
The Evolution of Urban Society and Social Changes in Sports Participation at the Grassroots in China

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Abstract

Since the 1980s the ‘economic reformation’¹ has played a crucial role in leading China to a fundamental change in every aspect of its society. This change accelerated a new process of urbanisation. In conjunction with the vigorous economic, political and social transformations caused by urbanisation, sport in China has undergone a comprehensive process of industrialisation, commercialisation, decentralisation and privatisation (Wu, 1999). Urbanisation has changed the infrastructure of sport, sports values and forms of participation. Against this background, sports participation in China has emerged with new spaces, forms, contents and concepts. Although elite sport has still been tightly controlled by the state as a political instrument, sport and exercise at the grassroots has become an individual and social activity as a new feature in Chinese urban life. The Chinese people have benefited from increased opportunities and have made great progress in sports participation.

Key words: Urbanisation, Sports Participation, Social Change in China

¹ The economic reform was aimed at creating market institutions and converting the economy from an administratively driven command economy to a price-driven market economy.

Since the 1980s, the Chinese market economy has been transformed from a planned economy and has led China into a new era of urbanisation. Urbanization is a prerequisite for the transformation of China, from backwardness to modernity, in terms of the technology of production and the orientation of individuals, social institutions and cultural concepts (Chang, 1994). It is a social process which has transformed Chinese society by fundamentally altering, not only the character and structure of its society, but also the very environment Chinese people live in; not only where they live but how they live; not only their relationships with other people but also their whole ‘way of life’ (Slattery, 1985). Participation in sports as a social phenomenon and cultural practice has been influenced by urbanization, both comprehensively and thoroughly. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese sport had evolved under very complex social, cultural and political circumstances. In a new era of urbanisation, participation in sports by Chinese people has acquired new characteristics. This article aims to examine how the evolution of Chinese urban society since the 1980s has shaped sport in the context of economic, political, cultural and global changes, and whether sport has become a new arena for the Chinese to express themselves and to achieve a real urban way of life.

History: Sport in Pre-1980s Regime

As soon as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded, China began a full socialist transformation and the reconstruction of a new social order. As a social institution, sport played a complex role in this process and was mediated through the new state, which locked in all structures of society as a whole (Gu, 1997). In order to re-integrate its members into the socialist order and at the same time re-build its international status, Chinese sport was closely associated with its political objectives: Communism and Nationalism.

In order to increase a reputation of the state externally and strengthen the cohesion of the nation internally, in 1949, He Long, who was the first Minister of the State Physical Education and Sport Commission (afterwards it was changed in to National Sports Ministry), addressed that

Chinese people were called “The Sick Men of the Far East” in the old society. Now, the Chinese people have to stand up in the world. We should take this label from our heads. Who is going to do this? Sport could undertake this arduous but glorious task. As communist members, we should devote ourselves into sports construction, which is also a great goal for the Chinese people.

(Gu, 1997: p.87)

At the beginning of the PRC the Communist sports policy provided a basis for rationalizing physical exercises and improving productivity in response to a state eager to use all possible means to build the new country rapidly. In order to satisfy the need to consolidate the revolution, recover social production and eventually lead China into a communist society, the state argued that the health of general public was crucial to achieving these aims. Sport therefore was asked to function in order to build healthy citizens. Zhu De (1886-1976), the then Vice-President of the PRC, assigned sport a crucial task:

At present our sport must serve the people, serve national defense and serve people’s health... In order to undertake the hard work of constructing our new country, sport should promote people’s health physically and mentally. Students, workers, peasants, citizens, militants and civil servants all have to become involved in sport.

(Cited in Zhu, 1950: 7)

On the 20th June 1952, Chairman Mao advocated ‘developing sport and promoting people’s physique’ (Xiong, 1995: 87). This slogan strengthened the main function of sport in this period, and contributed to establishing the importance of sport in people’s lives. Sport, especially mass sport², therefore promoted rapidly in the Chinese society (National Sports Commission [NSC thereafter], 1985: 158). According to *Sports History of People’s Republic of China*,

In the 1950s, workers, peasants, students, intellectuals were widely mobilised to take part in sport and physical exercises through their workplaces, agricultural communes or schools. In cities, exercises were arranged for workers at their break times in the morning or after work. Varieties of amateur competitive games were also organised among staff in public holidays. ‘Sport Weeks’ and ‘Sports Months’ were organised by local

² In a Chinese context, the term ‘mass sport’ is more frequently used than ‘Sport for All’ with comparison to ‘competitive sport’ (elite sport) in the official discourse.

governments and a campaign of ‘Ten-Minute Broadcast Exercises’³ was launched across the country in 1958. In the rural areas, peasants were also organised to participate in some sports activities after finishing working.

(Wu, 1999: 134)

Nevertheless, China was a poor country. The government did not have a large amount of budget to build proper sports venues and facilities. People could only take some simple physical exercises, which did not require professional and high standard facilities, for example, playing football in the factory compound; jogging on the street; swimming in lakes or rivers, skipping ropes in the fields. However, in this period, people’s sports participation appeared to be more government-controlled behaviour and collective activities rather than individual choices. Sport activities and physical exercises of urban citizen were completely organised and supervised by work units, which social units represented the benefits of the government rather than workers themselves. Therefore, sport was regarded as a political activity rather than a personal choice of life (Wu, 1997: 191). As an interviewee stated that

No matter whether people were willing to or not, we were forced to attend some exercises or sports events. The government required people to build a strong body through physical exercises so that we can fully involve into economic development and to defense our country⁴.

(Interview in Beijing, 2004)

In the 1950s, mass sport was the main concern of the government. However, since the failure in Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952, the state soon realised that elite sport had a powerful function in achieving status on the international stage. In 1963, Chen Yin, Vice-prime Minister of State argued:

Sport is not just playing ball. It reflects our country’s image, force, spirit and the superiority of our socialist construction. The achievements in sports are the glory of our country and people.

Xin tiyu 1963 no.5: 12

³ This was an every important form of exercise in workplaces and schools. It was designed by the National Sports Council and required to be held in every city and town. Workers and students exercised all together in the morning break along with broadcast music. This was why it was called ‘broadcast exercise’.

⁴ In July to August, 2004, the author carried out a semi-structured interview in Beijing to explore the changing situation of mass sport in the big cities. The field work lasted two months and 40 physical exercisers from different classes, ages and genders had been interviewed.

These focuses assigned sport a heavy political task, aiming at consolidating the national identity by erasing the image of China as a sick man and win world honor through high performances on the international sports stage. In the 1960s, the Sports Ministry changed its policy from promoting people's exercises at the grassroots into producing elite sports stars (Zhengyanshi, 1982: 72). The government determined to use the best of limited resources to give special and intensive training to potential athletes in a particular sport so that they could compete in the international sports stage. Consequently, the Sports Ministry whose major responsibility was to train physical education teachers and instructors for the mass sports movement reduced from 29 in 1959 to 20 in 1960. On the contrary, professional sports team increased from 3 in 1951 to more than 50 in 1961 (Zhengyanshi, 1982: 102). The changes of Chinese communist sports policy and practice in the 1960s marked as major historical change. It started the new era of elite sports, which maintained its priority in Chinese sport afterwards until the 1990s.

In the late 1979, People's Republic of China regained her membership of the IOC and many international competitions were open to the Chinese. The success of the Chinese athletes at 1979 World Volleyball Championships and the 1982 Asia Games brought the buzzword 'competition' to the Chinese. Sport was the most efficient political instrument, which determined winning Olympic Games would dominate the concerns of the government when she came back to Olympic family. The 1984 Olympic Games formed a great divide in China's Olympic history. China, for the first time, sent a large delegation of 225 athletes to the games. The Chinese did not only the first time perform on Olympic stage, but also won 15 gold medals. This astonishing achievement did not just greatly changed China's image in the world, strengthening a positive national image, self-esteem, self-confidence, but also occupied China's attention and put Olympic forward. In 1985 the Olympic Strategy was put forward by the Society of Strategic Research for the Development of Physical Education and Sport (*tiyu fazhan zhanlue yanjiu hui*). The slogan 'Elite sport is the guide' was clearly advocated. This slogan played a leading role in advancing Chinese sport more than a decade. Wu Shaozu, Minister of Sport claimed, 'the highest of Chinese sport is

success in the Olympic Games. We must concentrate our resources on it' (Wu, 1999: 402).

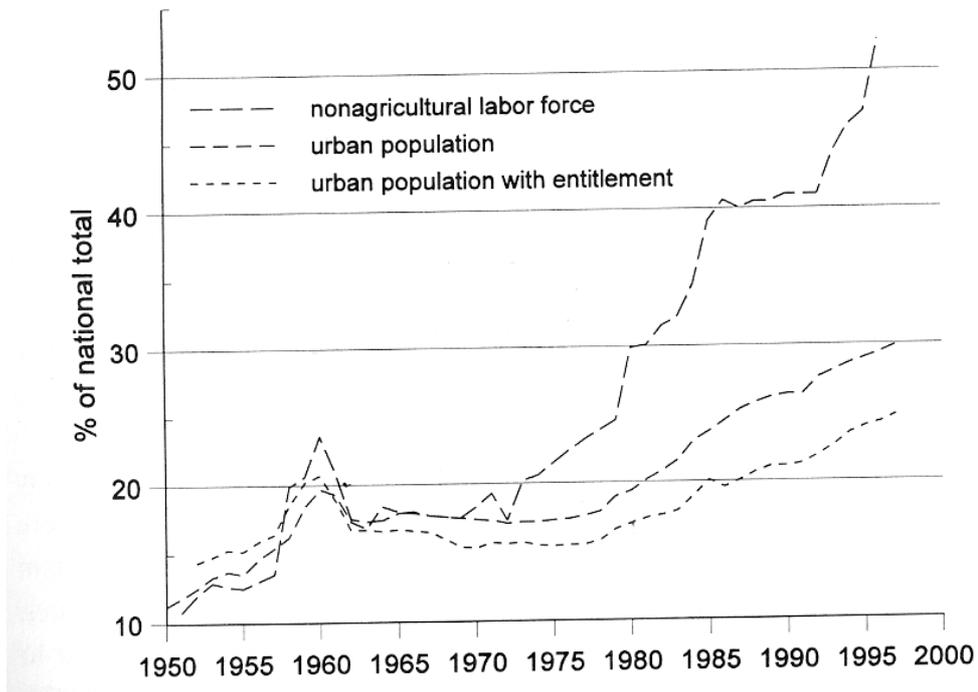
The significant achievement of China's elite sport did not bring development in sport at the grassroots. On the contrary mass sport was no more a concern of the government, and therefore they withdrew from making efforts to promote sport at the grassroots. Without governmental support and organisation, sports participation at the grassroots dropped very quickly. Many amateur sports teams were dismissed; morning exercises were canceled; and individuals rarely took part in physical exercises themselves because of their poor living conditions and also because of their being fully engaged in political movement since the Cultural Revolution in 1966. This situation did not change until the start of the urbanisation along with the economic reformation in the 1980s.

Urbanisation since the Economic Reform

In the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) broke away from the long-standing bondage of 'leftist' practice and embraced pragmatic economic and social reform. Based on economic, social and cultural factors and in order to meet individuals' social and personal needs, urbanisation developed rapidly. From 1980 to 1989, the level of urbanisation⁵ in China increased from around 19.4% to 26.2%, then rose to 30.9% in 1999 (Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003: 23). It grew to 37.7 % by the end of 2000 (*Xinhua News*, 16th September 2004) (see **Figure 1**).

⁵ The level of urbanisation was basically calculated by measuring the urban population, non-agricultural labour force and urban population with entitlement.

Figure 1 Urbanisation in China from 1950 to 2000



Source: The Population Research Institute (PRI), 1987, 1993, 1996; National Statistics Bureau (NSB), 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000.

* urban population with entitlement refers to the people who registered an official urban residency (*chengshi hukou*). Urban population includes urban residents with or without official urban registration.

Chinese urbanisation was a consequence of the development of a market economy. The increase in heavy industrial production saw a growth in the size of relatively large cities such as provincial capitals and China's industrial centres; at the same time, new light industry and tertiary ventures stimulated the emergence of new urban areas of various sizes, including small cities and towns across China (Fei, 1989) (See **Table 1**). Industrialisation also increased labour absorption in urban areas. From 1979 to 1990, workers in industrial sectors increased from 72.41 million to 121.58 million, and employment in tertiary sectors rose from 51.54 million workers to 105.33 million workers, a remarkable 104.37% increase (National Statistic Bureau (NSB), 1992: 9). In the course of industrialisation, a steady rise in the demand for labour occurred in towns and cities, but conversely technical developments in agriculture caused a

decline in the rural population. Labour, therefore, moved rapidly into towns and cities and the urban population grew significantly (Wei, 1985: 28–35). This is clearly shown in the statistics of the Nationwide Census Surveys from 1949 to 2000 (See Table 2).

Table 1 The Number of Cities of Different Sizes in 1999

Size of City	Numbers	Population
Extra-large	37	over 1,000,000
Large	48	500,000-1,000,000
Medium	205	200,000-500,000
Small	378	below 200,000

Source: The Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003.

Table 2 The Growth of Urban Population in 50 Years

Census	Year	Urban population	Population of whole country	Level of urbanisation (%)
1st	1953	77,260,000	582,600,000	13.26
2nd	1964	127,100,000	694,580,000	18.30
3rd	1982	206,580,000	1,003,940,000	20.60
4th	1990	296,510,000	1,130,480,000	26.23
5th	2000	455,940,000	1,263,330,000	36.09

Source: *Economic Times*, July the 11th, 2001, p. 2.

Note: CBD = Central Business District
Source: City Plan Centre in Beijing, 2004.

Urbanisation in China not only caused a rapid growth in the urban population and the size and scale of cities, but it also created changes in the economic, political and cultural functions of a city (Le, 1999). These changes affected, and were reflected in, people's urban life.

Firstly, Chinese cities became economically autonomous from the Central Government and became embedded in their immediate locale (Davis, 1995: 2). In order to stimulate productivity and satisfy the demand for more commodities in the cities, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decentralised much of its decision-making and financial power, and initiated global economic involvement. The country now allowed the entry of foreign capital, technology and managerial skills, which, of course, carried in their wake the introduction of new ideas and values (Zhou, 2004). In addition, the new enthusiasm for markets, decentralisation and foreign direct investment (FDI) undermined the barriers between urban and rural populations (Zhao and Zhou, 2002). Urban people were able to look for jobs without restriction. Besides, with the dynamics of social mobility and market orientation, goods, housing, social services and recreation became commodities and urban commercial activities were boosted (Wei and Wang, 1997). Accordingly, urban people's income and consumption levels rose dramatically.

Secondly, urbanisation rationalized the individual's own interests and created a relatively free climate for Chinese people to control their own lives (Zhang, 1996). People's productivity was no longer related to their "political credits"⁶ but purely associated with their salaries in work units (Li and Li, 2000). As a result, their social status depended on their personal capabilities, not their class. In addition, marriage and divorce were regarded as personal affairs free from political intervention. Moreover, urban people had more access to communication and ideas through the mass media and the Internet, and were able to express their own opinions on public affairs. This also resulted in the emergence of voluntary organisations in cities, this being evidence of the decline in political control over Chinese people's lives.

Additionally, urbanisation accelerated the transformation of China from traditional tenets to modern principles and concepts about life. The most noticeable phenomenon is that the totalitarian urban culture of the Maoist era has been replaced by a multicultural environment in cities. Western values, Confucianism and the Communist doctrine exist side by side. Citizens can choose their own religions and beliefs. Under these circumstances, individualism is expressed in the fields of arts and literature. It is also evident in people's lifestyles, in how they choose to dress, how they converse,

⁶ Political credit was regarded as a Bonus awarded for proper behaviour in the political sense.

and in their choice of leisure activities. Collectivism, by contrast, is playing a diminishing role in people's daily lives (Sun, 2003). Meanwhile, Chinese society itself has undergone a startling transformation, as diversity, consumerism, enhanced personal autonomy and cultural creativity have begun to appear forcibly (Li, 1996). These changes have influenced Chinese people's attitudes and behaviour in their work, family and marriage as well as in the public sphere.

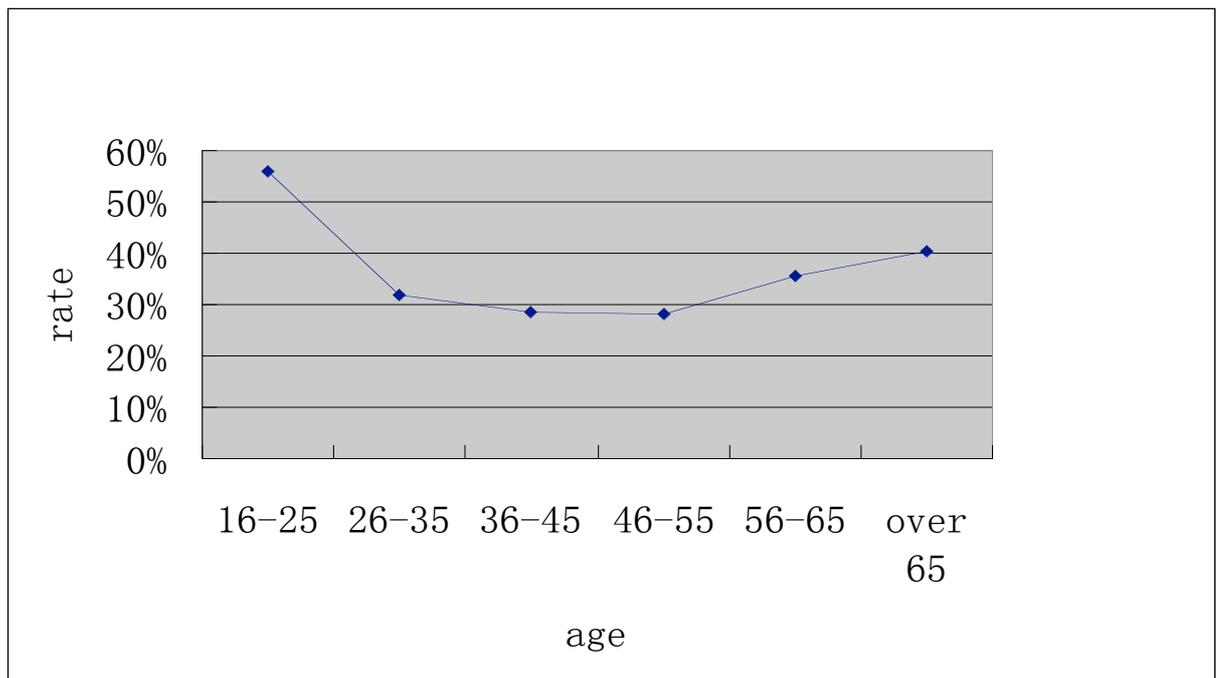
In summary, urbanisation which resulted from economic reform has been a combination of social transformation fuelled by a market economy and the commitment of the Chinese government to embrace social development. This process has transformed some rural places into urban areas. It has also stimulated the spatial and population expansion of cities. More importantly, it has brought China a 'way of urban life' (Wirth, 1938) through transforming people's lives into new patterns. For example, the new focus on consumption, the new relationship between work (public) and leisure (privacy), the new concerns about a healthy life, a greater demand for individual rights and a variety of norms and codes of behaviour, rather than a general consensus, have changed the ways in which people think and act.

Sports Participation at the Grassroots since the 1990s

Sport as a social phenomenon and cultural practice has been extensively and intensely affected by the evolution of urban areas. Especially, since the 1990s, the sports participation in cities has increased dramatically. In 1996, 15.5% urban people regularly took part in sport or exercises (at least three times per week), in 2000, the number increased to 18.3%. In addition, according to the Investigation and Research on Chinese Mass Sport (IRCMS afterwards), 35% Chinese people over 16 years old participated in sport at least once a week in 2000, which is 0.65% higher than 1996. Male's sports participants accounted for 20.2%, female accounted for 14.8%. Nevertheless, 55.11% (about 77,000,000) of these sports participants were from urban areas, 44.89% of them (about 63,000,000) are rural residents (IRCMS, 2004). The sports participation rate in the urban areas is 16.8%. This is much higher than that in

the rural areas, which is only 7.8 %⁷. Regarding to the ages, the participation rate of the youth and elder people was much higher than the middle-aged group (see **Figure 2**). The sports participation from different occupational groups was also different. In 2000, the highest group is intellectual staff⁸, which participation rate was 34.3%; followed by managers (24.4%), factory workers (19.2%), service workers (14.6%) and peasants (8.4%) (Research Team of IRCMS, 2001: 50) (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 2 The Rate of Sports Participation by Ages (2000)

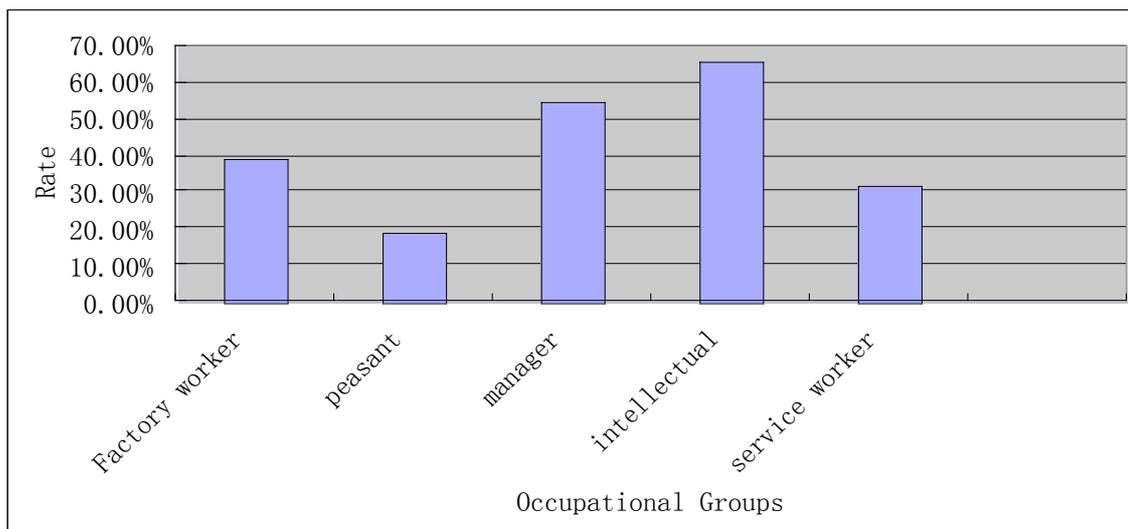


Source: Research Teams of IRCMS, 2001, p. 53

Figure 3 The Rate of Sports Participation by Occupational Groups (2000)

⁷ The overall population in urban was about 455,940,000 and rural population is about 807,390,000 in 2000

⁸ The intellectual staff (*ke jiao wen gongzuo zhe*) includes the professionals such as doctors, lawyers, educators, writers, scientists, accountants and designers, those who are involved in intellectual job rather than labour work.



Source: Research Teams of IRCMS, 2001, p.52

Not only had the rapid growth of sports participants, the motivations and forms of participation has become diversified. Instead of political goals, people participate in sport and physical exercises for keeping fitness; for entertainment; for communication with friends; for mental health and for increasing individual physical capability. They exercise with family members, with friends or individually. Some of them attend sport clubs; some of them exercise in their neighborhood compound. Some of them hire personal fitness coaches; some of them attend courses that offered by their community. The most popular physical exercise is aerobics, followed by martial arts, *Yangge* dance⁹, ballroom dance, broadcast exercises, badminton, *Taichi* and tennis ((Research Team of IRCMS, 2001: 109). Compare to the pre-1980s regime, people, especially the urban citizens have got more choices in sport.

Urbanisation has influenced the development of Chinese sport in two major ways: firstly urbanisation has stimulated an institutional reconstruction of the sport system through the reform of sports strategy, policy, administrative structures and functions. This has been a top-down process on the part of the state, aiming to satisfy the increasing economic and social demands for people's participation in sport. Secondly, urbanisation has launched the socio-cultural rebuilding of sport with changes in sports

⁹ A Chinese traditional dance, which was performed in festivals in the old days. Now people dance *Yangge* as a way of physical exercise.

infrastructures, participation models and sports values. It has been a bottom-up process driven by the complex demands of Chinese people at the grassroots. In the following sections, there will be discussions of how urbanisation, from top-down and bottom-up, has transformed the dimensions of sport in urban areas.

Policy: Promotion of “Sports for All”

When reviewing the history of Chinese sport since 1949, sport and politics have always been intertwined. This ideology was highlighted again by the Olympic Strategy in 1985, which clearly advocated that ‘elite sport was the priority’ (Wu, 1999: 288). Mass sports participation (“Sports for All”), as a sports ideal, was therefore superseded, for example the shortage of sports equipments, facilities and funding for mass sport. By 1995 there were 616,000 sports venues nationwide. Only 44.1% of them opened to the general public, 21.3% were semi-opened to the public; 34.6% of the sports venues were only used for professional games and training. This resulted in that 53.5% people could only exercise on the street, or in the open space of their residence areas (Wu, 1999: 491). In addition, the governmental funding for mass sport was very low. Take national sports budget in 1995 for example, the total budget was 2,778,000,000 yuan (US\$ 347,500,000), only 8,000,000 yuan (US\$ 1,000,000) spent on mass sport; most of governmental funding was used for training elite athletes (Law and Policy Department of Chinese Sports Ministry, 1997: 22). Compare to Japan, the China’s neighbour, each Chinese citizen only gained 0.5 yuan (US\$ 0.06) per year for participation in sport; whereas, one Japanese citizen had 20 yuan (US\$ 2.5) annually for sport (Law and Policy Department of Chinese Sports Ministry, 1997: 162).

As urbanisation has launched an economic revolution in people’s lives, it has triggered a socio-political debate on how to redefine the relationship between sport, the state and the individual. The changes in the roles of the state and market and their impact upon individuals constitute new concerns about how to live a better life for individuals. The political function of Chinese sport has accordingly been required to change. In the late 1980s, the book *Qiangguo Meng* [Superpower Dream] (Zhao,

1988) initiated a furious discussion over the dialectic relations between mass sport and elite sport and questioned the Olympic Strategy. Zhao argued that:

Olympic gold medals deprived most Chinese people of the opportunities to participate in sport for good health.

(Quote in Wu, 1999: 352)

It was the first time that research had stressed the importance of human beings in sport rather than sport itself. Thus, alongside vigorous economic and social reform, Chinese sports policy was encouraged to undergo a substantial change. The key objective was to encourage the Chinese sports system to become involved in the market-oriented transformation and to improve the quality of people's lives (Wu, 1995: 50-55).

The Central Government of China redefined the functions of sport. The No.8 Document entitled 'The Suggestions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Government on How to Strengthen and Improve Sport in the New Era', issued by the State Council in 2002, stated:

1. Sport is a symbol of the economic and social development of a country. Its function is to satisfy people's material and cultural needs.
2. Sport as a mass participatory activity cannot only strengthen people's health but also inculcate Chinese people with the spirit of bravery, competition, cooperation and justice. High-level sports competitions can also promote nationalism, patriotism and collectivism.
3. Sport is a bridge of social communication. It can improve the relationships of members of society, construct a healthy way to live and create a harmonious environment in society. In addition, sport is also an avenue for the development of international relationships with other countries.
4. Sport is a new economic force. The rise of the sports industry has become more important in the market economy in China.

The statement reflects the increased attention that the Chinese Central Government has been paying to the social and economic functions of sport apart from its political function. Consequently, mass sport has been strongly promoted. Wu Shaozhu, the then Director General of the Sports Ministry announced in 1994:

A nation rich in gold medals does not always mean that it is a sports super-power in the world. What is more important is to make the public more sports-conscious and get more people to take an active part in various kinds

of fitness exercises. To this end, it is necessary for the whole of society to invest more money in improving mass sport. Only when a well-coordinated development of both mass sports and elite sport is achieved will China truly become a sports superpower – like an eagle with two powerful wings that will enable it to soar high into the sky.

- Wu Shaozhu's Speech at the Sports Directors' Conference,
April the 6th, 1994, cited in Wu, 1995.

The policy of promoting sport for all was fundamentally based on the social and individual requirement to improve health and fitness. The Chinese government realised that health benefited both private and public purposes. They suggested that people's physique symbolised the development and modernisation of a nation (Li, 1995: 22). In addition, promoting sports participation at the grassroots could lead the Chinese people to a healthier lifestyle. A healthier workforce could also mean a more productive workforce, with less time lost through illness, and a happier workforce less prone to the debilitating effect of stress (Li, 1995: 32–38). In June 1995, the State Council of the PRC and the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) established the 'National Fitness Programme' (NFP thereafter).

The NFP was a watershed of Chinese sports policy. It aimed to 'promote mass sports activities on an extensive scale, improve people's physique, and spur the socialist modernisation of China' (State Council and COC, 1995: 4). The NFP targeted the whole nation, with an emphasis on young people and children. It also highlighted the importance of sports participation among workers, peasants, soldiers, minorities, women, the disabled, senior citizens, and intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*)¹⁰. To achieve these goals, the NFP stipulated that:

- 1, central and local governments should work together to promote people's sports and fitness consciousness.
- 2, sports legal systems need to be set up and put into operation in such areas as social sports supervision and guidance, mass sport participation, and the organisation and management of sporting facilities.

¹⁰ Intellectuals' (*zhishi fenzi*) is a political term which inherited from Maoist Era. In NFP, intellectuals refer to professionals (like doctor, engineers, Lawyers), senior management classes-i.e., those with stressful busy and sedentary work lifestyle.

3, the organising and managing of sports events is required to be shared among people. Prominence should be given to mass participation, health-oriented and fun-making features.

4 a fitness testing system should be introduced. This system is to focus on testing the physique and health conditions of urban people nationwide. A national physique survey is required to be held every five years.

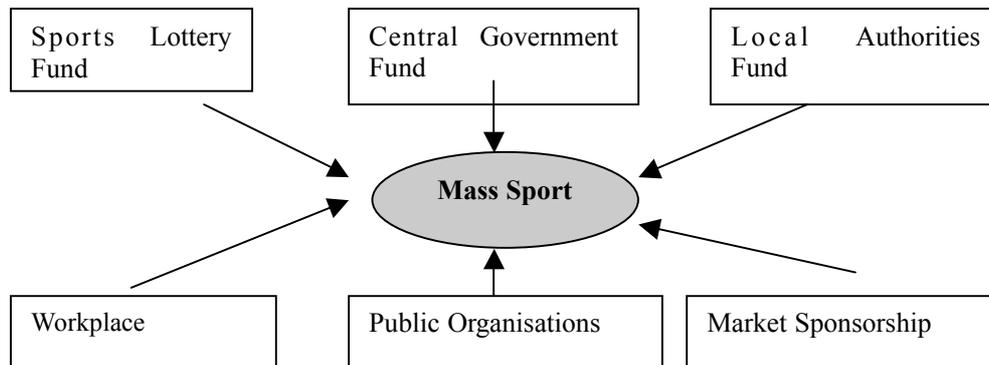
5, NFP also emphasised the construction of sports grounds and facilities and regulated that all state-owned sports grounds and facilities should be open to the public (State Council and COC, 1995).

However, the government observed that the NFP would not be fully implemented due to limited funding. To solve this problem, it decided to utilise resources within society (NSC, 1997). The sports lottery, established in 1994, was important for raising funds for sporting and recreational events and for maintaining sports facilities: 60% of the lottery's revenues were used for public projects including sports events and fitness programmes. In the ten years from 1994 to 2003, 24.8 billion RMB (3.1 billion US\$) was raised from the sports lottery. In total, 9.2 billion RMB (1,150 million US\$) was used for the NFP; 6.1 billion RMB (762.5 million US\$) was used for elite sport; 9.5 billion RMB (1,187.5 million US\$) was used for youth sport, sport for disabled people and hosting the Olympic Games in 2008¹¹ (*Sports Daily*, Nov. the 3rd, 2004).

Apart from the sports lottery fund, sports authorities at local levels were required to allocate their funds more efficiently to increase expenditure on mass sport. Enterprises, government-financed institutions, public organisations and individuals were encouraged to give financial support to sports and fitness activities. The government also aimed to develop the sports industry and to explore the sports market in categories such as fitness, rehabilitation and recreation to stimulate people's sports consumption (State Council and COC, 1995). In taking these measures, it intended to build a network for funding and supporting sports programmes (see **Figure 4**).

¹¹ Sports lottery is only a small amount of fund from the central government to invest Olympic Games. The Beijing local government has invested 1,800,000,000 RMB as a specific fund for 2008 Olympic Games. .

Figure 4 Funding Network for Mass Sport



The fund for mass sport would facilitate the development of fitness projects, the building of sports facilities, the training of fitness instructors and the holding of sports events, and also finance of fitness surveys. By the end of 2000, the China General Administration of Sport (CGAS) had carried out 1,182 fitness projects and built 2,200 fitness paths.¹² Local authorities had built 30,000 fitness paths. There were now over 200,000 fitness instructors and 436 fitness test centres in the country, most of them were located in urban areas. And in 1997 and 2000, the CGAS conducted two fitness tests and surveys nationwide (Yang, 2005). Besides supplying sports facilities, instruction, events and fitness tests, the NFP also inaugurated the ‘1-2-1 Programme’ to encourage social members, families, communities and schools to engage in fitness activities. It provided a guideline for promoting mass sport and achieving the goal of ‘sport for all’:

- 1) it encouraged people to participate in *one* sport or fitness exercise each day; to learn at least *two* fitness exercises; and to go to a fitness testing centre *once* a year.
- 2) it urged each family to have *one* piece of fitness equipment; to play sports outdoors *twice* each season; and to read *one* sports magazine or paper.

¹² Fitness paths (*jianzhen lujing*) are sports facilities built in parks and residential community centres, equipped with such apparatus as parallel bars, balance beams and rope bridges, which are all modified for amateur practice.

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- 3) it stressed each community should provide *one* place for fitness and organise fitness activities among residents *twice* a year; it also required *one* team of fitness instructors.
 - 4) it recommended that each school should give students *one* hour to take part in sport each day; and organise students hikes *twice* a year and test the fitness of students *once* a year.

(NFP, 1995)

In summary, the NFP represented a milestone in the history of Chinese sport. It comprehensively demonstrated the government's commitment to mass sport, and its dedication to making the sport needs of individuals a priority. However, although NFP mentions the importance of peasants sport, it does not apply to rural communities very well because of, first the limited budget to rural sport; second the lack of concerns for fitness levels outside the urban environment.

The growth of Chinese sports participation at the grassroots was not only a fundamental consequence of the sports policy, but also the unavoidable outcome of urbanisation and the changes in people's urban life. To a certain extent, the forces from the bottom up were far more powerful than top-down sports policy in promoting mass sports participation. As Chinese cities underwent a process of urbanisation, they were playing active roles in the transformation of Chinese sport. As Riess (1989) discusses, the cities were organic entities comprised of spatial dimensions, communication and transportation networks, governments and laws, voluntary organisations, social classes, ethnic groups, public behaviours and value systems (p.1), which elements are essential to the development of sport. Vice versa, sport is also seen primarily as corrective to characteristics of urban life. This is the main reason that although the development of a mass sport policy intended to apply equally to urban and non-urban population, mass sport developed more quickly in urban areas than in rural areas. To understand the relationship between urbanisation and Chinese people's participation in sport over the past two decades, we need to acknowledge the specific changes which occurred in the urban way of life – value systems, social organisations and physical structures¹³, and their impacts on Chinese people's sports activities.

¹³ The city's physical structure consists of space, demographics, economy and technology, while social organisation comprises class, ethnic and racial groups, social institutions and legal and political institutions. The value system encompasses individual and group attitudes, ideology and behaviour. (Riess, 1989)

Concepts: Demands for Sport

Since the 1980s, the Chinese economy has been expanding dramatically. From 1979 to 2005, it grew by a blistering 9.4% annual average, making it the fourth largest economy in the world (*New York Times*, January the 25th, 2006). China's full-year growth for 2006 outstripped expectations, with gross domestic product expanding by 10.7 per cent, the fastest annual rise in more than a decade. This means that China recorded double-digit economic growth for four consecutive years. It also means that if – as many expected – it records a similar pace of growth in 2007, China's economy could as early as 2008 leapfrog that of Germany's to make it the world's third largest in absolute terms (McGregor, 2007). This economic achievement has increased the living standards of the Chinese and changed individual lifestyles from a generalised, static and monotonous pattern into dynamic, varied and diversified opportunities. This has resulted in a great change in Chinese people's attitudes towards sporting life. The most significant changes have taken place in people's attitudes to health, leisure, and consumption in relation to sport.

The Expanding Concept of Health

Along with the rise of the urban economy, the material life of Chinese people has improved dramatically. Economic modernisation in China on the one hand has made urban life richer and more convenient, while on the other hand it has systematically eliminated a healthy way of life. For example, Western fast food has been introduced to urban people's dinner tables, and convenient public transportation systems such as the metro, bus and the increasing number of private cars in cities have reduced the necessity for walking and riding bicycles. According to statistics, the sale of private cars in China has grown at an annual average rate of 37.9% since 1999 (NSB, 2003). The spread and availability of mass media, films, magazines, televisions and the Internet has encouraged people to stay at home and has left no time for doing physical exercise outside.

As a result of this modern urban life, the health of Chinese urban residents has declined. According to a National Health Survey in October 2001, obesity, normally only occurring as an adult problem, is now a problem among young people and even children: 64 million out of a population of 1.3 billion suffer from a metabolic syndrome that raises their risk of heart disease and other respiratory illnesses. It has been reported that more than 100 million Chinese, or about one in every 13 people in China, are estimated to have high blood pressure, a leading cause of heart and brain problems (*Xinhua News*, September the 30th, 2002). These illnesses – what the Chinese call the ‘wealthy illnesses’ (*Fugui Bing*) - have made the country more aware of the importance of health (Xiong, 2000).

According to an ancient Chinese saying, *a healthy body through exercise is the origin of a good life*. This perspective is again pervasive among Chinese in cities, and has become the main force motivating them to participate in sports activities. According to a survey conducted in 1998, over 85% of Chinese people participated in sport for health reasons (Ma, 1999). In addition, the concept of health has expanded. It includes bodily health, spiritual health and a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, to reduce the pressures of urban life, Chinese citizens have been more concerned with taking part in recreational and therapy exercises rather than intensive and aggressive physical activities. Walking, yoga, *Taichi*, mountain-trekking, badminton and tennis have become popular activities according to their needs for health. As a result, a concept of health consisting of multiple elements including fitness, pleasure and well-being has evolved with many urban residents expecting more opportunities to participate in sport.

Increasing Leisure Time

In addition to the health reason, increasing leisure time is another crucial factor that has stimulated the rise of people’s sports activities in the urban areas. In the Maoist era, people’s private time and space were tightly controlled by the political orientation of the state with people’s leisure time being regulated. After the 1980s, the depoliticisation of the workplace and deregulation of economic life created new conditions (Davis, 1995: 3). Thus, compulsory or semi-compulsory political activities for workers were reduced, resulting in shorter working hours. In the 1990s, working days decreased from six to five days a week. In the year 2000, public holidays per

year increased to 114 days including weekends. Furthermore, thanks to the proliferation of various labour saving devices, the increase in commodity supply and the rise in the service sectors, people's time spent on housework dramatically declined. As a result, the total amount of people's leisure time increased. **Table 3** shows the change in Beijing urbanites' daily life between 1986 and 1996. **Table 4** shows the dramatic increase in the leisure time of Chinese people in the last two decades.

Table 3 Comparison of Time Allocation in Beijing Urbanites' Daily Life (1986 and 1996)

(In minutes)

	Work & study time	Sleeping & eating time	Housework time	Free time
<i>1986</i>	467	586	148	239
<i>1996</i>	390	636	111	303

Source: The Beijing Statistic Bureau (BSB), 1986; Research Team of Time Allocation in daily life, 1996.

Table 4 The Increase in Urbanites' Leisure times 1980–2001

(In hours and minutes)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2001</i>
Leisure time/ day	2.21	3.59	4.48	5.03	5.44

Source: Wang Yalin and Li Jinrong, 1982; Qing Nianbing, 1990; CSB, 1992; Zhang and Ma, 2004.

Sport has become an integral part of the commercialisation of popular culture, together with cinema, travel, shopping and eating out, which has come to form part of the mass entertainment industry, closely linked to the mechanisms of the market. The commercialisation of sport has stimulated new needs and expectations, so that sport has become firmly established as dramatic entertainment. It is an important new

leisure activity for Chinese people. According to statistics, the average time for Chinese people's participation in sport in cities rose from 8 minutes per day to 20.4 minutes between 1986 and 1998; this data accounted for 6.05% of people's leisure time per day, and 71.9% of urban residents contributes to this average (Wang, 2003: 31).

There are four reasons that could explain the popularity of sports activities in people's leisure time. Firstly, as discussed earlier, sports activities contribute to bodily and mental health; secondly, it helps people to keep fit; thirdly, Chinese people tend to participate in sport with friends or family, which can provide them with a good atmosphere for social communication and networking; and last but not least, sport is fun – it can release people from the pressure of their work.

The increase in leisure time has been considered essential for human development. It is in leisure rather than work that individuals see themselves as free to act and develop as they please. Expanding choices of leisure activities symbolise the improvement of the quality of Chinese urban life. Also Chinese people's pursuit of sports activities has stimulated a dynamic and diverse improvement in urban leisure lives.

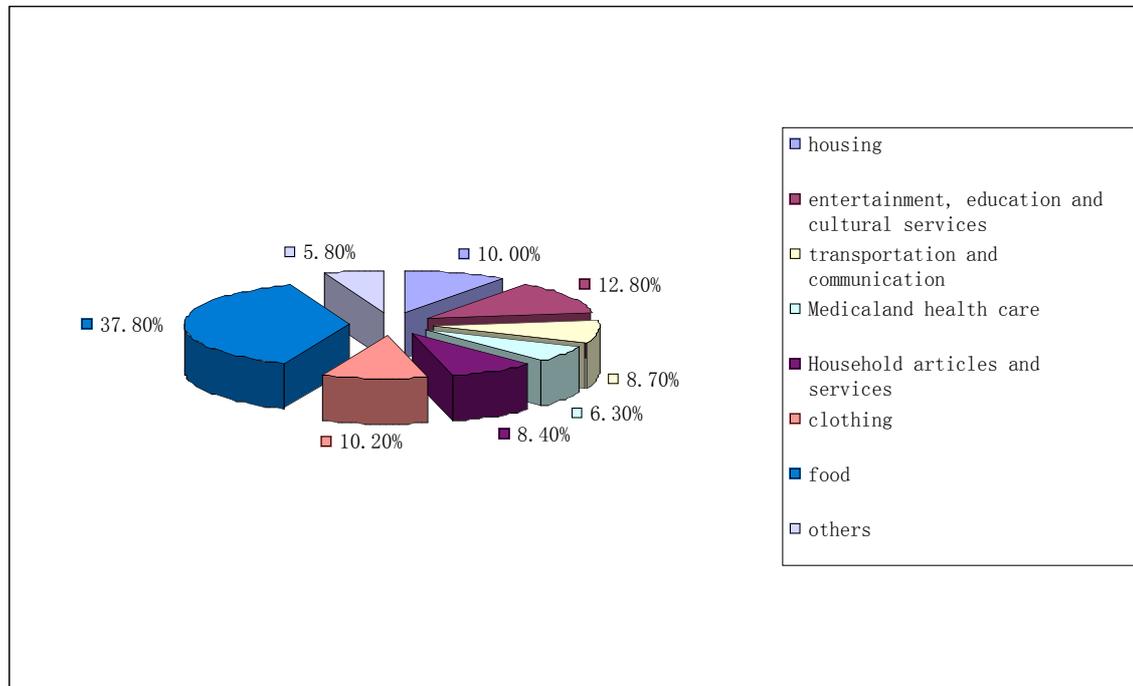
Pervasive Sports Consumption Activities

Since China undertook economic reform, Chinese urban society has launched a 'consumer revolution' (Davis, 2000). The first aspect of this is that the incomes of urban residents have rapidly increased. Per capita income of Chinese people doubled between 1978 and 1990, and increased by another 50% between 1990 and 1994¹⁴ (NSB, 1995: 257). From 1995 to 2000, it increased by 32%. The second aspect is that when the government reduced its control over the flow of commodities, it also ceded greater autonomy to everyday social activities, which substantially boosted urban commercial exchange according to market principles (Davis, 2000: 3). The growth of income and enhanced commercial exchange has nurtured individual desires for consumption. According to statistics, levels of urban household consumption rose from 405 yuan (US\$ 81) annually in 1979 to 6,651 yuan (US\$ 831) in 1999 (NSB,

¹⁴ In 1978 per capita income was 316 RMB, in 1990 it was 1,387 RMB, and in 1994 it was 3,179 RMB. Indexed with 1978 as 100, per capita income had grown to 197 in 1990 and 237 in 1994. *China Statistical Yearbook 1995*, p.257.

2001).

Figure 5 Consumption Structure of Chinese Urbanites in 2001



Source: The NSB and the Urban Statistics Committee (USC), 2003.

Along with soaring gross consumption, the structure of consumption has changed. **Figure 5** shows the new consumption structure of Chinese households in recent statistics. Proportionately, expenses for food, clothing and basic daily utilities have greatly declined, while those for housing, transportation, telecommunications, medical and health care, culture, education and entertainment have radically grown. These changes are the result of further improvements in the quality of people's lives.

Along with the growth of consumer activities of Chinese citizens, their expenditure on sports and fitness activities has also grown gradually. Firstly, the sports market has begun to establish in Chinese cities and the business of sport is rapidly spreading together with its federations, clubs and stars, and their commercial backers. According to a report from ISPO China, the total market volume of sporting goods in China amounted to approximately 25.9 billion US\$ in 2001. This meant an increase of 23%,

from 1999 to 2001. Further strong growth of 15% p.a. was expected to a market volume of 50.3 billion US\$ in 2006. Due to fashion trends and increasing brand awareness, sportswear gained a 60% market share of sports business in 2001 (ISPO, 2005). In addition, sports related business was varied and immense. It fed off not only the most established sports of football, basketball, volleyball, swimming and table tennis, but also the emergence of more ‘Westernised’ sports, for example, motor racing, tennis and golf.

Along with the development of the market for sport in cities, Chinese residents have become aware of sports consumption and they are passionate about sport. Sporting consumption has grown rapidly as the younger, affluent and professional groups demand more recognised brands and more sports entertainment. According to statistics published in 2002, after the second national survey of China’s mass sport in 2000, Chinese residents spent 8.8% of their money on stadiums, gyms or fitness centres, a 0.2% increase over that of 1996 (Bai et al., 2005: 5–7). The yearly expenditure of urban residents on sport, taken by household, averaged RMB 192 (US\$ 24) in 1991. It rose dramatically to RMB 1,385 (US\$ 173) in 2003 (see **Table 5**). It was estimated that the value added to China’s sports industry in the year 2010 would reach at least 28.12 billion yuan (3.5 billion US\$) (COC, 2005). As Zhang Lin, the Manager of CSI-Bally Total Fitness Club, pointed out:

Spending some of their income just on sport was something unbelievable for ordinary Chinese 20 to 30 years ago. But sport has now become a regular part of many urban Chinese residents’ consumption, with their income considerably increased during the past years.

(Interviewed in Beijing, 2003)

In addition, in the recent years since 2000, the structure of sports consumption has the profile shown in **Table 6**. As the table indicates, at the end of 2003, expenditure on sportswear and sports utilities declined¹⁵. Spending on fitness gyms, sports travel, sports mass media and tickets for sports matches increased (Bai, 2005: 5–7). For high earners, gyms and other expensive venues become new areas for sports consumption.

¹⁵ The expenditure on sports utilities rose before 1996 and dropped after 1996. Before 1995, the government was not engaged in building public sports facilities in a large scale. Therefore those people who wanted to take part in sport needed to spend money to buy themselves sports utilities and exercise at home. In 1995, NFP was established and public sports facilities increased dramatically in cities. People could use the free facilities to exercise. As a result the expenditure on buying sports utilities fall.

Table 5 Changes in Household Consumption of Sport (RMB)

	1991	1996	1999	2003
Household income	6250	15909	21435	32501
Household consumption	5291	13567	17791	22973
Sports consumption	192	679	740	1385
%	3.62	5.01	4.18	6.03

(RMB 8 =1 US\$)

Table 6 The Structure of Sports Consumption (%)

	1991	1996	1999	2003
Sports Travel	N/A	N/A	N/A	29.34
Sportswear	31.40	21.12	18.83	9.61
Sports shoes	30.40	20.11	23.07	12.51
Sports utilities	22.39	40.90	36.45	23.29
Sports print media	4.64	8.70	7.8	6.25
Sports nutrition	11.18	5.02	7.04	9.37
Tickets for matches	0.02	4.78	6.85	9.63

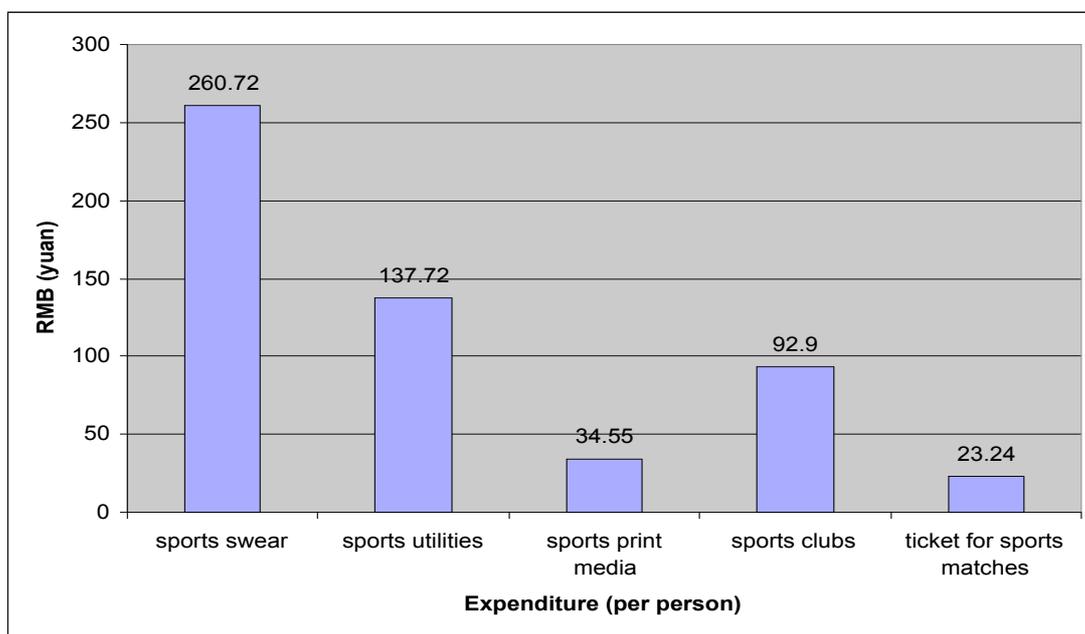
Note: investigation samples: 4,497 samples in 1991; 2,982 samples in 1996; 2,176 samples in 1999; 5,316 samples in 2004.

Table 6.6 and Table 6.7 Source: Bai *et al*, 2005.

By examining the changes of sports consumption in Chinese cities, it can be seen that participation in sport as a consumer activity has become very evident in Chinese sport. It is a sign of an increased desire for material life, and also representative of Chinese people's desire for personal and social enrichment. However, the consumption of sporting goods and services is based critically on people's economic capacity and living conditions. Optimistically, it predicts the way that Chinese sport is

developing at the grassroots and can become the principal factor in influencing mainstream participation. Nevertheless, this aim realistically is for the future, because there are still a large number of residents in cities who cannot afford expensive sports commodities. In 2000, only 7.3% of urban residents went to paid-for sports venues; 92.7% urban citizens chose free accesses to taking part in sport (Research Team of IRCMS, 2001). For the majority people, expenditure on sportswear was still prior to the other sports consumption such as going to sports club or purchasing tickets of sports matches (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Expenditure on Sports Goods (2000)



Source: Research Teams of IRCMS, 2001, p.115. (RMB 8 =1 US\$)

By analysing the evidence from the perspectives of health, leisure and consumption, it can be seen that individual expectations of the Chinese for enhancing their material and cultural life are the main force driving the transformation of Chinese sport. The increasing demands of the Chinese urban citizen for health and fitness in recreation and consumption reflect their physical, psychological, economic, social and cultural ambitions in contemporary Chinese cities. Comparing to the urban residents, the rural residents' demands for sports participation are lower. The first reason is that the concept of keeping health through sport has not popularized in the rural areas. Most Chinese peasants were still struggling for feeding themselves and their families. To

eat well is a primary concern of the most Chinese peasants and is also the primary way of them to keep healthy. The second reason is that the rural residents' lack of leisure time. The public holidays do not apply to the peasants very well. In the harvest seasons, they work all day on the farm; in the non-harvest seasons, they go to cities to earn money. Most of them are involved in manual labour work. Therefore, they no longer want to be engaged in physical exercise in their resting times. The third reason is the limited potential for the development of a commercial sports industry in rural areas. First of all, there is little demand for sports commodities in rural areas. The rural residents prefer to take simple exercise or folk sports in public places without paying entry fee. In addition, the supply of sports facilities in rural areas is very poor because of lack of sports fund and a market to investment of sport. These evidences in rural areas to certain extent reflect that in contemporary China, the development of mass sport could only take place in urban communities in relation to the way of urban life.

Forms: The Transformation of the Institutional Structure of Sport

Individual pursuits, as discussed, have become the driving force in the transformation of Chinese sport since the 1980s. However, without a rational institutional structure, people's personal pursuits could not have been fully achieved and the transformation could not have happened. The change in institutional structures of Chinese society during urbanisation has been a fundamental condition for the transformation of Chinese sport at the grassroots. The decline in the power of the state and the proliferation of new economic and social organisations have unquestionably enlivened city life. They have also opened up new venues for both public and private interaction (Davis, 2000). Under these circumstances, sport as an individual activity as well as a social activity has gained more room to develop. This has stimulated the emergence of voluntary sport organisations in cities. These voluntary organisations provide Chinese people with choices on how to be engaged in sporting pursuits.

Expanding Autonomy in Sports Participation

Since the start of economic reform in the 1980s, the most distinctive institutional change has been that state-owned work units have become independent economic organisations without the burden of the social and political functions tied to them in the past. Certainly, this is still an ongoing process. Nevertheless, the hierarchical or vertical system of work units has generally changed to single-purpose profit-maximising firms. Their responsibility for managing and organising people's social lives is in decline. The reduction in the power of the work unit has certainly depoliticised social life, redefining the boundaries between private and public activities and allowing greater autonomy for individuals to decide their personal affairs (Yin, 2002). One of the results of depoliticising social life is the privatisation of leisure pursuits (Wang, 2000). People's sport at the grassroots level, as an important leisure activity in the lives of city dwellers, has therefore been privatised. In other words, people can participate in sports activities for their individual benefit.

When reviewing Chinese sport in the past, the most significant phenomenon was that people were forced to take part in physical exercises and sports events such as workers' sports events in autumn and spring. Sport activities were associated with workers' bonus and "political credit" (*zhengzhi biao xian*) in work units. However, at that time, sports activities were disciplined and dull. For example, the 'Broadcast Exercises', which was the dominating sports activity for Chinese people at the grassroots, was designed by the government and required people to take part in them at the same time in the morning and in the same places of the playground. In the contemporary era, once released from the bureaucratic system, Chinese citizens have gained autonomy to decide whether, when, and how to participate in sport. With relative freedom, Chinese people have unleashed previously suppressed emotions, expressed previously hidden desires and pursued interests not previously allowed, thus considerably stimulating an increase in enthusiasm for sport in Chinese cities. Under these circumstances, Chinese sports activities have become increasingly diverse and are substantially based on people's own preferences and requirements. As Ma Li, the Director of the Sports Department of Chongwen District in Beijing concluded:

Nowadays for Chinese people the best thing is that they can have a chance to choose their lives, and moreover they have multiple choices.

(Interviewed in Beijing, July
2003)

In addition to the diversification of sports activity emerging in the lives of the Chinese, another significant and meaningful change is that different forms of participation coexist in society. In the past, people could only participate in sport with their schools or work units. When voluntary sports organisations emerged in the 1980s, they provided Chinese people with new opportunities. As **Table 7** shows, voluntarily organised sports activities have played a prominent role in pioneering sport at the grassroots. Unlike the work-unit management system, these voluntary sports organisations tend to put people's preferences and interests first. The voluntary sector has given people expanded choices. Chinese sports participation has advanced, today to a stage of diversity and coexistence.

Table 7 Proportion of People's Sports Participation in Different Organised Forms

	Numbers	Proportion %
Exercise organisations	381	100.00
Voluntarily organised by residents	219	57.50
Organised by local sports administration	29	7.6
Organised by resident committee	68	17.80
Organised by work units	13	3.40
Organised by sports associations	14	3.70
Organised by schools and enterprises	24	6.30
others	14	3.70

Note: This survey covered 144 communities in 9 provinces. 381 sports organisations were investigated.

Source: *Zhongguo qunzhong xianzhuang diaocha*, [Investigation and Research of Chinese Mass Sport (IRCMS)], 1998.

The Formation of Community Sport

The formation of community sport in China has been the direct result of the rise of the voluntary sector in sport. Along with the establishment of the community service system in Chinese cities, community sport in China emerged in the 1990s. The

community service system (*shequ fuwu tixi*) as a concept was officially introduced into Chinese cities in 1986. It was partly a response to the disintegration of the traditional welfare system that was tied to work units (Yang, 2002), and was set up at the level of either a street office or a residents' committee (Xia, 1996). It was related to the special interests of various government agencies at different levels and was intended to 'use community resources motivated by the development of community services to deal with civil affairs' (Xia, 1996: 18). The aim was to build a socially healthy and integral community, which could improve residents' living conditions and strengthen the economic, political and cultural development of urban society (Tang and Parish, 2000).

Community sport was a product of the community service system. Since sports participation can improve the quality of urban people's lives and strengthen the integration and cohesion of a community, it has been greatly promoted and has become a part of the community service system. Consequently, the community has played a substantial role in changing Chinese sports at the grassroots. There are three aspects of contributions to mass sport:

Firstly, communities offer a good atmosphere and a free space for urban residents to choose when, where and how to take part in sports activities according to their own preference. In communities, people can seek an alternative to the mainstream sports at an elite level. In pursuit of alternatives, they have established their own programmes and organisations. This is the most remarkable difference from the work-unit and government-organised sports. Secondly, the community services system provides urban residents with extensive resources to participate in sport. For example, it tries to make sports facilities more accessible to people at the grassroots and offers free sports instruction to them. Thirdly, communities have set up voluntary sports organisations either run by resident volunteers or led by residents' committees. These organisations consist of registered and non-registered sports organisations. Registered ones are named sports associations (*tiyu xiehui*), which can receive a small amount of funding from the government. Most of their income comes from a membership fee or from commercial sponsors. Non-registered voluntary sports organisations are called sports groups (*duanlian xiaoqunti*) (Huang, 2004). There is no formal regulation of these groups and the forms of participation are very casual and flexible. Participants simply

attend and pay a small fee each time they participate. Participants in sports groups might have the same interests in sport or might have social connections (*guanxi*), such as classmates, neighbours, colleagues or relatives. Voluntary sports organisations in the communities can satisfy Chinese people's needs by providing them with an autonomous environment, and new values in sport.

In conclusion, along with urbanisation, the form of urban sport in China has been transformed extensively and intensively. The transition of urban institutional structures from the work-unit's vertical system into a community horizontal service system has been a major factor. It has considerably changed the relationship between the government and social organisations and those who participate in sport. Unlike the work-unit system, which tended to bind everyone's life to governmental control (Pejovich, 1995), community sport tends to prioritise urban residents' autonomy, their demands and free expression. Sports participation at the grassroots level, accordingly, has shifted from organised and controlled activities to self-initiated and voluntarily organised activities. The emergence of community sport offers Chinese people comparative freedom in sports participation. In addition, in communities, recreational activities have proliferated. Furthermore, through sport, Chinese people are building their own communities around shared interests and collective goals. This involves deliberate efforts to move away from elite sport towards a more cooperative and inclusive one.

Space: Specialisation in the Urban Physical Structure of Sport

The transformation of urban institutional structures has politically released sports participation of Chinese people at the grassroots from the vertical system of the work unit. This change, as discussed, has increased people's autonomy in cities and their opportunities to pursue sport as a means of improving the quality of their lives. For the further development of sport within China, the rearrangement of physical structures in cities has created space and provided diversified access for people's sports activities. It has been a necessary condition for the transformation of sport and

has contributed enormously to the sporting pursuits of the Chinese.

Since the beginning of urbanisation, social and economic changes have had a substantial impact on the urban physical structure along with the transformation of industry, housing, transportation and other aspects of spatial organisation in cities (Ma and Wu, 2005). In contrast to the generalised arrangement of urban space developed during the Maoist period, since the 1980s the urban physical structure has gradually been transformed. It consists of spatially distinct districts which tend towards a functional specialisation, such as residential districts, commercial districts or recreational districts, devoted different activities so that urban dwellers can utilise urban space for commercial, industrial and residential purposes (Gaubatz, 1995). In this process, the separation of residential districts from the workplace, the redevelopment of city centre squares and municipal parks for recreation, and the growth of commercial districts, are the major factors in a process that seeks to contribute to economic development, as well as to the improvement of urbanites' living standards, by dedicating particular spaces for sports activities.

Construction of Residential Neighbourhoods

In contrast to previous practices before 1980, housing construction in the post-Mao era has been administratively and spatially separated from the workplace (Li, 1991). The increasing physical separation of housing and the workplace has contributed to dramatic changes in employees' social activities outside working hours. Accordingly, many aspects of people's lives can occur outside the spatial and organisational boundaries of the work unit (Gaubatz, 1995); Thus, residential districts are becoming the main spaces for urban dwellers' private activities. As a result, being separated from the workplace, residential neighbourhoods provide urban people with a civic atmosphere in which to live.

In the 1990s, a new tendency with residential districts was to mix residential, service, and commercial functions to construct a new style of residential neighbourhood (Gaubatz, 1995). Ideally, the new residential developments were expected to provide a variety of social services for their residents in order to maintain 'convenience' in the residential system. In order to meet residents' demands for exercise in neighbourhoods, many residential districts in Chinese cities were equipped with

fitness paths, table tennis tables and basketball hoops, with the apparatus funded by the sports lottery. By the end of 2004, there were 23,319 fitness paths, 5,920 table tennis tables, 13,790 basketball stands and 2,820 sets of fitness-testing equipment built in urban residential districts (COC, 2005). This stimulated the popularity of participating in exercise and sport in neighbourhoods.

The formation of residential districts outside the direct control of bureaucratic bodies has created relatively autonomous spaces for urban people's social activities. With the development of cities, there has been less available space in neighbourhoods for people's outdoor activities. However, due to less bureaucratic control by work units over residential districts, communicational space for social members has been established, which in addition, has expanded in urban residents' lives through their sports activities in their neighbourhoods.

The Rise in numbers of Parks and Squares

Public parks and squares utilise further space in urban society for Chinese people's sport and physical exercises. Urbanisation has created urban problems such as loosened social ties, lost opportunities for reflection, repose, and desensitisation. In order to solve these problems, squares and parks have been constructed or reconstructed in an attempt to elevate the moral and social life of the city (Ye, 2002). Unlike the Western parks movement in the 19th century, which tended to build parks far from the centre of cities, and which in turn made public parks a middle-class resort (Riess, 1989), Chinese urban parks and squares have usually been built in the centre of a city or near residential districts. They have natural surroundings with trees and fresh air all accessible to normal urban dwellers seeking refuge, while also retaining a semblance of privacy and anonymity away from work and home (Chen, 1995). Chinese urban parks and squares are designed as centres of recreation in which city dwellers can experience the pleasure of tranquil scenes, gentle streams and grassy meadows. They are also becoming a space for people's sports activities.

Parks and squares have several advantages for people's sports participation. Firstly, Chinese parks and squares are mostly located in the inner city, where the connecting transportation system is very convenient. Secondly, entrance tickets to the park are very cheap with some even free. Thirdly, the large spaces and natural environments

are an attractive feature. People can jog on the lanes, play badminton on meadows and do *Taichi* exercise under trees. When ponds freeze during the winter, people can skate on them, and the same space can be used for boating in the spring when the ice melts, which is an attractive setting for sports activities. Finally, in parks, people can freely choose sports activities they are interested in, allowing them to exercise alone or play games with partners or join in group exercises. With these advantages of natural and social conditions, parks and squares have become fascinating spaces to do exercise.

To meet people's requirement for doing exercise in centre parks and squares, developing sports activities in parks and squares has become a nationwide movement. The central and local governments have made constant efforts to construct a 'park culture' (*Gongyuan wenhua*) in order to provide people with a civic space to take part in sport. For example, in Mianyang (a medium-sized city in Sichuan Province, in the southwest of China) the municipal government launched a 'light-up' and 'music-up' movement in parks and squares. It also built some simple but useful facilities and services for city dwellers. For instance, they set up table tennis tables; rented badminton courts and rackets; built jogging lanes and cycling paths; and enclosed a place for dancing. They set more benches along the paths so that people could have a rest when they felt tired, providing good conditions to participate in sport.

Formation of Commercial Districts

Apart from taking part in physical exercise in residential districts and parks in Chinese cities, new spaces have been created for sports activities by commercial trends. Since the 1980s Chinese cities have experienced a revival of commercial functions in 'downtown' economic centres (Guabatz, 2005). The large population now has improved urban transportation systems, and the rise of mass transit and the popularity of sport in central cities have encouraged entrepreneurs to build fitness clubs and indoor sports centres in commercial districts.

In addition, Chinese cities have also witnessed the emergence of a middle class. The research department of the BNP Paribas Peregrine defined China's 'middle class' as well-educated professionals and white-collar workers with a yearly income of RMB 25,000 (US\$ 3,125) to 30,000 (US\$ 3,750) per capita, i.e., RMB 75,000 (US\$ 9,375) to 100,000 (US\$ 12,500) a year per household, who partake in corporate decision-

making and management and engage in intellectual work (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the middle class in China accounted for 15% of the whole population in 1999 and then rose by 1% annually, until it reached 19% in 2003 (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). *The Economist*, on January the 19th, 2005, reported ‘Chinese cities are today aglow with the trappings of middle class life.’ In addition to the middle class, a group of newly rich has gradually come into being (*People’s Daily*, July the 20th, 2001). Based on an investigation by the Merrylin Group in 2003,¹⁶ China had about 236,000 wealthy people in cities, each with more than US\$ 1 million in assets, in 2003. The number of wealthy people in China saw an increase of 12 per cent over the previous year, being second behind India which had a 22 per cent increase (*Shenzhen Daily*, September 14th, 2004).

The expanding middle class and the wealthy urban population have stimulated participation in commercial sport. The proliferation of professional fitness gyms, sports centres and leisure complexes in the city’s commercial centre has developed, driven by the powerful consumer ability of these groups of people. It is hoped that when they go out shopping, eating and for other activities, they can easily find places to exercise. For example, in Beijing’s New World Department Store, which was built in 2000, the whole basement was set up as a sports centre. It includes the Haosha Fitness Clubs, an indoor ice-skating rink, a bowling hall and several sports shops selling sports clothes and equipment. This new commercial space for sports activities had a tremendous impact on the Chinese market. For example, in 2005, there were around 1,000 sport and entertainment clubs in Beijing, with over 100 of these being fitness centres, and about 20 top fitness clubs, all boasting floor areas of over 3,000 square metres (*China Daily*, July the 18th, 2000).

Establishing indoor sporting places in commercial districts provides Chinese people with new opportunities for involvement in sports activities. The rise of sporting places in commercial areas has not only widened the access of urbanites to sport, but it has

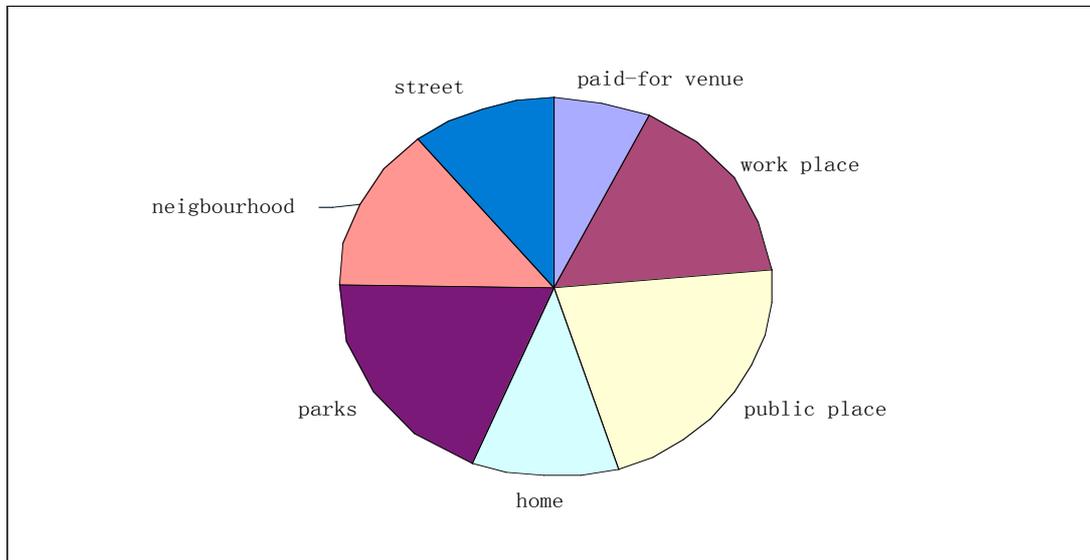
¹⁶ Merrylin employed a special method for calculating wealth. It first estimated the total wealth of the country and then calculated the wealth distribution among adults. The calculations include shareholdings, bonds, funds and cash while excluding antiques, property and consumer goods. The wealth is calculated on financial assets, not including housing. Their total assets average 34 million yuan (US\$ 4.25 million), according to the report.

also broadened their leisure activities from traditional shopping and watching films, into participating in sport activities.

In the 1980s, the cost of attending a fitness gym was similar to the cost of staying in a five-star-hotel. Since the 1990s, going to a fitness gym has become a fashionable way of participating in sport for some middle class people, implying an increase in their living standards and disposable income. With free weekends, increasing salaries, an individualistic society and the continuing fad for all things Western, Chinese people are hitting the gym, taking to the slopes and trying out, in ever-larger numbers, sports that ten years ago did not even exist in China. Outstanding facilities, professional instruction and well-equipped services are the main elements attracting Chinese people to go to fitness gyms and indoor sports centres. In Beijing, for example, an estimated fifteen thousand people signed up as members of fitness centres in 2002 and 2003, and fitness gyms are still in great demand (*China Daily*, March the 10th, 2005).

The commercialization of sport and the specialisation of sports spaces also went side by side with the stratification of sports participation among the urban residents. Although the number of sports club members increased dramatically in recent years, it is still a very small proportion of the core urban population which accounts for 7.3% of urban sports participants. Most urban residents who cannot afford sport choose free-entry places to exercise, for example 16.1% of urban exercisers use sports facilities provided by work places; 21.6% of urban residents go to public sport venues; 10.8% exercise at home; 19.2% go to park to exercise; 13.7% exercise in their neighborhood and 10.8% take part in exercise beside the street (see **Figure 7**). As Coakley (2001) has argued, sport in the contemporary world grew in urban societies in tandem with an increasing standard of living which allowed people time, opportunity and money to participate in sport activities. Sport in this sense becomes a vehicle for further differentiation between wealthy groups in the urban population and poorer sectors.

Figure 7 The Proportion of Sports Participation in Difference Places



Source: Research Teams of IRCMS, 2001, p.64

In summary, urbanisation since the 1980s has resulted in the specialisation of the urban physical structure. The changes in physical structure have contributed to an increased autonomy and diversity in urban spaces. In line with district specialisation, Chinese individuals have gained more choices for their living, working and recreational activities. Urban space, such as residential districts, parks and squares and commercial districts have become centres for people's participation in sports activities. The construction of residential neighbourhoods has created the most 'accessible' space for Chinese people to take part in sport because of the convenient location and free facilities. Parks and squares are the most 'popular' spaces for sports activities because of their natural and cultural environments and affordability for most Chinese people. Fitness gyms in commercial locations are new spaces in urban areas, which provide middle-income and high-income people with a professional sports environment to build up fitness and enjoy a modern life. While making up for the deficiency of sports grounds, these spaces in cities are convenient for urban people in their daily lives.

Conclusion

Chinese people's participation in sport has been closely associated with the process of Chinese urbanisation since the 1980s. The new pattern of urbanisation under economic reform has been a combination of geographic, demographic, economic, political and cultural transformation. It has also been an essential process in which market-oriented principles in different social institutions have coincided with each other, and moved towards modernity. This process has substantially transformed Chinese sport at the grassroots within four dimensions: policy, concepts, forms, and space, while these four parts are deeply interrelated to each other. Sports policy since the 1990s has legislated for mass sport and has also taken people's own needs into account. This created an institutional environment for the change in Chinese sport. However, the driving force has been Chinese people's own pursuit of a good life, which has stimulated social demands for sports activities. Meanwhile, the transformation of institutional structures in Chinese cities has been a fundamental precondition, which has provided freedom for Chinese people to achieve their demands for sport. Another necessary condition has been the rearrangement of the physical structure in the cities, which has provided diversified access for people to enjoy their sports pursuits. With integral forces initiated from urbanisation, Chinese sport at the grassroots has been transformed by the introduction of privatisation, diversification and commercialisation.

Compared with the pre-1980s era, Chinese people of the reform era have been emancipated from the state-oriented ideology of sport, gaining the power to make decisions in sport and to take-up sport that satisfies their own needs and purposes. Furthermore, urban development has provided them with a diversified, vivid and relatively free sports climate, not only attracting a large number of people to take part in sport and exercise, but also encouraging them to pursue their own interests and fulfillment through sport.

Generally speaking, China's sport at the grassroots has improved. However, as it is in a developing stage, some problems still exist. For example a lack of funding to sponsor mass sport, especially sport in the rural areas, unequal leisure time of social members, a lack of economic capacity for consumption among urban citizen with low income, the unequal development of rural and urban sport, and the self-organised sports group lacking in regulation, Urbanisation will continue to drive Chinese sport forward in the 21st Century. To host 2008 Beijing Olympic Games is a golden opportunity for the promotion of sport at the grassroots in China. Firstly, the newly constructed sports venues and facilities for the Olympic Games will be used by the general publics after the Games, in which way to certain extent solve the problem of lacking sports equipments for mass sport. Secondly, to host Olympic Games will centralise social resources from different channels and make continuous development in Chinese sports system and administration. Thirdly, it will encourage Chinese people from all walks of life to share the sports opportunities brought by the Olympic Games. Fourthly, it will contribute to promoting a popularity of sports culture with the interaction between individuals and society through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit. Fifthly, Olympic Games will advance cultural exchange of Chinese people and people from the other countries in the filed of sport. Through this culture bridge China can learn experiences of sports development from the other countries. And finally, Olympic Games will also contribute to an overall development of Chinese urban societies and Chinese sport will be further transformed by the interplay of the elements that comprise the process of urbanisation.

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