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**Message from the Honorary President for Life
of the International Olympic Committee**

Juan Antonio Samaranch ,

Marqués de Samaranch

“From Bound Feet to Olympic Gold in China : The Case of Women’s Table Tennis ” , which recounts the evolution of women’s sport in the People’s Republic of China , makes an important contribution to the promotion of the Olympic ideals.

One of the fundamental principles of the Olympic Movement is to promote sport for all and encourage the harmonious development of all individuals to take part in the sport of their choice.

The IOC has made the participation of women in sporting activities

and in the Olympic Games one of its major concerns. Sport , whether competitive sport or sport for all , has become a social force with a major impact on the structure of society and the condition of women.

For the first time , this work will share the knowledge and the experience of what the Chinese women have achieved in thousands of years in the field of sport. These outstanding women , who have faced many challenges , are examples for future generations. Their performances and achievements motivate young girls and boys , encouraging them to practise sport and above all inspiring dreams of participating in the Olympic Games.

Let me say a few words about the author , Yaping Deng , who works tirelessly to promote the Olympic ideal. I , as President of the International Olympic Committee , had the honour and privilege to present her with the Olympic gold medals she won in the individual event at two consecutive Olympic Games , in Barcelona in 1992 then in Atlanta in 1996. Two other gold medals (in doub-

les) were added to her Olympic titles during the same Games.

After a successful sports career, Yaping Deng moved into sports administration, going to university and learning English. She is now bringing her talent and perseverance to her work for the IOC Athletes' Commission, the Chinese Olympic Committee, and the Organising Committee for the 2008 Beijing Games, another challenge.

China is a country of culture, rich in traditional sport and where the concept of sport for all is well founded. There is no doubt that the Chinese sports movement will welcome this book, which highlights an important part of the history of sport in China and its contribution to the Olympic Movement, by promoting the development of sport and Olympism, which is based on solidarity, friendship and peace.

As we look forward to the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens in 2004, I am certain that the Chinese women will add to the excellence and excitement of the Games.

Yaping Deng is a deserving and extraordinary young lady , a real role model for the young generation. As I said once to her :“ The world is ready to embrace you because you have the key. ”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Young". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent vertical stroke on the left side.

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Chapter One :

Introduction

Olympic Gold in China: The Case of Women's Table Tennis

From Bound Feet to

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 the Chinese government provided opportunities for the general public to participate in all kinds of sport activities. During the past 53 years Chinese athletes have achieved great success in international sports competitions. They have won 1207 gold medals at a variety of world championships. In the last five Olympic Games alone , Chinese athletes have won 80 gold medals. The fact that 44.5 gold medals were won by Chinese women athletes (See Appendix A2) indicates a great step forward in reaching the goal of gender equality in Chinese society.

Confucianism has influenced the life of Chinese women for thousands of years. The Confucian philosophy demanded women's obedience to father , husband and son. The role for women in traditional society was hard work and suffering. Confucianism not only dominated society , but also created a monstrous horrible idea of feminine physical beauty—small bound feet—in order to have women completely under men's control. Some of them did not release their bandages until 1949 (Fan , 2002).

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 , the Communist Party tried to liberate women from the old system by encouraging them to participate in social , political and employment activities. The government paid special attention to sports because it involved women in society. Therefore , the government provided equal opportunity for both men and women and gave priorities to women to participate in sports. There were two reasons why the Chinese government had this motivation. Firstly , in the past , China was described as “ the Sick Man of East Asia ” (Wu et al. , 1999 :

11). In order to change this image , the Chinese government was determined to create a new identity for China in the world , and sport provided an opportunity to achieve this goal. Secondly , after winning the civil war in 1949 , the Communist Party wanted to improve the government's status in the world and to be formally recognized internationally. Therefore , the government used its limited resources to try to achieve its ambition of making China one of the strongest sports nations in the world.

However , it was hard for the new government to develop sports on the international platform as most of the International Sports Federations (IFs) , and in particular the International Olympic Committee (IOC) , did not recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s. For this reason , the government paid special attention to promoting table tennis because of the then rare recognition of the PRC by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). Since then , the Chinese table tennis team has dominated world table tennis competition. Not only have the team and its members collectively won 108.5 gold medals in the Olympic Games , the World Championships and the World Cup (See Appendix A3) , it has also helped China to establish diplomatic relations with America in the 1970s and opened China's door to the outside world. The Chinese table tennis team encouraged a huge number of Chinese people to overcome difficulties by providing role models for the young people. table tennis is the national sport in China.

In order to improve people's health and to raise the standards in elite sports (elite sport is sport at high level , such as international competitions , world championships or Olympic Games) , the State Council established the Physi-

cal Culture and Sports Administration of China in the early 1950s. Chairman Mao Zedong stated : “ Promote physical culture and build up people’s health (*Fa zhan ti yu yun dong zeng qiang ren min ti zhi*) ” (Wu et al. , 1999 : 12). This defined the Sports Administration’s working task. Therefore , the main responsibility of the Sports Administration was to provide fitness criteria for the general public to pass and to provide better training conditions for athletes to win championships for China. At the same time sports administration committees were established at provincial and county levels. This system was in fact copied from the Soviet Union. Regular programmes of physical training were introduced in army units , communes , and factories. Sports facilities were constructed or renovated. Massive sports competitions were organized and a network was set up for the selection and training of top athletes (Whitby , 1999).

It is generally agreed that Chinese female athletes have achieved more than Chinese male athletes. People often say : “ Women are strong and men are weak ” (*Yin sheng Yang shuai*). This is unusual in Chinese culture. However , there are few studies which explore the deep-seated reasons for the achievement made by Chinese women athletes , especially female table tennis players. The purpose of this research is therefore to analyse how and why Chinese women athletes were capable of achieving great success in sports competitions at international level , particularly in table tennis , from the 1950s to 2002. In order to do this , this research raises the hypothesis that Chinese women athletes perform better than men in the international sporting arena because of traditional culture , government sports policy and professional training system.

Chapter Two presents some historical background and concentrates on the history of Chinese women in general, the history of sports in China and history of table tennis in China. In Chapter Three a literature review will be presented, which focuses on the various perspectives of elite women's sport in China. In Chapter Four, the research methods and data gathering techniques will be provided as well as details of interviewees. In order to test the hypothesis, three aspects will be discussed: government policy, the professional training system and the effect of traditional culture on women athletes. Following this, in Chapter Five, findings and discussions will be presented. In this chapter, the author will analyze the Chinese government's sports policy in encouraging women to participate in sports, especially in table tennis, the impact of cultural change on Chinese athletes, and what the advantages and disadvantages of professional training systems are at the present time. Finally, Chapter Six sets out the conclusions of this dissertation, which support the researcher's hypothesis, as well as recommendations for changing the sports system and for future research.

Chapter Two :

Historical Background

Olympic Gold in China: The Case of Women's Table Tennis

From Bound Feet to

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the historical background of women's status in Chinese society, which is helpful to deepen the understanding of how much Chinese athletes have achieved in sports competitions at international levels. It firstly focuses on how Confucian ideology impacted on women and how gradual changes have occurred within traditional culture. It then concentrates on how the Chinese government has provided opportunities for women to participate in sport. Finally it describes how table tennis was introduced and developed in China.

2.1 The History of Women in China

2.1.1 Traditional Culture

China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with 5000 years of continuous history. The Chinese culture is unique. For over two thousand years, Confucianism has been regarded as the central and exclusive philosophy, which provided the political, social, and moral foundation for Chinese culture. There were three aspects in the Confucian Ethics: "Absolute loyalty and obedience were due from minister to prince, from son to father and from wife to husband" (Fan, 1997: 18). As the principle of the Confucian doctrine explains, women should have 'Four Virtues': propriety, filial piety, benevolence and morality. In fact, the woman's role was to serve and obey men (Dong, 1998).