

Life Careers of Chinese and Finnish Top Female Athletes

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This study is one part of the ongoing research project on life careers of Chinese and Finnish top athletes initiated since 1996. The study is concerned with the common problems which occurred because of great time commitment on sport among Chinese and Finnish top female athletes during their sport career. Particularly, this study focuses on the common barriers, namely sacrifices due to sport in other spheres of life among Chinese female athletes in the period of 1995-1996, and Finnish female athletes in 1984. The main reason for bringing sacrifices to the fore in discussing the life career of top female athletes is that when the recent developments in the field of sport research on women are evaluated, sport training, sport medicine, and sport biology are particularly prominent. However, research into the personality and social environment of female athletes has been exposed to less study.

The population of the study is the most successful Chinese and Finnish female top athletes who were active in practice and competition in 1996 (Chinese) and in 1984 (Finnish). The samples of the study were selected among the Chinese and Finnish female athletes according to the following criterion :

Chinese top female athletes are those who took part in: 1) the Olympic Games, World Championships and World Cups; 2) the Asia Games, Asia Championships and Asia Cups; 3) Chinese Championships in selected sports (17 disciplines).

Finnish top female athletes are those who took part in: 1) the Olympic Games; 2) Finnish Championships in selected sports (21

disciplines); 3) the representatives of the "East-West" contest in Finnish baseball.

The data for this study were collected by means of a questionnaire sent to 186 Chinese top female athletes at the turn of 1995-1996 and to 109 Finnish top female athletes in 1984. The sample of all Chinese and Finnish female athletes were active in practice and competition at that point of time. Team sports was represented by 80 Chinese and 52 Finnish female athletes while individual sports were represented by 106 Chinese and 57 Finnish female athletes. The average age of Chinese female athletes was 24.4 years old while Finnish females athletes had an average age of 23.6 years old.

The questionnaire to Chinese female athletes, identical to that given to the Finnish female athletes, was made up of 37 questions (179 variables) which includes 7 major parts: (a) sport involvement and achievement; (b) educational background; (c) occupational experience; (d) leisure activity and family life; (e) common barrier and social support; (f) life satisfaction; (g) personal information and family background.

In athletes' lives, the undesirable sacrifices made as a result of the great time commitment on sport were most clearly manifested in schooling, occupational life, family life and vacationing. Recognizing the negative effects of sport among the Finnish athletes was greater in the area of education than in professional life, whereas, differences in the experience of disadvantages on account of sport among the Chinese athletes were the same between education and occupation. Moreover, views held of the undesirable sacrifices due to sport in the area of study and professional life among the Chinese athletes were stronger than those the Finnish athletes had experienced. One reasonable explanation for the causes is that the Chinese female athletes spent approximately five hours a day on organized training and competition, whereas the daily total time spent on training and other physical exercises among the Finnish female athletes was only 2.5 hours.

In the other areas of social life the disadvantages arising from sport were felt most distinctly in personal life. They were recognized most strongly by the Chinese and Finnish athletes as sacrifices in family life and vacationing. In family life, which was highly esteemed by Finnish athletes in particular, the sacrifices made on