

**Exploring the Potential Athletic Career Frameworks/Models for the Whole Nation System
(China)**

by

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Abstract

In recent years, the Chinese government and people are gradually realizing the importance of physical education, mental health, and the overall development of athletes. In sport psychology, the significance of the athletic career discourse (ACD) has been recognized by sport psychology researchers and practitioners. Some sport psychology scholars have dedicated their efforts to structuring the athletic career knowledge which has been utilized to conduct research to understand athletes' career development stages and transitions. Furthermore, based on the athletic career research, many intervention programs and strategies have been applied around the world in order to help athletes cope crisis-transitions and strive career excellence both within and outside sports. However, athletic career research has not widely been conducted in mainland China, and there is a need for contextualized athletic career research which is specific to China because athletes' development will be influenced by the sport systems, societal norms, and culture. In this paper, I found some issues (e.g., low educational level, short lifespan), which are associated with athletic career, of the Whole Nation System and Chinese athletes through understanding the Whole Nation System and a self-reflection. Furthermore, I found several athletic career frameworks/models which may be, in part, suitable to conduct athletic career research for Chinese athletes, through a literature review of athletic career research.

Keywords: Athletic career, career development, career transition, crisis-transition, self-reflection the Whole Nation System, Chinese athletes

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1 Chapter One: Introduction

In recent years, people's living standard in China has improved because of the improvement of economy, technology and medical treatment. Therefore, people pay more attention to health, and people increasingly take part in and pay attention to sports. Moreover, most parents and the government are gradually realizing the importance of physical education and mental health. Due to this situation, more people devote their efforts to sports realm, so the overall level of sport science has gradually increased. At the same time, the development of sport science also enhances the competitiveness of Chinese sports teams in the world sports arena. China's leading position in certain sports worldwide reflects not only the high professional skills and support of talented coaches and athletes, but also the success of the Chinese Whole Nation System where cultivates the majority of Chinese elite athletes (Ge et al., 2019). Since 1984 to 2004, China has become a powerful competitor in the Olympic Games because of the management mode and operation mechanism of the Chinese whole sports system (Yang, et al., 2004). However, this system also has its limitations which could be perceived as a potential developmental opportunity for Chinese sport scientists to explore, and this system has been rethinking, and reforming to iron out limitations.

In order to achieve this goal, the policy “Opinions on Deepening the Integration of sports and education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth” was issued in September by the General Administration of Sport of China (GSA) (GAS, 2020). The policy suggests deepening the integration of sports and education to promote the healthy development of youth and establish a high-level sport team in the high educational department (e.g., high school, and university). Additionally, the policy also focuses on the improvement of the overall development of athletes both within sport and outside sport and explores the potential multiple developmental

pathways of Chinese athletes such as three-level training network, sport team, sport club, school, and individuals (GAS, 2020). It is clear to see that GAS has started to pay attention to the overall development and multiple development pathways of Chinese athletes, and not only on sport performance (sport), but also education and others (non-sport). It is an opportunity for Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners to conduct athletic career research because there is still a gap and a blank field in athletic career research in mainland China.

Although Chinese success in the international sporting arena and Olympics is a greatly symbolic expression of the country's efforts to develop elite sport and make China a superpower in the world (Tian & Green, 2008), the number and quality of sports scientists in China need to unceasingly increased, and these sports scientists are involved in sports related professional fields such as sports psychology, sports nutrition, and professional training (Li et al., 2020). Additionally, as coaches and athletes reflected on the successful experience and the lessons of failure of the Olympic games, they have realized the importance of scientific sport training. Consequently, Chinese sports departments and managers have begun to pay more attention to sport science and increased the investment in sports science and technology to improve the level of scientific sport training (Chen, 2019). Therefore, China has hired many sport scientists, such as sport psychologists, conditioning coaches, from around the world to help athletes and coaches and enrich the knowledge of sport science (Li et al., 2020). Given the large population of athletes in China and the increasing demand of support and assistance for sports science in competitive sports area, the number of existing sport scientists is still insufficient to meet the increasing demand, and some sports scientists pay more attention to health promotion rather than sports performance improvement (Li et al., 2020). In addition, some sport scientists lack relevant professional education and practical experience in research and scientific and technological

services for athletes which leads to the lack of satisfactory sports scientists for the national team (Jiang 2007, Li et al., 2020), but this situation is getting better and better.

In China, by the end of 2018, the total number of athletes is 386,602, including 309,279 sports school athletes and 70,462 Provincial athletes, and the total number of national level athletes is only 6,861 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). Additionally, the total number of sports scientists is 2,534, including 121 national level, and 886 provincial level sports scientists (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). It is clear to see more than 95 percent of the athletes do not have chance to enter the national team. People can imagine that even if elite national teams do not have enough sport psychologists, most ordinary professional athletes will have even less opportunity to get counseling and help from sport psychologists. As a result, when the population of athletes encounter some psychological issues and/or crisis transitions, coaches and/or parents could be important people who can help and support these athletes to reduce stress and solve psychological problems through conversations. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how these athletes grow up under Chinese culture and the Whole Nation System and where athletes' pressures come from in different development phases.

Due to the particularity of Chinese culture and the Whole Nation System, athletes in different developmental phases (first class, second class, and third class) are involved in various personnel and have different goals and tasks, so they will encounter varied pressures and psychological problems. Third class is similar as the early years, and in this stage, these are the years of playful encounter with the sport, "the years of discovering the excitement of organized competition and of being a part of a team." (Kalinowski, 1985, p, 141), and most athletes start playing the sport in school teams in primary and secondary schools. Second class is similar as the middle years, and the middle years are the stage which the athlete becomes engrossed in the

details of the sport and works hard to master the sport (Kalinowski, 1985), and in this stage, athletes start practicing a specific sport in sports schools and/or sport colleges. First class is similar as the later years, and most athletes decide to devote full time to a specific sport (Kalinowski, 1985) and be a professional athlete in a provincial or national team. If coaches and parents can clearly understand what factors will influence young athletes, they will avoid some negative behaviors, such as emphasizing on winning, unsolicited technical guidance, and unrealistic expectations (O'Rourke et al., 2011), which hinder the development of young athletes, and give more supports to athletes.

1.1 Project Aims

There is an increasing number of literature and research that was conducted to explore the experiences of Western nations in their attempts to construct systems for supporting elite athletes' development, but there is very little in-depth and informative knowledge and information in this regard about China (Tian & Green, 2008). Due to the specific Whole Nation System and Chinese culture, the developmental process of the Chinese athletes is different than several European approaches, such as Spanish, Danes, Italians (Ge et al., 2019). This system also differs from Western countries, such as Canada and the United States. Given the success of the Chinese Whole Nation Sports System, the merits and weaknesses of this specific system should be explored in terms of how Chinese athletes are cultivated through this sport system. Thus, it is crucial to understand how Chinese athletes develop in the Whole Nation System through different development stages and transitions and how the Whole Nation System works not only for athletes but also for all the personnel engaged in sports. I hope that by understanding the development stages and transitions of Chinese athletes and analyzing the advantages and potential opportunities for development of the Whole Nation System, the Whole Nation System

can be developed, and give young athletes an excellent developmental environment.

Additionally, other countries can obtain some new perspectives and informative information from Chinese successful experiences in sports. At the same time, the weaknesses of the Whole Nation System can be found, and we can learn from the successful experiences of other countries to find solutions. Learning from each other and improving can make contributions to the sport scholarship community and help athletes from different countries improve their level of sport performance and their overall development. Furthermore, I hope parents and coaches can understand more information about athletes' development stages and transitions, and psychological problems through this article, and then give young athletes more supports, and parents and coaches can make a good relationship with young athletes.

There are several aims within the major paper that will be accomplished. First, I will introduce and analyze how the Whole Nation System works, and provide the general perspectives, information, and concepts of the Chinese sport system for readers. Second, I reflect on my background and athletic career which is how I grow up under the Chinese culture and Whole Nation System at different development stages and transitions. Additionally, I will reflect on, and explain, how my athletic experience and characteristics influenced my life and perspective of the Whole Nation System and how my personal history and athletic experience have led to, and influenced, my research topic. The purpose of this reflection is to understand the limitations of Chinese athletes and explore the potential development opportunities of the Whole Nation System. Third, I would like to understand the key knowledge of athletes' career development and transition through a literature review based on papers of the ISSP Position Stand (Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020) and the ISSP book *Athletes' Career across Cultures (ACAC)* (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013), and then try to explore

and find some potential key models and aspects of career development and transition that relate to link with the Whole Nation System. Finally, I would like to make some recommendations and suggestions about the athletic career research for the Whole Nation System and sport psychology consultants who work with Chinese athletes.

1.2 Significance of Major Paper Aims

This paper holds potential to be significant for young athletes and the personnel engaged in sports. For Chinese athletes, due to differences in culture and training systems, the pattern to cultivate athletes is different between China and Western countries, and the parental or coaches' involvement and behaviors will be influenced by the Whole Nation System and Chinese culture context. Thus, it is important to understand Chinese athletes' career development stages and transitions to help them cope crisis transitions and adversities. If parents and coaches can understand these contents, they can reflect on their behaviors and give more supports to young athletes. The behaviors of coach are important for the development in sports, and their parental behaviors also have the greater effects on them that is often emphasized in a lot of research (Lauer et al., 2010). According to Knight, Neely, and Holt (2011) stated that parental behaviors can cause negative or positive influences on young athletes. Parental behaviors, such as achievement goals, high expectations, and unsolicited technical guidance, can cause pressure for young athletes (O'Rourke et al., 2011), and these behaviors will influence the development of young athletes. If parents can understand the developmental process and the stressor of young athletes, they will avoid some behaviors which cause the pressure for young athletes. In addition, in many different countries (Canada, U.S, U.K), parents are highly involved in their children's sports experiences. Watching their children compete in an important pursuit, with winning and losing and success and failure on the line, it is no surprise that many parents become very

involved in monitoring and directing this experience (Lauer et al., 2010). Yet while healthy involvement is often the intended goal, parental involvement can become excessive, involve much parental criticism of the child's performances, create pressure, hinder tennis development, and can harm the parent-child relationship (Gould et al., 2008). On the other hand, understanding the Whole Nation System and Chinese culture context can help young athletes set goals, and it also provides a clear flow chart of developmental phases. The flow chart gives a clear concept of what athletes need to do, what problems they may encounter, and how they transit to the next phase in different developmental phases. For parents, this research provides information which what kinds of crises and adversities athletes may face, what resources athletes can obtain, and what supports athletes need. Then parents can give more supports for young athletes to help them cope the crises and adversities.

For coaches, understanding the stressors of young athletes is important because in China, young athletes spend more time with their coaches than with their parents, so coaches not only play the role of coaches, but also are like their parents, so coaches should know what young athletes think about, where the stressor comes from, and how to communicate with young athletes. When coaches understand the thought of young athletes, they can help athletes reduce the pressure through conversations before sport competitions and give more supports for young athletes to help them cope the crises and adversities. In addition, it also can help coaches make a good relationship with athletes because good communications can make athletes trust coaches more. It is not only beneficial for young athletes, but also help coaches easily complete and do their job better.

Yang, Sun, Shu, and Wei (2004), they described that sport scientists would benefit from strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, expanding stable channels of exchanges

and cooperation, and purposefully introducing new technologies, new methods and new means are conducive to improving the overall level of sports science and technology in China. Thus, it is necessary to analyzing the Whole Nation System of China to find some potential opportunities for development because during this procedure, sport scholars and policy makers can identify advantages and disadvantages of this specific system. At the same time, they can also find some potential opportunities for development from the Whole Nation System, and it can help them to make suitable and correct decisions which can promote the improvement of the all aspects of sports (Li et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2018).

Furthermore, given the importance of the sport psychology consulting recognized by athletes, coaches, as well as sport administrators, and an increasing number of sport psychology consultants have been hired by governments, Olympic teams, sport club, and individual athletes in China. Therefore, there is a demand for high-level and professional sport psychology consultants, and more professional knowledge and practical experience are needed for developing sport psychology consulting services and consultants' skills. Si et al. (2015) described that it can improve Chinese sport psychology services by identifying the characteristics of the Whole-Nation System and the successful blending of it with Chinese cultural characteristics into the psychological service. Therefore, it is clear to see the usefulness of analyzing the Whole Nation System and Chinese culture for sport psychology consultants who will work with Chinese athletes.

For sport governing bodies and the nation, analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the Whole Nation System is also important because such analysis can be useful for sport policy makers to identify the shortcomings of the Whole Nation System and make decisions for policies to address the gap. It can benefit athletes, sports scientists, and all the personnel engaged in

sports. Meanwhile it may raise the overall level of competitive sports in China through sensible policy-making and advanced scientific sport training methods and increases the influence of China in the competitive sports area in the world.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

With the development of sport science and the increasing number of people who devote to sport field, such as athletes, coaches, sports scientists, and sport policy makers, these people have recognized the shortcomings of the Whole Nation System, such as the low level of education of athletes, the problem of employment after retirement of athletes, and the waste of talented athletes (Li, 2019; Li & Xv, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Meanwhile, these shortcomings also have affected the mental health and development of young athletes. For example, due to the low level of education and professional occupation skills, athletes may face some post-career transitions, if they cannot successfully cope with these career issues, they may face such as alcohol abuse. Therefore, whether at present or in the future, it is necessary to constantly improve the operation mechanism of the Whole Nation System and enrich its content (Luo, 2020). As a result, it is necessary and crucial to explore the career development and career transitions of Chinese athletes under the Whole Nation System and culture context. Within a number of recent research articles and the suggestions of researchers, the training mode of reserve talents of the Whole Nation System (3 class of training network) should be changed to the mode of the combinations of sports and education to solve the shortcomings of the Whole Nation System and improve the developmental environment for young athletes (Hou, 2019; Li, 2019; Li & Xv, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2018).

“Combination of Sports and Education” is a suitable and important solution to the limitations of the Whole Nation System’s development in China. This training model changed its

focus from traditional training model that the traditional training model only focus on the development of special sports skills and ignores the importance of education, which is not beneficial to the overall development of young athletes (Hou, 2019). “Combination of Sports and Education” is a new training model which is created to maintain a balance between the sport training and the academic education and promotes the overall development of young athletes. As a result of the change of sport training model, competitive sports talents gradually change their single role (athlete) to their dual role (students-athletes) (Hou, 2019), which can help athletes paper their post-sport career when they retired and achieve career excellence both within and outside of sports.

Due to the Whole Nation System, the Chinese athletic career includes different stages of career development and the career transition from each stage to the next until retirement. In every career transition, the role of the athletes may change such as student-athlete, athlete-student, professional-athlete, athlete-military, and coaches-athlete. Along with the career transition and the change of role, the stressor, goals, supports, missions and resources have been changed. These changes may have a significant impact on mental health and overall development of athletes. Additionally, due to the particularity of Chinese culture and the Whole Nation System, Chinese athletes in different developmental stages and transitions (first class, second class, and third class) are involved in various personnel and have different goals, tasks, supports, and resources, so they will encounter varied pressures, psychological problems, and adversities. There are some differences and nuances between Chinese athletes and others during their development stages and transitions. Therefore, there is a need for contextualized athletic career research which is specific to China. Therefore, the clear concept of career development and

career transitions is necessary, and how career development and career transitions influence the role change of athletes under the Whole Nation System should be explored.

1.4 Article Orientation

This major paper will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter is introduction. In the first chapter, I would like to describe and explain the general background and information of this major paper including five sections which are (1) major paper aims (2) significance of the research, (3) statement of the problem, (4) article orientation, and (5) operational definitions. The first chapter can help readers obtain the key information of this major paper. In the second chapter, the general structure and its operating mechanism of the Whole Nation System will be presented by four sections including (1) background and history, (2) definition and contextualization, (3) infrastructure and organization, and (4) elite athlete training, selection process, and competition. The second chapter can provide some general information and concepts about how Chinese athletes are cultivated by this specific development environment for readers. The third chapter will be my self-reflection. The third chapter will provide a reflective review of my own athletic career and background, and then I will explain how my athletic experience and characteristics influenced my life and perspective of the Whole Nation System and how my personal history and athletic experience have led to, and influenced, my research topic. The third chapter will consist of several sections including (1) introducing myself: my athletic career in the Whole Nation System, (2) reflecting on how my athletic career influenced my life and perspective of the Whole Nation System, (3) how my personal history affects my research topic and interests, (4) summary of my background relevant to the major paper. The third chapter may provide readers more detailed information and concepts about how Chinese athletes grow up through my own experience as an example. Additionally, it also gives me an

opportunity to think about how my own experience, background, and perspective may influence the research topic. The fourth chapter will be a literature review of athletic career research based on two papers of the ISSP Position Stand (Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020) and the ISSP book *Athletes' Career across Cultures (ACAC)* (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). This chapter will be consisted by (1) historical overview of key career development and transition knowledge based on the ISSP Position Stand, (2) potential key career development and transition models for the Whole Nation System. During this chapter, I would like to understand the key knowledge and concepts of athletic career research, and to explore and find several potential frameworks/models which may be, in part, suitable for the Whole Nation System, and Chinese sport psychological research. The final chapter will be conclusions. In the conclusion chapter, there will be three sections including (1) conclusions, (2) implications, (3) recommendations. I would like to make some recommendations and suggestions about the athletic career research and introduce several frameworks/models for the Whole Nation System and sport psychology researchers/practitioners who work with Chinese athletes.

1.5 Operational Definitions

Athletic career. “Athletic career” is a term which describes “a multi-year sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person, and aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events” (Stambulova et al., 2009, p. 397), and an athletic career may occupy up to “one third of the lifespan and influences all aspects of an athlete’s development” (Stambulova, 1994, p. 221). Additionally, the athletic career is also perceived as a part of life career and a natural progression of specific stages and transitions, including beginning to retirement from sports (Battochio et al., 2015; Mortensen et al., 2013; Ryba, & Stambulova, 2013; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014), and these stages entitle specific or unique

periods in a trajectory of athletes in sport and contain different demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and challenges. Furthermore, these stages may co-occur as stages and transitions both within and/or outside sport, such as on the personal, social and academic vocational level (Mortensen et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2020; Wyllemann & Lavallee, 2004).

Career development. In the sport psychology field, career development is defined as proceeding through the athletes' career stages and transitions (Stambulova et al., 2009), and the process is uneven and means athletes' progressions, decays, and stagnations along with athletic and non-athletic career issues and striving for career excellence, which is a new term and defined as "an athletes' ability to sustain a healthy, successful, and long-lasting career in sport and life" (Stambulova et al., 2020, p. 2).

Career transitions. In the sport psychology field, a career transition can be perceived as a turning phase, a process, or a career change event which need various coping strategies and resources to deal with a set of transition demands, and requires in order to continue in athletic and parallel careers or athletes' career development; additionally, a career transition may lead to a successful transition (outcome of effective coping) or an crisis transition (outcome of ineffective coping) in an athlete's career trajectory (Bonhomme et al., 2020; Schinke et al., 2018; Stambulova et al., 2020; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020).

Whole nation system. The Whole Nation System is a term which is to describe the sport system of China. The sport system of China is called Juguo Tizhi in Chinese and is translated as whole-country support for the elite sport system (Hong et al., 2005; Hu & Henry, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018). The Whole Nation System is an adaptation of a sports training system from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1950s and developed Chinese own character in the 1980s(Zheng et al., 2018), "within which the national government organizes and allocates

resources to sport through a strategic plan, and manages sport by executive means, with the aim of cultivating competitive athletes to win in the international events” (Ge et al., 2019, p. 7).

Self-reflection. It is a reflective review, or a reflective practice to be able to look at ourselves and allows researchers to look neutrally at their feelings, emotions, actions, and thoughts. A self-reflection can be defined as challenging, focused, and making judgments of one’s own belief, and behavior; furthermore, during this process, researchers may think about their thoughts and thought-processes to make judgments about whether professional activity is equitable and to think about “how our own background and perspective affects the production of knowledge, recognizing viewpoints other than our own, and confronting power issues by celebrating multiple viewpoints in the research process.” (McGannon, & Johnson, 2009, p. 75).

2 Chapter Two: The Whole Nation System (China)

The Whole Nation System is a term which is to describe the Chinese sport system. In this chapter, the general structure and its operating mechanism of the Whole Nation System will be presented by four sections including (1) background and history, (2) definition and contextualization, (3) infrastructure and organization, and (4) elite athlete training, selection process, and competition. This chapter can provide some general information and concepts about how Chinese athletes are cultivated by this specific development environment.

2.1 Background and History

There are a lot of traditional sports such as dragon boat racing, cuju (an ancient football) and martial arts in China, and these sports have been rooted there for more than a thousand years. Therefore, in China, sport has a long history, but before the twentieth century, China did not have a strong sporting culture because neo-Confucianism has influenced the Chinese culture by an emphasis on intellectual activities (Zheng et al., 2018). However, in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established, so the year was not only a milestone in modern Chinese history, but also Chinese sport because the All-China Sport and Physical Education Congress was convoked on 26 and 27 October, 1949. After the year, the first governing body of sport, the All China Sports Federation (ACSF), was established in Beijing in June 1950. Additionally, the mission of the ACSF is to supervise the development of physical education and sport in China, and help the government to improve people's health and serve the national defense and state-building, so the ACSF is led by the Central Government of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Fan & Lu, 2012). In brief, China's sport system can be divided into

three stages; it began in the 1950s, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, and matured with its own character in the 1980s' and succeeded in the 2008s (Zheng et al., 2018).

In 1952, in order to participate in the Olympic Games, the Chinese Premier was remaindered by the Soviet Ambassador that the PRC would have to declare its membership of the International Olympic Committee (IOC); therefore, China sent an official telegram to the IOC to declare the ACSF's legitimate position (Fan & Lu, 2012). Meanwhile, the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China issued a notification of 'Selecting and Training Elite Athletes' on 18 February, 1952, and a campaign was launched by the PRC at the international sports federations to obtain recognition. However, before the start of the Helsinki Olympics, the IOC did not send the official invitation to Beijing, but the Chinese Premier (Zhou Enlai) still decided that same day to send PRC delegation to Helsinki, and the PRC athletes missed the majority of competitions and did not achieved any medals (Fan & Lu, 2012). Additionally, the Helsinki Olympics was also the first time the Soviet Union participated in the Olympic Games, and the Soviet athletes had outstanding performance and won 22 gold medals and 71 medals total. Due to the remarkable success of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government was inspired to follow in the footsteps of Soviet Union in aiming to gain international recognition through sport (Fan & Lu, 2012). After the Helsinki Olympics, the Central Government Officially established a new national sport governing body which was the State Physical Culture and Sport Commission (the Sports Ministry) on 15 November, 1952.

The Sports Commission officially launched the Elite Sport System of the PRC in 1956 and created a landmark document which laid the foundations, such as recognizing 43 elite sports, formulating rules and regulations, organizing full-time sports team, and providing competition

opportunities for the elite sport system in China (Zheng et al., 2018). In the same year, the Chinese Sports Ministry issued the ‘Ten-Year Guideline for Sports Development’ which aimed to promote mass and elite sport development (Zheng et al., 2018) and achieve the same level as the rest of the world within a decade, and one of the symbols of the Ten-Year guideline was the First National Game in 1959 (Fan & Lu, 2012).

The period from 1966 to 1976 (The Culture Revolution) was a special and unstable time, and also had some influences for sports in China. Zheng and his colleagues (2018) described that during the Culture Revolution, the people (workers and peasants) and collectivism were highly valued, while the elite group, ranging from science to sport, was severely criticized and often physically threatened or assaulted, and almost every sports activity was suspended; for example, the training system was broken down, the sports school was closed, the sports competition was vanished, and the Chinese team was stopped touring abroad.

The end of the Culture Revolution in 1976, it was a new era for sport in China, and sports were attracted people’s attention again because of the elite sport emerging as the overriding priority which means to raise the national flag of China at Olympic Games became an important government responsibility (Zheng et al., 2018).

In late 1979, due to reinstating the seat of China in the International Olympic Committee, ‘develop elite sport and make China a superpower in the world’ was perceived as a slogan and pursuit in China, so elite sport received significant attention, and the Chinese government decided to concentrate its limited resources on the medal-winning sports. Additionally, in the wake of the success at Los Angeles 1984, the landmark document (Olympic Strategy), which established elite sport as the priority both in the short term and long term, was issued in 1985 (Zheng et al., 2018).

In 1988, due to the poor performance of China at the Seoul Olympic Games, China paid more attention to the elite sport development systems of its major rivals, so a national symposium was held for analysis of the top three sports nations (Soviet Union, the USA and East Germany) and two major Asian rivals (Japan and South Korea), and China started to realize the importance of sport science in sporting success (Zheng et al., 2018). Therefore, China has paid more attention to sport science including sport training, talent identification, and Olympic Games preparations. In order to better serve Olympic Games preparations, the National Games, which is used as a platform for the selection of talented both athletes and coaches, was rescheduled in 1993 (Zheng et al., 2018). Furthermore, due to the Olympic strategy to make China a sports superpower, Chinese government strived to bid for the Olympic Games, and Beijing won the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games in 2001; after that, the Olympic became the focal point within the realm of sport in China (Zheng et al., 2018).

After the Beijing Olympics, the system of Juguó Tízhì (the Whole Nation System) did not fade away, and the significance of maintaining the system was stressed; additionally, the government started to pay more attention to the deterioration of children's physical fitness and the overweight of citizens, so the significance of fitness was realized by the Chinese government (Zheng et al., 2018).

2.2 Definition and Contextualization

China's leading position in certain sports worldwide reflects not only the high professional skills and support of talented coaches and athletes, but also the success of the Chinese Whole Nation System (Ge et al., 2019). Many researchers also agree that the success of Chinese sport depends on the Whole Nation System and the Olympic strategy (Hong et al., 2005; Zheng et al., 2018). When people would like to explore and research the Chinese sports, the first

question, which they must understand, is what the China's sport system is. The China's sport system is called *Juguo Tizhi* in Chinese and is translated as 'whole-country support for the elite sport system' (Hong et al., 2005; Hu & Henry, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018). The term is called the Whole Nation System (Ge et al., 2019; Si et al., 2011). The overarching goal of the Whole Nation System is to win gold medals in the Olympic Games and all international sporting competitions (Zheng et al., 2018).

Before the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, the field of sports was virtually blank, and after the PRC's debut at the Helsinki Olympic Game in 1952, the government realized the significant of the sport which can serve the political, social, ideological, and diplomatic purposes or requirements of government, such as 'Ping-pong diplomacy' (Fan & Lu, 2012; Zheng et al., 2018). Therefore, in order to change the backward status of competitive sports in a short time, rapidly improve the level of sports skill and technology, and narrow the gap with the world's leading countries (Yang et al., 2004), a management/administration model and operation mechanism (the Whole Nation System), 'which learned from the Soviet Union in the 1950s but developed its own character in the 1980s' was created (Hong et al., 2005).

Ge et al. (2019) illustrated that "The Whole-Nation system originated in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, within which the national government organizes and allocates resources to sport through a strategic plan, and manages sport by executive means, with the aim of cultivating competitive athletes to win in the international events" (p. 7), and they summarized the Chinese Whole Nation System as having following characteristics: (a) a centralized structure, (b) a medal-orientated, and (c) a semi-closed environment. Zheng et al. (2018) also stated that the most distinctive characteristic of the Whole Nation System is its centralized organizational structure, and argued that the model of the Chinese sports administrative system reflected the

wider social system in China: both the Communist Party and state administrations were organized in a vast hierarchy with power flowing down from the top. Furthermore, Hong, Wu, and Xiong (2005) described that the main characteristics of the Whole Nation System are centralized management and administration and provided financial and human resources from the whole country to ensure it maximum support, and the government can assist in the distribution of the limited resources of the whole nation to medal-winning sports; in return, the international success of Chinese athletes will bring pride and hope to the nation.

The Whole Nation System is a specific national setup in China's sport system, which state government allocates financial resources through various administrative means and implements effective management to develop sports according to a national strategic plan. Furthermore, the Whole Nation System aims to win glory for the nation and serve national interest and political purposes and emphasizes the value and honor of nationalism and collectivism (Hu & Henry, 2016; Si et al., 2011). Moreover, Hu and Henry (2017) described that the Whole Nation System encompasses the full range of state activities in sport, such as academic research in sport, management of national governing bodies, facilities and policy bodies.

Sport in China is monopolized by the government through sport administration, training, and competition, which are all regulated by governmental agencies. Therefore, the characteristic of China is its government's sole responsibility for sport. Additionally, the government's strategic objective of Olympic Glory is fundamental of the developments of each sport, and the government supports all the necessary costs of sport development and pays salaries for all sport participants, such as athletes, coaches, sport scientists, and administrators; in return, these sport

participants need to accept the management of government and priorities national interests of China (Ge et al., 2019).

2.3 Infrastructure and Organization

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Sport has consistently played an important role in political, social, ideological, and diplomatic realms. With the only exception of the turbulent time of the Culture Revolution, the central government has established specialized government departments and dedicated plenty of financial support for the development of elite sports (Zheng et al., 2018). In 1952, the Central Government Officially established a new national sport governing body which was the State Physical Culture and Sport Commission (the Sports Ministry), which as a government body had the same status as other ministries such as Education, Finance, and Commerce, directly under the leadership of the State Council. After the establishment of the central sport governing body (Sport Ministry), which was a pyramidal structure from top to bottom, local sports commissions were established at provincial, municipal, and county levels throughout China (Fan & Lu, 2012), which can be interpreted as a hierarchical structure from central government to provincial, city and county levels (Zheng et al., 2018). The Sport Ministry facilitated the implementation of policies and decisions of the central Government, and local sport commissions were supervised by the Sport Ministry in terms of policy making and implementation, but local sport commissions also received direct leadership from the local governments in terms of human and financial resources and operations (Fan & Lu, 2012).

In 1988, in order to reduce all sport participants' expenses and to increase the efficiency of the Chinese government, the Sports Commissions transformed its administrative structure (Tan & Green, 2008). Additionally, the Sports Commission was renamed the General

Administration of Sport of China (GAS) and downgraded to the level of GAS, which delegated its authority in relation to national elite sport selection and training and competition, to 23 quasi-autonomous organizations, i.e. national sport management centers (NSMCs), and focus on strategic policymaking for sport development (Tan & Green, 2008), and it was simplified and merged from the previous twenty departments to nine departments (Zheng et al., 2018). Additionally, Tan and Green (2008) described that “The primary concern of these canter is to oversee and manage the training and monitoring of national trams. At the provincial level there are also sport bureaus and sport management centers with responsibility for producing elite athletes for selection into the national squads.” (p. 318).

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the whole Nation System is a centralized structure of Chinese government, and the General Administration of Sport supervises the system (including elite athlete training, competition, selection) from the top down; furthermore, the General Administration of Sport is directed by the Central government.

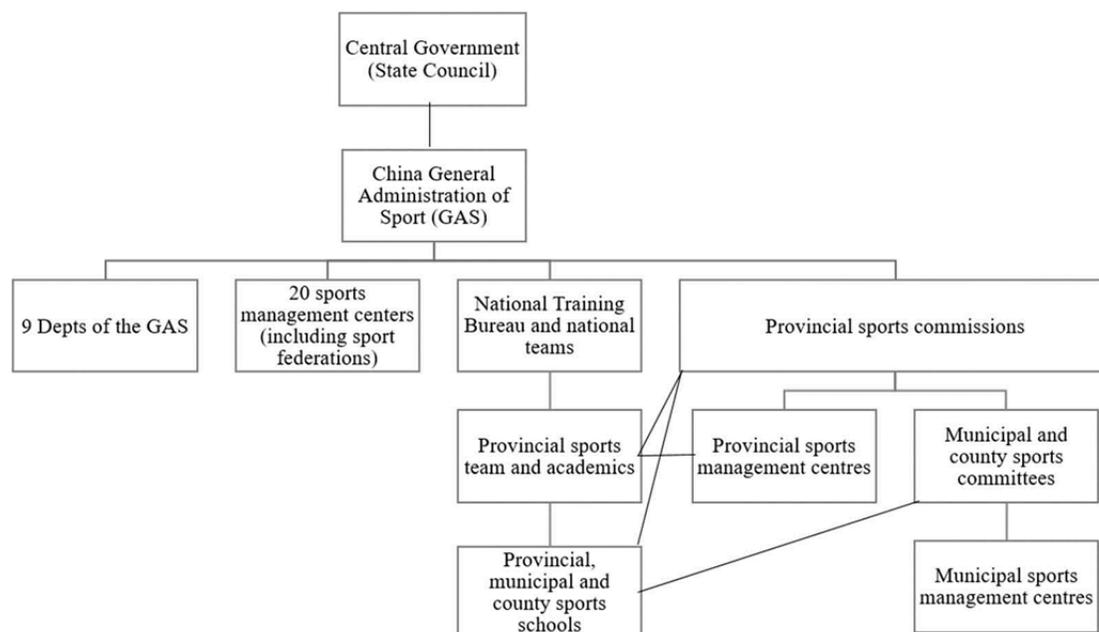


Figure 1. The administrative structure of Chinese sport (1998-2020).

Source: Hong & Lu (2012b, p. 116).

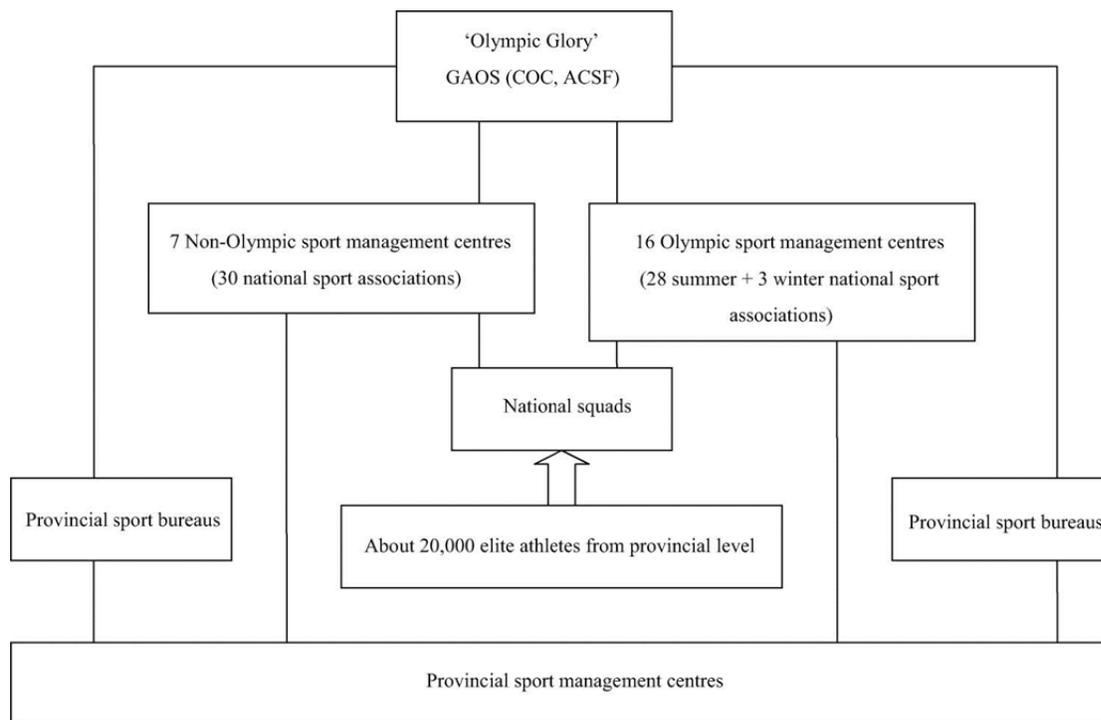


Figure 2. China's centralized sports structure.

Source: Tan & Green (2008, p. 318)

2.4 Elite Athlete Training, Selection Process, and Competition

Due to the specific characteristics (a centralized structure, a medal-orientated, and a semi-closed environment), pyramidal structure (from top to bottom), and hierarchical structure (from central government to provincial, city and county levels) of the Whole Nation System, elite athletes training, competition and selecting process have been shaped and influenced by the specific characteristics and pyramidal and hierarchical structure of the Whole Nation System, and the Chinese elite athletes training, selection process, and competition have been shaped as a pyramidal structure and hierarchical structure.

Hong, Wu, and Xiong (2005) stated that the Whole Nation System is one of the most effective systems in the world for systematically selecting and producing sports stars from a very

young age. Additionally, Tian and Green (2008) described that the Whole Nation System is “an effective system for the statistical identification and monitoring of the progress of sub-elite and elite athletes” (p. 319).

On the instruction of the Sports Ministry, a systematic talent identification and training system and sport colleges were established in each province by the government, and the government charged provincial governments, sport universities, the People’s Liberation Army and the trade unions with the development of several Olympic sports (Tian & Green, 2008). In China, most young athletes developed and progressed through the selecting and training system, but a few young athletes were developed outside the system. The talent identification and training system is called three-level training network and the (spare-time) sports school system, which dominate the cultivation of elite athletes in China, and it is a pyramidal structure. Figure 3 illustrates the structure of the systematic talent identification and training system.

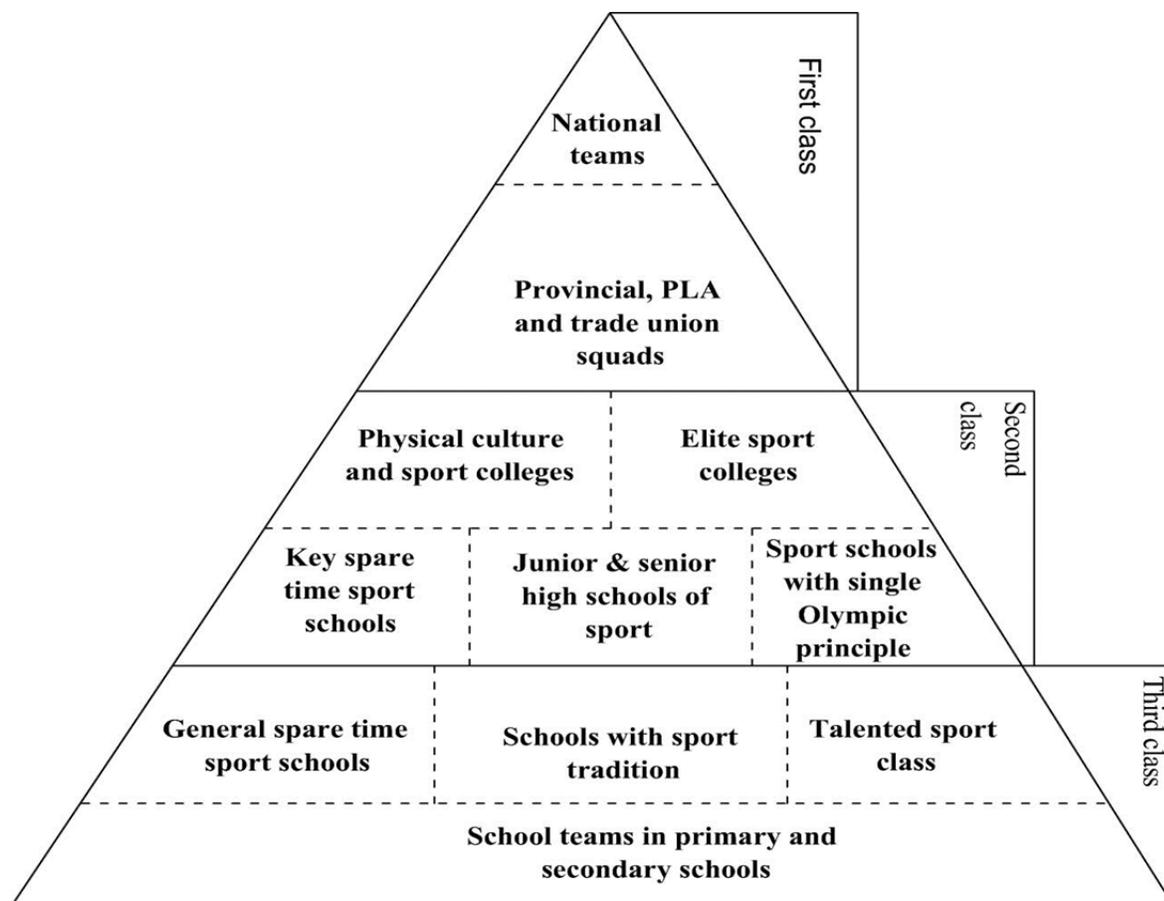


Figure 3. The talent identification and training system in China

Source: Tan & Green (2008, p. 320)

In Third class, most athletes start playing the sport in school teams in primary and secondary schools when they are ages of six to nine. In this stage, most athletes are trained two or three hours a day three or four days a week, and almost all the costs of athletes are borne by their parents. After a period of hard training, some promising athletes will move to next stage.

Next stage is Second class. In this stage, athletes start practicing a specific sport in sports schools and/or sport colleges. Young athletes will conduct semi-professional training five to six hours a day five or six days a week, and some excellent young athletes will receive financial support, but parents still have to pay for most of the young athletes' expenses. Additionally, most athletes live on campus, and they can only meet their parents on weekends.

First class is similar as the later years, and most athletes decide to devote full time to a specific sport (Kalinowski, 1985) and be a professional athlete in a provincial or national team. In this stage, professional athletes are trained seven to eight hours a day six days a week, and almost all the costs of professional athletes are borne by government.

In terms of training methods, the People's Army's methods (hard, disciplined, intensive training, and practice according to real battle) were adopted in 1963 (Hong et al., 2005). In 1964, however, a new training method was invented. It included three non-fears, which are not being afraid of hardship, difficulty or injury, and five-toughness which are toughness of spirit, body, skill, training and competition. (Hong et al., 2005). However, as coaches and athletes reflected on the successful experience and the lessons of failure of the Olympic games, they have realized the importance of scientific sport training. Consequently, Chinese sports departments and managers have begun to pay more attention to sports science and increased the investment in sports science and technology to improve the level of scientific sport training (Chen, 2019).

In terms of the athletes selecting process, Tian and Green (2008) illustrated that “the details of the talent identification and development system are constantly changing.” (p. 322), and the athletes selecting process also have some changes, such as the introduction of grassroots and professional clubs, the targeting of key sport schools and sport colleges in the selection system, and the introduction of two national-level squads, which are national squads and Olympic squads. Figure 4 illustrates the athletes selecting process in China.

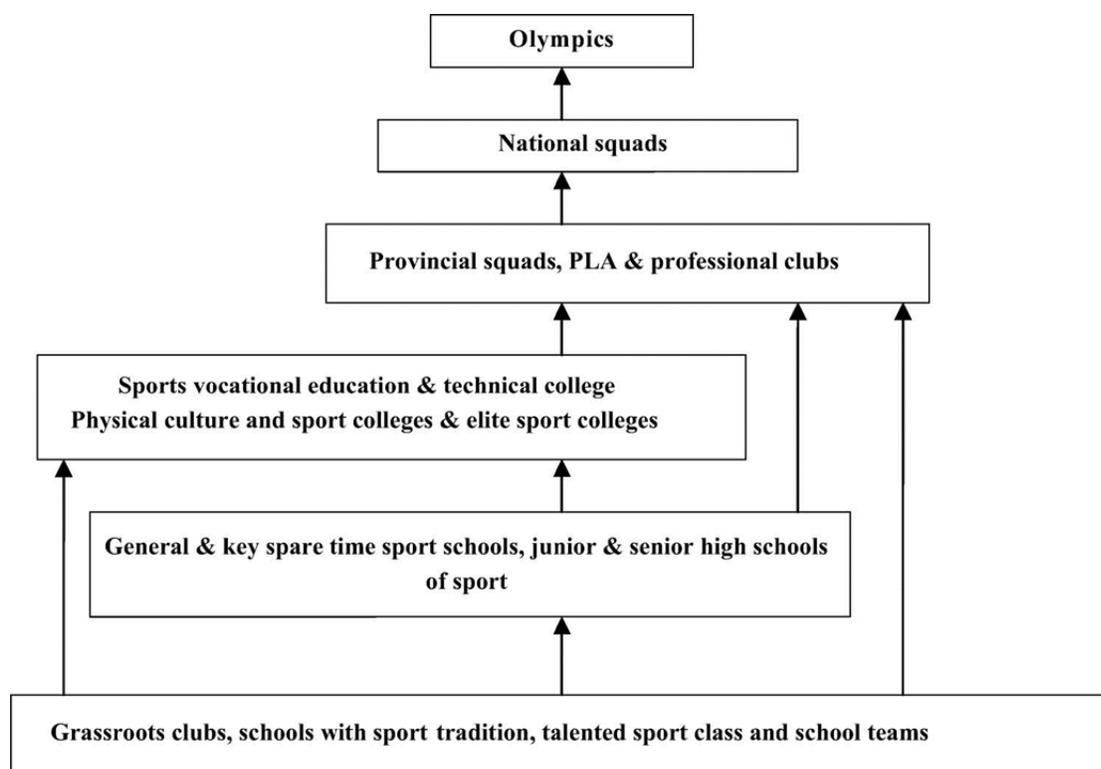


Figure 4. The athletes selecting process in China

Source: Tan & Green (2008, p. 322)

When we discuss the athletes training and selecting process in China, it is imperative to talk about competition because competition is not only a way to assess and monitor athletes' training results and conditions and to help athletes prepare international competitions, but also the most important means to select athletes. Additionally, it is a mean to motivate provincial governments to support the Olympic strategy. The competition system is a pyramidal structure in China, and the overarching goal is same as the Whole Nation System to win the Olympic glory and succeed in international competitions. "This was especially so with the national games, which were the main driving force for achieving Olympic glory. To achieve Olympic success through this competitive system, China not only mirrored the rules and regulations of the Olympics for national city games, national games and most of the provincial games, but also regarded all the games in this system as arenas for selecting, training and preparing Chinese

athletes for international competition, and especially for the Olympic Games in Beijing.” (Tian & Green, 2008, p. 325). Figure 5 illustrates the sport competition system of China.



Figure 5. China’s sport competition system for Olympic glory

Source: Tan & Green (2008, p. 325)

2.5 Summary

In sum, the development stages of Chinese sport system can be divided into four stages: (1) began in the 1950s, (2) developed in the 1960s and 1970s, (3) matured with its own character in the 1980s’ and succeeded in the 2008s, (4) rethinking and reforming after the 2008s to present. The Whole Nation System is an adaptation of a sports training system from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1950s and developed Chinese own character in the 1980s.

The distinctive characteristics of the Whole Nation System are: (1) a centralized structure of its infrastructure and organization, (2) a medal-orientated, and/or political orientated within

the value of nationalism and collectivism, (3) a pyramidal or hierarchical structure of Chinese athletes' training and selecting systems, and competitions, (4) state-control, (5) uniform management of resources.

The overarching goal of the Whole Nation System is to win the Olympic glory and succeed in international competitions for the nation and serve national interest and political purposes and emphasizes the value and honor of nationalism and collectivism which can be expressed as “a medal-orientated or political-orientated” and “the prioritization of collective interests” (Ge et al., 2019). In order to achieve these goals, the Whole Nation System works through the three-level training network (i.e., first class, second class, and third class) to training and selecting of elite athletes. This three-level training network is shaped as a pyramidal or hierarchical structure by the centralized structure of the Whole Nation System. Additionally, the central government supports all the demands of sport development; in return, these sport participants need to accept and follow the management of central government and priorities national interests of China.

For Chinese athletes, the Whole Nation System has brought them a lot of advantages, but it also has brought some disadvantages such as low educational level, short sport lifespan, and wasted talent. These factors may influence on athletes' financial condition, competitive performance, and post-sport career. The advantages are that athletes have good training environments, excellent sport skills, and financial supports. On the other hand, the disadvantages are that athletes have the short sport lifespan, low educational level, and wasted talents.

3 Chapter Three: Self-Reflection: Athlete in the Chinese Whole Nation System

During the first year of my graduate studies I took part in a graduate-level qualitative research class where we learned about how the we, researchers, influence the research we conduct. Based on what I learned last semester in a graduate-level class of qualitative research methods in sport psychology, I make a reflective review of my background and athletic experience. Through this graduate level class, I learned some perspectives that I never thought about, and how these perspectives influence my research. I bring awareness to some new perspectives, and how these factors may influence my research. I divided my reflection chapter into three sections. In the first section, I reviewed and described my background and athletic experience (i.e., career development, career transition, identity conversion) from phases one, two, and three to retirement. In the second section, I explained how my athletic career and characteristics influenced my life and perspective of the Whole Nation System. In the third section, I considered how my personal history and athletic experience have led to, and influenced, my research topic.

3.1 Introducing Myself

I am a Chinese, former professional table tennis athlete, heterosexual male, single child from a middle-income and literary family. I was born in Xichang, Sichuan, China in 1995. Most people born in this generation were single children due to the Chinese single-child policy at that time. I grew up in a literary family, as both parents and grandparents graduated from university and value academic education. My grandparents on my mother's side were both teachers, and my grandparents on my father's side were both public servants. Additionally, my father is a bank manager, and my mother is an engineer of concrete structure. When I was a boy my grandparents and parents hoped that I would become a highly educated individual or a professor in the future.

Although I pursued a sport career which my family members have never been involved in, I want to become a highly educated person associated with sport.

3.1.1 My Athletic Career in the Whole Nation System

In this section, I reflected my athletic career in the Whole Nation System from various aspects including my career development, career transition, and identity conversion. The first section is the reflection of my initial athletic career, and then I reflected my athletic career in different stages based on the Chinese three-level training network.

Third-Class (early years). When I was six years old, I watched a table tennis match on the television and was instantly interested. I was absolutely amazed at how the athletes could control the ball with their table tennis rackets, and the speed they hit ball and move. My parents thought otherwise, as academic study is the most important thing in China, and they thought that participating in sports will lead to decrease academic record. However, my parents wanted what was best for me, and I joined the school table tennis club, named the after-school sports team in the Whole Nation System. My coach found that I had a talent for table tennis and told my parents to send me to a professional club. One year later, my aunt, who knew that I was very interested in table tennis and told my parents that I should have a chance to try because interest is the best teacher, connected me with a very good table tennis coach. With my parents' approval, I left my hometown and travelled to Shanghai to practice table tennis by myself. My parents and I made a pact where if my academic record dropped, I had to stop playing table tennis. When I arrived in Shanghai, it was the first time I left my parents alone, but I were not frightened and scared because everything was interesting and new to me. I went to school for studying and practicing table tennis, and the school is called schools with sport tradition in the Whole Nation System. I was a novice athlete at the school, and my parents supported me by paying for my expensive

tuition, training, and living expenses. I felt no pressure at the time; I had a feeling of freshness about everything, but I did miss my parents and hometown. I focused on practicing table tennis and school, and my parents focused on my daily life such as food and health. Table tennis was not a task, but as an interesting game which was played with my friends. My table tennis skills improved rapidly, and my academic record was still excellent because I perceived myself as a student-athlete. My primary identity was as a student, and my primary mission was academic learning as opposed to practicing table tennis. During my novice years, I took part in many tournaments and got excellent results. Two years later, I was one of the top two players in my age group in Shanghai, giving me the opportunity to sign with the club and move up to the city team.

Second-Class (middle years). I transferred to another school with two teammates when I entered second phase – elite sport colleges or physical culture and sport colleges in the Whole Nation System. I began to conduct semi-professional training, where my academic study was scheduled in the morning and table tennis practice scheduled in the afternoon and night, five days a week. I represented the city in provincial tournaments and received a tuition and training fees waiver. The shift in performance focus forced me to take time away from my academic study to attend table tennis tournaments across the country, as I was asked to gain a good score in the tournaments. My parents began to pay attention to my results at tournaments and gave me some technical direction, pushing me to train harder. I began to gradually feel the pressure to perform, but I was proud of my parents' recognition. Additionally, due to the increase in exercise intensity and the lack of relevant scientific training, I started to encounter some sport injuries and psychological problems (re-injury anxiety) during table tennis practice and tournaments such as Hydrops of knee joint, Tibial tuberosity epiphysis, and other knee, wrist, shoulder, ankle injuries,

re-injury anxiety and pre-competition anxiety. During this phase, when I encountered some injuries, I needed to see a doctor in a general hospital. Unfortunately, I could not access any conditioning coaches, sport psychology consultants, dieticians, and sport physiotherapists who could have helped me because most sport scientists work only with provincial or national teams because of the lack of the sport scientist and the Olympic strategy in China. I tried to ask my parents for help because I was scared to open my heart to the coach due to the hierarchical orientation of the Whole Nation System, where coaches had more power than me and could determine which athletes could take part in tournaments. I scared that the coaches would perceive me as a weaker athlete because I had some physical and psychological impairments, and that might cause coaches did not give me chances to participate in tournaments. I perceived that coaches were severe. Another reason that made me reluctant to ask coaches for help was that sometimes I thought that they did not trust me. For example, once, when I hurt my knee, I went to a hospital to get it examined by a doctor. The doctor gave me a report and recommended that I rest for two weeks. My coach thought the report was an excuse to get break from practice. He ordered me to continue my training, which also caused my knee injury to worsen. Additionally, he had the right to decide who can transfer to the next phase, so I did not want to show him my negative side. Therefore, I continued to practice with a severe sport injury because I were cared of the repercussions.

As I advanced through the second phase, the training schedule and the focus of my parents and I changed. My perception of my own identity gradually shifted from a student-athlete to an athlete-student, where my primary identity was an athlete, and then a student. My primary mission was to have good table tennis performance and secondary to have a good academic record. My identity conversion led to a decline in my academics because I paid less attention to

my academic learning and more attention to my table tennis skill practicing. It also had led to an increase in my pre-competition anxiety because I devoted all my attention to practicing table tennis skills to achieve great results in tournaments to have a chance to transition into the next phase. I became too nervous and anxious at the thought of failing, which often led to my poor performance. I over-focused on the results, but at that time, I did not realize it, and I thought my sport skills were lacking, forcing me to train harder. The over training led to me more injuries, and injuries increase anxieties, anxiety increases need to train harder that resulted in my knee not fully recovering. This phase lasted about five years and although I encountered some problems, I got some good results in tournaments, and I was still ranked top five in the city. Therefore, I still had a chance to go further and move up to the next phase.

Frist-Class (later years). When I entered the final phase, I moved up to the provincial team in the Whole Nation System. During this phase, I did not have to pay any fees, and I received a salary from the government. I began to conduct professional training which included table tennis training in the morning and afternoon six days a week, and academic learning only in the evening three days a week. I felt increased pressure to perform due to the increasingly high competition performance requirements and my parents' expectation and almost gave up my academic learning to put all of my energy into the training and competitions. As my training schedule and mission changed, so did my perception of my identity, shifting from an athlete-student to a professional table tennis athlete. My identity as a professional athlete meant that my only identity is an athlete, restructuring my primary mission towards good performance in table tennis tournaments to have a chance to make the national team. I put all my energy into the training and competition and started to neglect academic learning; when I went to the school for academic learning, it was like a time for me to relax. The identity conversion also increased my

stress because I almost gave up academic learning, which meant I must achieve the success in the sport career. If I did not achieve success in table tennis field, I did not know what I can do when I was retired. At this phase, the chances of getting into the national team and taking part in the tournament were becoming less, resulting in intensified competition among athletes across my team and the country. I began to worry about a lot of things, such as injury affecting my performance and causing me to lose the chance to take part in the national tournament, failure to make the national team because of poor performance, my life after retirement from table tennis if I was not successful, and disappointing my parents. These pressures caused my pre-competitions anxiety and nervousness to increase, and my competition results to decline. During this period, the Singapore table tennis national team hoped that I could immigrate to their country and represent their country in the competition. However, although I would like to have a try because there were more chances to take part in international tournaments, my parents and my team manager did not allow this decision, and I respectfully obeyed their arrangement.

As the training intensity increased, my injuries became increasingly serious, which also caused me to lose a lot of table tennis competitions. Even though my table tennis skill was still high, I was not playing well, and I started to fear competition. However, I was still lucky because few players on my team could beat me, so I was able to get a place in temporary training with the national team, named the national team in Chinese sports system. I only stayed for a few months because the national team the best provincial players and the training intensity was so intense that I seriously injured my knee (Hydrops of knee joint, and Tibial tuberosity epiphysis). My knee required surgery, which meant it would take me almost a year to recover, and I didn't think I could get back to my best, so I retired and went back to the provincial team as an assistant coach.

Retirement. When my identity changed from an athlete to a coach, I reflected on my own sports career and found that what affected my performance in a competition was not only technique, tactics, or physical stamina, but also my psychological diathesis. I observed whether my students' performance in competition was different from their performance in training, and I tried to communicate with them to see if they had similar problems I had. However, I did not know how to help them solve these problems because I lacked theoretical knowledge. My lack of knowledge motivated me to enroll in university to continue my education, and I chose sports training major in order to help young athletes. When I went to my school, I found that what I studied was not what I really wanted to know which was how to help athletes coping psychological issues in their athletic career. Moreover, because sports psychology was not valued in my university, I wrote my thesis under the guidance of my professor, without really understanding the knowledge involved and solving the problems I wanted to understand.

Although I retired from high-level national table tennis, I continued to play table tennis for my university. I found an interesting thing, when I represented my university to participate in the college table tennis competition, although I had not participated in the training for a long time, my performance in the competition was better, and I won against a lot of national team teammates. Upon reflection, I think I had a good performance because I did not have extreme external pressure. My goal was to enjoy the game and there was no requirement of achievement or excessive attention from my parents. I did not train as hard as when I was a professional and viewed failure as normal with no guilt if I failed. Less external pressure may have contributed to my improved athletic performance, but I am not sure, so after I graduated from China East Normal University, I moved to Canada to study sport psychology and try to explore how the athletic performance can be improved by coping psychological issues.

3.2 Reflecting on How My Athletic Career Influenced My Life and Perspective of the Whole Nation System

After I reflected my holistic athletic career from the early phases to retirement. I transitioned to become an assistant coach, and then I went to university and became a university athlete. I had experienced all the phases of the Whole Nation System. In these different phases, I played various roles and gained different experiences. My athletic experience and characteristics have not only shaped my life, but also influence my perception of the Whole Nation System.

Many people have asked me whether I regret choosing to be an athlete, and if I had a chance to choose again, would I still choose to be an athlete? My answer is absolutely yes. Although I have encountered many difficulties, such as injuries, and losing competition, in my athletic career, my athletic experience not only brought me a lot of great memories, but also taught me a lot of knowledge and shaped my worldview. As a professional athlete, I learned self-discipline, punctuality, and respecting others, and also learned to never give up no matter what kind of difficulty you meet. I think these qualities are valuable and have brought me a lot of benefits in my later life. On the other hand, sometimes, the never giving up could be considered negative, as I trained through my knee injury that has not recovered until today, so both physical and psychological are important factors of athletic success. Additionally, I left my hometown and my parents when I was young, which also made me more independent and able to live alone compared to my peers. Meanwhile, my athletic experience also makes me know how to cherish the kinship and friendship, and cherish every moment with my parents, friends and family members because the time away from home, and away from friends and family was lonely, so when I was able to visit them it felt fantastic right, like nothing else mattered at the time. Furthermore, my athletic experience also gives essential elements that help me pursue my sport

scholarship because I had experienced the development process of Chinese athletes and also faced some problems which may need to explore and research.

My perception of the Whole Nation System is influenced by my own lived experiences. Firstly, table tennis is called “national ball” in China, and the Chinese National table tennis team is the international leader for table tennis. Within China, table tennis attracts more attention and has more participants, which increases the competition, and pressure, among table tennis athletes. However, because of the national popularity of table tennis, when a table tennis athlete retires, they get more options and job opportunities because of the increased opportunities to coach given the popularity and high demand. Therefore, my table tennis background may influence my perception of the Whole Nation System, which means my perception may be different than other athletes involved in other sports. My perception of Whole Nation System is influenced because I were a table tennis athlete, so If I played a less popular sport, like ice-hockey, I might think differently of the Whole Nation System because I might have not been given the opportunities that a table tennis athlete received. Therefore, I may have a positive outlook of the Whole Nation System because of the sport I played. Second, because I grew up in a middle-income and literary family, I have been paying close attention to academic learning since childhood, as well as my current identity as a sport scholar, this characteristic may affect how I perceive the Whole Nation System. For example, some athletes and their parents do not think that academic learning is important for young athletes, but I do not agree this opinion. Additionally, my family were able to provide (both athletic career and education career) financial support to me, so I could relocate to a different city to practice table tennis and a different country to study. That is a big financial burden that could prevent low-income athletes from succeeding. Third, because I did not win the Olympic championship or the world championship,

and I did not achieve my dream which is to be a world champion, so I do not perceive myself as a successful elite athlete. Therefore, my perception of the Whole Nation System may be different than other athletes who achieved their dreams and think themselves are successful elite athletes. Fourth, because of my learning experience in Canada, I have received some Western education and culture, so I do not only explore the Whole Nation System from the perspective of a Chinese sport scholar and athlete (an internal viewer), but also from the perspective of an international sport scholar (an external viewer) because I am studying under the sports psychology consultant for two Olympic teams, ISSP president, and Canada Research Chair. He (Robert Schinke) has given me a lot of different perspective for the Whole Nation System from an external viewer's aspect. Finally, my personal injury experience and psychological problems were not timely addressed. When I injured, I did not obtain any help from sport scientists that caused me thought that the Whole Nation System only focused on the Olympic athletes and did not pay attention to ordinary athletes. Additionally, when I couldn't perform and win tournaments, I felt like that I were cast aside. These tough times also shaped and influenced my perception of the Whole Nation System.

3.3 How My Personal History Affects My Research Topic and Interest

In China, most of the psychological knowledge is only learned as a course in the university, and psychological knowledge has not been widely promoted and applied to the actual sports training and competition. As far as I know, in China's sports teams, psychological experts are only available for the sports teams that reach the top level of the national team and the teams or elite athletes that will participate in the Olympic Games, even most provincial teams do not have psychologists. As my athletic experience, when I injured, I did not obtain any help from sport scientists that caused me thought that the Whole Nation System only focused on the

Olympic athletes and did not pay attention to ordinary athletes. Therefore, exploring the potential developmental opportunities of the Whole Nation System, and how to train young athletes and cope crisis transitions during athletes' development stages should be a necessary topic. Because of my own sports experience and the psychological problems I encountered in my holistic athletic career, I hope to obtain more professional knowledge to answer my questions, and it can also help young athletes who have same psychological problems like me to avoid these difficulties and achieve better athletic performance and development, and make parents aware of the development process of their children. In addition, I hope that parents and coaches in China can start to pay attention to the importance of psychological problems in professional sports and put the knowledge of sports psychology into practice.

Due to my background and experience, I chose my domain of research for several reasons. First, I was an athlete in my previous role (former athlete), and I encountered numerous physiological and psychological issues (psychological hardship) throughout my athletic career. These problems, such as hydrops of knee joint, tibial tuberosity epiphysis, re-injury anxiety, pre-competition anxiety and crisis transitions, may be the reason why I did not achieve my dream of becoming a world table tennis champion, and I want to understand these problems on a personal level. Second, I think we not only need to study the successful elite athletes to explore the secrets of their success, but also need to pay attention to many ordinary and/or prospective young athletes like me to find the reasons why they don't succeed because of a crisis transition. Additionally, we need to explore and understand the athletes' career of the Chinese athletes from both successful athletes and ordinary athletes, allowing us to discover some potential developmental opportunities for the Whole Nation System. In this research, I not only see this research topic from the perspective of a researcher, but also from the perspective of a Chinese

young athlete, former athlete, coach, and international sport scholar, as a participant. I am thinking about the study topic from multiple perspectives, and I can imagine a benefit for other people in similar roles. I think my identities, my experience, and my age are similar to athletes and coaches in the research, so this may help me to get closer to them and understand them better because of empathy.

As I further reflect on my own athletic career, I find that I did not pay attention to my parents' behavior, and I did not feel pressure in the third-class phases. I think that during the initial phase, when I was still relatively young, my cognition and way of thinking were not fully developed, and I only focused on what I was interested in, which was table tennis at the time. During the initial phase, my parents did not have any pressure, and they did not focus on my sports because they regarded sport as my leisure-time hobby. They provided me with financial and time support and let me feel their attention and love. Therefore, during this period, I think it was the fastest phase of my technical progress and the time that I enjoyed the most because I did not feel any pressure, leading to increased happiness. When I entered the next phase, I occasionally felt some pressure from many aspects, including my parents and coaches, I began to feel the stress when my parents began to focus on my sports and academic performance. My parents had high expectations of me and expected me to keep academic excellence while practicing sports. My parents thought that I spent a lot of time and energy on sports, so I needed to have a good performance in sports to demonstrate the value in so much time spent practicing. In addition, they think academic study is also very important, so I also need to keep excellent academic performance. However, because I began to conduct semi-professional training in this phase, I only had a half day to study academic subjects, and I did not have enough time to do my homework because after table tennis training, I was really tired. Therefore, it is very difficult for

me to keep excellent in both academic and sports performance, so I began to feel the pressure. Moreover, I also started to feel the pressure from the coach because at this phase, the coach started to set goals for me in the competition, and when I couldn't meet the goals, I might be punished. Even though I began to feel the pressure during that time, I can still sustain the pressure, so I think it only had a slight negative impact on my competitions in terms of what I was able to handle. Therefore, my sports performance was not affected too much, and I was still able to get a good performance in competition. So that I still got the opportunity to move forward, I entered the provincial team, but my academic performance did have a little decline.

When I entered the provincial team, I began to conduct professional training in this phase, and this was the most important phase for my sports career. I participated a lot of competitions at different levels, and I started having some psychological problems during the competition so that my sports performance started to be bad. When I participated a competition, I had some symptoms of pre-competition anxiety, and pre-competition anxiety affect me both psychologically and physiologically in the competition. During the competition, I started to have problems with concentration, muscle stiffness, blank brain, and sometimes I couldn't control my limbs. As a result, my performance in table tennis competition plummeted, and I was afraid to take part in competitions which almost causes my drop-out from my own athletic career. In addition, I began to have an aversion to table tennis, and even I refused to participate in training, and I began to feel more and more pressure. After I retired, I really thought about where the pressure came from. I think the most pressure came from my parents, and myself, although the coaches also put some pressure on me. During this phase, my parents felt pressure, and this pressure was transferred to me with some of their behaviors. Because of the cultural and social conditions in China, if people do not have a higher educational degree, many people will look

down upon you, and people may not get a good job. Therefore, my parents are very worried about that because I conducted professional training, and I gave up almost all my academic studies to practice table tennis. If I do not succeed in my table tennis career, my parents think my future will be very gloomy because I do not have a high level of education, so I may not be able to enter a good university, and I cannot get a good job, so they are very worried about my future.

My parents started talking to my coaches regularly about my training, and they tried to monitor my training. In addition, my parents started calling me frequently, trying to push me to train harder, and often asking me about my skills and competitions, even though they did not know much about table tennis and tactics. Moreover, my parents started talking to me about how much time and money they had put into me. They just wanted me to succeed and live a better life, and they did not ask for anything in return. Sometimes, when I go home on vacation, I get together with my parents and their friends, usually my parents and their friends will praise me. For example, they will say that I am very good at table tennis, and how I won some championships and so on. However, these compliments also have a negative psychological effect on me because it makes me feel like I can't lose to anyone, and I am perfect in their compliments, so I should not lose to anyone. Therefore, when I participate in the competition, I start to worry that if I lose to the opponent, let them know, they may laugh at me, they may be disappointed, or they may scold me. I thought too much, so I was very anxious and afraid of losing. Due to these athletic experiences, it caused me to interest in this research topic.

3.4 Summary of Background Relevant to the Major Paper

To help me reflect on how I will impact this research topic what above is a reflective vignette to becoming involved in this research. In order to reflect my holistic athletic career, I had several phone calls with my parents, and wrote a journal to recall my athletic experience. I

reflected my athletic career in different stages (Third-Class, Second-Class, First-Class, and Retirement) based on the Chinese three-level training network, where most Chinese athletes grew up in the training system.

This reflective procedure gives me a chance to critically analyze how my experience and identity will impact my perspectives and perceptions on this research topic. The following is a list of the key points of each aspect of my background, and these key points will tie to the research paper.

3.4.1 *Who am I?*

I perceived my identity as a former Chinese table tennis athlete, ordinary athlete, single child, middle-income and literary family, Chinese, and international sport scholar.

Firstly, I was a former table tennis athlete in China, and because of the special status of table tennis in my country, these specific characteristics of table tennis would impact my perspectives and also caused some special events during my athletic career. Compared with other sports in China, this special experience would influence my perception of the Whole Nation System which tie to the research. Additionally, due to my sport experience in the Whole Nation System, and I not only see this research topic from the perspective of a researcher, but also from the perspective of a young athlete, and/or former athlete. This experience brought me an essential concept and idea for this research paper.

Second, I was an ordinary athlete. I did not win the Olympic championship or the world championship, and I did not achieve my dream which is to be a world champion, so I do not perceive myself as a successful elite athlete. Therefore, I would like to reflect why I did not go further and achieve my dream. Additionally, during my own athletic career, I have experienced psychological problems, sports injuries, career transition problems, which are also encountered by the majority of the Chinese athletes, as well as international

athletes. Therefore, this identity gives me a concept and chance to explore the potential developmental opportunities for the Whole Nation System and create a healthy and positive developmental environment for young athletes.

Third, I am a single child from a middle-income and literary family. In this family context, I do not have to share any resources, such as money, parents' love, and relationship, with siblings; I am the sole focus of my parents. Therefore, I always have access to human, social, cultural, and financial capital. Additionally, because of the middle-income and literary family context, I am taught to strive for success, independence, discipline, and hard work, and my parents hope that I can become a highly educated person or a professor. However, I still have the freedom to choose and pursue my own life goals and ambitions, which means I can do anything, without some limitations (illegal act). My parents' worldview has impact on my own worldview, and also has directly influenced my pursuit of a graduate degree and a PhD degree. Furthermore, the impact of the family context and parents' worldview on the development of young athletes cannot be ignored, and it also gave me some new perspective for the research topic.

Finally, I am a Chinese and/or international sport scholar. Due to of my learning experience in China and Canada, I have received both Eastern and Western education and culture, so I do not only explore the Whole Nation System from the perspective of a Chinese sport scholar and athlete, but also from the perspective of an international sport scholar. The education background brings me thinking out of the box and also a lot of concepts and perspective for the research paper.

4 Chapter Four: Athletic Career Development and Transition Research Review Based on The International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) Position Stand

Due to my athletic career, which included different development stages, transitions, and crises, and research interests, I did a literature review of the athletic career research based on two papers of the ISSP Position Stand (Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020) and the ISSP book *Athletes' Career across Cultures (ACAC)* (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013), and I am trying to explore some theoretical and applied frameworks and models which can fit for the Whole Nation System in China. The Whole Nation System adopted the talent identification approach to select and cultivate athletes, and this approach has been successfully used and produced thousands of medals and elite athletes in China. However, this system also has its limitations which could be perceived as a potential developmental opportunity for Chinese sport scientists to explore, and this system is being rethinking. In current years, the Whole Nation System is reforming, and trying to iron out limitations. The athletic career research has provided a lot of useful and informative concepts and frameworks/models which could be necessary elements for the reformation of the Whole Nation System.

Stambulova and Ryba (2014) authored a critical review paper where they identified three dominant (North American, Australian, and West European) and two emerging (Asian, and South American) discourses in athletes' career research. Additionally, in athletes' career research, the dominant discourses involve a greater variety of research topics than the emerging discourses, and most researchers/practitioners of the emerging discourses borrow ideas, frameworks, and models from the dominant discourses, and then develop their own approaches. For example, even though some Chinese researchers/practitioners have first actively adopted ideas and/or model from the dominant discourses and then developed their own theoretical and

applied frameworks/models (e.g., the three-level career development model (Si, 2008)) (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2014), there is still a gap and a blank field whereby almost all Chinese athletes' career research focus on athletes' retirement or retired athletes, and there is not a lot of research on athletes' development and transitions in mainland China. However, this topic is significant for not only athletes, but also all sport participants including coaches, parents, administrators, policymakers, and sport scientists, Chinese researchers/practitioners should explore and develop their own frameworks and model on athletes' career research.

In this chapter, I would like to describe the current key career development and transition knowledge, frameworks, and models in order to choose several frameworks and/or models which may be, in part, suitable for the Whole Nation System.

4.1 Historical Overview of Key Career Development and Transition Knowledge Based on the ISSP Position Stand

“Athletic career” is a term which describes “a multi-year sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person, and aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events” (Stambulova et al., 2009, p. 397; see also: Stambulova, 1994), and an athletic career may occupy up to “one third of the lifespan and influences all aspects of an athlete's development” (Stambulova, 1994, p. 221). Additionally, the athletic career is also perceived as a natural progression of specific stages and transitions, including beginning to retirement from sports (Battochio et al., 2015; Mortensen et al., 2013; Ryba, & Stambulova, 2013), and these stages entitle specific or unique periods in a trajectory of athletes in sport and contain different demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and challenges. Furthermore, these stages may co-occur as stages and transitions both within and/or outside sport, such as on

the personal, social and academic vocational level (Mortensen et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2020; Wyllemann & Lavallee, 2004).

Career research in sport psychology started appearing in the 1960s and has shown a vast increase both in its quantity and quality since the end of 1980s; in recent years, athletic career development and transition research is conducted around the world and has evolved (Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020). Career research in sport psychology consists of two interrelated research areas (career development and career transitions) with an applied part (career assistance). The area has evolved during the last six decades, and during last decade, athletic career researchers in sport psychology dedicated their efforts to structure the athletic career knowledge and consolidate it into the athletic career discourse (ADC) (Stambulova et al., 2020).

The purpose of the career development research is to describing athletes' career development stages and career pathways with prediction of normative transitions. On the other hand, career transition researchers describe and explain a transition process and factors involved in terms of normative transitions (i.e., relatively predictable and derived from the logic of athletes' development, the athletic transition, and non-athletic transition e.g., athletic retirement, the junior to senior, and education or family-related), non-normative transitions (i.e., less or hardly predictable, and crisis transition e.g., injury or change of a coach or a team), and quasi-normative transitions (e.g., cultural transitions, or Olympic Games transition) (Stambulova et al., 2020; Samuel, & Tenenbaum, 2011; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020). The quasi-normative transition is normative and/or predictable for a particular group or a certain group of elite athletes, so it is not normative or predictable for ordinary athletes because the quasi-normative transition is only experienced by a small subset of elite athletes (Bonhomme et al.,

2020; Schinke et al., 2015). For example, the national team athlete's trajectory would be to achieve Olympian status, so the status is an example of quasi-normative transition that only a specific group of people could aspire to. These transitions are experienced in a singular athletic career or within the context of a dual career, such as simultaneous transitional processes in sport and education (see Sum et al., 2017; Tshube, & Feltz, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2018).

Additionally, career assistance programs, and interventions are focused on helping athletes to cope with athletic and non-athletic career issues and strive for career excellence, which is a new term and defined as “an athletes' ability to sustain a healthy, successful, and long-lasting career in sport and life” (Stambulova et al., 2020, p. 2; see also: Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020).

4.1.1 The Holistic Lifespan Perspective and the Holistic Ecological Perspective

Athletic career research in sport psychology also creates understandings of athletes' career development, transitions, and crises based on holistic lifespan and holistic ecological perspectives (Schinke et al., 2018). Within the holistic lifespan perspective, the advocates perceive an athlete as a whole person doing sports alongside other things in their life, so the athletic career can be perceived as a part of a life career. Moreover, they also conceptualize an athletes' development as multi-dimensional, such as athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic-vocational, and financial dimensions (Schinke et al., 2018; Stambulova, 2010). Within the holistic ecological perspective, the advocates also treat the context of athletes' career development as multi-domianial including athletic and non-athletic domains (e.g., education, and vocational occupation), micro-level which refers to the environment where prospect elite athletes spend the majority of daily life (e.g., coaches, experts, teammates, peers, and family), and macro-level which refers to the influence of social settings for athlete but do not contain the athletes

(e.g., sport federations, educational systems, the media, and references groups), including athletes' close environments and factors which related to the national culture and sport system (Henriksen et al., 2010; Mortensen et al., 2013; Schinke et al., 2018; Stambulova et al., 2020). It is important to understand how Chinese athletes develop in the unique environment.

In the recent years, athletic career researchers have recognized the significance of the holistic lifespan and ecological perspectives in understanding athletes' development, transitions, and crises, and these two perspectives have been well accepted in the field (e.g., see Henriksen et al., 2011; Schinke et al., 2015). Whereas, these two perspectives have not widely spread in athletes' career research in mainland China, and it should be promoted to Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners. Due to the characteristics of the Whole Nation System, the development pathway of Chinese athletes is simple, and most Chinese athletes grow up in the three-level training network. Additional research on Chinese athletes' careers should be conducted in order to consider how the Whole Nation System and the Chinese culture influence the development of Chinese athletes in different development stages. Additionally, Si, Li, and Chen (2016) stated that the influence of the sport system and culture has been realized by Chinese researchers/practitioners on sport psychology services, but there still is a gap in systematic research examining Olympic sport psychology services. Furthermore, the main foci in Chinese sport scholarship has been to improve athletes' sport performance and talent identification (Si et al., 2016), but for now, the overall development of athletes is gradually emphasized. However, in recent years, increasing sport scholars have recognized these problems such as low educational level of Chinese athletes, and premature dropout from sport. Therefore, many Chinese sport scholars have suggested that it is necessary to reform the Whole Nation System, and then the policy "Opinions on Deepening the Integration of sports and education to

Promote the Healthy Development of Youth” is issued a few days ago by the General Administration of Sport of China (GAS, 2020). The policy suggests deepening the integration of sports and education to promote the healthy development of youth and establish a high-level sport team in the high educational department (e.g., high school, and university). Additionally, the policy also focuses on the improvement of the overall development of athletes both within sport and outside sport and explores the potential multiple development pathway of Chinese athletes such as three-level training network, sport team, sport club, school, and individuals (GAS, 2020). It is clear to see that GAS has started to pay attention to the overall development and multiple development pathways of Chinese athletes, and not only on sport performance (sport), but also education and others (non-sport). I infer that GAS has gradually focused the holistic lifespan perspective (athlete as “whole person”, athletic career as a part of life career) and holistic ecological perspective (athletic career as a “social affair”). Therefore, the two perspectives may be suitable perspectives for Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners to understand the Chinese athletes’ career developments, transitions, and crises within relevant environments cultural contexts.

4.1.2 Cultural and Cross-Cultural Approaches and Cultural Praxis of Athletes’ Careers

Paradigm

An increasing number of sport and exercise psychology researchers and practitioners have recognized the significance of cultural diversity in sport, and they consider culture as an important context that mediates psychological processes. Therefore, in order to further deepen our understanding of the career development and transitions in sport, sport and exercise psychology researchers and practitioners should use psychological approaches which deal

specifically with culture for considering athletes in their cultural context (Ryba et al., 2018; Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009).

There are two major approaches (cultural and cross-cultural studies) which are used in sport psychology to analyze the role and/or impact of culture upon human behavior and development (Ryba, & Schinke, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009; Stambulova, Johnso, & Stambulova, 2009). Both cultural and cross-cultural approaches stress significance of a culture as “a social system of shared symbols, meanings, perspectives, and social actions that are mutually negotiated by people in their relationships with others” (Stambulova et al., 2009, p. 400), but there are some different foci between two approaches. Within the cultural psychology approach, the advocates perceive that culture affects how people think and behave, and it is mostly inside people (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009). Furthermore, the advocates of this approach have declared that cultural context creates meaning; thus, human behavior is context-specific and should be studied within culture, instead of only comparatively across cultures (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009). Compared with the culture psychology approach, the advocates of the cross-cultural psychology approach mainly focus on cross-cultural comparison where they compare human behavior and experiences in different cultures. Moreover, the advocates of this approach perceive that culture is outside people and plays the role of an environmental context for their experiences, and they also suggest a set of criteria, called “cultural syndromes”, which is defined as “a pattern of attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, unstated assumptions, norms, roles, and values shared among people speaking a particular language and living during a specific historical period and in a definable geographical region.” (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009, p. 294; see also: Stambulova et al., 2009), to compare cultures with each other, such as collectivism/individualism

(vertical/horizontal collectivist vs. vertical/horizontal individualist societies), hierarchy/equality (hierarchical vs. egalitarian cultures), ideology (empiric vs. ideological societies), and process/outcome (process vs. outcome-oriented cultures). Additionally, cultural particularities, socio-historical context and even geographical location can influence athletes, researchers, and practitioners (CSP, Schinke, & Hanrahan, 2009; Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009).

In the last decade, there was a major shift in career research which is “from perceiving a body of career transition knowledge as universal and applicable to any culture to more culturally informed career research and interventions” (Ryba, & Stambulova, 2013, p. 1), and this shift is explored in the recent ISSP book *Athletes’ Career across Cultures (ACAC)* (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013, 2014). In the introductory chapter of this book, Stambulova and Ryba (2013) used the metaphor of cultural waves as a framework, which derived from the book *Cultural Sport Psychology (CSP)* (Schinke, & Hanrahan, 2009), to trace an evolution of incorporating culture into athletes’ career development and transition through to retirement. The first wave (cross-cultural research) relates to an increased interest in understanding the role of culture in athletes’ career research in sport and exercise psychology that included a “splash” of cultural sensitivity to career studies. The second wave (cultural mindset) was characterized by the attention to be directed toward the positioning of athletes’ career research as a reflection of the epistemological re-focus on cultural psychology; in the other words, it is to permeate athletes’ career research with a cultural mindset. The third wave (cultural praxis of athletes’ careers) was described as a set of future challenges for the career research topic in sport psychology, and it involves and interrelates the career assistance, career development research, career transition research, the foundations of athletes’ career research, and the concepts of cultural adaptation as a stimulus for

linking the work of researchers and practitioners (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020; Watt, 2014).

After the new paradigm termed cultural praxis of athletes' careers was introduced, Stambulova and Ryba (2014) claimed that "a shift to a new paradigm is usually a reflection of dramatic changes in the relevant field and the researchers'/practitioners' dissatisfaction with current paradigms that mismatch the new reality. Sport has become more demanding, complex, and multifaceted, simultaneously highlighting and uniting diversity." (p. 9). Therefore, the awareness of cultural diversity in sport has been emphasized and increased, and there are calls for a culturally informed sport psychology research and practice. Additionally, they dedicated their effort to promote the new paradigm for all researchers and practitioners, and in recent years, the paradigm has been widely used in athletes' career research. The Career development and transitions of athletes: The International Society of Sport Psychology Position Stand Revisited (Stambulova et al., 2020) has offered a comprehensive update information about athletes' career development and transitions, which provided a description of the new paradigm which is called cultural praxis of athletes' careers.

Embracing the whole person and the whole environment perspectives of the ACD, Stambulova and Ryba embedded their theorizing in the cultural praxis heuristic to contextualize athlete subjectivity in lived culture and to mend the gap between theory and applied work. The cultural praxis of athletes' careers navigates career researchers and practitioners to: (a) reflexive positioning of career projects in particular sociocultural contexts, (b) taking the holistic perspectives on athlete career and environment, (c) exploring diversity of career pathways and their construction within and across international borders, (d) engaging culturally sensitive

methodologies, and (e) developing transnational networks and collaborative projects by career researchers and practitioners (Stambulova et al., 2020).

The new paradigm (cultural praxis of athletes' career) is regarded as a set of challenges for athletes' career researchers and practitioners, and it stimulates them to consider in relation to career theories, research, and assistance as permeated by culture and united into cultural praxis (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2014).

As aforementioned, in recent years, sport has become more complex, demanding, and multifaceted, and the athletic support teams of athletes are also increasingly multicultural, such as coaches and experts from different countries. This trend may become increasingly visible in the future (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013). Therefore, the significance of cultural diversity in sport should be paid more attention to by not only sport psychology researchers and practitioners, but also all of participants in sports. According to Stambulova and Ryba (2014), sport psychology practitioners' lack of cultural reflexivity can potentially hinder the applicability of career services to athletes from different cultures. In applied work, what works well in one culture may not be suitable in another has been verified (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009). For sport psychology practitioners, when they have increased the awareness of cultural diversity and been proficient these cultural research approaches and paradigms, they can develop their multicultural competencies, such as cultural reflexivity, understanding of the client's worldview, background, and religion, which can help sport psychology practitioners develop the culturally appropriate intervention strategies for their clients from different countries. Expanding further, understanding cultural research approaches and paradigms can stimulate sport psychology practitioners to deal with issues of marginalization, representation and social justice though theory, research and applied work (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013). There are some factors which may further influence

athletes' career development and transitions, such as differences in sport systems, societal norms, and cultural traditions (Stambulova et al., 2020). Additionally, historical and socio-cultural contexts in researchers' and athletes' respective countries influence researchers no less than athletes because researchers select research questions and participants, develop theoretical frameworks and instruments, and interpret their research results based on the messages they internalize from these contexts (Stambulova et al., 2020). It is significant that historical and socio-cultural contexts should be considered in research and practice of athletes' career development and transitions (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009). Therefore, for athletes' career researchers, understanding cultural research approaches and paradigms will help them produce knowledge with live culture and social action to improve athletes' wellbeing, and it may help researchers develop more contextually sensitive career research and improve assistance to athletes in their transitions (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009; Stambulova, & Ryba, 2013; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020). Furthermore, sport psychology practitioners and researchers reflect on their perspectives and biases which may facilitate interdisciplinary career research collaboration for the benefit of sport and society as well as athletes (Kiuppis, & Stambulova, 2020).

For Chinese sport psychology researchers and practitioners, the cultural sport psychological approaches are also very important for their research and/or practices. As aforementioned, Chinese sport psychology borrowed ideas, frameworks, and models from the Soviet Union, and then they built their sport psychology science from Russian roots (Si et al., 2016), but these frameworks may not directly fit the Whole Nation System because of the nuances between different cultures and sport systems. Therefore, Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners should use these cultural sport psychology approaches to conduct

research to understand the cultural diversity and develop some frameworks which are suitable and best fit the Whole Nation System and Chinese athletes. Additionally, due to the lack of Chinese athletes' career research, there is almost not any applied frameworks and models for Chinese athletes except athletic retirement models, so there is a need for contextualized career research which is specific to China. Furthermore, the applied frameworks/models, and intervention programs/strategies, which created by other countries, may not be suitable for the Chinese athletes because of the differences and nuances of cultures and sport systems, so Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners should explore and understand the cultural diversity between Chinese athletes and others through cultural sport psychological approaches, and then develop specific intervention programs and strategies which can best fit the Whole Nation System and Chinese athletes.

4.1.3 Evolution and Current Status of the Career Development and Transitions Topic

In 2009, the paper, ISSP Position Stand: Career Development and Transitions of Athletes, was issued, and this paper is significant for disseminating athletic career knowledge worldwide as well as promoting a cultural mindset among athletic career researchers and practitioners, and the substantial athletic career knowledge of exponential conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and applied developments has been spread (Stambulova et al., 2020). In the ISSP Position Stand: Career Development and Transition of Athletes, this paper attracts research foci to “viewing athletes from the perspective of their career development and their broader historical and socio-cultural contexts” (Stambulova et al., 2009, p. 395) and career transitions as turning phases in career development (Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009). Furthermore, Stambulova and Alfermann (2009) stated that all of sport participants, sport psychology researchers and consultants, are influenced by their historical and socio-cultural

contexts. Additionally, Stambulova, Ryba, and Henriksen (2009) summarized that there are several major shifts of research foci, theoretical frameworks, and attention to contextual factors in the evolution of the career development and transition research in sport psychology from studies of the athletic career research into a holistic, lifespan, multi-level approach. For example, previous athletic career transition studies focused on retired athletes and athletic retirement, and researchers perceived the athletic retirement as the retirement from a working career, so thanatology (stages of dying) and social gerontology (the study of the aging process) were used as the theoretical frameworks for the athletic retirement research. As a result, a negative and often times traumatic life event was typically perceived as results of the athletes' transition to the post-career; however, the shift is that the new understanding is an athletic transition as a coping process with potentially positive or negative outcomes (Stambulova et al., 2009). The second major shift is that researchers started to use the "a whole career" approach to study a range of transitions within an athletic career, and compared to before, the researcher almost exclusively paid attention to the athletic retirement (Stambulova et al., 2009). The third major shift is that researchers focus not only on athletic transitions in sport but also on "a whole person" lifespan perspectives, which focus on both transitions within in an athletic career and outside sport; additionally, the fourth major shift is that researchers started to consider and understand the role of contextual factors in athletic career research, but previous studies focused only on how coaches, parents, and peers influence the career development and transitions of athletes (Stambulova et al., 2009).

As aforementioned, the athletic career research has evolved, and there are several major shifts of research foci, theoretical frameworks, and attention to contextual factors . Even though the Chinese talent identification research has been successful and produced a lot of elite athletes,

the Chinese athletic career research still stays at an early phase which studies focus on retired athletes and athletic retirement, and researchers perceived the athletic retirement as the retirement from a working career. Due to the reformation of the Whole Nation System and the evolution and current status of the athletic career research topics, the athletic career research in China should be evolved and catch up with the recent trend of athletic career research around the world.

4.2 Potential Key Career Development and Transition Models for the Whole Nation System

Based on aforementioned the key knowledge and concepts of athletic career research, several career development and transition theoretical and applied frameworks/models have been developed and established by athletic career researchers and sport psychology practitioners. However, this topic has not attracted the Chinese researchers and sport psychology practitioners' attention, and there is still a gap and a blank field in mainland China. I would like to open a window and bring a new perspective for the career development and transition research in China and explore some potential career development and transition theoretical frameworks/models which may fit the Whole Nation System in China. Additionally, I also would like to introduce and describe these frameworks/models for the Chinese sport psychology researchers and practitioners and develop our own theoretical and applied frameworks/models together.

4.2.1 The Synthetic Athletic Career Model and The Analytical Athletic Career Model

The *synthetic athletic career model* and the *analytical athletic career model* are two descriptive theoretical models of the athletic career, and these models originated from Russian sport psychology (Stambulova, 1994). The author perceived the athletic career as a whole from its beginning to end and conducted an empirical research of athletic careers of more than 200 Russian athletes, who focus on different sports specializations and represent diverse levels of

achievement, and the author used two ways (synthetic, and analytic) to describe and explore athletes' career development and transitions.

The synthetic athletic career model derived the description of an athletic career as the whole through a series of elementary characteristics including four objective characteristics: *length* (e.g., time of athletic career, duration of sport participation), *generalization/specialization* (e.g., the number of sport events that athletes had competed, and the number of role in sports that athletes had mastered throughout the athletic career), *level of achievements* (e.g., narrow sense: achieved sport titles, qualifications, records, and results of competitions; broader sense: developed sports and life experience, personality characteristics), and “*cost*” (e.g., the expenditures of time, energy, health, and money which athletes paid for their achievements), and two subjective characteristics: *athlete's satisfaction* (self-esteem of athletic career), and *level of success* (social mark of athletic career) (Stambulova, 1994; Stambulova, 2016). Both the objective and subjective characteristics of the model describe the overall athletes' career development and transitions.

The analytical athletic career model guided an athletic career as a period multiyear activity of the individual (the preparation, the start, the culmination, the finish) with several stages (e.g., the preliminary sport preparation, the beginning of sport specialization, intensive training in the chose sport event, and sport perfection), and three level of sports (mass popular, amateur sports of high achievement, professional sports) and three ages categories (children, juniors, adults) were considered as time periods of athletic career (Stambulova, 1994; Stambulova, 2016). Additionally, the author also stated six normative transitions in this model including: (1) the beginning of sports specialization, (2) the transition to special intensive training in the chose sport, (3) the transition from mass popular sports to high-achievement

sports, (4) the transition from junior sport to adult sports, (5) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports, (6) the transition from the culmination to the end of the athletic career (more detail please see: Stambulova, 1994; Stambulova, 2016).

These two frameworks/models can be perceived as a starting point for sport psychology researchers to describe a Chinese athlete's career. As aforementioned in Chapter Two (The Whole Nation System in China) and Chapter Three (self-reflection), the Whole Nation System originated in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, so the athletes' development pathway is similar between China and Russia. Additionally, according to reflect my own athletic career, I can see that almost all aforementioned development stages and transitions had existed during my athletic career as a Chinese professional table tennis athlete. Furthermore, Si, Li, and Chen (2016) stated that in the early years, Chinese sport psychology mainly borrowed ideas and frameworks and translated texts from the Soviet Union, and there was large influence by Soviet Union's culture and science in various disciplines' scientific research in China. Therefore, I have reasons to believe that these frameworks/models can suitably fit the Whole Nation System and Chinese athletic career research to explore Chinese athletes' career, and then researchers can develop their own frameworks/models through a mass of athletic career research.

4.2.2 The Athletic Career Transition Model (Holistic Lifespan Perspective)

Natalia. Stambulova (2003) designed the athletic career transition model to describe and explain not only termination transition process but also other within sport transitions, and the model was developed from a series of Russian research. In this model, a transition is perceived as a process which use various "coping strategies" (e.g., planning, professional support, etc.) to deal with a set of "transition demands" or "challenges", and the effectiveness of coping is perceived as the determinant of the "transition outcome" and the relevant "pathways";

additionally, internal (person-related) and external (environment-related) resources and barriers also should be considered (Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova, 2016; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). There are two primary transition outcome (successful transition, crisis transition) which was predicted by the model. A successful transition is defined as “the outcome of effective coping, with a good fit between transition demands on the one side and the athlete’s coping resources and strategies on the other (the *most favorable transition pathway*)” (Stambulova, 2016, p. 257). A crisis transition is perceived as the outcome of ineffective coping which can be caused by one or several reasons including lack of resources, excessive barriers, and ineffective or inappropriate coping strategies. Furthermore, the crisis transition outcome can divide as two possible secondary outcomes. One is a “delayed” successful transition which caused by the event of effective transition intervention (the *favorable transition pathway*), and another is an unsuccessful transition which caused by the event of no or ineffective transition intervention (the *unfavorable transition pathway*) and usually related with negative outcomes such as premature dropout, neuroses, overtraining, substance abuse, or eating disorders, etc. (Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova, 2016; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). Additionally, the model also provides some career transition intervention approaches including crisis prevention, crisis coping, and negative consequence coping interventions.

In recent years, the athletic career transition model is widely utilize to study various types of career transition including junior to senior transition, dual career transition, Olympic Games as a career transition, and cultural transitions (Schinke et al., 2015; Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova, 2016; Stambulova et al., 2020; Stambulova, & Wylleman, 2014). This model was not only developed by Russian studies, but also it had been confirmed by research in other sociocultural contexts (Stambulova, 2016). Additionally, even though there are some differences

and nuances between the Chinese athletes and others, and the Whole Nation System and other sport systems, Chinese athletes will also face multiple transitions (e.g., junior to senior transition, dual career transition, Olympic Games as a career transition etc.) as other athletes do, and this career transition model has well worked in various countries and contexts. Therefore, this model could be a potential career transition model which fit the Whole Nation System and Chinese athletes, but Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners should firstly understand this model and consider the differences and nuances of cultures and sport systems between Chinese athletes and others, and then conduct a study with Chinese athletes through this model to develop specific models, and intervention programs and strategies.

4.2.3 *The Holistic Athletic Career Model (Holistic Lifespan Perspective)*

The holistic athletic career model was developed and renamed from the initial form (the *developmental model of transitions faced by athletes*, Wylleman, & Lavalle, 2004), and then it had been updated one more time (Stambulova, 2016; Stambulova, & Wylleman, 2014; Wylleman, 2019). The current holistic athletic career model was extended to six specific domain of development (athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal levels) from the earlier version (the *developmental model of transitions faced by athletes*) which was only four domains of development (athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational levels). Additionally, the six layers of the model were outlined and roughly aligned with chronological ages. The holistic athletic career model is used to study the transition experiences of athletes and provide sport psychology researchers and practitioners with a developmental and holistic frameworks to identify paths of experiences, challenges, and transitions in the six specific layers of development, and it is being utilized “to guide research on

career transitions, career support services, and the establishment of sport policies delineating the support required by athletes when retiring from sport” (Wylleman, 2019, p. 202).

The first layer of this model is the athletic level which includes four stages of development: (1) the initiation stage, (2) the development stage, (3) the mastery stage, (4) the discontinuation stage. The second layer is the psychological level which reflects the major transitions and stages in athletes’ psychological development including: (1) childhood, (2) adolescence, (3) (young) adulthood. The third layer is the psychosocial level which refers to persons who are seen important by athletes during a specific transition or stage, and in each stages, there are different persons who involve in the athletes’ career, and these persons are perceived as part of athletes’ social support networks including: (1) parents, siblings, and peers, (2) peers, coaches, and parents, (3) partners, family, coaches, support staffs, teammates, student-athletes, and students, (4) family, coaches, peers. The fourth layer is the academic and vocational levels which reflect the development of athletes at the academic and vocational levels including: (1) primary education, (2) secondary education, (3) higher education and (semi) professional athlete, (4) post-sport career. The fifth layer is the financial level which describes athletes’ financial support during each athletes’ developmental stage both within sport and post-sport including: (1) family, (2) family and sport governing body, (3) sport governing body, National Olympic Committee, sponsor, and family, (4) family and employer. The sixth layer is legal level which describes athletes’ legal identities including: (1) minor, (2) adult (of age) (more detailed description please see: Wylleman, 2019).

The holistic athletic career model and its earlier version have been guiding a series of career research in worldwide (Stambulova, 2016), and this model provides a perspective and encourage researchers/practitioners to deeply analyze athletes’ career both within sport and

outside sport. This model could be a potential career model for the three-level training network of the Whole Nation System (aforementioned in the chapter 2) to study and understand the Chinese athletes' career because all six layers of this model are associated with the Chinese athletes who are cultivated in the three-level training network (mentioned in the chapter 2) which can be perceived as a development model in China. Additionally, the Chinese athletes' career process is similar to the description of this model, so the Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners should conduct a study to match the model with the three-level training network as a career model for the Chinese athletes. The three-level training network includes four stages (third-class, second-class, first-class, retirement) at athletic level, these stages can match the stages of the holistic athletic career model at athletic level. For example, the third-class can match with the initiation stage, the second-class can match with the development stage, the first-class can match with mastery stage, and the retirement can match with the discontinuation stage. Additionally, as aforementioned the reformation of the Whole Nation System, the overall development of Chinese athletes has gradually become important and has increasingly attracted attention of sport scholars. Therefore, considering what and how various factors and domains will influence the overall development of Chinese athletes is necessary. Furthermore, the six layers of this model can guide Chinese sport psychology researcher/practitioner to understand Chinese athletes' overall development and transitions and develop specific intervention programs and strategies for them. These intervention programs and strategies may help Chinese athletes cope crisis transitions, provide healthier developmental environments, and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

4.2.4 Two key Models (*Holistic Ecological Perspective*)

Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2010) introduced two working model (ATDE, and EFS) as two frameworks/models to describe an environment (e.g., a club, team, or sport school) and explain its success or failure in supporting athletes in their junior to senior transition.

Additionally, both models aimed as working models to help researchers collect data (through interviews, participant observation, and analysis of documents), “with further transformation into empirical models reflecting unique features of each environment under study” (Stambulova, 2016, p. 258).

The first working model is the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) model which was created as a descriptive framework to describe a particular athletic environment and to clarify the roles and functions of the various components and relations within the environment in the talent development process (Henriksen et al., 2011). In this model, the environment is described as a series of “nested” structure. The young prospective athlete is at the center of the model, and other components of the ATDE are structured and divided into micro (e.g., coaches, and peers) and macro (e.g., media, and sport federation) levels, and athletic and nonathletic domains (Henriksen, & Christensen, 2013). Additionally, the outer layer of the model is the past, present, and future of the ATDE, and it also guided researchers to detect how members of the ATDE perceived its past, present, and future. In the talent development process, the ATDE model is perceived as a useful element for inquiring the various components of the ADTE, their relationships, and functions (Henriksen, & Christensen, 2013; Henriksen et al., 2010; Henriksen et al., 2011; Stambulova, 2016).

The second working model is the environment success factors (EFS) model which was designed as an explanatory model. The EFS model guided researchers to consider three domains:

(1) preconditions (e.g., financial, and human resources of the ATDE), (2) processes (e.g., various activities which the members of ADTE are involved in, including training camps, and social events etc.), and (3) the organizational culture of the ATDE (e.g., evident values, basic assumptions, and artifacts). The factor of the organizational culture of the ATDE was perceived as major factors which influence the development of individuals and teams, as well as the success of ADTE in facilitating young athletes' transition from junior to senior (more detail please see: Henriksen, & Christensen, 2013; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010; Stambulova, 2016). This model was designed as a framework to describe and explain how contextual inputs in a sport environment (Seanor et al., 2017), and to guide research and design research instruments such as interview and observation guides (Henriksen et al., 2011).

These two working models emphasize that the development of athletes is affected “not only by the immediate microenvironment, but also by the interrelated system of microenvironments (e.g., school and club), by settings in which the athletes are not actively involved (e.g., sports federation), and also by large cultural patterns.” (Henriksen et al., 2011, p. 356). As aforementioned, the athletes' development will be influenced by the environment; however, there is not any this kind of research in China, and it is crucial to conduct a research of ATDE and EFS to explore and understand the development process of Chinese athletes and the environment where Chinese athletes are cultivated.

These two frameworks and models are potential frameworks for the Chinese athletes' career research in the future. Although the current development pathway of the Chinese athletes is simple, and almost all Chinese athletes are cultivated and elected by the three-level training network. However, according to the policy “Opinions on Deepening the Integration of sports and education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth” (GSA, 2020), the policymakers want

to facilitate the retired athletes going to the different level of school to be coaches or teachers, and they promote that national teams, and provincial teams select athletes from multiple pathways, not only from the three-level training network, but also from society, sport team, sport club, school, and individuals. Unlike before, this policy has clear shown that in the future, Chinese athletes will not have only one development pathway (three-level training network), and they will have various development pathways (e.g., sport club, sport school, and sport team etc.) which also caused that athletes will be cultivated in different environments and influenced by various factors and domains. For now, we do not know which one development pathway or environment is best or good for Chinese athletes, so these two models may be a useful tool to explore and understand Chinese athletes' development and transition in the past several years.

4.3 Summary

Based on the literature review of the athletic career research, I found several concepts and frameworks/models have been widely used in athletes' career research around the world, and these concepts and frameworks may be, in part, suitable for conducting the athletic career research which is specific to Chinese athletes and the Whole Nation System. These concepts include: (1) the *Holistic Lifespan Perspective*, (2) the *Holistic Ecological Perspective*, and (3) the *Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm*. The frameworks/models include: (1) *The Synthetic Athletic Career Model* and *The Analytical Athletic Career Model*, (2) *The Athletic Career Transition Model* and *The Holistic Athletic Career Model*, and (3) *The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) Model* and *The Environment Success Factors (EFS) Model*. These frameworks/models are discovered based on their related key concepts.

Due to the lack of athletic career research in China, there is a need for contextualized career research, specific to China. The reason is that the sport system and athletes can be

influenced by cultural particularities, socio-historical context, and geographical location in their respective countries, and athletes' career development will be also influenced by different sport systems, societal norms, and cultural traditions (Stambulova et al., 2009). Therefore, the development pathways, stages, and transitions which may be faced by Chinese athletes are different than others and contain different demands, resources, barriers, and challenges. As the results, Chinese athletes may need the specific intervention programs and strategies for them. Before making some unique intervention programs and strategies for Chinese athletes, we should understand what specific development stages and transitions which may be only faced by Chinese athletes. For example, the majority of Chinese elite athletes needs to leave home and their parents at an early age and lives on campus, and they will start the specialization at a very earlier age than others. Therefore, the adversities (e.g., live alone away from their parents at an early age) and crises they may face and the support and resources they can obtain are different than other athletes, so the coping strategies, which Chinese athletes need, should be specific and different than others. Therefore, the contextualized athletic career research for Chinese athletes need to be conducted.

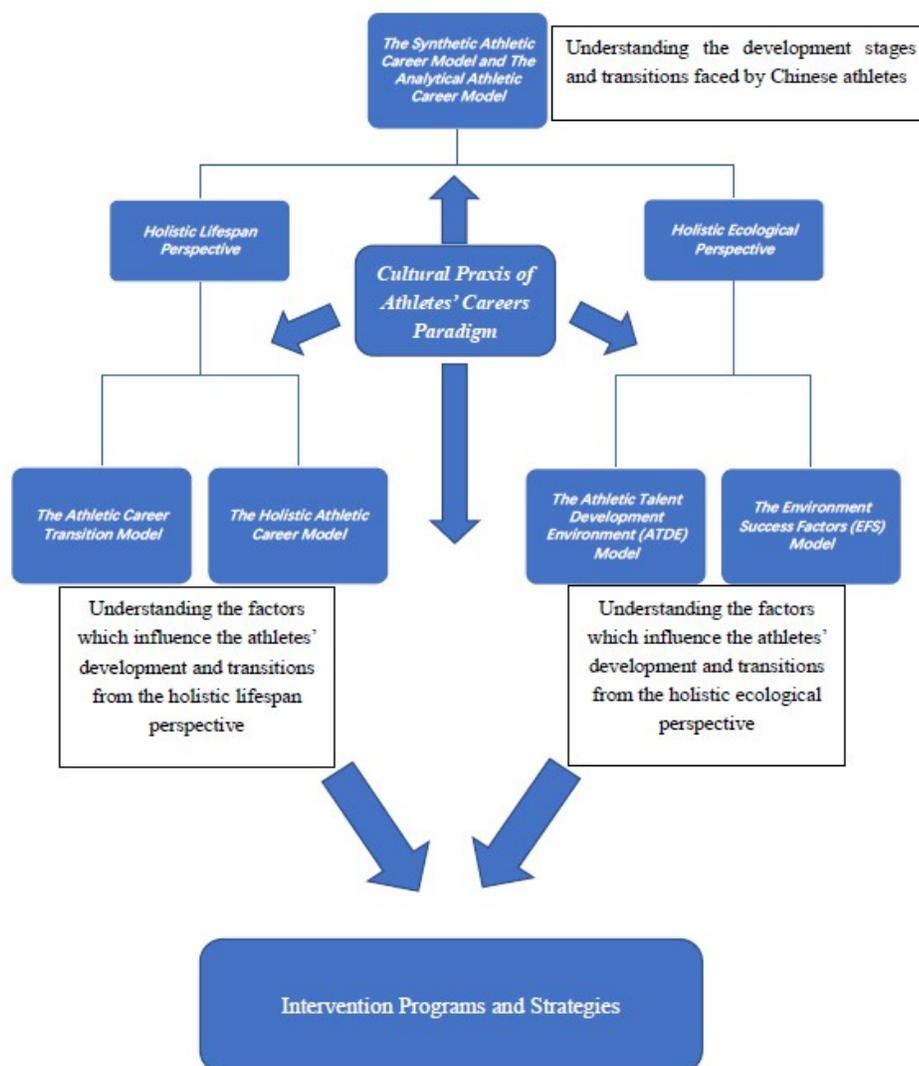


Figure 6. The potential frameworks/models for Chinese athletic career research

Figure 6 clearly shows the structure and the logic map of the potential concepts and frameworks/models for the Chinese athletic career research. The logic map was made based on the key concepts and frameworks/models which I found during the literature review process.

Firstly, due to the gap or the blank field of athletic career research in mainland China except the post-sport career research, so we do not know what kinds of development stages and transitions which will be faced by Chinese athletes. The two descriptive theoretical models of

athletic career research, which are the *synthetic athletic career model* and the *analytical athletic career model*, can be used to understanding, describing, and exploring Chinese athletes' career development stages and transitions. Furthermore, sport psychology researchers and practitioners can use the two models to conduct athletic career research, and then to explore and define the development stages and transitions which are faced by Chinese athletes. These two frameworks/models can be perceived as a starting point for Chinese sport psychology researchers to conduct the Chinese athletic career research and describe the Chinese athletes' career development stages and transitions.

After the Chinese athletes' development stages and transitions is understood and defined, the two models of the holistic lifespan perspective, which are the *Athletic Career Transition Model* and the *Holistic Athletic Career Model*, can be utilized to conducting the athletic career research in order to understand the factors which may influence the Chinese athletes' career development stages and transitions both within and outside of sport through understanding and exploring Chinese athletes' demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and challenges at different development stages and transitions. Additionally, the *Holistic Athletic Career Model* can be utilized to identify paths of experiences, challenges, and transitions of Chinese athletes in the six specific layers of development including athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, financial, and legal levels. Furthermore, the significance of the overall development of Chinese athletes has been recognized by the Chinese government and sport scholars, so the Whole Nation System is reforming because of its limitations. Therefore, the Chinese government and sport scholars have started paying attention to the development of Chinese athletes both within and outside sport and exploring the potential multiple development pathway for Chinese athletes such as three-level training network, sport team, sport club, and

university. During the reforming of the Whole Nation System, the key foci is not only on sport performance (sport), but also education and others (non-sport). As the results, it is clearly to see that the goals of the reforming of the Whole Nation System can perfectly match with the holistic lifespan perspective (athlete as “whole person”, athletic career as a part of life career) and holistic ecological perspective (athletic career as a “social affair”). Additionally, one of the main purposes of the reforming is to improve the educational level of Chinese athletes and extend multiple development pathways for Chinese athletes, so these two models may be merged with dual career scholarship to understand and explore the factors which influence the Chinese athletes’ development and transitions which is faced by Chinese athletes in the context of a dual career, such as simultaneous transitional processes in sport and education, to improve the educational level of Chinese athletes and to ensure a successful transition out of sport.

Meanwhile, the two models of the holistic ecological perspective, which are the *Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) Model* and the *Environment Success Factors (EFS) Model*, can be applied to conducting the athletic career research to describe an environment (e.g., a club, team, or sport school) and explain its success or failure in supporting Chinese athletes in their career transition. As aforementioned, the athletes’ development will be influenced by the environment and sport systems; however, there is not any this kind of research in mainland China, and it is crucial to conducting a research of ATDE and EFS to explore and understand the development stages and transitions of Chinese athletes and the environment where Chinese athletes are cultivated.

Finally, based on the results of Chinese athletic career research through above frameworks and models, the ultimate goal is to make some athletic career intervention programs

and strategies which can help Chinese athletes cope their career issues and achieve the career excellence both within and outside of sports.

Furthermore, when researchers would like to conduct an athletic career research through above frameworks and models, they also should think about the concept of the *Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm*. In recent years, sport psychology scholars have emphasized to increase the awareness of cultural diversity, and there are calls for a culturally informed sport psychology research and practice. Therefore, the *Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm* has been widely used in athletes' career research in order to further deepen our understanding of the career development and transitions in sport through dealing specifically with culture for considering athletes in their cultural context (Ryba et al., 2018; Stambulova, & Alfermann, 2009). Moreover, the *Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm* involves and interrelates the foundations of athletic career research (career development research, career transition research, and career assistance), and the concepts of cultural adaptation as a stimulus for linking the work of researchers and practitioners (Stambulova, & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020; Watt, 2014). Therefore, when sport psychology researchers and practitioners conduct no matter the athletic career research and/or career assistance, the concept of the *Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm* deserves their attentions.

5 Chapter Five: Conclusions

In this chapter, the summary of the main findings, and the implications and recommendations will be provided. In order to understand the development stages and transitions of Chinese athletes and help them achieve the career excellence, I did the literature review of the Whole Nation System and athletic career research in sport psychology scholarship, and I also did self-reflection to recall my own athletic career as a Chinese athlete. The ultimate goals of this major paper is to (1) find the limitations of Chinese athletes which are associated with athletic career research under the Whole Nation System context, (2) understand and promote the key knowledge and concepts of athletic career research for Chinese sport psychology researchers/practitioners, and (3) find the potential athletic career frameworks and models for future research.

Firstly, I will emphasize the significance of working with Chinese athletes from earlier (Second-class) in order to help them develop holistically. Second, the current limitations of Chinese athletes in relation to the athletic career research under the Whole Nation System context will be discussed. These limitations affect the development of Chinese athletes both within and outside of sport. I made some suggestions for working around these limitations. Third, the necessity of the career assistance in China (intervention programs and strategies) will be illustrated. Additionally, the potential solution will be discussed, and I would like to open up opportunities for constructing and implementing the career assistance programs in China. Fourth, the need of contextualized athletic career research specific to China will be emphasized, and the potential frameworks and models will be explored. Finally, the importance of specific professional resources, which need to be allocated to enhancing Chinese athletes in dual careers

throughout their athletic careers, will be described through the relevant implications and recommendations.

5.1 Conclusion One: There is a need for working with Chinese athletes from earlier (Second-class) in order to help them develop holistically

Based on the literature outlined and discussed within this paper, it was identified that there is a need for working with Chinese athletes from earlier (Second-class) to help them develop holistically through the literature review of the Whole Nation System and athletic career research and my self-reflection. Due to the characteristics of the Whole Nation System, the development pathway of Chinese athletes is unique, and the involvements and behaviors of their parents and coaches are different than others. For example, the majority of Chinese athletes start their specialization at a very early age, and they need to live on campus which caused that they will leave their family to reside with coaches and peers at very young age. Furthermore, due to the hierarchical structure of the Whole Nation System, the Chinese hierarchical orientation is like a paternalistic management system where coaches have more power and responsibilities in the relationship than the athletes, so athletes are expected to respect and obey orders of their coaches (Ge et al., 2009), and it also causes a circumstance where the coaches are perceived as authoritative and/or rigorous by Chinese athletes.

These unique characteristics are caused when young athletes encounter some issues which they cannot cope with by themselves no matter in sports or others, young athletes cannot find someone to help them cope with their adversities because of the inaccessibility of parents, the lack of family support, and the authoritativeness of their coaches. Young athletes may fear making mistakes and being criticized by their coaches, but their parents and coaches are the only people they can ask for help before the first-class stage. Therefore, there is a requirement to find

sport psychology practitioners who can work with Chinese athletes from earlier to help them cope with career issues and develop holistically.

5.1.1 Implication One: *The significance of working with Chinese athletes from Second-class*

In the early stage, young athletes' cognition, intelligence, and body are in an immature stage, so young athletes need someone who can guide and help them grow not only in their sport career, but also in their life career. Furthermore, this stage is also the most critical period for the athletes to establish their values, philosophy, and worldview which have lifelong impact on athletes. When young athletes encounter some issues, if nobody can help young athletes cope the career issues both within and outside of sport, it will influence not only athletes' mental health and athletic performance, but also hinder their overall development. For example, when young athletes cannot correctly cognize and handle the win or lose of competitions such as overvalued the winning of competitions, it may cause athletes' pre-competition anxiety, fear of failure, and low self-confidence which may directly or indirectly lead to some negative consequences for athletes such as the premature dropout from sport, injuries, the decay of athletic performance, and overtraining.

These negative consequences restrict not only the development of athletes but also the overall development of Chinese competitive sports. The overarching goal of the Whole Nation System is to have excellent results in the Olympic Games and all international sporting competitions. In order to achieve the goal, the outstanding elite athletes are basic elements, so there is a requirement of abundant prospective athletes who have the competence or can be chose and selected to take part in the international competitions. If these prospective athletes cannot successfully cope with their career issues at the early stage, these issues will cause negative consequences to athletes, such as premature dropout from sport, and psychological problems

which hinder prospective athletes to develop as outstanding elite athletes. At the same time, these issues will cause that there are not enough prospective athletes who have competence or can be selected to take part in international competitions, so the overall development of Chinese competitive sport would be restricted. Therefore, working with Chinese athletes from earlier in order to help them develop holistically is crucial for both Chinese athletes and the governing bodies.

5.1.2 Recommendation One: Facilitating the early career assistance program for Chinese athletes in the second-class stage

In order to achieve the goal which is working with Chinese athletes from earlier in order to help them develop holistically, there is a need of efforts from not only the sport psychology practitioners, but also athletes, parents, coaches, and sport governing bodies.

For athletes' parents and coaches, they should have more conversations with their children and athletes to provide more support and to discover the issues of athletes at the early stage. When parents cannot meet their children in person, they should have conversations through phone calls or video calls to encourage their children to talk about their doubts and issues as well as to ask for help from sport psychology practitioners. Additionally, parents and coaches should pay attention not only to athletic performance of young athletes, but also the mental health, psychological problems, academic study, and the overall development of athletes.

For Chinese sport psychology practitioners, the main focus now is on enhancing the athletic performance and coping with the post-sport career crises of elite athletes. Chinese sport practitioners should also pay more attention to the career issues of young prospective athletes both within and outside of sport and start to work with young prospective athletes from earlier to help them develop holistically. Additionally, the third-class athletes have not started professional

(semi-professional) training and have not taken part in a lot of sport competitions, so they do not have a lot career issues and psychological problems. However, the second-class athletes have started to conduct semi-professional training and take part in high-level competitions, so they will face different career issues such as the imbalance of the sport training and the academic study. Therefore, Chinese sport psychology practitioners should start to work with second-class athletes who may face the junior to senior transition and other transitions.

For the Chinese sport governing bodies, they should issue some policies to increase the number of sport psychology practitioners in order to meet the demand of sport psychology practitioners who can work with young prospective athletes from the second-class stage. Furthermore, the policy also should promote sport psychology practitioners to work with Chinese young athletes from the second-class stage to the retired stage to help them cope career issues and develop holistically.

5.2 Conclusion Two: The current limitations of Chinese athletes affects their development under the Whole Nation System context

We know that the sport system will influence the athletes' development. In order to understand the Chinese athletes' development, I conducted a literature review of the Whole Nation System where the majority of Chinese athletes are cultivated by and I also did the self-reflection to recall my own athletic career as a Chinese table tennis athlete. During the process, I found that the Whole Nation System has been proven as a successful sport system because of its leading position in certain sports worldwide. The Whole Nation System also has produced an abundance of elite athletes and gold medals in international sport competitions. However, it still has some areas for improvement which influence the Chinese athletes' development. The existing limitations of Chinese athletes include (1) low educational level, (2) short sport lifespan,

(3) early specialized training, and (4) sole development pathway (Hong, 2004). These limitations of athletes are influenced by the Whole Nation System, related to crisis-transitions, and caused negative consequences such as premature dropout, overtraining and injuries which influence not only on athletes' mental health, but also their overall development both within and outside of sports.

5.2.1 Implication Two: The impact of the Chinese athletes' limitations

In recent years, the overall development of Chinese athletes has been gradually emphasized by the Chinese sport scholars and governing bodies because the athletes' development affects not only influences themselves, but also the development of sport and the society they belong to. For example, the low educational level of Chinese athletes may cause not only the unsuccessful transition out of sport, but also stereotypes and biases which influence the athletes' mental health and the development of sport. In China, due to the low educational level, some people believe that Chinese athletes have strong bodies, but they have a low level of intelligence. This stereotype leads to some athletes' mental issues and also hinder the development of sport because some parents do not allow their children to pursue a sport career due to the stereotype. On the other hand, the low educational level has also caused post-sport career crises; for example, athletes cannot find a good job due to the lack of knowledge and other professional skills when athletes retired. Therefore, before Chinese athletes retire, they may have the anxiety to achieve the excellent results in sport competitions in order to obtain better opportunities and supports when they retired, such as the study opportunity in the university without passing any examination, becoming officials or coaches, and the financial support of establishing sports agencies and/or companies, and these opportunities can only be obtained by athletes who reach the national level (Hong, 2004). The anxiety of achieving the excellent results has an impact on

not only athletes' mental health, but also their athletic performance, so the limitations of Chinese athletes should be explored through athletic career research under the Whole Nation System context.

5.2.2 Recommendation Two: The call for understanding the dual career development of Chinese athletes

Fortunately, the low educational level, and the importance of the overall development of athletes have been recognized by the Chinese sport scholars and Chinese government. The Whole Nation System has been starting to reform, and several relevant policies have been issued to augment the gap. I can infer that one of the main goals of the reforming of the Whole Nation System is to help athletes improve the educational level and overall development. The goals of improving the athletes' educational level and overall development can perfectly match with the holistic lifespan perspective (athlete as "whole person", athletic career as a part of life career), holistic ecological perspective (athletic career as a "social affair"), and the dual career scholarship. As the results, these two key concepts may be merged with dual career scholarship to understand and explore the factors which influence the Chinese athletes' development and transitions which is faced by Chinese athletes in the context of a dual career, such as simultaneous transitional processes in sport and education, to help Chinese athletes improve their educational level and to ensure a successful transition out of sport. Therefore, it is important to conduct the athletic career research in order to understand the development stages and transitions, the limitations of Chinese athletes, and the environment to help athletes develop better. For example, we know that the low educational level is one of the limitations of Chinese athletes. If Chinese sport psychology researchers and practitioners can merge the two holistic lifespan perspective models with dual career scholarship to conduct the research to understanding the Chinese athletes' development

stages, transitions, and the barriers of pursuing the academic study and conduct some intervention programs and strategies for Chinese athletes, when the new generation of Chinese young athletes pursue their athletic career, they can successfully cope their career issues through abundant resources and supports and do not need to sacrifice either sport career or academic study. Athletes may achieve the excellence both in their sport career and academic study under the Whole Nation System context.

5.3 Conclusion Three: There is a requirement of the career assistance program for Chinese athletes

An unsuccessful transition, which may be faced by athletes during their athletic career, will caused some negative consequences that influence the athletes' overall development and mental health both within and outside of sport. Therefore, it is important to know how we can help athletes cope their career issues and achieve the career excellence both within and outside of sports. The career assistance should be a good solution. Stambulova, Ryba, and Henriksen (2020) stated that in applied sport psychology, career assistance is a professional discourse which aim to help athletes with their career issues both within and outside of sport, and the career assistance includes intervention programs and strategies which are provided by sport psychology practitioners.

However, even though there are some intervention programs and strategies to help Chinese athletes prepare their post-sport career and cope the post-sport career crises, there is almost no intervention programs and strategies to help Chinese athletes cope the career issues which exist in such as the junior to senior transition in sport in mainland China. When Chinese athletes encounter some career issues such as crisis-transition, and/or the imbalance between sport training and academic study, they cannot find anyone to help them. Therefore, the career

assistance program should be conducted in China. Additionally, due to the reforming of the Whole Nation System, it is clear to see that GAS has started to pay attention to the overall development and multiple development pathways of Chinese athletes. Therefore, during the reforming process, some Chinese athletes will face the career issues in the different development pathways and transitions, so the career assistance program should be considered for helping Chinese athletes achieve excellence and successful transition at different career stages in China.

5.3.1 Implication Three: The importance of career assistance program for China athletes

An unsuccessful transition may cause negative consequences for athletes at different development stages and transitions. The career assistance program can be perceived as a very important recourse or a method to help athletes cope their career issues. When athletes encounter some career issues, whether or not there is an intervention program to help athletes may lead to two completely different outcomes. Athletes with an intervention program, they may successfully cope the career issues and achieve the career excellence in and outside of sport. On the contrary, athletes without an intervention program, they may not be able to cope the career issues that cause negative consequences such as premature dropout, and depression which influence the overall development and mental health of athletes, and it will also influence the athletic performance of athletes.

For Chinese athletes, even though we are still not sure and do not categorize what kinds of unique transitions Chinese athletes will face under the Whole Nation System context, we can ensure that Chinese athletes will inevitably face some transitions (e.g., the junior to senior transition, the post-sport career transition, the change of a coach or a team, and the Olympic Games transition) during their athletic career which are same as other athletes do. Therefore, Chinese athletes will definitely encounter the career issues and adversities, but these career

issues and adversities may be shaped and influenced by the Whole Nation System, so there is a requirement of career assistance programs which is specific to Chinese athletes under the Whole Nation System context to help Chinese athletes cope their career issues and achieve the career excellence.

5.3.2 Recommendation Three: The opportunities for constructing and implementing the career assistance programs in China

Due to the importance of the career assistance program, Chinese sport psychology researchers and practitioners should firstly conduct the athletic career research which is specific to Chinese athletes in order to understand their unique development stages and transitions and define and categorize the development stages and transitions of Chinese athletes. Furthermore, the factors which will affect the development of Chinese athletes should be understood and analyzed through athletic career research. Based on the results of athletic career research, to establish specific intervention programs and strategies for Chinese athletes to help them cope their career issues and achieve the career excellence.

In China, the career assistance program could be different styles such as a seminar, an expert group, or a lecture. For example, in the lecture, the sport psychology practitioners are expected to provide the general knowledge, the key concepts, and coping strategies or methods of athletic career to athletes and coaches help them understand the topic. The lecture can be carried out in different provincial and municipal teams of each sport discipline across the country. After the lecture, if athletes have any doubts and/or career issues which need to be deal with sport psychology practitioners, athletes can request to conduct a seminar with sport psychology practitioners to discuss athletes' career issues through any kind of conversation such as face by face, a phone call, and/or a video call. This seminar can involve in for athletes and

sport psychology practitioners only or with their coaches together which can depend on the athlete. If during the seminar, there are some unique issues which the sport psychology practitioner cannot deal with, and then the sport psychology practitioner can request an expert group meeting with other experts and discuss the issues to find the specific coping strategies. Finally, the sport practitioner can conduct a seminar with the athlete again in order to help the athlete successfully cope the career issues.

5.4 Conclusion Four: There is a need of contextualized athletic career research specific to China

In recent years, the significance of the athletic career discourse (ACD) has been recognized by sport psychology researchers and practitioners, and the key athletic career knowledge and concepts which has been utilized to conduct research to understand athletes' career development stages and transitions. Based on the research of athletic career, some intervention programs and strategies have been applied by sport psychology practitioners around the world in order to help athletes cope crisis-transitions and strive career excellence both within and outside sports.

However, the athletic career research has not widely been conducted in mainland China, and there is a need for contextualized athletic career research which is specific to China because of several reasons. First, the sport system and athletes can be influenced by cultural particularities, socio-historical context, and geographical location in their respective countries, and athletes' career development will be also influenced by different sport systems, societal norms, and cultural traditions (Stambulova et al., 2009). As the results, there are some nuances and differences between the development pathways, stages, and transitions of Chinese athletes and others, and also contain different demands, resources, barriers, and challenges. Therefore,

the contextualized athletic career research is required in order to understand Chinese athletes' athletic career. Second, in order to make some intervention programs and strategies to help Chinese athletes, sport psychology researchers and practitioners should firstly understand the unique development stages and transitions of Chinese athletes, and then to make specific intervention programs and strategies for Chinese athletes based on the contextualized athletic career research. Third, the contextualized athletic career research will provide the specific and detailed information of Chinese athletes to sport psychology practitioners, and sport policymakers.

5.4.1 Implication Four: The necessity of the contextualized Chinese athletic career research

The contextualized athletic career is crucial to Chinese athletes, sport psychology practitioners, and also Chinese sport governing bodies. For Chinese athletes, the contextualized research can provide the information to sport psychology practitioners making specific intervention programs which can help Chinese athletes cope their career issues and achieve the excellence both within and outside of sport. For sport psychology researchers and practitioners, the contextualized research can provide the unique information of Chinese athletes to help sport psychology researchers and practitioners, who work with Chinese athletes, increase the awareness of Chinese athletes to improve their services. For Chinese sport governing bodies, due to the reforming of the Whole Nation System, the combination of sport and study has been emphasized. The contextualized research in dual career scholarship can provide more informative information to help sport policymakers make the right decisions about the policy to perfect the reforming, and it also increase the influence of China in the sport area around the world through improving the Whole Nation System and the overall development of Chinese athletes.

5.4.2 Recommendation Four: suggestions for the Chinese athletic career research

Before conducting the contextualized athletic career research in China, the systematic review of athletic career research should be conducted in order to deeply understand the key knowledge, concepts, and frameworks/models of athletic career research. Meanwhile, sport psychology practitioners and researchers should consider how the Whole Nation System and the Chinese culture influence athletes' development stages and transitions through the Cultural Praxis of Athletes' Careers Paradigm. For example, we may think about how the characteristic (keep face) of Chinese culture influences the athlete's development in their different development stages.

Additionally, due to the reforming of the Whole Nation System, the contextualized dual career research in China should be considered by sport psychology researchers and practitioners in order to provide the informative and detailed information which can help sport policymakers make right decision about sport policies. The accurate policy can facilitate the reformation of the Whole Nation System efficiently. For example, when the contextualized athletic career and dual career research are conducted in China, the unique barriers, resources, and demands of Chinese athletes during their athletic career will be discovered and understood under the Whole Nation System context. The Chinese sport policymakers can issue some specific policies to facilitate the development of Chinese athletes and different sport disciplines in China based on the results of the contextualized athletic career and dual career research.

5.5 Conclusion Five: Specific professional resources need to be allocated to enhancing Chinese athletes in dual careers throughout their athletic careers

From the literature review of the Whole Nation System and the athletic career research, I found that specific professional resources need to be allocated to enhancing Chinese athletes in

dual careers throughout their athletic careers. These specific professional resources could be specific sports scientists (e.g., sports psychologists, sports nutritionists, sports physiotherapists, sports therapists, strength and conditioning coaches), and relevant sport policies.

As aforementioned, the overarching goal of the Whole Nation System is to achieve excellent results in the Olympic Games and all international sporting competitions. Therefore, the majority of professional resources are concentrated on the top of Chinese elite athletes (members of national teams) in order to help them achieve the highest athletic performance and cope the career issues. However, only a fraction of the professional resources is available to young prospective athletes who are training at the third-class, second-class, and even provincial teams. These professional resources are crucial for the young prospective athletes' development both within and outside of sport. Therefore, specific professional resources need to be allocated and accessible for young prospective athletes to help them cope their careers issues and achieve excellence in dual careers throughout their athletic careers.

5.5.1 Implication Five: The importance of specific professional resources for Chinese athletes in the dual career context

Chinese sport governing bodies and sport scientists should not only pay attention to enhance the athletic performance of elite athletes, but also need to distribute some attention to facilitate the overall development of young prospective athletes. Competitive sports are cruel and fiercely competitive, so only a small number of athletes can become the world champion, so we cannot just care about their development of sport career, but also need to pay attention to their overall development and other careers (e.g., academic career, work career). Additionally, all the champion athletes grow up step by step from the early stage. Before these elite athletes achieve their best performance, they are also young prospective athletes and need to experience career

development stages and transitions under the Whole Nation System. If we want to enhancing Chinese athletes, we should firstly facilitate the overall development of young prospective athletes because only when the quantity and quality of young athletes improves, the overall level of sport will enhance through abundant of prospective athletes who have competence and can be selected to take part in international sport competitions.

Therefore, the distribution of specific professional resources may be an advisable solution to help Chinese athletes cope their career issues and achieve the career excellence in dual careers throughout their athletic careers because of the importance of the specific professional resources for Chinese athlete. When young prospective athletes do not have enough professional resources to help them cope adversities, it will hinder athletes' overall development. For example, when athletes are injured, they will take longer to recover without the help of sports physiotherapists and therapists. When young athletes encounter some career issues such as the imbalance between sport training and academic study, they may not successfully cope the issue by themselves without the help of sports psychologists. When athletes are training only with their coaches without any help of sports scientists (e.g., sports nutritionists, strength and conditioning coaches), athletes may need to train longer to achieve the same results as other athletes who work with the coaches and sport scientists. Without these professional resources, athletes may need to spend more time and their energy on the sport training which is also inefficient, and they may unsuccessfully cope their career issues. Due to athletes need to spend more time and energy on their sport training, they do not have enough time and energy to pursue other career such as academic career, or work career. Therefore, the specific professional resources are important for athletes to achieve the career excellence in dual career throughout their athletic career.

5.5.2 Recommendation Five: Suggestions for allocating specific professional resources to enhancing Chinese athletes in dual career context

The Chinese government and sport scholars have recognized the significance of the overall development of athletes, and several policies have issued. The main foci of the policy are on the combination of sport and academic study which well match with dual career scholarship in order to help athletes achieve the career excellence both in sport career and academic or work career. The specific professional resources could be one of the most important factors.

Firstly, Chinese sport governing bodies should issue some polices to facilitate sport scientists working with different level sport teams across the country. To make sure sport scientists are accessible for the majority teams and athletes who are above the second-class. Furthermore, to facilitate the cooperation of coaches and sport scientists train and help athletes achieve the career excellence in dual careers. Additionally, to facilitate retired athletes continuing their educations and entering universities to study sport science disciplines in order to train them as potential sport scientists who can work with athletes and sport teams in the future. There are huge demands of sport scientists in China because there are a lot of sport teams and clubs cannot find sport scientists to help athletes. Therefore, to promote retired athletes entering universities is not only a method to satisfy the demand of sport scientist, but also a way to help athletes paper their post-sport career.

5.6 Reflections: Study the athletic career research in sport psychology

Stambulova and colleagues (2009) defined athletic career is “a multi-year sport activity, voluntarily chosen by the person, and aimed at achieving his/her individual peak in athletic performance in one or several sport events” (p. 397), and an athletic career may occupy up to “one third of the lifespan and influences all aspects of an athlete’s development” (Stambulova,

1994, p. 221). Athletic career research aims to understand and describe athletes' career pathways (development stages and transitions) and conduct career assistance programs to help athletes cope with athletic and non-athletic career issues and achieve their career excellence (Stambulova et al., 2020; Stambulova, Ryba, & Henriksen, 2020).

Due to my special athletic experience, I had a stereotype which the coaches and athletes are the core of the athletes' career, and the determinants, which influence athletes' development, are training methods, the skill level of athletes and coaches, the results of sport competitions, and the motivations of athletes. I perceived an athlete as a person doing sports without any other things in order to achieve the highest accomplishment in their specialized sport disciplines before their retirements from sports. This perspective caused me only focusing on athletes' athletic achievements and development and never thinking about their athletic career as a part of life career and alongside other things (e.g., study, work) in their life.

Furthermore, from my previous perspectives, the development stages of Chinese athletes are always same, and the transitions are automatic when athletes achieve the excellent results of sport competitions and sport skills. When Chinese athletes reach the certain criteria, they can transfer to the next development stage. However, I did not clearly understand what kinds of transitions Chinese athletes will face and how to define and categorize the development stages and transitions in the Whole Nation System context. I never think about what resources and barriers athletes have in different stages and what demands, challenges, and coping strategies will influence athletes' transitions and development. Moreover, I think that the transitions of the elite Chinese athletes are automatic, and we do not pay attention to understand and explore what determinants help these elite athletes obtain the successful transition. In addition, we also do not focus on the athletes who have the crisis-transitions which may cause them premature dropout

from sports and other negative consequences. We still do not understand the reasons which cause the crisis-transitions of Chinese athletes. Therefore, we do not know how to help Chinese athletes cope their career issues.

Before I did the literature review of athletic career research, my main focus is on enhancing athletes' sport performance and relevant factors which influence athletes' sport performance. The athletic career discourse provides me a lot of new perspectives and opens a window for me to rethink about Chinese athletes' career. From the literature review of athletic career discourse, the key knowledge of the athletic career research changed my perspectives to perceive an athlete as a whole person who is doing not only sports, but also alongside other things (e.g., study, work et al.) in their life. This concept let me rethink about the balance of sport and study in the Whole Nation System context. Additionally, I start to pay attention to not only Chinese athletes' development of athletic dimension, but also multi-dimension such as psychological, psychosocial, academic, vocational, and financial dimensions. Moreover, I accepted the concept which the athletic career (as a part of life career) is a natural progression of specific development stages and transitions and contains different demands, resources, barriers, coping strategies, and challenges, and these development stages and transitions may co-occur both within and/or outside sport (Battochio et al., 2015; Mortensen et al., 2013; Ryba, & Stambulova, 2013; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). These concepts make me start to pay attention to not only the athletic development, but also the overall development of Chinese athlete. I realized that the athletes' development is multi-dimensional and will be influenced by not only training methods, the skill level of athletes and coaches, the results of sport competitions, and the motivations of athletes, but also parents' supports, mental health, career planning, and professional resources et al.

My previous goal is to understand the factors which may influence Chinese athletes' sport performance and help Chinese athletes enhance their sport performance and cope with psychological issues related to sport competitions such as pre-competition anxiety, and reinjury anxiety. When I recognized the importance of athletic career research, I changed my mind to understand Chinese athletes' career development stages and transitions in order to help them cope their career issues both within and outside sport and improve the overall development of Chinese athletes. There are so many researchers who have conducted research to understand and help athletes cope their psychological issues related to sport performance in China. However, the sport career is only a part of athletes' life, so we should not only focus on their sport performance, but also their mental health, physical health, and other dimensions such as academic, and/or vocational dimensions. The multi-dimensional development not only influences athletes' athletic performance, but also the overall development. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct the athletic career research to understand athletes' career issues, which may have lifelong impacts, and help them cope career issue to achieve the career excellence no matter during their sport career and/or post-sport career.

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