

SPORTS PARTICIPATION FOR HONG KONG WOMEN AND HONG KONG INITIATIVES 對香港女性參與運動之探討



Leung Mee Lee
Associate Professor, Hong Kong Baptist University
梁美莉
浸會大學體育系副教授

歷史上，無論東西方社會，運動廣泛地被視為屬於雄性的項目。正如中國以陰陽來代表女男一樣，女性被認為較順從和脆弱的，而男性則較強壯和具攻擊性。在九成人口都是中國人的香港社會中，「女性應該留在家裡」的觀念曾規限著女性須要處理家務和照顧孩子的責任。踏入20世紀，女性對社會事務的參與也開始積極起來。時至今日，香港的女性在多方面都能跟男性般獲得平等對待。她們不單止得到較佳的教育機會，在社會的角色也越來越重要。因此，無論在運動比賽及健體活動上，女性的參與比十年前的大為提高。究竟香港女性過去在主要運動競賽上的參與情況和未來女性在運動發展上方針應該如何？這都是本文探討的綱領。

Historically, sports was globally understood within the context of a masculine value system both in the Eastern and Western Societies. The 'Ying' and the 'Yang' stand for female and male in the Chinese culture implied that the female are more fragile and submissive where as the male being more aggressive and stronger. With 90% of the population in Hong Kong being Chinese, the cultural belief in a Chinese society that "Women's place should be in the home" has confined women to attend household chores and child bearing activities. In early 20th century, with the changing role of women in China and especially in Hong Kong, women are more active that they were a decade ago. Women are equal nowadays in a wide range of activities because they are better educated, play a more committed role and live a more active life. Thus, their participation in sports has increased in the past decade both in recreation and in competition. This paper attempts to report on Hong Kong women's participation in major games and also to recommend strategies which can further enhance women's place in sports.

In recent years, while women in the western countries faced the career of lower pay jobs, longer working hours and less promotional opportunities in sports and recreation, Hong Kong women seem to be more privileged and favourable in their athletic career and professional development. This can be validated by the number of Hong Kong women athletes attending the various major Games. As you can see from the table below, the number of women participating in major games has increased in percentage terms when compared to their male counterparts.

TABLE SHOWING PARTICIPATION OF HONG KONG
WOMEN IN MAJOR GAMES FROM 1986-1995.

Name of Major Games	Competitors			Officials		
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
	%			%		
Asian Games (Seoul, 1986)	138	53	38.4	42	4	9.5
Olympic Games (Seoul, 1988)	39	10	20.4	19	2	9.5
Commonwealth Games (Auckland, 1990)	43	24	35.8	14	3	17.6
Asian Games (Beijing, 1990)	149	66	30.6	52	4	7.1
Olympic Games (Barcelona, 1992)	28	10	26.3	20	6	23
	%			%		
East Asian Games (Shanghai, 1993)	28	31	52.5	20	7	25.9
Commonwealth Games (Victoria, 1994)	28	25	47.1	8	5	38.4
Asian Games (Hiroshima, 1994)	78	40	33.8	29	5	14.7
Pacific Ocean Games (Colombia, 1995)	4	3	42.8	8	1	11.1

The above information was supplied by the Amateur Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong.
Note: %= percentage of female in that category.

The first Olympic Games were celebrated in Athens in 1896 with only male competitors. Tennis and golf were the first women events to be included in the 1900 Games in Paris. By 1936, there were 15 women events out of 71 in 17 sports. In 1984 Los Angeles Games, it increased to 61 events out of 220 in the programme and in 1988 Seoul Olympics, Judo, table-tennis and badminton were also added. Hong Kong participated in the Olympic Games for the first time in 1952 and we took part only in swimming. Out of 4 competitors in swimming, two were women and since then, there has always been women competitors in the Hong Kong Team in the Olympic Games although the number was smaller compared to their male counterparts. The reason stated by Riordan (1994) was that there are more events for men than for women in all Games and there were no women competition in some of the events and this imbalance indirectly limits the opportunities for female participation. The situation improved here in the last decade when the gold medallists from Hong Kong in the Asian Games were women. Catherine Kuk-hung Che from Ten-pin Bowling won the first gold medal for Hong Kong in the 1986 Asian Games followed by Kim-fei Ho, who won the gold medal in rowing during the 1st East Asian Games in 1993. It can be easily spotted that during the major Games all the headlines in Chinese newspapers were describing women athletes representing Hong Kong or China in Athletics, Badminton, Gymnastics, Swimming, Rowing, Windsurfing, Table tennis, and Wushu. The mere fact that women in these two countries were the major medal winners have won for themselves financial and media support.

Recently, the Nike Athlete Award and the Hong Kong Sports Institute Best Athlete Award was won by Lai-shan Lee from windsurfing and Po-wah Chai from table-tennis respectively. Moreover, for the last 4 years, 80% of the finalists in the Coca Cola Best Athletes of the Year awards were women and the winners of the title have always been women. I was lucky to be appointed as the lady official responsible for Hong Kong female athletes in the Commonwealth Games in Victoria last August. When interviewed by the Vancouver Sun, a daily newspaper in Vancouver, I said "Hong Kong Media have focused on performance over gender ever since the flood of gold medals for Chinese women in swimming and athletics at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics galvanized interest in women's sports. Incentive awards and recognition were given to everyone based on merits. Regardless of sex, the important thing is achievement, so women have better equality and visibility in sports in Hong Kong" (Ng, 1994). Mr. A. de O. Sales, our President of the Amateur Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong and also the Chairman of the Commonwealth Games Federation (1990-1994) once made the following comment at the 260th Council Meeting "All the men and women were in the team on their own merit. Sometimes there were more women than men, e.g. the first East Asian Games" (O · Sales, 1995). Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the Flag Bearer for Hong Kong at the 1st East Asian Games in Shanghai, the Asian Games in Hiroshima and the recent Pacific Games were women. However, this equality does not only confine to sports participation, more important, it also extends to include women in sports education and training. This year, Hong Kong sent 5 representatives to attend the International Olympic Academy in Greece and all 5 were women from various National Sports Bodies and all were carefully selected on merit.

You may envy Hong Kong that we are progressing at a faster pace than most western countries, but the following policy that the Olympic Committee of Hong Kong has in force since its formation in 1949/50 has given a great impetus to the development of women's sports in Hong Kong.



Lee Lai-Shan, the windsurfing star

1. The Olympic Committee gives equal opportunities and recognition for both male and female athletes. This is done by increasing the number of competitions and events for females locally and internationally by selecting female athletes for major games solely on merit.
2. The Olympic Committee gives incentive performance awards to all deserving athletes regardless of sex since the scheme was started in 1986.
3. The Olympic Committee develops leadership through sports education. Women are encouraged to participate at conferences, workshops and to be involved in all activities and organisations so they are better prepared for the challenge which requires professional knowledge and human skills.
4. Females are encouraged to serve in committees so they are involved in the decision-making process on all sports policies.

In Hong Kong, women are most respected by our National Olympic Committee and we are given the opportunities, responsibilities and most important, autonomy so that we have the chance to share the athletic experiences and also the freedom to choose our sporting career. This sets a prominent example to all sports organisations and government departments engaged in promoting physical recreation. Although women's sport in Hong Kong was not a straight road until this conscious policy on the part of the Olympic Committee, we are still running on an uphill route with old detours from a colonial past and vested interests, but we all have a dream to reach the top of the hill. It is up to us, who are more than half way there, to keep going strongly so that one day we can look down from the peak and say "My dream has come true."

References

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