would be regarded as genuine supporters of the Maoist

road. At the same time sport leadership groups and sports teams were set up at every level, from county to village, commune to production brigade, to systematically promote mass sport. By 1976, most counties and communes in China had organized sports meetings.⁶⁹ It was the first time in Chinese history that farmers had been systematically organized and mobilized to participate in sport and physical activities.

Following the launch of the 'Anti-Lin and Anti-Confucius Campaign', Jiang Qing initiated her offensive to take over the Sports Ministry.⁷⁰ A mobilization meeting for the 'Anti-Lin and Anti-Confucius Campaign' was held in the Capital Gymnasium on 25 January 1974. Jiang spoke at the meeting and attacked Zhou Enlai through innuendo. Rebels in the Sports Ministry were incited to carry out class struggle and road struggle movements. Organized by Zhuang Zedong, rebels re-launched the revolution in sport. The sport system was condemned as promoting bourgeois sport that excluded the proletariat. Textbooks translated from foreign languages were deemed 'capitalist poison'. Elite sport was again criticized as being representative of championism. Struggle sessions were carried out to attack Sports Minister Wang Meng and his supporters. They were accused of following the revisionist road. Wang lost control of the Sports Ministry in March 1974. His health deteriorated and he was sent to the Beijing military region hospital. The rebels continued to attack him and placed Big-Character Posters outside the hospital. They tried to break into the hospital but were stopped by the guards from the army. Deng Xiaoping came to rescue and helped Wang to get out. An order was issued by the Central Military Commission appointing Wang the Vice-Political Commissar of the Wuhan military region of the PLA.

After Wang Meng left the Sports Ministry, Zhuang Zedong became the Sports Minister, making him the youngest Minister in the history of the PRC. Under his command, the Sports Ministry served the implementation of the Maoist ideology and played a part in the power struggle between Mao and Zhou. Zhuang's wife recalled:

He became an important person overnight, making him more loyal to them [Jiang Qing and Wang Hongwen [1935–1992]] ... sometimes, they even summoned him by phone in the middle of the night and he never dared be delayed. He used to be a simple person and knew nothing about politics. In order to show his loyalty, he followed their instructions and created lies and propaganda [in the Sports Ministry] ... Wang Hongwen praised him: 'The Sports Ministry is doing very well in promoting the [revolutionary] campaigns. You are good at understanding the policies.' Jiang Qing also encouraged him 'Do not be afraid. We are covering you from behind.'⁷¹

Although Wang Meng had retreated, Zhuang Zedong continued to use his case to carry on the road struggle in the Sports Ministry. Regardless of Zhou Enlai's warning on 1 February 1975 not to revive the revolution in the sport system, Zhuang developed the slogan 'Repulse the Three Generations' Revisionism'⁷² to eliminate Zhou Enlai and Wang Meng's influence in the Sports Ministry, consolidate his power, promote Mao Zedong Thought and reinforce the Maoist road. Cadres and athletes who opposed him were removed from their posts.⁷³

However, some leading athletes, coaches and cadres occasionally reported the situation in the Sports Ministry to Deng Xiaoping through secret channels. A private meeting was organized by Deng Xiaoping and Vice-Premier Chen Xilian (1915–1999) in the Jingxi Hotel on 19 September 1975. Cadres, coaches and athletes in the Sports Ministry who supported Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping attended the meeting. Chen Xilian commented to the representatives from the Sports Ministry:

It was wrong for Zhuang Zedong to promote the 'Repulse the Three Generations' Revisionism' movement and recruit new Party members [to consolidate his power] ... He is too young and

was used by them [Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan] ... He does not understand politics and may easily change his position. I hope he can be freed from the evil powers and converted to justice ... I will talk to him. You should talk to him too and help him. Let him understand the principal issues.⁷⁴

The Mao's side pushed the power struggle to a new level in November 1975 by initiating the 'Repulse Right-Deviationist-Verdict-Reversal Movement'. The education sectors were attacked. Deng Xiaoping was publicly condemned as the leading representative of the right-deviationists who, it was claimed, wanted to restore revisionism and capitalism. After the beginning of the 'Repulse Right-Deviationist-Verdict-Reversal Movement' and the 'Anti-Deng Campaign', Zhuang Zedong was used by Jiang Qing to attack Deng Xiaoping. The secret meeting organized by Deng Xiaoping on 19 September 1975 became an opportunity for Zhuang to rid the Sports Ministry of Deng's supporters. Cadres who had participated in the meeting were removed from their posts and investigated. Zhuang also ordered his men to gather evidence against Deng. He published an article in *Red Flag*, a journal controlled by the left wing, entitled 'What Does Deng Xiaoping Want to Promote in the Sports Ministry?', condemning Deng for following the revisionist and capitalist road.⁷⁵

The anti-Mao side suffered a major loss when Zhou Enlai died of cancer on 8 January 1976. Hua Guofeng (1921–2008), former General Secretary of Hunan Province, was appointed Acting Premier by Mao on 2 February 1976. On the same day, Zhou supporter Marshal Ye Jianying was removed from power.⁷⁶

The *Wenhui Daily*, which was controlled by Jiang Qing, continued to publish anti-Zhou and anti-Deng editorials. The Central Government banned condolatory activities for Zhou Enlai. Despite the ban, people around the country began to publicly lament Zhou's passing. A major protest took place in Tiananmen Square in early March 1976. Thousands of people in Beijing gathered in Tiananmen Square on 3 March to mourn the death of Zhou Enlai and protest against Mao's abettors. It was reported that two million people joined the campaign on 4 March.

On the evening of 4 March, Jiang Qing and Hua Guofeng condemned the protest as a 'counter-revolution movement'. Police and militiamen were dispatched on 5 March to crack down on the protests in Tiananmen Square. The next day, the *People's Daily* reported the protest as a 'counter-revolution movement' and accused Deng Xiaoping of having organized it behind the scenes. That evening, instructed by Mao, the Political Bureau of the CCP officially appointed Hua Guofeng Premier and Vice-Chairman. Deng Xiaoping was removed from power. A nationwide purge was launched. People who supported Zhou or who had taken part in the protest in early March 1976 were arrested. Pro-Zhou poems, essays and slogans were confiscated. In Beijing, 300 people were put in jail; more were investigated and sent to special schools to be 're-educated'.⁷⁷

The situation changed after Mao's death on 9 September 1976. Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao (1917–2005) and Yao Wenyuan (1931–2005) were eager to take power back from Hua Guofeng, who had been appointed by Mao as his successor. Hua Guofeng was Vice-Chairman and Premier in title only. He was not capable of ruling the Party because he had not entered the CCP leadership until August 1973. In addition, he did not have any supporters in the army, making him a figurehead without any true power. Right-wing leaders, including Marshal Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian (1909–1992), Wang Dongxing, Chen Yun (1905–1995) and Marshal Nie Rongzhen (1899–1992), decided to ally themselves with Hua in order to eliminate their long-time enemies, Jiang Qing, Wang

Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan – known as the ‘Gang of Four’. The strategy was successful. The members of the ‘Gang of Four’ were arrested in the evening of 6 October 1976 in Zhongnanhai.⁷⁸ By 21:00, the army controlled the Central Television Station and Beijing Television Station. At the same time, the Ministry of Public Security was taken over by the army. The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP held a meeting between 22:00 on 6 October and 04:00 on 7 October to elect the new leader of the country. As part of the deal, Hua Guofeng was appointed Chairman of the CCP and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Subsequently, a ‘Repulse the Gang of Four Movement’ was launched in late 1976 to rid the Party and the government of any remaining influence from the ‘Gang of Four’. Cadres who had been brought down by the ‘Anti-Lin and Anti-Confucius Movement’ and the ‘Repulse Right-Deviationist-Verdict-Reversal Movement’ were returned to their posts. Supporters of the ‘Gang of Four’ were investigated and arrested.

Immediately after the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’ in October 1976, Sports Minister Zhuang Zedong was removed from his post and was arrested by the Central Government’s special investigational group. He was put under house arrest for four years and was released in 1980. He then became a table tennis coach. From world champion to counter-revolutionary, from counter-revolutionary to Minister, and from Minister to prisoner, Zhuang Zedong was one of the many victims and, at the same time, oppressors in the Cultural Revolution.

The End of the Cultural Revolution

General Wang Meng returned to Beijing in February 1977 and was again appointed Sports Minister. Cadres and coaches who had been expelled by the rebels returned to their posts. The following order from the Central Government was one of the many documents that acknowledged the damage to the sport system that had occurred during the Cultural Revolution:

Reply to the Core Group of the CCP Committee of the Sports Ministry about the case of comrade Rong Gaotang:

Agree with your report entitled ‘A Report on the Case of Rong Gaotang’, which was submitted on 2 January 1969. Abolish the report entitled ‘Conclusions on Traitor Rong Gaotang’ made by the Special Investigation Group of the Central Government on 27 May 1975. Renew comrade Rong Gaotang’s Party membership and refund his salary for the period of the investigation [from 1966 to 1975]. Assign him a new post [in the Sports Ministry].

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

21 February 1977.⁷⁹

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, ‘Class struggle-oriented’ domestic and foreign policies were abolished and modernization became the new guideline. Domestic and foreign policies that focused on economic construction were adopted to serve the goal of modernization. The country’s sports policy underwent transformation in this new era. In February 1979, the Central Government rescinded the No. [68] 71. In the same month, the Sports Ministry held a national conference in Beijing to discuss the future development of sport. The class struggle-oriented sports policy was abolished and a new sports policy was developed that would serve the goals of the Four Modernizations.⁸⁰ The conference established the new mission of the Sports Ministry: ‘Focus on the development of sport and work hard to catch up with the world level ... Promote mass sport and elite sport but with more emphasis on elite sport.’⁸¹

The Fourth National Games, which were held in September 1979, symbolized the recovery of sport, especially elite sport, in China. Sports Minister Wang Meng's speech at the opening ceremony reflected a new and open-minded ethos in sport:

Dear comrades and friends,

... sport suffered under the 'ultra-left road' that was followed by Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four'. The level of performance declined and we fell far behind the world level. The 'Gang of Four' has been brought down and sport has been set free. Sport is reviving around the country.

Recently, Chairman Hua Guofeng highlighted the close relationship between sport and people's health and national spirit. He requires us to promote sport among the youth and build up the physique of the people. He also requires the athletes to improve their levels of performance and win glory for the country ...

... We will show our determination to emancipate our minds, demonstrate a spirit of solidarity and hard work and unite together to achieve the Four Modernizations. Our athletes should go all out and aim high, and adhere to the principle of 'Friendship First, Competition Second', perform well and display fine sportsmanship, produce excellent results and greet the 30-year anniversary of the PRC.

Finally, I wish the Games complete success!⁸²

Conclusion

The changes at the Sports Ministry between 1966 and 1976 revealed the complexity of the Cultural Revolution. In the first phase of the revolution (1966–1972), the Sports Ministry and the sport system was brought down by the Red Guards and rebels. Celebrity athletes, coaches and privileged officials who dared to challenge the Maoists were criticized as sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie. They were tortured by the rebels at struggle sessions, and were sent to May Seventh Schools in the countryside to be re-educated through hard labour. Less-privileged athletes and coaches were encouraged to participate in criticism meetings and to condemn the privileged. Some outstanding athletes, coaches and officials died in the violent revolutionary storm. In the second phase of the revolution (1972–1976), the Sports Ministry became a battlefield in the power struggle within the PRC leadership. The sport system was used to propagandize Mao Zedong Thought and consolidate the Maoist road. To conclude, the fall of Sports Minister He Long and Vice-Minister Rong Gaotang, and the power and powerlessness of world champion Zhuang Zedong have demonstrated how Mao and his supporters tried to secure their power and authority through the hands of the rebels. The purge in the sport system and the tragic stories of celebrity athletes and coaches reflected how people's lives were affected by top-level power struggles and ideological conflicts.

Notes

1. Fan Hong, 'Not All Bad! Communism, Society and Sport in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Revisionist Perspective', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 3 (1999), 47–71; and Grant Jarvie, Dong-Jhy Hwang, and Mel Brennan, *Sport, Revolution and the Beijing Olympics* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).
2. Jiahuan Wang, 'Rong Gaotang, Designer of the Blueprint for Chinese Sport', *China News Weekly*, no. 6 (2008), 38–40.
3. According to an interview with a former official in the Sports Ministry, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, less than 10 percent of the staff in the Sports Ministry joined the

rebels and attacked Rong Gaotang. About 80 percent of the staff were conservatives and did not join the campaign.

4. Big-Character Posters (Dazibao) are posters used as a means of protest and propaganda. During the Cultural Revolution, they were widely used around China to condemn the so-called capitalist roaders and counter-revolutionaries and to propagandize the Maoist road.
5. Lingxiu Li and Minggong Zhou, 'Rong Gaotang, the Son of Sport', *Sports Culture Guide*, no. 7 (2003), 65.
6. Ibid.
7. Li and Zhou, 'Rong Gaotang, the Son of Sport', 65.
8. Zhongnanhai is the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council of the People's Republic of China.
9. A struggle session was a type of public court in which individuals were coerced by the Red Guards, the rebels and the local community into confessing crimes. During the session, those who had been condemned as revisionists, counter-revolutionaries and capitalist roaders were paraded in front of thousands of audience and were subjected to physical and mental humiliation, abuse and violent beatings. The session may have lasted for a few hours or even for the whole day. Many people were tortured to death in these struggle sessions. Others committed suicide to escape from them.
10. Qiuqiu Yan, 'The Most Difficult Time in Li Furong's Life: Delivering Dumplings for Rong Gaotang', *Table Tennis World*, no. 10 (2005), 60.
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18. Ibid., 621.
19. Yihui An, 'The Fall of Marshal He Long (2)', *The History of the Party*, no. 9 (2003), 16–19.
20. Ibid., 17.
21. Editorial Board of Biography of He Long (ed.), *Biography of He Long*, 627.
22. Editorial Board of Biography of Ye Jianying (ed.), *Biography of Ye Jianying* (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2006).
23. Ibid.
24. Binrong Liu, *He Long and His Brothers and Sisters* (Beijing: Eastern Press, 2004).
25. Editorial Board of Biography of He Long (ed.), *Biography of He Long*.
26. Yongzhong Gu, *Marshal of the Republic: He Long and His Special Road* (Beijing: People's Press, 2004), 227.
27. Qiuqiu Yan, 'The Most Difficult Time in Li Furong's Life: Delivering Dumplings for Rong Gaotang', *Table Tennis World*, no. 10 (2005), 60.
28. Ming Zhou (ed.), *Rethinking Our History: 1966–1976* (Taiyuan: Beiyue Literature Press, 1989), 186.
29. Where half the head is shaved bald, a kind of mental torture that added to the torment of people who were condemned as revisionists, counter-revolutionaries and gangsters during the Cultural Revolution.
30. Zhou, *Rethinking Our History*, 186.
31. Can Jin, *The Lives of Others* (Beijing: Hualing Press, 1991), 137.
32. Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang, 'Sport in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 1 (2012), 53–73.

33. Eastern China Satellite TV, 'Rong Guotuan: The Fall of the World Champion', broadcast by Eastern China Satellite TV on 7 April 2009. 'Championism' refers to the promotion of elite sport and neglect of mass sport.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. 'Order from the Central Committee of the CCP, State Council and the Central Military Commission [68] no. 71', in *Collection of Documents for the Cultural Revolution*, ed. General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (Beijing: General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1968), 211.
37. Hong and Zhouxiang, 'Sport in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', 55. The May Seventh Cadre Schools were set up in rural China during the Cultural Revolution to re-educate the cadres and intellectuals from the cities. Numerous cadres and intellectuals at all levels, including Deng Xiaoping, were sent to these schools to perform hard labour.
38. Lijuan Liang, *He Zhenliang and China's Olympic Dream* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2007).
39. Yannong Fu (ed.), *The History of Sport in China, vol. 5, 1949–1979* (Beijing: People's Sport Press, 2007), 301.
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55. Ibid.
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58. Ibid.
59. Hua Shao and You Hu, *The Life of Lin Biao* (Wuhan: Hubei People's Press, 1994).
60. Witold Rodziński, *The Walled Kingdom* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), 419.
61. Zhen and Hua, *China in the Mao Era*, 255.
62. Shikai Jin, *The Cost of History: Death Files of the Cultural Revolution* (Beijing: China Dadi Press, 1993).
63. Zhen and Hua, *China in the Mao Era*, 331.
64. Song Li, *A Chronicle of the Model Opera of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Vol. 2: 1967–1976* (Taipei: Xiuwei Zixun Keji, 2011).
65. Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 51.
66. Dinghua Wang, 'Wang Meng and the Sports Ministry (3)', *The Sons and Daughters of China*, no. 6 (2008), 93.

67. Eight revolutionary model operas and ballets were promoted by Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution to propagandize Mao Zedong Thought and the Maoist road.
68. Wenmin Guan (ed.), *Sports History* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1996), 193.
69. Ibid.
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71. Jin, *The Lives of Others*, 192.
72. 'Three Generations' refers to the Sports Ministry's former ministers: He Long, Cao Cheng and Wang Meng.
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77. Ibid.
78. Yonglie Ye, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China – 1978: The Turning Point* (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press & Beijing: Huaxia Press, 2012).
79. Wang, 'Wang Meng and the Sports Ministry', 95.
80. At the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, Deng Xiaoping launched the 'Four Modernizations', a set of goals aimed at ensuring the modernization of agriculture, industry, technology and national defense.
81. Wu, *China in the Mao Era*, 515.
82. 'The Fourth National Games', Xinhua.net, 22 August 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/sports/2005-08/22/content_3389143.htm (accessed 9 September 2012).

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