
BETWEEN ECONOMIC REFORM AND THE MAINTENANCE OF STATE SUPPORT FOR ELITE SPORT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ELITE SPORT POLICY IN CHINA (2001-2013)

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-347/R1 - (895)

All authors:
Richard Hu, Ian Henry

Date submitted: 2015-04-08

Date accepted: 2015-05-03

Type: Scientific

Keywords: China, Sport Policy, Elite Sport, Reform

Category: 12: Sport Policy

Synopsis:

Employing a Critical Realist approach and modifying Fairclough's discourse analysis framework, we have investigated the construction of the relationship between, and the invoking of, the two sets of goals resulting dilemma in Chinese elite sport policy in order to unveil the evolution of the 'power of discourse' concerning the performance and reform of Chinese elite sport (how particular discourses shape the reality of elite sports policy), and 'power over discourse' (whose views prevail and why).

We argue that the characterisation of Chinese elite sport and of its development has varied with the change in the power relationship and the tension between these two sets of goals of elite sport success and economic reform, and thus has major implications for understanding change in contemporary Chinese elite sport policy and its governance system.

Abstract:

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

China's growing Olympic success since it re-joined the Olympic movement at the 1984 LA Olympics has been associated with its traditional planned-economy-based and government-controlled elite sport system of state-sponsored professionalism, Zhuanye sport, and the administration and operational framework underpinning that system, Juguo Tizhi (Li, Bao, Ren, Wang, & Lu, 2010; Long, 2013; Tan & Houlihan, 2012). However, given Zhuanye sport and Juguo Tizhi's relationship with the planned economy, they are viewed as inconsistent with the reforming trend of Chinese society, and thus have been experiencing pressure from civil society and government to implement a reform of Chinese elite sport, in effect a 'refining of Juguo Tizhi' (Li et al., 2010; Zhang, 2009). This requirement for reform has been officially recognised since the Chinese sport authority published its first reforming document as a draft in 1986 (The SPCSC's Decision on the Reform of Sport System). However, given the nature of the political task of Chinese elite sport,

(‘winning glory for the country’), which is also emphasised by the PRC government, and the close relationship between elite sport performance and the vested interests of Zhuanye sport, this requirement of reform of Juguo Tizhi has caused great concern in certain quarters because of its potentially negative impact on the Zhuanye and Juguo Tizhi systems and thus on the performance, and interests, of Chinese elite sport (Li et al., 2010; Zhang, 2009). Similar to the PRC government’s apparently contradictory adoption of market economy and socialist ideology, Chinese elite sport authority has also endeavoured to balance these two competing requirements, while maximising its own interests. Our paper investigates changes and continuity in policy statements in relation to the balance between these two sets of goals after Beijing was awarded the 2008 Olympics in 2001 till 2013, aims to unveil the impact of winning the bid and of the staging of the Beijing Games on Chinese elite sport policy.

METHODOLOGY

In our research, we employ a Critical Realist approach to investigate the development of Chinese elite sport policy, identifying the nature and significance of real, but socially constructed, policy structures in elite sport through examining the evolution of discourse in the policy community, with emphasis on the power and interests reflected and constructed within, and by, these discourses. The analysis is based on archival material, including elite sport policy statements and related (political, academic and media) commentary and interpretation, and on 28 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2012 with key stakeholders within the Chinese elite sport system. The discourse analysis protocol employed to examine the constitution and implementation of policy within Chinese elite sport is modified from Fairclough’s (2009) framework, which he terms a Dialectical-Relational Approach. This approach enables us to analyse the construction of the social world, which both facilitates and constrains social actors’ (re)production of (particular facets of) society. .

FINDINGS / CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis highlights the construction of the relationship between, and the invoking of the two major sets of goals in Chinese elite sport policy and reveals the nature of the evolution of the ‘power of discourse’ concerning the performance and reform of Chinese elite sport (how particular discourses shape the reality of elite sports policy), and ‘power over discourse’ (whose views prevail and why).

We argue that attempts to maximise the interests of the Zhuanye sport system also reflect the protection of the interests of sports administrators, at the national level (and particularly in the General Administration of Sport (GAS)), and are evidenced in the adjustments of the balance between the two sets of goals in elite sport policy, in issues such as the selection of sports to be professionalised in the 1990s, the superficial promotion, or the inherent neglect, of economic reform of elite sport during the preparation of the Beijing Games, and the re-accentuation of reform in the post-Games period (especially after President Xi took power in 2013). The balance between the two goals is also significantly affected by the political climate of Chinese society, especially by the demands of the leading Party elite. These two core factors bear directly on the interests of the government-dominant Chinese elite sport system. This tension thus has major implications for understanding changes in contemporary Chinese elite sport policy and its governance system. These changes on the one hand, include the reemphasis of sport reform as promoted by the former

Chinese President, Jintao Hu (emphasising a development of Chinese sport, which balances elite sport, mass sport and the sports industry); while on the other hand since 2014 they have also incorporated an enthusiasm throughout the governance system for promoting football, a move discursively constructed as related to President Xi's personal ambitions for China's performance in this sport.

References:

- Fairclough, N. (2009). A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Li, Y., Bao, M., Ren, H., Wang, D., & Lu, Y. (2010). *Woguo Jingjitiyu Juguo Tizhi de Yanjiu* [The Research on the Elite Sport Juguo Tizhi of Our Country]. In the G. Policy Analysis Office (Ed.), *Guojia Tiyuzongju Tiyu Zhexue Shehuikexue Yanjiuchengguo Huibian (Jingji Tiyu Juan 2001-2006)* [Selection of the GAS's researches on Sport Phylosophy, Sport Socialology (Elite Sport, 2001-2006)] (pp. 41–57). Beijing, PRC: Renmin Tiyu Chubanshe [People' Sport Press].
- Long, B. (2013). *Zhongguo Aoyunhui Chengji Tanyin: Yi Bajie Xiaji Aoyunhui Weili* [Researches on the Chinese Olympic Performance in Eight Summer Olympics]. *Hubei Sport Science and Techonology*, 32(2), 141–144.
- Tan, T.-C., & Houlihan, B. (2012). Chinese Olympic sport policy: Managing the impact of globalisation. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(2), 131–152. doi:10.1177/1012690212445169
- Zhang, X. (2009). *China's Sport in post-2008 era*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press.