

Career Transition, Prospects, and Challenges Faced by Chinese Elite Female Athletes in Competitive Sports

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to study career transition, prospects, and challenges faced by Chinese elite female athletes in competitive sports. This article uses the life history approach in the qualitative method and Schlossberg's transition theory to investigate the reasons for the retirement of elite female athletes and the specific problems during and after retirement period. And the article deeply explores the real needs of elite female athletes during the transition period of retirement. Find out the specific problems in the Chinese competitive sports athletes' training system and the social guarantee system. After that, it will focus on the "Female" elite sports, combining social reality, and put forward relevant suggestions from five aspects: Policy environment, Social Environment, Social Media, Social Faith, and Social Network. So as to fill in the gaps of researches in the field of "female sports" in China and provide references for further improving the retirement protection system of Chinese competitive sports athletes.

Keywords: sports management, gender and sport, women in sport and education, female athletes, professional sports, competitive sports, sports in China, athlete retirement

1. Introduction

1.1 Current Context

Since the 1980s, research on the issue of "female sports" has always been a marginal field in China and has fallen far behind the development of female sports research in the world. (Sun, 2020). Through comparing Chinese and foreign pieces of literature related to 'female sport,' 'female competitive sports,' 'female participation in competitive sports,' and 'female and Olympics' by reading, the author found that "female sports" is getting more and more attention abroad. In particular, it embodies gender "equality" in sports, and it is also in line with one of the priorities of the United Nations in the field of society and development. The United States even has a journal named 'Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal.' for women's sports. However, the research on "female sports" in China is relevant "niche," and the research field of women's sports in China has not yet formed a stable core author group. The overall research is approximately "simple," which is a vacancy in sports in China.

The issue of the retirement of competitive sports athletes has always been a major issue discussed in international academics. Since the 1980s, women's competitive sports in China have been growing at an extraordinary speed, and the performance of female athletes in the world-class arena is also very extraordinary (Sun, 2020). Due to the particularity of the Chinese Whole-Nation system, that is, sports is monopolized by the national government (Wang, 2013) and the "three-level training network" which is the method of selecting competitive talents for national team. It is leading to Female athletes in competitive sports have entered the closed training of professional teams since they were young. Moreover, it is almost challenging to learn the corresponding social skills for survive.

In recent years, China has begun to advocate the transition from a “combination of sports and education” to a “dual career of athlete.” To a certain extent, it can help improve the knowledge level of female athletes and avoid the tragedy of retirement and unemployment. However, the significant reason for the difficulty of retiring athletes for employment lies in their lack of “socialization.” Competitive athletes do not only lack opportunities to contact the society, but training in social skills is still lacking. For example, common college students of the same age will have internship opportunities during college and can enter different companies to learn certain social skills. However, athletes of the same age have no chance. Getting gold results is their only goal and belief.

The process of their careers is never perfect, but always magnificent. After the Olympic Games, many Chinese female athletes have retired from competition sports to pursue other life goals. It is not easy for them to start a new life stage with the abrupt transition from being an athlete to being a regular citizen. The difficulties they face before and also after retirement are plentiful and complex—both on their personal level as well as when it comes to the bureaucratic system in China’s sports industry.

In addition, since most female athletes’ sports careers are relatively shorter than men’s, they are about to retire as they are getting older. Sports career refers to a term of a multi-year sports activity chosen voluntarily by an individual, aimed at achieving the highest level of personal sports performance in one or more sports events.

(Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007) On the one hand, they will be under pressure from the public opinion from the society and the media. On the other hand, there are also emotional pressures from the family, fertility pressure, etc., making the retirement problems they face difficulties. Furthermore, female competitive athletes are often accompanied by varying degrees of injuries when they retire, and when they do not master any social skills in professional teams, the transformation of retirement has become a social issue worthy of in-depth study.

According to statistics, there are about 50,000 elite athletes registered in China. Every year, at least about 3000 athletes retire, of which about 40% are unemployed after retiring. Only a few thousand people have been “properly placed,” and the rest can only be compensated as “one-off compensation” (Liu, 2020). The life plight of elite athletes after retirement has gradually risen to a social topic. Athletes’ sports careers are probably 15-20 years, such a long career, often accompanied by illness, but ultimately cannot be exchanged for happiness in old age. There is a massive gap between their contributions and rewards, making fewer and fewer people choose competitive sports, which ultimately leads to a gap in competitive sports talents.

Which career path can they choose? How to settle down? How to learn new skills and find a new job after retirement? What will replace the sports career in society’s eyes? There is not an answer for all these questions. If you are a Chinese elite female athlete, what should you do after your sports career ends? This article aims to provide an answer for these questions through the experiences of elite current and former athletes. And studying the reasons for the retirement of elite female athletes and the specific issues during and after retirement period. To explore the real needs of elite female athletes during the three retirement transition phases. Moreover, this article uses a qualitative method, using life history approach and grounded theory, to find out the obstacles in the policies of the Chinese competitive sports athlete training system and the social guarantee policy. Succeeding, regarding the “female” elite competitive sports, combining social reality, relevant suggestions are made from five aspects: Policy Environment, Social Environment, Social Media, Social Faith, and Social Network. It laid the foundation for follow-up related research in the field of “Female and Competitive Sports.”

1.2 Aim and Objectives

In recent years, China has begun to advocate a transition from the “sports and education combination” competitive athlete training model to the “dual career of athlete,” that is, paying more attention to the comprehensive healthy development of young competitive athletes. In order to better develop the “dual career of athlete” in China, it is urgent to study the current issue of the retirement of elite female competitive sports athletes. Because female athletes are different from male athletes in physical structure, sports injuries, sports psychology, and other issues, it is vital to study female athletes in competitive sports separately. It can be distinguished from male athletes and find a more suitable method for female athletes.

This article utilizes qualitative analysis methods to analyze female athletes and combine gender sociology, social psychology, and sports sociology. Analyze female athletes from the aspects of gender, social role, social status, social power, etc., and deeply explore the career transformation, prospects, and challenges of female athletes in China’s competitive sports, and examine the appropriate ways of helping female athletes to pass the retirement transition period smoothly. This has particular international academic reference value and reference research significance for the research vacancies in the field of “Chinese female sports” in recent years.

1.3 Scope and Structure

There are too many sports events in competitive sports; it is beyond the scope of this research. Instead, the article chose to focus on the single group of elite females in China’s predominant sports event, which after referring to

literature references related to “competitive sports” and “female athletes”. ‘When it comes to athletes’ retiring transition, the answer is often that athletes are poorly educated and unable to get a job (Deng, 2018). Previous studies have shown the importance of education for the career choices of retired athletes and proposed a new talent selection model of “Dual Career of Athlete.” However, almost no one noticed that the training methods of competitive sports talents for men and women are different, and female athletes face a more significant problem of re-employment after retirement (Wang, 2013). This article will focus on “Female” to investigate and study the transition of athletes from retirement.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research and explain the definition of what is the “Chinese Sport system,” “Three- level Training Network” Training Mechanism, and “Dual Career of Athlete”. The Third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study. The fourth section presents the finding of the case study. Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary and critique of the findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chinese Sport System

Chinese sport system (termed the Chinese Whole-Nation system): The Chinese government is fully responsible for sports and exercises all management powers. Sports is monopolized by the national government (Wang, 2013). Sports management, training and competitions are supervised by government agencies (Yang, Sun, Shu & Wei, 2004). The evolution of each sport is rooted in the government’s strategic objective of Olympic Glory (GAS, 2011). The government is liable for all necessary expenses to support the development of sports and pays salaries for all sports participants, including athletes, coaches, sports scientists, and administrators. In return, these employees accept the government’s authority and give priority to China’s national matters.

Contemporary China’s sports management system (Chinese Whole-Nation system) was formally established at the 19th meeting of the Central Government Council held on November 15, 1952. At this meeting, “The Central People’s Government Committee of sports” was established. Since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, China’s domestic and abroad are facing different pressures. Under the international external environment, due to the nature of a socialist country, China’s political, economic, cultural, and sports are all blocked by the worldwide mainstream. While China’s internal environment was established, its economic level was low, resources were tight, and lacked the ability to build sports software and hardware facilities. In this background, China imitated the Soviet Union in the 1950s to create a “Chinese Whole-Nation system.” (Deng, 2018). The “Chinese Whole-Nation system” is based on China’s governmental and financial system. China chooses to prioritize that expansion of competitive sports to obtain a way to effectively achieve national rights abroad and stimulate the people’s hearts domestically in a relatively short period.

However, with the ongoing development of Chinese society, the Whole-Nation system has been modified in terms of becoming more open to the domestic free-market and reducing the state government’s control intensity (Tan & Houlihan, 2013). In recent years, Chinese scholars have put forward the concept of the “New Chinese Whole- Nation system.” Wang (2018) pointed out that the nationwide system model of competitive sports of “strong government and strong society” is more in line with the actual situation of current Chinese sports improvement. Wang (2018) believes that the goal of “New Chinese Whole-Nation system” should be changed from “sports only for the country to win glory “ to “sports for the country to win glory and also taking into account the benefits of the people”; In terms of participation subject, the transition from “single government subject” to “government-led and coordinated participation of social subjects”; The content of development has expanded from “closed technology-led” to “open and diversified.” The pattern design is transformed from “sports system endogenous” to “system internal and external symbiosis.” At the same time, emphasizing “social participation” is the key feature of this policy change.

2.2 “Three-level Training Network” Training Mechanism

At the beginning, the training mechanism of competitive sports talents in the Chinese Whole-Nation system was a “Three-Level Training Network” type, that is a three-level training system of “National Team—Provincial/municipal Sports Team—Youth Amateur Athletic School.” “Province” refers to the most important first-level administrative region in China, which belongs to the first-level administrative organ of the central government. The “Three-Level Training Network” evolution process of the mechanism is as follows:

In September 1954, the “The Central People’s Government Committee of sports” was renamed the “Sports Committee of the People’s Republic of China” and referred to as the “National Sports Commission.” Since then, the selection method of competitive sports talents has gradually been replaced by amateur sports schools and provincial and municipal sports teams. The three-level training system of “National Team—Provincial/municipal Sports Team—Youth Amateur Athletic School” has gradually begun to be established.

In 1965, Chinese society began to enter the period of socialist construction in an all-around way. And China

began to attach importance to the development of amateur sports and competitive sports. At the “National Amateur Sports Work Conference,” the National Sports Commission required the construction of key youth amateur sports schools across the country. Key youth amateur sports schools will continue to train and select outstanding athletes, and sent them to provincial and municipal sports teams.

The Youth Amateur Sports School is a school that combines studying and sports training settled by various provinces or cities. The athletes trained excellent can enter the provincial and municipal work teams after selection. Since then, an interlocking three-level talent training system from grassroots to amateur sports schools to the national team has gradually formed (Sun, 2002).

In 1978, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China approved the “National Sports Work Minutes in 1978” submitted by the National Sports Commission, agreeing to hold the 4th National Games in 1979 and establish a “Grass-roots Sports Team—Amateur Sports school—Key Amateur Sports School—Sports Team” training mechanism (Policy Research Office of China National Sports Commission, 1982). The cultural education of elite athletes in this system is completed by the Cultural Education Section set up within the Sports Commission. So far, the three-level training system of “National Team—Provincial/municipal Sports Team—Youth Amateur Athletic School” is basically formed.

The “three-level training network” model of cultivating competitive sports talents has achieved certain achievements in a particular period of time and has effectively cultivated many outstanding athletes, but it has also procured many problems. It is especially obtaining the issues of cost and benefit of athlete training, cultural and educational issues, transitional development and reemployment issues, injury issues, and anomie within the competitive sports system (Wang, 2018). Furthermore, because the “three-level training network” pays too much attention to the pursuit of athletic goals, ignores the educational goals of young athletes. The number of retired athletes has increased, but the available job resources in the sports system have decreased correspondingly. Therefore, the contradiction between training, studies, and occupations has become more and more prominent (Liu, 2020).

2.3 From “Sport and Education Combination” to the “Dual Career of Athlete”

In order to solve the above problems, in the 1980s and 1990s, the National Sports Commission established a “Sports and Education Combination” talent training model. This training model is based on the training of elite athletes in amateur sports schools in the sports system, and cooperates with general colleges and universities in the education system. The general colleges and universities provide athletes with cultural education and academic certificates, so that athletes can be based on sports training, and can also get opportunities for learning (Li, 2019). However, it is still the sports system that cultivates the dominant position of athletes. Moreover, the general colleges and universities in the education system recruit current elite athletes or well-known former athletes mainly for the purpose of representing the school to achieve rankings in the competition and do not pay attention to the systematic training of these students in education (Li, 2019). This is also due to the administrative monopoly of China’s competitive sports management system and the narrow educational concept of the education sector, and the disadvantaged position of “Sports and Education Combination” in the conflict of interest. Therefore, the “Sports and Education Combination” has not essentially solved the contradiction between the learning and training of competitive sports reserve talents and the placement of retired athletes, nor is it applicable to the new era of China’s competitive sports elite training model.

In recent years, the concept of “Dual Career of Athlete” has been proposed and will replace “Sports and Education Combination.” On September 21, 2020, the State Sport General Administration of China and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the “Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Adolescents,” changing the previous “Sports and Education Combination” to “Dual Career of Athlete” (Liu, 2020). The “Sports and Education Combination” aims to solve the problem of the way out for athletes to retire. The “Dual Career of Athlete” is based on the healthy development of young people. While cultivating reserve talents for competitive sports, it also puts forward higher requirements for school sports and objectively promotes school administrators to re-examine the value of competitive sports (Liu, 2020).

The “Sports and Education Combination” and “Dual Career of Athlete” are two different guiding ideologies and sports policies. The distinction between them is that the internal logic of the policy, the key groups targeted by the policy, the policy measures adopted, and the objectives expected to be achieved. First of all, the focus group of the “Sports and Education Combination” is essentially Chinese elite athletes, while the center group of the “Dual Career of Athlete” is on young people across the country. Secondly, in terms of policy focus, the “Sports and Education Combination” is to provide national policy support and guarantee for athletes who have achieved excellent results in high-level competitive sports such as the Olympics, World Championships, and World Cup after retiring and entering corresponding colleges or universities to study. However, the “Dual Career of Athlete” is a clear requirement for national physical education proposed by the state in accordance with the actual

situation of China's education and the general decline and low physical fitness of the majority of young people.

The first goal of the "Dual Career of Athlete" requires further strengthening of school physical education, cultivating children and adolescents' interest in sports, the habit of health-preserving physical exercise, forming a good sports lifestyle, mastering the essential technical skills, and improving the school's various sports facilities. Furthermore, schools should equip sports teachers, including amateur training coaches, strengthen the protection of sports funds, primarily ensure the time for students at all levels to carry out sports activities. And besides, improving the sports competition system of all levels and types of schools and incorporate students' sports results during the entrance examination. Another goal of the "Dual Career of Athlete" is to train "talents with comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, beauty, and labor". The fundamental purpose is to comprehensively improve the quality of physical education work at all levels and types of schools and to ensure the overall physical and mental development of young students.

The proposal of "Dual Career of Athlete" also means that China's competitive sports reserve elite training method has undergone a fundamental change. It will pay more attention to the cognition of the concept of competitive sports reserve talent training and pay more attention to the whole process of athlete training, including the post-retirement stage.

However, looking at the United States, a typical country that uses the "Dual Career of Athlete" model in the world, they still face many challenges and need to reform. Although the United States has used the model of "Dual Career of Athlete" to solve the contradiction between athletes' academic performance and athletics, there have been frequent scandals in sports enrollment, team training, financial support and other aspects of colleges and universities. There is a huge conflict between the commercial interests of the school and its educational mission (Liu, 2020). Compared with the United States, China's "Dual Career of Athlete" road will also face huge challenges: first, China's sports sector and education sector have different value orientations for talent cultivation, which makes it difficult to integrate; second, most the lack of sports software and hardware resources in colleges and universities makes it difficult to invest a lot of funds to train athletes; third, how to balance the time of study and training has always been an international problem that is difficult to balance and solve.

Therefore, this article explores the process and real needs of elite female athletes' retirement transformation and finds out the methods that can be adapted to solve the retirement problem in the future "Dual Career of Athlete" method, so as to ensure the smooth passing of female athletes during the retirement transform process.

2.4 Research Gap and Direction

In terms of Chinese literature, the existing research on "Female and the Olympics and Competitive Sports" has a broad field, but there are few studies. For example, Gao (2012) analyzed the evolution trend of women's participation in Olympic events from the perspective of feminism, from the early eradication of gender discrimination in women's participation in any Olympic events to later gender equalization. Until modern sports, there are sports programs specially set up for women. Zhao (2016) explored China's women's competitive sports from the perspective of sociology and culture. Compared with the United States, analyzed the reasons for the extraordinarily rapid development of Chinese women's competitive sports related to the support of policies and regulations and the education level of women. Huo (2015) interprets the inauthenticity of the "strong women and weak men" in Chinese competitive sports from a gender perspective. He found that Chinese women are more obedient, more obedient, and more tolerant than men, so they can better execute the wishes of coaches.

In the Chinese literature, although the existing research on the issue of "retirement of competitive sports athletes" is significant and wide-ranging, it lacks a gender perspective, not only does not have a gender-specific discussion but also lacks attention to the unique needs of elite female athletes. For example, Liao (2014) analyzed the difficulty of retired placement of Chinese competitive sports athletes based on empowerment theory. The core lies in the lack of competence of the athletes themselves, and it is difficult to adapt to the fierce competition in the market. Xiang (2017) analyzes the psychological problems of athletes retiring through process theory. Fang (2018) pointed out that Chinese athletes have no livelihood security and difficulties in reemployment after retirement. Most research scholars agree that the difficulty of retiring athletes is one of the shortcomings of the "Chinese Whole-Nation system."

In the international literature, research on the topic of "female competitive sports" has gradually begun. In recent years, there have also been studies on the retirement of elite female athletes. For example, Ronkainen (2016) interviewed Finnish female running elite athletes between the ages of 25-62. It was found that Finnish female athletes will have health problems, loneliness, social pressure and lack of social support in the last few years of their careers, leading to early retirement. Chow (2001) interviewed 6 active and 6 retired elite female athletes in Hong Kong, revealing three key factors for female athletes to retire, respectively associated with a woman's being an immigrant athlete, entering early into sport, and pursuing an education.

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According to the above literature review, yet, there is a gap in literature on Chinese women's athletic careers and few studies have focused on understanding the impact of gender on athletes' career development and retirement processes. Therefore, through qualitative analysis, this article uses life history approach and grounded theory to study the professional transformation, prospects, and challenges of elite female athletes in China from the perspective of a combination of gender sociology, social psychology, and sports sociology, and find out a career transformation program for female athletes that is suitable for "Dual Career of Athlete."

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Principles

Aiming to understand the real needs of female competitive athletes after retirement, this study principally conducts a research philosophies of interpretivism, and through induction approach to find out their requirements.

Besides, this article uses the life history approach to document athletes' life over a period of time in a qualitative method. It is a personal account of their life, in their own words and using their own personal timelines. And time horizons follow cross-sectional study. The method will be different elite female athletes from different sports compared at the same time. This article will select three dominant sports in China: table tennis, diving, weightlifting, and select one current female athlete and former female athlete in each sport, a total of 6 female athletes for research. Explore whether former and current female athletes in different sports have different real needs facing retirement problems and whether former and current athletes in the same sports have different real needs facing retirement problems. Moreover, it summarizes what most people think is the biggest problem that elite female athletes face when they retire and the direction they hope to improve so as to clarify the career transformation, prospects, and challenges of Chinese competitive sports female athletes.

3.2 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data included Chinese sports core journals such as the Sports & Science and information available in the public domain limited to the National Center for Philosophy and Social Sciences Documentation and CNKI websites, blog articles and the Wikipedia page. The scope of the research is Chinese current elite female athletes and former elite female.

3.3 Methodological Issues and Ethics Consideration

Firstly, this article mainly studies the retirement of female athletes in competitive sports in China. It does not include potential superior sports and disadvantaged sports, so there are certain limitations in analysis. However, because elite athletes all have the exact selection mechanism, this article will summarize the ways and means of transformation of female competitive athletes after retirement in most advantageous events to explore the retirement protection mechanism most urgently needed by female competitive athletes.

Secondly, in terms of ethics, since the interviews selected by the official Chinese media or magazines are non-anonymous and open, and active female athletes are still under the control of the national team, there are certain limitations in answering some questions, and cannot avoid the influence of social approval totally.

Thirdly, because the "successful experience" of individual athletes' retiring transition cannot be replicated, selecting only six female athletes in the retiring transition process is too few and accidental. For example, a Chinese female athlete encountered the opportunity of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, participated in Beijing's bid for the Olympics, the preparations for the 2008 Olympics and the competition, and the work of the International Olympic Committee. These experiences greatly helped her enhanced international and domestic visibility and had the opportunity to study abroad. This article will try to reduce accidental events, find out the general retirement path of most people, and find out the universal problems of the decommissioning transformation process.

4. Female Athletes Case Study

4.1 Background

Since the research object is female athletes in competitive sports, and the Summer Olympics and Winter Olympics represent the highest level of international competition, sports can be divided into different categories based on the performance of Chinese female athletes in the Olympics. Tian (1983) divided Chinese sports events

into three categories according to their competitive level: world level, general international level and backward events. Lei (2005) adopted analytical method of palette divided the China Summer Olympics projects into four categories: advantageous project groups, potential advantage project groups, undeveloped project groups, and disadvantaged project groups. Wu (2017) divided the Winter Olympics sports into predominant sports event, potential advance sports event and disadvantaged sports event according to the number of gold medals obtained in sports. Predominant sports events refer to sports events that China has won gold medals in the Winter Olympics many times and demonstrated overall advantages in the event, and will still maintain a favorable winner position in the subsequent Winter Olympics. Potential advance sports event refers to sports events in which China has won many medals at the Winter Olympics, but it is one step away from the gold medal, and there is still a great possibility of breakthroughs in subsequent competitions. Disadvantaged sports event refers to sports events in which my country failed to win medals at the Winter Olympics, developed slowly in subsequent competitions, participated in fewer athletes, and had less hope of achieving breakthroughs. The following Table 1 are the categories of Chinese female' sports after classification.

Table 1. Classification of Chinese Female' Sports

Competitive level	Summer Olympics	Winter Olympics
Predominant Sports Event	Table tennis, Diving, Weightlifting, Shooting, Judo, Badminton, Taekwondo	Speed Skating 1000m, Short Track Speed Skating 1000m, Short Track Speed Skating 500m
Potential Advance Sports Event	Athletics, Swimming, Fencing, Archery, Wrestling, Tennis, Volleyball, Sailing, Gymnastics, Cycling, Trampoline, Rowing, Football, Softball	Curling, Snowboard U-Shaped Field Skiing, Short Track Speed Skating 1500m
Disadvantaged Sports Event	Other summer Olympic sports events other than the above two	Other winter Olympic sports events other than the above two

In this article, the “Predominant Sports Event” refers to the sports events that have won gold medals many times in the Olympic Games and have always maintained their project advantages and have a certain economic status. The “Potential Advanced Sports Event” refers to the events that have won multiple medals in the Olympics but are one step away from the gold medal. It may be caused by psychological, tactical, technical, and other reasons, and it is very likely to break through the gold medal in the future. The “Disadvantaged Sports Event” refers to sports events that have hardly won medals in the Olympics, have slower development, and have less hope of achieving breakthroughs.

This article will focus on selecting three “Predominant Sports Event” in China: table tennis, diving, and weightlifting, as well as selecting 1 former female athlete and current female athlete in each sport, a total of 6 female athletes for research. Because the predominant sports events are more concerned in China and they have better social resources, if they also have the problem of retiring transition, then the female athletes of the potential advanced sports events and the disadvantaged sports events will face greater problems. Secondly, the media exposure of predominant events is higher, and female athletes will face greater media social pressure. Therefore, using predominant events as an entry point can better identify the common problems of female athletes after retirement.

4.2 Finding and Analysis

4.2.1 Data Collection

(1) Access

This article collects a large number of books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines related to competitive sports, as well as interviews and reports from authoritative Chinese media, to obtain strong data support for the writing of the article. On the one hand, using “female sports” as the key word in electronic literature to check the relevant literature in the database, such as CNKI, Wanfang Database, VIP Chinese Science and Technology Journals, Google Scholar, UCL Library, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Library, Beijing Sport University Library, etc. And then data were analyzed using typology and constant comparison methods. After fully understanding the status quo of the research on the retirement of Chinese female competitive athletes, we focus on understanding the relevant literature on the development process of the female competitive athlete selection mechanism. This article will select female athletes of different ages, different sports career durations, different reasons for retirement, and different professions after retirement.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory which defined a transition as any event, or non- event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. According to his theory, this essay divides the transition model into Pre-transition to Competitive Retirement Phase, Transition to Sports Retirement Phase and Post-Transition to Sports Retirement Phase. And Schlossberg identified four major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. This theory will also be used in the following analysis. The "Current" athlete was defined as a member of the Chinese National Sports Team during the research process. "Former" athletes are operationally defined as former members of the Chinese national sports team who have stopped elite representation in the past four years.

(2) Sample Selection

The data for this study was collected from interviews with Chinese official website media or magazines from 2013 to 2021. The sports items selected are table tennis, diving, and weightlifting in the predominant sports event, including 6 elite female athletes (3 current and 3 former athletes). All national teams' female athletes from this research have won 1 or more than 1 Olympic gold medal. The interview information of elite female athletes belongs to secondary data and is authoritative. The average age of Current and Former athletes is 25 years ($SD=4.6$) and 43 years ($SD=4.2$), respectively. All former athletes retired voluntarily, and their retirement was not forced to retire because of a sudden severe injury or disqualification from the national team.

All current athletes are single, and all former athletes are married and have more than one child. Besides, all current and former athletes belong to the Chinese national system. Current athletes have fixed wages and bonuses, and former athletes have retirement wages based on their career honors. Other available demographic data are summarized in Table 2. Throughout the paper, aliases have been used to protect privacy. Similarly, the personal data of selected athletes in the "data analysis" section are also constructed in a way that hides the identity of these women.

4.2.2 Data Analysis

Table 2. Basic data of 6 elite female athletes

Sport Event	Age	Years Retired	Years in Chinese Team	Best Record	Full time Athlete	Marital Status	Education Level/now	Career at Retired	Current Career
FORMER ATHLETES									
Table Tennis	48	24	10	4 OP GOLD	18	Married, 1 child	PhD	Student	Founder
Diving	40	10	18	4 OP GOLD	23	Married, 3 children	MBA	Full-time housewife	Full-time housewife
Weightlifting	42	13	13	2 OP GOLD	18	Married, 1 child	Master	Civil servant	Civil servant
CURRENT ATHLETES									
Table Tennis	21	—	4	1 OP GOLD	16	Single	Bachelor	—	Athlete
Diving	30	—	10	4OP GOLD	10	Single	Master	—	Part-time Athlete
Weightlifting	24	—	6	1 OP GOLD	13	Single	Bachelor	—	Athlete

(1) Pre-transition to Competitive Retirement Phase

The survey found that the emergence of former female athletes' retiring thoughts is usually related to the decline in the mental state of life. For example, female athletes who have thoughts of retiring may reflect a decline in their role recognition and self- evaluation, a decline in life satisfaction and interpersonal communication, and at the same time, an increase in life anxiety and loneliness.

One of the elite female athletes A said when talking about why they want to retire: "Even if I continue, I will win another Olympic champion. For me, I am already delighted. If I win another Olympic champion, I will be the Olympic champion, and I won't become a champion of the universe." At this time, she thought that her athletic career had reached its peak, and there was no room for improvement. Coupled with the whole body injuries caused by her sports career, she became confused and depressed about the future. "I think my athletes did a good

job at the time, but everything was arranged by others. I seem to have poor abilities and know nothing.” Even female athletes who have achieved remarkable achievements in their athletic careers still do, she appears the decline in self-evaluation and anxiety about life. (Souhu, 2019)

Coincidentally, another B athlete also retired at the peak of her sports career. She was only 24 years old when she retired. She said, “People must have the determination to ‘return to zero’ (Yuan, 2013).” This is a widely circulated sentence among Chinese competitive athletes. Words mean that whether you are a world champion or an Olympic champion during your sports career, after you retire, everything will start from the beginning. Athlete B said, “If I go to compete with others, or if I go to society, what will I do and what can I do?” For the confusion and uncertainty of the future, Athlete B also chose to retire (Yuan, 2013).

However, 2 current female athletes who are on the rise in their sports career has not planned to retire and what to do after retirement (Baidu, 2021). They pay more attention to their rankings, how to improve their performance, and how to win the championship in the next competition. It also emphasizes that coaches do not allow themselves to consider other things, which will lead to “distraction.” What they need to do at present is to train hard and win more medals. There is only one E athlete. Due to her age, and like A and B athletes, he has reached the pinnacle of his sports career and may soon choose to retire. There is only one E athlete, who is already the oldest of the athletes in this event. Like the A and B athletes, she has reached the peak of her athletic career and announced that she might retire soon.

The reasons for former athletes to retire are roughly the same, which shows that they have reached the peak of their sports career. However, most of the current athletes have not considered retiring, unless they have reached the peak or encountered a bottleneck period and cannot break through and then retire.

This also reflects the general status quo faced by Chinese competitive athletes in the Pre-transition to Competitive Retirement Phase: low life skills, low literacy, decreased self-evaluation, narrow life circle and inaccessibility to society; and the country’s inadequate logistics support and psychological counseling. The status quo that is not in place and the training mode is too closed. Unlike other countries, female athletes in China do not involve issues such as race or religious beliefs, so there will be no limitations in choosing a career for retirement.

(2) Transition to Sports Retirement Phase

Transition is the fuzzy period between deciding to retire and being settled in life circumstances beyond retirement (Zhou, 2001). Among these women, A trigger is an event or circumstance which influences the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). Education level, English language skills, and friendship network in the elite sports story lines potentially impact the Transition to Sports Retirement Phase.

Athlete A said: “At that time, H (A’s boyfriend at the time and now her husband) told me that ‘you have been practicing for so many years. It is better to go out and have a look. This world is not only your sports and the State Sports General Administration.’ (Souhu, 2019). “A was inspired by H to retire and chose to study in the UK during the transition phase of retirement. A’s husband, H, has had the best educational resources since he was a child. He grew up in a bilingual environment in both Chinese and English. He also studied at the top universities in the UK (Wikipedia, 2021). H has been in different counties from birth to schooling to work. He has the opportunity to get in touch with the cultures of different regions and has a wide range of knowledge and vision. The educational environment deeply influences H’s experience he grew up in, so he has more keen judgment. In H’s suggestion to A, he hoped that A could go to the UK to study abroad, learn about multiculturalism, and experience a different world. This also stems from H graduating from a UK university, understanding UK culture, and knowing what education can bring to people. A’s choice during the transition to sports retirement phase was inspired by the friendship network. Although A’s education extent was not great during her athletic career, she made a proportionately exact transition decision through the guidance and advice of her close friends.

Athlete B was nominated as a member of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) by the former president of the IOC during her career. However, B, who only speaks her mother tongue, must bring an interpreter in every meeting, so she wants to change this situation. She went to Chinese colleges and universities to study English during the transitional phase of her retirement. During her athletic career, B, who was able to stand on the international stage, was deeply aware of the importance of language, so she chose to learn languages during the career transition to increase her experience and enrich her knowledge. English language skills influence B’s choice. After going through this, B said that “for athletes, retirement is always a difficult hurdle to overcome. After such a long period of professional training, it is difficult for any athlete to put down to do other jobs suddenly.” So, B recommends that athletes prepare early and prepare early for the work and direction after retirement, including life planning so that they do not know what to do at the time (Yuan, 2013).

C athlete retired three times and returned three times in her sports career. The first time she decided to retire was because she failed to participate in the Olympics and go back to school to continue her bachelor studies; the

second retirement decision was because she fulfilled the dream of an Olympic champion and chose to retire to continue her studies; third, this time, she retired because he participated in the Olympic Games held in China and won the championship, and she eventually retired permanently and never returned. During the two retirements in her sports career, C has returned to school to study and study, so C's education level is higher than other full-time athletes. After her third retirement, she had no transitional period and was directly appointed as a civil servant by the government and got a stable job (Du, 2021).

Athlete C retired three times and returned three times in her sports career. The first time she retired was because she failed to participate in the Olympic Games and chose to go back to university to continue her bachelor studies. However, she returned to the sports team for the second time because she wanted to be an Olympic champion. After her dream comes true, she determined to retire and back to college again. For the third time, the Beijing Olympics is about to be held. She hoped to participate in China's first Olympics, so she turned to the national team again. When she successfully won the second Olympic medal, she decided to retire permanently. During the two retirements in his sports career, C has actually returned to school to study, so C is a part-time athlete, and her education level is higher than other full-time athletes. After her third retirement, she almost had no transitional period and was directly appointed as a civil servant by the government and got a stable job (Du, 2021).

The above examples reflect that the education status, English language skills and friendship network of these former elite female athletes have a considerable impact on their transition to sports retirement phase. A, B, and C athletes are good cases of female athletes who have completed the transitional transition period smoothly. These are all due to the ability to receive a relatively complete school education, the opportunity to use English language skills on the international stage, and the influence of close friends who have insights and perspectives.

However, the current athletes are not so lucky. One of the active athletes said that "only those who win the Olympic champion can get rich rewards, but the runner-up is much worse" (Baidu, 2021). They train day and night in the national sports team, and everyone's goal is to grab a gold medal. And only those who get the gold medal can have more subsidies and more opportunities after retirement. The coach told them this is a result of positive feedback. Since they do not have the opportunity or time to think about what to do after retirement. What they can do is to improve their performance and win the Olympic championship, and then accumulate more assets that can be converted into income before the transition of career, thus making the transition of retirement easier. Nonetheless, if they did not win the Olympic championship, but only won the second or third place, or even did not win a medal, then they may face the possibility of involuntary retirement. It needs to be emphasized here is that, unlike other countries, the length of a Chinese athlete's personal sports career is not entirely a personal decision and is greatly affected by opportunities and the sports systems. If their sports performance rankings are not good, they will face the risk of being kicked out of the national team. This will be a very confused process for the eliminated athletes, and it will bring even continuous depression to the athletes.

In view of this, it can be hinted at the drawbacks of the "Chinese Whole-Nation system" and the result of the vicious circle of the "golden medal theory" policy. Nowadays, the proposal of "integration of sports and education" is adapted to current China's national conditions, which need urgent reform. Nowadays, the issue of the placement of athletes after retirement is in urgent need of reform. The proposal of "Dual Career of Athlete" is also to adapt to the present.

(3) Post-Transition to Sports Retirement Phase

Speaking of life condition after retirement, athletes A, B, and C all expressed their satisfaction with their current lives (Yuan, 2013; Baidu, 2021; Souhu, 2019). A athlete after completing her studies in the United Kingdom, she married with H and became a full-time wife, focusing on family and children. After completing his undergraduate studies, B went on to study for master's and doctorate degrees in the UK, and now he founded his own business. C entered the government department and became a high- ranking civil servant. The analysis shows that if the former athletes find a demanding job or study within a few months after retirement, their transition will be smooth. B talked about the "brain drain" and "talent backlog" problems caused by the failure of various sports organizations to make full use of retired elite athletes.

The analysis shows that if the former athletes find a demanding job or study within a few months after retirement, their transition will be smooth. B athlete also talked about the "brain drain" and "talent backlog" problems caused by the failure of various sports organizations to make full use of retired elite athletes. At the same time, almost all current athletes believe that their career opportunities in elite sports are limited, their career prospects are vague, and it is difficult to cross into other career fields because they have no work experience or social experience. The current older active athletes hope to be engaged in coaching or physical education. In contrast, young athletes prefer to continue their studies and to see the "outside" world after retiring. However, they all believe that if athletes have enough academic qualifications, they will have better career opportunities after the sports career. In other words, since certificates and language skills are considered important assets for future

careers, current athletes hope to see more resources to assist in further learning.

Although these retired athletes have found corresponding jobs, the injuries caused in their sports career will accompany their whole life. Among the current and former athletes studied, all have injuries caused by competitive sports, and the injuries caused by different sports are also different. A retired diving athlete, due to the great impact at the moment of diving into the water, long-term training caused her retina to detach, and her vision was severely damaged. Her vision after surgery was only 0.2 (Souhu, 2018). And the retired table tennis athlete, because of long-term hard training, serious injuries to both legs were caused (Yuan, 2013). Compared with diving and table tennis, weight training caused relatively few injuries and was not as serious.

These injuries are caused by overtraining during the athletic career. Overtraining has three aspects: diet and nutrition, menstrual cycle, and osteoporosis. These three aspects will have a physiological impact on the body of female athletes, and will have adverse effects on the body for a long time (Liu Lin & Liu Chengxiang, 2012). It is a normal physiological reaction for athletes to experience fatigue during sports training. Under normal circumstances, fatigue will gradually disappear after 12-24 hours. However, if the training plan is improperly arranged and the balance between training and recovery is neglected, and the athlete continues to bear the stimulation of high-intensity exercise under the state of fatigue, the body function will be challenging to recover, the excess compensation will not be achieved, and the athlete may experience exhaustion. If the athlete continues to train, symptoms of overtraining will appear.

First of all, dietary nutrition is the material basis of human tissues. It can provide enough energy and heat to meet the needs of normal human activities best. Female athletes have to receive many exercises every day and consume much energy. Therefore, eating the primary food nutrition of ordinary women is likely to cause their insufficient energy intake. And malnutrition can also affect physical fitness. Symptoms such as loss of appetite, digestive disorders, insomnia, easy sweating, susceptible skin and tissue infections, reduced lung capacity, long heart rate recovery time, and other symptoms will affect the training effect and cause a decline in sports performance (Liu Lin & Liu Chengxiang, 2012).

Second, high-intensity training affects women's menstrual cycle. Not only will it cause mental stress, but also physical strength and the nervous system will be affected. The menstrual cycle of adult women reflects the complex relationship between the endocrine and reproductive systems. The effects of overtraining on the body and other stress responses can directly or indirectly cause menstrual disorders or amenorrhea in women. The most apparent symptom is abnormal menstruation. Studies have found that about 20% of female athletes have amenorrhea after high-intensity training (Liu Lin & Liu Chengxiang, 2012). If high-intensity training does not pay attention to timely adjustment and recovery, it will affect the level of female athletes' secretion of estrogen, leptin, and body fat, and may also lead to women delayed menarche and decreased bone mass of young athletes affect the growth and development of female athletes in adolescence. It means that overtraining may cause life-long harm to the health of female athletes.

Thirdly, Liu lin and Liu chengxiang (2012) research shows that overtraining can easily lead to osteoporosis. In healthy women with a history of amenorrhea, there is a very close relationship between amenorrhea and bone density reduction. Female athletes with amenorrhea or oligomenorrhea have low estrogen concentrations, which can lead to increased bone mineral loss. Therefore, when they are engaged in competitive sports, fracture risk is greater, and premature osteoporotic fractures are prone to occur. After high-intensity training, insufficient hot meal intake and malnutrition will also increase the risk of fractures for such female athletes. For adolescent female athletes, poor nutritional status and low estrogen levels are likely to cause insufficient bone calcification during the critical period of physical development. Bone loss is extremely dangerous for female athletes and can lead to osteoporosis in adult athletes. Moreover, the osteoporosis caused by adolescence is irreversible. It can be seen that the amount of bone mass in adolescence has a huge impact on the life of female athletes.

Through investigation, it can be found that almost all female athletes have experienced overtraining during their sports career, and they have caused irreversible damage to the body to varying degrees. While paying attention to the problem of athletes retiring, it could be found that female athletes' injuries are more common and last longer than male athletes. Therefore, it is particularly important to ensure the medical placement of athletes after retirement.

4.2.3 Discussion

The life history approach successfully explored the views of current and former Chinese athletes on their elite careers, especially in the transitional period of their retirement. In this group of elite female athletes, their views and experiences have similarities and differences. Retirement from sports competition was confirmed as having overlapping components: pre-transition, transition, and post-transition. The pre-transition to competitive retirement phase comprised three interlocking stages: recruitment (termed "initiation" by Wheeler and coworkers, 1996), elite training and competition, and decision to retire. However, there were interesting local factors such as

educational attainment, and marital status, not evident in either the Swain (1991) or Wheeler et al. (1996) study.

Under the Chinese Whole-Nation system, education is still the most influential problem faced by elite female athletes. Hence, China's current model of "Dual Career of Athlete" is correct. Considering the particularity of female athletes and policy support, we should also help elite female athletes retire from aspects such as social network, social environment, policy environment, social media, and social faith (Figure 1).

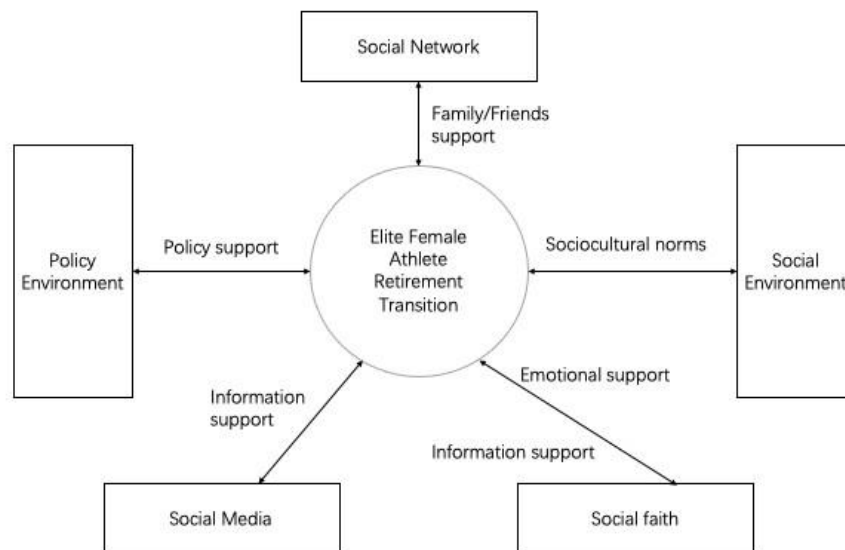


Figure 1.

(1) Policy Environment

Firstly, establish a sound and complete retired resettlement policy system from the policy environment perspectives, and ensure equal opportunities for female athletes to re-employ after retiring through legal provisions. Because women still have some "discrimination" problems in the job market, especially elite female athletes who have no social experience and shared cultural knowledge after retiring from sports will face more tremendous employment pressure. Consequently, the sports team should sign a retirement protection agreement with the athletes before joining the national team, and the sports team needs to perform their duties in accordance with the content of the agreement after athletes retirement. In addition, sports teams must implement the policy of "Dual Career of Athlete," balance learning and training, ensure that athletes have enough time for cultural learning and skill training, and ensure the quality of teaching of athletes' general knowledge courses (Zhang, 2020).

Secondly, provide athletes with a tremendous social environment for re-employment, and establish an exceptional service department for athletes to provide athletes' re-employment services. At present, many countries have established rescue centers for retiring athletes to develop practical professional assistance programs. Practice has proved that it not only meets the needs of athletes to solve the problem of retirement, but also helps active athletes to establish the goal of professional transformation.

A summary report (Table 3) published by Wylleman et al. (2004) lists the service items of these rescue centers, which can be roughly summarized into three aspects, showing the characteristics of athletes' retirement intervention education: (1) Athletes' retirement assistance programs are usually provided by National Sports Commission, the National Olympic Committee, the association of sports units (such as the National Basketball Players Association of the United States), or the university are operated. But there are also independent sports-related organizations (such as the American Women's Sports Federation); (2) These rescue projects' service targets usually include both elite athletes in national teams and high-level amateur athletes; (3) The establishment of these projects aims to develop athletes' education, social and work-related skills. At the same time, it also pays attention to cultivating the lifestyle of athletes through learning plans, goal setting, time management, repeated practice, and professional retirement preparation to help athletes achieve professional career transition (Wang, 2006).

Table 3. Selected overview of career transition programs (Wylleman et al. 2004)

Program	Institution	Country
Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program	Australian Institute of Sport	Australia
Athlete Career and Education (ACE-UK) Program	UK Sports Institute	UK
British Athlete Lifestyle Assessment Needs in Career and Education (BALANCE) Program	University of Strathclyde	Scotland
Career Assistance Program for Athletes	US Olympic Committee	USA
Making the Jump Program	Advisory Resource Centre for Athlete	USA
Olympic Athlete Career Centre—National Sports Centre	Olympic Athlete Career Centre	Canada
Olympic Job Opportunities Program	Australian Olympic Committee	Australia
Study and Talent Education Program (STEP)	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	Belgium
The Retiring Athlete	Dutch Olympic Committee	Netherlands
Wales Lifestyle Management Program	Sports Council for Wales	Wales
Whole-istic	American College Athletic Association	USA
Women's Sports Foundation Athlete Service	Women's Sports Foundation USA	

China should also learn from these countries to establish retired female athletes rescue centers, according to the athletes' wishes, help athletes design their career plans after retirement, and offer targeted skills training courses to help athletes expand their social circle. At the same time, governments at all levels can also strengthen support for athletes to start their own businesses after retirement, encourage athletes to start sports clubs on their own and provide them with business loan funds.

Thirdly, Prevent and treat the adverse effects of overtraining on female athletes from the three perspectives of diet and nutrition, menstrual cycle, and osteoporosis. In terms of dietary health, the proportion of female athletes' dietary intake should be adjusted to consume 7 categories of food. Namely cereal, edible fat, meat (fish), root tubers, dairy products, vegetables, and fruits. The quantity and quality of various foods should be adjusted according to the seasons, climate changes, and the physiological state of female athletes. Pay attention to the diversification of food and the supply of certain nutrients that are easy to lack. Athletes consume a lot of energy, and the physical energy consumed by different sports and intensity is also different. Sufficient energy needs to be supplemented for athletes in time, including sugar and fat. On the one hand, it can meet the everyday needs of the athlete's body, and on the other hand, it can keep the athletes with sufficient athletic ability and sufficient thermal energy reserves. In addition, pay attention to supplementing the appropriate amount of vitamins, inorganic salts, and silver carp elements. The food distribution of three meals a day should be scientific and reasonable. The amount of food taken before exercise should not be too much, but it should have a certain amount of calories and be easy to digest.

In terms of osteoporosis, female athletes should arrange reasonable rest time while training intensively. It is also necessary to formulate a diet plan in conjunction with the exercise day, supplement the lost bone organic nutrients in time, and take an appropriate amount of vitamin D to help the deposition of calcium and promote the absorption of calcium. Fundamentally prevent and solve bone loss so that osteoporosis can be controlled and resolved. Finally, during the female menstrual period, the training mode should be treated differently according to the specific situation of the athlete. For healthy athletes, have normal menstruation, have an excellent physical response, and have a certain number of years and levels of exercise, specific training can be arranged during their menstrual period. However, in the beginning, the exercise load should be reduced, and appropriate exercise items should be selected. After the standby body adapts, the exercise load should be increased. Pay attention to gradual progress and strengthen medical supervision. For female athletes with short years of exercise, low training level, menstrual disorders, and poor physical reactions during menstruation, training should be stopped,

and those with pathological types should be prohibited from participating in competitions.

In the face of competitive sports, especially in the face of economic benefits in sports, no matter how many temptations, the athletes' health should not be compromised, let alone give up athlete' health for temporary sports performance. Achievements and gold medals give athletes a short period of flowers and applause, but the athletes themselves can only suffer the physical and mental damage caused by overtraining. When making training plans, coaches should pay attention to reasonable arrangements for training and rest and pay attention to the allocation of diet and nutrition to ensure the training effect. For female athletes, their physical fitness, structure, function, etc., are very different from those of male athletes. Coaches should be different from person to person during training. Reasonable arrangements should be made to inspire athletes' interest and enthusiasm for training and improve their performance.

Fourthly, help female athletes to further education after they retired. The average annual elimination rate of Chinese athletes is 15%. If it coincides with the Olympic Games, Asian Games, and National Games, the elimination rate will even reach or exceed 40% (Wu Tong & Hou Yanwu, 2014). Among them, compared with men, female athletes have the dual constraints of physiological and social factors. After retirement, their professional development status is in a weak position, and they urgently need social attention and policy support.

For the benefit of society, facing the increasingly tricky employment situation, women are relatively disadvantaged in the process of employment competition, and female athletes are among the groups that need special attention. Further education provides female athletes with a good learning platform during the transition period after retirement. As a buffer in the process of integrating into society, further education has played a considerable role. For society as a whole, a few years of the school learning process can temporarily relieve severe employment pressure and improve the overall quality of female athletes after retirement and help shape their balanced image with outstanding special skills and equal emphasis on cultural knowledge to enhance a tremendous social influence.

For personal benefits, the continuous learning and exploration of athletes' own knowledge and skills can promote the development of individuals and the improvement of their overall quality, which is helpful to the improvement of women's comprehensive competitiveness in today's society and can better protect women's rights and enhance women's rights and interests—independence status in society and family. After female athletes leave the sports team, the future reemployment problem needs to be long-term planning. As a safe and necessary way, further education can make up for the lack of cultural knowledge for women, and at the same time, provide the double guarantee of academic qualifications and abilities required for employment.

Here are three suggestions for continuing education policies for female retired athletes. Firstly, a special guaranteed plan for policies and funds. After review and investigation by the government, the "methods," "notices," and "opinions" issued by the government for the protection of the employment of retired athletes only remain at the level of policy regulations and have not formed a complete policy system, nor have they risen to the height of the construction of a legal system. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate specific support policies for continuing education for this special group of female athletes to further improve the policy system. It is proposed that the government and society jointly raise funds to create a female retired athletes education security fund, which will be managed by relevant departments. So as to prevent them from giving up the opportunity to continue learning because of the blank of the guarantee policy or the constraints of objective economic conditions when they choose the way of continuing education.

The second point is to pay attention to female sports and the rights of female athletes. The development of female sports is a product of feminism and women's sports in the new era. Due to gender differences, women's sports should receive special attention. This promotes the development of women's culture and reflects the progress of the times and the innovation of values. Therefore, it is imperative to protect the rights and interests of female athletes. Female athletes are in a transitional period of professional development after retirement, and continuing education should be one of the ways to give women fair educational opportunities. Capable colleges and universities can set up some learning opportunities and research directions specifically for female retired athletes to give full play to female characteristics and advantages. This reflects the concern for women and the protection of the rights and interests of female athletes.

Thirdly, vigorously develop female vocational education. In the context of the rapid development of vocational education in China, it is necessary to continue to improve the system construction and legislative guarantee of vocational education. For female athletes, vocational education can develop skills in more fields, such as sports vocational education such as sports dance, or non-sports vocational education such as cooking, gardening, and literature. The vocational education of the target female athlete group can be more targeted, can also optimize the teaching effect, give full play to the practical function of vocational education, and ultimately help women achieve "second employment."

(2) Social Environment

First of all, it is necessary to improve the subsidies and support for athletes in terms of pension insurance, medical insurance, and work-related injury insurance. In terms of endowment insurance, during the athlete's active period, the sports team should pay the endowment insurance for the athletes according to their sports age, and do a good job in connection with the endowment insurance after retirement. While female athletes are in the transition to sports retirement phase and have not yet found a job, the sports team should continue to pay for the athlete's pension insurance. Regarding medical insurance and work-related injury insurance, the standards should be further refined on the existing basis, high-level dangerous sports events should be classified, and different compensation indicators should be divided into different compensation indicators according to the degree and severity of the injury. For athletes with injuries, preferential treatment policies must be formulated. What's more, as injured athletes need huge medical expenses, it is recommended that the government provide sufficient funds for rehabilitation treatment to reduce the pressure on athletes' lives and avoid missing the best time for rehabilitation because of insufficient funds (Liu, 2020). Secondly, schools can set up full-time teacher posts for female athletes. Female athletes generally have strong professionalism and self-discipline, and can complete teaching tasks rigorously and efficiently. This can provide retired elite female athletes with a stable opportunity to engage in the teaching profession.

Many studies have found that female athletes are more likely to get sick than male athletes, both physically and psychologically. Jiang (2015) research found that in football, hockey, basketball, and other events, female athletes have a higher incidence of Anterior Cruciate Ligament injuries than male athletes. ACL is the extra synovial ligament in the joint, which mainly restricts the anterior movement of the tibia relative to the femur. Compared with male athletes, ACL injuries in female athletes increased by 2 times, and the increase in injury rate showed a dramatic peak distribution (almost 4 times). And 75% of the injuries are non-contact, and 95% of the injuries occur during the game. The high incidence of ACL injuries in female athletes is related to their own anatomical and physiological characteristics. First of all, female femurs are shorter in length. In order to ensure that their body's center of gravity falls on their feet, they have to increase the adduction angle of the hip joint, which will increase the knee joint varus angle, thereby increasing the stress of ACL. Secondly, this cyclical change of relaxing makes female athletes prone to anterior cruciate ligament injury before ovulation when estrogen levels are high. The third point is neuromuscular. During the rapid development of puberty, the muscle strength, function, and coordination of men increase greatly, while women do not increase much. This leads to post-pubertal women being prone to ACL damage at this stage of development.

In addition to physical injuries, female athletes are also more likely than male athletes to get a physical dysfunction syndrome called eating disorders. Eating disorders (EDS) mainly refer to a group of syndromes characterized by abnormal feeding behavior and mental disorders, accompanied by significant weight changes and/or physical dysfunction. Its main clinical types include Anorexia Nervosa (AN), Bulimia Nervosa (BN) and eating disorder not otherwise specified (EDhK). Most of the eating disorders in athletes are EDhK, and most of them are women. The risk of disease is more than three times that of non-athlete women (Yan & Wang, 2009). EDS patients are mostly women. In the past 10 years, the recovery rate of EDS has been less than 50%, 25% have become chronic diseases, and the mortality rate varies from 0 to 25%. Female athletes are high-risk groups of EDS, and most of them have atypical eating obstacle. Athletes who require a slim body, such as gymnastics, ballet, figure skating and long-distance running, are more likely to develop such diseases (Yan & Wang, 2009).

In recent decades, the number of women participating in various athletic events has continued to increase. In the past, female professional athletes, their parents, and coaches neglected some unique features of female physiology, which caused tens of thousands of athletes to cause illness. With the gradual in-depth study of female pathophysiology, the various adverse effects of female exercise on health have attracted more and more attention (Yan & Wang, 2009). However, there is currently no method for the treatment of EDS in female athletes. Because EDS is a complex physical and mental disease. The problem usually requires the help of doctors, psychologists, and neurologists to work together in this field. The treatment plan is usually based on a combination of physical (physiological), and nutritional evaluation criteria. In addition, personal and family psychotherapy and nutritional education are also critical auxiliary methods for treating eating disorders.

In short, women are more vulnerable than men in terms of physical structure and mental health. In social security, efforts must be made to protect the rights and the treatment of female athletes.

(3) Social Media

Investigations into media representations of female athletes have empirically demonstrated male bias and the maintenance of hegemonic values in sport (Bruce, 2015). Some Literatures claim that the under-representation of women's sport reinforces the notion that women's athletic endeavours are of less interest and value than men's, thereby perpetuating notions of female athletic inferiority. When women's sport receives media attention, it is often the aesthetic, sexual and personal attributes of female athletes that are highlighted over what are perceived

as masculine qualities of strength and power—media strategies that further reinforce gender differences in sport (Bruce, 2015; Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013; Sherry, Osborne & Nicholson, 2016). Studies examining how female athletes are represented online suggest that patterns associated with the depiction of female athletes in traditional media are replicated in digital spheres, with men's sport receiving greater coverage and women athletes being represented in sexually suggestive and non-sport contexts (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011; Lisec & McDonald, 2012).

The Chinese mass media has the following three problems with regard to the status quo of the image construction of female athletes. First, the number of reports on female athletes is relatively tiny. Judging from the current sports reports of the famous butterfly body in newspapers, television, etc., whether female athletes are reported in sports media reports, as well as the frequency and size of the reports, depend on whether they have news value, that is, the degree of public attention, rather than their field performance and competition results. The standard for measuring whether male athletes are reported is more scientific and perfect, and the number of reports is more significant than that of female athletes, which is conducive to the improvement of male athletes' popularity and reputation. Secondly, the report content of female athletes deviated from the stadium. Most of the reports on female athletes focus on life and tend to be entertaining. In order to cater to the interests of the public, some media reports may even deviate from the original identity of female athletes and weaken their performance on the court. The mass media tended to be "female" rather than "athletes" in their reports. Most of the reports were based on life outside the stadium, which deviated from the reality of the stadium, and was not conducive to the establishment of a professional image of female athletes. Thirdly, the focus of female athletes' reports is out of competition. In the content of sports media reports, male and female athletes have different focuses. The reports of male athletes focus more on sports competitions and rarely involve personal life. The report language is plain, standardized, and time-sensitive. While the reports on female athletes focus on personal style and details. Judging from the current report content, the report content of female athletes focuses more on clothing, appearance, hobbies, marriage and love, personal life, etc. The sports skills, sports experience, and competition results of female athletes are easily overlooked, leading to deviations in the public's impression of them.

Generally speaking, news reports overemphasize female athletes' gender, personal performance in daily life, emotions, etc., ignore their sports performance, and report styles that are more entertaining. The reports on male athletes are just the opposite, paying too much attention to the description of the game content, ignoring personal performance factors, and language biased toward news. This shows that sports reports have unfairly judged the status and value of female athletes. This will reduce the image and status of female athletes in the public mind, and will also put a lot of pressure on the side of female athletes (Zhang, 2015). Therefore, the Chinese media should weaken the "female" label of female athletes and reduce the mention of "body", "appearance" and "married" to reduce the pressure on female athletes.

(4) Social Faith

Social support can not only help athletes solve the problem of reemployment, but more importantly, psychologically relieve the "social anxiety syndrome" caused by athletes' retirement, and help improve the quality of life of athletes after retirement by Petitpas et al. (1992). The support of coaches and all walks of life plays an important role in influencing the adjustment of athletes' retirement.

First of all, the coach is the direct leader of the athlete. They know the athlete's competitive state well and play a pivotal role when athletes decide to retire. Therefore, coaches should encourage athletes to end their careers in the form of the "Li Ning phenomenon" (that is, athletes have a relatively complete training process for many years and can persist in the competitive level maintenance stage for many years until they can no longer maintain a highly competitive level). Care and help should be given to those athletes who "retire bravely" or retired by accident so that the athletes leave the professional sports team with hope and confidence.

Secondly, the family is the home of the athlete's soul. If family members cannot understand and support the athlete's decision to retire, the athlete will feel disappointed and will not be conducive to the athlete's good adjustment before retirement. Finally, the sports that athletes engage in are different, and the degree of attention they receive from Chinese people is also different. For example, for popular Olympic events that have attracted much attention, the employment situation and economic income of retired athletes are better than those of non-Olympic athletes (Petitpas et al., 1992). These social support systems will cause an imbalance in athletes' psychological responses.

In addition, the method of psychological counseling for athletes is also a way of social support, usually emphasizing the quality of life during or after retirement to help athletes develop existing resources that can be used after retirement (MURPHY, 1995). At the same time, retired psychological counseling can also help athletes develop social resources and establish social networks. Lavallo and Andersen believe that the content of psychological counseling for retirement can help athletes grasp the autonomy and control points of retirement, adjust appropriate athlete role recognition, and help athletes understand the impact of non-sports factors on the

retirement process and the available coping resources (LAVALLEE, 2000). Retirement psychological counseling can also help athletes' previous psychological experience of the Transition to Sports Retirement Phase to plan their career development after retirement, let athletes understand and use retirement coping strategies and techniques, and help athletes design solutions for the sustainable use of sports technology after retirement. Guide athletes' sports and support services related to retirement, and look for the development direction of new careers after retirement.

As a special group of female retired athletes, they face pressure from society and family. It is inevitable that when changing their role, there will be a series of issues such as how to adapt to the new environment, overcome inferiority complex, and deal with pressure and choices. Once athletes can't get rid of these problems, they will fall into deeper confusion. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct psychological counseling for retired athletes with psychological barriers. By using psychological counseling, behavior correction, and other methods to remove psychological barriers, guide them to correctly understand and evaluate themselves in practice, and strive to shape themselves according to the needs of society, coordinate interpersonal relationships, and enable them to choose employment positions seriously and choose a new starting point in life. Therefore, female elite athletes should promptly seek psychological counseling for retirement.

(5) Social Network

Wang (2006) analyzed the gender characteristics of retired athletes in China and found that female athletes' mental state of retirement is worse than that of male athletes. This is mainly reflected in female athletes' low life satisfaction and increased life anxiety, especially the life anxiety of active female athletes is the highest. The study further compared the mental state of life of retired athletes and active athletes, and the results showed that the mental state of life of active athletes is not optimistic. Generally speaking, active athletes are not as good as retired athletes in terms of psychological adjustment, especially in life anxiety. However, the loneliness reported by retired athletes is higher than that of active athletes. Investigation and analysis believe that the life anxiety of active athletes may come from the pressure of competitive training and competition. From interviews with some athletes, Wang (2006) learned that Chinese athletes usually put all their energy into training and competitions. Their life is relatively simple. The main content is to complete competitions and training tasks. Therefore, most of the pressure in life comes from competition and training, and the sensitivity to loneliness is not very high. For retired athletes, the content of social communication in life has increased, but due to long-term concentrated training life, their social circle has become very small, and their ability to adapt to society is relatively low. In this way, when the growth of psychological needs contrasts with the actual ability, they will feel lonely.

A further comparison of the sports careers of female athletes reveals that they are generally shorter than that of male athletes, which may be one of the causes of anxiety in life (Wang, 2006). Analyzed from the perspective of social psychology, because women's social roles determine that female athletes have a stronger sense of family destiny than male athletes, at the same time, female athletes' career choices are restricted by social recognition. These physiological and social factors are all It may become a source of cognitive stress for female athletes, thereby increasing the anxiety of life. Through the analysis of the coping strategies of male and female athletes, it is found that female athletes mainly adopt avoidance coping strategies to deal with the problem of retirement, which to a large extent reflects the negative elements of female athletes. These findings suggest that retirement education should be treated differently, with special attention to the retirement process of female athletes.

According to Wang's (2006) survey on Chinese athletes receiving social support during retirement, it is found that the social support received by athletes during retirement comes mainly from family, friends, and relatives. Therefore, when female athletes retire and turn from the peak to the ordinary, there will be a huge psychological gap. What's more frequent over-fatigue during sports team training has caused hard-to-recover damage to athletes' physical functions. Long-term injuries can easily lead to adverse physical and mental symptoms after retirement. Family and friends are critical at this time. They need to give the athletes enough care and confidence to help them find their own position and start a new life. The mental state of female athletes and male athletes when retiring is very different. Especially, female athletes will feel more dependent on family. Some female athletes who choose to return to their families and become full-time housewives may face psychological problems of lack of sense of value. Husbands at this time will play a pivotal role to encourage, and the company is essential (Chow, 2001). Unmarried female athletes without a spouse need more support from their parents and friends so as to reduce psychological and emotional fluctuations and reduce the negative impact of "social syndrome."

5. Conclusion

By evaluating the representation of current and former female athletes in the three stages before, during, and after retirement phases demonstrated that female athletes are faced with the problems of low life skills, low education level, narrow life circle, and few social opportunities; and the national logistics guarantee not in place, psychological counseling is not in place, and the training mode is too closed. This study strongly demonstrates

that the importance of education, English language skills, and friendship network for athletes' transition to retirement, but further raises crucial problems about how to help athletes complete the transition period of retirement more smoothly.

This study is limited in its generalizability of findings due to among the current female athletes in this study, there are no athletes who are married and have children. Consequently, it is improbable to explain in detail the issues of balancing career and marriage and family faced by female athletes, continuing sports careers after giving birth, and how to return to the competition after childbirth. To comprehend the impacts of the findings brought out in this study, more studies could help to find out the problems encountered by female athletes in their sports career, such as marriage, pregnancy, menstrual period, body discrimination, etc.

From these conclusions, practitioners should factor in the policy environment, Social Environment, Social Media, Social Faith, and Social Network five aspects. Firstly, the Policy environment needs to establish a sound and complete retired resettlement policy system, and ensure equal opportunities for female athletes to re-employ after retirement through legal provisions, and reduce workplace discrimination that female athletes may encounter, such as "marriage discrimination," "sex discrimination," "physical health discrimination," "age discrimination" and so on. At the same time, in order to prevent the loss of outstanding competitive sports talents, an exceptional athlete retirement service department can be established to provide athletes reemployment services. The establishment of this department can also provide more jobs for society and help athletes find employment, which can also increase the social employment rate.

Secondly, the social environment should improve the subsidies and support for athletes from pension insurance, medical insurance, work-related injury insurance. Moreover, it divides athletes into different compensation indicators according to the degree and severity of athletes' injuries. For athletes with injuries, preferential policies should be formulated. Thirdly, social media workers should be weak the "female" label of female competitive athletes, reduce the media pressure of female athletes, and prevent negative comments and reports from affecting athletes' mental health. Fourthly, as for social faith aspects, it needs to provide retired psychological counseling to help athletes develop social resources, establish social networks, plan ahead of time for career development after retirement, and guide athletes to find new career development directions after retirement. Fifthly, the social network means relatives and friends should provide encouragement and companionship to alleviate the negative impact of "social syndrome" after athletes retired.

According to the analysis of this article, it can be concluded that the issue of education is the origin of the issue of athletes' retirement, regardless of whether they are men or women. Compared with male athletes, it is more difficult for female athletes to find employment after retirement, and their job channels are also narrower. In addition, due to the different physical structures and different ways of thinking, female athletes are more likely to suffer serious injuries than male athletes in sports, and they are also more likely to have mentally difficult diseases.

Finally, at present, China's newly proposed strategy of "Dual Career of Athlete" is in line with national conditions and is the only way for most major sports nations in the world. Although it will take some time for development, the path is prosperity. In addition, it is also necessary for scholars to further study the dilemma of female athletes in the transition to retirement and the influence of marriage/partner/family on the transition of female athletes to retirement transition.

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