

From Bound Feet to Olympic Gold in China: The Case of Women's Table Tennis

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About the Author

Deng Yaping was a member of the Chinese national table tennis team from 1988 to 1997, during which time she won 18 world titles, including at the 1992 and 1996 Olympic Games, World Championships and World Cup. In 1996 she matriculated at Tsinghua University in Beijing; in 2001 she was awarded a B.A. in English. From 2001 to 2002 she studied Contemporary Chinese Studies at the Business School of the University of Nottingham, U.K., and in 2002 was awarded an M.A. in Contemporary Chinese Studies. Now she is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, U.K., and also working at the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of XXIX Olympiad.



*Member of the International
Olympic Committee
Athletes' Commission
2004.2.16*

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in Chinese characters, which appear to be '邓亚萍' (Deng Yaping). The strokes are fluid and expressive, with a prominent loop at the end.



1994 XII Asian Games in Hiroshima, Japan (www.sportsphoto.com.cn)



Medal Awarding Ceremony at XXVI Olympic Games in Atlanta, USA



Tsinghua University, Beijing, China, 2001



M.A Graduation Ceremony at the University of Nottingham, UK, 2002

For my parents—

my father, for his whole-hearted encouragement and
help throughout my career, and

my mother, for her loving concern in my daily life.

**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 doubles) 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."

Preface

Over the years I have been involved with sport at the international level I have become increasingly aware of the role played by women at the top level. Although my period of research for this Masters Degree commenced in October 2001, I have been thinking about the impact of sport on the lives of women over a much longer time. My international commitments imposed very real constraints on my time, but on the other hand they offered a multitude of opportunities to discuss many aspects of this area with sports administrators and competitors across the world. This breadth of interaction has helped me to take a more global view of the subject which I think has been valuable in focusing on the chosen area of my research.

I am acutely aware of the limitations placed on the scope of my research by time constraints but I feel that my extensive international experience has enabled me to look more objectively at my material.

Abstract

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party opened sports to all and it promised to guarantee equal political and social rights to men and women. The purpose of this research is therefore to analyse how and why Chinese women athletes were capable of achieving great success in the sports competitions at international level, particularly in table tennis from the 1950s to 2002. The primary method employed to collect data was in-depth interviews. A total of 16 interviewees were selected from the Chinese Sports Administration and the National Table Tennis Team. Top level officials, national team managers, head coaches and women players were interviewed.

The researcher found that the Chinese women athletes' great success in the international competitions was due to three important factors: the Chinese government sports policy, professional training system and Chinese traditional culture. The researcher considers that there are potential dangers facing the sport of women's table tennis in coming years. The responses of the informants underlined the three recommendations we should adopt: the setting up of women's table tennis teams in schools and universities; improving education and English language teaching for active women athletes; putting professional clubs into the marketplace in addition to government sponsorship.

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The extent to which this study has been successful in meeting its goals is partly due to the efforts, co-operation and support I received from many individuals. Special thanks to Mrs. Ann Smith and Mrs. Norma Hazledine of the University of Nottingham; Prof. Musheng Cheng, Prof. Zhongshe Lu and Prof. Xiaozhong Chen of Tsinghua University; Prof. Shaojie Zhang, Dr. Hong Fan, and Dr. Yi Wang. Thanks go also to my family for standing always behind me. Last, but not least, I wish to thank all my friends, colleagues, interviewees, and supporters.

Abbreviations

ATTA	American Table Tennis Association
CTTA	Chinese Table Tennis Association
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IFs	International Federations
ITTF	International Table Tennis Federation
JATTA	Japanese and Asian Table Tennis Association
KMT	Kuo Ming Tang (The Nationalist Party)
PRC	People's Republic of China
NOC	The National Olympic Committee
WSF	Women's Sports Foundation
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
WTA	Women's Tennis Association
LPGA	The Ladies Professional Golf Association

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