

# **The Development of Women's Professional Ice Hockey in China: Using the Canadian League to Leverage Success for Beijing 2022**

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## **Purpose of Paper**

Our aim is to understand how women's ice hockey is developing in China and how it is being used to leverage success at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, understanding the ways in which gender, nationalism, the state and markets intersect.

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

After winning the right to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, the government of China planned to create 300 million winter sports participants including skiers, skaters, ice hockey players, and other winter athletes before 2022. China is pouring investment into ice hockey and wants to turn it into a powerhouse by 2022. Although women's ice hockey in China has not been attractive previously as a mass sport, the Chinese women's national ice hockey team has appeared three times in Winter Olympic Games, whereas men's national team has not qualified for any Winter Olympics. The national women's hockey team was highly regarded and was expected to win the gold medal in the 2022 Winter Olympics. The challenges to hockey's development in China are not surprising as new markets tend to experience struggles due to the fluidity of logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and issues of establishing legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008).

How gender affects the place and role of women in sports participation has been closely tied to cultural views in China. We employ a mix of critical feminist analysis and institutional logics theory to break down the position and aims of women's hockey. Chinese women have recently become national heroines, with the intent to put China at the forefront of the sporting world (Brownell, 2008). Chinese authorities and other stakeholders have created, built, and sustained the environment for the national women's team. Specifically, our research was limited to examining the Chinese national clubs in Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL), and the Chinese national women's hockey team in the context of an emerging market for hockey and the Chinese government's Winter Sports Strategy.

This inquiry was guided by the following questions: (1) In what ways has the Chinese government intentionally supported improved performance of Chinese national women's hockey team; (2) How does this intentional support relate to possible changes in gender roles for Chinese women, who are participating in a traditionally male sport; (3) How might the development of women's hockey leverage the success of Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, and (4) How does the role of women in the Chinese culture and the participation in a male dominated sport fit with the nationalism in China.

## **Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis**

To answer those questions, we employed archival research methods to document the history, policies, media coverage, and attendance figures of women's ice hockey in China. We systematically collected and analyzed data to create an understanding of the women's ice hockey development model. Primary data included documents collected from the General Administration of Sport of China, Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2022 Olympic and

Paralympic Winter Games, HC Kunlun Red Star Club, and several secondary documents such as the research reports and media coverages from China. These multiple data sources allowed us to address the development model of women's ice hockey in China, and its primary advantages and challenges. In sum, we collected data that spanned 26 years of women's ice hockey development in China. Data analysis followed the inductive grounded theory approach, wherein we identified first order concepts, second order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

## Results

Initial findings suggest women's ice hockey development in China has framed the development model with opportunities and multiple resources. Women's hockey development in China was supported by the government in different ways. For example, the government increased the payment of Chinese women hockey players, offered scholarships to the U18 women hockey players, cooperated with HC Kunlun Red Star hockey club and established the "women's national hockey club," and built two women's teams participating in the Canadian Women's Hockey League.

## Conclusion and Implications

The review suggested in China, the women's ice hockey development has created jobs for women on and off the ice, brought the opportunities for Chinese women players to speak up, and provide youth with role models. With Kunlun Red Star club reaching Clarkson Cup final in CWHL, and the national team placed 5<sup>th</sup> in 2018 IIHF Women's World Championship Division I B, the Chinese women's hockey players, are still described as "national heroines," bringing the hope to China for the success in Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

## References

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