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The Gender Structure of National Sport Organizations in Post-Reform China

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Dedication

To my uncle, Dr. Liu Weiyu, a respected

surgeon who sacrificed his life in the fight against SARS in May 2003

Abstract

This research examined female sport administrators' organizational experience in the Chinese national sport hierachy from 1978 to 2003. Through in-depth interviews with 14 sport administrators, both male and female, most in senior leadership positions, I explored the underlying reasons for women's under-representation in the decision-making of Chinese national sport organizations. I argued that women's absence from senior leadership positions and their powerlessness in the national sport management hierarchy is partly attributed to the traditional cultural thinking on social gender roles, but to a larger degree, is reinforced by a male-defined organizational culture. Processes such as recruitment, evaluation and promotion are examined. Also discussed are women's dual responsibilities in work and family and the different implications of the transformation from elite athletes to sport managers for both sexes. Based on the research findings, tentative recommendations are put forward with regard to enhancing women's equal career opportunities in sport management.

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Chapter One - Introduction

In the past two and a half decades, Chinese female athletes have achieved unprecedented success in the world sports arena. They not only bring tremendous national glory to their country but also project a shining image of Chinese women. The aphorism, "the yin waxes and the yang wanes" (*yin sheng yang shuai*), is cited extensively by both scholars and the public as capturing one of the most essential features of Chinese competitive sport development over this period of time.[1] However, the exclusive male domination in the national sport administration system constitutes a striking contrast to female athletes' impressive representation and performance on the playing fields. Although female athletes outshine their male counterparts in most sports internationally, women are still substantially underrepresented in management and professional positions, particularly in the decision-making bodies of national sport organizations (NSOs).

There are a number of interwoven political, economic, ideological and cultural reasons accounting for Chinese women's outstanding athletic achievements, particularly after 1978 (Fan, 2003; Dong, 2003). It is superficial and problematic to attribute the result to any single factor. Nevertheless, continuous government support in the form of affirmative action to promote women's participation in competitive sport should never be underestimated. However, little evidence can be located that gender equality is explicitly advocated, to any significant degree, in the sphere of sport administration in post-reform China. Women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions is considerably marginalized. Unfortunately, little academic attention has been paid to this phenomenon, and to paraphrase the transformed version of the old saying, "female

athletes wax and female administrators wane". The gender structure of NSOs has rarely been under systematic academic investigation as a core issue in the scholarship of Chinese women in sport.

Inspiration for the Study

I started my graduate study at the University of Alberta in 2002. What attracted me to embark on this academic journey in Canada was an international research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The research, initiated by Professor Trevor Slack, was designed to examine the organizational change dynamics in national sport organizations in emerging economies. China was chosen as one case for the study. So not surprisingly, I directed my academic focus extensively on issues related to Chinese sport from the very beginning. Unfortunately, the project was never carried out in full scale as the principal investigator, Professor Slack, fell critically ill in December 2002. However, as my program was still funded through the SSHRC grant, which was dedicated to the initial research project, my thesis research kept this focus on Chinese sport organizations.

My initial interest in the topic of the gender structure of NSOs derived from illuminating conversations with Professor M. Ann Hall, who agreed to supervise my academic program from early 2003 onwards. A world-renowned scholar and advocate for women and sport, Professor Hall unfolded for me a research field with emphasis on addressing women's needs and problems in sport. Moreover, through intellectual interactions, she developed a critical thinking perspective in me, which led me to link what I came across in academic reading to what I had experienced in my personal life. Women's role in sport, and in particular, the discourse of gender relations in sport

organizations stood out as an immediate concern to me, and allowed me to re-examine my previously taken-for-granted perceptions.

The social sciences deal with public issues at a macro-level rather than personal problems at micro-level. However, more often, we realize the existence of a problem from our individual life first, and further link it to a social question. This is the journey that I have traveled. Choosing the topic of examining the gender structure of NSOs is closely related to my previous work experience in the State Sport Commission from 1998 to 2002. I started working in a ministry department of the Commission in 1998 and, a few months later, moved to a research institute affiliated with the Commission. I had frequent business interactions with various national sport organizations and, therefore, obtained a fair amount of knowledge of their organizational structures, managing styles and operational practices. Mills (1961) reminds beginning students in the social sciences that successful scholars "do not split their work from their lives" (p. 195). He encourages us to learn to use our life experience in our intellectual work: "continually to examine and interpret it" and "to be skeptical of your own experience" (p. 196). Thus, I am empowered to take full advantage of my personal experience and make critical reflections on what I have regarded as commonplace before. To my knowledge, in the majority of Chinese NSOs, most senior top leaders were male and most accountants and secretaries were female. Why was that? Why did I hardly see a female coach in women's national teams? Why did most female managers postpone their childbirth many years after marriage? Why did I feel so uneasy in an all-male project team? These questions and others became problematic and urged me to start a quest for answers.

Need for the Study

In the West, there is an increasing academic interest in Chinese sport and physical education. This mounting enthusiasm is fueled not only by the country's emerging influence on global politics and economics in the post cold-war era, but also by its recent unprecedented achievements in international sports.[2] China is evolving into one of the most important economic players in the world. So it is in sport.

An emerging and lucrative sport market, backed by a 1.3 billion population, many of whom, especially in big cities, have shaken off poverty and would now be considered "middle class", is a huge appeal for transnational corporations. But the potential market for economic benefit is not adequate to fully explain this accumulating research curiosity of Chinese sport. The fact is that very limited knowledge is available in English to a Western audience about sport development in the world's most populous nation, still a Communist regime. Many questions and phenomena related to Chinese sport are under-explored and remain unanswered. I think this is the main reason that more and more researchers are casting their eyes to this rising sport superpower.

In this context, a growing body of literature in English on Chinese sport has accumulated. An early effort to introduce the overall Chinese sport system was attempted by Knuttgen et al. in *Sport in China* (1990). This collection was an account from "inside" because all chapters were written by Chinese sport scholars and officials in Chinese and then translated into English. Not surprisingly, the book was embedded with a strong tint of literal translation and the imprint of Communist ideology. In terms of content, it was more descriptive than interpretative. James Riordan and Robin Jones edited another anthology, entitled *Sport and Physical Education in China* (1999), which provided a

more analytical version of topics related to Chinese sport and physical education. In contrast, most contributors came from the West except for two Chinese natives, who had studied in Canada and Britain respectively. A comparatively more critical perspective was evident in this collection. However, the volume was substantially flawed in other aspects such as its imbalanced structure, repetition, inconsistency, inadequate collection of first-hand material, and careless editing.[3] Its academic contribution and authority was, therefore, severely questioned (Fan, 2001).

In the new millennium, with a booming consumerism sparking a prospering sport market and, in particular, after Beijing was selected to host the 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese sport has attracted a wider spectrum of international attention. For example, there is now more focus on professional sport in China. This new interest is best illustrated by the recent publication of *China: Opportunities in the Business of Sport* (Ashton, 2002) and *Football in China* (Eaves et al., 2003).

Along with this growing interest in Chinese sport in general, the past decade has also witnessed scholarship with specific relevance to Chinese women in sport. In this regard, two female Chinese scholars have made tremendous contributions in documenting the gender discourse surrounding Chinese women's participation, opportunities, and success in sport. They are Fan Hong and Dong Jinxia. Both had previously worked in the Chinese sport system but had undergone academic training in the West in pursuit of their doctoral degrees. They have played instrumental roles in providing the Western world a first-hand and in-depth analytical interpretation on issues of sport in China and, in particular, of Chinese sportswomen. Collectively, they offer a convincing, accountable, and authoritative explanation of Chinese female athletes'

astounding success in international sport. In *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (1997), Fan expounds the historical background of women's physical emancipation and early access to sport before 1949. In *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China: Holding Up More than Half the Sky* (2003), Dong contributes a more comprehensive and panoramic interpretation of the political, economic, and cultural factors that underlie women's excellence in competitive sport since the founding of New China. Their works appearing in other books and academic journals cover a wide range of topics, from an overview of women's sport in China (Fan, 2003; Dong, 1998 and 2001) to a critical analysis of women's performance in a particular sport, such as soccer (Fan and Mangan, 2004; Dong and Mangan, 2001 and 2002).

Another important figure widely known in this field is Susan Brownell, who impressed readers with her book *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic of China* (1995). An American who went to China to learn Chinese as a student and returned to Beijing to do fieldwork for her doctoral dissertation in the mid-1980s, she established her position by studying gender issues in Chinese sport. Her life experience in China, especially her strong proficiency in Chinese, enabled her to interact directly with local Chinese and collect information from original Chinese sources. This gave her a competitive advantage in obtaining a deeper understanding of Chinese sport and society. Moreover, as a foreigner, Brownell was in a position to adapt a more Westernized and critical perspective in her analysis compared to her Chinese peers, who hold both emotional and personal attachments to the country. In other words, she dared say what Chinese scholars were hesitating to put explicitly or to say in a more straightforward way. For instance, she argues (1999) that both popular nationalism and

debates on Chinese sportswomen's success are essentially based on a masculine perspective. One reason for the absence of gender in discussions of Chinese female athletes is that they are "the product of a sports system that deliberately erased gender differences" (p. 216). Unfortunately, her judgments are based on limited and partial information. Given the time period of her stay in China and the informants with whom she spoke, her observations do not reflect the status of Chinese women athletes at the elite level.

Even in this literature on Chinese women and sport, little attention is directed specifically to women in the realm of sport management. Again, the emphasis is largely, if not exclusively, on female athletes on the playing fields, but not female sport administrators who strive for a position in the male-dominated national sport bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the construction of gender relations in NSOs has become a major concern in Western scholarship on gender and sport. A number of researchers from Western countries have directed their attention to examining the power structure in NSOs based on gender and women's organizational experience. A body of knowledge has been created, particularly in the past two decades, which will be the focus of the next chapter. Although women's disproportionate under-representation in key management posts is touched upon in some works on Chinese women in sport (e. g., Fan, 2003; Dong, 1998; Brownell, 1999), the issue is approached only at a superficial level. They fail to take a further step to deconstruct discriminatory organizational practices that account for women's disadvantageous condition in management. Discussions on women's experience and the construction of gender relations in national sport organizations are neglected and remain considerably under-explored. Compared with the increasing amount of research

dedicated to studying women's organizational wellbeing in the decision-making and leadership of NSOs, China lags considerably behind in this field of inquiry. The national sport organizations have never been placed in the centre of gender discourse in Chinese sport, nor treated as a key scholarly analysis site. The organizational culture, embedded with entrenched and insidious gender disparity, and retaining limited space and opportunities for women to thrive, is not fully challenged. In this sense, a first-hand empirical study is demanded.

There has existed a paradox with regard to women's social situation in China. On the one hand, the Chinese Communist Party has advocated gender equality in its political rhetoric for five decades since the inception of the Communist regime. The adoption of a series of legislation initiatives and affirmative action policies has brought about significant changes to women's emancipation. Hundreds of thousands of housewives were liberated from domestic chores, entered the workforce, and acquired economic independence. On the other hand, women's social status does not show consistent improvement. For example, as of 2003, there were nearly 500 female mayors or vice mayors in China, accounting for only ten per cent of all officials at the same administrative level.[4] At the tenth National People's Congress's in 2003, 604 deputies were female, making up 20.2 per cent of the total, which was 1.6 percentage points lower than that of the ninth Congress.[5] At the grassroots level, the unemployment rate of females is much higher than that of males. Some local governments even issued overt gender discriminatory regulations, denying women access to certain occupations in government agencies. In 2003, a provincial government in southwest China formulated a controversial regulation forbidding male leaders to have female secretaries. The rationale

was that women secretaries were involved with quite a few corruption cases and won the favor of their bosses by using their sexuality. Although the regulation sparked an immediate and heated debate, there were still those who saw it as an applaudable anti-corruption measure.[6]

A paradoxical phenomenon exists among Chinese women in different realms of the sporting world. The team composition of Chinese delegations to the Olympic Games in the past decade serves as a good example in this regard. China has sent more female than male athletes in three consecutive Olympic Games since 1996. At the Athens Games in 2004, the Chinese delegation comprised 407 athletes, among whom 268 were women, accounting for sixty-five per cent of the total. The only country which has claimed the same proud record in this respect is Canada. There were a total of 268 Canadian athletes competing in Athens, 135 female and 133 male (The Canadian Olympic Committee, 2004). But let me cite another group of numbers. China competed in thirty-one disciplines in Athens, while only three teams were headed by female team leaders. The delegation command centre at the Olympic Village, where thirty powerful officials from the national sport authority supervised the overall operation of the delegation, had merely five females, less than twenty per cent. The percentage of females in the medical team was thirteen per cent. Less than twenty coaches among the total of 121 were women.[7] By comparison, there were ten men and ten women working in the Canadian delegation village operation. Women even outnumbered men in their communication team. Female staff accounted for over forty per cent in health care. Women accounted for about a quarter of the coaches (The Canadian Olympic Committee, 2004). Needless to say, what

China had proudly dispatched to Athens was a female majority athlete delegation and a male majority official delegation.

In this study I argue that as a vibrant and active constituent group of sport managers, female sport administrators deserve a position of their own as well academic attention from researchers. They definitely play an instrumental role not only in asserting women's potential in the world of sport management but also in shaping the landscape of Chinese sport. Their representation and power in the governance structure of NSOs will improve the athletic experience of sportswomen and create an intimate environment for female athletes. As a young female, once working in the system myself, I feel more than obliged to bring my former female colleagues to the front stage and allow their voices to speak. Through this study, I hope to act as their spokeswoman, telling a wider audience beyond the boundary of language about their stories.

Statement of Research Question

The questions I explore through this inquiry are:

1. How have the organizational change dynamics, driven by widespread socioeconomic transformation, reconstructed the gender regime of NSOs in a way that excludes women from equal access to career advancement opportunities?

2. What are the underlying reasons for the persistent gender inequality in national sport organizations?

It is hoped that the empirical findings from this inquiry can contribute to and facilitate an understanding of women's organizational roles in the Chinese sport system and help to draw the attention of policy makers to improve Chinese women's overall status in sport.

Notes

1. *Yin* means feminine and *yang* means masculine in Chinese. The expression of "*ying sheng yang shuai*" is underwritten by the fact that Chinese female elite athletes have contributed more than half of the world champions that China had reaped in international competitions. Chinese women have a competitive edge internationally in many sports such as volleyball, soccer, basketball, swimming, where Chinese men have performed poorly. From 1949 to 1994, women athletes claimed 512.5 gold medals, accounting for sixty-four per cent of all gold medals won by Chinese athletes. During the same period of time, Chinese athletes broke world records 797 times, among which sixty-six per cent were by women (Zhang, 1995).

2. Chinese athletes' performance at the Olympic Games serves as a prime example. The Chinese Olympic Committee withdrew from the International Olympic Committee in 1958 because of the dispute on the Taiwan issue, and returned to the international Olympic family in 1979. In its first appearance after coming back to the Olympic stage, China won fifteen gold medals in Los Angeles in the absence of Russia in 1984. Twenty years later in 2004, the Chinese delegation claimed thirty-two gold medals in Athens, surpassing the traditional powerhouses of Russia and Germany, and took second position on the gold medal count behind the United States.

3. For example, the book has thirteen chapters. Ten chapters focus on contemporary China after 1949 and only two deal with ancient China (3000 BC to 1840 AD) and one with Modern China (1840-1949). Physical education and sport in some important historical periods in the twentieth century are completely ignored or substantially under-considered, such as the communist revolutionary period (1927-1949) and the Great

Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). There are also countless mistakes such as inconsistencies in the spelling of people's names and places. See Fan (2001) for more details.

4. "China has 500 female mayors." *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/22/content_257275.htm on Aug. 26, 2003.

5. "Improving political status." *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/25/content_257874.htm on Aug. 26, 2003.

6. "Why male leaders cannot have a female secretary." *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200307/21/print20030721_120740.html on Oct. 6, 2004. *"Nan lingdao nv mishu shi shui re de huo?"* ("Male leader and female secretaries, whose fault?") *Qingdao Zaobao*. Retrieved from http://www.qingdaonews.com/gb/content/2003-08/07/content_1800755.htm on Oct. 6, 2004.

7. *"2004 yadian aoyunhui zhongguo tiyu daibiaotuan 633 ren wan quan mingdan"* ("A complete name list of Chinese sport delegation to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games"). Sohu Sport. Retrieved from http://2004.sports.sohu.com/20040720/n221090957.shtml On Sep.1, 2004

Chapter Two - Developing the Theoretical Framework

As discussed in Chapter One, there has been no academic study completely devoted to examining women's experience and status in Chinese national sport organizations (NSOs). This paucity of research into Chinese women in NSOs compels me to look for a relevant theoretical framework from Western scholarship to guide my inquiry.

Gender, a Relational Social Category

Scott (1986) suggests that gender was developed as a social category of analysis to emphasize the social construction of the relationship between the sexes. The word "gender" was introduced as a relational notion into our analytic vocabulary to distinguish it from biological determinism based on sex or sexual difference. Connell (2002) puts it in a straightforward way: sex relates to the biological distinction between male and female, while gender refers to cultural and social difference. Hall (1988) further argues that "gender is a major social and theoretical category that, along with social class, race, age, ethnicity, and others, must be incorporated into all theoretically based social analyses of sport" (p. 330). Both Scott (1986) and Hall (1988) point to a misleading tendency that uses gender as a synonym for "women" and regards issues about gender as being relevant only to women, never to men. "Women's experiences are seen as variations (or deviations) on men's" (Hall, 1988, p. 331). According to this simplistic view, gender, as a substitute for "women", fails to recognize that information about women is necessarily information about men and that one implies the study of the other. It is problematic to assume that "the experience of one sex has little or nothing to do with the other" (Scott, 1986, p. 1056).

The distinction between gender and sex provides an essential theoretical foundation for this inquiry. How gender is conceptualized and theorized informs how gender dynamics are approached in empirical discussions. National sport organizations, as one type of major social institutions serve as a typical research site to explore how gender works in human relationships and how it gives meaning to organizations. The relational notion of gender suggests that men and women in sport organizations are two equal and interrelated social categories of humans. Instead of simply focusing on how women are different from men, I direct my attention to how one category is different in relation to another on an equal basis. I believe that the solutions to women's inequality in organizations lie in how gender relations are constantly constructed and reconstructed by the changing dynamics and interrelationships between men and women. Such assumptions determine that my research subjects included both men and women and my interview questions formulated to find out how they perceive each other in their gendered interactions.

Connell (1987) articulates a pervasive account of the social construction of gender and develops notions of the "gender regime" of institutions (family, state, workplace, sport, school, etc.) and the "gender order" in a society. As he states: "Gender relations are present in all types of institutions. They may not be the most important structure in a particular case, but they are certainly a major structure of most" (Connell, 1987, p. 120). The gender regime refers to the state of play of gender relations in a given institution. It creates specific gender patterns and prescribes institutionalized sexual roles for women and men. For example, in families, wives take primary domestic responsibility, especially for child rearing, although it is not uncommon nowadays that some husbands undertake

more housework and childcare to support their wives' career pursuits. At the workplace, men still occupy most leading positions in decision-making bodies, and women, more often, are placed in supportive and peripheral posts. The institutional context is instrumental in shaping its gender regime. For example, what is considered normal in a hospital administration structure can become problematic in a bank or on a professional sport team. Various institutions are interconnected and interact with each other in social practices, which produces a more complicated gender order in society. Therefore, a set of widespread gender arrangements are established. Boys are expected to show toughness, assertiveness and domination, while girls are taught to appear soft, smooth, and elegant. Men are major players in political and economic life, while women are less visible in the public realm, especially before women's entry into the workforce. Disparity in income, property, and power becomes part of the overall inequality embedded in this gendered pattern.

Connell (2002) further elaborates this concept with an updated review of the social construction of gender relations and identities. He argues that both the gender order at the societal level and the gender regime at the institutional level are subject to constant changes as human practices create new situations and circumstances. This observation draws our attention to the situational and contingent nature of gender relations over different historical periods and in diverse cultural backgrounds: "Gender patterns may differ strikingly from one cultural context to another, but are still 'gender'" (Connell, 2002, p. 10). This assertion reminds us that when gender discussions, based on observations of a particular social and cultural context are applied to another, historical and cultural specificity should be full appreciated. Connell also reviews the changing

dynamics between gender regimes and the gender order. The gender regimes of institutions do not necessarily change at an equal pace with the overall gender order of a society, but may depart from it. Some institutions change quickly; others lag. I argue that the discrepancy in the rate of change among various institutions provides for a chance of improvement and allows us to identify change momentums and draw illuminating lessons. As discussed in Chapter One, female athletes in China have demonstrated great potential and obtained more equality in terms of training and competition opportunities, while women's status in the management of national sport organizations has rarely been addressed in the mainstream discourse of gender and sport. Different underlying reasons are arguably at work to drive the changes in these two kinds of institutions.

Connell (2002) proposes a useful conceptual structure to approach gender. He identifies four main structures in the modern system of gender relations: power, production, emotion, and symbolic relations. Power, as a key concept of men's patriarchal dominance over women, is an essential dimension of gender, underpinning women's subordination in the social construction of gender. The gender structure should not be understood only at the individual level but as a process operating between different power groups and through institutions collectively. The power structure represents a gender pattern expressed in a display of authoritarian domination and unyielding oppression between one group (males) over another (females). For instance, gender inequality in property and resource distribution ultimately reflects the imbalance of power between genders. Connell also contends that bureaucracies are an important case of the institutionalization of power relations.

Production relations refer to the sexual division of labor and were the first structure of gender to be recognized in the social sciences. Connell (2002) states:

> In many societies and in many situations certain tasks are performed by men and others are performed by women...Such divisions of labor are common through history and across cultures. But while gender divisions of labor are extremely common, there is not exactly the same division of labor in different cultures or at different points of history. (p. 60)

This change dynamic is evident and salient when sport development in the New China is compared with that in the West. Pervasive gender inequality does not feature, at least superficially, the social reality of Communist China. According to state propaganda, women enjoy equal participation and even favorable support in competitive sport. However, a question remains unanswered. If Chinese women can and have shown their capability in a traditional male preserved domain, why cannot they acclaim compatible accomplishment in sport management?

Emotional relations are often interwoven with power and the division of labor. Connell claims that emotional commitment may be positive or negative, favorable or hostile towards the object. For instance, prejudice against women or against homosexuals is primarily an emotional reaction. Emotional attachments are also present in the workplace. Some jobs require developing a particular emotional relationship with customers or subordinates and therefore are considered more appropriate for women than for men. Or vice versa

Symbolic relations refer to the meanings associated with women and men throughout the evolution of cultural history. Gender symbolism operates in a wide range of analytical sites, from language, dress, make-up, and gesture to photography, television programs and films. To behave as a woman or a man is not simply an individual activity.

It is also based on a series of social definitions prescribed to different genders. The symbolic relations involve a group of gendered assumptions and norms to regulate and explain why people interact with each other in a particular way and why deep meanings are conveyed by using gendered language.

Connell's analysis of these dimensions of gender provides a useful framework to conceptualize the social construction of gender relations and, at the same time, highlights cultural and historical diversity. Moreover, this approach sheds light on the change dynamics and the reconstruction of the gender order of a society and the gender regimes of institutions. It offers a valuable perspective to analyze the gender structure of Chinese NSOs in a period when the whole nation, including its sport system, has been undergoing dramatic political, economic and ideological changes over the past two and a half decades.

Gender and Organizations

Increasing academic interest in gender and organizations, two previously separate areas of study, is driven both by women's growing visibility in organizational life and the widening gender discrimination confronting women in the workplace. From gender wage gaps to discriminatory recruitment practices, from double standards in performance evaluation to unequal access to promotion, these organizational processes and patterns constitute a major source of gender inequality and echo women's subordination in society at large. Therefore, studying gender relations in organizations not only contributes to an understanding of women's organizational well-being but also provides valuable information on how to improve women's social status.

As Hearn and Parkin (1987) point out, "organizations construct sexuality and yet contradictorily sexuality constructs organizations. The organizational construction of sexuality and the power of sexuality to reconstruct organizations exist in dialectical relationships" (p. 131). Their point of view corresponds to Connell's theory of the social construction of gender regimes of institutions, where gender relations are exposed to constant organizational changes and transformations when human practices create new social situations and circumstances.

In general, there are two major theoretical perspectives applied to the study of the relationship between gender and organizations (Riger and Galligan, 1980; Hall et al., 1989; and De Bruijn and Cyba, 1994). The fundamental distinction between the two views is decided by what is perceived as the root cause of gender inequality--in other words--who should be blamed and what should be changed. The first approach is person-centered. It sees women's disproportionate under-representation in the senior management of organizations as due to factors internal to women themselves. Women are stereotypically perceived as being less committed, less motivated, and lacking appropriate skills and qualities as leaders. Therefore, women have to adapt themselves to the organizations. This approach only looks for reasons within women themselves and fails to recognize the institutional contexts that constrain women's growth in organizations. Not taking into account the production of gendered relations by social institutions, the person-centred perspective is unable to provide satisfactory answers as to how to eradicate gender inequality in the workplace. On the contrary, it helps to perpetuate persistent gender discrimination and loses the chance to bring about positive changes by restructuring the organizations.

The second perspective is organization-centered. This approach emphasizes how gender relations are constructed by organizational structures and processes. In other words, women's organizational behaviors are not biologically determined, but shaped by organizations which appear to be created and operated by and for men. Classic organizational practices and cultures are often depicted from a male perspective. Therefore, a fundamental argument of this perspective is the necessity to view gender as an essential variable in organizational studies through a critique of how mainstream organization theory has been gender blind (e.g., Wilson, 1996). Martin (2000) summarizes a variety of techniques for revealing gendered assumptions in theory and research. One strategy is to look at the sex of participants in a study and examine whether the researcher's conclusions have acknowledged gendered dynamics. For example, Acker and Van Houten (1974) reexamine the famous Hawthorne studies and contend that sex differences have partially led to the differential treatments of male and female participants. Another technique Martin suggests involves textual analysis of words and phrases used to state a theory, which themselves carry gendered implications. For example, by deconstructing a speech of a CEO, Martin (1990) critiques how organizational processes have suppressed gender conflict and how false dichotomies between public and private domain for women employees have perpetuated gender inequality in the workplace.

Overall, with increasing academic interest directed at the gendered structure of organizations, a body of knowledge has been created in this area over the past three decades. Various aspects of organizational processes, which were previously considered gender neutral, including recruitment, selection, and promotion, are approached critically

to uncover their hidden discriminatory nature (e.g., Snizek and Neil, 1992; and Rubin, 1997). Interestingly, among the advocates of this organization-centered perspective, disagreements exist with regard to how to understand the persistence of gender inequality in organizations and what solution should be put forward to initiate changes. For instance, Martin (2000) argues that "small-scale organizational reforms would not seriously alleviate gender inequalities at work, and only large-scale, societal-level reforms at home and at work will create enduring changes"(P. 211). However, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) promote the application of a small-wins strategy to trigger changes both in behaviors and in understanding. To them, small wins have a snowballing effect and will eventually bring about substantial reforms to the whole system. Moreover, implementing these small scale changes does not arouse fear and annoyance from the dominant men, as everyone benefits by improving overall efficiency. I argue that this contradiction is like the mythical "chicken and egg". Societal reforms can hardly reap satisfactory results without support of concrete incremental changes within institutions. At the same time, organizational gender equity initiatives will not be lasting and influential unless traditional discriminatory gender perceptions are challenged and transformed in society. In reality, the answer may be situational, depending on the historical and cultural context in which organizations are situated.

Kanter's Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I find most helpful is that which Kanter elaborates in her book *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977). In her study of a large hierarchical industrial enterprise, she places emphasis on organizational structures and processes and develops an analytical framework comprised of opportunity, power, and proportions.

These three variables, she argues, all play a part in the construction of gendered organizational patterns. They are interrelated with one another in a sophisticated organizational structure and collectively create an organizational environment that shapes people's behaviors and determines their success within an organization, particularly those disadvantaged, such as women. The gendered nature of organizational practices will not be challenged, and gender discrimination will not be eradicated unless efforts are made to deconstruct the organizational structures and processes that work to the advantage of men and to the disadvantage of women.

Kanter's first structural variable, opportunity, is defined as vertical upward mobility through an organizational hierarchy. It determines people's job performance and organizational behavior. Lack of opportunity has become a major barrier for women to achieve career development and its critical significance in maintaining women's disadvantageous position in sports organizations cannot be underestimated. First, it has a domino-like effect. When women lose opportunities at a lower level of management, the side effects extend far beyond simply missing one chance. They may lose a lifetime opportunity because they will not be eligible or qualified for promotions to a higher level. Such practices naturally lead to a shrinking of the number of women candidates in upper management levels. It also provides male leaders with a handy excuse: "You see. It's not our fault. We don't have many women to choose from." Second, people who seldom seize opportunities for success gradually lose motivation in their jobs and discard the hope that "perhaps someday it will be my turn." In this sense, it is not hard to predict how many women, never visited by good opportunities, respond to gloomy job prospects. It is no wonder that married female staff with children sometimes turn their attention to their

families as a substitute for career-fulfillment, especially when there is no opportunity for them to grow in their jobs. However, the most dangerous impact of unequal opportunities for women is the creation of a false cause-effect logic and a misleading conception of women's potential. When women are rarely present in top management, people (especially men) believe they are not capable of being leaders nor do they possess the knowledge, skill, and vision to make it to the top of the ladder. Also, without appropriate mentoring and networks, women start to doubt their competence and blame themselves for their slow career progress.

The second structural variable, power, refers to the ability to get things done and to mobilize resources. Leaders exert power to influence how decisions are made, how scarce resources are distributed, and what activities are valued within organizations. Specific functions are tied to greater opportunities and greater power. Kanter (1977) identifies three kinds of activities that pave the path to power: extraordinary activities (people getting credit for performing unpredictable tasks under conditions of high uncertainty), visibility (the ability to attract people's attention by doing something more noticeable), and relevance (identified with the solution to a pressing organizational problem). This argument is insightful in that it explains why male and female managers at the same administrative hierarchical levels are appointed to different functional divisions in national sport organizations. More often than not, women are responsible for youth and amateur sports, whereas men are in charge of national teams and professional leagues, the latter being obviously regarded as the core business of most NSOs in Chinese sport. In other words, the gender pattern of where men and women are positioned and what tasks they are assigned to perform is associated with and influenced by the power structure.

When women are excluded from top management positions, they are, in fact, isolated from the power center of the organization. Consequently, their ability to influence the decision-making process is weak, and their capacity to change the organizational culture is limited.

The third structural factor Kanter discusses is relative numbers or proportional representation. When the numerical representation of a particular type of people is highly skewed, tokens are produced. Kanter (1977) identifies three perceptual tendencies that are typical in most token situations: visibility, contrast, and assimilation. She reviews how these dynamics influence women's organizational well-being and their common responses to tokenism. She argues that each of these tendencies is associated with particular forces and dynamics that, in turn, generate a typical token response: "Visibility tends to create performance pressures on the token. Contrast leads to heightening of dominant culture boundaries, including isolation of the token. And assimilation results in the token's role encapsulation" (Kanter, 1977, p. 212). This view is useful to understand how senior women sport managers, because they are so few, are treated by their colleagues and how their experience is informed by their token positions in these organizations.

Kanter's approach provides a useful tool to understanding women's situations in Chinese national sport organizations. A descriptive review of women's under-representation in senior management posts contributes little to comprehending women's disadvantageous condition in the Chinese national sport hierarchy because it is already obvious on the surface. In this sense, Kanter's framework, grounded in opportunity, power, and proportions, provides an effective means to examine so-called gender neutral

sport organizations and explain why and how women are deprived of access to equal employment and promotion opportunities.

The Gender Structure of National Sport Organizations

No matter what the organization, it is gendered. Most, if not all, organizations possess a distinctive gender structure, with men typically occupying the more powerful positions and women the less powerful ones (Hearn and Parkin, 1987). Researchers have applied different approaches and perspectives to examine the entrenched and hidden gender discrimination associated with various aspects of organizational processes. This mounting literature opens up a rich vein when I look at the gender structure in the particular context of national sport organizations.

Hall (1996) synthesizes three levels of analysis in the discourse about gender and sport. The first level, categorical research, attributes sex differences to biological factors and socialization. This point of view still stays at the level of the biological distinctions between the sexes and is mostly adopted by psychologists. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, it does not take into account the cultural and historical construction of gender relations in social practices. The second level, distributive research, focuses on the distribution of resources and inequality of opportunities and access. This method stays at the descriptive level of documenting where gender inequality exists, but falls short in explaining how and why it is generated and perpetuated. Although this kind of research provides valuable information concerning women's position, it is at most a starting point for further analysis and action. To achieve a deeper understanding of how gender works in sport, scholars call for the use of the third level research, relational analyses, which are based on the assumption that "sporting

practices are historically produced, socially constructed and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups in society" (Hall, 1996, p. 11). This approach highlights the relational nature of gender and sees sport as a social construct prescribing specific sexual roles for women and men. Power is considered central to understanding the unequal relationships between dominant and subordinate groups. By the same token, McKay (1997) claims, "there is increasing recognition of the cardinal role sporting practices play in constructing gender relations and identities" (p. 19). He further argues that organizations embedded with pronounced institutionalized gender patterns cannot be analyzed in a gender-neutral way: "Organizations are key sites where gender struggles take place and in which femininities and masculinities are both constructed and reproduced" (pp. 13-14).

Hall et al. (1989) point out that previous studies of sport organizations focusing on the sexual division of labor and distributive analyses fail to address the gendered structuring of sport organizations. In other words, they do not address the organizational processes and dynamics structure and relations of gender and power between women and men in sport organizational contexts. Hall et al. (1990) further assert that, "although the proportion of women in leadership positions at the national (or international) level in governmental and non-governmental sports organizations varies from one country to another, generally speaking, women are under-represented" (p. 1). Despite the fact that women's under-representation in sport organizations has become an overt and universal issue across national boundaries, the underlying reasons attributed to the problem vary in different cultures and societies. An increasing number of empirical studies have documented gender relations within national sport organizations in a variety of countries.

Researchers use various theories and perspectives to approach the gender discourse in sport organizations. For example, Hall et al. (1989) apply Kanter's structure of opportunity, power and proportions and Hearn and Parkin's dialectical relationship between organization and sexuality to their investigation of the gender structure of Canadian NSOs. They explain women's under-representation in high-level management positions as the result of "organizational elites (males) [who] work to recreate themselves in order to retain their power" (Hall et al., 1989, p. 28). In a related study, Whitson and Macintosh (1989) also focus on power relations when explaining gender inequalities in Canadian NSOs. They develop their explanation of the gendered organizational structure and its resistance to change utilizing a theory of gender domination which "sees social structures as constituted and reconstituted in power relations" (Whitson and Macintosh, 1989, p. 145). Their empirical data point to two main arguments with regards to women's disproportionate representation in senior level positions, one being qualifications and the other family relations. Women are generally found to lag behind men in terms of personal and professional experiences, which are valuable assets for candidates to access senior administrative and technical positions. Besides, women's domestic responsibilities have caused more contradiction for women than for men in their public career pursuits.

McKay (1997) conducts a comprehensive study of affirmative action and organizational power in Australian, Canadian and New Zealand sport. He employs Connell's (1987) approach of the (macro) gender order and (micro) gender regimes, combined with the structures of labor, power and cathexis. His analysis puts emphasis on discovering organizational barriers to women's career advancement rather than superficially locating their disproportionate numerical representation. Hovden (2000)

examines some of the gendered aspects of leadership selection processes in Norwegian sporting organizations, using both feminist and critical perspectives. Her inquiry further demonstrates how selection criteria and selection strategy are defined in favor of male candidates in the process of hiring organization leaders. By doing so, the predominantly male selection committees are able to secure their privileged status. Shaw and Slack (2002) use Foucault's post-modern approach to analyze the historical construction of gender relations in British national sport governing bodies. They find that, in older organizations, men appear to be more influential in protecting traditional practices while in younger organizations more equitable gender relations are present.

In summary, all this work contributes to our understanding of the cultural diversity of the social construction of gender relations in national sport organizations. As far as this study is concerned, I employ both Connell's (2002) four structures related to gender (relations of power, production, emotion and symbolic relations) to explore the social construction of gender relations in Chinese national sport organizations. I also use Kanter's (1977) concepts of opportunity, power, and proportions as an analytical tool to examine the gendered organizational processes. Again, the combination of these two perspectives is mainly due to their strength in addressing the power dynamics and change implications in organizational practices.

Chapter Three - Understanding Chinese Society and Sport

> In any study of women it is difficult to maintain a balance between presenting an outline of the socio-economic structure in which they are located and the details which directly affect the role and status of women. This problem is magnified in the case of China, where the cultural and political frameworks may be unfamiliar to many readers. (Croll, 1978, p. 9)

Before attempting any scholarly inquiry on Chinese sport, it is important to introduce relevant aspects of Chinese society and sport. Some background information will pave the way for a better understanding of the discussion to follow, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the country and its sport. I start by introducing the society of contemporary China and the major changes relevant to women's social status which have taken place since 1978. Further discussion is devoted to an account of the development of Chinese elite sport, highlighting the accomplishment of women athletes. The last section in this chapter provides an overall picture of the Chinese national sport administration structure and women's situation in it.

An Overview of Chinese Society

The People's Republic of China (PRC), often referred to as New China, was founded in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated the Nationalists in the civil war and established a one-ruling-party communist regime. Over the next thirty years, the country went through much turmoil, both political and economic.[1] In particular, the ten-year Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) launched by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1966 proved to be disastrous for the country. After Mao's death in 1976 and the political power struggle which followed, Deng Xiaoping became the new state leader in the post-Mao era. At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP in

December 1978, historical decisions were made to initiate unprecedented economic reforms, characterized by a transition from the original planned economy to a market-oriented economic system. The Chinese government put forward many initiatives to realize the modernization and prosperity of the country. The introduction of the family responsibility system returned the lands to peasants and motivated the massive labor force significantly in rural areas. The government encouraged the development of private business outside the state sectors in townships and villages, and formulated policies to attract foreign direct capital investment (Dwyer, 1994). Political reforms were also initiated, although within controlled limits to safeguard the absolute ruling of the CCP. The central government has been restructured several times since the late 1980s so as to be aligned with the on-going economic transformation.

The year 1979 marked a watershed in the history of New China. Radical social changes took place after Deng Xiaoping came to power and launched the open-door reform policy. This strategic decision started the engine of China's modernization. The past twenty-five years have witnessed the most profound changes in every aspect of social life in China, particularly the astounding boom in the economy. China realized more than two decades of consecutive robust economic growth, and by the turn of the century was one of the world's fastest growing economies. The government gradually relaxed control over various industries and sectors, and encouraged businesses to compete with each other in the ever-evolving free market. Large flows of foreign capital, technology and expertise entered the Chinese market with the global penetration of transnational corporations, which played an instrumental role in increases to the GDP. The flourishing of private businesses encouraged entrepreneurship, replaced state-

planned production with free competition, and created enormous employment opportunities outside the state sectors. Economic reforms also brought profound socioeconomic changes to people's work and life. The profit motive was promoted; material incentives were allowed in reward systems; and consumerism was encouraged. Millions of people shook off poverty as the national income level and standard of living improved dramatically, especially in the cities.[2] As an example, China became the world's largest consumer of mobile phones, surpassing the USA in 2001, with over 120 million users. This number doubled within three years and by 2004 had reached 300 million.[3]

Cadres and the National Administration Hierarchy

Before the economic reforms, urban employees could roughly be divided into three social categories: cadres (*ganbu*), workers, and intellectuals. Several new professions emerged in the country's transition to a market economy, giving rise to new occupational identities, such as individual entrepreneurs (*geti hu*), managerial entrepreneurs (*qiye jia*), white-collars in foreign corporations (*waiqi bailing*) and freelance professionals (*ziyou zhiyezhe*). However, the former three-category classification remained typical of those in state owned institutions and enterprises.

Cadres represent a more privileged social class since the vast majority are employees in administrative and leadership positions in the public sectors. For most Chinese, "cadre" is considered a synonym for "managerial staff". They are the backbone of the state bureaucracy, enjoying enormous preferential benefits, which include housing, wages and health care. For instance, cadres can receive spacious apartments from their work units (*danwei*),[4] which are rarely available to other workers. Also, the mandatory

retirement age for cadres is five years older than that of most workers, who must retire at fifty-five while cadres can work till sixty.[5]

Cadres are ranked by different administrative grades, which make up a sophisticated state bureaucratic hierarchy (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Administrative Ranks of the State Bureaucratic Hierarchy

	Government institutions	Corresponding administrative ranks
1	The State Council (*guo wu yuan*)	Premier/Vice Premier/ State Councilor
2	Ministries/State Commissions (*bu*)	Minister/Vice Minister
3	Department/Bureau (*si*)	Department director/Vice department director
4	Division/Town (*chu*)	Division head/Vice division head
5	Section/County (*ke*)	Section head/Vice section head
6		Entry-level manager or ordinary cadre (*yiban ganbu*)

This bureaucratic hierarchy takes the shape of a power pyramid and is strictly implemented in government agencies, such as the State Sport Commission. Each rank is responsible to its immediate superior rank and each vice position is half a grade lower than the corresponding grade without the "vice". Despite the fact that state institutions have different names and their leaders have different titles, all cadres belong to a corresponding administrative rank in the hierarchy. Cadres at each administrative rank are entitled to enjoy a comprehensive benefit package at a certain level. Specific standards are set up with regard to housing, wages, transportation service and retirement

ages. For instance, senior state leaders at and above the ministerial level, regardless of their sex, can retire at sixty-five rather than sixty, which is the cap for vice ministers and the ranks below.

The state bureaucratic hierarchy is deeply engrained in the society of socialist China. A cadre's administrative grade, to a large extent, determines his or her social status and identity. It is closely associated with how much respect and power one enjoys in society. Officials in high administrative grades receive absolute respect and compliance from their subordinates. This is even the case between a director and a vice director within a department. It is a well-established practice to address senior officials by their administrative titles, such as Director Wang (*Wang Jvzhang*), rather than Mr. Wang, because the former indicates his status and power in the government.

Women's Status in Contemporary China

China is one of the oldest, continuous world civilizations with more than five thousand years of recorded history, and for two thousand years it remained a Confucian society.[6] The traditional thinking of male superiority and female inferiority was dominant in pre-modern China. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed changes to improve women's social status. However, before 1949, Chinese women were still largely excluded from social life while supporting and serving men at home. The situation changed dramatically after the Communist rise to power in 1949. The CCP placed considerable priority on the promotion of gender equality between men and women since it was an integral part of the socialist transformation and state economic construction. A nation-wide campaign for women's emancipation was launched, and women's equal status was written into the first constitution of the People's Republic. The passage of the

Marriage Law eradicated a discriminatory marriage system characterized by arranged and forced marriages. Women were also encouraged to enter paid work to achieve economic independence. The first decade after the creation of New China witnessed an astounding increase in women's employment both in the rural and urban areas. Meanwhile, a large-scale education campaign was initiated to teach the vast majority of illiterate females how to read and write. Politics was no long a reserve of men but also open to women leaders.[7] For the first time, Chinese women, for centuries fettered by the notion of male superiority and female inferiority, were entitled to equal rights with men in every sphere of life.

However, gender disparity was not solved by merely adopting a few legal policies, and gender equality did not happen immediately after women stepped out of their homes. Li (1995) argues that gender inequality in the PRC was not so much ignored as misunderstood. There were inherent problems embedded in the Chinese women's gender equality campaign. Chinese women were told they were liberated and equal to men by state propaganda, but as Croll (1978) points out, what was required was an analysis and consciousness of their position in society, together with a complete change in women's beliefs, self-image, obligations and expectations. Unfortunately, Chinese women were given little opportunity to question the status quo and had insufficient information to appreciate the women's liberation movement in other parts of the world. An awakening of Chinese women's conscious efforts to fully exercise their rights did not happen until the mid-1990s. The Fourth United Nation's World Women's Conference, hosted in Beijing in 1995, led to a flourish of feminist studies and the growth of women's organizations. (Hsiung, Jaschok and Milwertz, 2001)

Many scholars (e.g., Croll, 1983; Barlow, 1994; Li, 1994; Li, 1995; Wang, 1999; and Shang, 1999) have argued that women's status has deteriorated in China's transition to a socialist market economy. Female workers have become the major victim of lay-offs from the unprofitable state owned enterprises, and the majority of school dropouts in the rural and poorer areas are girls. Female graduates from colleges and universities have found it more difficult to obtain satisfactory employment.[8] Many young women have resorted to becoming mistresses of wealthy men as a means to escape poverty.[9] Although there are 330 million female employees, totaling forty-six per cent of the nation's labour force, the proportion of women cadres has dropped to less than a quarter in state institutions. Women scientists account for only six per cent of the academicians in the Chinese Academy of Science and Chinese Academy of Engineering, which are the best academic societies consisting of the most prestigious national scholars. The rate of female university students reached forty-one per cent in 2000, the first time the figure exceeding forty per cent. In 1999, the illiteracy rate for adult women was twenty-two per cent, more than double that of men (at nine per cent). Rural women constituted at least half of the fifty million poverty-stricken people across the country.[10] The traditional gender bias, characterized by hope for male offspring, is still pervasive, particularly in rural areas, and has led to a dangerous gender imbalance among newborn babies. According to the fifth national census conducted in 2000, the ratio of newborn males to every 100 females in China has reached 119.2, an alarming difference over the international index of 105.[11]

This setback in women's status is most obvious and serious in politics and senior management. The proportion of women representatives in the National supreme decision

making bodies began to decline a few years after the economic reforms were launched in 1983.[12] More recently, few women leaders are spotted in top government offices. Women are still absent from the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP, the core leadership group. In March 2003, at the latest plenary meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC), which is the supreme authoritative national legislation body, the newly elected State Council contained only two women out of thirty-six top officials. Not even one of the twenty-one Ministries and State Commissions was headed by a female. It is worth highlighting that in January 2005, a forty-eight years old woman was elected governor of a province in northwest China becoming the only female provincial governor in the current government leadership. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, females accounted for merely one per cent of the total village directors in rural areas. Therefore, Chinese women's representation in politics shows fewer at the very top and also at the very bottom.[13]

An Overview of Chinese Sport

The development of sport in New China has always been closely tied to national politics and economics. After the founding of the PRC, sport became an immediate concern in order to improve the nation's health and the physical condition of the workforce for re-construction and defense. Under these circumstances, mass sport received more attention in order to engage people in physical activities. Women and girls were also encouraged to participate and even take up sport as a profession. The government's focus began shifting to competitive sport from the mid-1950s onwards, although its development was not smooth due to the political and economic turmoil

during the next two decades. China's withdrawal from the International Olympic Committee in 1958 over the Taiwan issue further prolonged this process. [14]

After twenty years of isolation from the Olympic family, in 1979 China restored its seat at the International Olympic Committee, which coincided with the announcement of its economic reform policies. The Chinese government was eager to rejoin modern society and create a new national identity. Sporting success was deemed an effective instrument to serve this purpose. Winning gold medals at international competitions, particularly the Olympic Games, was considered a vehicle to assert national glory. In this context, the State Sport Commission developed an Olympic Strategy in the mid-1980s, setting a key priority of winning gold medals at the Olympics and world championships. A nation-wide selection, training and competition system was put in place to support this initiative. Efforts were made to mobilize limited resources to produce top athletes at the elite level in specific sports in which Chinese athletes had more of chance to be successful. This overriding emphasis on Olympic sports and win-at-all-cost mentality became a perpetual theme for the development of competitive sport, maintaining its prevalence in the following two decades.

One milestone in 1995 was the adoption of an Olympic Honor Program, which set out the strategic direction and goals for Chinese competitive sport until the end of the century. According to this Program, financial support for Olympic sports was increased and the funding and resources location guaranteed and tilted to priority sports (*Guojia tiwei*, 1995). Sports such as table tennis, badminton, shooting, athletics and weightlifting were identified as key disciplines with a high potential for gold medals in international competitions. National sport organizations (NSOs) responsible for those sports were

given preferential treatment in terms of funding, training and technical support. This Olympic strategy proved effective for Chinese athletes, particularly women athletes, who scored impressive victories in the international sports arena. From 1998 to 2002, Chinese athletes won 485 world championships and broke world records 193 times. In 2002 alone, 33 world records were rewritten by the Chinese.[15]

China made its new Olympic debut at Los Angeles in 1984 and won fifteen gold medals in part because the USSR boycotted those Games. Eighteen years later at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, China claimed its emerging status as a sport powerhouse with twenty-eight gold medals and third place in the medal count. At the Athens Olympics in 2004, China's record was thirty-two gold medals and second place in total medals.

China's remarkable progress within a short period of time inevitably aroused suspicions of a systematic doping program backed by the government.[16] Doping had initially entered Chinese sport in the 1980s following the open door reform policy. Driven by a win-at-all-cost mentality and tempted by substantial financial rewards for winners, some coaches and athletes turned to performance enhancing drugs and methods to gain advantages over their rivals. Chinese athletes were implicated in a series of drug scandals beginning in the late-1980s and the doping crisis stained China's sporting reputation.[17] The State Sport Commission responded to the issue seriously and took aggressive action to address the problem. A test laboratory was set up in 1988, which has passed the International Olympic Committee and then the World Anti-Doping Agency lab accreditation for the past fifteen years, the best record among Asian countries.[18] A comprehensive national doping control program was put in place. The numbers of testing

soared from less than 200 in 1990 to over 4000 in 2004. Meanwhile, the rate of positive cases in the Chinese national doping control testing program dropped to 0.4 per cent, far below the international average of 1.6 per cent.[19] China developed its National Doping Control Quality System and received international standard certification in 2004, joining a handful of leading countries in the field and winning international credibility. With its continuous anti-doping efforts, China has sent a message to the sporting world that its government is against doping in sport and its athletes are clean.

International Success of Female Elite Athletes

Sport in the New China has always been a major means of nation building and women's sport is no exception. Female athletes started receiving sport training as early as male athletes and enjoyed equal access in national and international competitions. There was no obvious gap in the number of sports available to men and women from the early years of the New China (Dong, 2001).

Chinese women elite athletes have played an instrumental role and made a tremendous contribution in realizing the goals of the Olympic strategy in the post-reform period. Since 1992, female athletes have outnumbered their male counterparts in Chinese delegations to the past four Olympic Summer Games.[20] In every Summer Olympics since 1988, women have won more than half of the gold medals for the Chinese delegation. From 1998 to 2002, Chinese female athlete won 289 world championships and broke 176 world records, which was ninety-one per cent of the total world records broken by Chinese athletes.[21] In the 1980s, when the women's national volleyball team won five consecutive world championships, the players were celebrated as national heroines inspiring the entire nation.

Several Chinese female athletes have been particularly inspiring. For instance, in the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, the diver Fu Mingxia claimed her first Olympic gold medal at the age of fourteen and became the youngest Olympic champion in the world. Wang Junxia, a female long distance runner, won the first Olympic gold medal in athletics for China in Atlanta in 1996. In Salt Lake City in 2002, when Yang Yang, a female short track skater, won the gold medals, the Chinese national anthem was played for the first time at a Winter Olympics. Chinese female athletes have achieved distinctive international success in sports such as volleyball, diving, speed skating and soccer, and are viewed as role models to inspire nationalism and patriotism.

There has been considerable discussion on the reasons for Chinese female athletes' accomplishment in the international sports arena with different arguments and points of view offered.[22] The following factors are generally considered most relevant. First, women athletes obtained equal access to and opportunities in sport in the New China. Second, Chinese women are traditionally hard working and obedient. Hence, female athletes are easy to discipline. Third, they received enormous support from male coaches and training partners. Fourth, sport provides an avenue for female athletes from lower class families, especially from rural areas, to achieve social mobility and improve their social status. Fifth, Chinese sport is unbiased with regard to gender. Favorable state support will go to whoever can accomplish international sporting success. Although these opinions shed some light on the issue, they are speculative in nature and lack solid empirical evidence. The academic gap between reality and theory was filled when Dong (2003) provided a more complete answer to this question:

> Chinese women's success in international competitions is an outcome of the subtle interaction of historical and cultural events, political priorities, and rapid economic

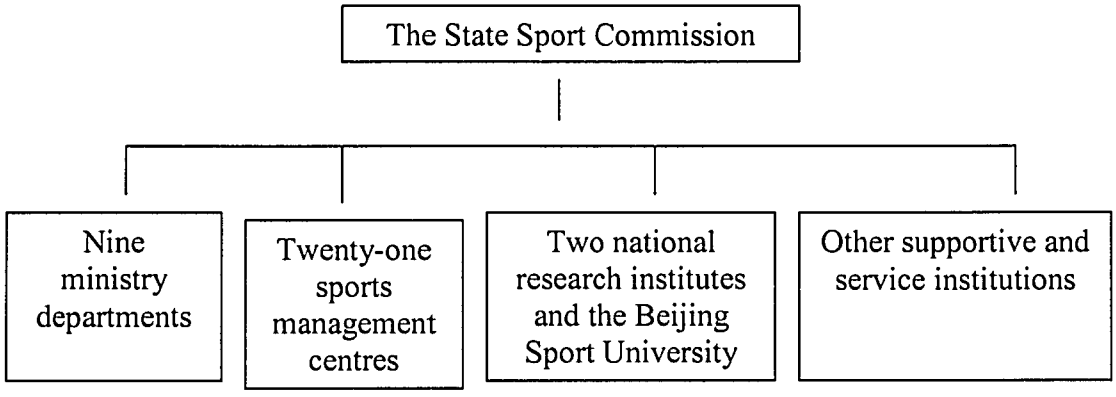
development, changing gender relations, international political ambitions and an efficient sports system. (p. 11)

Chinese National Sport Administrative Structure

Chinese sports are largely managed by the State Sport Commission (*guojia tiwei*), a government agency at the ministerial level.[23] It is the centre of the national sport system and administers all sport-related affairs across the country. [24]

At present, the State Sport Commission comprises four different types of organizations. Its core administration body is called *jiguan*, which refers to various ministry departments.[25] They are the basic functionaries responsible for the daily operations of the Commission. There are now nine such departments in the State Sport Commission. The second group consists of twenty-one Sport Management Centers, which are the executive offices for the national sport associations. Third are the research and education institutions, which include two research institutes and one physical education institute (*tiyuan*).[26] The final group covers other supportive and service institutions, such as the Lottery Management Center and the Sport Equipment Center. Figure 3.1 shows the current organizational structure of the State Sport Commission.

Figure 3.1. Organizational chart of the State Sport Commission



The main responsibility of the State Sport Commission includes formulating national sport policies, regulations and strategies, as well as monitoring their implementation; guiding the reform of the national sport system and coordinating sport development at the local levels; and advocating for mass and competitive sport across the country. Since its inception in 1952, the State Sport Commission has adopted a highly centralized and hierarchical structure. The tight state control over sport was partly a result of the planned economy in socialist China and also in line with the Olympic Strategy in the reform period. It enabled the country to concentrate limited resources on selected Olympic sports and to reap significant breakthroughs in international sport within a short period of time in the early 1980s (Bao, 2001; Xiao, 2001; and Yang, 2001).

This highly centralized sport delivery system faced increasing challenges in the reform period. In order to become aligned with the on-going political and economic reforms, the State Sport Commission was transformed significantly to comply with the demands of a socialist market economy. The most radical change took place in 1998 when the State Sport Commission was restructured. (See Appendix A for a detailed structural composition of the State Sport Commission before and after 1998.) Several trends were evident in this groundbreaking institutional restructuring. First, it was characterized by a decentralization of state control of sport administration when direct government management of sport was replaced by indirect guidance. Administration was to be separated from operation (*guanban fenli*) and the State Sport Commission's role shifted to overall coordination. Its work priority was to formulate sport strategies and policies, and to monitor their implementation. In light of this, four Competition and

Training Departments within the Commission were disbanded and twenty Sport Management Centers (SMC) were set up.[27] The SMCs functioned as "*changshe banshi jigou*" (standing executive bodies) of national sport associations, which were housed in the ministry departments before 1998. The management of operational affairs for various sports was shifted from the Commission to the associations. Second, the sport funding formula was changed. Sport was no longer exclusively financed by the government. Sport industries were promoted and professional leagues were established in such sports as soccer, basketball and volleyball. With increasing autonomy, the SMCs were encouraged to seek diversified funding sources, such as sponsorship, naming rights and television broadcasting rights. Third, streamlining was initiated to reduce redundancy and increase efficiency. The ministry departments saw a reduction of fifty per cent of their employees. Most of those made redundant were re-appointed to institutions affiliated with the State Sport Commission such as the SMCs and research institutes. Meanwhile, other institutions affiliated with the Commission shrank significantly with only one physical education institute (*tiyuan*) and two research institutes remaining under its direct leadership.[28]

Ministry Departments versus Sport Management Centres

As discussed above, the ministry departments and the sport management centers are the two main groups of organizations responsible for sport administrative affairs within the State Sport Commission. These organizations are compatible in several aspects. They are at the same administrative levels (*si*). Directors of the ministry departments and the sport management centers are both accountable to the Sport Minister and Vice Sport Ministers. Their employee numbers vary roughly from fifteen to twenty-five depending

on their scope of business. The ministry departments are comparatively smaller, generally with approximately twenty staff. There is also a close link between the organizations. Since the sport management centers were separated from the State Sport Commission in 1997, most senior staff are former public servants and have worked previously in various ministry departments. The ministry departments execute guidance and supervision over the work of the sport management centers on behalf of the State Sport Commission since their work reports must pass through the ministry departments to the ministers.

There are more than ninety national sport associations, while the total number of existing sport management centers is twenty-one at the time of writing.[29] This means that most sport management centers are responsible for more than one sport. Sports are grouped together based on factors such as disciplining features, popularity and performance level, and then managed by a single SMC. Such an arrangement is also in response to the principle of the Olympic Honor Program, which focuses on priority Olympic sports. There are eight single-sport management centers--football, basketball, volleyball, athletics, tennis, wushu (martial arts), mountain climbing, and motor sport; there are three bi-sport management centers--table tennis/badminton, shooting/archery, and chess/bridge. The remaining are multi-sport management centers responsible for three or more sports. A detailed profile of the SMCs is provided in Appendix B. Most single-sport management centers generally adopt functional organizational designs as shown in Figure 3.2. Divisions are set up to manage a specific function of the sport such as competition, training, professional leagues, amateur and youth sport, national teams, marketing and development, and so on. The executive managing structure for the

corresponding national sport association looks much the same as the sport management center.

Figure 3.2. Organizational structure of single-sport management centers

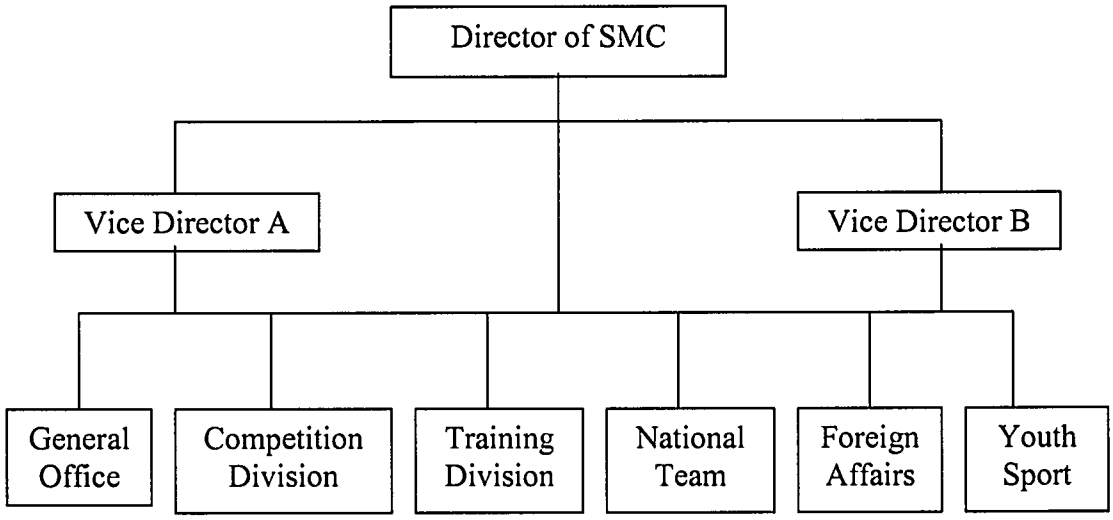
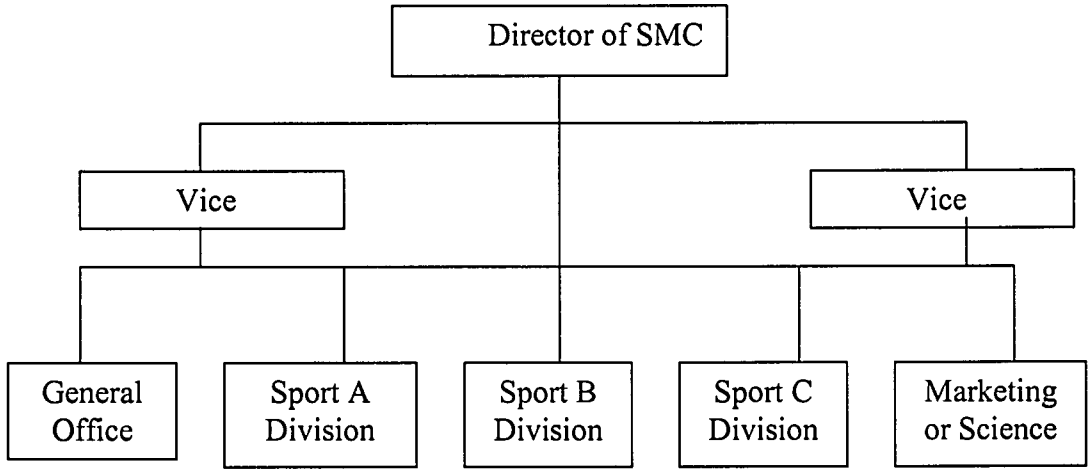


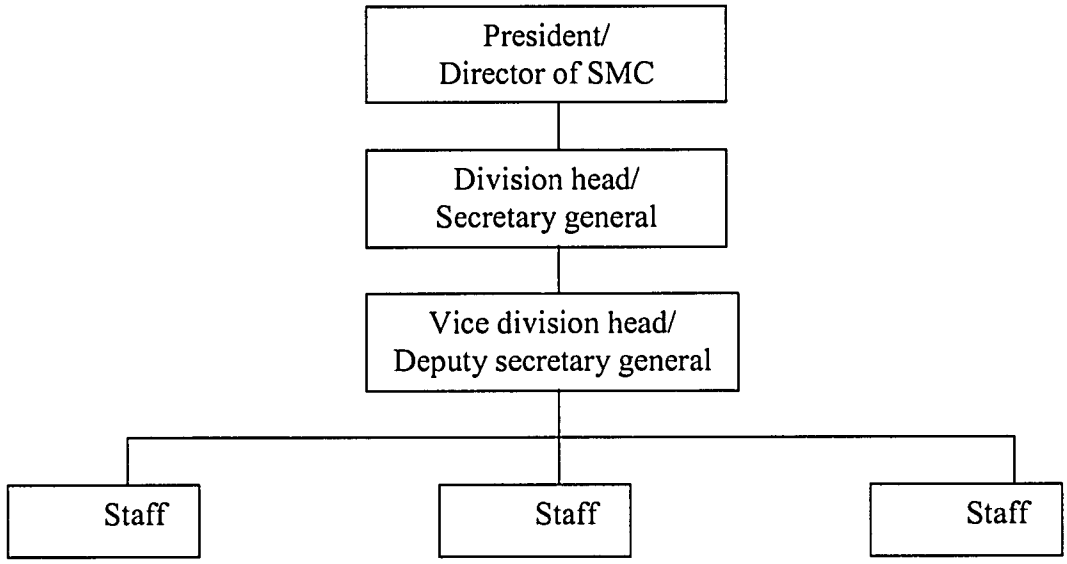
Figure 3.3. Organizational structure of multi-sport management centers



The multi-sport centers more often choose divisional structures, and responsibilities are distributed by sports as illustrated in Figure 3.3. A General Affairs Office functions as the secretariat and sometimes provides accounting and foreign affairs resources shared among other sport divisions.

The executive structure of a small national sport association (NSA), which is housed in a multi-sport center, is shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4. Executive structure of a small NSA within a multi-sport management center



Women in Chinese National Sport Organizations

Women's situation in sport organizations, in many aspects, echoes their representation in politics and senior management in Chinese society. Generally, women have more difficulty in accessing coaching, technical and administrative posts, which remain male-dominated.

In 1995, for instance, females accounted for thirty per cent of the scientific personnel at the five research institutes affiliated with the Commission, and only 8.8 per cent of those had senior academic titles (Zhang, 1995). In 1991, there were 18,173 coaches across the country and 3,527 were women (less than twenty per cent). The percentage was even lower (8.13 per cent) among head coaches (Dong, 1998). This pattern is more prominent at the higher level management in national sport organizations. In more than fifty years, the State Sport Commission has seen only one female Vice-Minister and no female sport Minister. In most national sport organizations, men dominate key management positions. By the end of 2001 there were 2,153 female employees in the State Sport Commission and its affiliated institutions, accounting for 38.6 per cent of the total, but only 117 (twenty per cent) women had positions above the division head level. Among them, three were department directors and nineteen were deputy department directors or their equivalents.[30] In other words, only three organizations were headed by women throughout dozens of ministry departments and the Commission affiliations at the departmental level.

The neglect of women's status in sport management is also reflected in the paucity of data related to gender. The Personnel Department does not maintain regular statistics on female cadres. The very limited statistical figures available so far were collected in 1994 and 2002 respectively. The former was collected prior to the Fourth United Nation's World Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1995. The female Vice Minister Zhang Caizhen was a driving force in investigating the statistical work. The later statistics were collected in 2002 in preparation for a report to the central government on nurturing

female cadres and later cited in a senior official's address at the March Eighth Women's Day celebration.[31]

Notes

1. They included China's involvement in the Korean War against the United States, the Anti-Right Campaign, the Rectification Campaign, the Great Forward Leap and the Great Cultural Revolution.

2. The Chinese population in extreme poverty declined from 250 million in 1978 to twenty-nine million in 2003 and most of the rural residents have had enough food and clothing. "UNDP chief praises Chinese poverty-reduction experience, urging more efforts". *Xinhua News Agency*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200405/28/eng20040528_144615.html on Jan. 28, 2005.

3. "Chinese Mobile Phone Users Rank First". *Xinhua News Agency*, Aug. 14, 2001. Retrieved from http://www.china.org.cn/english/MATERIAL/17481.htm on Jan. 28, 2005. "Chinese mobile phone users pass 300 million". *Business Times*. Retrieved from http://it.asia1.com.sg/newsdaily/news004_20040723.html on Jan. 28, 2005.

4. Shaw (1996) defines the work unit as a workplace where a group of people are employed to carry out a line of business under the socialist state planning. The term refers to a variety of state controlled organizations, such as government agencies, public services and factories because the private sector did not exist in any meaningful way before the economic reforms. From the early 1980s, private businesses were encouraged and boomed. However, in a traditional sense, work units are still commonly cited in contemporary China to refer to any state owned institutions in the public sector. See Shaw (1996) for more details.

5. There is a disparity in the mandatory retirement age for male and female employees. The retirement ages for female workers and cadres are fifty and fifty-five respectively. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

6. The Republic of China (*zhonghua minguo*) succeeded the Qing Dynasty in 1911, ending 2,000 years of imperial rule in China.

7. Song Qingling was elected Vice Chairman of the People's Central Government and Vice Chairman of the PRC. Shi Liang was name Minister of Justice. There were a total of ten women in the National Commission of the Chinese People's Political and Consultative Conference in 1949 (Dong, 2003).

8. "Job hunt an uphill battle for female graduates". *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200404/05/eng20040405_139453.shtml on Nov. 29, 2004. "Gov't urged to help women find more jobs". *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200403/09/print20040309_136989.html on Nov. 29, 2004.

9. "Chinese mistresses do it to escape poverty". *The Strait Times Interactive.* Retrieved from http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/asia/story/0,4386,163916,00.html on Feb. 2, 2005.

10. "Statistics and Graph Data". *Women of China*. Retrieved from http://www.womenofchina.com.cn/WOC/introductList.asp?BigClassID=3&subClassID=29 on Apr. 21, 2003.

11. "China mobilizes to tackle gender imbalance". *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200308/15/print20030815_122398.html on Oct. 2, 2004. "Men outnumber women, population structure worries China". *People's Daily*

Online. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200209/27/print20020927_104013.html on Oct. 2, 2004.

12. Women constituted twenty-one per cent of the Standing Committee members at the Fourth NPC in January 1978, but only nine per cent at the Sixth NPC in January 1983. See Shang (1999) for more details.

13. "*Pandian zhongguo nvxing gaoguan congzheng zhilu: daduoshu fenguan wenjiao wensheng*". ("Political careers of Chinese female senior leaders: Most responsible for culture, education and health"). *Nanfang Zhoumo (South China Weekend)*. Retrieved from http://news.sohu.com/20050127/n224130165.shtml on Jan.27, 2005.

14. PRC insists that Taiwan is part of China and there is only one China. However, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) decided to recognize both National Olympic Committees (NOCs) in Beijing and Taiwan, violating the Olympic Charter, which allowed for only one NOC per country. In protest, China withdrew from the IOC in 1958. See Ren (1999) for more details.

15. See He (2003) *Zhongguo funv yu aolin pike yundong* (Chinese women and Olympic Movement). *China Sports Daily*.

16. Doping scandals exploded in East Germany and the USSR after the communist regimes collapsed in these countries. Their governments were implicated in the use of performance enhancing drugs in elite sports.

17. Wu Dan, a veteran player of the national women volleyball team, failed a doping test at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. In 1998 a Chinese swimmer, on her way to world swimming championships in Perth, was caught at the Sydney airport with growth

hormone in her luggage. Another four swimmers' urine samples tested positive in the pre-competition testing at the same event.

18. The accreditation of doping test laboratories was shifted from the International Olympic Committee to the newly established World Anti-Doping Agency in 2003.

19. "*Shi Kangcheng: Zhongguo fanxingfenji de zhemei jinpai fenliang gengzhong*" ("Doping control victory is a heavier gold medal"). *Chinese Olympic Committee Anti-Doping Commission*. Retrieved from http://www.cocadc.org.cn/chinese/sanji/sj01.php?id=3371 on Jan. 30, 2005.

20. The percentage of female athletes in Chinese delegations increased from forty-six per cent in 1988 to sixty-seven per cent in 2000 and sixty-five per cent in 2004.

21. See He (2003) *Zhongguo funv yu aolin pike yundong* (Chinese women and Olympic Movement). *China Sports Daily*.

22. See Dong (2003) for more details.

23. In early 1998, the State Sport Commission was restructured and renamed as the State Sport General Administration (*guojia tiyu zongjv*). However, the agency is still informally referred to as the State Sport Commission. I follow this tradition to avoid confusion.

24. The complete national sport system in China comprises four major organizations: the State Sport Commission, the All-China Sports Federation, the Chinese Olympic Committee, and the China Sports Science Society. They are often collectively referred to as the sport commission system (*tiwei xitong*). The term refers to all people working in these four organizations and their affiliated institutions. The Commission functions as an umbrella organization for the other three organizations, which all operate under the

Commission's guidance and leadership. Most senior leaders in the State Sport Commission had several positions concurrently in these organizations. For example, the Sport Minister, Director of the State Sport Commission also serves as President of the All-China Sports Federation and Chairman of the Chinese Olympic Committee. The Vice Minister responsible for science and education is chairperson of the China Sports Science Society.

25. Only employees in government departments (not state owned institutions and enterprises) are public servants, who generally enjoy more favourable benefits especially in housing and health care.

26. They are the Research Institute of Sports Science, the Research Institute of Sports Medicine, and the Beijing Sport University.

27. The Qigong Sport Management Centre was established in 2002. So currently there are twenty-one SMCs in the State Sport Commission.

28. Before 1998, there were six *tiyuan* and five research institutes under the direct leadership of the Commission. Most were shifted over to their respective provincial sport bureaus.

29. "*Zhishu daiwei zaixian*" ("Affiliated work units on-line"). *The State Sport General Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.sport.gov.cn/zsfb/zsfb.htm on June 18, 2003.

30. *"Guanyu peiyang xuanba nvganbu qingkuang de huibao"* ("Report on selecting and developing female cadres"). *Guojia tiyu zongjv*. Jun. 4, 2002.

31. Ibid.

Chapter Four - Methodology

A case study design was employed in this research with three national sport organizations selected as the units of analysis. Given the substantial under-representation of female managers in Chinese national sport organizations (NSOs), a quantitative approach, such as a questionnaire survey, would contribute little to our understanding of the construction of gender relations in these NSOs. Practical difficulties with regard to the costs of translation, distribution, and collection of questionnaires also make this methodology impracticable. A simplistic statistical description will do little to explain the persistent gender disparity. For this reason, qualitative research methods were used to uncover the dynamics of how the organizational culture and practices structure gender relations. What is required is an analysis and explanation of women's peripheral position in the domain of sport management through an in-depth empirical inquiry. Only when a clear picture of the gendered organizational environment, and its underlying forces, is drawn out, can we initiate strategies and processes to challenge and change persistent gender inequality underpinned by dominant masculine hegemony.

Case studies have the power to examine the sample thoroughly by taking into account the context that shapes practices in reality. Yin (1993, p.31) argues: "A major rationale for using (case studies) is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring because the context is hypothesized to contain important explanatory information." The study of context is important because behaviour takes place within a context and its meaning stems largely from that context. The same behaviour can mean very different things depending on its context (de Vaus, 2001). This is particularly true of studies about

Chinese women. Feminists contested that their social status is subject to a number of interrelated social, political, economic and cultural factors, all of which play an important role in shaping and transforming women's social existence. The past twenty-five years represent the fastest changing period of time in contemporary China with significant social development in both economic growth and standard of living. Therefore, any study of Chinese sport which ignored general social influences would not be convincing. In short, we cannot use a static perspective to study cases immersed in a fast changing social context. The different retirement ages for women and men, for instance, which were seen as an example of affirmative action in the 1950s, was questioned as a discriminatory regulation some fifty years later in the new millennium.

A case study design is also a theory driven research method. A case study deals with the whole case but it does not mean it covers everything about the case. As de Vaus (2001) vividly puts it: "It [description of the case] will be more like painting of a landscape than a photograph; it will be an interpretation rather than a mirror image" (p. 225). In other words, a case study is selective in description and guided by explicit theories in order to highlight certain aspects of the case and explain the phenomenon under investigation. The selectiveness of cases in this study was informed by previous studies on gender inequality in national sport organizations conducted in countries such as Canada, Australia and Norway. Characteristics of the Chinese sport delivery system were also taken into account. Hopefully, this research will provide empirical insight into the construction and reproduction of the gender structure of Chinese national sport organizations.

How the Cases Were Selected

As outlined in Chapter Three, there are two major types of sport governing bodies within the State Sport Commission: ministry departments (nine) and sport management centres (twenty-one). The latter represent the executive bodies of more than ninety national sport associations. This study focuses one ministry department and two national sport associations.

The ministry department was selected based on my capacity to access the most contacts with the department. Several factors were taken into account in selecting the national sport associations. First, this research focuses on established Olympic sports that are central to the country's Olympic Honour Program and key contributors to gold medals in international competitions. Organizations managing such sports receive favourable budget support and play an instrumental role in institutional reforms within the national sport system. Second, traditional sports with a long history of women's participation and comparatively new sports with the recent addition of women's disciplines were included. For example, in some Olympic sports, women made their debut on the Olympic program very early such as gymnastics in 1928 and shooting in 1968. However, some sports have remained male preserves for decades without female involvement. For example, women's soccer became a full medal sport at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 and women's wrestling was introduced in Athens in 2004. Such consideration in selection was intended to explore whether sport organizations respond with varying degrees of attention to women in their administrative structure depending on their involvement in the sport. Third, given Chinese female athletes' impressive international sport success, I have attempted to include sports which show a sharp

contrast in the performance level between female and male athletes. For instance, Chinese female swimmers were highly successful in the mid-1990s by rewriting a number of world records, while their male peers seldom made it to the podium. Finally, the size of the organization was a factor that a single-sport management centre as well as a national sport association within a multi-sport management centre were included.

Brief Introduction to the Three Organizations

To protect the identity of the organizations, what is presented here are composites drawn from my observation and knowledge of several sport organizations. In other words, they do not represent real organizations. Each case shares common features of a number of sport organizations within the national sport system but does not match any of them precisely. By the same token, all interviewees were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity except for the female Vice Minister, who agreed that her identity could be revealed.

Organization A: Small Organization in a Multi-sport Management Centre

This is a typical small sport organization within a multi-sport management centre. As a low profile individual sport, it is not especially popular at the grassroots level. Not widely practised by youth in normal schools, it is mainly available in special sport schools and professional sport teams. In addition, the sport is generally referred to as a "masculine" discipline because it demands extensive presentation of muscular strength. Women were not allowed to compete in this sport until the early 1980s. Female events were accepted as a full medal sport to the Olympic program only recently. China is considered a world-class powerhouse in the sport, particularly in women's events. Given

its strong ability to win gold medals, this organization has put significant emphasis on maintaining a world calibre national team. Obtaining a place on the national team is very competitive. The organization enjoys a high status in the sport management center, and the director of the management centre, which houses the organization, serves as its president and pays considerable attention to the national team's performance.

The structure of Organization A is rather flat with different responsibilities roughly distributed among a half dozen full-time staff members. Its organizational chart is presented in Figure 3.4 (see p. 46) The division head takes the overall responsibility for daily operations. Given the short history of women's participation in this sport, there have been very few female managers in the organization's management structure. At the time of the interviews, the vice division head was the only female in the executive office. She was promoted to the position a few years earlier during a structural reorganization of the sport management centre. She is in charge of the women's national team and holds positions in both the Asian and international sport federations. Before her promotion, both the men's and women's national teams were managed by males. Two other female staff mainly assisted these men and had little influence in important decision-making processes. However, the female vice division head's rising status aroused jealousy and speculation within the organization. It was rumoured that her promotion was attributed to a close relationship with the director of the management centre, and she felt isolated by her colleagues in the centre. Unfortunately, few people highlighted her strengths: strong English ability, excellent communication skills with international federations, a post-graduate degree in sport, and particularly, an outstanding speech at the open selection interview presentations. As a result, she was reconsidering her future in the organization.

Organization B: Large Organization as a single-sport Management Centre

This is a comparatively large organization, functioning as a single-sport management centre dedicated to one team sport. This sport has a long history of women's involvement and is popular in China because the women's national team has achieved extraordinary international success. Professional leagues were also set up a few years ago, which constituted another priority for the organization along with the national teams.

There are about twenty full-time employees in Organization B, staffing various divisions. The organization has adopted a departmentalized structure and is more hierarchical when compared to Organization A. Its organizational chart is illustrated in Figure 3.2 (see p. 45). The director of the sport management centre is the supreme leader of the organization. Two vice directors assist the director in different areas through various divisions divided into two business groups. One is core and includes competition and training, the national teams, and the professional league; the other is considered non-core and includes foreign affairs, accounting, and a secretariat.

There are a number of female staff (about thirty per cent of the total) in this organization. Given the outstanding performance of the women's national team, female elite athletes have a greater opportunity to enter management, coaching, and officiating positions in this sport. At the top of the hierarchy is a female vice director, who is also a former national team member, yet she is responsible for men's national team not the women's. Since the women's national team is a top priority for the organization, it is administered by the male director. Gendered organizational patterns also exist at the divisional level. For example, there are no women in the core business divisions since the only woman in competition and training division had left the organization shortly before

the fieldwork occurred. At the time of the interviews, all female staff worked in the non-core business divisions.

Organization C: Ministry Department in the State Sport Commission

This organization is a ministry department within the State Sport Commission, and has about a dozen full-time stuff. As a functionary of the Commission, this organization does not manage any particular sport but is responsible for the general supervision and coordination of one aspect of sport affairs. A ministry department is similar to a mediator between the ministers and the sport management centres. Reports on important decisions from the management centres are first directed to these departments to propose recommendations, which are then forwarded to the ministers for approval. In a ministry department, there are generally three divisions headed by a department director and a vice department director. The vast majority of employees of a ministry department are graduates from physical education institutes, and many have a graduate degree.

There has not been a female department director in the organization's history, and all three divisions are headed by men. Women account for thirty per cent of the total staff and are evenly distributed among the three divisions. Two vice division heads are female and both have graduate degrees.

Data Collection

Semi-structured Interviews

A total of fourteen semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with sport administrators, both female (nine) and male (five) from the selected organizations. All interviews took place in Beijing between September and October 2003. Research

participants were interviewed at places and times most convenient to them. Eight were interviewed in their offices during free time at work and two at restaurants during lunch breaks. The interview with the director of a sport management centre was conducted at the national team's training gymnasium. The former female Vice Minister was interviewed at her home because she had retired several years ago and it was during a national holiday. The time duration of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two and a half hours. Interviewees with females were, on average, longer than those with males.

Twelve interviews were tape-recorded with consent obtained from the interviewees. A male participant interviewed at a restaurant during a lunch break declined to be tape-recorded. In his case, I compiled a thorough retrospective account of our conversation based on memory.

A guideline for questions was prepared before conducting the interviews (see Appendix C). Many ideas for the questions were derived from Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1978) as well as two sport specific studies on the gender structure and power discourse in national sport organizations (Hall et al., 1990 and McKay, 1997). Kanter (1978) applied two general thematic categories in organizing her analysis: roles and images (managers, secretaries and wives), and structures and processes (opportunity, power and numbers). Hall et al. (1990) categorized questions into six aspects in their questionnaire on the status of women in selected national sport organizations. McKay (1997) did a comprehensive review of previous studies on barriers to women professionals in sport and grouped his questionnaire items into five parts. The most

salient items were personal background, organizational experience with sexual discrimination and comments on affirmative action.

In developing my question list, I put emphasis on collecting information with regard to recruitment, selection, evaluation and promotion processes in these organizations. In particular, I was interested in how female sport managers perceived their career development in these organizations. Therefore, my questions fell into six groups: governance and structure, personnel arrangement, sport experience and professional expertise, culture and values, affirmative action, and for women, their self-perception of their status in sport management. As a guideline, this list of questions was inclusive and open to adjustment. The framing and sequencing of questions were customized according to how much information had been collected regarding the organization and the research participant.

My previous work experience in the State Sport Commission enabled me to include both current employees and those with long service in the organizations who had left due to retirement or were transferred before being interviewed. For example, a male interviewee who had worked in Organization A for more than ten years but had been appointed to another division within the same management centre was still approached as a key informant. Two other female interviewees had both left their organizations because they were transferred to the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games.

Each interview could be roughly divided into three stages: preparation, implementation and reflection. Preparation occurred before face-to-face contact with the interviewees took place. This stage involved reviewing all relevant background information about the organization and the interviewee collected through various sources,

as well as how the interviewee had been approached (i.e., whether I was acquainted with the interviewee or had been introduced through an intermediary). This degree of acquaintance determined the basic tone of the conversation and the time needed for my self-introduction. I then developed a customized list of questions for the interview with key questions particularly relevant to the interviewee and the organization highlighted for emphasis during the conversation. This strategy was very helpful to ensure a focused interview and an efficient use of time.

Implementation started when I arrived at the site of the interview and met the informant in person. An interview shares many features with a friendly conversation, although a conversation seeking explicit research information should not be confused with a casual talk. At the beginning of each interview, I devoted a few minutes to introducing my personal background, and explaining my research project as well as related ethical concerns. Then I invited the interviewee to tell me about his or her personal experience, such as how and when they came to work in the organization. I found it was an easy ice-breaker to get the informant to start talking. I followed up with further exploratory questions when the interviewee felt comfortable with the interaction by becoming more responsive and cooperative.

My own reflections on the interview were generally recorded on the same day. I would write down my overall observations and impressions about the interviewee such as attitude, degree of cooperation, reaction to questions, willingness to provide information and style of talking. A summary of key information obtained from the interview both about the organization and the individual was documented. I also examined whether any emerging themes or new informants could be identified, whether any cross reference

needed to be made to proceeding interviews, and what new questions should be incorporated into the next interview.

Informal Talks

Three features distinguished informal talking from the formal interview. First, there was no defined interview agenda to follow in these casual interactions. Such informal chatting generally touched upon only one particular topic relevant to the study. In most cases, I took every chance to explain what my research was about and then listened to people's comments. It worked like magic since most generously volunteered their opinions. Second, most data were gathered without the speakers' awareness. The conversation simply took place naturally. Finally, these informal talks were characterized by the wide breadth of backgrounds among the people with whom I spoke. The vast majority were affiliated with the State Sport Commission but not the three selected organizations under investigation. Therefore, they provided me with significant complementary information about the Commission as well as these three organizations. There were either retired senior officials, incumbent public servants in ministry departments, or younger sport managers. The purpose here was to make full use of my fieldwork in Beijing by gathering as much information as possible. In total, twelve informal talks took place, and all were documented in my fieldwork journal.

Document Collection

Most documents were collected from the Department of Sport Policy in the State Sport Commission. There is also a division of sport theory study in this department, responsible for managing all social sciences and humanity research projects in Chinese

sport. Most materials are collections of research papers and proceedings of sport conferences and symposiums on various subjects. I also obtained valuable materials from the female Vice Minister and a female official in charge of women's work in the sport ministry concerning statistics of female administrators in addition to a collection of research papers on women's studies. In general, very limited archives were available from the three selected organizations because, according to my interviewees, these contained work reports delivered to senior leaders and were therefore unavailable to outsiders.

Online Sources

A number of government and non-governmental organization official web sites were accessed regularly. They provided a comparatively direct and reliable source of government regulations, organizational documents, and historical information. Included were the State Sport Commission (www.sport.gov.cn), the Chinese Olympic Committee (www.olympic.cn), the All-China Sports Federation (www.sport.org.cn), All-China Women's Federation (www.women.org.cn), the International Olympic Committee (www.olympic.org), the Canadian Olympic Committee (www.olympic.ca), and Beijing Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (www.bocog.org). Information was also obtained from a variety of journalistic sources, both in Chinese and English. They included, but were not limited to, *China Daily* (www.chinadaily.com.cn), *People's Daily Online* (www.peopledaily.com.cn), *Xinhua News Agency* (www.xinhua.org), *China Sport Daily* (www.sportsol.com.cn). Also included were: *zhongguo tiyu wanwei wang* (Chinese sport wanwei website, www.sportschina.com), the top ten sport websites in Chinese, such

as *Hua'ao Xingkong* (www.sports.cn), and some of the most popular Chinese online service providers, such as Sina (www.sina.com.cn) and Sohu (www.sohu.com.cn).

Insider Status

Before embarking on my academic study in Canada, I had worked in the State Sport Commission for four years. I had business interactions with all three sport organizations under investigation and was acquainted with most interviewees. Given this, I had several concerns before beginning the study such as whether I would be biased by my personal experience and not sensitive enough to some phenomena in the organizations. However, my insider status proved to be a bonus throughout my one-month fieldwork in Beijing and the subsequent data analysis. It can be conceptualized at different levels, both social and individual. I discuss the issue from three aspects: as a witness to social and cultural conflicts; as a researcher, particularly as an interviewer; and as a research subject, in particular as a new mother.

Experiencing Social and Cultural Conflicts

China is still a country undergoing significant transition despite more than two decades of reform. Its entry into the World Trade Organization and the selection of Beijing as host of the 2008 Summer Olympics will definitely speed up China's integration into the rest of world. Nonetheless, fundamental changes do not happen quickly and it will take some time before China fully joins the global club. This is why there is much in China that is complicated and difficult to understand, especially by Westerners and sometimes even by the Chinese as well. From time to time, I had to remind myself of these realities. Knowing the rituals, protocol, and more importantly, the

taboos is considered crucial to doing business in China. There is also no exception in doing research. The cultural language is silent, unspoken and hard to master within a short time. In this sense, as one culturally brought up in China and now having academic training in the West, I felt privileged to observe this contrast between East and West. The impact was felt throughout my fieldwork as illustrated by a few examples.

I addressed people by their administrative titles (i.e., Director Wang) or used an informal title, *laoshi* (teacher) to show respect to those who were more senior. Generally, there was no need to shake hands unless I was introduced very formally by a high-ranking official to another. Being humble and using polite expressions was always welcome. Being self-effacing is more than just a courtesy; it is a common practice and ritual in Chinese society. As someone who had worked in the same system as many of the interviewees, I was occasionally able to speak their "bureaucratese", creating intimacy between the speakers.

Ethical concerns are always a key issue in most social science and humanities research. It became a more salient concern in this study, initiated in the West but with empirical data collected in an oriental country, where distinctly different social, historical and cultural contexts prevail. This sharp contrast in underlying values and norms is reflected in several aspects. First, this study was submitted to an ethics review process before the actual fieldwork took place. A complete set of relevant documents was prepared, including a brief introduction to the study, participant information letter and informed consent form for the participant. Unfortunately, they were not applicable in Chinese culture, where building mutual trust is largely based upon personal connection rather than signing formal documents. On the contrary, the use of such written documents

aroused concerns from the interviewees. This was evident in my first two interviews where participants looked hesitant when they were presented with background information documents and asked to sign the informed consent form. Therefore, I decided to discard the documents and integrate the ethical issues as an oral explanation at the beginning of each interview. At the same time, I tried to provide more information to my initial contacts, who helped me set up interviews with the research participants. Being more familiar with those initial contacts, I was able to explain my study in more detail and they then forwarded the information to the research participants.

As a Researcher

It is no exaggeration to say that, without my previous involvement in the State Sport Commission and the personal connection network, I would never have been able to complete this research. I drew heavily upon my knowledge of the current Chinese sport system when identifying organizations for study. All documents obtained from the Department of Sport Policy were marked as internal materials. In other words, they were published in very limited volumes as internal reference archives and not available for public distribution. I was given these books as preferential treatment when a friend introduced me to a vice department director.

The benefits of my insider status were no better reflected throughout the interviewing process, the major source of empirical data. For instance, a friend of mine lent me a phone directory of the State Sport Commission with all of the sport organization's contact numbers. My former colleagues were always happy to act as my references in approaching interviewees I had never met before. A number of research participants said explicitly that they would have declined an interview were I not

introduced by so and so because they had no obligation to undertake interviews for research rather than journalistic purposes. The interviewees generally showed more hospitality after I explained my work experience in the Commission. Their serious facial expressions immediately disappeared, and they felt more relaxed to talk to a former colleague rather than a stranger coming from far and having no connection with their world.

At the same time another issue arose. This was the conflict between building rapport and maintaining control over the direction of the interview. Oakley (2003) argues that what the methodology textbooks say about interviewing is embedded in a prominent masculine paradigm. The conventional concepts of interviewing promote a hierarchical relationship between the two speakers: the interviewee is confined to a subordinate position as a passive data-producing machine and the interviewer is typified as a data-collecting instrument. This masculine paradigm presents practical difficulties when women interview women. Oakley (2003) contends that more information will be obtained "when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 252). Interviewing women is "a strategy for documenting women's own accounts of their lives" (p. 253). In most cases, I let the interviewee speak freely even though some wandered away a bit from my question. I found that after establishing trust, I was able to raise more sensitive questions, some of which probed into their private lives, such as a widowed life or a broken marriage. Many female interviews told me at the end of interviews that they had before never shared their experience and opinions so openly.

As a Research Subject

As explained in Chapter One, my own work background was a major source of inspiration to start this study. The fact that I had worked, as had most interviewees, in similar organizational settings within the State Sport Commission, qualified my role as a research subject. I had once shared common experiences which gave me significant first-hand information of the organizations and people I studied.

I am also different from them in some aspects. For example, I am younger than most interviewees who were primarily middle-aged managers. I have much less seniority since my four years of work experience is nothing compared to their several decades of service. I used to be an entry-level manager at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, while most interviewees held middle and senior administrative positions. Finally, I had left the national bureaucracy and had no formal affiliation to the Commission. Therefore, it was important for me to show innocence before most participants on some matters, since they were expected to have more knowledge and more authority to provide information.

At the data analysis stage, I further reflected on my role as a research subject from a new perspective because I became a new mother during this period of time. I was in the early stages of pregnancy at the time of conducting the interviews. However, I still felt like an outsider when female interviewees talked about their frustration during their childbearing and childcare years. Questions of childcare sounded like remote subjects to me, a yet-to-be mother. In short, it was a public issue but not yet a personal one. The arrival of my newborn baby changed my life enormously and gave me an entirely new perspective to understand family issues more deeply. Suddenly, these women's words made more sense to me especially when I linked my own life to theirs. I was able to gain

more from the data and arrived at a deeper interpretive analysis on topics particularly related to parenthood and childcare. On the one hand, becoming a mother delayed the progress of my studies, but on the other, it enhanced my ability to interpret the data. As the data analysis proceeded, I felt more confident to speak both individually and collectively for the women I interviewed. According to Mills (1961), the sociological imagination is the ability to go beyond the personal issues we all experience and connect them to broader social structures. His statement perfectly mirrored my academic journey throughout this study. Gender inequality in organizations came to me first as purely academic questions and eventually inspired reflections on my own experience. Similarly, questions about family responsibilities versus work obligations went beyond the boundary of personal concerns and became an important social issue for me. Therefore, the valuable lessons I learned from my personal life facilitated my understanding of the research question and guided me to eventually theorize and treat it as a social issue.

I was still worried about whether I would be biased by my emotional identification with the female interviewees. Eventually, I realized that the foremost question was whether unbiased social studies and purely neutral researchers were possible. As Naiman (2000) states: "No knowledge is unbiased, since it is all collected by humans who have brains full of ideas that cannot be laid aside while something is 'neutrally' studied . . . . We most commonly notice bias only when it differs from our own views" (p. 17). In light of her argument, I look more biased in the eyes of those males, who have become accustomed to the dominant masculine hegemony in management. However, I would argue that a biased analysis is not necessarily wrong. As Naiman (2000) further contends: "A piece of information can be true or false regardless of the bias of the observer. Put

differently, information can be biased and true or biased and false" (p. 17). As a socially constructed human, a researcher, and her perception of the world, cannot be value free but should withstand rigorous scientific investigation. The more information we have, the more possible and powerful we are in making right judgments about reality. If this hypothesis holds true, I argue that I would have been more biased without the knowledge and intimacy I had with the research environment and research subjects.

Demographics of the Interviewees

Strictly speaking the number of interviewees in this study did not seem to carry adequate significance to draw statistical conclusions. However, some patterns reflected in the demographic data aroused my interest because, in some aspects, they mirrored the broad reality of many sport organizations.

All interviewees had university degrees. Females, in general, were better educated. Three female interviewees held graduate degrees while only one male had a Master's degree. With regard to areas of specialization, female interviewees presented a more diversified academic background. All five male participants graduated from physical education institutes (PEIs) under the Commission's leadership. However, only two females were graduates from PEIs. The other seven women showed diversity in their education and specialization, including sport, politics, and biochemistry. It is worth noting that three female interviewees had specialized in English during their undergraduate studies, and three women chose to work at national sport organizations because their husbands worked in the State Sport Commission.

Ages of the interviewees are shown in Table 4.1. More than half of the interviewees were between forty and fifty years old. All male interviewees were from forty to sixty

years, while females range widely from twenty seven to seventy years. All interviewees were married and had children. Two females were widowed and one was remarried.

Table 4.1

Age of Interviewees

	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Above 60
Female	1	2	4	1	1
Male	0	0	3	2	0
Total	1	2	7	3	1

Two male interviewees were former elite athletes, and both had been national champions. Four female interviewees had trained and competed at different levels from national and provincial teams to varsity and sport school teams.

On the whole, the administrative ranking of interviewees ranged from entry-level managers at the bottom of the bureaucracy, to middle management positions at the divisional level, and up to senior leaders at the departmental and ministerial levels. In other words, the research participants covered all key administrative levels in the Chinese sport management structure. It should be pointed out that the majority of interviewees were department directors, division heads and deputies, representing the most active players in the power structure of the Chinese sport administration hierarchy. Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the administrative rankings of all interviewees.

Table 4.2

Administrative Ranking of Interviewees

	Minister	Department director	Division head	Entry-level manager
Female	1	1	5	2
Male	0	4	1	0
Total	1	5	6	2

As illustrated in the above tables, male interviewees were concentrated in the middle age ranges, generally in their forties or fifties, and occupied comparatively higher administrative ranks such as vice department director or department director. Female interviewees were, on average, younger than men, with most in middle level and, more often, less powerful administrative positions such as vice division heads.

Data Interpretation and the Emergence of Themes

Handling qualitative data is a serious concern faced by many researchers who have adopted a qualitative research methodology. What I had employed in this study for data interpretation is a data-handling procedure developed by Turner (1981). Turner elaborates in fine details a series of nine stages that guide starting researchers through their data analysis. This nine-stage approach includes the following main activities: develop categories, saturate categories, abstract definitions, use the definitions, exploit categories fully, develop and follow-up links between categories, consider the conditions under which the links hold, make connections, where relevant, to existing theory, and use extreme comparisons to the maximum to test emerging relationships.

My data analysis started from interview transcription and translation because all the interviews were conducted in Chinese. At the beginning, I attempted to transcribe the interviews in Chinese and then translate the text into English. However, it did not turn to be an effective and efficient way. As is mentioned earlier, I gave research participants much flexibility to offer their comments on a variety of issues, some of which were not necessarily relevant to my research question. Therefore, from the third interview, I started directly transcribing the recording into English with an awareness of skipping irrelevant sections.

The transcribing process enabled me to get more familiar with my data and their richness, which facilitated tremendously the primary stages of data interpretation. Categories and sub-themes emerged naturally during the transcription, which forced me to pause for a while when finishing each interview and summarize what categories and definitions had been accumulated. Therefore, categories already became saturated when transcriptions were completed. At next step, I read through the complete transcription again and again, further producing definitions and establishing links and connections. The first draft manuscript was developed based this preliminary data analysis, not surprisingly, consisted of repetition and redundancy, and was loosely structured. I revisited the categories and themes and further examined their relationships and linked them to existing theories and previous studies. Further connections were identified, cross reference made and sub-themes merged and combined. Based on the refined and better-structured analysis, the second draft of data interpretation was developed and finalized. This is what will be presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five - Results and Discussion

This chapter draws upon the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter Two, particularly the analytical frameworks of Connell (2002) and Kanter (1977), to conceptualize how gender works in Chinese national sport organizations. The main discussion focuses on how power relationships between men and women have shaped the organizational landscape of the Chinese sports hierarchy. The paucity of studies on gender in Chinese sport organizations determines that the presentation of results is initially descriptive in order to provide an empirical grounds for further interpretation and analysis. Drawing a picture of the current reality provides a premise "to understand, explain, and eventually alter the gender structure in these organizations" (Hall et al., 1989, p. 41).

In many organizational practices, gender discrimination is manifested by depriving women of equal opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities or to compete with men. The reason that women are largely absent from senior management is not because they are not qualified or competent for the positions. More often than not, their absence or under-representation in upper level positions is rooted in the fact that women are not included as prospective candidates for consideration in hiring and promotion. They are simply not given the chance to demonstrate their competence and potential.

This lack of opportunity is most salient in organizational processes such as recruitment, selection, evaluation, and promotion, all of which are the focus of discussion in the following sections. In these organizational activities, opportunity plays a critical role in undermining women's organizational success. Unfortunately, unequal career opportunity is seldom discussed in the discourse concerning Chinese women in sport.

Arguably, Chinese organizations are said to be unbiased with regard to gender given the government's advocacy of gender equality. However, it is more accurate to say that people are blind to discriminatory practices because they have penetrated deeply into the organizational culture. In this sense, Connell's (2002) perspective, based on the gender relations of power, production, emotion and symbolic relations, is very useful to conceptualize and re-vision the gender neutrality of these organizational processes.

Part I of this chapter offers a chronological review of the main recruitment strategies and selection criteria for hiring sport administrators from 1978 to 2003. I examine the dominant employment patterns and tendencies over this period of time. It is argued that a special group of sport administrator candidates, former elite athletes, face a particularly challenging transition because their elite sport experience brings gendered implications to their careers in sport management.

Part II discusses several major qualifications that are identified as the most valuable contributors in decisions concerning promotion. Some characteristics benefit women while others impede them from pursuing ambitious career goals. There are both institutional barriers and perceptual biases that undermine women's promotion opportunities in sport organizations.

Part III examines the specific working environment and typical job assignment patterns between the sexes in different types of national sport organizations. It is argued that the prevailing mentality, emphasizing the winning of gold medals, reinforced by China's Olympic Honour Program, has put tremendous pressure on these particular sport organizations and legitimized a result-oriented and personally demanding organizational culture, which gives little consideration to women with families.

Once again, as explained in Chapter Four, all interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their identities, except for the interview with the female Vice Minister.

Part I: Recruitment and Selection

Burton (1992) has analyzed the "mobilization of masculine bias" in selection and promotion of staff. Although Kanter (1977) has mainly discussed opportunities for promotion, her analysis does not shed light on recruitment and selection. Before analyzing women's under-representation in upper management, there is a need to trace the problem back to its roots in recruitment and selection. If few women are employed or the best qualified women are not employed, what is the point of discussing the absence of competent women in leadership? If women have not been given equal access to employment, how can we expect a sufficient pool of qualified women leaders to exist? It is not meaningful to talk about women's status in sport management if they have been excluded from the organizational hierarchy. In this sense, recruitment and selection are important in the discussion of women's organizational well-being.

Over the past two and a half decades, the recruitment practices of the State Sport Commission have been transformed tremendously. Significant changes have taken place in almost every stage of the process: where the candidates come from; how they have been selected; and who has made the final selection decision. All these changes reflected broad social changes in China's transition to a market economy. This section reviews the changing dynamics of recruitment and selection which have taken place between 1978 and 2003.

Traditional Job Assignment in the 1980s

In the 1980s, during the early years of reform, the planned economy still played an essential role, and a highly centralized management mechanism remained prevalent. Life employment, also known as the iron-rice-bowl (*tie fanwan*), was dominant in the public sector. Unemployment was rare in cities, and motivation levels were accordingly low due to the lack of incentives. The national labour market was under tight state control, and the social mobility of the population was heavily restricted by the Household Registration System (*hujizhi or hukou*).[1] Under such circumstances, it was considered important to enter a well-paid work unit with favourable benefits and compensation plans, and o then try to secure the job for life. Employment was mainly manipulated by arbitrary state assignment. University students, in short supply at that time, were assigned jobs upon graduation based on a macro-control system of human resources. Students were very passive and given little room to choose their future employers. They had to wait to be selected. Such a mechanism provided people at the top of the hierarchy with an opportunity to use their personal power and connections to help their family members, relatives, and friends secure good jobs.

During this period of time, the vast majority of employees in the State Sport Commission came from the six major physical education institutes (PEIs) under its direct leadership. It is also worth noting that this traditional recruitment was based principally on selection according to merit in that top students were more likely to come to the attention of the State Sport Commission. In the early 1980s, the ministry departments often organized investigation and research working groups (*diaoyan gongzuo zu*) to conduct consultations and collect information from grassroots institutions. Task forces

were set up and sent to PEIs and local sport commissions. Face-to-face meetings were held with the local sport administrators, scholars, and students. Many working groups served as talent scouts to find prospective administrators for the State Sport Commission.[2] For example, Mr. Deng, a division head with about twenty years of service in the Commission, was a typical beneficiary of such practices. In his second year of study at a PEI, a task force from the Personnel Department of the Commission went to his university on an investigation and research tour. As a student representative, he attended a seminar meeting organized by the task force and actively participated in discussions. He recalled that "partly because my talk at the meeting impressed the people from Beijing, I was recruited by the State Sport Commission when graduating in 1984 "(Interview 2, p. 2). Mr. Wang, the director of Organization B, was another prime example of an even more successful group arising from the system:

> I attended the Beijing Institute of Physical Education, now a university, in 1978. It was the first year that universities resumed admitting students through the National University Entrance Examination. So we became the first group of university graduates after the Great Cultural Revolution. I was selected by the State Sport Commission when graduating in 1982 and started my long time service in a department until the establishment of this sport management centre. A number of alumni, who graduated in the same year as I, are now working in key management positions in Chinese sport. At the department director's level alone, there are a whole bunch of us. (Interview 5, p. 1)

Besides these top students picked by the State Sport Commission in its talent drafts, there was another channel for obtaining jobs with the Commission--doing internships. Traditionally, each year the State Sport Commission and its affiliated organizations accepted a number of graduating students from PEIs, especially the one in Beijing given its geographical proximity, to do internships. The practice proved to be a win-win situation for both the students and the potential employers. Direct interactions in the

office allowed the students to demonstrate their capabilities. At the same time, the organizations were also given more time to fully evaluate their prospective employees rather than making judgments on partial information from brief interviews. For instance, a female vice division head reported that she felt it natural to receive a position at the ministry department after doing her internship of several months in the office in the late 1980s. She was not alone, as several of her classmates were hired in this way despite the difficult situation in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square event:

> It was not easy to find a job in Beijing when I graduated. Our university made a great effort to facilitate our job assignment. I got to do my internship at this division of the department and was recruited by the department afterwards. A number of my classmates were retained by the office where they did their internships. (Interview 10, p. 2)

The tradition of arranging student-internships in the State Sport Commission existed throughout the reform years and has remained a useful way to import new blood into the Chinese sport hierarchy. For example, when Ms. Jia quit her job from the Commission in 2001, her position was soon filled by a student who was assigned to do an internship.

Institutionalized Recruitment System in the 1990s

The traditional recruitment system, characterized by job assignment and a narrow concentration on sport majors, had both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, graduates from the PEIs were deemed a legitimate source of sport administrators for several reasons. First, they had achieved university degrees and thus were equipped with basic knowledge and training since a mandate of the PEIs was to develop sport administrators and professional workers. Second, they specialized in sport-related

subjects and, in most cases, had acquired sport experience and involvement at various levels. With their insight into sport, they appeared to be an ideal and privileged source of sport administrators. On the other hand, the system was questionable in other respects. It was not backed by an institutionalized selection procedure and lacked fairness and transparency. Decisions were not made on the basis of collective evaluations or wide consultation. Furthermore, the practice appeared more problematic because substantial socio-economic changes took place as a result of economic reforms. An emerging free market gained influence in a more open and capitalistic society in the early 1990s. Inevitably, the impact penetrated into sport and had significant implications on the changing patterns of recruitment. The national sport organizations were faced with new challenges, such as professional leagues, sport marketing, sponsorship, and television rights, all of which did not exist to any meaningful extent under a planned economy. Against this backdrop, the expertise of conventional sport management officials seemed narrow and inadequate to respond to the growing challenges of the reform era. The State Sport Commission was compelled to recruit people from various areas, rather than just from sport. Sport experience was not always as significant in evaluating applicants as it once was. Sport organizations finally opened up to people with different skills, knowledge, and perspectives. Under these circumstances, the educational background of sport administrators tended to be a more diversified. Sport management was no longer a reserve for sport majors and it began to embrace professionals with various types of knowledge and skills.

During this period, the national labour market saw an increase in the population's social mobility. Government institutions and corporations were given more freedom to

recruit people from a wider spectrum of candidates. University students were also allowed to seek employment in both the public and private sectors. Since the early 1990s, employment has finally become a mutual choice between employees and employers, and the traditional job assignment was replaced by a "mutual choosing system" (*shuangxiang xuanze*). Job hunting, through the sending out of resumes, became common at this time. By way of example, a female vice division head reported that she was assigned to a middle school as a PE teacher upon graduation from the sport department of her university in the mid-1980s. A few years later, driven by the wish to become a university teacher, she wrote the National Graduate Study Entrance Examination. After finishing her Master's degree in the mid-1990s, she found herself with a wide range of employment options. She was able to choose jobs she liked and even one which she had never considered:

> Even after completing my Master's degree, I still wanted to be a teacher and had no intention to shift to administration. Fortunately, the talent market was opening up and people came to have more freedom to choose a work unit. I sent out about thirty resumes and got offers from two universities. Just before signing a formal contract with one university, I received a response from the State Sport Commission. Our former division head called me for an interview and that's how I ended up here. (Interview 9, pp. 2-3)

After working in the department for four years, she was promoted to a vice division head, something she had never envisioned in her career plan ten years before.

Along with the increasing freedom and flexibility in employment, the recruitment practice at government agencies became more institutionalized and standardized, as symbolized by the adoption of a comprehensive and transparent selection procedure. In 1997, for the first time, the Personnel Ministry organized a unified national recruitment of public servants from new university graduates to fill vacancies in the central

government. Students with recommendations from their universities were allowed to apply for entry-level positions in various government ministries. As is still the case today, all applicants have to write a national examination testing their administrative knowledge. The three candidates with top scores in the written exam advance to interviews. For some positions, additional tests of professional knowledge are required. For instance, foreign language majors have to pass another interview involving their oral and translation skills.

It is no exaggeration to say that the institutionalized open recruitment mechanism provided a comparatively open and equal competition environment for women. In 1998, when the State Sport Commission recruited public servants from newly graduated university students, about thirty per cent of the final candidates were female, and most of them had no connection to sport. Ms. Jia was one of these women, and she attributed her entry into sport to the fairness of this open selection process:

> I learned about a student's story during the interview. The man applied for a position with strong confidence because he had a relative working in the senior management of the Commission. So as long as he got an interview opportunity, the job was his. Unfortunately, he ranked fourth in the written exam. [Only the top three applicants could advance to interviews.] He was not qualified for the interview despite this influential connection. (Interview 14, p. 6)

Her positive appraisal of this system was based upon her own experience. She obtained the job because she had the highest interview score, better than two male applicants. On the other hand, a graduate student, who had done an internship in the same department, was eliminated even though the department was willing to hire her:

> But she was too nervous and performed poorly at the interview. The selection committee is composed of the department directors and officials from the Personnel Department. So the committee had to make a fair evaluation of each interviewee based on performance. Otherwise, the selection would become a nominal formality and outsiders coming from nowhere like me would have little chance. (Interview 14, p. 6)

The transparency of the new recruitment procedure is best reflected in the contrast between ministry departments and sport management centres. Early in 1998, national sport associations were separated from the State Sport Commission and twenty-one sport management centres were consequently set up as the executive bodies for these associations. The changes coincided with the first national recruitment of public servants from new university graduates. As explained in Chapter Three, only employees in the ministry departments have the status of public servants. The recruitment practice of ministry departments is centralized and coordinated by the Personnel Department, which strictly implements the selection procedure described above. However, sport management centres have more flexibility in hiring people into entry-level positions. They organize their own recruitment and selection procedure with the assistance of the Human Resources Development Centre. Most openings at various sport management centres are posted on the State Sport Commission's website. On the surface, the hiring process looks open, but it leaves more room for personal manipulation. It is comparatively easy for people with bureaucratic power to influence the final selection without supervision from outside. For instance, the university students recruited by the departments of the Commission in 1998 were graduates of different universities and specialized in a variety of subjects, including law, journalism, economics, accounting, English, and human resources management. By contrast, newly recruited staff in the sport management centres were drawn mostly from the PEIs, and many obtained their jobs through internships or personal connections.[3]

Two Steps Forward and One Step Backward

In the foregoing discussion, little evidence was presented to suggest that explicit gender preference exists in recruitment and selection. Nevertheless, a strong preference for males has remained persistent in employment throughout the reform era. One reason underpinning the persistence of discrimination against women is a biased gender perception engrained in the minds of most Chinese, especially men. Under the traditional job assignment system, employment decisions lay in the hands of a few gatekeepers who had the power to determine who was hired. Gender discrimination, therefore, was more often reflected as personal prejudice rather than the systematic exclusion of women. Only those indisputably qualified female performers were short-listed and perhaps became the final winners against male competitors. A female division head used her recruitment experience to illustrate the unfair competition that young women faced at the beginning of their careers. She graduated from the Beijing Institute of Physical Education in the mid 1980s and was directly employed by the State Sport Commission. A total of six students from her university were selected by the Commission that year and she was the only female. She learned afterwards that her employment was regarded as unexpected because her (female) division head was known to have a strong bias against women:

> Before the selection our division head said that she wouldn't recruit a female. No wonder her colleagues were surprised that she picked me. Since her husband was then Director of the Personnel Department, she was supposed to know every candidate's background very well. It was mostly because I had a strong CV and she was impressed by my performance at school. Being a veteran member of our varsity volleyball team, I also did excellent work in academic studies. I won scholarships for four years and served as class monitor as well. I graduated with distinction that year. (Interview 8, p. 2)

This woman believed that without her distinctive performance at school, achieving her position would have been impossible. Not surprisingly, most employees recruited by the State Sport Commission over this period of time were disproportionately male. For

instance, when a male department director proudly claimed that a group of his classmates had been promoted to department directors, I found only one woman's name, and she was a vice director, not a director as was the case with most of her male classmates. This partly explains the paucity of women senior officials at senior management levels and the lack of rigorous discussion on discrimination in recruitment. People who have benefited from a system are rarely sensitive to its unfairness.

Generally speaking, economic reform brought unprecedented opportunities for women with higher education to assert their competence and career ambition in sport management. In particular, the 1990s witnessed substantial and positive changes in recruitment and selection practices as was evident in the increasing number of women administrators with diverse academic backgrounds who were recruited under the new recruitment system. Nevertheless, gender prejudice was still not removed from formal employment procedures. The diversified composition of selection committees and more democratic decision-making did increase both fairness and transparency in selection. However, given the male domination in senior leadership positions, female applicants seldom appeared to be favourable choices because most selection committees were largely composed of men. Therefore, despite the positive efforts in support of gender equality in employment, the selection practice still worked to screen out female candidates because men, who were doing most of the interviewing, more comfortably bond with other men (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). This finding also supports Hall et al.'s (1989) argument that organizational elites ensure the maintenance of power by selecting those individuals most like themselves. Many male senior directors preferred not to have too many women in their organization. For example, a male department

director admitted in an interview that he was no exception. Coincidentally, there was an open position in his department at the time of his interview. The two recommended candidates were both female. When asked whether he would consider choosing either of them, he said frankly:

> Both candidates have their strengths and are well qualified for the position. But I am still hesitating at the moment. You know, there are already two women in the office. If three, eh... seems too many. Well, a man will be ideal. (Interview 13, p. 6)

In this sense, the real hurdle female candidates must cross to obtain employment is not competition from male candidates but the hidden and entrenched gender discriminatory mindsets among selection committee members.

The emerging market economy system also worked like a double-edged sword with respect to gender inequality in the workplace. Chinese society became more profit driven and pragmatic. One the one hand, many employers came to enjoy more autonomy in recruitment. On the other, some, especially private businesses, were found to abuse their employment rights. Overt employment gender discrimination became rampant again beginning in the late 1990s and remains pervasive today. It is not uncommon to see such phrases as "Jobs only for male students" or "Male student preferred" on application notices. Many female students have had to turn to unconventional job-hunting strategies, such as using their sexuality to enhance their job prospects. Some even attached eye-grabbing photos to their application package. Cosmetics account for a large portion of their total expenditure when job hunting.[4] Although these controversial strategies have sparked debate and even criticism, female students should not be blamed because they are victims, not beneficiaries, under such discriminatory practices. For instance, Ms. Jia, a young entry-level manager, reported that she had encountered explicit gender preference

when graduating and looking for a job in Beijing in the late 1990s. Although she had interviews with several companies, every time she was told "Your C V and interview are impressive, but we prefer a male or a native Beijinger." Even secretarial positions, a traditionally female-dominant occupation, were shut to female students. She said that a company went to her class to hire a male secretary for their president and refused to consider any female students, regardless of their academic performance. Given this disappointing experience in job-hunting, when applying for a public servant position in the State Sport Commission a few months later, she could not help but ask a personnel official three frank and brave questions:

> Suppose I score among the top three in the written exam, will it be a negative factor that I am not from a foreign language university? Suppose I am qualified for an interview, will I be disadvantaged because I am female? Have you internally set a gender preference for a male for this position? (Interview 14, p. 2)

To her surprise, she received three positive "no's". She was convinced that was where she wanted to be. The State Sport Commission did not let her down. She proceeded to the interview and finally won the job with the highest score among all applicants, beating two male competitors for the position in the interview. Ms. Jia was not the only one to comment positively on the fair selection process. Another female staff member, who joined the Commission in the late 1980s, also mentioned in an informal talk that if gender was the foremost concern in recruitment, she would have had no chance against a male applicant.

> There were only two candidates who remained: me and another fellow. Both of us held graduate degrees. I think they had made a thorough evaluation of our performance and abilities. Otherwise, they didn't need to waste any time but simply select the man. (Informal talk 10, p. 1)

Needless to say, there is still a long way to go before gender discrimination in recruitment and selection practices is eliminated. However, given these positive voices from female sport managers, and compared with the rampant blatant employment discrimination in other sectors, there is reason to claim that Chinese sport organizations, though not a gender equality utopia, provide a comparatively fair and impartial platform for women to strive in a competitive career world.

Unfortunately, there are a special group of women, namely former elite female athletes, who were found to share a very different experience in their entry into national sport organizations. The next section is devoted to issues faced by female managers with elite sport experience and the gender perceptions of their athletic achievement as well as their career transition from athletes to sport managers.

Transformation from Elite Athletes to Sport Managers

It is not surprising that a large proportion of sport practitioners and sport administrators are retired elite athletes. A quick examination of some influential sport leaders in international sport organizations and national sport authorities provides support for this assertioin.[5] Experience as an international calibre athlete is often a favourable stepping-stone for women's access to top management posts in sport organizations. A recent study on women's leadership in the Olympic movement, initiated by the International Olympic Committee, indicates that a significant proportion of female National Olympic Committee (NOC) executive members have experience as elite athletes.[6] According to the report, forty-six per cent of female NOC executive members have been international athletes and twenty per cent have been Olympians. As far as the

data from my study are concerned, a total of six interviewees, four women and two men, have sport experience in provincial and national teams.

The reasons for this disproportionate entry of retired elite athletes into sport administration are two-fold. On the one hand, sport administration is a comparatively familiar field for former athletes to enter as a post-sport occupation. They have accumulated first-hand knowledge of and experience with sport. The national sport organizations (NSOs) afford them an opportunity to contribute their expertise to the sporting world. On the other hand, their presence also reflects the need of the NSOs to recruit people with a professional understanding of and insights into sport to manage sport organizations. In this sense, former elite athletes represent an ideal source of sport administrators. It has been a popular practice in many Chinese NSOs' recruitment strategies to hire sportsmen and sportswomen.

Under a well-developed sport talent identification system in China, promising young athletes start professional training in sport schools and elite sport teams at early ages. However, the intensive sport training programs interfere with their academic study,[7] and due to sport injuries and fierce competition from the younger generation, many athletes have to quit professional training in their twenties to begin new careers. But the early withdrawal from formal schooling undermines their future job prospects and restricts most to sport-related employment. To be a coach or a sport administrator became the most popular choices for retired athletes, especially in the 1980s. Athletes who achieved outstanding performance were more likely to obtain such jobs. In the late 1980s, the State Sport Commission adopted a policy to give Olympic and world medallists priority in job assignments. Some successful athletes gained prominent upward mobility

in sport administration hierarchies in recognition of their accomplishments. This trend was manifested in the appointment of a number of veteran national women's volleyball team members to senior management positions immediately after their retirement because the team won five consecutive world championships throughout the 1980s. Nevertheless, such political awards were not necessarily in line with the athletes' individual choices. Many athletes would rather complete their university studies first before settling down to a specific profession. A female vice department director serves as a prime example. As a former Olympic champion, she was promoted to the position right after her retirement. Although she personally preferred to go to university before deciding on a new career, she had to accept the well-intentioned appointment. She recalled in an interview:

> Just one day after I retired from the national team, my appointment was announced. I was told that the appointment was decided by a provincial government leader rather than the provincial sport commission. Declining the appointment would push everybody into an embarrassing situation. (Interview 6, pp. 1-2)

This was a somewhat unusual situation faced by only a few famous elite athletes since not all elite athletes are lucky enough to leap frog up the employment ladder. For most, a formal education is required if they wanted to enter sport-related occupations, including coaching and sport administration after retirement. In this context, the State Sport Commission endorsed an affirmative action policy in the mid-1980s so that top international athletes were able to attend university and enjoyed preferential treatment for completing their studies.[8] The policy created more accessible higher education opportunities for elite athletes and allowed them to better prepare themselves to begin new careers after leaving competition. Physical Education Institutes (PEIs) became popular destinations for athletes who wanted to stay in sport because they could catch up on their academic training as well as gain easy entry to sport organizations. Some athletes

were proactive even before quitting their professional training. For example, as a former national champion and international calibre competitor, Mr. Li was a successful athlete. As a sport administrator, he also became a superstar. He was promoted to senior management positions in his thirties and now, in his mid-forties, is heading a multi-sport management centre. However, it is not easy for an athlete to combine rigorous sport training and academic study. Mr. Li benefited from his formal education. At the same time, he was also aware of how hard the process was. He finished his university degree while still competing with the national team. He pointed out that he had invested twice the effort of his teammates to achieve his goals:

> I took all exams as a full-time student. It demanded extraordinary perseverance. Every day athletes felt exhausted after training and had little energy left to study. I always stayed in the dorm alone to study when my teammates went out for entertainment. I wrote a lot of notes on small pieces of paper and stuck them on the walls in my dorm. So I could read the texts when lying in bed. (Interview 1, p. 6)

His experience might explain why he was supportive of young athletes' wishes to study and always encouraged athletes and coaches to pay more attention to their education.

Mr. Li's experience embodied the usual path many elite athletes took in the 1980s: competing as elite athletes, attending university, and becoming coaches or administrators. This route was partly due to the fact that they did not have many alternative employment choices under the planned economy. From the 1990s, athletes, especially sport stars, came to have increasing freedom and resources to pursue their post-sport careers in other areas because through economic reform, outstanding sport performances brought them not only fame but also fortune.[9] Consequently, coaching and management positions were no longer the most attractive jobs for retired athletes. Some went abroad to continue their athletic causes or to work as coaches in clubs; some opened their own businesses and

became entrepreneurs; and others pursued new careers such as singers and actors in the entertainment industry.[10]

In addition to increasingly diversified employment opportunities, there are other reasons contributing to the decrease in elite athletes' entry into sport administration. First, from the late 1990s and onwards, recruitment practice has become more institutionalized and standardized. Now, all candidates must meet specific selection criteria and go through formal recruitment procedures. The practice of fast-tracking top athletes to senior management positions has become rare. Second, by the end of the 1990s, the notion of sportsmen and sportswomen managing sport became outdated. Sport organizations started seeking candidates from a variety of professional backgrounds. Elite sport experience was not the most valued quality in selection any more. Meanwhile, higher education received a growing emphasis. Former elite athletes, who were generally weak in formal education, found it hard to secure jobs in sport organizations.

However, for those elite athletes who have entered the profession of sport administration, elite sport experience has gendered implications in their transition from athletes to sport managers. Given Chinese female athletes' outstanding international success, especially compared to their male peers, they are supposed to have a competitive advantage in obtaining jobs in sport organizations. Unfortunately, statistics from the State Sport Commission indicated that only thirty per cent (thirty-five) of women cadres at and above the division head level had educational background in sport and sport management.[11] Considering that not all sport graduates had necessarily competed on competitive sport teams, the real number of female officials with sport experience should be even lower. Women with experience in elite sport constitute less than five per cent of

all middle and senior level sport administrators in Chinese national sport organizations. Moreover, women interviewees with sport experience reported that sport and sport administration were not their first occupation choices. This attitude may be partly attributed to the status of sport as a profession in Chinese society. Sport is traditionally regarded as being only physically demanding. Athletes are stereotypically depicted as physically apt but mentally weak. Chinese parents, especially those in big cities, do not encourage their children to take up sport as a profession. In their minds, academic study is the foremost priority for teenagers. For example, Ms. Ren, a former varsity team player at university and now a division head, recalled that she did not continue training on the provincial team because her parents were against her further involvement in competitive sport:

> I went back to continue normal academic study at school and took the National University Entry Examination. I was admitted to a Physical Education Institute because they sought a player for their varsity team. But you know, my examination score was about 200 points higher than students specializing in sport. (Interview 8, p. 1)

The traditional gender perception entrenched in Chinese culture represents another main obstacle for women to assert themselves in the sporting world. As discussed in Chapter Three, Chinese women were traditionally considered inferior to men. Women's roles were largely restricted to serving their husbands and caring for their children at home. In other words, women were not considered competent for intellectual work. Such gender bias remains prevalent in contemporary China and, unfortunately, leads to a misinterpretation concerning Chinese females' sporting achievements. Their success has been conventionally attributed to Chinese women's personal characteristics, such as a capacity for hard work and obedience. Some Chinese still think that women athletes excel

internationally not because they are smart, but because they are easy to discipline and have been coached by intelligent men. In many elite sport teams, women still play a subordinate role. Their life is managed by male team leaders; their training is monitored by male coaches; their sport injuries are treated by male team doctors. I was in contact with a number of women's national teams in my previous work in China. Female athletes were largely, if not exclusively, in a male-dominated environment. Women were rarely visible as team officials, coaches, and doctors. Being a woman with elite sport experience transfers symbolic meanings and stereotypical assumptions with respect to ability and character. In the highly hierarchical Chinese society, cadres receive considerable respect, and management is regarded as an occupation for intelligent and well-educated people. Therefore, women with elite sport experience are stereotypically thought to be less suited for management positions. For instance, a female vice department director, who had been a former Olympic champion and who was fast tracked to the position, admitted that she occasionally felt discriminated against at work:

> You could feel it [discrimination] everywhere, from your superiors, co-workers and even subordinates. I think this sensation is directed to elite athletes as a group and not simply aimed at any particular individual. I heard of and perceived such bias myself. Sometimes people looked down upon you as former elite athletes. (Interview 6, p. 7)

It is hard to believe that as a senior level official she still encountered overt discrimination. The situation of other female managers at lower administrative levels and with less outstanding sport success is, therefore, self-evident.

The situation is dramatically different for male leaders with similar sport backgrounds. Being an outstanding athlete affords a man the credibility to be a sport administrator. It is believed that males who excel in both sport and administration

possessed valuable qualities: intelligence, perseverance, and assertiveness. For male sport administrators, elite sport experience translates into professionalism and authority rather than "lack of education". For example, Mr. Li, a former national champion, established himself as a tough sport leader who was highly respected by his subordinates. Everyone behaved and spoke carefully in front of him. He told me during an inspection of the national teams that neither the coaches nor the athletes could hide anything from him in training: "I have credit even in front of the most experienced coaches. I became a national team coach at the age of 24 when some of our young athletes were not yet born" (Interview 1, p. 1). As mentioned previously, the Chinese women's national volleyball team, five-times world champion, set an exceptional record for elite athletes, especially women athletes, to be fast-tracked to upper management positions. Some of the team members are still active senior sport administrators in national and provincial sport authorities. They represent not only the most successful female sport officials but also the most successful female athletes in sport administration. But the real "flyer" who rose from the team and reached the top of the power hierarchy is a man. Yuan Weimin, head coach of this world champion team, as well as a former male volleyball player, became Vice Minister and then Sport Minister. Two other former Vice Sport Ministers, Mr. Xu Yinsheng and Mr. Li Furong, were both table tennis world champions. All of them were well known for being both professional and authoritative sport leaders.

In short, elite sport experience has distinct gendered implications for the transition of former athletes to sport management. On the one hand, sport accomplishment offers female elite athletes an advantage to access positions in the national sport organizations. On the other hand, being a female sport administrator with elite sport experience does not

necessarily ensure a successful and smooth career path. Their sport aptitudes are not recognized equally or appreciated to the same extent as those of men choosing the same path. The hidden bias related to their achievement in sport strongly influences the organizational culture and impairs female athletes' entry into and development in sport management.

Part II: Hurdles to Women's Promotion

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) argue that women's disadvantaged status in organizations occurs because most organizations are created by and for men, and are therefore based on male experience. This male-based culture determines that official job descriptions may seem gender-neutral, but the attributes required often reflect and reinforce gendered stereotypes. Hall et al. (1989) have conceptualized this dynamic as a self-recreation of organizational elites (males), a process that occurs in order for them to retain their power and privileged status. This power struggle is clearly reflected in promotions within an organization because not only do they lead to a higher status in the hierarchy but they also open routes to power, which determine resource distribution and influence organizational values and norms. The following discussion focuses on the qualities identified as most salient in blocking women's promotions and constraining them from competing for senior management positions. Although some traits are seldom spelled out in formal selection documents, they have a far-reaching impact on women's careers in Chinese national sport organizations.

A Strategic Vision: Leadership Qualities Defined by and for Men

The interviewees suggested that having a strategic vision and maintaining a broad perspective were regarded as the foremost qualities of senior-level sport administrators. Nevertheless, lacking a strategic vision was also the most cited weakness of female managers by most interviewees. Women in sport management were stereotypically portrayed as "gossips, being emotional and too concerned about tiny things," the opposite of what is looked for from good leaders, as illustrated in the following statements:

> Women can be good consultants to male leaders who like to act on impulse and who are not cool-headed enough sometimes. However, being too much focused on details constrains women from grasping an overall picture of the situation, which is not good for decision-making at the macro level. (From a male department director, Interview 2, p. 4)

> I learn about some negative comments on women in management. For instance, women are more detail oriented and have narrow visions. So they are not suitable candidates for leadership positions. This is true to some extent. (From a male department director, Interview 13, p. 5)

However, a female vice division head stated that people should not be blinded by the stereotypes:

> There is a popular joke in our department that men are more attentive and careful than women. It is not due to sex differences but rather decided by the nature of management work, which entails caution and carefulness. (Interview 9, p. 5)

In fact, positive opinions were also voiced by men. For example, a male vice department director expressed his own analysis of the so-called female shortcoming of being a "detail-digger":

> I can't agree with the opinion that only women focus so much on trivial things. Men are no exception and sometimes go even further than women. It's hard to say who is the champion. The stress on the sexual difference in personalities only reflects biases against females. (Interview 7, p. 3)

In fact, men can be even more short-sighted than women and lack a broader vision. A retired male department director once wrote in his autobiography that without the female Vice-Minister, Ms. Zhang Caizhen, his career would have been completely different. Ms. Zhang recalled the story in our interview:

> He didn't accept the position when we decided to transfer him to the State Sport Commission. After teaching at a local physical education institute for years, he had gotten used to a life style with a flexible schedule, and summer and winter holidays. So he was very hesitant to move to Beijing. But I told him that it would be a rich experience. In our department, his vision would be expanded to the national and international level. He finally agreed to transfer, which changed his life and career tremendously. (Interview 11, p. 9)

Women also make a unique contribution to decision-making procedures. Traits such as being attentive, careful, and cautious are considered valuable to decision-making under certain circumstances. However, there is a dangerous line concerning whether these characteristics are positive or negative to women's qualifications as senior leaders. For instance, in elite sport teams, head coaches and team leaders are expected to show toughness in order to discipline athletes. In sport organizations, senior leaders should look authoritative and forceful before their subordinates. These gendered characteristics are presumably foreign to female managers and, therefore, work to favor men only. When women demonstrate such leadership abilities, they are not applauded as good leaders, but are regarded as lacking in womanly charm. In the end, the inclusion of a limited number of women to senior management is legitimized by the premise that there are "not too many of them". On the other hand, the merit of mixed-sex leadership works to justify women's less powerful role in the sport administration hierarchy, as illustrated by the following comments:

> Some female leaders show less independence and self-assertiveness in managing. They dare not make decisions by themselves at critical moments. Such weaknesses may be related to their knowledge, education, and experience. (From a male division head, Interview 2, p. 4)

> The composition of a leadership team reflects the complementary nature of different types of expertise and skills. Some propose ideas, some draw out plans, and some take care of details. To me, this is the art of the gender structure of leadership. (From a male department director, Interview 1, p. 3)

To some extent, a strategic vision has become synonymous with the male vision in male-dominated organizational cultures. Power struggles, often concealed by male-defined leadership qualities, also explain the bureaucratic powerlessness of female managers who are promoted to senior management positions under the quota system. As Kanter (1977) has argued, "Anyone who is protected loses power, for successes are then attributed to the helpful actions of others rather than the person's own actions" (p. 188). Affirmative action, intended to increase female representation at the upper levels of management, through the inclusion of a mandatory minimum percentage of females to top decision-making positions, fails to reap the expected results. The main cause is due to the fact that the few women at the top cannot build a coalition strong enough to confront the power structure underpinned by male influence in promotion decisions. "As long as organizations remain the same, merely replacing men with women will not alone make a difference" (Kanter, 1993, p. xv).

Higher Education

Higher education has received increasing emphasis in both recruitment and promotion in the post-reform era. Candidates with graduate degrees are now welcome and preferred by national sport organizations. For example, after 2000, all newly recruited staff at a ministry department hold Master's degrees. The former female Vice

Minister, Ms. Zhang, has used the rise of another Vice Minister to illustrate how crucial higher education was to an individual's career in administration:

> Knowledge and education are essential qualities for competent leaders, but they could not replace each other. Many years ago, when the Vice Minister, Mr. Deng, was still head coach of the national team, he asked for my advice on whether he should study for a university degree. I told him that if he just wanted to be a head coach on the national team, he didn't have to go. But if he hoped to advance his career in administration, further academic training and theoretical study was very important. He felt very grateful for my suggestion, which led him to make a right decision. Without the study experience at university, his future promotions would have never been possible. (Interview 11, p. 9)

However, the emphasis on higher academic training is not stressed so much for men as it is for women. This subtle disparity explains why successful career women are generally better educated, compared with their male peers at the same or even higher administrative levels. Men do not need a graduate degree to be qualified for their jobs. In contrast, women need hard evidence to prove their competence as leaders. For example, among the fourteen interviewees, only one man has a Master's degree. In comparison, three women have finished their graduate studies, but all are deputy division heads, lower than any of the men interviewed. On the other hand, the evidence shows that education is still a barrier to women achieving senior positions. Female sport administrators, as a whole, do not have strong academic backgrounds. Statistics from the State Sport Commission indicate that only half of the female managers at and above the division head levels have university degrees.[12] As discussed previously, higher education has become more important than elite sport experience in hiring sport managers and, consequently, increases the difficulty for female elite athletes to be hired by national sport organizations.

In the broadest sense, education is not only restricted to formal school education, but also includes a comprehensive socialization process, such as family influence. Unfortunately, in traditional China, women were not supposed to be actively engaged in public affairs. Instead, illiteracy was considered a virtue for females. This biased gender conception, though outdated, still has a strong influence in Chinese society. Girls are not trained to be assertive or tough. Women are not as strongly encouraged to pursue higher education as men. For a young woman, finding a good husband is more important than doing a graduate degree. Such an environment by no means prepares women to consider ambitious careers. A recent survey of college students' employment preferences suggests that female students are most interested in jobs that attract excellent young men and are, therefore, convenient for finding their future husbands.[13] A male department director also argued that the so-called common weaknesses of females are largely attributed to family or rather social influence:

> I also notice gender differences in perspectives between female and male university faculty member, who have compatible school education. So I don't think knowledge learning is a decisive factor. Chinese women grow up in such a society that prescribes them a certain social role defined by thousands of years of tradition on sexuality. (Interview 13, p. 5)

However, the educational roles of sport, such as character building, are far from fully recognized in the debate involving higher education. Many graduates from physical education institutes have some sport experience or, at least, are loyal sport fans. Their deep connection with sport shapes their unique management style. To some degree, many sport managers do not look like typical Chinese bureaucrats, as illustrated by the comment of a female entry-level manager, who graduated from a comprehensive university:

> I love working with those managers who have practiced sport before. They are energetic, open and straightforward. Such differences are particularly prominent in female managers. Their frankness and extroversion make them appear very different from those sensible and prudent female officials in other industries. They just go to the point directly and don't play euphemism with you. (Interview 14, p. 7)

Unfortunately, academic performance and knowledge acquisition are still perceived as essential qualifications in Chinese organizations. In such a context, female managers are often overqualified in terms of their educational backgrounds compared with their male peers, but they still need to demonstrate special skills to compete with men, as shown in the following discussion.

English Ability

Along with the diversification of employees' educational backgrounds beginning in the late 1990s, a new quality has received attention in screening potential sport leaders, namely, ability in a foreign language, especially English.

English proficiency has never before received much emphasis in China because language is a barrier to the country's participation in international affairs. With China's growing influence in global politics and the world economy, the Chinese are eager to have a stronger voice and play a more active role on the world stage. Therefore, the country needs individuals who are able to communicate with the West. China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 reinforced its demand for individuals fluent in a major foreign language. The International Olympic Committee's decision to name Beijing as the host city for the 2008 Olympic Games undoubtedly reinforced this trend. All of a sudden, an overwhelming fad to learn English swept the city of Beijing, and hundreds of thousands of English-training programs mushroomed overnight.[14]

The 2008 Olympic Games have created an impending challenge for Chinese sport officials. The preparation work entails a tremendous amount of communication and coordination with various international Olympic constituents and stakeholders. In order to test the competition venues and facilities, China is expected to host a number of international competitions in Beijing over the next few years. A top priority for the State Sport Commission is to develop promising sport administrators fluent in English and familiar with the practices of international sport organizations. Against this backdrop, and beginning in 2002, the Commission organized internal English-language training sessions for its staff. Young managers were selected to attend full-time professional English training at home and abroad. Also in tune with the preparation work, the Commission is making a greater effort to promote Chinese representatives' entry into the decision-making bodies of international sport federations. Foreign language ability has thus became a key quality in nominating candidates to run for positions in international federations.[15] In the Chinese Soccer Association, for example, all four full-time vice presidents can speak a second language fluently. The organization has set a goal that seventy per cent of its staff will be able to communicate in a second language in the near future.[16] By the same token, when the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) took on seconded sport administrators from the State Sport Commission, candidates were exempt from a professional knowledge test, which was required for applicants from the general public; however, they still had to take the English examination.

This new emphasis on English opens up an unprecedented opportunity for female mangers to compete for senior level positions in national sport organizations.

Conventionally, women have been considered more apt to learn other languages than men, and university students specializing in foreign languages are predominantly female. On many occasions, women have demonstrated a strong ability in English. For instance, Ms. Xue Li, the first and the only female vice president of the Chinese Soccer Association, majored in sport at university. When, on behalf of the association, she delivered a report in English to the Asian Soccer Federation, she surprised the media and received high praise from her international colleagues.[17]

Ms. Huang serves as another prime example. An English major in her undergraduate program with a Master's degree in sport, she was promoted to deputy head division and further named as deputy secretary general of an Asian sport federation within a few years. She attributed her successful career opportunities to her background in English:

> The Chinese association nominated several candidates to the Asian federation: our division head to the technical committee, and me to the statistics committee, which was one of the least important committees. However, our division head was withdrawn because of his poor English. At this Congress, I was appointed as Deputy Secretary General responsible for the women's program. (Interview 3, p. 9)

Another female entry-level manager, also an English major at university, mentioned that her involvement in an international project was due primarily to her ability in English, the working language of the project:

> The experience is illuminating and a huge learning opportunity. Without the English background, I wouldn't have been included because team members should be key persons in charge of the business. Our division head had to withdraw in the middle since he felt embarrassed to sit at the meetings with little knowledge of English. (Interview 14, p. 7)

However, the emphasis on English ability has also sparked controversy between the need for language skills versus knowledge of sport as key qualities for sport

administrators. Not surprisingly, the criticism or, rather, jealousy comes from men who feel disadvantaged by this change in priorities. For example, a male division head, who was a sport major at university, expressed a strong opinion against the promoting of English majors in national sport organizations:

> Professional knowledge and experience in specific sports should be put as priorities in promotions. I think we should send managers with sport knowledge abroad to improve their English rather than promoting people with English backgrounds to senior management positions. It is not normal that so many former employees in the Foreign Affairs Department have taken up leadership positions in sport management centres. English majors have a common shortcoming: the rigorous training of learning by retention prohibits their ability of thinking creatively and critically. (Interview 2, p. 5)

Ironically, the English-speaking manager, referred to in the interview and who had been promoted, were largely male not female. The shift in emphasis to English ability does not give women a competitive edge alone. They do not gain the upper hand when competing with male English majors. The assumption that translators are predominantly female does not hold true in national sport organizations. At the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, there were twenty-six translators traveling with the Chinese delegation to Athens and only nine were women.

Under certain circumstances, men are found to benefit even more from the English policy. A young female manager told the following story to illustrate how the policy served as an affirmative action for men:

> The Commission once organized an English test to select two candidates for an international training program abroad. Both of the top two scorers turned out to be female. However, there was a requirement regarding the nomination: a male and a female. The consideration was presumably intended to assure women's opportunity to enter the program. But, in this case, a young fellow with the highest score in the male group got the chance eventually because he was a man. (Interview 14, p. 5)

Support Networks

Many will agree that, in China, there is no shortage of talented women, but talent is useless without the means to realize its potential. Women often find it harder to be promoted in organizations without adequate information and appropriate mentoring. A support network helps a person to integrate into the mainstream organizational culture and provides a route to promotion.

In Chinese society, people identify with each other easily when they share something in common. The notion of sameness (*tong*) plays an important role in bonding Chinese together in their public lives (Yang, 1994). An individual can be identified with different groups as a result of sharing the same social characteristics or the same experience with others. For instance, *tongxue* means classmates or alumni and includes people graduating from the same school; *tongxiang* (fellow countrymen) means people coming from the same place; and *tongshi* (colleagues) refers to people working in the same office or organization. Eventually, everyone is connected to a sophisticated network which offers favours and protection. In organizations, commonalities such as coming from the same county or graduating from the same university enables a newcomer to be easily accepted and find a foundation to expand his or her personal network. Not surprisingly, speculation often follows important employment and promotion decisions, as people look for evidence of any similarities between the beneficiary and the gatekeeper.

Given the historical recruitment of graduates from physical education institutes (PEIs), and their subsequent promotion to upper management in national sport organizations, people without sport experience, and especially without educational

backgrounds in PEIs, often feel alienated: "You just feel lacking something and are not in the mainstream" (Interview 8, p. 6).

A female vice division head explained why she experienced a challenging transition when she began working at the Commission:

> I felt very pressured at the beginning not due the work load or my master's degree. I graduated from the sport department of a comprehensive university rather than physical education institutes, whose alumni dominated most offices in the Commission. I came out as a total stranger to them and, of course, was under more critical scrutiny. (Interview 9, p. 4)

Her comment suggests that alumni from different PEIs often form a homogeneous alliance. In fact, graduates from the same PEI maintain a close network and favour their own members when a competitive employment or promotion opportunity appears. The Beijing PEI apparently has a privilege in this regard because a number of senior officials at the department director level and even ministerial level graduated from this university. On the other hand, graduates from other PEIs seem to show an even stronger sense of connection and pay more attention to their alumni network, partly because of their limited and weak representation on the Commission. A young female manager from such a PEI mentioned in an informal talk that when her husband finished his graduate study, his internship and job were both arranged with the help of alumni at various sport organizations.

Undoubtedly, as a result of knowing insiders at the top and receiving mentoring from senior staff, one will be better informed of promotion opportunities and climb faster in an organization. Networking brings acquaintances, increases visibility, and develops intimacy between members. However, it also involves frequent attendance at many casual social functions, which are often not open to women. Female officials often feel

that important negotiations take place and decisions made when the men go out for beer or bowling after work. These social functions seem more frequent at sport management centres. A male department director in the Commission admitted that, as a leader of sport management centers, it is important to be a champion in drinking. It seems to have become part of the business. Sometimes an athlete's transfer to the national team is decided during dinner. Problems tend to be left to dinner time since alcohol is an excellent moderator for hard negotiations between men. Unless they are accomplished drinkers, women find difficulty in fitting into these occasions comfortably. For instance, a female vice division head reported that she often chose to avoid these dinner and entertainment occasions:

> We are often invited for dinner after work by the local sport officials. I generally declined these invitations. First of all, I don't drink. Second, I don't like these social functions, and would rather stay home and enjoy the tranquility with family. But, that is not what people think an official in my position is supposed to do. (Interview 3, p. 5)

Moreover, these social occasions, which are often characterized by after-work dinners, drinking, and men cracking sexist jokes, contradict the traditional gender role of Chinese women. Sociable women are not applauded in Chinese society. Women who can drink more than men may not win respect in the office. Being an overly sociable woman is not an admirable reputation, and instead she may be blamed for socializing too much with men. An attractive young female manager, for example, complained that she had been criticized for playing too much tennis with her department director.

Differential Retirement Age

In China, men and women retire at different ages. For cadres, men retire at sixty while women do so at fifty-five. This differential retirement age was introduced in the early 1950s as an affirmative action measure to protect women's interests due to their heavy burden of childbearing and care. Since the implementation in 1979 of the one child policy, Chinese couples have fewer children and women's burdens from household chores and childcare have been significantly reduced. Along with more accessible higher education and employment opportunities in the reform period, women have also achieved unprecedented success in senior administrative roles, as illustrated in Chapter Three. Under such circumstances, the discrepancy in retirement ages has been questioned in the reform era. It is argued that talent is wasted if many well-educated women officials have to retire when they are still able to make positive contributions at work. In contemporary China, this obsolete policy has perpetuated discrimination against women in the public domain despite the fact that many proposals have been put forward in the past decade calling for equal statutory retirement ages for men and women.[18]

The early mandatory retirement age for women has undermined female university students' employment prospects. Young women become hesitant to pursue post-graduate degrees even when they have the potential and the option is open to them. The reason is simple. When they finish their graduate or post-graduate degrees, which are supposed to enhance their competitiveness in job hunting, they have to face another hurdle -- their ages. To put the problem in perspective, let me outline a typical female student's academic history. Under the current education system, a girl attends elementary school at the age of seven and studies there for six years. She then completes another six years of high school study. Generally, she enters university at the age of nineteen. When a female

student finishes her four years of undergraduate work, three years of Master's studies and another three to four years to obtain a doctorate, she will be around thirty years old. If she retires at fifty-five, she can thus work for only twenty-five years for an organization. From the employer's point of view, it does not make sense to hire a woman given her shorter period of service. Furthermore, when a woman completes her education in her late twenties, according to tradition, she has reached a peak time for women to get married and have children. It does not matter whether the woman herself has such a plan or not, organizations do not want to take the risk of recruiting a woman who presumably will take maternity leave and redirect her primary attention from work to family within the foreseeable future. The Education Ministry has reported that the number of female engineers has decreased in recent years. The tendency for fewer female students to choose engineering as their major is arguably attributable to women's earlier retirement age.[19]

The negative impact of differential retirement ages is also reflected in promotion decisions and has caused problems in retaining competent and experienced female officials in national sport organizations. In recent years, the central government has regulated the retirement of senior leaders by promoting young managers to senior positions. It is now rare to see an over-sixty Vice Minister but common to see a man in his early fifties or even forties assuming office as a vice minister. It has gradually become an unspoken rule that a man in his mid-fifties is not likely to be considered for promotion to any senior posts. If the speculation is applied to women, female managers will have little chance for upward movement given the five-year retirement age discrepancy. Consequently, women's career paths are shortened and their development prospects are

significantly impaired. The female Vice Minister, Zhang Caizhen, said that she recognized this problem many years ago and had made a great effort to improve women's status in organizations. When she served on the Working Commission on the Development of Youth and Women, established by the State Council in the 1980s, the delegates set a goal of "doing something of practical benefit to women" (Interview 11, p. 8). They put forward a proposal that the retirement age should be extended to sixty for female administrative staff at and above the division head level and for female academics at and above the associate professor level. The proposal was adopted by the State Council and was soon issued as a binding government document. Unfortunately, this policy has not been fully implemented by government agencies, including various ministries such as the State Sport Commission. Some organizations just turn a blind eye to it. For example, the female Vice Minister told me that right before the National Games in 2001, five female division heads, all in their fifties, were asked to retire by their organizations. After negotiating with their organizations by referring to this document, they succeeded in continuing for another term of office. One woman was even promoted. However, another female division head said that although she was allowed to continue working until sixty, at age fifty-five she was not permitted to work another term of office in the position. She left the organization one year later.

Part III: Conceptualizing Discriminatory Organizational Cultures

Tainted Glasses and Double Standards in Evaluation

Chinese NSOs have an institutionalized annual evaluation system, which generally includes the following steps. At the end of each year, each employee fills out an annual

work appraisal form, summarizing the most important work he or she has completed in the year. A group discussion is then organized within the office to collect peer comments. Afterwards, the director of the office writes an overall closing remark on the form. The form is then stored as a record in the individual's personal file. An annual performance award winner is generally selected at the second stage of the group discussion. However, the appraisal system does not carry much significance in the organizational culture as, in some cases, it has been distorted into an exchange of favours or a means of excising political revenge. For instance, a young female manager commented that the evaluation system had turned into a formality in her division, and the winner of the annual performance award was literally a choice between the male division head and another male colleague:

> I never think it is a meaningful way to appraise an employee's performance. There has been no election or voting to nominate the award winner. We two women have never been considered for it regardless of how hard we work. (Interview 14, pp. 4-5)

A female vice division head told of another unpleasant experience. After her promotion to the position, she worked extremely hard because the division head left for several months training. However, at the annual assessment, she was marked the third last in the organization. The main reason was that she was considered a protégé of the department director, who initiated reforms and encountered resistance from conservatives within the organization. The woman claimed that: "I never believe the popular cliché that evaluation was not based on performance in Chinese sport. But after this I think it's true" (Interview 3, p. 11).

In a broad sense, evaluation involves opinions from different sources, such as remarks from superiors and subordinates and comments from co-workers and clients.

When the formal assessment system has lost its true meaning, what matters is the informal evaluation. These opinions are often expressed in different forms in the workplace, such as peer acceptance. For example, a female deputy division head said she learned a lesson from her early years of service in a ministry department. It was that being progressive and overly dedicated was not welcomed by her co-workers. Unfortunately, she was always eager to demonstrate her capabilities and, inevitably, appeared offensive with their bold actions:

> The senior staff seldom communicated their discontent with me frankly, but reported to our supervisors. It feels strange that the more dedicated you are, the more speculation and jealousy you arouse. Anyway, I was thought to have too much power in the office. I loved my job but couldn't bear the atmosphere. So I asked for a few months of training. When I came back, I became more sophisticated and learned to deal with everything impersonally or indifferently. It characterized the work environment in the ministry departments. People never expressed their opinions to your face. The personal relationships are complicated although it looks harmonious on the surface. (Interview 10, pp. 3-4)

There has been a misleading belief about organizational culture that good performance results in good evaluations and good evaluations bring promotions. However, as illustrated by the foregoing discussion, such is not always the case. First, there is no certainty that a favourable assessment will lead to a hoped-for promotion. It is true that a positive evaluation can bring incentives and awards under some circumstances. These awards, though good motivators at most acknowledge that one has done a good job in the current position. There is no direct implication that one is qualified for a higher level in the hierarchy. Second, promotion decisions are based on a number of factors, such as educational background, leadership skills, and experience in specific areas. Previous performance is one factor for consideration but not necessarily the most important one. On the contrary, as Kanter (1977) has argued, long time continuous good

performance without movement only means that one has been stuck in a dead-end job. Finally, dedication is not always fully recognized and may not result in a favourable appraisal, as shown in the abovementioned cases. There are many other things that come into play. Employees' abilities vary, and the actual work result can be beyond an individual's control. An individual's performance is a text from which different interpretations are derived. In other words, an evaluation may not reflect what you have done but how others think about what you have done. It is contingent on how your attitude and behaviour are interpreted by others. A Chinese jest found on the Internet encapsulates the phenomenon vividly:[20]

- If a male employee puts a family picture on his desk, the boss will think, "A responsible man for family"; if it is a female, the boss will think, "Career is not important to her. Never expect her to devote herself to the company."
- If a male employee's desk is in a mess, the boss will think, "What a hard worker. He's got no time to clean up the desk"; if it is a female's, the boss will think "What a mess she has made! Poor organizing ability."
- If a male employee is chatting with other staff, the boss will think, "He must be talking about a recent project he is working on. How dedicated!"; if it is a female, the boss will think, "She must be spreading gossip."
- If a male employee works overtime, the boss will think, "It is not easy to find such a diligent employee"; if it is a female, the boss will think, "Her ability is limited. How come she spends so much time on a small piece of work?"
- If a male employee is not found in his office, the boss will think, "He must have left to meet a client"; if it is a female employee, the boss will think, "she must have left to go shopping."

This description is rather exaggerated, but mirrors the harsh gender discrimination in performance appraisal within many organizations. Suspicion of women's ability is detrimental when male leaders translate it into a double standard for evaluating female and male subordinates' work. Contrary to the higher double standards for women in recruitment and promotion, in this case, women are subjected to a lower standard. Is the latter good or bad? Let us consider an example before jumping to a hasty answer. A male

department director said that he had once asked a male and a female staff member to write two reports on different subjects:

> Although not very satisfied with Ms. Fan's report, I only asked her to make minor changes. She returned from a maternity leave only a year ago. I understood that she got involved in the area not long enough and still lagged behind in understanding. She had reached her potential. Regarding Mr. Liang, I returned his report and asked him to resubmit. Actually, his report was not that bad, probably better than Ms. Fan's. But the point was he should have been able to do a better job given his ability and experience, and I had higher standards for him. (Interview 13, p. 6)

Ironically, the woman seemed to have received preferential treatment in this case. Her boss showed considerable appreciation for her situation: She was new to the job and recently returned from a maternity leave. Nevertheless, I argue that this case is an example of transformed discrimination. How much credit could the woman receive as a result of her low quality work? On the contrary, higher standards for the male employee reflected the director's higher expectation of his ability and growth potential. The cause for the double standard in evaluation is rooted in a blind perception that views women as a homogeneous group. It also illustrates how gender symbolism operates in organizational settings. As Connell (2000) argues, when we speak of a woman or a man, the meanings of these words are greater than the biological categories of male and female. They link to a system of "understandings, implications, overtones and allusions that have accumulated through our cultural history" (Connell 2000, p. 65).

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) maintain that neither men nor organizations benefit from gender inequality. An empowering environment helps organizations to attract and retain talented staff. However, a de-motivating culture only increases the turnover rate. Organizations lose credibility by misinterpreting dedication and employees' motivation suffers. The male department director cited above mentioned the departure of a capable

young female manager from the organization in the same interview. In an informal talk, the woman attributed her leaving to a lack of recognition and motivation.

Family Commitment

Martin (2000) has argued that the dichotomy between the public domain of the workplace and the private sphere of the family is central to understanding women in organizations. Many career women face questions when targeting ambitious career goals: what impact will her career have on her family and how will her family commitment influence her career? The private sphere of her family is inextricably intertwined with the public realm of her work. What happens in one domain inevitably affects what goes on in the other. The double burden of paid work in the office and unpaid housework at home constitutes a major barrier that impairs women's capacity to pursue career goals in organizations. Acker (1998) claims that an organizational gender sub-structure reproduces gender divisions and reinforces persistent gender inequalities. Such a substructure is based on the assumption that "an ordinary and ideal worker is an abstract man with few obligations outside work that could distract him from the centrality of work. However, women, at least stereotypically, do not have these qualities" (Acker, 1998, p. 197). In other words, men belong to work and women belong to family. As in many families, husbands often have a better income and higher social status than their wives, and their work is always the foremost priority. As a well known Chinese saying suggests: "There is always a woman behind a successful career man." It reflects a widely accepted gender order and reality in Chinese society. Many husbands' career success is based on their wives' devotion to family affairs and sacrifice in their own careers. Many women compromise their own work to accommodate their families' needs. A number of

female managers told me that they had cancelled business trips or took extensive leaves due to childcare responsibilities. They never considered alternative arrangements because their husbands often held more prestigious positions. It is commonplace for wives to make concessions whenever a conflict occurs between their work and their husbands'. A female division head made the following comment when asked about how she balanced her work with that of her husband's:

> Traditionally, it is normal and natural for the wives to sacrifice career for family. You can't imagine how difficult it is to open your mouth to ask your husband to give up his business traveling and prioritize yours instead. (Interview 8, p. 9)

However, the situation is dramatically different when a wife accomplishes more and has better career opportunities than her husband. Women have to pay a higher price for ambitious career pursuits. The female Vice Minister commented that: "there is always a broken marriage behind a successful career woman." She said her conclusion was based on observing many female top political leaders. Of course, not every successful career woman ends up with a failed marriage. The point is that, in a patriarchal society, it is not easy to ask a husband to sacrifice his work for his wife and stand behind a successful woman. Many well-educated women choose to take up the double challenge and strive to be the best in both the public and domestic worlds. A survey of female academics in a mid-China provincial capital city suggested that their image of an ideal woman was an accomplished career woman at work but virtuous wife and good mother at home. The results showed that no matter how successful a woman becomes in her work, she does not retreat from the domestic scene, engaging in housework and the supervision of her child's study at school. For example, according to the survey, wives, on average, spent more than double the time on household chores than their husbands.[21] When a woman is appointed

to a senior political position, an immediate concern is to redefine the relationship between her career life and her family roles. For example, after her appointment to the position, a female provincial governor said to the media that women still held more responsibilities than men in families. At home she was a wife, a mother and a daughter. At work she was a civil servant. She must try her best to fulfill her roles in both the public and domestic spheres.[22] Ms. Wu Yi, the most powerful woman in Chinese politics and the only female vice premier, is now in her mid-sixties but remains unmarried. The famous iron lady once said that she did not intend to be single, but life (her career) did not leave her any time for love affairs.[23] It is not surprising that senior female officials face more serious conflicts between work and their family because their work leaves them little flexibility and alternative. Being senior leaders, they should act as role models for their subordinates. More often than not, they have to compromise their primary domestic responsibility. So it is the case in national sport organizations. There are many important meetings and ceremonies they must attend, and many social functions and publicity events to which they cannot send apologies. Important meetings go overtime and, consequently, overtime is inevitable to handle the piles of reports in office. As a female department director rightly pointed out:

> It is not easy to be a woman, more difficult to be a female manager and even harder to be a female leader at senior levels. In leading positions, we don't have the alternatives as other staff. (Interview 6, p. 8)

For instance, after a woman was appointed a vice director of a large sport management centre, her son complained that she had turned from a good mother to a bad mother. According to her son: [24]

> I realized big changes in my family. Every day, when I went back home after school, it was always my dad who prepared the dinner. The telephone kept ringing all the time. They were all for my mother. At last, my father had to take me to my grandparents' home because I couldn't do my homework there.

An earlier study of gender inequities in Canadian national sport organizations suggests a similar finding: women's domestic roles impair their capacity to pursue careers (Whitson and Macintosh, 1989). Moreover, regular absences from family life apparently cause more conflict for women than for men. The data from my research confirm this point. In light of the Olympic Honour Program and the overriding mentality of winning international gold medals, competition and training at elite levels are always put at the top of the work agenda by national sport organizations. Chinese teams take part in international tournaments and championships more actively than before. Many Olympic sports maintain national teams on a regular basis throughout the year, and the management of national teams is under the close supervision of national sport organizations. Prior to important international competitions, training programs intensify greatly. Responsible managers pay regular visits to the national teams and sometimes even live with the teams to oversee their training. Although many national sport training centres are concentrated in Beijing, there are still a number of training bases spread across the country depending on the availability of facilities and resources.[25] Also, local sport commissions in smaller cities are encouraged to host national competitions to attract investment and attention to sport from the grassroots level. Against this backdrop, sport administrators, especially those in the competition and training divisions, travel extensively all year around to attend national and international competitions, or to supervise the national team's training. Irregular office hours and frequent business travel leads to constant absences from family life and apparently cause more conflict for women

than for men. As a result, such organizational practices seriously impede women's capacity to access positions in the core business functions. For instance, when asked about women's representation in his organization, a male director of a sport management centre said that there were no women in the business sections, which include the divisions of competition, training, and national teams. The only female in the business sections left the organization half a year ago because, as he explained: "Working in business divisions involves a lot of traveling around the year. That's too tough and not suitable for women" (Interview 5, p. 5). A young female staff member in a business division said that she was traveling to competitions almost every month in the first few years:

> I was married but didn't have a baby at that time. So that [traveling] was not a big concern for me. I bore a baby after leaving the organization. I would have missed many precious opportunities if I had a baby. Besides, I can't imagine how I could handle the baby if I was still working there. Maybe, I would quit the job. (Interview 14, p. 7)

Another female department director recalled that when she accompanied the national team to a world championship abroad, she had to leave her eleven-year-old son home alone, with no adult supervision, because her husband was not in Beijing either at that time.[26]

Under economic reform, with the growth of service sector and the availability of labour-saving devices, such as washing machines and micro-waves, certainly urban women are freed from some household chores. Yet, marriage, pregnancy and childcare still remain a priority that impedes women's opportunities in employment and promotion. Kanter (1977) maintains that for a married male employee, being a "family man" is a clear sign of stability and maturity and is taken into account in promotion decisions.

However, for a married female employee, being a "family woman" indicates a lack of commitment and dedication and is also considered in promotion decisions, but in a negative sense. Nevertheless, females are traditionally expected to play a more important role in childcare. As Connell (2002) argues, "the fact of reproductive difference between male and female humans is not controversial, but its significance is" (p. 30). Women's reproductive role, in effect, constitutes an interruption in their careers. However, what is unfair is that it is taken for granted as women's work. My interview data highlight that male interviewees seldom talked about their roles in families. They tended to discuss the issue of domestic responsibilities and childcare from a third party's point of view. Men are rarely positioned in domestic scenes as if they have few family responsibilities to fulfill. Their blindness to, and lack of understanding of, the problems women face when combining their dual roles in work and family seems legitimate to men, who dominate the leading positions in most national sport organizations. Thus it is not surprising to see that organizations have not responded adequately to address women's roles in their policies, structures, and practice. For instance, a male department director explained why he was hesitant to recruit women without children:

> Childbearing is not a matter of a couple of months after the childbirth or the maternity leave, but requires a mother's years of commitment. She will be tied up with all terrible-two problems until the child gets school age. (Interview 13, p. 6)

Much gender discrimination against women is closely associated with their reproduction responsibilities and is sometimes even a disadvantage for those women without such responsibilities. As the previous discussion reveals, childbirth and childcare is a major concern that prohibits organizations from recruiting female graduate students.

Single women and married women but without children face a more serious situation. A female division head made such a comment during an informal talk:

> Despite that I experienced gender bias myself, when we recruit new students, I still prefer to hire a male rather than a female. It is just that practical. We need somebody to work here without an interruption. (Informal talk 4)

Under such circumstances, women's attitudes toward reproduction are slowly being transformed. In recent years, a new phenomenon, the *dingke* family appeared in large cities. "*Dingke*" is derived from the English acronym DINK or Dual Income No Kids. It is a form of defiance against the traditional Chinese concept of family. In many cases, it is because the wives hold competitive jobs and are reluctant to compromise their promising careers.

Certainly, most married women still choose to have a child. However, when or the best time to have a baby is still a controversial question. Some argue that it is not wise for a woman to have a baby right after she starts working in an organization because a new job requires significant commitment. In addition, it does not provide her superior with a positive impression of her devotion. She is signaling a message that a series of leaves, such as pregnancy, childbirth, maternity and caring for a sick child, will be required. For example, a young female manager was married in her early twenties shortly after entering the organization. She said that her department director looked more surprised than pleased to hear the news. Another female division head reported that she even encountered explicit interference from her supervisor:

> When I told our department director that I was getting married, she paused for a while and then said, "That's fine. But remember there is no rush to have a baby." Later, she implied to me several times, "No hurry to have a baby too early." Although my parents-in-law were very eager to have a grandchild, I dare not get pregnant too early because that was against my superior's will. (Interview 8, p. 8)

However, others contend that a newcomer will not be assigned to undertake important work and, therefore, it is better to have a baby early. If a woman waits until she has settled into her job and has gained some seniority, she will miss some promotion opportunities. In national sport organizations, many female managers choose to have children in their late twenties or early thirties.

Over different periods, middle-class families have applied different approaches to address childcare issues. Before economic reform, most urban residents lived in extended families with three generations under one roof. It was common for retired grandparents to help take care of their grandchildren to support the young wage earners. For example, the female Vice Minister, Ms. Zhang Caizhen, always made a special note of her mother's contribution to her career development.

> My mother helped me take care of the children and look after the housework so that I could concentrate on my work. I always volunteered to be on duty at weekends because most my colleagues, even men, could not make it due to family responsibilities. They all felt jealous of my having a healthy and capable mother. (Interview 11, p. 12)

Nevertheless, not everyone is as fortunate as Ms. Zhang. Social mobility has increased greatly in post-reform China. University students are able to obtain jobs in big cities, which are thousands of miles away from home, but offer better development opportunities. Under such circumstances, childcare becomes a practical burden to most two-wage-earning families and a major obstacle to the wives' career development. My interview data suggest that female interviewees unanimously experienced a difficult time when they struggled to strike a balance between work and family when their children were young. In some cases, grandparents helped for a while, but such assistance was only a temporary solution given the poor housing condition in large cities. It was

commonplace to entrust a friend or a colleague to pick up their children after school or to baby-sit them when both parents had to travel on business at the same time. Many female interviewees praised their children for being very independent because most of them grew up in nurseries and boarding schools. The following are typical reflections of some successful career women with children:

> It's a painstaking process to struggle with inadequate sleep when the child was young. I started traveling for business when my baby was only eight months old. We had to hire a home nurse and later on sent him to a boarding nursery. I kept encouraging myself that every mother went through this process and I was no exception. (Interview 8, p. 8)

> I remembered shortly after my baby was born, I said to myself how wonderful it would be if I were a full time housewife. But I must go back to work soon. Otherwise, nobody will retain the position for me. (Interview 9, p. 5)

> I believe every woman wants to be a good mother. But it's really difficult to keep the commitment for a career woman. I felt very sorry for my son in this respect because I couldn't afford to spend much time with him. (Interview 6, p. 10)

The Gender Pattern in National Sport Organizations

The embedded prejudice towards women's capability and commitment is widespread in Chinese society and has severely hindered women's development in the public sphere. More often than not, females and males in management are stereotypically regarded as two homogeneous groups. Women are presumed to be inferior to men, whereas it is taken for granted that men are born leaders and that women just do not have what it takes. The appointment of a female vice director to a high profile sport management centre is a good example. The announcement threw the woman into the immediate spotlight, not because her new job was with one of the most popular sports in the country, but rather due to the fact that the organization had never before seen a female

top decision-maker. Unfortunately, what was highlighted most was her sex rather than her rich experience and excellent performance in sport administration. Her appointment was depicted as the arrival of a beautiful vice president (*meinv fuzhuxi*). Such an expression is hardly considered a compliment because Chinese traditionally think that beautiful women are less intelligent and often obtain favours due to their sexuality rather than their ability.

A direct consequence of such gender bias is that women are often assigned to less powerful vice positions. Even female officials at the top of the state hierarchy are no exception. Many female leaders' political careers are characterized by promotions from vice positions at a lower level to a higher level. Some have no experience of being number one throughout their entire political life.[27] A popular aphorism "*funv xingfu*" which means that female officials have the same family name as vice encapsulates the rampant phenomenon.[28] Women are so rare at the top of the state power pyramid that when a female provincial governor (not a vice governor) was named in 2004, her appointment immediately became front-page news. To put the story in perspective, there are over thirty provincial administrative regions in China, and this woman is only the second female ever to be appointed to this position. The situation in national sport organizations also indicates a similar trend. Among the nine female managers interviewed in this study, five are in vice administrative positions, all playing an assisting role to the top male directors in their organizations. The former female Vice Minister, Ms. Zhang Caizhen, appears to be an exception. She has held seven top positions in different organizations. At the age of seventy-three and almost ten years after her

retirement as Vice Minister, she is still serving as President of the Chinese Sport Association for Senior Citizens. She stated in an interview:

> There are huge differences between a chairman and a vice chairman. You don't shoulder much responsibility as a vice chairman. However, being the No. 1 is dramatically different. You must have an overall vision of all aspects of the organization. Everything is in your mind all the time. (Interview 11, p. 11)

A female division head used her own experience to illustrate how difficult it was to win trust from male superiors just because she was a female. Some years ago, still as a vice division head, she had been in charge of a core business division in a ministry department because there was no division head in the office. However, she was never promoted to a division head there:

> Our department director was always concerned whether it was wise to let a woman head an important core business section. My instinct told me that he would feel more comfortable to appoint a male to the position. So he was hesitant to propose a promotion for me. (Interview 8, p. 3)

Her speculation was confirmed shortly after she was transferred to another organization. A man who had less experience and seniority was appointed to the office. Ironically, the decision turned out to be a mistake. The man was fired one year later due to his poor management skills and performance.

The other distinctive feature of women's representation in the organizational power structure is that they are usually assigned to be in charge of less important business functions. Evidence shows that most influential female state leaders in the central government are appointed to undertake work primarily related to culture, education, health, science and women's work. For instance, the Vice Chairperson of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, Ms. He Luli, was responsible for public health when serving as Vice Mayor of the Beijing Municipal Government. Ms. Chen Zhili was

the former Education Minister before being appointed as a State Councilor. Ms. Gu Xiulian and Ms. Hao Jianxiu, both ministerial leaders serve as President and Vice President of the All-China Women's Federation respectively. According to a 2001 national survey, there were 317 female vice mayors in China, more than half in charge of culture, education and health. Only fifteen per cent were responsible for economic issues. This is not to say that other areas are not important, but apparently less so given the government's continual emphasis on economic growth.

Women's powerless position is also conspicuous in national sport organizations and is reflected in the experience of female interviewees as well. The former female Vice Minister had played a critical role in promoting sport policy and sport social science studies in China and was awarded an Olympic Order for her contribution to Chinese sport. However, she had never been in charge of competitive sport, which was the foremost priority of the National Olympic Program. Ms. He Huixian, a seasoned female department director and assistant to the Minister, had headed the department of publicity, and not competitive or mass sport. A female vice department director reported that she administered the men's national team rather than the women's team, which was a strong Olympic contender and received enormous public attention in China. Therefore, responsibility for the women's fell to a male director. The only female division head interviewed in this study headed the general affairs office in a multi-sport management centre. The main responsibility of this office was to provide secretarial and logistical support to five Olympic sports and had little to do with the competition and training programs.

Even the international federations place female officials in secondary positions in their decision-making bodies. When Ms. Huang was named as deputy secretary general of an Asian Federation, her role was mainly with issues related to women's sport. However, it is worth noting that a deputy secretary general is a less prestigious position compared to secretary general, which is decided by election at the organization's congress rather than by appointment, and is generally won by a man. Moreover, as a new addition to the Olympic Program, the women's events are of less strategic importance than the men's disciplines in the federation's development plan.

Statistics from the State Sport Commission provide tangible evidence of women's position in the power structure of the national sport bureaucracy.[29] The higher the administrative ranks, the fewer and the older the female officials. As of 2002, females accounted for twenty per cent (117) of all middle level cadres (585). Not a single woman in this group was under the age of thirty-five; a quarter fell between thirty-six to forty-five years old; and more than a half were between forty-six and fifty-five. There were only three female department directors and nineteen female vice department directors, with an average age of fifty-three and fifty-two respectively.

Kanter (1977) has argued that holding a variety of positions across functions, including service in the central headquarters, paves the way to senior management. The benefits of moving through different offices are obvious: obtaining a clearer picture of how the entire organization functions, increasing one's visibility, and building up networks. Traveling around to different functions also enhances an individual's interpersonal skills and helps accumulate knowledge in various fields. All these add favourable weight and win credibility for a future promotion. However, these rules do not

evenly affect men and women in national sport organizations and, therefore, explain the production of specific, gendered patterns of women's representation in different types of sport organizations in China.

In the context of the Chinese sport hierarchy, ministry departments are closely equivalent to central headquarters. Working in the ministry departments not only helps one develop a broad perspective of the entire national management structure but also offers more visibility and closer contacts with top executives, such as the Minister and Vice Ministers. Furthermore, given the administrative nature of work in the ministry departments, relevant knowledge and experience are more transferable between divisions and even departments. Therefore, there is a better chance of movement both horizontally and vertically. For instance, in Organization C (see Chapter Four), a ministry department, female staff were evenly distributed in different functions and both of the two female vice division heads had worked in more than one function before their promotions. During the interviews, two other female managers, who were laid off from ministry departments and reappointed to management centres, made the following comments based on their experience:

> Working in ministry departments is valuable training for an individual to develop a broad vision. It is at a higher level and gives you a holistic perspective. Generally speaking, there are more promotion opportunities in ministry departments. Seniority and experience are valued. You just need be patient to wait for the opportunities. (Interview 8, p. 6)

> At sport management centres, the focus remains at the level of doing things. People seldom reflect on the art of management seriously. Even if you have a sense of improvement, you are paralyzed by limited information. However, in ministry departments, the work involves interactions with all kinds of people in various fields, from international to national, and from administrative to academic. With adequate information, you are trained and encouraged to think broadly. (Interview 14, p. 5)

As indicated in the above comments, the situation in sport management centres is different from ministry departments. At management centres, functions are roughly divided into business and non-business groups. Business divisions, which generally include competition, training and national teams, require professional knowledge of specific sports. These qualities are expected of a secretary or an accountant in the non-business divisions. Unfortunately, most women in management centres are clustered in non-business peripheral functions, such as accounting, foreign affairs and secretariat and, consequently, have a slim chance for transfer and promotion. In sport management centres, a position in core business functions, even at the entry-level, is more desirable than positions in non-core business sections because core business functions provide a promising and longer career path. On the contrary, non-core business divisions provide a shorter development route and one reaches a career dead end more quickly. The possibility of transferring from a peripheral to a priority business function is very low. Moreover, managers at and above the division head level have better opportunities of moving to other functions under the cadre rotation policy.[30] Such transfers sometimes symbolize an interest from the top executive, and frequent movements often signal prospective promotions. Therefore, a promotion to a division head is a significant event for young, promising managers in national sport organizations, particularly for women. First, a division head is entitled to supervise the overall daily operations within an office. It represents a platform to test a manager's ability. Second, division heads are a stepping-stone to more prestigious positions, such as vice department directors and department directors, which have the power to influence the final decision-making at organizational levels. However, it should be noted that promotions to division heads are much more

valued by women than by men because as division heads many women perceive that they have reached the glass ceiling in their careers. On the contrary, for males, only promotions to vice department directors or department directors mean something in their ladder climbing. Only three female department directors in the Sport Commission out of dozen of such positions, sends a discouraging message to young female managers.

This study also shows that, among sport management centres, female managers in small and less hierarchical organizations had comparatively better development opportunities. Furthermore, in sports which have only recently encouraged women's participation, females stand a better chance to break into the central decision-making bodies due to the emerging attention on women's events. By contrast, in traditional sports with a long history of female involvement, women's representation in their management structures has lost momentum and is not seen as a priority. In these sports, former female elite athletes may be fast-tracked to senior management positions due to their outstanding athletic accomplishment. Nevertheless, as discussed in previous sections, sport organizations do not offer an accommodating environment for them to thrive. Consequently, they rarely achieve further impressive promotions in their ladder climbing. This is why it is common to see one or two token female officials in the leadership of traditional sports, but their influence within the organization is limited.

As a result of entrenched gender bias against women, this study has revealed distinct contradictions concerning female managers' organizational behaviours. First, although women are stereotypically perceived to be less committed to work, my interview data indicate that most female managers felt more dedicated to their work than men. However, the turnover rate of female managers is also higher than that of male

managers. Many reported that they loved their jobs but did not feel satisfied with how they were treated in their organizations. Therefore, they showed lower motivation and less loyalty to their organizations. One female manager expressed her intention of leaving her organization within the next year and three had changed organizations one year before the interviews. In contrast, all five male interviewees had worked in the same organization for five years and longer. There is reason to claim that women's lower motivation is closely related to their deprivation of growth opportunities in male-dominated organizations. Female professionals and managers in corporations often quit not for family reasons, but to advance their careers (Tronst, 1990). Day care centres and family benefits alone cannot attract and retain female professionals. This research echoes this assertion. It is evident in the fact that many female sport managers are considering a move or have already done so when they see few advancement opportunities to achieve their career goals.

Notes

1. The *hukou* system was introduced in the 1950s with the enforcement of a rationing system on basic commodities such as grain, oil, cloth, etc. Under the system, each citizen must register a *hukou* at the place of his birth. When individuals move to a new place for reasons such as attending university or employment, their *hukou* is transferred accordingly. Without a local *hukou*, one can rarely get a formal job offer from state affiliated employers. It is still difficult for many university students to find jobs in big cities despite the fact that the government relaxed control of *hukou* in the 1990s.

2. Interviews with Mr. Deng and Ms. Zhang.

3. Interview with Ms. Jia.

4. "Job-hunt: an uphill battle for female graduates". *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200404/05/eng20040405_139453.shtml on Nov. 29, 2004.

5. For example, the current International Olympic Committee's President, Jacques Rogge, was a former yachter at three Olympiads. Richard Pound, an Olympic finalist in swimming, chairs the World Anti-Doping Agency and once served as the President of the Canadian Olympic Committee. Anita Defrantz, an Olympic bronze medallist in rowing, acted as the Vice President of the International Rowing Federation and sat on the executive board of the American Olympic Committee. *The International Olympic Committee*. Retrieved from http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/ioc/members/index_uk.asp on Jan.18, 2005.

6. *Women, leadership and the Olympic Movement*: *Final Report* (2004). Research undertaken by the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy for the International Olympic Committee.

7. A 1996 survey of 274 elite athletes in China revealed that fifty-nine per cent of sportswomen and fifty-eight per cent of sportsmen joined elite sport teams before the age of thirteen. More than half of female athletes in most sports received only elementary school education. See Dong (2003).

8. The regulation stipulated that athletes who had ranked in the top three in international competitions could enroll in universities without an entrance examination and complete degree courses within five to nine years. On provincial teams, top athletes also enjoyed privileges in admission to university.

9. The State Sport Commission awarded each Olympic gold medallist in the 2004 Athens Games a 200,000 yuan (15,000 U.S. dollars) cash prize. Olympic champions also received additional money prizes and even large apartments from the local governments, sport authorities and businesses in their hometowns. For example, Tian Liang, winner of men's platform synchronized diving in Athens, received 700,000 yuan (87,000 U.S. dollars) from the Commission and his home provincial government. Guo Jingjing, gold medallist in women's springboard diving in Athens, received an apartment from a business in her hometown.

10. From the 1990s, an increasing number of Chinese elite athletes left to study or coach in the western countries, including former volleyball player, Lang Ping, and Olympic diving champion Gao Min. Liu Xuan, Olympic gold medallist in the balance beam in Sydney in 2000, started exploring her new life in entertainment after leaving the national team. Mo Hulan, a former gymnastic world champion, chose to study broadcasting and media after retirement, and became a journalist. Fu Mingxia, a four-time Olympic champion diver in Barcelona, Atlanta, and Sydney, moved to Hong Kong

after getting married to the former financial minister of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

11. *"Guanyu peiyang xuanba nvganbu qingkuang de huibao"* (Report on selecting and developing female cadres). (2002). *Guojia tiyu zongjv* (The State Sport General Administration).

12. Ibid.

13. 'Survey: men want career; women want men". *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200411/24/print20041124_165000.html on Nov. 27, 2004.

14. To prepare for the 2008 Olympics, hundreds of thousands of Beijing residents are learning English, from government officials, to police and taxi drivers, to elementary school students and retired senior citizens. Estimates show that Beijing has as many as over one thousand languages training centers (companies) competing to hold various language training courses. See "Olympic Bid, WTO Entry, APEC Boost Beijing 'English Economy'. *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200111/05/eng20011105_83923.html on Feb.18, 2005.

15. "Guanyu jiaqiang guoji tiyu zuzhi rencai peiyang gongzuo de yijian" ("Proposals for promoting the development of representatives in international sport federations"). (2002). Renshi Si (Personnel Department of the State Sport General Administration). Retrieved from http://www.sport.org.cn/ziliaochaxun/zonghe/2004-03-24/118830.html on December 7, 2004.

16. "*Xue Li rang fanyi cheng baishe, Yan Shiduan ganshou xiagang weixie*" ("Xue Li discarded the translator, Yan Shiduo facing laid-off threat"). *Qian Long Wang*.

Retrieved from http://sport.qianlong.com/4713/2003/11/03/117@1687904.htm on Feb. 2, 2004.

17. Ibid.

18. "*Shi qishi haishi zhaogu? Funv keyi yu nanren tongling tuixiw ma?*" ("Discrimination or preferential treatment? Can women retire at the same age as men?"). *Xinhua News Agency*. Retrieved from http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/zhuanti/269982.htm on Oct. 2, 2004.

19. "Number of Chinese Woman Engineers Decreases". *People's Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://english.people.com.cn/200308/25/print20030825_122998.html on Oct. 2, 2004.

20. Translated from an email entitled "*Nan nv you bie*" ("Men and women are different") from xiaohua@sina.com to tinacuiying@hotmail.com on Jun. 2, 2003.

21. "*Wuhan diqv dazhuan yuanxiao, keyan danwei nv zhishi fenzi zhuangkuang diaocha baogao*" ("Reports of a survey on female academic's situation in universities, colleges and research institutions in Wuhan"). (2000). Rights and Interests Department of Hubei Provincial Women's Federation. In *Diaoyan Baogao Lunwen Ji* (Collections of Research Reports). General Office of the State Council's Working Committee on Women and Children.

22. "*Pandian zhongguo nvxing gaoguan congzheng zhilu: daduoshu fenguan wenjiao wensheng*". ("The political careers of Chinese senior female leaders: most responsible for culture, education and health"). *Nanfang Zhoumo*. Retrieved from http://news.sohu.com/20050127/n224130165.shtml on Jan.27, 2005.

23. Ibid.

24. "Xue Li". *Yangts Evening*. Retrieved from http://www.yangtse.com/gb/content/2003-08/07/content_117705.htm on Oct. 2, 2004.

25. For example, the National Training Bureau, in the vicinity of the National Sport Commission office complex, provides training facilities and accommodation to a number of sports, such as swimming, gymnastics, diving, weightlifting and badminton. Other Beijing based national training facilities include the National Olympic Centre for judo and field hockey, the Shooting and Archery training center, and the Laoshan Cycling training centre.

26. It is not illegal to leave children under twelve without adult supervision at home.

27. *"Pandian zhongguo nvxing gaoguan congzheng zhilu: daduoshu fenguan wenjiao wensheng"*. ("The political careers of Chinese senior female leaders: most responsible for culture, education and health".) *Nanfang Zhoumo*. Retrieved from http://news.sohu.com/20050127/n224130165.shtml on Jan.27, on Jan. 29, 2005.

28. The Chinese words "vice/deputy" and "women" have the same pronunciation as *fu*. Also Chinese names start with the family name which is followed by the given name. In official occasions, female leaders are often referred to as Vice Minister Ms. A or Vice Director Ms. B. Therefore, all titles start with the pronunciation *fu*.

29. *"Guanyu peiyang xuanba nvganbu qingkuang de huibao"* (Report on selecting and developing female cadres). (2002). *Guojia tiyu zongjv* (The State Sport General Administration).

30. The main purpose of the cadre rotation system is arguably to prevent corruption and to enhance motivation in middle and senior level cadres. Depending on the

administrative ranking, after varying years of service in a function, a cadre will be appointed to a new position.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings of this study and apply them to Connell's analytical framework of the four dimensions of gender -- power, production, emotion, and symbolism. It is recognized that most empirical data in study are based on a small group of interviewees in national sport organizations. However, it is not to say that the discussions in the previous chapter are grounded on anecdotal data. Even the very limited documentary data available on female managers' representation in Chinese national sport organizations have suggested that there is a gender equality problem. Therefore, I bypassed quantitative approaches and aimed to look for possible answers to gender inequality through in-depth investigation of a small group of representative organizations.

To conclude this inquiry, I put forward two tentative recommendations. First, I propose potential affirmative action strategies that can be implemented to improve women's status in the sphere of sport management in China, and second, I suggest potential directions for future academic studies on the gender structure of Chinese national sport organizations.

What Is Known about the Gender Structure of Chinese National Sport Organizations

In Chapter Five, I focused my discussion on the organizational processes of recruitment, selection, promotion, and evaluation to conceptualize how gender relations work in sport organizations. As is evident from previous arguments, female sport managers are disproportionately under-represented, particularly in senior management

positions, and are significantly disadvantaged in accessing growth opportunities at various stages of their careers.

In terms of power, females seldom make it to the positions of department directors, not to mention ministers, usually ending up in less powerful vice positions, such as vice division heads and vice department directors. In the power structure of the national sport hierarchy, the higher the administrative rankings, the fewer and the older the female managers. This means that women are excluded from the central decision-making roles in organizations and have limited influence on organizational practices. In other words, influential gatekeepers in the national sport bureaucracy remain predominantly male, and men keep control of decision-making in these organizations. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that sport organizations favour recruiting and promoting males rather than females, and letting go females rather than males when downsizing. Such phenomena are mainly due to the fact that men comprise most selection and promotion committees, and have a final say on who is hired and promoted. According to Kanter (1977), there are different sources of activities that enhance an individual's opportunities to power and success: extraordinary activities, visibility, and relevance. However, women are found to be largely absent from these kinds of activities. The underlying reason for women's distribution across functions is related to the production relations of gender: there are distinct sexual divisions of labour in sport organizations. A deeper analysis of the pattern of women's representation and duty assignment reveals that females are often isolated in peripheral and non-core business functions, such as accounting, foreign affairs, and secretariats. Women are usually assigned to be in charge of amateur sport or youth sport, whereas men are generally placed in posts of responsibility such as

competition and training, both of which are of more strategic importance to organizations.

The emotional relation of gender is also reflected in job assignments of men and women to different areas. Male managers are more likely than females to be charged with the responsibility of managing national teams because the job requires officials to be tough and forceful when disciplining athletes. In the same vein, working in competition and training divisions demands that an individual show authoritativeness and be able to travel extensively all year round. These qualities are conventionally associated only with men and give males the credibility to take up positions of responsibility. On the other hand, women are regarded as soft and attentive and, therefore, more suited for routine office positions, such as translators and secretaries. Women's domestic commitments, especially childcare responsibilities, still remain a main obstacle and cause contradictions with respect to women's capacity to pursue public careers. In many Chinese families, the husband's work is always the foremost priority, and the wife must often compromise her own career when a contradiction occurs.

With regard to the symbolic relations of gender, the stereotype of women's inferior image is rampant and reinforces women's relative powerlessness in organizations. For instance, women are stereotypically depicted as focusing too much on trivialities and lacking a broad strategic vision. Such characteristics are not regarded as beneficial to decision-making and, as a result, become "legitimate" excuses to block women from top executive posts. The suspicion concerning women's capabilities and competence has a far-reaching impact on women's organizational well-being. Male directors apply lower standards in evaluating female subordinates' performance and, at the same time, weaken

their promotion prospects. Former female elite athletes who continue their careers in sport as sport administrators feel discriminated against because their athletic success is misinterpreted as a symbol of being less educated and less intelligent.

This study has also revealed that specific qualities have worked to enhance women's promotion opportunities during the reform era. As discussed in Chapter Five, having a graduate degree is a selling point for employment and has increased one's marketability since, from the mid-1990s, higher education has received growing attention in formal recruitment processes. English majors became favorite prospective candidates for senior executives after China was selected to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. However, as the previous discussion has also revealed, women do not benefit from possessing these qualities in any absolute sense. For instance, female English majors, who have obtained unprecedented opportunities as a result of China's preparation for the 2008 Olympics, are criticized for lacking professional knowledge of sport by those men who have been disadvantaged in this regard. Female managers with post-secondary degrees perform their duties under extraordinary pressure because they are placed under a spotlight by male colleagues. Nevertheless, the disturbing voices and biased judgment cannot overshadow the plain fact that these value-added merits, in effect, have offset discrimination caused by gender differences and have provided women with advantages and more development space over male competitors in their ladder climbing. For example, many successful female sport administrators in the national sport hierarchy are found to have one or more of these attributes. Not surprisingly, a number of female interviewees possess at least a value-added merit, such as a Master's degree or a major in English.

What Can Be Done Next

Hall (1996) has stressed the importance of unity between theory and action in bringing about change. It is also my sincere belief that academic studies have a role to play in influencing and improving practice in reality. Sociology is a discipline that studies issues in societies and, therefore, has a mandate to contribute a positive input to real life. Theory, politics, and practice should be linked together. Otherwise, social science studies will lose their meaning as an applied scientific discipline. Likewise, those practitioners working on the front line need to have an awareness of academic and empirical research and draw upon academic studies to guide policy formulation and decision making. Cordial communication and collaboration between the two spheres are central to introducing continual positives changes to women's status in organizations. With that said, I feel obliged to build a bridge that links the results of my academic pursuit to everyday practice. Therefore, I have divided my suggestions for future actions into two aspects: the practice-centred and academic-centred.

Suggestions for Affirmative Action Initiatives

In Canada, the Employment Equity Act has become a fundamental document in eliminating discrimination in employment. Under the Act, both private and public employers have the obligation to ensure equality in the workplace. Women, as a major disadvantaged group, are granted equal employment opportunities according to the Act. Evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of the Act in Canada is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, regardless of the extent to which it has been enforced, women's rights to equal employment are, at least, institutionalized and protected by law. Therefore, in Canadian society, it is commonplace to see institutions proclaiming

themselves as equitable employers. On the contrary, what is widespread in the Chinese labour market and in recruitment practices is blatant discrimination against women and overt preference for males. Such a disappointing reality is, to a large extent, due to the absence of a mandatory document, such as the Employment Equity Act, to regulate hiring practices. Although, as mentioned in Chapter Three, women's right to equal employment and other social activities has been written into Chinese laws, the clauses are too general to provide any practical benefit to improve day-to-day operations. What is needed urgently are workable and operational regulations or guidelines, which can give concrete instruction to practice as well as a monitoring mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the regulations.

In tune with policy support from the top, a series of concrete actions need to be taken at the operational level to ensure women's equality in national sport organizations. First of all, efforts should be made to increase female representation in the selection committees for hiring and promotion. When more women sit on the committees and are entitled to speak for women, biased judgments of female candidates will be greatly reduced. I believe that this can be an even more effective method than the written gender equity regulations, which are easily ignored in a male-dominant decision-making team. Second, female managers at all administrative levels should have greater access to training programs and be offered more opportunities to move across different areas, including core business sections. This approach will build up women's knowledge and skills in various areas and, moreover, provide females with a stage to demonstrate and develop their capability and potentials. Last but not least, a career advancement and support program should be set up within the sport administration system to address issues

relevant to female managers in sport organizations. The main purpose of such a women's advocacy initiative is to provide all necessary resources to female managers for their prosperity in organizations. These include the sharing of information, learning from successful female leaders, receiving leadership ability training, getting mentoring support through peer partners, and so forth. Women need to establish their own support networks and alliances in order to fight discrimination and achieve career objectives.

Directions for Future Studies

This study has mainly explored the gender relations and power dynamics in different types of national sport organizations in post-reform China. However, due to the limitations of access and timing, I have not been able to examine how gender dynamics shape the interactions and behaviors of female and male employees in a specific organizational setting. It has not been thoroughly demonstrated in what aspects and through what methods gender discrimination is communicated and contested in organizations. More work needs to examine the construction of gender relations within a micro-organizational environment by studying other elements such as speech, dress codes and body language.

This study reveals an ironic finding with regard to females' organizational behavior. Most female interviewees demonstrated a high level of dedication to their work but have a low level of motivation. On the one hand, they have admitted that they love their jobs. But on the other, they have reported that they do not hold high expectations for their careers and have learned to treat gender inequality with indifference. They have adopted a sophisticated approach to address the issue of gender discrimination in their lives. Instead of expressing frustration and making collective efforts to contest the

discrimination, they have appeared defensive and less assertive to strike back. Future studies might use motivation theory to look into the contradictory behaviors of female managers in sport organizations and find out how gender discriminatory practices influence career women's motivation and their career goals. We need to know more about the factors that attract women to join sport organizations and what factors empower or de-motivate them when deciding whether to stay or leave their organizations. This information will be useful to initiate gender equity strategies to attract and retain female professionals and provide insights into how to reconstruct gender relations and create an accommodating environment in national sport organizations for female managers to thrive.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Administrative Structure of the State Sport Commission

	Before 1998	After 1998
Constituent departments	Administration Department Communist Party Commission Bureau of Retired Staff Finance and Planning Department Personnel Department International Affairs Department Science and Education Department Propaganda Department Polity and Regulation Department Mass Sports Department Competition and Training Department One, Two, Three, and Four	Administration Department Communist Party Commission Bureau of Retired Staff Finance and Planning Department Personnel Department International Affairs Department Science and Education Department Propaganda Department Polity and Regulation Department Mass Sports Department Competitive Department
Affiliated research institutes	Research Institute of Sport Science Research Institute of Sport Medicine Research Institute of Sport Information Research Institute of Sport Injury Research Institute of Sport Electrical Equipment	Research Institute of Sport Science Research Institute of Sport Medicine
Affiliated sport institutes	Beijing Sport Institute Shanghai Sport Institute Wuhan Sport Institute Chengdu Sport Institute Xi'an Sport Institute Shenyang Sport Institute	Beijing Sport University (the former Beijing Sport Institute)
Sport management centres		Football Basketball Volleyball Athletics Wushu Mountain climbing Motor racing Swimming Tennis Gymnastics

		Winter sports Table tennis and badminton Shooting and archery Chess and bridge Cycling and fencing Aquatic sports Strength sports Small balls Aerobatics and radio Mass sports guidance centre Qigong
Other affiliated institutions	Logistics Centre National Training Bureau National Olympic Centre Sport History Commission International Cooperation Centre Sport Equipment and Costume Centre Sport Foundation Centre China Sport Publishing Group	Logistics Centre National Training Bureau National Olympic Centre Sport History Commission International Cooperation Centre Sport Equipment and Costume Centre Sport Foundation Centre China Sport Publishing Group Sport Lottery Centre Accounting and Auditing Centre Sport Information Centre Human Resources Development Centre

Appendix B

Table A2

Profile of the Sport Management Centres

	Sport management centres	Sports in charge
1	Football	Football
2	Basketball	Basketball
3	Volleyball	Volleyball and beach volleyball
4	Athletics	Athletics
5	Wushu (martial arts)	Wushu (martial arts)
6	Mountain climbing	Mountain climbing
7	Motor racing	Motor racing
8	Tennis	Tennis
9	Table tennis and badminton	Table tennis and badminton
10	Shooting and archery	Shooting and archery
11	Gymnastics	Artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, acrobatics and trampoline
12	Swimming	Swimming, diving, water polo and synchronized swimming
13	Strength sports	Weightlifting, wrestling, judo, boxing and taekwondo
14	Aquatic sports	Rowing, kayak, canoe, sailing windsurfing, motor-boating, water skiing and fin swimming
15	Cycling, motor cycling and fencing	Cycling, motor cycling, fencing, modern pentathlon, equestrian
16	Chess and bridge	Chess, Chinese chess, Chinese go and bridge
17	Winter sports	Short track speed skating, speed skating, figure skating, ice hockey, cross country skiing, ski jumping and freestyle skiing, Alpine skiing and curling
18	Small balls	Baseball, baseball, softball, field hockey, handball, billiards, rugby, squash, golf, rattan ball and bowling
19	Aerobatics and radio	Aerobatics, aeromodelling, balloons and airships, gliding, hang gliding, general aviation, human powered flying, microlight, parachuting, paragliding, rotocraft

20	Mass sports guiding centre	Sport dancing, body building, dragon boating, dragon dancing, lion dancing, kite flying, tug of war, roller, target shooting, throwstick, shuttlecock and pigeon
21	National Olympic centre	Triathlon
22	Qigong	Qigong

Note. The Qigong management centre was set up in 2002.

Appendix C

Guideline of Interview Questions

Governance and Structure

1. Could you introduce your position in the organization and your main responsibilities?

2. How long have you been working in this position and in this organization?

3. Could you tell me how the organization is structured? What divisions, in your point of view, are central to the operation of the organization? Are there any women heading or working in these divisions?

4. Have you ever held any administrative positions in other national sport organizations? If so, at what level?

5. What are the major goals and vision of the organization? Have they changed in the recent years?

6. Could you tell me what significant structural changes have taken place since the separation of national sport associations from the State Sport Commission?

7. To whom is the organization accountable?

8. Who makes major decisions in the organization? Has this changed since the organization's inception? How is consensus achieved when disagreements occur?

Personnel Arrangement

9. How are people recruited and promoted? Are the same procedures applied for the recruitment, evaluation and promotion of superiors compared to other employees?

10. Who makes decisions regarding personnel arrangement, such as recruitment, evaluation and promotion?

11. Is there an open selection program for recruitment in your organization? What are the main sources of candidates: university graduates, officials cross-appointed from other organizations or officials from the State Sport Commission?

12. How do people get the information for open positions: from official websites, newspapers, colleagues, friends, or relatives?

13. Is there an age cap for the promotion and appointment of managers at a specific level?

14. How long is the maternity leave for female employees and how will they be paid during the maternity leave? Will their positions be retained during this period of time?

Sport Experience and Professional Expertise

15. Could you tell me your personal background, such as education and previous work experience?

16. What is your major or speciality? Is it relevant to your current job? Do you think it is a critical factor that led you to this position?

17. Do you have experience in competitive sport? If so, to what level? Do you think your success in competitive sport contributes to your development in management?

18. What was your first administrative position (at any level) in national sport organizations and when did you hold this position?

19. What do you think is the most decisive factor for your acquisition of the current position, education background, sport experience, or previous work experience and performance?

Culture and Values

20. Do you think there is a disproportionate representation of female sport managers, especially at senior level and decision-making positions in national sport organizations? If so, what do you think is the major reason for it?

21. Have you noticed any gender-related bias or prejudice in your organization?

22. Do you agree that "*yin sheng yang shuai*" is a prominent phenomenon characterizing Chinese competitive sport in the past two and half decades? If so, do you think female athletes' outstanding performance gives momentum and increases the chances for women, particularly retired elite sportswomen, to enter the sport management sphere?

23. Given the centralized training and competition system, to what extent, do you think the increase of female sport managers in national sport organizations will enhance female elite athletes' experience, particularly, in national teams and provincial teams?

24. What advantages and disadvantages do you think female sport managers have compared to their male colleagues?

25. From your point of view, the traditional Chinese culture and values are or are not in favour of women's pursuit for public careers? Have you felt its impact at work?

Affirmative Action

26. Is there a baby care program, or any other programs of the kind in your organization?

27. Is there any quota system in the recruitment and promotion of female managers?

28. Is there any mentoring system designed to developing female mangers?

29. Do you think the increase of female sport managers in sport organizations, especially at the top decision-making level, will help enhance women's participation in mass and competitive sport?

Questions to Female Participants

30. What are people's attitudes towards female sport managers?

31. Have you experienced unfair treatment, bias or injustice from your colleagues because of your gender?

32. Do you find being a woman is, to some extent, a barrier for your promotion and career development?

33. What do you think of your work in this organization? Is it important for achieving the organization's goals or just routine work?

34. In what respect and to what extent, if any, do you think female sport managers are disadvantaged from equal career opportunities, such as networking and access to information?

35. Is it a big concern for female managers to get pregnant, for the concern of losing a promotion or other work opportunity? What are your colleagues' and leaders' attitudes towards this?

36. Have you experienced conflict between your family responsibilities and your job? For example, do you have regular office hours and do you have to travel a lot in your work?

37. Do you find it difficult to solve the contradiction between your job and child rearing and housework?

38. Is your husband supportive to your work?

Closing Comments

39. Would you like to add anything else that you think might have influenced female sport managers' status in the organization?