

Sports coaching development in China

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Sports Coaching Development in China: the system, challenges and opportunities

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There has been considerable academic attention on the systems and structures relating to the education and development of coaches in Western nations. Despite China's competitive sports success, particularly at the Olympic Games, little is known about the structures of coaching systems and coach development in China. To foster a comparative understanding of sports coaching development from different contexts and to inform and enrich investigative agendas in the area, this paper focuses on China and introduces its sports coaching systems and structures with an analysis built upon government policy and relevant Chinese literature. Specifically, the paper delineates the two systems (elite and school), traces the changes of different versions of the skill grading system of Chinese sports coaches, outlines opportunities available for continued education; and highlights some of the current issues and challenges which hinder the development of Chinese sports coaches. Accordingly, suggestions for future policy and practice improvement are put forward in support of China's mission to become a world sports power.

Keywords: sports coaching, China, coach development, sports policy

Introduction

China's competitive sports success, particularly at the Olympic Games, is compelling. From winning its first gold medal in 1984 to maintaining a position in top three of the Olympic medal rankings at the most recent five Games, the rise in sport has been attributed to the development of a strong team of sports coaches in addition to other factors, including advanced training techniques and scientific support (Zheng & Chen, 2016).

As early as 1995, the National Sports Commission stated in the then most authoritative policy document in elite sport (Winning Olympic Glory Plan 1994-2000) that the competition of modern competitive sports can be seen as a contest between *coaches* (National Sport Commission, 1995). This statement reflects coaches' indispensable role in elite sport success (Cheng, 2013). Consequently, how to develop and train these high-quality coaches became one of the main focuses in Chinese sport development (Zuo et al., 2009).

Globally, sports coaching education and development has been a consistent focus of discussion in many Western countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States (Aoyama, 2003; Cassidy & Kidman, 2010; Edwards, Culver, Leadbetter, Kloos, & Potwarka, 2020; Gilbert, Lichtenwaltdt, Gilbert, Zelezny & Côté, 2009; Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013). However, recently these discussions extended beyond these borders contributions from Brazil and other European nations (Resende, Sequeira, & Samento, 2016; Rodrigues, Nunomura, & Pombo, 2016) which have been useful to interrupt the Western-dominated scholarship and promote unique cultural issues that impact upon coaching systems and the education and development of coaches.

Despite increases in scholarship from the aforementioned nations, there has been a notable gap with regard to the global sporting superpower of China. Despite China's reputation for Olympic success, there is still little known about coaching systems and the development and education of coaches in China's context.

In addition, informed by the perspective of comparative analysis in a global context to enhance international understanding and harmony (Bray, Adamson and Mason, 2014), our paper contributes to this growing debate and enable a cross-cultural knowledge exchange by specifically focusing on coaching educational issues in China (the ‘unknown’) and comparing, where possible, the similarities and differences with other contexts (the ‘known’).

Indeed, discussions in mainstream education domains have long advocated for embracing a comparative understanding of particular cases or phenomena in different contexts in order to free ourselves from static reporting (Hall, 1990). Such an approach allows us to identify recurring patterns or tendencies that are constructed or intricately connected with the societies and systems that support them (Sadler, 1900). Ultimately, by exposing readers to little known coaching systems, such as that in China, we challenge them to consider the extent to which the issues reported transcend or are confined by particular national characteristics (Parkyn, 1977). This is of importance as the identification of commonalities or nuances in national coaching systems contributes to the conceptual and theoretical development of the field.

In this regard, in order to form a comparative analysis of coaching development from different cultural backgrounds/context, our paper outlines the Chinese sports coaching system and relevant contextual features. Specifically, it explains the two relevant systems (elite and school), traces the development of the skill grading system of Chinese sports coaches, summaries opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD), and highlights some of the current issues and challenges that are considered to hinder the development of Chinese sports coaches. Several recommendations to improve practice are provided at the end. The analysis rests on a review of various government policies and academic literature (in Chinese) translated by the authors.

The Chinese sports coaching system

In China, coaches work in two systems: the elite sports system and the school (mass sport) system. The coaches in the school (mass sport) system are those working with sports clubs and private organisations, as well as with sports teams from schools at all levels, including high-level sports teams from colleges and traditional sports schools, while coaches in the elite system include those in sports-specific schools, professional clubs, provincial teams and national teams. Whilst elite sports coaches work in a full-time capacity, sports coaches in the school system generally work part-time with their main job being physical education teachers.

Elite sports and school sports in China are regarded as two different fields which are managed by the General Administration of Sport (GAS, formerly known as the National Sports Commission) and the Ministry of Education respectively. As later discussed, in comparison with more sophisticated training and progression pathways set up for elite sports coaches, school coaches, in terms of their governance and continuous personal development, have largely been overlooked.

As Figure 1 indicates, the management of China's elite sports coaches is basically a dual structure which is jointly managed by the GAS, personnel departments of provincial and municipal sports bureaus, and the corresponding training institutions at all levels. The GAS and personnel departments of provincial and municipal sports bureaus are responsible for the personnel management of sports coaches, such as recruitment, quota, turnover, professional title review, etc. The daily management and administrative management are the responsibility of the training organisation which are part of the GAS. Training centres are responsible for organising coaches to undertake political and ideological education, political theory education and other activities. They are also accountable for keeping track of the coaches' attendance and performance records (Zhong, 2013).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The latest available national statistics from China Statistical Yearbook show that as of 2009, the total number of sports coaches in China was 20,852 (as shown in Table 1), which was 4,964 fewer than the 25,816 in 1998, a 19.23% decline. In terms of the number of sports coaches at different levels (job ranking from the highest to the lowest are national, senior, intermediate, junior and other), there were 448 national coaches (constitutes 1.5% of the total coach population), 4538 senior coaches (15.5%), 11,032 intermediate coaches (37.6%), 13,060 junior coaches (44.6%); and the others accounted for 239 coaches (0.82%, Zuo et al., 2009). Major sports such as track and field and swimming had the biggest number of qualified coaches, followed by Chinese Olympic medal sports such as gymnastics, table tennis and shooting. Sports such as modern pentathlon, beach volleyball, ski jumping, freestyle skiing and biathlon had the least number of qualified coaches (Zuo et al., 2009). A majority of the coaches are retired elite athletes (Wu & Wang, 2016). These Chinese coaches also included students who graduated from physical education colleges, and physical education teachers with some well-funded institutions introducing coaches from other provinces or countries (Shao, 2010).

[Insert Table 1 here]

The Skill Grading System of sports coaches

The progression and development of all Chinese sports coaches (i.e. elite and school coaches) adheres to the national Skill Grading System which was created in the 1950s when Chinese sport began to develop. In order to rapidly improve the level of sports skills and to promote sports development, in 1958 the National Sports Commission introduced China's first coaches' skill grading system in the document 'Regulations of Coaches Grading System of

People's Republic of China (Draft)'. This system was largely developed in line with the grading systems of athletes, coaches and referees used in the Soviet Union.

The skill grading system refers to the process of hiring coaches for various positions according to the coaches' professional skills (Wang, Wang & Sheng, 2011). It was, and continues to be, formulated and implemented by the GAS with the purpose of encouraging coaches to improve their political awareness, theoretical knowledge and professional skills; to provide athletes with quality teaching and training; and to promote sports development in China. China has amended the skill grading system five times respectively in 1958, 1963, 1979, 1981 and 1994. The 1994 skill grading system is still used today.

The earlier versions of the skill grading system proposed four grades of coaches: national, first, second, and third. But in 1981, the grade of 'senior' was added between the grades of national and first. Thus, a total of five grades of coaches have been established and used until today. Table 2 shows the conditions for coaches at different grades for the two different systems (i.e., elite sport system and school system). As illustrated in the table, each grade has a clearly defined criteria and obligations, a procedure to qualify for the grade, as well as rules for promotion and rewards. National coaches and senior coaches are accredited by the GAS; the first- and second-grade coaches are certified by sports commissions of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities; and the third-grade coaches are authorised by sports commissions of prefecture-level cities and counties.

[Insert Table 2 here]

The 1994 skill grading system also defines and specifies clearly the duties, job qualifications, approval procedures and employment methods of the coaches of different grades. These job qualifications are based on coaches' length of service, education level,

research ability, foreign language level and work performance. In contrast to the previous version, the revised grading system placed emphasis on the education background and teaching ability of coaches. For example, a senior coach must have secondary education or a higher degree in physical education; serve as a first grade coach for more than five years; demonstrate a mastery of the basic theories and professional knowledge of sports; have a deeper understanding of research relating to sport; have two theses published/presented, or have academic articles that reflect the results of their research project(s) and obtain a certificate of senior coach training. This coach must also demonstrate mastery of a foreign language which means they are able to read the rules and regulations of the sport with the use of a dictionary and use technical terms to communicate (State Ministry of Personnel, & National Sport Commission, 1994).

In summary, according to the latest data, 1610 coaches were officially approved for grades in 2015; and the ratio of graded coaches to graded athletes was 1:26. In addition to providing clarity of career pathway, the development of the skill grading system in China has resulted in one that better reflects China's cultural character and priorities (as opposed to following the approach of the former Soviet Union) and the quality mechanisms for sports coaches have improved.

The education and development of Chinese Sports Coaches

The continuing education of sports coaches is focused on expanding, supplementing, and updating their knowledge after they are employed and promoted, and to continuously improve their thinking, professional quality, professional skills, and professional ability. This continuous professional development is viewed to be an important part of coach education and training, and also a valuable means to improve the professional skills of coaches (Li, Si, Liu, & Feng, 2010).

China has always attached importance to the continuing education of sports coaches. In the early days, the National Sports Commission (1963) regulated that coaches were required to improve their qualification through in-service learning (including elements e.g., advanced study, attending workshops, writing papers on professional skills, and watching competitions); and 4-8 hours of study time should be guaranteed every week. In addition, other CPD opportunities were offered to sports coaches. For example, two-year or three-year specialised courses are organized by sports colleges to improve the coaching staff's professional skills (NSC, 1983).

A policy principle of 'Inviting In and Sending Out' was implemented, which focused on learning advanced sports training theories and methods by inviting excellent foreign coaches to China as well as sending coaches to foreign countries (e.g., the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries). This was the case for several sports in the 1950s, including football, swimming, volleyball, weightlifting and gymnastics (Wang, 2015).

However, it was not until the end of the 1990s, Chinese coaches' training began to develop more seriously (Hua, 2012). In addition to the original system, individual sports-specific associations, provinces, cities and sports teams have held training courses. The training content was no longer limited to the coaching techniques, but incorporated elements such as: physical fitness, rehabilitation, altitude training, psychological control, etc. (Hua, 2012).

By the 2000s, the importance of continuing education was further elevated. It is considered as a measure for coaches to master modern competitive training methods and means, enrich the theoretical knowledge of competitive training, update coaching concepts and improve coaching skills (GAS, 2017).

Most importantly, the GAS (2000) requires that only coaches who have taken the job training and obtained the certificates of corresponding levels can apply for promotion. The

variety of CPD opportunities has been expanded too. But to ensure quality, the Sports Management Centres of the General Administration Sport led the development of coaching training materials, and the training is mainly delivered by two sectors – the higher education sector and job training agencies (Guan, & Zhang, 2008). While the high education sector organises courses and exams (for obtaining the nationally recognized academic diplomas), job training agencies (often government-owned or affiliated) offer short-term training courses entailing the latest information and developments to improve their knowledge or ability (Zhang, 2013). Additionally, two colleges - Shandong Coach College and the Coach College of the General Administration of Sport - were established for CPD for sports coaches in 2010.

As of 2014, there were 20 vocational colleges offering sports training qualifications, 86 colleges and universities offering sports training undergraduate programs, 108 colleges and universities offering postgraduate programs in physical education and training, and 15 colleges and universities setting up doctoral degrees in physical education and coaching (Wang, 2015). In recent years China has gradually formed a sports coach education system based on junior college and undergraduate education. For those who would like to pursue a career in coaching who, due to age, were ineligible to access the traditional educational pathway, developments in postgraduate education and adult higher education created new pathways for the training of coaches.

The training of coaches is divided into four levels: national, senior, intermediate, junior (GAS, 2017). Specifically, national coach training highlights the research and innovation of training theories, methods and means, and focuses on improving the ability to solve training problems (e.g. tactics, injury prevention/rehabilitation). It is organised by institutions commissioned by the Science and Education Department, and is conducted in the form of self-study, lectures, seminars and oral defences. The lectures and seminars should be

no less than 60 hours; the self-study time should be no less than 70 hours; the participants should write about 5,000 words of summaries or papers.

Senior coach training focuses on the latest training and scientific research in China and abroad and updating coaches on new theories in their respective sports. It is divided into two parts: theoretical training and sports-specific training. Participants who pass both training programs can get the certificates which are valid for four years. The theoretical training is carried out by sports colleges and universities commissioned by the Science and Education Department who, through a traditional lecture format, focus on content related to the latest scientific training and research. In addition to the theoretical subject matter, the sports-specific training adopts an intensive training mode with no less than 30 hours (or 5 days).

The intermediate training sponsored by the Sports Management Centre of the General Administration Sport is differentiated from the senior training in terms of the depth of required knowledge. It is organised by sports bureaus of provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The training program also includes theory training and sports-specific training. The overall training time shall not be less than 40 hours (or 6 days).

The junior coaches training focuses on basic training theory knowledge. Through self-learning and passing the national examination, junior coaches can obtain their training certificates. The Science and Education Department develop an examination syllabus and an exam question pool, and organise examinations.

People participating in the national, senior, and intermediate coach training courses and the job qualification test of junior coaches must have corresponding qualifications, as shown in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

The education and development of elite athletes

As highlighted in the previous section, a majority of coaches are progressed through the grading system, however some are sourced through an alternative pathway. Since the 2000s, education opportunities (offered ‘in house’ by the GAS) were introduced to assimilate retired elite athletes who, due to their training, did not have the opportunity to complete the required examinations to be eligible to study (Wang, 2015). A number of strategies were set in two policy documents on Further Improving Employment and Resettlement of Retired Athletes (GAS, 2014; the State Council, 2010) to help retired athletes with job finding and career development. The most notable policies are 1) For those sports departments funded by the public welfare lottery, a certain proportion of posts should be arranged for the employment of retired athletes. 2) The GAS shall designate specific internal departments to undertake the cultural and educational work of national team athletes, and appoint full-time academic and educational administrators to coordinate, supervise and organise the general education and personal development of national team athletes. Thus, by offering education opportunities and forming relevant regulations on staff recruitment of state funded sports departments, efforts are made to ensure that a large pool of athletes who were unable to progress in China’s competitive elite sport system and had forfeited their education for their sport can still find a career pathway, including one as a coach. Through this approach, the government demonstrates a concern for athlete welfare and career development post-competitive sport.

Challenges in the recruitment and development of Chinese Sports Coaches

Although China’s sporting performances have strengthened with sports coaches identified as contributing to these world leading sports performances, the development of the coaching system, particularly in relation to quality control and ensuring a sufficient number of sports coaches available for deployment, remains problematic (Wu, Wang, & Peng, 2016). These

issues became more significant, after China's success in the Beijing Olympic Games, as the government looked for a new development pathway to transform from a big sports country (in terms of achieving elite success) to a world sports power (i.e., strong in both areas of mass and elite sport) (Tian et al., 2015).

From this review of relevant policy documents and literature, the following issues currently relevant to Chinese sports coaching were identified. First, the lack of sports coaches in China has long remained a subject of concern (Zeng, 2015). In particular, few young and educated sports coaches exist (Yan, 2012). Development is poorly balanced among regions, with the number of coaches available in eastern areas being significantly higher than in central and western areas (Zeng, 2015; Zhong, 2013). Female sports coaches are also significantly underrepresented (Zhong, 2013; Wang, 2015): less than 20% of coaches are female, and a majority specialise in medal-winning sports/disciplines and summer Olympics sports (Yan, 2012).

Retired athletes continue to form a large proportion of elite sports coaches, and school (mass) sports coaches are mainly sports college and university graduates (Wu, Wang, Peng, 2016). Whilst the number of elite sports coaches is steadily increasing over the past decade, the number of schools (mass) sports coaches in China has shown a downward trend with the development of coaches falling behind that of athletes. According to Meng et al.'s (2010) study, the ratio between coaches and athletes in China's sports schools has changed from 1:8 in 1995 to 1:14 in 2005; the ratio of coaches to athletes in sports schools has been maintained between 1:17 and 1:24. Overall, opportunities and resources are heavily placed on the development of elite sports coaches, leaving the sports coaches at schools, colleges and universities to be overlooked. Influenced by the unique national sporting system of 'Juguo Tizhi' (meaning that the whole country supports the development of elite sport), the development of coaches from outside of the elite sport system has been weakened to a certain

extent. As indicated in Table 2, for senior coaches in the school system to move up one level to be national coaches, special applications need to be made to the GAS; yet specifications to the applications are not made clear, which suggests that it is harder for senior school coaches to progress than it is for elite sport senior coaches. Such an imbalance in focus has also affected the professionalisation of school and mass sports coaches as those coaches often work on a part-time basis. That is, the role of sports coach is undertaken by PE teachers in schools, colleges, and universities (Li, 2006) whose CPD training and skills assessment are not offered or regulated by the GAS, or by anyone else.

Similar to concerns about the school coaches' academic abilities, the education levels of the elite coaches are viewed to be low. On the one hand, as Wu and Wang (2016) revealed, elite sport coaches' learning is often not systematic and comprehensive which resulted in lower education levels and research abilities. This has limited their ability to enter the school system in which academic education levels' requirements are higher than elite system, and their possibilities for career progression in the school system is slim. To create more flexible means for elite sport coaches to serve in the school system, the GAS and the Ministry of Education (2020) recently jointly issued a policy document revising the transfer criteria to enable more retired elite athletes to work either as part-time or full-time coaches PE teachers in schools.

On the other hand, although more graduates with higher education qualifications from sports colleges and universities have entered the coaching team, since they do not have professional sport experience, few of them can make successful careers in the elite sport system. As a result, the Chinese sports coaches are polarized, that is, coaches with professional sports experience usually do not have qualified knowledge, computer skills and research capabilities; and coaches who are educated generally lack professional sports experience. Therefore, how to effectively solve this polarization and make up for the

shortcomings of different coaches have become the key to the construction of China's coaching team.

A further issue relates to the assimilation of athletes who are able to skip some of the formal education and grading requirements has resulted in coaches who adopt the same approach as how they were coached (He, Trudel & Culver, 2018). More recently, even for some medal-winning sports/disciplines, such an approach of 'the Master Shows the Apprentice' has been considered as not modern enough for athletes' training and development, particularly around the area of physical fitness (Hu, Wu, & Cai, 2013). Subsequently, the aforementioned 'Inviting in and Sending out' strategy has increasingly been exercised both for coaches and athletes in and out of China, within the intention of 'learning from the best on the market' (China Net, 2006). For example, South Korean Jiang Jingzhen for badminton, Australian Tom Maher for women's basketball, and Romanian-born French Adriana Pop for women's rhythmic gymnastics. Such a movement is especially prominent in those Olympic success sports/disciplines, as the number of coaches and athletes in those sports/disciplines are often excess. However, the adoption of such approaches has been associated with problems such as friction between coaches and players due to contextual differences in culture and coaching methods, resulting in poor performance (Dou & Liu, 2014) and a lack of significant improvement in competition outcomes due to the brevity of many foreign coaches' employment (Liu & Wang, 2017).

Nevertheless, the 'Inviting In and Sending Out' strategy has implications not only on enhancing coaches and athlete's performance through talents exchange, but also on balancing the tension created as a result of being dominated in few sports at international competition stages. For example, a long-term strategic plan, called 'Wolf Raising Programme', was proposed in the 2000s, which refers sending out a group of coaches and athletes to foreign countries to help improve their performance or to represent those countries in international

competitions in order to avoid the situation in which all the finalists of international competitions were Chinese. A few sports have adopted this plan, e.g., table tennis and women's weightlifting. Representing Kazakhstan, Zulfya Chinshanlo's (Chinese name is Zhao Changling) winning of the Olympic gold medal (53kg women weightlifting) at the London 2012 Olympics was a successful example of the strategy (Cai, 2009).

Another issue in Chinese sport coaching is associated with CPD opportunities and course availability. At present, a majority of CPD training courses rely heavily on government funding. Many training opportunities and courses continue to be provided by government-owned sports organisations. This operational format is criticised by some scholars (Wu, Wang, & Peng, 2016) as too simple and lack of diversification. In addition, the feedback on those courses is rarely positive, mainly because those sessions were viewed as offering little value in solving practical problems. Even the GAS (2017) self-identified that, at present, the management methods, training requirements, and service for the training of coaches in China's sports system are difficult to meet the needs of sports development. For a long time, the coaches' CPD training was criticised for placing too much importance on theory and ignoring practice (Wu, Wang, & Peng, 2016). This was also echoed by Zeng (2015) who recognised that the imbalance between theoretical content and practical application has resulted in qualification which cannot effectively improve the knowledge and ability of coaches. The content of those training also focuses heavily on traditional disciplines (such as biomechanics, physiology, and strength and conditioning) and neglect the need for a more rounded and comprehensive development for coaches (e.g, sport psychology, coach-athlete relationship management). CPD training becomes a 'tick the box' exercise (Zuo et al., 2009). As a result, concerns have been raised regarding the value of this mandatory CPD.

In summary, on the one hand, following the call of embracing an in-depth understanding of social, cultural and political factors that might steer the development of

coaching (Rodrigues Marques, et al., 2016), our above discussion and summary of challenges in the recruitment and development of Chinese sports coaches were carefully done so to interrogate and reflect on the potential influence of the contextual setting (socio-cultural backgrounds) to the emergence of those issues: Distinctive Chinese features such as the Wolf Raising Programme and the significantly imbalanced development between elite and school (mass) sports coaching development, within the constraints of the unique ‘Juguo Tizhi’ system, are worth highlighting and could potentially inform and enrich investigations in Western contexts (Jones, 2016), serving as a starting point for offering prospects for making informative comparisons across cultures and concepts.

On the other hand, some of the aforementioned challenges discussed in this paper are also discerned outside the context of China. Research elsewhere, such as in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Portugal, and Japan, has reported similar problems such as shortages of sports coaches, poor quality sports coaching in general, a lack of development in education for coaches, and inadequate regulation of certification and accreditation (Horn, 2008; Nash, Sproule, & Horton, 2017; Nelson, et al., 2013; Phillips, 2000; Sawiuk, Taylor, & Groom, 2018; Aoyama, 2003; Cassidy & Kidman, 2010; Edwards et al., 2020; Gilbert et al., 2009). Those similarities identified seem to suggest that challenges and issues are transnational. This is interesting because, in many of the aforementioned nations, coaching forces are largely voluntary, in contrast to the structured coaching professional system in China. There is a belief that by making coaches a more recognised profession, some of the issues would be resolved. Yet, the Chinese case showed otherwise. The roots of these problems are hence worth questioning.

Recommendations for improving the Chinese sports coaching system

To develop China from a major sports country to a world sports power (Hu, 2009), a

sustainable plan for the development of coaches is required. The following recommendations for future improvement are provided for relevant policymakers, educators, and practitioners to address and overcome the aforementioned challenges prohibiting Chinese coaching development:

1. To reform the current coach education and development provision, a variety of channels should be explored. Attention needs to be placed on the nurturing and development of sports coaching talent so that retired elite athletes are not relied upon to fill coaching roles. Furthermore, sports colleges and universities should be supported in establishing sports coaching related degrees and expanding student recruitment to resolve the shortage of coaches and the imbalance between male and female coaches.
2. To address concerns about the quality of sports coach development, enhanced coordination between the GAS and Ministry of Education is needed to balance the disparity between the school and elite systems. At present, resource allocation has been skewed towards the elite system, however, some of the training could work across both systems. This has the additional benefit of allowing school and elite coaches to network and/or share knowledge and practice. Not only would this help to reduce the exclusiveness of the two systems that has been considered to hinder the development of coaches, but such an approach could also increase possibilities for horizontal and vertical career movement between the systems, which is currently limited.
3. In relation to CPD, various contributors—including the voluntary and private sectors—could play a significant role in the coach training system through joint ventures and cooperation with sports administration organisations. As discussed earlier, given that a majority of the current training opportunities and courses are provided by government-owned sports organisations who have little incentive to change, opening the CPD market and allowing different types of organisations to deliver training sessions will help improve the provision and stimulate competition between those organisations, which potentially will enhance the design and delivery of training sessions. To address the potential concerns on the uniformity of a variety of CPD programmes, the GAS may take a leading role in establishing CPD programmes standards for quality assurance and content appropriateness. Such

standards should ideally also receive endorsements from relevant professional bodies.

4. By increasing the number of CDP providers, training opportunities might therefore be enhanced so that not only at national, provincial, and municipal levels but also at county and township levels coaches can access those courses and resources. Training opportunities should also be stratified and classified to form an integrated training system encompassing amateur, professional, and elite coaching. Implementation of the “Inviting In” and “Sending Out” principle should be pushed for all sports/disciplines (including both advantaged and disadvantaged sports (Zheng & Chen, 2016) and both summer and winter sports).
5. In terms of training content, the government and relevant research councils could support multidisciplinary research concerning the development of theory and practice in coaching. In particular, financial support can be provided to coaching research projects that move beyond traditional disciplines and introduce a more comprehensive knowledge base.
6. The mechanisms for the reassignment of elite sports coaches to school sports settings and private sports organisations should be more flexible through the establishment of a ‘dual track’ operation model for Chinese sports coaches. This suggestion is derived from a concern amongst sport coaches who work in the public sector by the government sports departments and enjoy the status of public servants that if they would deploy to schools, they would lose such title - a title that holds importance as it is associated with secure employment and social standing – as which is not offered yet in the school system. By implementing a dual-track career route to enable a temporary transfer of elite sports coaches to schools, it would overcome such a concern and support the development of sports in professional and school contexts.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the development and refinement of a sophisticated grading system for sports coaches have had a great impact on the development of China’s competitive sports, contributing to dominant elite sport performances. However, such a refined system was not duplicated in the development of school coaches. This issue can be explained by the

organisational structure of the two systems. To rehearse the earlier discussion, at an organisational level, coaches are jointly managed by the GAS, the human resources departments of provincial and municipal sports bureaus, and the corresponding training institutions at all levels. However, in recent years, the number of sports coaches in China has been decreasing and the training rate is considered to be too slow. In addition, the organisational structures in place are viewed to be creating an imbalance in the development of the two systems. As the two systems are facilitated by two different government bodies, there is a resource imbalance, with the school/amateur sport system being less of a priority. Protection of the elite system and the former athletes assimilated into coaching leads to more numbers, however, this has less of an impact on the school system as the inflow of former athletes goes into the elite system. This raises issues relating to quality as there are concerns that the elite athletes moving into the system have the practical experience but are not at the same academic level.

Sports coaching has been recognised as a key reason for China's international prominence in elite sports. However, little is known regarding Chinese sports coaching and how it operates. This is attributed to a combination of factors and particularly because that scholarship in English-speaking countries exerted significant leadership in the field of sport, thanks to the advantage and tradition that English is a language of international discourse for scholars (Bray, Adamson and Mason, 2014). Thus, many of the abovementioned challenges and issues associated with coaching development were firstly reported in Western contexts. However, we would like to challenge this notion of 'newsworthy' whereby some studies conducted outside of the Western contexts, from which similar findings were reported, have been criticised for bearing limited weight or credit to the literature, and deserving little of our attention. On the contrary, studies conducted beyond traditional Western contexts contribute significantly to the field development, in terms of enhancing our understanding of the nature,

scope and value of trends, issues and concerns relevant to coaching development, to allow us to examine the extent to which those reported issues can be transcended or are confined by particular national characteristics (Parkyn, 1977), to form a broad body of knowledge.

Indeed, we shall recognise the global centres of gravity has shifted, in economic and social terms. The growth of sports activity in Asia is also particularly notable (Hong & Luo, 2020; Lee & Tan, 2019; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2012). These developments infill new perspectives based on different social traditions.

Our paper contributes to existing knowledge by providing an overview of the Chinese sports coaching system and relevant features. An understanding of the Chinese sports coaching system and relevant contextual features is valuable to facilitate a culturally informed perspective on the topic of sports coaching. Future research work is encouraged to explore the impacts of various coaching initiatives and programmes (e.g., the Wolf Raising Programme and the Inviting In and Sending Out initiative) on China's Olympic success. Further empirical investigations on the effectiveness of policy mechanisms and the outcomes of school (mass) sports coaching development are also required.

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Table 1. Numbers of coaches in China's sports system in 2009

Order number	Source	Number of Coaches
1	Governmental sports organisations	1388
2	Sports management centres (elite sport)	4192
3	Universities	172
4	Vocational and sports colleges	268
5	Physical education schools	3288
6	Competitive sports schools	137
7	Children's sports schools (amateur sports schools)	10264
8	Individual sports schools	108
9	Training bases	239
10	Gyms	540

11	Other institutions	256
Total		20852

Table 2 Qualification for coaches at different grades in “Regulations of Coaches Grading System

Grades	Job rankings	Specifications (for coaches in the elite sport system)	Specifications (for coaches in the school system)
National	National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports college or college degree or above and completed training at the national coach seminars. - Having worked as a senior coach for more than five years, with two high-level academic papers published, an academic article with international level reflecting the training results of sports projects, or many international and domestic lectures and academic exchanges. - Mastering a foreign language, can read and translate professional technical materials and can have conversations in a foreign language to discuss technical matters. - Having successfully coached athletes who were trained for two or more than two years under his/her supervision, and subsequently achieved one of any following results within four years: Top three in the ranking of the Olympics / Four to six in the ranking of the Olympics or top two in international championships or world cup / A three-time champion in international championships or world cups / Asian Games two-time champion or Asian Championship or Asian Cup two-time champion / More than three athletes joining the national team or more than three athletes representing the country to participate in the Asian Games, international championships, world cups or Olympic Games, and won five national championships or two Asian 	For those senior school coaches, who would like to transfer to state-owned organisations/departments due to work requirement, can submit their applications to the GAS for the title of national honorary coaches.

	<p>Games (Asian Games Asian Championship or Asian Games Cup) champion / Top ten in the ranking of the Olympics for team sport events / Top two in international championships or world cup for team sports.</p> <p>8. Team sports champion at Asian Games, Asian Championship or Asian Cup champion / Successfully coached and sent more than five athletes from team sport events to the national teams, or more than five athletes from individual sports/disciplines to compete in the Asian Games, international championships, world cups or the Olympics, and won gold medals in the Asian Games or two times champions at national highest level competitions.</p>	
<p>Senior Senior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports college or college degree or above. - Having worked as a first-level Coach for more than five years, having the basic theoretical and professional knowledge of sports, and having done rigorous research on the training and teaching of a specific sport discipline, with two papers being published or met an equivalent standard, or academic articles being considered as national leading papers that summarised the training results of sports projects. - Mastering a foreign language, can read and translate professional technical materials and can have conversations in a foreign language to discuss technical matters. - Having completed the CPD training of senior-level coaches. - Having successfully coached athletes who were trained for two or more than two years under his/her supervision, and subsequently were considered as a world-leading or Asian leading or national leading athletes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports college or college degree or above. - Having worked as a first-level Coach for more than five years, having the basic theoretical and professional knowledge of sports systematically, having a sound understanding of various coaching materials as well as basic coaching knowledge, with two papers being published or met an equivalent standard, or academic articles being regarded as national leading papers. - Mastering a foreign language, can read and translate professional technical materials, - Obtained the certificate for the CPD training of senior-level coaches. -80% of the athletes coached meeting the basic national standard, 20% of those athletes being good; Nine to fourteen of the athletes coached joining upper-level training organizations with one of the following conditions being met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Athletes, who were under the supervision of the coach in question for more than one year, were sent to the upper level and

		reached the national excellent level within seven years after delivery. 2. Three of the athletes, who were under the supervision of the coach in question for more than one year, were sent to the upper level and received the Great Athletes title within four years after delivery.
First	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports college or college degree or above. - Having worked as a second-level coach for more than four years, having the basic theoretical and professional knowledge of sports relatively systematically, demonstrating some research ability, can write thesis. - Having a preliminary grasp of a foreign language, being familiar with the professional terminology, can read the rules and regulations of their specialised sport with the use of a dictionary. - Having completed the CPD training of intermediate level coaches. - Having successfully coached athletes who were trained for more than two years under his/her supervision, and subsequently were qualified for national teams, and ranked number one at the nation's highest level competitions in team sports events.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports college or college degree or above. - Having worked as a second-level coach for more than four years, having the basic theoretical and professional knowledge of sports relatively systematically, demonstrating some research ability, can write thesis. - Having a preliminary grasp of a foreign language, being familiar with the professional terminology, can read the rules and regulations of their specialised sport with the use of a dictionary. - Having completed the CPD training of intermediate level coaches. -60% of the trained athletes meeting the basic national standard; two and more than two athletes joining upper-level training organizations and achieving outstanding results in national youth or the highest level competitions in the province (region, city).
Second	Junior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Must have a sports college or college degree or above, or having worked as a third-level coach for more than two years, or worked as a sports coach for more than one year. - Having a basic understanding of theoretical knowledge and skills of respective sports/disciplines. - Having completed for the CPD training of first level coaches. - Can use training and coaching methods proficiently, and can
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Must have a sports college or college degree or above, or have worked as a third-level coach for more than two years, or worked as a sports coach for more than one year. - Having a basic understanding of theoretical knowledge and skills of respective sports/disciplines. - Having completed the CPD training of first level coaches.

	accomplish training and competition tasks outstandingly.	- Can choose adequate coaching materials and accomplish coaching tasks outstandingly. -30% of the trained athletes meeting the national basic standard.
Third Junior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports senior school or senior school certificate or above, or having worked as a sports coach for more than one year. - Having a preliminary understanding of theoretical knowledge and skills of respective sports/disciplines - Can use training and coaching methods and can accomplish training and competition tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must have a sports senior school or senior school certificate or above, or having worked as a sports coach for more than one year. - Having a preliminary understanding of theoretical knowledge and skills of respective sports/disciplines - Can choose coaching materials and can accomplish coaching tasks.

Table 3 Requirements for Participating in Job Training and Qualification Test

Grade	Requirements for Participation
National	Having a senior coach's job training certificate and a professional title.
Senior	Having an intermediate coach's job training certificate and a professional title.
Intermediate	Having a junior coach's job training certificate and a professional title.
Junior	Working for more than two years as a sports coach. Graduating from sports training, martial arts and national traditional sports majors.

Figure 1. Structure of China's Elite Sports Coaches Management Organizations

