



**WOMEN,  
SPORT and  
SOCIETY in  
MODERN  
CHINA**

**Holding Up *More*  
than Half the Sky**

**DONG  
JINXIA**

# WOMEN, SPORT AND SOCIETY IN MODERN CHINA

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Holding Up *More* than Half the Sky

DONG JINXIA

*Peking University*



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# Sport in the Global Society

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General Editor: J.A. Mangan

## WOMEN, SPORT AND SOCIETY IN MODERN CHINA

# SPORT IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY

General Editor: J.A. Mangan

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The interest in sports studies around the world is growing and will continue to do so. This unique series combines aspects of the expanding study of *sport in the global society*, providing comprehensiveness and comparison under one editorial umbrella. It is particularly timely, with studies in the political, cultural, anthropological, ethnographic, social, economic, geographical and aesthetic elements of sport proliferating in institutions of higher education.

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In a very real sense, this book has been my intellectual 'Long March' – arduous, difficult and demanding. I shall always remember all those who urged me on and offered help to me on my way, but understandably I shall remember most often and most warmly the trio who marched with me step by step – in spirit in China and in life in Britain. Thankyou.

DJ

*Beijing*

February 2003

## List of Abbreviations

ACSF:	All China Sports Federation
BIPE:	Beijing Institute of Physical Education
BMSC:	Beijing Municipal Sports Commission
BUPE:	Beijing University of Physical Education
CCCL:	Central Committee of the Communist League
CCP:	Chinese Communist Party
CWVT:	Chinese women's volleyball team
CR:	Cultural Revolution
GLF:	Great Leap Forward
IAAF:	International Amateur Athletic Federation
IOC:	International Olympic Committee
NSA:	National Swimming Association
NSC:	National Sports Commission
PLA:	People's Liberation Army
PRC:	People's Republic of China
SEZ:	Special Economic Zone
SSC:	Sichuan Sports Commission
WPS:	'workers, peasants and soldiers'



# Foreword

With great pride I have presented medals to Li Lingwei, Fu Mingxia, Wang Liping and Ge Fei, as well as many other Chinese women athletes at the Olympic Games and other major international competitions. The success of these Chinese women have not only helped China to win world recognition, but have also aroused worldwide interest. Why are Chinese women athletes so impressive? How could they become so impressive? Are the Chinese people as impressed by them as the rest of the world? These are some of the questions asked by the world's media. My international and Chinese colleagues, acquaintances and academic friends have also frequently asked me the same questions. In order to provide convincing answers, it is necessary to explore the relationship between women and sport in modern Chinese society in terms of cultural traditions, recent history, economic developments, modernisation and international politics. The subject calls for a careful and comprehensive study.

In her book, Dr Dong Jinxia has offered fascinating and thoughtful answers to these questions and she has responded to the call for a serious consideration of women and sport in modern China. In a sentence – she fills a gap. China and the world beyond China will be intrigued by her study. *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China* is the first survey of the subject in the English language, and thus the first available to the world beyond China. In this book Dr Dong Jinxia deals thoroughly with the evolution of women's sport in new China and its complex relationship with culture, society, economics and politics.

Based on her experience as a woman athlete, a coach and a sports university academic, she is able to discuss with authority and insight political sports ideologies, centralised planning arrangements, winning-orientated sports policies, the issues of the politicisation of sport, the commercialisation of sport and attitudes to performance-enhancing drugs.

First and foremost her book is a study of Chinese women in a time of change. It is a commentary on the reformation of gender attitudes, expectations, responses and demands in contemporary China. In this reformation women athletes have acted as Pioneers; as Dong Jinxia rightfully states, they

have held up *more* than half the sky. Dong Jinxia is an remarkable and faithful witness of their achievements.

LU SHENGRONG

President of the International Badminton Federation (1993–2001)

Member of the IOC (1996–2000)

Member of the Women and Sports Working Group of the IOC (1995–)

January 2003

## Series Editor's Foreword

Dong Jinxia's *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China* deals with a present belief in equality increasingly instilled in women's minds: 'Women have the courage and the capacity – the product of history – to confront modern dilemmas and overcome them. Sportswomen for their part today are aware of their possibilities and confident in their aspirations as never before. Women in general are conscious of their rights and ready to fight against social bias and injustice ... If and when women's equality with men is fully achieved, women could well hold up more than half the sky – in Chinese sport and society.'<sup>1</sup>

In short, *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China* is about far more than just sport. 'The wise man points to the moon', so the Chinese saying goes, 'but the fool looks at the finger'. Dong Jinxia is purposefully moon-gazing (or perhaps more aptly sky-gazing) and she is certainly not mesmerised by any finger. Nor, however, is she starry eyed: she notes the challenges; she is aware of the difficulties. There is a long march ahead – but women are on the move – and sportswomen are among 'the spear-carriers' in the vanguard. Her concluding remarks are cautious and sober. Nevertheless what she makes clear in page after page of evidence and argument, is that in the world of international sport – so significant in terms of national status – Chinese women have more than an edge over Chinese men: they hold up *more* than half the sky – and this has resonances for the women of China. As she remarks in her opening sentence to the Prologue: '“Women hold up half the sky” and “Women can do what men can do” are not just popular slogans peddled by Chairman Mao, but recent actualities in China's elite sport'.<sup>2</sup>

This is their story. It is a tale for modern times: of gender challenge and change; of the release of women's potential; of their demonstrated capacities; of their determination to free their talents. The story is not yet

fully told. It is to be hoped that Dong Jinxia, who herself personifies so well the qualities outlined above in the first paragraph, will add to it with the acumen that characterises *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China* – perhaps after the Beijing Olympics!

J. A. MANGAN  
International Research Centre  
for Sport, Socialization and Society  
De Montfort University (Bedford)  
February 2003

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