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Chinese State Sports Policy: Pre- and Post-Beijing 2008

Fan Wei, Fan Hong and Lu Zhouxiang

This article provides an overview of Chinese sports policy and practice, the origin, the challenge and continuity, from the 1920s to the 2000s with particular emphasis on the post Beijing Olympics. It states that the development of Chinese sports policy has always been shaped by political, economic and educational requirements. Since the beginning of the reform and open-up in the late 1970s, elite sport received more support from the government while mass sport was hoped to be supported by the market and society. After the Beijing Olympics, it is likely that the government will continue its economic reformation of sport in the areas of mass sport and sports industry. At the same time, elite sport will continue to develop in the traditional form of ‘Juguo Tizhi’ (whole country support elite sport system) for its political and patriotic purposes.

Chinese society has undergone a dramatic transformation since the 1980s from planned economy to market economy and from an orthodox Leninist society to a neo-liberal socialist society with a Chinese character. Sport has played its part, as have education, economy and other social institutions, to reflect and stimulate the change. In order to understand the change a review is necessary of the sports policy adopted to respond to different political, economic and cultural agenda in different historical periods. This essay will overview the changes of China’s sports policy and highlights policy-making and transformation between 1929 and 2009 with particular emphases on the post-Beijing era.

Red Sports and the New Sports Movements (1920s to 1940s)

The formation of Chinese sports policy can be traced back to the 1920s and 1940s during the Communist years in Jiangxi and Yan’an by means of the Red Sports Movement (1929–34) and the New Sports Movement (1936–48). [1]

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Between 1929 and 1934 the Chinese Communist Party and its Red Army established the Chinese Soviet Republic in the mountainous area of Jiangxi. They created a policy and a formal system of physical exercise for workers and peasants. It was called the Red Sports Movement. It was a mass movement in which exercise was viewed as the basis of physical, cultural and military training for those in the Communist areas.

The Jiangxi era ended in October 1934 and the Yan'an era began in late 1936 when the Communists established a new region with Yan'an as its capital. Physical education was systematically promoted in the army, schools, counties and villages. A Physical Education and Sports Committee was founded under the leadership of the Communist Youth League. The Committee supervised clubs and groups, ratified the regulations for games and organized sports events. The Committee promoted a New Sports Movement. Its slogan was 'everybody is to do exercise'. It is clear that the policy and structure of post-1949 physical exercise and sport were pioneered in Jiangxi and Yan'an.

The Sovietization of Chinese Sports: Policy and Practice (1952–60)

The Communists won the Civil War in October 1949 and established the People's Republic of China (PRC). A national congress of sports took place on 26 and 27 October 1949 in Beijing. Zhu De, the Vice-Chairman of the PRC and the Head of the People's Liberation Army, made a speech at the opening and set out the PRC's principles of sport. He stated that sport should socialize the population into the new establishment system of values including loyalty, conformity, team spirit, cooperation and discipline. Also, that all workers, parents, soldiers, students and the citizens of the New China should be involved in the mass sports movement as pre-training for work and military defence. Feng Wenbin, the General Secretary of the Communist Youth League, also addressed the audience and pointed out that the sports policy of the New China was to promote mass sport, because 'People with health bodies would contribute better to military, economic and cultural development'. [2]

The All China Sports Federation was established in 1950. It was a semi-governmental sports organization. Its major members consisted of the Communist Youth League, the Worker's Union, the All-China Women's Federation and the National Students Union. It followed the structure of the Red Sports and New Sports Movements in which the Youth League played the leading role. Feng Wenbin, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, became the Chairman of the All-China Sports Federation. Rong Gaotang, the Head of the Department of Military Sports in the Youth League, became the General Secretary.

The All China Sports Federation was expected to continue the tradition of the Communists in the pre-1949 era and to implement the government's policy which was to popularize sport activities among ordinary people: from schools to factories; from cities to countryside; from army to civilians. Rong Gaotang, the General

Secretary of the All-China Sports Federation, stated in 1952: ‘Our sports policy is to encourage more people to participate in sport activities in order to serve economic and military development’. [3]

However, the situation began to change after China’s participation in the Helsinki Olympics in 1952. The debate of the ‘Two Chinas’ issue with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) brought to the Communists a realization of the close relationship between sport and international politics. The Helsinki Olympics opened the Communists’ eyes and they started to understand the importance that sport could play in a vital role on the international stage to win recognition of the New China, the PRC. Furthermore, the Soviet Union’s success at the Olympic Games provided the Chinese Communists with a best example of how a socialist country could beat capitalist countries on the international stage.

Helsinki was the first time that the Soviet Union had participated in the Olympic Games. The Soviet athletes performed remarkably well and achieved 22 gold medals, 71 medals in total. With these medals the USSR were placed 2nd on the gold and total medal tables, and on equal points with the USA. The Helsinki Olympics began the new era of the Soviet Union and the East European bloc’s determination to achieve world supremacy in sport. It marked the beginning of the ‘Cold War’ in modern Olympic History.

The victory of the Soviet Union inspired their Chinese counterparts. On their way home the delegation, led by Rong Gaotang, visited Moscow and paid particular attention to the sports policy and centralized administration system of Soviet sport.

As soon as Rong Gaotang came back from Moscow, in August 1952, he proposed to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that they learn from the Soviet Union to strengthen the leadership of sport and develop a sports policy and centralized system to meet China’s political and diplomatic requirements.

He pointed out that

The All-China Sport Federation is a non-governmental organization. It is not fit to lead the development of sport in China. In order to strengthen the leadership, we propose to set up the All – China Physical Education and Sport Commission – a ministry of sport, a governmental organization. The Ministry of Sport should be under the direct leadership of the State Council. We also propose that Martial He Long be the Minister. [4]

He proposed in detail that Chinese sports policy and practice should follow the model of the Soviet Union as it had been proved the most successful in the world. Furthermore he suggested that the Ministry of Sport should have status equal to that of other government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education. His suggestion was endorsed by the Minister of Education, Ma Xulun.

Rong’s proposal was immediately approved by the Communist leaders, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, Liu Shaoqi, Chairman of the PRC, and Deng Xiaoping, General Secretary of the CCP. Only a few days after the submission of the proposal, Deng Xiaoping instructed Rong to:

- 1) Begin the preparation of the structure of the new Ministry of Sport;
- 2) Begin to recruit professional full time athletes from the army and society;
- 3) Start to build an athletic stadium;
- 4) Begin to establish sports institutes;
- 5) Hold a National Games next year (1953).

So, two months later, in November 1952, the Sports Ministry was established. Martial He Long became the first Sports Minister (he was also the Vice-Prime Minister in charge of Foreign Affairs). The new Sports Ministry had powers to decide on all issues concerning the organization of sport. Under the leadership of the Sports Ministry in Beijing, sports administration committees were established at every provincial and county level. They would implement the central government's policy and be in charge of provincial and local sports activities. All the people attached to a particular factory, office, school and college would be organized to participate in sports collectively at their place of work and study. The Sports Ministry became a powerful, centralized and hierarchical state organization.

In 1954, led by Martial He Long, the Sports Ministry's delegation visited the Soviet Union to learn more of its policy and administration system. When the delegation returned home He Long gave a public lecture entitled 'Sport in the Soviet Union: the Strong Force to Construct Communist Society'. He introduced the development of sport in the Soviet Union and claimed: 'How to develop sport in China is still a new area for us. We, led by the Party and Chairman Mao, must learn from the Soviet Union'. [5] Chinese sport now was ready to adopt the Soviet Model and to define sports development into two parts: elite sport and mass sport.

The Soviet Model: Competitive Sport – Producing Elite Athletes

In order to learn effectively from the USSR the methodology of the Chinese Sports Ministry was to 'invite Soviets to come to China and to send Chinese to the Soviet Union'. [6]

In September 1953, the Sports Ministry invited the Soviet senior gymnastic coaching delegation to visit China. The delegation consisted of former world gymnastic champions, coaches and Merited Masters of Sport of the USSR. They introduced modern training methods of gymnastics to their Chinese counterparts and hosted training sessions. They introduced the system of soviet sports and the USSR Sports Award Pyramid to the Chinese sports administrators. The visit had a profound impact on the establishment of the Chinese gymnastic training and ranking system.

The same things happened in other sports events, such as, swimming, basketball, volleyball. Soviet coaches and athletes were invited to visit China where they gave seminars and demonstrations to the Chinese sports coaches and administrators and hosted training sessions for Chinese athletes.

In February 1955 *New Sport*, a publication of the Sports Ministry, stated in its Editorial:

Soviet sport has the methods of training elite athletes, such as 'intensive training, all-year training and scientific training'. Its training methods and techniques are among the most advanced in the world. We must learn from the Soviet sports theories and training methods. [7]

At the same time, Chinese athletes were sent to the Soviet Union and some East European countries, such as Hungary. For example, the famous swimmer Wu Chuanyu was trained in Moscow and Budapest in 1953 and 1954 before his participation in the 1st International Youth Friendship Games in 1954. In his footsteps China subsequently sent 24 swimmers to be trained in Budapest in 1954 and 1955.

A Chinese football team with 24 players trained in Hungary in 1954. The coaches of the Chinese male and female volleyball teams came from the Soviet Union and both teams trained in the Soviet Union for three months before their participation in the 12th World Students Games in 1954. China sent a gymnastics team to Moscow Physical Education Institute in 1955 for five months' training and study, also nine weightlifting athletes to the Soviet Union to train there for five months in 1955. When they came back home they gave a demonstration performance at the newly completed Worker's Sports Stadium in Beijing. The Communist leaders including Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and He Long watched it. They were very pleased with the results of their athletes' training in the USSR. One year later, Chen Jinkai became the first Chinese athlete to break a weightlifting world record.

Most of the athletes later became influential coaches and senior administrators in Chinese sports, including Zhang Junxiu, Nian Weishi, Zhen Xuening in football; Mu Xianghao, Chen Yunpeng and Mu Xiangxiong in swimming; Chen Jinkai, Huang Qianghui in weightlifting; and Lu Enchun, Ge Keyu and Qi Yufang in gymnastics. What they learnt in the Soviet Union later formed the foundation of Chinese sports policy and practice.

Finally, in 1956, the Sports Ministry issued 'The Competitive Sports System of the PRC' which was modelled on the Soviet model. 43 sports were recognized as competitive sports. National Games would take place every four years. In the meantime, rules and regulations were implemented. Professional teams were set up at national level. The National Athletic team was established in 1953; the National Table Tennis, Swimming, Badminton teams in 1954; the National Gymnastic team in 1955; and the National Volleyball team in 1956. At the same time professional teams were also set up at provincial level.

In order to train and advance talented athletes from young ages, the Soviet Union's spare-time sport school model was copied. The Chinese Sports Ministry believed that early specialization, especially in athletics, gymnastics and swimming, was essential to achieve high standards and hence success in international competition. It was the cradle for producing Olympic champions. In 1956 the Sports Ministry issued 'The Regulations of Youth Spare-time Sports Schools'. By September 1958, there were

16,000 spare-time sports schools with 770,000 students throughout the country. The Chinese elite sports pyramid had formed.

The Soviet Model: Mass Sport – GTO (Ready for Labour and Defence) – Lao Wei Zhi Programme

Although the Chinese Communist Party had a tradition of motivating the population to participate in sport and physical activities, the GTO (a Russian acronym for *Gotov k trudu I oborone* which in English means Ready for Labour and Defence) programme provided the Chinese with a much more organized and efficient model. The GTO was initiated in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and developed further in the 1950s. It was expressly intended to train people, through sport, for work and military preparedness. [8] It aimed both to extend the scope of sports participation and to establish a mass base from which potential sports stars could be drawn. [9] The Soviet GTO was in general aimed at the whole of society including workers, soldiers and students.

In 1953 the Chinese Education Ministry and the Sports Ministry launched the Chinese GTO: Lao Wei Zhi (Ready for Labour and Defence Sports Programme Regulation). It stated: 'Lao Wei Zhi is the principle of Chinese physical education and sport. It aims to educate Chinese people through an all-around physical education, to train people to become healthy, brave, and optimistic defenders of their country and workers for socialism'. [10]

In 1954 the Ministry of Sport together with the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, the Youth League and the Students Union issued a decree: 'Promote Lao Wei Zhi among Secondary Schools and Colleges'.

Physical education in China was an integral part of education and served to ensure the all-round development of the physical and moral qualities of schoolchildren, to prepare them for life, labour and defence of their country. With the launch of the Lao Wei Zhi, schools and colleges had a target to reach in respect of sports involvement and sports standards to which it was hoped students would aspire.

Lao Wei Zhi set modest targets, the attainment of which brought some official honorific recognition and started to make regular participation in sport a normal feature of 'the socialist way of life'. The targets were to be set not for one single sport but rather for all-round ability in a number of sports and knowledge of the rudiments of hygiene, first aid and physical education theory. The Lao Wei Zhi badge system, a unified ranking system, was introduced to encourage students' participation. There were three rankings of Lao Wei Zhi which were awarded by age, sports participation, speed, flexibility and strength of physique. All the students were required to pass Lao Wei Zhi at different levels. Schools and universities were required to provide the necessary time, facilities and supervision to help students to pass Lao Wei Zhi.

In 1958 based on the USSR experience the Chinese Sports Ministry initiated its ten-year plan 'The Plan of Achievements in Sports in Ten Years'. Its ambition was, on the one hand, to catch up with the world's most competitive sports countries in ten years. By 1967, China's basketball, volleyball, football, table tennis, athletics, gymnastics, weightlifting, swimming, shooting and skating performers were to be among the very best in the world. China would produce 15,000 professional athletes. The number of spare-time sports schools would expand to 1,200 with 360,000 students.

On the other hand, Lao Wei Zhi would not only be practised in schools and colleges but also in the whole of society. Two hundred million men and women were expected to pass the fitness grade of Lao Wei Zhi by 1967. Sports teams numbering 1,720,000 would be formed among 40 million urban workers and three million sports teams would be formed among peasants by 1967. It was expected that Chinese sport would develop under the 'two legs walking system': elite and mass sports developing simultaneously. [11] However, the failure of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the Great Famine in 1960 resulted in a change of direction.

In summary, the period from 1952 to 1962 witnessed the strong socialization of Chinese physical education and sport in the areas of sports policy, administration structure, training system, sports schools, uniform athletic ranking system and Lao Wei Zhi.

China in this period witnessed the flourishing of all competitive sports with mass spectator appeal. Official encouragement of championships and sports heroes was designed to provide the Chinese people with the feeling of 'togetherness' and patriotism, the will to demonstrate to people both abroad and at home how happy, how healthy and how strong the Chinese people were under socialism.

It was significant that sports events often accompanied major political festivals: the International Women's Day in March, May Day and the National Day in October. The party leaders were also present at major sports events. Sport became a means of linking members of the public with politics. Arguably, this period laid the foundation of the policy and system of Chinese physical education and sport which still operates in China today.

The Development of the Chinese Elite Sports Policy and System (1963–66)

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine in 1962–63 and the associated shortage of finance and food the government reduced the number of sports teams, sports schools and athletes. The split with the Soviet Union brought Lao Wei Zhi to an end. From 1963 to 1966 the policy was to concentrate all the resources on a few elite athletes in order to produce high performances on the international sports stage. It was a turning point from mass to elite sport in China.

In 1960 The Chinese Communist Party changed its policy to 'readjustment, consolidation, filling out and raising standards'. [12] The Sports Ministry changed

its policy in 1961 to be consistent with the Party's line of producing elite sports star. [13] Its policy focused on using the limited resources to provide special and intensive training for potential athletes in a particular sport so that they could compete on the international sporting stage. Consequently, physical education institutes, whose major responsibility was to train physical education teachers and instructors for mass sports, reduced in number from 29 in 1959 to 20 in 1960. In contrast, professional sports teams increased from three in 1951 to more than 50 in 1961. The Sports Ministry also issued the 'Regulations of Outstanding Athletes and Teams' in 1963 to improve the system. Under the instruction of the Ministry a search for talented young athletes took place in every province. [14] Meanwhile ten key sports were selected from the previous 43. They were: basketball, volleyball, soccer, table tennis, track and field, gymnastics, weightlifting, swimming, skating and shooting. [15] The Sports Ministry concentrated all the resources on a few elite athletes in order to produce high performances on the international sports stage. It was a turning point of Chinese sport ideology and the system had changed from 'two legs' to 'one leg' – the elite one.

Sport, Diplomacy and the Nation (1966–76)

Competitive sport was seriously damaged and the training system was dismantled at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1967–70). Sports schools closed, sports competitions ceased, Chinese teams stopped touring abroad and outstanding athletes were condemned as sons and daughters of the bourgeois. They suffered mentally and physically. However, from 1971 to 1976, the situation changed for political and diplomatic reasons. Sport was promoted by the state and developed rapidly *both* at competitive and mass levels.

The Cultural Revolution left two legacies. First, sport had proved extremely valuable for diplomacy. Sport enabled the Communists to make approaches to Western enemies through a medium which benefited from a non-political image. The best example is the 'ping-pong diplomacy' episode. Sport was also used to strengthen relations between allies. The famous slogan 'friendship first, competition second' served its purpose. Sport deserves credit for helping China to transform its image. Second, the Cultural Revolution was an accessible introduction to modern sport in a patriotic and politically unimpeachable form. Supported by the full might of the Chinese state, untold millions of peasants watched and played, and most had never before participated in any modern forms of exercise. The Cultural Revolution, in fact, pushed the roots of sport deep into Chinese society.

In general, sport in the Cultural Revolution developed under very complex and unique social, cultural and political circumstances. It is curious that the Revolution had a destructive effect on arts, education, industry and agriculture, but that sport survived and even developed. This fact constitutes a valuable and interesting phenomenon in the context of Chinese contemporary history.

Sports Reformation after the 1980s: The Olympic Strategy; the Commercialization of Sport; and the Fitness for All Programme

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, China initiated a profound economic reformation and made a great effort to integrate with the world economy. The national ambition was to catch up with the Western capitalist world through modernization. Chinese sport played an important part in stimulating the nation's enthusiasm and motivating people towards modernity. In 1979, China renewed its membership of the IOC and subsequently other international sports organizations. Many international competitions were now open to the Chinese. Attending the Olympics and other international competitions and performing well became a symbolic means of catching up with, and even beating Western powers. The success of Chinese athletes at the 1979 World Volleyball Championships, the 1982 Asia Games and, in particular, the 1984 Olympic Games, raised the hopes of both the government and the people that China would become a great country again in the near future.

In 1980, Wang Meng, the Sports Minister, stated at the National Sports Conference that forging a relationship between sport and the socialist economy was crucial to the development of Chinese elite sport. On the one hand, China was still a poor country and had limited wealth to invest in sport. On the other hand, elite sport was an effective way to boost China's new image on the international stage. Therefore, the solution was to bring elite sport into the existing planned economy and administrative system, which could assist in the distribution of the limited resources of the whole nation to medal-winning sports. [16] The international success of Chinese athletes would, in return, bring pride and hope to the nation, which were badly needed in the new era of transformation. [17]

Following China's participation in the 1984 Olympic Games, the Society of Strategic Research for the Development of Physical Education and Sport (*Tiyu fazhan zhanlue yanjiu hui*) produced the 'Olympic Strategy' (*Aoyun zhanlue*) for the Sports Ministry in 1985. This strategy clearly stated that elite sport is the priority. It aimed to use the nation's limited sports resources to develop elite sport to ensure that China would become a leading sports power by the end of the twentieth century.

The strategy was the blueprint for Chinese sport in the 1980s and 1990s while the target was primarily the Olympics. Wu Shaozu, the Minister of Sport from 1990 to 2000, claimed: 'The highest aim of Chinese sport is success in the Olympic Games. We must concentrate our resources on it. To raise the flag at the Olympics is our major responsibility'. [18] To achieve this goal the government had to channel the best of its limited resources to give special and intensive training to potential gold medallists. The famous phrase 'Juguo Tizhi' (whole country support elite sports system) was born.

In 1986 a new policy document was issued: 'A Notification about Moving Further Ahead in Sports Reformation'. It confirmed the importance of elite sport for promoting Chinese national pride and confidence. However, it also emphasized that mass sport was important. It would, on the one hand, produce potential young stars

and, on the other hand, healthy citizens. The policy was to raise the standard of elite sport first and through the achievement of elite sport to thereby promote mass sport. [19]

Although for many years Chinese sport had a stability determined by Communist ideology, the sports business is now subject to rapid and radical change. Old policies are being discarded and new ones are emerging in response to internal economic reform and external opportunities. In June 1993, the Chinese Sports Ministry held a conference entitled 'The Urgent Promotion and Development of Sports Business'. Attending this conference were heads of provincial and large city sport councils. The conference claimed that with China's greater openness and fast-developing links with the rest of the world, the Chinese sports market should be opened up! This would result in trade that would benefit the people and the economy. At this conference the Chinese Sports Ministry, for the first time, publicly advocated the commercialization of sport. This was a milestone in the evolution of Chinese sport.

The Minister of Sport, Wu Shaozhu, claimed that the Chinese sports system must reform without delay. He pointed out that the strategy of reform was to commercialize sport and to integrate sport into people's daily life. This included people paying for sports and exercise; privately sponsored sport; the club system and promotion of the sports commercial market. Sport was expected to stand on its own feet and not rely on State support. As living standards rise, as leisure time increases, as the profit motive is encouraged, and as the economy becomes global, China is becoming a major outlet for commercial sports opportunities of every kind.

Therefore, in order to set the framework of the development of sport in an increasingly marketized economy, three targets were set: the Olympic Strategy; the Development of Sports Industry and Commerce Strategy; and the National Fitness for All Programme. They were designed to be integrated and were expected to support each other and to form a new sports policy and practice in China. They were approved by the China State Council in 1995.

However, China's ambition to re-establish its national image and status and to inspire national confidence to catch up with the Western powers through Olympic success meant that the Olympic Strategy was the priority.

In 1984, China re-emerged onto the Olympic stage after an absence of 32 years, won 15 gold medals and was placed fourth in the Olympic medals table. Although success in Los Angeles was partly attributed to the absence of the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Germany, it nevertheless excited many in China, from government officials to ordinary citizens. 'Develop elite sport and make China a superpower in the world' became both a slogan and a dream for Chinese people. Furthermore, China bid twice for the hosting of the Olympic Games in 1993 and 2000. For the Chinese government and the people, hosting the games was the symbol that Chinese people were not the 'sick men of East Asia' any more and that China had entered the ranks of the world's economic and political powers.

When China achieved extraordinary success at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games the term, the 'whole-country support for the elite sport system' (*Juguo tizhi*) began to

appear regularly in official statements to explain why Chinese sport had achieved so much in such a short time. When Jiang Zemin, the General Secretary of the Party, claimed in 2000 that ‘The success of American sport depends on its economic power; the success of Russian sport depends on its rich resource and experience of training elite athletes; the success of Chinese sport depends on “Juguo tizhi” – “whole-country support for the elite sport system”’, [20] the concept was for the first time approved at the highest political level. Yuan Weimin, the Sports Minister from 1990 to 2004, officially defined the term at the All State Sports Ministers’ Conference in 2001. He stated that the meaning of ‘Juguo tizhi’ was that central and local governments should use their power to channel adequate financial and human resources throughout the country to support elite sport in order to win glory for the nation. [21] The ‘Juguo Tizhi’ brought China remarkable success in the international sports arena. China had re-emerged onto the Olympic stage after an absence of 32 years, [22] and its athletes ran up the ladder at an amazing speed. After the Chinese squad won 32 gold medals and was placed second at the 2004 Athens Olympics, the Cable News Network (CNN) commented:

In the six Olympic Games they have competed in, China has moved up the medal tally in world record time. Their first gold medal came only 20 years ago. In Barcelona 92 they climbed to 5th spot on the medal tally, in Atlanta 96 they moved into fourth place, in Sydney 2000 they took third and this year in Athens they finished second. You do the calculations. Another Games, another rung up the ladder. Undoubtedly China wants the top spot in Beijing 2008. [23]

In 2008, China’s performance at the Beijing Olympics (the national squad won 51 gold medals at the games) testified to CNN’s prediction. The mission of building China into a world sports power has now been accomplished.

China’s Sports Policy: Post-Beijing 2008

After the Beijing Olympics, China’s sports policy and practice did not change very much. The National Sports Congress in early 2009 re-emphasized the continuation of the implementation of sports policies issued by the State Council in 1995: the ‘Olympic Strategy’, the ‘National Fitness for All Programme’ and the ‘Outline of Development of Sports Industry and Commerce’. Chinese sport in the post-Beijing era will follow three routes: elite sport, mass fitness and the commercialization of sport.

Mass Fitness

The rapid development of the market economy created a new dimension for Chinese sport in the twenty-first century. Mass sport has developed with new characteristics in the new era. With the increase of leisure time (Chinese people began to retire at the age of 50 to 55 (female) and 55 to 60 (male)), and improved living standards, people

began to participate willingly in physical exercise and recreational pursuits. Fitness and lifelong physical activity has become a new trend of mass sport. According to a survey conducted by the Sports Ministry in 2008, about 340 million people in China participated in physical exercise regularly. The survey also showed that, 28.2% of the population spent more than 30 minutes on fitness exercises at least three times a week. [24]

After the Beijing Olympics, the government turned its attention to the area of recreation and fitness. The trend for future development is likely to be the pushing of mass sport towards the market and letting it depend on society. Immediately after the Games, the State Council issued the 'National Fitness Regulations' in August 2009. It consists of 40 articles in six chapters. A brief examination of the document will give us a clear indication of the direction of mass sport in the post-Beijing era.

Chapter 1 is the 'general rules'. It clarifies the government's responsibility for promoting mass sport and proclaims the citizen's right to participate in sports. It also indicates the government's desire to let mass sport depend on society. For example, Article 6 states that individuals and organizations that donate to national fitness programmes will enjoy tax preferences in accordance with the law.

Chapter 2 contains the plans for the national fitness programme. According to the four articles in this chapter, both central and local government will cooperate in designing fitness programmes and monitoring people's health.

Chapter 3 lists 13 regulations for mass sport. For example, Article 12 designates 8 August as National Fitness Day. It states that on that day public sports facilities should be open to the public for free. Article 21 and 22 affirm that students should have at least one hour per day to practise sports at school. Schools should organize hiking, camping, sports camps and other sports activities regularly, and hold a sports meeting at least once a year.

Chapter 4 explains the supporting measures for mass sport. Article 28 states that schools should open their sports facilities to the public. They are entitled to charge the citizens for maintenance the facilities. [25] Article 29 requires local governments to open parks and facilities to the public for free. Article 32 declares that companies that run high-risk sports businesses such as mountain climbing, sailing, scuba diving, parachuting and other extreme sports should apply for a licence from local sports commissions. Article 33 directs the government to encourage the purchase of insurance by companies in the fitness industry and also individuals who participate in mass fitness programmes.

Chapter 5 clarifies the legal responsibility of schools, companies, local governments and sports commissions. Schools that violate this decree will be prosecuted. Companies that run high-risk sports without a licence could face a fine of up to 150,000 RMB. Civil servants who neglect their duties or abuse their power will face disciplinary punishment or prosecution.

Chapter 6 declares that the 'National Fitness Regulations' will take effect from 1 October 2009.

The 'National Fitness Regulations' have indicated the government's desire to improve people's fitness level by promoting mass sport. They have highlighted the government's role in supervising, guiding and supporting mass sport. Liu Peng, the Sports Minister, stated that

The Regulations have provided legal protection for people who take part in sports activities. It is a remarkable step in raising physical wellbeing It clarifies that citizens have the right to participate in sports and that is the key point. Health and happiness are basic rights for people. Participation in sport is an effective way to achieve this goal. [26]

Commercialization of Sport

After 15 years' development from 1994 to 2009 the sport industry already stands on its own feet without relying on government support. According to the General Administration of Sport of China, prior to 2010, the annual growth rate of China's sport industry was approximately 20%. [27] It is estimated that by 2010, the total output value of the industry will account for 0.5% of gross domestic product (GDP). [28] Wei Jizhong, chairman of the China Sports Industry Co Ltd, commented,

Compared with the situation more than ten years ago, people's awareness of sport has increased, thanks to the development of the sport and leisure industry in ChinaAt the same time, the demands of people and the market will advance the development of the sport and leisure industry. [29]

Today, China has become the world's biggest sporting goods factory as well as one of the world's largest sporting goods markets. According to a report conducted by the China Marketing Research Centre, by 2008, 65% of the world's sporting goods were made in China. [30] Almost all the world's leading multinational sporting companies have established branches in China. By the end of 2008, there were about four million sporting goods manufactures in China. [31] According to China Customs, from January 2007 to December 2007, the export volume of sporting goods increased by 15.49% to 5.097 billion items (compared to 2006). The export value of sporting goods was US\$8.081 billion in 2007: an increase of 22.06% compared to 2006. [32]

In terms of the sporting goods market, recent reports from the World accessed 17 June 2009 Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI) and Goldman Sachs & Co. showed that the demand for sporting goods in China is rising. The Chinese sporting goods market surpassed US\$1.2 billion in sales in 2001 and rose to over US\$2 billion in 2006, faster than the overall growth rate of the Chinese economy as a whole. [33] In 2009, the U.S. Commercial Service anticipates that China will become the largest sporting goods market by 2010, surpassing the United States. A report conducted by the Sports Ministry made the same prediction. [34]

In addition, the past decade also saw the commercialization of professional sports. Before the 1990s, competitive sports in China were not market-oriented. Since 1994, led by the professional football league 'Jia A', China's sports associations began to embrace the market economy. Chinese Basketball Association League (in 1995), Chinese Volleyball League (in 1996), China Table Tennis League (in 1995) and Chinese Weiqi (Go) League (in 1999) were initiated. These professional leagues attracted millions of sports fans around the country. An estimated six million spectators attend professional sports events each year, producing an annual value of about 700 million RMB. [35] Profits were made from ticket sales, advertising, sponsorship, player transfer, commercial matches, television rights and other commercial venues. The annual total output value of China's professional sports industry exceeded 50 billion RMB in 2007. [36]

In 2004 a Formula One race was first held at the Shanghai International Circuit. Spectators numbering 135,000 enjoyed the F1 Grand Prix racing at the Circuit on 26 September 2004. This was the record for the most spectators at a live event and the highest box office value of any single championship ever held in China up to 2004. [37] The ticket proceeds reached 0.3 billion RMB. [38] By 2009, Shanghai International Circuit successfully hosted six Chinese Grand Prix, all of which hosted enthusiastic fans, earned substantial incomes, and indicates the huge potential of China's professional sports industry.

Professional tennis is another good example. In order to develop the Chinese market, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) gave Shanghai the right to host the Tennis Masters Cup in 2002. The tournament raised about US\$3.5 million through ticket sales and another US\$7 million from sponsorship. Following the successful tournament, the ATP awarded Shanghai the Tennis Masters Cup from 2005 to 2008. Spectators numbering 104,000 watched the tournament in 2005. The total income reached 107 million RMB. Inspired by the success of these tournaments, the ATP and the Chinese Tennis Association jointly created the Shanghai ATP Masters 1000 in 2007. It is part of the ATP World Tour Masters 1000. The event took place in October 2009. Nearly 125,000 spectators enjoyed the tournament. [39]

The sports lottery system was initiated in 1994 and is a major achievement of China's sport industry. It has experienced rapid growth during the past 15 years. The sales revenue of the China Sports Lottery in 1994 was only 1 billion RMB. But the figure reached 45.6 billion RMB in 2008. [40] The objective of introducing a sports lottery was to provide funding for elite sport and mass sport. In 1998, the Ministry of Finance and the People's Bank of China announced that 60% of the income would be directed to promote mass sport and the remainder (40%) would be allocated to elite sport. A report on the distribution of lottery funding conducted by the General Administration of Sport in 2004, noted that 1,750 million RMB was channelled to mass sport and 1,190 million RMB went to elite sport. [41] At the 2009 Annual Conference for Sports Lottery held in Guangdong province in March 2009, Liu Peng, the Sports Minister, stated that the sports lottery is the 'lifeline' of Chinese sport.

He reviewed the achievement of China's sports lottery system and confirmed that the government would continue to support the development of China's sports lottery system. [42] According to the 'Outline of Development of Sports Industry and Commerce (1995–2010)' issued by the State Council in 1995, commercialization is an essential policy for the future development of the sport industry. The decree emphasized that the sport industry 'should depend on society instead of relying on state investment . . . The government's role should be to provide consultation services and preferential policies'. [43] After the Beijing Olympics, together with the further development of the market economy, the government will continue to accelerate the commercialization of sport and reform the sports industry.

Elite Sport

There were some debates and predictions before the Beijing Olympics that the elite sport system would fade away after the Games and the Beijing Olympics would be the last celebration of the 'Juguo Tizhi'. However, China's victory at the Beijing Olympics has proved the effectiveness of the elite sport system 'Juguo Tizhi' and its important role in establishing China's international image and in helping to fulfil China's ambitions to be one of the global economic and political superpowers of the twenty-first century. Immediately after the Games, at a press conference held in Hong Kong on 29 August 2009, Liu Peng, the Sports Minister, publicly announced that the sport system would continue its development. [44] One month later, at an awards ceremony for the 2008 Olympics and the Paralympics held in Beijing, President Hu Jintao praised the elite sport system and confirmed its continuity. [45]

In addition, China's new nationalism focuses on the restoration of 'the great Chinese civilization' and supports the consolidation of the elite sport system. During the past 30 years international sports competitions have become places where Chinese people could witness the glory of China; feel proud for being Chinese and sense unity as a great nation. [46] The success of China's elite sport was closely linked to the goal of 'the rise of China' and Chinese people's patriotism and nationalism. By defeating the USA at the Beijing Olympics, China succeeded in becoming a 'world sports superpower'. After the Games, a strong patriotic and nationalist sentiment encouraged the government to continue forward the promotion of the 'Juguo Tizhi'. Chinese people's reaction to the national squad's failure at the 25th FIBA Asian Men's Basketball Championship is an example of the public pressure to continue with 'Juguo Tizhi'.

The 25th FIBA Asian Men's Basketball Championship took place in Tianjin, China in August 2009. China lost to Iran in the finals and failed to defend its Asian title. The national squad and the China Basketball Association (CBA) received harsh criticism from both the fans and wider population. The defeat was described as a national shame. Critical articles appeared in news papers and on the Internet. They complained that the downfall of the national squad was organizational laxity and disunity. Some called for the punishment of the players who 'take the shame as an

honor'. Consequently, the CBA apologized to the public for failing to defend the Asian title and declared that any team member who undermines the unity of the national squad would be expelled. [47]

Xin Lancheng, Director of the Basketball Department of the Sports Ministry, publicly criticised the CBA league system in June 2009. [48] He proposed to return to the old 'Juguo Tizhi', place the clubs under local sports commissions' control and reduce the number of teams in the CBA league to improve the national squad's level of performance. [49]

China's astonishing economic development since the early 1990s provided necessary financial and human resource for athletic success. The economic reforms have enabled more money and resources to be channeled into the improvement of the elite sport system, including: upgrading of training facilities; the improvement of the support system for retired elite athletes; the adoption of modern training methodology and sports science research.

During the past 20 years, training facilities have benefited from massive upgrades in facilities and equipment. This applies to both provincial-level training camps which are normally situated in the capital city of the province and national training centres in Beijing. Many modern training centres were also established to offer a better training environment for national teams. These training centres have first class training facilities which are jointly sponsored by local governments and the General Administration of Sport. Some of the camps cost up to 0.6 billion RMB, e.g.:

- Hongta Camp in Yunan province: football (2001)
- Xianghe Camp in Hebei Province: football (2002)
- Sanya Aquatic Camp in Hainan province: sailboarding (2003)
- Duoba High Altitude Training Camp in Qinghai Province: track and field (2004)
- Qiandaohu Camp in Zhejiang Province: rowing (2007)
- Tianzhushan Camp in Anhui Province: tennis (2007)
- Yuzhufeng Camp in Qinghai Province: mountain climbing (2008)
- Qinghuangdao Camp in Shandong Province: swimming and diving (2009)

In recent years, universities have also begun to provide venues and training facilities for national teams. For example, a National Team Training Centre was established at Beijing Sport University in 2006. The total investment for this training centre is over 35 billion RMB. The national rhythmic gymnastics team, trampoline team, track and field team and modern pentathlon team trained in this centre for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. After the 2008 Olympics, this National Training Centre continued to serve various national teams.

Training methodology and sports science research, since the 1990s, has become more scientific. Although the traditional training and coaching method based on the three unafraids (unafraid of hardship, difficulty and injury) and the 'five toughnesses' (toughness of spirit, body, skill, training and competition) still plays an important

role, it is now complemented by more scientific coaching, sports psychology and sports medicine technologies.

Sports research centres were established around China from the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were required to link their research directly to training athletes to win medals. Now, there are 36 sports research centres at provincial level and one National Institute of Sports Science in Beijing. Since the mid-1990s, experts and researchers in universities have begun to contribute directly and indirectly to training gold medallists in coaching techniques, sports psychology, sports medicine, sports physiology and biomechanics and sports sociology. In the past decade, several Olympic research centres were established in universities, for example:

- The Humanistic Olympic Studies Centre in Renmin University of China (2000)
- The Olympic Culture Research Centre in Beijing Union University (2000)
- The National Team Management Centre in Beijing Sport University (2005)
- Beijing Institute of the Olympiad at Beijing Institute of Physical Education (2005)
- China Paralympics Research Centre at Xi'an Sport University (2006)
- The Beijing Olympic Education Research Centre at Beijing Normal University (2006)

In addition to sports science research, China from the late 1990s began to import foreign expertise in training methodology by hiring successful foreign sports coaches from all over the world. In the 2000s, the number of foreign coaches who serve in national and provincial teams grew rapidly. 'Legendary Yugoslavian soccer coach Bora Milutionovic, led the Chinese national team into the 2002 World Cup finals and enjoyed enormous popularity in China', is one of many examples. [50]

After the establishment of the 'Juguo Tizhi' in the early 1980s, the Chinese government issued a series of policies and decrees to support retired elite athletes. In general, provincial and local governments had the responsibility to assign jobs to retired elite athletes. However, only a small amount of top athletes could enjoy the benefits.

As the market economy reforms deepened in the late 1990s, the government introduced a policy to encourage retired athletes to search for jobs by themselves and the provincial and local governments would provide them with a settlement allowances. [51] In 2002, the Sports Ministry, the State Commission Office for Public Sector Reform, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Human Resource and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security jointly issued the decree on 'Suggestions on Re-employment for Retired Athletes'. It required governments at all levels to support retired athletes, and to offer them jobs and education opportunities.

Some economically advanced regions, such as Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Shanghai and Beijing, acted quickly. Athletes could be offered a comfortable settlement allowance and good job opportunities. For example, according to Guangdong province's 'Measures for Retired Athletes' in 2004, athletes who

performed well at the Olympics, international championships, world cups and the Asian Games, and those who won medals at national level could be employed as cadres in government departments. Athletes who won medals at international and national sports events would be offered big bonuses and jobs in Guangzhou or any other cities in Guangdong province.

In Fujian province, the 'Measures for Retired Athletes' established by the provincial government in 2005 stated that professional athletes could receive a settlement allowance if they chose self-employment or tried to find jobs by themselves. In August 2005, the Sport Commission of Fujian Province paid a 10.51 million RMB settlement allowance to 140 retired athletes. For example, Chen Hong, a badminton player who won a gold medal at the national games received 200,000 RMB. [52]

There was a sea change for retired athletes nationally in 2006 when the 'Notifications on the Strengthening of the Insurance System for Elite Athletes' was issued. It was a joint venture between the Sports Ministry, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Human Resources. It detailed regulations on social insurance, endowment insurance, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, injury insurance and housing allowance for retired athletes. [53] One year later, another decree (the 'Administration Preliminary Measures for the Employment of Elite Athletes') was jointly issued by the Sports Ministry, the Ministry of Human Resources, the Ministry of Education, the State Commission Office for Public Sector Reform, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the Ministry of Public Security. It clearly defined regulations for the recruitment, training and retirement of elite athletes. It required that every provincial government and sports commission had to establish its measures for retired elite athletes. The aim was to protect the athletes' rights. [54]

Higher educational opportunities for elite athletes are another major concern. Due to the lack of formal schooling, it was difficult for retired athletes to find suitable jobs outside the sports world. Disillusionment and depression were two of the negative outcomes for many of the elite athletes who did not make it to the very highest level. [55] Although the government produced a policy document in 1987 to help elite athletes receive higher education, only winners of the first three places at the Olympics, world cups and world championships could benefit.

Major changes took place in 2002 when the Sports Ministry, the State Commission Office for Public Sector Reform, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Human Resource and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security jointly issued the 'Suggestions on the Re-employment of Retired Athletes'. It broadened the entrance requirement for elite athletes in order to encourage them to go to universities. Athletes, who were among the first eight places at international sports events, or among the first six places at Asian sports events, or captured the first three places at the national sports competitions, could enter universities without taking the National Universities Entrance Examination. [56]

Government policy from the early 2000s also began to support young athletes. According to the 'Notification on University Recruitment with Sport Talented

Students' and the 'Standard for University Recruitment with Sport Talented Students' issued by the Ministry of Education in 2005, secondary school graduates, who achieved the titles of the 'First Rank Athletes' and the 'Second Rank Athletes' and also captured the first three places at provincial sports competitions, could enter universities without taking the National Universities Entrance Examination. By the end of 2006, 235 universities had recruited young athletes under these policies. [57] Universities also provided scholarships for elite athletes who chose to study at universities and colleges. Additionally, according to the 'Interim Procedures for Scholarships for Elite Athletes' issued by the Sports Ministry in 2003, elite athletes and retired elite athletes could apply for government scholarships. The amount awarded ranged from 3,000 to 15,000 RMB which would cover their tuition fees and/or living costs.

Conclusion

The development of sports policy has always been state-controlled. It has always been shaped by political and ideological requirements. In the 1950s mass sport was cultivated to train a fit, obedient and disciplined workforce. It aimed to help form all-round citizens in pursuit of economic and military strength and efficiency. At the same time the competitive sport policy and system was established to raise the profile of the New China and to achieve for it international recognition and domestic unity. The Soviet Union's sports model, which was simultaneously producing elite athletes and a healthy workforce (*Lao Wei Zhi*), was adopted, and it laid a solid foundation for Chinese sports policy and practice in the 1960s.

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine in 1962–63 and the associated shortage of finance and food, the government reduced the number of sports teams, sports schools and athletes. The split with the Soviet Union brought *Lao Wei Zhi* to an end. From 1963 to 1966 government policy concentrated all their resources on a few elite athletes in order to produce high performances in the international sports arena. It was a turning point from mass to elite sport in China.

The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 left two legacies. First, sport had proved extremely valuable for diplomacy. Sport enabled the Communists to make approaches to Western enemies through a medium that benefited from a non-political image. The best example is the 'ping-pong diplomacy' episode. Sport was also used to strengthen relations between allies. The famous slogan 'friendship first, competition second' served its purpose. Sport deserves credit for helping China to transform its image. Second, the Cultural Revolution was an accessible introduction to modern sport in a patriotic and politically unimpeachable form. Supported by the full might of the Chinese state, untold millions of peasants watched and played, most of them had never before participated in any modern form of exercise.

China has undergone a dramatic transformation since the 1980s. Government policies have favoured economic liberalization and the adoption of a free market

system. Sports policy has reflected this change. Commercialization and globalization of sport has become the focus of Chinese sports policy reformation since the 1980s. Elite sport which previously developed under centrally planned regimes is now expected to be more economically self-sufficient. Mass sport is expected to be returned to the people and community and to be supported by all sectors of the society.

In the 1990s, the government, under pressure of rising demands for grassroots sports participation, began to advocate that the 'Olympic Strategy' and the 'National Fitness Programme', which was initiated in 1995, should advance simultaneously. However, China's bids, in 1993 and 2001, to host the Olympic Games ensured that elite sport remained the priority. Moreover, the success of the host of the 2008 Olympic Games and China's ambition to play a major role in international affairs has stimulated a new set of Olympic-related policies and objectives in the future.

After the Beijing Olympics, it is likely that, on the one hand, the government will continue its economic reformation of sport in the areas of mass sport and sport industry, and will speed up the commercialization of sport. Sport will be pushed further towards the market. On the other hand, elite sport will continue to develop in the traditional form of 'Juguo Tizhi', a product of the planned economy, and will receive major support from the government. Chinese nationalism will also make the government eager to preserve the title of the 'world sports superpower' and keep it unassailable. This may result in the consolidation and the promotion of China's unique elite sport system. At the same time, together with the rise of the Chinese economy, money and resources were and will be allocated to elite sport. Therefore, the Chinese elite Sport System will be consolidated and continue to produce gold Medallists for the 2012 London Olympics and beyond.

Notes

- [1] Hong, *Footbinding*, 155.
- [2] Wu, *The History of Sport in the People's Republic of China*, 2.
- [3] Gaotang, *The History of Contemporary Chinese Sport*, 122.
- [4] Wu, *The History of Sport in the People's Republic of China*, 49.
- [5] *New Sport*, 11 (1954).
- [6] Wu, *The History of Sport in the People's Republic of China*, 41.
- [7] Gaotang, *The History of Contemporary Chinese Sport*, 41.
- [8] Riordan, *Sport, Politics and Communism*, 27.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 25.
- [10] Wu, *The History of Sport in the People's Republic of China*, 62.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 102–6.
- [12] Tan, *The History of Sport*, 402.
- [13] The Policy Research Centre of the Sports Ministry, 72.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 102.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 103.
- [16] Wang, 'The Report to the 1980 National Sports Conference', 150.

- [17] Gaotang, *The History of Contemporary Chinese Sport* op. cit.
- [18] Wu, *The History of Sport*, 402.
- [19] Tan, 'Chinese Sports Policy and Globalisation'.
- [20] Hong, Wu and Xiong, 'Beijing Ambitions', 513.
- [21] Wu, *The History of Sport*, 364.
- [22] Due to the Taiwan issue and the Cold War, the CCP boycotted the Olympics after its establishment in 1949. In 1979, the PRC renewed its membership of the IOC and subsequently other international sports organizations.
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