In recent years, the sport of women’s ice hockey is growing fast worldwide. Upon winning the bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, women’s ice hockey in China started to develop rapidly. However, the development of women’s ice hockey in China has encountered numerous challenges. These challenges include addressing traditional Chinese culture, gender norms, and the process of sport reform. This study used a qualitative case study methodology to examine the perspectives of Chinese women ice hockey players, coaches, club administrators, government administrators, and the parents of youth hockey players to understand how women’s ice hockey navigated itself within the institutional complexity to gain legitimacy, and how the different institutional logics impacted the identities of organizations within women’s ice hockey in China. An abductive grounded theory approach was used to analyze the transcriptions and archived documents. Findings indicated that there were challenges for the development of women’s ice hockey in China at macro level, meso level, and micro level. Actors such as hockey administrations, professional clubs, and ice hockey coaches and players at different levels adopted multiple forms of institutional work to find out ways to incorporate institutional structures that mitigated the fact that there were multiple logics. In addition, influenced by competing logics, the organizations created collective identities to balance those logics. This study provides insights into how the actors within sport organizations create a more satisfactory environment to gain legitimacy.
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Hongxin Li
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Upon winning the bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, China has been working to boost winter sports in the domestic market. The Chinese government pledged to secure 300 million people to participate in winter sports before 2022 (Guan, 2017), and one of the particular target areas of the growth is in the ice hockey market (Li & Nauright, 2018). The government and the private actors in China have been actively working to promote a market for winter sports. In so doing, cities such as Beijing started to realize the necessity to expand of hockey clubs and youth teams. For example, since 2016, a private ice hockey club was formed, creating one men’s team and two women’s teams playing in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) and Canadian Women’s Hockey League (CWHL).

In the past years, the sport of ice hockey has been developed successfully especially in North American and European countries. Ice hockey is a high body-contact collision sport, frequently employing an aggressive and violent approach (Silva, 1980; Tjønndal, 2016). Professional ice hockey players often legitimize rule-violating behaviors more than the players participating in less physical contact games (Silva, 1983). Scholars have recognized the hegemonic masculine, aggressive behaviors, and violence that have been identified as the dominant culture in ice hockey for a long time, especially in North American countries (Allain, 2008, 2011; Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995).

Because ice hockey affirms hegemonic masculinity, validates rough play and aggressive identities of masculinity, the sport is seen as a traditionally male-dominated institution (Moret, Traclet, Clémence, & Ohl, 2019). Therefore, the masculine nature of ice hockey suggests women players may experience numerous challenges (Etue & Williams, 1996; Theberge, 2002).
Although body checking remains illegal in women’s ice hockey games, many female ice hockey players still see body checking and physicality as a normal incarnation of the hockey culture (Rosenthal, 2001; Theberge, 2000). In fact, the final women’s ice hockey game of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics ended with a team brawl between USA and Canada.

Since 1990, women’s participation in ice hockey has grown rapidly in the U.S. and Canada (Morris, 2016; Theberge, 2002), then, it expanded to European and Asian countries such as Finland, Sweden, China and Japan (Theberge, 2002). During the past 30 years, there was a tremendous growth for women’s ice hockey, and many ice hockey associations developed games and tournaments for women and girls through different programs supported by communities or governments of different countries (Stevens, 2016). Research has pointed out the rapid expansion and issues of women’s international ice hockey, and women hockey players have to struggle to reconcile ice hockey with their femininity (Coakley, 2017; Ezzell, 2009; Morris, 2016). The prohibition of body checking emphasizes strategy and skills, making female participation in ice hockey more appropriate (Morris, 2016; Theberge, 2002).

Ice hockey in China expanded after the successful bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics. Both Chinese men’s and women’s ice hockey teams, under the support of the government, are making every possible effort to improve their performances (Li & Nauright, 2018). However, not many people in China were familiar with the sport of ice hockey (Li & Nauright, 2018). As of 2019, there were only 252 registered professional male hockey players and 239 registered professional female players in China (IIHF, 2019). Currently, the IIHF world ranking of the Chinese women’s ice hockey far outweighs that of the Chinese men’s team. Winning expectations are higher for women given their record versus that of the male players. Although the women’s ice hockey started from the early 1990s and its national team has performed well in
the Winter Olympics and IIHF Championships, the development of women’s ice hockey in China has continued to be slow (Li & Feng, 2014; Wang, 2012).

The logic of playing ice hockey seems to be in contrast with some cultural gender norms in China. For example, influenced by traditional Chinese culture (i.e., Confucianism), women in China are expected to obey men, to be humble, and compliant and respectful (Liu, 2010; Peng, 2007; Riordan & Dong, 1996), and Chinese do not encourage much body checking in sports (Jiang, 2008; Sun, 2004; Shi, 2009). In addition, in the sport context of China, the “nationwide system” of competitive sport has brought some success for women sports (Lu, 2010; Xia, 2015). However, the sport reform had some negative impact on women’s sport (Liu, 2010; Lu, 2010; Xia, 2015). In summary, it seems that the development of women’s ice hockey in China is facing many challenges such as traditional Chinese culture, the gender norms in China, as well as the sport reform.

Institutional theory is a theoretical lens that has been widely used to understand the influence and pressure of an organization from multiple social orders (Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence, & Meyer, 2017). Institutional theory argues that “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Organizations tend to integrate institutionalized practices to avoid scrutiny from stakeholders and society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In recent years, the focus of institutional theory has shifted from isomorphism to institutional work and institutional logics. The institutional work perspective focuses on the practices and processes of the relationship between institutions and actors rather than the outcomes (Lawrene, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011). The institutional logics perspective is an analytical framework for understanding interrelationships among individuals, institutions, and organizations (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012).
Institutional logics researchers examine how organizations align with societal logic orders, in order to identify which logic is dominant and how those logics interact with each other to impact the organizations.

The application of institutional logics helped researchers focus on micro aspects of institutional analysis (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logics, which are collective rationales and values, usually guide the actions of institutionalized organizations (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Southall et al., 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). For most situations, instead of being guided by only one dominant logic, organizations are affected by multiple logics together (Robinson, 2016).

Besides logics, institutional theory also has a rich relationship with the concept of identity (Glynn, 2017). In the organization’s institutionalization process, identity is working as a forerunner or the outcome (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009; Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). For example, according to Glynn (2017), for a new market, identity usually works as the causal antecedent for the institutionalization processes, however for a mature or changing market, identity is often the consequence of institutionalization process.

Researchers have applied institutional theory to institutionalized sport settings, and used research on sport organizations to extend the use of institutional theory (Washington & Patterson, 2011). For example, researchers suggested that sport organizations need to adopt different strategies to comply with the pressures from the governing bodies or environments in order to gain legitimacy (Adams & Stevens, 2007; O’Brien & Slack, 2004). Although the literature has placed great emphasis on the competing nature of institutional logics, research about the implications of logics from multiple (e.g., individual, organizational, cultural) levels on the organizations and the organization’s responses are still needed (Kraatz & Block, 2017).
future research, I argue that women’s ice hockey in China is a new market but changing rapidly under the influence of logics of sport in China, women in China, as well as the logics of ice hockey.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China and understand how women’s ice hockey navigates the institutional complexity within the Chinese gender roles and cultural norms. I conducted a qualitative case study of women’s ice hockey in China to examine the institutional work of different actors (i.e. players, officials, and coaches) seeking to establish the legitimacy of Chinese women’s hockey. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey navigate institutional complexity to acquire legitimacy?

RQ2: How do the competing logics impact the identities of organizations within Chinese women’s ice hockey?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I am going to provide a review of the literature relevant to this study. First, I discuss how sport in China, women’s sport, ice hockey, Chinese cultural norm, and gender norm play a role in the pluralistic organization of Chinese women’s ice hockey. Second, I briefly introduce institutional theory, its development, its basic tenets, and the related literature examining issues in sport management.

Sport in China

Since the 1980s, with China’s transition to a market economy, sport structure in China has also changed. The development of the sport industry in China experienced different developing periods (Wang, 2014; Zhang & Wang, 2010; Liu, 2011). From 1978 to 1992, although the country’s economic system gained much progress in the economic reform, the sport industry was still under the “planned” mode. National sport administration and local sport bureaus controlled the development of sports in almost every aspect during that time, and Chinese sports mainly focused on the performance of different national teams in the Olympics. Since 1992, the sport industry in China started its own reforming process. During this period, sport in China made significant progress, and the economic system of sport started to transfer from “a planned economy” to “a market economy.” At the same time, the government also established many policies to support sport development. For example, in 1994, the China Football Association (CFA) established the Chinese Jia-A Football League, as a pilot to move the sport industry into a market economy. One year later, another sport league, the Chinese Basketball Association was founded in China. Later, the professional volleyball league, table-tennis league, and badminton league were founded respectively. Since 2000, with the sport
system’s further reformation, the government released more authority to the sport companies and enterprises in China. In the 2000, 2004, and 2008 Olympics, the Chinese Olympic team made brilliant achievements. However, some serious problems still existed in the institution of sport in China. For example, some state-controlled companies were controlling the resources of sport in China, and many clubs, private companies in sport and relevant industries could not make enough profit (Wang, 2014). After the Beijing Olympics, since 2009, the national and local sport governments realized that their roles should be “server” rather than “manager” (Wang, 2014).

With regard to sport reform, scholars have stated that intra organizational conflicts and globalization were the main drives for the development and reform of sport in China (Lv & Shang, 2010; Wang, 2007). To be specific, Lv and Shang (2010) stated that national and local sport governments in China had too much power and the overall control on the professional leagues limited the process of sport development. Compared to the reform in other areas, the reform of sport was very slow and could not keep up with the process of the economic growth in China, thus the development of sport was impeded (Wang, 2007; Xu & Wang, 2004). Meanwhile, the sport reform in China had also made some progress (Wang, 2014). Yu, Li, and Zhang (2001) evaluated the development of Chinese professional soccer league and stated that the professional reform on soccer helped the national soccer team to gain access to the World Cup, which could be valuable for other sport leagues.

Sport reform in China impacted the development of sports both positively and negatively. However, in addition to sport reform, sport in China has always been influenced by traditional culture norms such as Confucianism. Confucianism, also known as Ruism, was developed in China more than 2000 years ago and continues to impact Chinese citizens’ thoughts and actions significantly (Bell, 2010). The traditional philosophical system of Confucianism encompasses
morality, politics, economy, family life, and education that emphasize morality and social
harmony (Sima, 1959; Oldstone-Moore, 2003). The core concepts of Confucianism include five
virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity (Dong, 2011). Kou,
Semaan, and Nardi (2017) explained those virtues:

- **Benevolence** describes how people should manifest love and compassion for others.
- **Righteousness** emphasizes how a person’s thoughts and actions should conform to his or
  her own beliefs, and the person should resist temptation. **Propriety** refers to how a
  person should respect behavioral norms that maintain social structures, such as hierarchy.
- **Wisdom** elaborates how a person should develop knowledge regarding what constitutes
  right and wrong. **Integrity** illustrates how a person’s own words and deeds support the
  collective good (pp. 379-380).

Scholars have examined the influence of Confucianism on sport in China. Regarding the
positive impact, Ma and Yuan (2008) noted the basic Confucian concepts such as “Integrity,”
“Righteousness,” and “Propriety” were in line with the dynamics of sport development in China,
as these concepts could keep athletes from winning the game by using deviant behaviors such as
doping, drug abuse, and violence. Tan (2000) stated that Confucianism has been the dominant
ethos of Chinese culture for thousands of years, making the contemporary Chinese sport reflect
the core concept of Confucianism and put the sport development in a right direction. Zhou
(2012) stated that there was too much emphasis on utilitarianism in modern sport, which caused
many scandals and corruptions in sport. Therefore, Confucianism should be the guidance for the
development of sport in China (Tan, 2000; Zhou, 2012).

Confucianism has also impeded sport development in China (Jiang, 2008), and scholars
have addressed multiple conflicts between the Confucian ideology and sport in China (Jiang,
2008; Sun, 2004; Shi, 2009). First, Confucianism emphasized “Propriety”, or “Ceremonial
hierarchy”, which meant that people should be satisfied with their status, “keep remaining their
own proper sphere”, and value stability and harmony over radicalism, which contradict the basic
concept of competition and “Faster, Higher, Stronger” (Jiang, 2008, p. 13). Additionally, Sun (2004) also stated that “Propriety” impaired the equity and entertainment of sport.

Second, Confucianism attached importance to the collectiveness, which constrained the individual’s talent and creativity in sport (Jiang, 2008; Sun, 2004). The concepts of “Benevolence” and “Integrity” made people neglect the importance of sport because they emphasized the building of “moral development” such as “obedience,” and “altruism” rather than the building of “strong body” or “sound personality.” In addition, in Confucianism, the concepts of “being moderate” and “harmony” hindered the spirit of adventure in Chinese sport culture (Jiang, 2008; Shi, 2009). For example, Shi (2009) stated that Confucianism regarded competition as “amoral,” which contracted the orthodox ideology of Chinese traditional culture. In addition, the concept of “moderation” was the reason why the Chinese national soccer team always had poor performance (Shi, 2009).

Confucian concepts of “Righteousness” and “Integrity” represented extreme conservative thoughts, which are not associated with the spirit of modern sport (Jiang, 2008). Believing in these concepts, people were not supposed to challenge the authority of their elders and people higher in the hierarchy (Jiang, 2008). In traditional Chinese culture, coaches were seen as “masters” whereas the athletes were seen as coaches’ “disciples” (Jiang, 2008). Coaches remain unchallenged and athletes should always obey their coaches without any doubt.

Women’s Sport in China

Sport for women in China has also been influenced by Confucian’s gender norms, rooted in traditional gender norms in China. Confucian gender norms include the philosophies such as “three obediences and four virtues,” “male superiority,” and “inability constitutes the very virtue of a woman” (Liu, 2010, p. 4). To be specific, “three obediences and four virtues” means that “a
woman was required to obey her father before marriage, and her husband during married life and her sons in widowhood, and the four virtues are morality, physical charm, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needlework” (Liu, 2010). Women in China were socialized to be obedient, particularly to men from childhood (Riordan & Dong, 1996). Li (2008) also concluded that traditionally “male superiority” was the basic philosophy of gender norms in China, “three obediences and four virtues” was the code of feminine conduct, and “inability constitutes the very virtue of a woman” was seen as the best value for women. Currently, in the patriarchal society of China, most people still deem “man predominates over woman,” “men are strong and women are weak,” and “men are bread makers and women are homemakers” to be the dominant ideology (Xia, 2015, p. 18). Researchers also investigated how people see “beauty” in China. The standard that the Chinese people used to define a beautiful woman always followed “the slender figures” (Lu, 2010; Xia, 2015). According to a study conducted by Xia (2015), Chinese women did not like to choose sports or physical activities as their favorite leisure activities, and a sizeable number of Chinese women from rural areas did not participate in sports at all because they were afraid of “being laughed at.” Those concepts could lead to a shortage of youth female athletes in China.

Besides the Confucian gender norms, sport for women in China has been long influenced by the “nationwide system” in China sports. Under this system, sport is seen as part of a “national project” and the national and local governments tended to intervene and control the sport in China. Government support was the key to the success of sport for women in China (Lu, 2010). Scholars have examined how politics and nationalism in China changed the development of sport for women (Lu, 2010; Peng, 2007; Riordan & Dong, 1996; Xia, 2015). For example, the success of the Chinese national women’s volleyball team in the 1984 Olympics inspired a
national spirit, as women athletes became role models for the liberty of women in China. In order to keep success in the Olympics, the government made many policies to enhance women’s sport in China, by producing continuous financial support (Lu, 2010). Therefore, for professional teams and athletes in general, the performance of women’s sports is better than men’s sports in China. Since 1988, Chinese female athletes have won more medals than male players have in all the summer Olympics.

Previous research has also indicated the accept of nationalism brought a negative impact on Chinese women’s sport as well as a positive one. The nationalism of sport encouraged women athletes to focus essentially on winning and obtaining gold medals in the Olympic Games. For example, in Lu’s study (2010), when being interviewed, a former national volleyball player noted: “I don’t belong to myself anymore. After we won the Olympics, the image of me smashing the ball was printed everywhere, and I was treated like a national hero. Playing volleyball is not for me, it is a national affair.” Another former women’s national diving player said, “If I lose once, then everybody knows I am not a machine, I am human” (Lu, 2010, p. 71).

Academic research also drew attention to the relationship between Confucianism and women’s sport in China. Scholars found that Confucianism brought success to Chinese women’s sport. Riordan & Dong (1996) stated in their study that the philosophy of Confucianism helped Chinese women’s sport achieve better performance than Chinese men’s sport generally because it reinforced discipline in training and made it easier to manage women athletes, who could endure incredible training loads. In addition, since most head coaches were men, female athletes rarely violated the regulations and schedules made by their male coaches (Riordan & Dong, 1996). In line with this finding, other researchers also stated that because the traditional Chinese culture emphasized the idea of “male superiority,” women in China were treated unfairly, hence,
their strong abilities to endure hardship, especially those participating in track and field, marathon, and ball games (Liu, 2010; Peng, 2007).

In general, the transition to a market economy also brought many benefits to women’s life in China (Xia, 2015). However, the following sport reform process had some negative impact on women’s sport. For example, the government reduced the support of women’s sport. In addition, under the market-controlled sport economy, fewer investors were willing to spend money on women’s sport due to its inability to attract a large audience. Therefore, fewer chose to become professional players in China. For team sports, such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey, some cities and provinces even disbanded teams due to lack of investment (Liu, 2010). Moreover, the excellent performance of women athletes in Olympic and Championships under the market-controlled sport economy not only brought team cash bonuses, but also increased their commercial value, which led to disagreement on the benefit distribution between players and their coaches (Lu, 2010).

Ice Hockey

Ice hockey is typically associated with traditional norms of masculinity, aggression, and violence (Silva, 1980; Tjønndal, 2016). For example, in the National Hockey League (NHL), there are some players whose primary role is “enforcer.” An enforcer’s sole job is to aggress against the opponent. “Masculinity” is a social construct (Weinstein et al., 1995), and is something that boys or adult men go in for, rather than something males are born with (Grunneau & Whistons, 1993; Weinstein et al., 1995). According to Silva (1980), the definition of aggressive sport behavior is “an overt verbal or physical act that has the potential to physically or psychologically injure a person,” and instrumental aggression and hostile aggression are two types of aggressive sport behavior. Smith (1983) concluded in his study that the perceived
legitimacy of aggression in sport was seen as necessary, good, or justified. Previous research has shown that athletes participating in high body-contact collision sports (e.g., American football, ice hockey, and rugby) often legitimize rule-violating behaviors more than the players participating in less physical contact games (e.g., soccer, basketball, and volleyball) (Silva, 1983).

A large body of research has examined the relationship between ice hockey and masculinity, aggression, and violence. For example, Cantelon (2006) and Stark (2001) stated that historically the hegemonic masculinity has been dominant in hockey culture, and masculinity has been seen as powerful force in hockey in Canada. In line with Cantelon and Stark, Allain (2008, 2011) also addressed that only North American hockey players perceive masculinity as legitimate and as the identity of hockey, whereas non-North American players were seen not as tough as the North American players.

Aggressive behavior is also seen as a socialization process for male ice hockey athletes. Ice hockey athletes are often taught to play aggressively as well as avoid detection by officials during the games (Vaz, 1982), and those aggressive behaviors can be characterized by coaches and players as normal and a part of efficient ice hockey strategies to social with teammates and to win the games (Englehardt, 1995; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Widmeyer & Birch, 1984). Allain (2008) states that hockey players who do not play in a hard-hitting, physically aggressive way are often labeled as “chicken” or afraid. Stephens and Kavanagh (2003) conducted a study to investigate aggression in Canadian youth ice hockey players, and results showed that the team contexts were not good enough for developing positive characters, and the majority of youth ice hockey players would like to adopt aggressive behaviors during the game.
Scholars also investigated ice hockey and violence. Earlier studies viewed hockey as a subculture of violence (Faulkner, 1974; Smith, 1983). Later, many kinds of literature indicated that there was a positive correlation among perceived legitimacy of aggression, violence, and the age of ice hockey players (Bloom & Smith, 1996; Conroy, Silva, Newcomer, Walker, & Johnson, 2001; Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995). In a study of ice hockey players’ perceptions of the legitimacy of aggression, older players who were playing at a more competitive level tended to perceive aggressive behavior as legitimated behavior (Visek & Watson, 2005). Loughead and Leith (2001) also found that even among youth hockey players, players who were older perceived hostile-aggressive behavior as a more acceptable behavior than the younger players did. Additionally, Weinstein and his colleagues (1995) used the penalty minutes as an indicator for violence and found that elder hockey players (age from 16 to 20) were more violent than younger players (age from 14 to 16) in Canada. In addition, researchers also found that American and Canadian ice hockey players saw violence on ice as a proactive approach to enhancing “face”, and players from European countries, including Russia, Sweden, and Finland were less violent compared to North American players (Weinstein et al., 1995).

Ice hockey’s symbolism as a “flag carrier of masculinity” (Bryson, 1990, p. 174) made women players struggle to claim a space for themselves in ice hockey (Theberge, 2002). According to Kidd (1990), hockey arenas were seen as “men’s cultural centers” where women’s role was just to be supportive: they were either spectators or staff for the concessions and box office. Historically, even in Canada, a traditional ice hockey country, women’s hockey experienced many difficulties such as recruiting players and gaining access to ice (Etue & Williams, 1996). However, since 1990, women’s ice hockey started to grow faster. In 1990, IIHF led the first official World Women’s Championships in Canada and in 1998, the admission of
women’s hockey to the Winter Olympics marked huge progress in the development of women’s ice hockey (Theberge, 2002).

The appearance of women’s ice hockey in mega-events, however, brought questions of the legitimacy of women’s playing in the masculine preserve of sport. In women’s ice hockey, according to the rules, the intentional body checking is prohibited. However, women’s hockey also requires a great level of intensity and body contact (Theberge, 2002; Tjønndal, 2016).

Scholars have examined the relationship between women’s ice hockey and body checking. Although body checking was banned, many women hockey players still had experience playing with body checking, and perceived body checking as part of the game (Rosenthal, 2001; Theberge, 2000). Theberge (2000) interviewed some women hockey players, who felt players felt body checking “brings them pleasure and satisfaction” because physical contact and hockey skills were necessary at elite level (Theberge, 2000, pp.133-134). Rosenthal (2001) discussed professional women hockey players’ thoughts on the physicality of hockey and aggression. She found that women hockey players felt that ice hockey provided them with the physical and mental release, and they appreciated playing hockey in an aggressive way (Rosenthal, 2001). In addition, even the coach of the Canadian Olympic team said that the women’s hockey players enjoyed the full contact (Theberge, 1997). Theberge (1997) investigated the relationship between aggressive behavior, physicality and gender production in women’s ice hockey. She stated that the elite Canadian women ice hockey players saw injury and pain as routine features for ice hockey. In addition, the women ice hockey players did not seem to care much about physical dangers of their sport participation. This evidence suggested that women ice hockey players were ready to accept the violence inflicted on their bodies, indicates they accepted the dominant model of ice hockey. If there was no body checking,
players would tend to use hockey sticks to stop their opponents, which was a more dangerous activity (Theberge, 1997).

Women hockey players also see playing ice hockey as an approach to making themselves feel better. Theberge (1997) stated that women’s ice hockey was superior to men’s ice hockey because women’s game emphasized speed and playmaking, rather than violence. Rosenthal (2001) also concluded in her study that women hockey players felt that playing hockey was “empowering and enjoyable for women” (p. 151).

In China, the history of contemporary ice hockey could date back to the year of 1927 when a book called “Paobingshu” was published for the first time to introduce the rules of ice hockey (Guo, 1983). This was believed to be the first time that ice hockey was introduced from Western countries to China. From the 1930s to the early 1980s, there were only men’s ice hockey teams and games in China. In the late 1980s, with the increasing popularity of ice hockey and Chinese women’s liberation, women’s ice hockey started to emerge in China (Li & Feng, 2013). Since the national women’s ice hockey team participated the IIHF World Women’s Championship for the first time in 1992, the Chinese national women’s hockey team was seen as one of the best women’s ice hockey teams in the world (Wang & Yuan, 2011). By 1998, this team had won two gold medals in the Asian Winter Games and gained fourth place in two IIHF Women’s championships. In addition, in the 1998 Winter Olympics, Chinese women’s national ice hockey team won fourth place. By then, there were 10 professional women’s ice hockey teams around China.

However, since 1998, with further reform in sport, the investment in ice hockey was reduced. Since ice hockey used to be popular only in some northern cities (i.e., Harbin and Qiqihar) in China, which indicated a limited market value, without government funding, ice
hockey in China experienced a hard time. The number of rinks decreased dramatically, and fewer people participated in the sport. By the 2010s, there were only three professional ice hockey teams in China (Li & Feng 2013).

Since 1999, the performance of Chinese national women’s ice hockey team declined sharply. In 2000, this team’s ranking was down to the sixth in the IIHF World Championship, and seventh in the 2002 and 2010 Winter Olympics. Moreover, the Chinese women’s national ice hockey team failed to even gain access to the Winter Olympics in 2006, 2014, and 2018. In 2012, there was only one professional women’s ice hockey team in China (Wang, 2012).

In the 2000s, although ice hockey was not popular in China, there were still some people playing hockey in Beijing, which was not a traditional hockey area. Most of the youth players were from rich families and supported by their parents who had experience studying in North American countries (Li & Nauright, 2018). With a rapid economic growth, people in Beijing were getting richer, so they started to spend money on ice hockey. Meanwhile, more families with higher income wanted their children to play hockey. By the end of the 2000s, there were around 1000 registered youth hockey players in Beijing (Bi, 2015).

Different from the traditional mode of sport development in China, the Beijing Municipal government did not play a key role, whereas families and private clubs were the main factors for the hockey development in Beijing (Li & Nauright, 2018). In 2012, Beijing Hockey Association (BHA) was founded by a few parents who wanted to provide a better environment for their children to play hockey. Since then, BHA successfully integrated the hockey resources, including ice hockey rinks, coaches, players, and referees, and hosted many tournaments in Beijing. Additionally, in a commercialized context, sport clubs focused on improving the
athletes’ skills (Cheng & Song 2007). In recent years, most of the hockey players in Beijing were from those professional youth hockey clubs.

Winning the right to host the 2022 Winter Olympics brought a good opportunity for the ice hockey development in China. In 2016, Winter Sport Management Center, a subsidiary of General Administration of Sport of China, issued a “winter sport development plan”, as a guideline to promote the development of winter sport in China, including ice hockey. In March 2016, Beijing Kunlun Red Star Hockey Club (HC Kunlun Red Star; HC KRS) was founded under the support from many organizations from both China and Russia. HC KRS is the first professional club participating in the world first-class ice hockey league in China. In June 2016, the men’s team joined Russia’s Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), and in September 2017, this club organized two women’s hockey teams, participating in Canadian Women’s Hockey League (CWHL).

The hockey market in China also attracted the attention of the National Hockey League (NHL). In the summer of 2017, NHL held training camps in many cities around China, attracting more than 200 youth players’ participation. In September 2017, the NHL held two professional ice hockey games in Shanghai and Beijing, celebrating its 100th anniversary. It was reported that NHL was going to continue the China Games until Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. Furthermore, along with the NHL China Games, some NHL officials met directors of the Chinese Ice Hockey Association (CIHA), trying to promote a cooperation plan with many schools (Liu, 2017).

The globalization process of Chinese ice hockey has brought hope for the development of ice hockey in China. However, it seemed that ice hockey globalization in China was not as successful as expected. Ice hockey games did not attract many fans. For the professional hockey club playing in KHL and CWHL, the average number of spectators for men’s club was 2952,
whereas, for women’s team, the number was approximately 2000 (Liu, 2018). Even for the NHL China Games, there was only a small audience. According to Li and Nauright (2018), for the first two NHL China games, there were 10,088 spectators at the hockey arena in Shanghai and 12,759 at the hockey arena in Beijing. However, the attendance only took up 56% and 71% of the 2 arenas. Because many people were not familiar with ice hockey, there were the rule introductions on the seats (Yang & Tang, 2017). In Shanghai, a large number of fans were Americans and Canadians living and working there, with many fans coming from the United States and Canada to show their support.

Contemporary Women’s Ice Hockey in China

Scholars have addressed the development of women’s ice hockey in China. However, most of the studies were focusing on the performance of the women’s national hockey team in the World Championships and Olympics. Song and Wang (2015) analyzed women’s national hockey team’s performance in 2015 IIHF World Championship, and concluded that although hockey development was growing in Beijing, women’s ice hockey in China had to rely on traditional hockey areas in northern China because most of the registered women hockey players were still from these areas rather than Beijing.

Wang (2012) concluded that women’s hockey was becoming more and more masculine in the Winter Olympics. He also investigated the current situation and the problems of women’s hockey development in China and found that four main reasons impeded the development of Chinese women’s hockey (Wang, 2012). First, there were not enough youth players. Many parents felt that there was not a bright future for the girls to play ice hockey, especially when the clubs could not get any funding from the government. Second, Chinese women players were not good at using body checking during the game although they were good at other skills. Third,
investment in women’s hockey was not enough. There was limited funding was from the General Sport Administrative Bureau of China and sponsorship of business entities. However, with the limited funding, some teams even could not afford the equipment, not to mention the facilities and traveling expenses for tournaments. In line with Wang’s findings, Wang and Yuan (2011) analyzed the development status of women’s ice hockey in China and found that lack of government support, lack of funding, fewer games, and lack of ice hockey players were the reasons that limited women’s ice hockey development in China.

Overall, the sport of ice hockey seems does not line up with traditional Chinese culture and the norms of Confucianism. Although body checking has been banned in women’s hockey, violence and aggression are widely accepted by women ice hockey players. The acceptance of aggression and violence goes against the Chinese gender norms. The Chinese women’s ice hockey was facing challenges from multiple levels such as the cultural norms (Jiang, 2008; Sun, 2004; Shi, 2009), gender norms (Liu, 2010; Wang, 2012) and the Chinese sport reform (Song & Wang, 2012; Wang, 2012; Wang & Yuan, 2012). Yet, how the individual organizations experience and respond to the institutional plurality has not been fully explored. Therefore, this research will examine how Chinese women’s hockey navigates themselves within the pluralistic logics. In order to understand and fully explore the development of women’s ice hockey in China, this study will employ institutional theory as a guide. In the next section, institutional theory will be introduced, and related literature will be presented.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory can be traced back to Selznick’s (1948, 1949, 1957) work. According to Selznick (1957), an institution is “an organization infused with value” (p. 17). Later, since the late 1970s, Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), Meyer and Scott (1983), DiMaggio and
Powell (1983), Tolbert and Zucker (1983) focused on the social construction of values within an organization, and those studies formed the groundwork of the “new” institutionalism. Although the neo-institutional tradition is still using Selznick’s definition of an institution, scholars of neo-institutional see institutions as process, practices, and ideas (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996).

According to Greenwood et al (2008), institution refers to “more-or-less, taken-for-granted repetitive social behavior that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order” (p. 4-5). Greenwood and his colleagues (2008) offered five key elements of institutional theory. The first is that organizations are influenced by their institutional environment or contexts. The second element is that organizations, especially organizations with unclear technologies, are affected by institutional pressures. The third element is that organizations tend to become isomorphic with their institutional context so that the organizations can gain legitimacy. The fourth element is that conformity to institutional pressure may be contrary to practices to gain efficiency, and practices to gain legitimacy may be involved into the process of decoupling, which enables organizations to decouple their ceremonial structure from the production activities when there is conflict among different institutional pressures (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). Finally, the last element is that institutionalized practices are taken-for-granted, widely accepted, and whenever a practice becomes viewed as essential for legitimacy, it is resistant to change.

Institutionalization is a process of social construction from collective cognitive acceptance (Porac, Thomas, Wilson, Paton, & Kanfer, 1995), which is determined by the legitimacy of defined or implied practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995).
Legitimacy is also a socially created concept. Individuals and organizations seek internal and external legitimacy within their context, and legitimacy helps organizations survive from the pressures of their external environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Legitimacy is defined by Suchman (1995) as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate, within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (p. 574). According to Meyer and Scott (1983), organizational legitimacy is the degree of cultural support for an organization. In order to gain legitimacy, organizations adopt practices and processes so that they can survive under the environmental pressures and organizations are guided by both symbolic and rational properties (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organizational actions are driven by three main forces such as coercive, mimetic, and normative, and together these pressures operate to lead the organizations to become similar (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991). In neo-institutional theory, legitimacy is a core concept and it consists of symbolic conformity and cultural understandings (Deephouse, 1999; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Ruef & Scott, 1998). Organizations have to use different responses to reduce uncertainty and gain predictability and stability so that they can be seen as legitimate (DiMaggion, 1983; Oliver, 1991). According to Oliver (1991), there were five strategic responses such as “acquiesce, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation” (p. 151).

The early work of institutional theory explained why so many organizations structure became similar. However, it did not focus on cultural heterogeneity (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Recent work of institutional theory tended to focus on institutional change (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002) and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) rather than the issues of stability. DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991, 1992) emphasized the importance of focusing on the impact of individual and collective actors on the institutions.
Scholars in sport management have examined the issue of legitimacy. Washington (2004) studied the process of NCAA becoming a dominant institution in the field of amateur athletics. Washington and Ventresca (2008) examined how men’s basketball in NCAA came to be dominant and concluded that its rise to dominate pivot on processes of institutional conflict. Cunningham (2008) examined gender diversity in sport organizations and discussed the institutionalization processes of gender inequality in sport organizations. In addition, Soebbing and Mason (2009) examined the NBA’s amateur entry draft and found that commissioners in sport leagues should balance pressures from internal and external environments to manage legitimacy. Recent work by Nite (2017) investigated how the NCAA addressed legitimate threats to its governance. It was found that the process of message framing could be an important factor for institutional maintenance work.

Identity is a construct, and early institutional scholars see identity as an outcome of institutional processes (Selznick, 1957; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). More recently, institutional scholars have shifted their focus into how identity works as a forerunner to institutionalization (Navis & Glynn, 2010, 2011; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). In addition, identity was also seen as the outcome or antecedent in the process by which institutions are created, maintained and changed (Glynn & Abzug, 2002; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). On an institutional level, identity was seen as “institutionally standardized social categories” (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, Lounsbury, 2011; Glynn, 2008; Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pratt & Kraatz, 2009), and it was more about its membership in a collective identity than about the unique features of the organization (Glynn, 2008; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). However, in the literature of management, institutionalism and organizational identity do not have many points in the intersection (Glynn,
Organizational identity refers to “the criterion of claimed central character, the criterion of claimed distinctiveness, and the criterion of claimed temporal continuity” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, P. 265). Organizational identity emphasizes the micro-processes in which the polymorphous action was guided by an organization’s unique attributes (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Glynn, 2017).

Glynn (2008, 2017) connected concepts of identity and institutions by the generation of multiple relational algorithms. To be specific, she used three “connector words” – to, of, for, to outline three modes for understanding identity and institutionalization. First, identity can be seen as a causal antecedent to processes of institutionalization, especially for the new market or fields. Second, identity can work as a consequence of processes of institutionalization, particularly in the fields that are maturing or changing. Third, in the processes of establishing, maintaining or transforming institutions, identity can also be seen as a mechanism for institutionalization.

Institutional Logics

The concept of “institutional logics” was first introduced by Alford and Friedland (1985) to describe the internal contradictory practices and beliefs in capitalism, state bureaucracy, and political democracy of modern western societies. Later, Friedland and Alford (1991) started to apply institutional logics to the interrelationships between individuals, organizations, and society. This application motivated research to focus on macro aspects of institutional analysis (Thornton et al., 2012).

The most widely accepted definition of institutional logics is “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols, and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences” (Thornton, et. al, 2012). The concept
of institutional logics is a metatheoretical framework that helps researchers understand how individuals and organizations are influenced by their situation in multiple layers in an interinstitutional system (Thornton et al., 2012).

Although neo-institutional researchers such as Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) paid close attention to how the cultural rules and cognitive structures shape organizations, the concepts of institutional logics are significantly different from the neo-institutional theory. The institutional logic perspective highlights how institutional logics impact individuals and organizations from larger contexts (i.e., markets, industries, and organizations), rather than on the isomorphism in the organizations or organizational fields (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In addition, the institutional logic perspective considers both the material and symbolic aspects of institutions, which enables the shift of the focus of analysis from the homogeneity of institutions to cultural heterogeneity (Thornton et al., 2012). Under the institutional logic perspective, instead of being subject to a domestic institutional order, organizations are affected by multiple institutional orders and are placed in positions of institutional pluralism (Robinson, 2016).

The concept of institutional logics has received attention from many sport management researchers. For example, O’Brien and Slack (2003) examined the English Rugby Union and concluded that factors from the organizational field level made a change in logics. In addition, in another research on English Rugby Union, O’Brien and Slack (2004) examined how logic changed. They concluded that isomorphic change with a new professional logic diffused by three patterns: status drive, bandwagon, and the social learning of adaptive responses. Furthermore, Allison (2016) investigated the “business” and “cause” institutional logics of the U.S. women’s professional soccer teams and found that they represent different organizational goals.
Researchers also investigated the institutional logics in collegiate sports. Southall, Nagel, Amis, and Southall (2008) examined the institutional logics of NCAA Division I men’s basketball and found that there was a conflict between the logic of education and the commercial logic. Similarly, Southall and Nagel (2008) found that there was a conflict in NCAA women’s basketball. Moreover, Nite, Singer, and Cunningham (2013) examined the competing institutional logics in an NCAA Division II department and concluded that religious academic culture often conflicted with the logics of winning and marketing, finally, they indicated that the athletic department could use some strategies to resolve the conflicting logics.

Institutional Pluralism

Institutional pluralism is “the situation faced by an organization that operates within multiple institutional spheres” (Kraatz & Block, 2008). An organization facing the situation of institutional pluralism is a participant in multiple discourses, addresses multiple institutional categories, and possesses more than one identity from different segments of the environment. To be specific, the pluralistic organization is seen as the organization that has multiple institutionally-given identities, embodies multiple logics, contains different taken-for-granted beliefs, and legitimated by many mythologies (Kraatz & Block, 2008).

Institutional pluralism is associated with the problem of organizational legitimacy. First, organizations are likely to adopt multiple practices and structures to deal with the norms, values, and beliefs of many social systems, and create and maintain conformity (Kraatz & Block, 2008). Therefore, organizations must first find out their own identities and then pursue legitimacy through multiple institutional rules and standards from different categories (Kraatz & Block, 2008). Second, it is hard to separate or compartmentalize different institutional identities in a pluralistic organization. A pluralistic organization sometimes can meet the demand of one
constituency, while other constituencies may have different values on it (Glynn, 2000; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Stryker, 2000). Thirdly, organizational legitimacy is that organizations should demonstrate cross-temporal consistency rather than just meet the expectation of the prevailing beliefs (Kraatz & Block, 2008).

Institutional pluralism has to deal with the problem of organizational governance. Governance refers to the organizational purpose and control (Hansmann, 1996; March & Olsen, 1995; Selznick, 1992; Williamson, 1996). Institutional pluralism seems to reduce the completion of organization governance because it is hard to distinguish who rules the organization with multiple logics (Kraatz & Block, 2008). If the organization has multiple institutional identities and purposes, the governance has to comply with the need for all those identities and purposes.

Institutional pluralism also has to cope with the problem of organizational change. In neo-institutionalism, transformation occurs “when one set of constitutive beliefs ultimately gives way to another one” (Kraatz & Block, 2008, p. 257). However, in a pluralistic organization, the changes are from legitimacy and government from multiple norms, values, and beliefs (Kraatz & Block, 2008). To be clear, first, under the perspective of pluralism, organizations are not stable, and changes often occur. Second, in a pluralistic organization, the meaning of organizational change is not stable. Finally, in a pluralistic context, both changes from external and internal organizations can be observed.

Institutional complexity is a “situation where organizations experience a multiplicity of different pressures from a plurality of institutional logics” (Greenwood et al., 2011, p.). Organizations face the situation of institutional complexity when they confront multiple institutional logics. Usually, emerging fields are often characterized by severe logics contestation because there are no stable priorities within those logics, whereas mature fields are more
“settled” priorities (Greenwood et al., 2011). When new organizations come into fields with new ideas, the interests in the organization will shift by either installing a new logic or reprioritizing the existing ones (Lok, 2010). Accordingly, organizations need to adjust their strategies to respond to the circumstances created by the institutional complexity.

In China, due to the economic transition, organizations have had to deal with the problem of how to improve efficiency in a pluralistic context. For example, from the 1980s, market logic was introduced to China. However, the government logic is still very prominent in many areas and is expected to be prominent in the future (Du & You, 2013). Therefore, researchers should pay more attention to studying the interaction between market logic and government logic in China, and find out how the organizations there deal with the pluralistic environment to achieve efficiency.

Institutional Work

Besides the concept of institutional logic and institutional pluralism, institutional work has become increasingly prominent as an approach to studying institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) proposed the concept of institutional work, which offers a new approach for institutional analysis. Institutional work refers to the “practices of individual and collective actors aiming at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Institutional work allows a deeper examination of “how institutions and strategic action affect each other” (Rojas, 2010, p. 1266). Rather than focusing on the impact of institutions on actors within an organizational field, reversely, institutional work focuses on the role of actors and how individuals’ action impacts institutions (Hampel, Lawrence, & Tracy, 2017).
The concept of institutional work is made up of two major elements, and the first element is embedded agency (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009). Embedded agency is how people deal with institutions on a routine basis (Creed, Dejordy, & Lok, 2010; Leung, Zietsma, & Peredo, 2014) and it is now at the heart of the perspective of institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017). The second key element is practice because practice is bridging people’s reflexive, purposive efforts and the institutions within which they are situated.

Pache and Santos (2013) found that hybrid organizations could lead to perform institutional work. Hybrid organizations combine distinct institutional logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2013), identities (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Glynn, 2000), and organizational forms (Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011). Therefore, the concept of hybridity seems to take the opposite point of view with the neo-institutionalism (Battilana, Besharov, & Mitzinneck, 2017). Organizational scholars and institutionalists have examined the combination of incompatible elements in organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Meyer & Roway, 1977). For example, Besharov and Smith (2014) recognized the prevalence of hybridity in organizations. Battilana & Lee (2014) examined the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of hybridity in organizations. Additionally, Kraatz and Block (2008) suggested that hybrid organizations usually exist in an institutionally pluralistic environment, and need to deal with the institutional complexity because of multiple, and competing logics.

Washington (2004) discussed how the NCAA changed its rules to keep maintaining its authority within intercollegiate athletes. Woolf, Berg, Newland, and Green (2016) offered insight into institutional work at an elite Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) gym and found out two types of institutional work (i.e., refinement work and barrier work) were integral in creating, maintaining,
and disrupting the institution. In addition, Dowling and Smith (2016) examined how Own the Podium (OTP) contributed to the expansion of elite sport in Canada. The findings highlighted the importance of agents in shaping institutional settings, concluded that the creation of OTP could be viewed as a type of institutional disruption, and challenged the status quo of high-performance sport in Canada. Furthermore, Edwards and Washington (2015) examined the creation of College Hockey Inc. (CHI). They found that by creating CHI, NCAA could remain competitive with the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), and maintain its legitimacy with Canadian youth players and their parents.

In recent years, scholars in sport management also studied hybrid organizations, institutional complexity, and institutional pluralism. Svensson and Seifried (2017) examined different entities of hybrid organizations of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), and suggested that SDP hybrids operate under multiple institutional logics while shared beliefs are underlining their legitimacy. Another study conducted by Gillett and Tennent (2018) researched a professional soccer club in England, found it was common that local authorities usually were encouraged by the central or national government to assist local teams. This research also discussed the challenges of building a hybrid organization under the conflict between professional sport and the public sector.

Lekwart and Lofland Gustafsson (2015) examined the institutional complexity of sport associations in Sweden and found that the sport associations had to adapt to different expectations from different actors such as the fans, the municipality, the volunteers and the sponsors. In addition, Gammelsæter (2010) studied the “commercialized” sport clubs (CSCs) in Europe and found that commercialization added complexity to sports and made it difficult to
manage those clubs. The clubs were made by different constituents from diverse institutional logics, which together became a “meta-identity” through multiple institutional constructions.

Despite the notion that institutional theory has been well developed and applied by multiple scholars, further research is still needed to be refined and elaborated by empirical research. For example, Greenwood and his colleagues (2011) mentioned that examining identity under pluralistic environment is still nascent and the studies on connecting institutional complexity and identity are in need of attention. In addition, Hampel and colleagues (2017) argued that only focusing on the work of actors that affect field or organization-specific institutions is not enough, and scholars should combine the concepts of institutional work with institutional logics. Both kinds of literature of institutional work and institutional logic did not successfully address how actors work together to affect the institutions purposefully and skillfully (Hampel et al., 2017).

Therefore, the purposes of this study were to understand the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China and understand how women’s ice hockey navigated the institutional complexity within Chinese gender roles and cultural norms. An examination of Chinese women’s ice hockey from institutional theoretical perspectives was conducted. Women’s ice hockey in China provided a suitable context for this study as it is facing challenges in a pluralistic environment from three institutional logic orders: sport in China, women’s sport in China, and ice hockey.

Table 1 summarizes the different attributes of institutional logics of ice hockey in general, women’s ice hockey, sport in China, and women’s sport in China. Within the background, each of the three logics has a distinct institutional logic attached in the logics of ideal type. Those factors are likely to influence the choices that it made to navigate itself in the
pluralistic environment and the identity of Chinese women’s ice hockey. Therefore, the integration of institutional theory and Chinese women’s ice hockey allows the following research questions to be addressed:

RQ1: How do the actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey navigate institutional complexity to acquire legitimacy?

RQ2: How do the competing logics impact the identities of organizations within Chinese women’s ice hockey?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Sport in China</th>
<th>Women’s Sport in China</th>
<th>Ice Hockey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>Nationalism, Confucianism, market sport</td>
<td>Nationalism, Chinese gender norm</td>
<td>Aggression, masculinity, violation, body checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority structure</td>
<td>General Administration of Sport of China, local sport bureau</td>
<td>Male family members, team coaches/club leaders</td>
<td>IIHF, NHL, KHL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>A platform to show the power of the nation</td>
<td>A platform to show the spirit of Chinese women</td>
<td>Flag carrier of masculinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>planned economy, market economy</td>
<td>Enduring hardship, Obey male coaches</td>
<td>Exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions:</td>
<td>Sport reform, government support</td>
<td>Government support, games</td>
<td>NHL, KHL, IIHF Championships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to succeed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions:</td>
<td>Sport reform, youth sport</td>
<td>Building the market</td>
<td>Developing the leagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study was applied to understand the institutional logics of Chinese women’s ice hockey in a pluralistic environment and find out how the different logics impacted its identity and how the organization in Chinese women’s ice hockey navigated institutional complexity within this environment. Case studies offer flexibility and concentrate on a specific system (Durdella, 2017). A case study is “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2017, p. 15). Similar to other forms of qualitative research, case studies can provide researchers opportunities to obtain an in-depth perspective of the research participants’ thoughts and beliefs through “insight, discovery and interpretation” (Merriam, 2009, p.12). In addition, the focus of case studies is a holistic description and explanation (Yin, 2017), which can help researchers understand the participants’ perspectives on their experiences, and worldviews within a particular context (Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

A qualitative case study approach was utilized in this investigation in order to ascertain the manner in which individuals interpreted their experiences, and how significant their understanding is (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I chose the challenges and successful implementation for the development of women’s ice hockey in China as the case. According to Yin (2017), case study research is appropriate when 1) the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions. 2) Researchers have little control over behavioral events. 3) The study is a contemporary phenomenon. Therefore, since “how” questions frame this study, and the Chinese women’s ice hockey is a contemporary phenomenon, the method of case study is the best fit for
this study. By implementing a case study method, I could gain a better understanding of the institutional complexity within the organization of Chinese women’s ice hockey.

Research Settings

The settings for this study were two professional female ice hockey teams in China. One of the teams was from a private ice hockey club located in the southern region of China, and the other team was a provincial team belonging to a local sport bureau from a northeastern province in China. The two teams were significant because the private ice hockey club was recognized as one of the most competitive women’s ice hockey clubs in China, and it as located in one of the most developed cities, while the provincial ice hockey team was one of the strongest team from the traditional ice hockey area.

The private ice hockey club, HC KRS, was founded in 2016 and it has both the men’s team and women’s team. Regarding the women’s teams, they were two women’s teams participating in a women’s ice hockey league in North America. In the 2018-2019 season, those two teams were combined into one team playing in the same league. The league in which this club was playing has been recognized as one of the most competitive leagues for women’s ice hockey around the world. This team was organized with players from China, Europe, and North America. In addition, some Chinese American players and Chinese Canadian players were also playing in this club. Coaches of this team were from both China and the USA. The provincial ice hockey team had a relatively long history in China, and it won the national ice hockey championship several times. In recent years, many national ice hockey players in China were from that team (Li & Nauright, 2018).

Participants

Participants were people who worked closely with women’s ice hockey in China,
including professional hockey players, coaches, club, and government administrators, as well as parents of youth hockey players \((n = 15)\). Three female ice hockey players from the private hockey club and two female ice hockey players from the provincial hockey team were interviewed. In addition, the head coach of the club, the head coach of the provincial team, a coach of a youth hockey club, one of the managers of HC KRS, and a female hockey player’s parent were also interviewed. Additional interviews included five Chinese ice hockey governmental administrators including the one official of China Ice Hockey Association (CIHA), one of the coordinators of Beijing Organizing Committee (BOC) for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games, the manager of China National Olympic ice hockey team, an official who was in charge of the Winter Sports Administrative Center in the General Sport Administration of China (GSA), and an official of China Hockey Academy (CHA). All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Data Collection

In order to answer the research questions, multiple data collection strategies were employed. The primary data for this study were gathered from semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews. The semi-structured interview allows participants to address the core research questions and to give more in-depth responses with some flexibility, and it allows researchers to ask probing questions, which may lead to findings of other ideologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Based on the interview protocol, research participants shared their perspective on the institutional logics and the organizational identity of Chinese women’s hockey in the pluralistic environment and how Chinese women’s hockey responses to the institutional logics from different levels. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes to 120 minutes. Right after the interview, participants were offered to review and revise their interviews and transcripts. In addition, once the transcription was completed, I sent the transcripts to the
participants via email and social media, and participants could check and change the information as deemed necessary. An audio recorder was used during the interview process, and field notes was taken to maintain and comment on the impressions, environmental contexts, behaviors and nonverbal cues that were not able to be captured by audio recorder. After the interview processes, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcription written by Chinese characters was then translated into English by a certified translator. After the translation processes were complied, translation was checked discussed with the primary translator and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

Secondary data were collected via archived documents from numerous sources so that an in-depth understanding of the logics and identities of women’s ice hockey in China could be identified and determined. Considering that multiple data from different authors often reflect the biases of the narrators, and the records are from different scope and focus of authors, I triangulated the data by collecting multiple data from unrelated sources. Those sources included documents from General Administration of Sport of China (GSA), the Beijing organizing committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the CIHA, as well as documents from those ice hockey clubs. In addition, some academic documents such as the dissertation of Xia (2015), the thesis of Bi (2015), research reports from Li and Nauright (2018), and online narrative reports from the mainstream media reports were also collected.

**Interview Guide**

Before the beginning of each interview, the procedures were explained and it was emphasized that an audiotape recorder would be used during the interview process. In addition, before the interview, each participant signed an informed consent form appraising them of the benefits, risks, and other information of the study, as well as ensuring confidentiality. Coaches,
club directors, and their teammates would not have access to any of their responses. There were two parts within the interview processes. The first part of the interview consisted of questions about the participants’ perspective on the women’s ice hockey in China (see Appendix A-E). Second, in the concluding portion of the interview, participants were provided an opportunity to make additional comments about their answers. Moreover, some participants also asked me questions regarding the study. At the point of the completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their comments. In addition, at the end of interview, I also provided a short debriefing about the conversation to the participants.

Data Analysis

An abductive analysis is a “qualitative data analysis approach aimed at generating creative and novel theoretical insights through a dialectic of cultivated theoretical sensitivity and methodological heuristics” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 180). The abductive analysis allows the researcher to develop their theoretical repertories with a deep and broad theoretical base (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In this study, a grounded theory-building approach was used to analyze the collected data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Guetterman, Babchuk, Smith, & Stevens, 2019). This approach for data analysis allows the data analysis process to achieve a “systematic rigor in conducting qualitative grounded theory research” (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012, p. 26). After the transcribing process, the raw verbatim was translated into English. A certificated translator was included to reach consensus on the translation. Within the general grounded theory approach, following the protocol, two coders analyzed the collected data independently to identify the first order concepts, second order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). Specifically, after reading the initial transcript, the terms, codes, and categories emerging at the beginning of the analysis, coders
discussed the similarities and differences among the categories to reduce the germane categories with the process of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then, Krippendorff’s alpha was calculated to evaluate the intercoder reliability (Krippendorff, 2004). In this study, the Krippendorff’s alpha (α = .879) suggested the reliability is fairly high (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Once the array and patterns of the categories are established, second order themes were identified. Then, the aggregate dimensions were identified within the second order themes.

Trustworthiness

An assumption guiding this study is that the organization of women’s ice hockey in China is constructed by different actors. Therefore, in this research, I employed a constructivist research philosophy were utilized for inquiry. The definition of constructivism is “one of several interpretivist paradigms and is concerned with the ways in which people construct their worlds” (Williamson, 2006, p. 85). In constructivists’ view, as a social phenomenon, organizations consist of the meaning-making activities of groups and individuals around the organizations (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Thus, I conducted the abductive study to collect and analyze those key actor’s constructions of the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative studies, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are four general types of trustworthiness. Credibility is the degree to which the collected data and interpretations represent the actual meanings of the research (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). In this study, the trustworthiness of the data was assured through strategies as follows: First, to acquire credibility, all interviews were audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data. Moreover, member-checking was utilized as another strategy to provide credibility. Participants were asked to review their transcripts for verification after the interview, and, they
were given the opportunity to add, delete, or rework those data if they felt the data were not accurate. Data triangulation is another approach that helped me to ensure credibility. Data from multiple sources such as interviews of the participants from different positions, documentaries, and websites were included so that the credibility could be ensured. Additionally, peer-debriefing was also used to ensure credibility.

Another aspect of trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings in one study are applicable to another context or subjects (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, transferability was ensured by clearly describing the research settings, and having a thick discussion on how the findings could be relevant to other contexts.

Dependability refers to the reliability of the research results, and the degree to which the results are consistent if the research was replicated with similar participants and context (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability refers to the demonstration of a clear link between the research results and conclusions, and the results are free from biases, motivations or interests of the researcher (Guba, 1981; Moon et al., 2016). In order to guarantee the dependability and confirmability, similar to peer-debriefing, an external auditor who is familiar with the qualitative research methodology from an independent third party was included. To be specific, the auditor helped in reviewing and examining the entire research process. Moreover, the entire research process was reviewed by my advisor and the dissertation committee.

Ethics and Human Subjects

Prior to the participant recruitment and data collection, the formal approval of the study was obtained from the university’s institutional review board (IRB). At the beginning of each interview, each participant was provided with a document introducing the research process in
detail. Then, all participants were informed that participating the study was voluntary, and the research team would maintain their confidentiality.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to understand the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China and understand how women’s ice hockey navigated the institutional complexity within the Chinese gender roles and cultural norms. Throughout this chapter, themes from the data that were related to the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China are discussed. Then, I provide insights of participants’ perspectives of successful implementation on women’s ice hockey in China.

Multi-level Challenges

In this section, findings referring to the first research question focusing on the institutional complexity are presented. All participants answered questions about their perspectives on the challenges that, in their view, impacted the development of Chinese women’s ice hockey. From the data collected, three categories emerged including:

- Macro-level Challenges
- Meso-level Challenges
- Micro-level Challenges

These are discussed in detail subsequently.

Macro-level Challenges

*Bias on Women’s Hockey*

Participants noted societal biases regarding women playing sports under the traditional Chinese gender norm (see also Liu, 2010; Riordan & Dong, 1996; Xia, 2015). When asked people’s view on women’s ice hockey in China, most of the participants admitted that there is still a strong bias toward women playing hockey in the Chinese society, which highly challenged
the development of women’s ice hockey. For example, when asked directly about women’s hockey participation, one of the hockey players in the professional hockey club offered,

I think most people don’t know much about ice hockey or women hockey players. I heard people say that we don’t look like hockey players. They think female hockey players are all very tall and muscular, like weightlifting athletes. When it comes to hockey, they first think of body contact and brutality. They think only with those could we play hockey.

Another player from the professional club also mentioned people’s stereotypes regarding female hockey players,

I feel it is normal… if you have a daughter, probably you don’t want her to play sport like hockey. It is much different from having a son…, you want him to grow up, mentally and physically, in a sport with body-checking… For girls, we are supposed to be protected and be gentle…, that’s the culture.

The coach of the professional hockey club also expressed a similar viewpoint,

Ice hockey is not in line with the traditional gender norm. Parents want their girls to learn some traditional girls’ skill such as music, chess, and painting…they feel hockey is a sport full of violence, and it is only for boys. When they see their daughters wearing thick gears, they feel that their daughters look like boys.

Gender bias was also admitted by a parent, whose daughter was a hockey player in a youth hockey club,

Many parents are not familiar with this game…, they either don’t know or don’t accept hockey, because they are worried about their daughters. You know, there are fights and body checking in hockey games. Every parent would feel it is a rude sport. The gender norm of China could be one reason.

As noted in the previous statements, the Chinese gender norm was still an important impediment to women’s ice hockey development in China. Most of the participants emphasized it was hard to recruit female players due to the impact of gender norm. However, the traditional gender norm was not the only factor that challenged the development of women’s ice hockey at the macro-level.

When asked to discuss how traditional Chinese culture impacted women’s hockey in
China, some participants indicated that the development of women’s ice hockey was somehow impacted by the traditional Chinese culture, although it was not as strong as before. Some of the participants could notice it in their daily training and games. One of the professional players spoke to this,

In China, most people feel that hockey is a dangerous sport. So, adults would tell their little kids that they should not play hockey because it is risky and not friendly. Then, kids accepted this kind of view. Therefore, some of the players started to practice hockey with the concept, and they may still resist this sport from their inner mind, and don’t accept hockey even though they are professional players… It’s not correct.

When asked about the impact of traditional Chinese culture, the coordinator of the BOC, who also worked in Beijing Hockey Association before, shared her ideas,

I think it has some negative impact on the development of hockey in China. In Asian countries, the lifestyle and education made kids relatively “weak.” Some parents cannot accept body checking at all. When they see their kids being knocked down during the game, they feel upset.

Similarly, the parent of a youth hockey player shared his opinion,

I think our culture has some problems. You see, we are good at table tennis, diving, badminton, etc., but for those sports that require body checking, we are not good at them. I have noticed that some youth players don’t dare to use their body… For the players in China, when they were young, their skills were perfect. However, after they pass 13 years old, those players were not as good as before because players started to play physically.

Another professional player mentioned that the impact of the traditional culture was not strong in sport, but it was related to the competence of their hockey skills,

Some of my former teammates would like to avoid the body checking, so they quit after practicing for a while. However, I feel it depends on their hockey skills…, she might feel that she did not have a big potential, so there was no need to be that strong.

Aligned with the discussion on “male superiority” (Liu, 2010; Peng, 2007; Riordan & Dong, 1996), the impact of the Confucianism was also reflected in the discussion about the hockey coach preference. Although most of the participants expressed that there was no difference between male coaches and female coaches, some participants still suggested that male coaches,
generally, were better than female coaches. For example, one professional hockey player expressed,

To be honest, from the perspective of the team’s tactics and hockey skills, I prefer male coaches because there is much difference in the way male and female coaches think. It is clearer to understand a male coach’s instruction. However, a female coach likes to pay more attention to your emotion and physique.

Coaches in this study expressed similar opinions. In their eyes, few parents like to send their daughters to participate in sports like ice hockey, and this is one of the important reasons that China lacks female hockey players. The coach youth of a hockey club shared her opinion on people’s bias on women’s hockey,

Under the Chinese gender norm, you know, girls are supposed be “gentle women.” Parents are not willing to encourage their daughters to play hockey because there are many body contacts in such a game… They would rather choose figure skating for their daughters. This opinion impacts the hockey development a lot. I feel that in China, the ideologies such as “men are superior to women” are still there.

Even a female coach, who played for the Chinese national women’s hockey team for several Winter Olympics, expressed her preference for male coaches. Specifically,

When I was a hockey player, I felt that male coaches were stricter, sometimes crazy… this kind of coaches were very helpful for Chinese female players. My coach left me the deepest impression because he was a “monster coach.” He had an absolute authority in the team…and he trained us in extreme ways, but it worked pretty well. In that season, we won the majority of the games.

Even in the national team, the manager of the women’s national team shared her opinion,

I heard that someone would say, “oh my goodness! you are a girl, but you are playing hockey? You must be very tough!” I think the gender norm and traditional culture made them hold this kind of view, because Chinese people like to see girls gentle and soft.

Gender norm and the cultural influence might continue in women’s hockey for a long time, but they are not seen as a dominant logic at the current period. The government has led the direction of the women’s ice hockey development in China for a long time. However, almost all of the participants expressed their concern on the problems of the government.
Problems of the Government

Participants in this study suggested that the problems within the government were their biggest concern. Most participants called for a strong governmental policy that could direct the development of women’s hockey in China within the complicated developing situation of sport reform. In addition, sometimes, the policy of the local sport administrations was not consistent with the national team. According to the hockey coaches,

Regarding the government policy, we don’t see a significant guide for professional women’s hockey, and there is not a good set of policies that combines the national team and local teams. Right now, just several local sport administrations are supporting their local hockey teams, but sometimes they don’t agree with the national team’s strategy. – Head Coach of the Professional Hockey Club

I am sure the state government is willing to support women’s hockey development. However, I don’t feel they are actually doing anything. We see from news that they are promoting hockey, but I haven’t noticed any change in my team. Everyone is expecting us (women’s hockey) to make progress, but we do need their (the government’s) support… only the players at the highest level may get benefit from the government’s policy…, it is not good for the players in the fundamental level. – Hockey Coach of the Local Team

The manager of HC KRS clearly stated that the government had too much power, and there was a need for guidance from the state government on the development of women’s hockey. In addition, the management of the government is also problematic. He talked about the problems caused by the government. Specifically,

Umm, the government, first, we need them to delegate their power to the hockey market and make hockey development driven by the market. Second, we need the government to make a united policy for the hockey development in a macro level, making rules for hockey market…, or at least give us some guidance. Last, the government should provide service for the hockey clubs, teams, players in the market… Sometimes I don’t understand… Some officials in the sport administration don’t know much about sport, and they are unclear about how to build the national team or train the players. The uncleanness has brought us much trouble.

In line with the manager of HC KRS, the manager of national women’s hockey team also stated her opinion on the problems caused by the government,
In our country, the government controls too much. Since it is so powerful, it means that it can promote hockey with a strong strategy. However, I haven’t seen it use many strategies to development women’s hockey. They did not adopt an advanced approach.

Further, even the officials of the Chinese sport and hockey administrations affirmed that there were some governmental problems in women’s hockey development. Officials from different sport administrations expressed their perspectives. They felt that the government did not have a unique policy, and its management was not efficient. Specifically,

Right now, we are still adopting “the whole nation system”, which means those coaches and hockey players in the national team are working as government staff. They are training together and receiving salary from the government. However, this kind of system is problematic. – The GSA official

In China, if there is a need to promote a sport, usually, the highest sport administration makes a policy, then it goes to provincial sport bureaus, and then local sport teams, then clubs. It is efficient and useful in China, like soccer, or basketball. However, for the hockey development in China, the structure is reversed. Nowadays, the games and tournaments are organized by the actors in the lower levels… Those hockey players do not have much hope unless the government can guarantee the professional leagues and tournaments. We don’t have a union for hockey. We have to rely on the government. The hockey development is in danger in China if the sport administration doesn’t take the leading roles. – The coordinator of the BOC

I feel the government should provide a policy for women’s hockey development. They should have some policies to guarantee hockey players’ future careers after their retirement. They can either help them get further education or help them get other jobs that they want. – the CHA official.

This evidence suggested that problems of the government was strongly related to the lack of the development of women’s ice hockey in China. Within the institution of sport in China, women’s hockey development and expansion still depend on the sport administration. However, the professional players, coaches, and the hockey officials of the sport administration expressed their concern on the unclearness of the hockey policies and developing direction.

*Geography*

Another challenge that participants mentioned is the geography. In China, hockey is seen
as a sport only for people who are living in cold regions of the country. Only people living in the northeast provinces are familiar with it. According to the CIHA official,

People don’t know hockey well… Hockey is not like table tennis in China, most people think hockey is for people living in the north, or cold area… some people even think that hockey is not a sport for Chinese, it is only for foreigners in western countries.

In addition, one of the professional players also addressed that hockey was only popular in northeast area. For instance,

Umm, most of the adult female professional players are from cold areas. There are, maybe, 4 players in the national team who are not from Heilongjiang (the province located in northeast China). I feel, in some southern cities, people barely think about hockey because they don’t have a suitable climate.

Meso-level Challenges

*Tensions among Different Actors*

Most of the participants noticed conflicts among actors such as national government, local government, private hockey clubs, national teams, and local hockey teams. This was reflected in the interview with the CHA official,

There is conflict between us (the Chinese Hockey Academy) and the local sport administration… according to the agreement, they send their youth hockey players to us, and we help them to train those players. However, the local sport administration has their own adult team, which means they don’t need those youth players after we get them. We have to negotiate with many local sport administrations to see if those youth players could play for their teams, otherwise these players will not have much game experience.

The private hockey clubs are necessary in the hockey market of China, which is seen as a new way of cultivating professional players for the national team, whereas hockey teams funded by the local governments are the traditional way of training female hockey players. However, the conflict between the private clubs and the local governments is very strong, according to the manager of HC KRS,

The parents of the youth hockey players want us to become more professional, and they hope there will be a professional hockey system directed by the market. However, some
of the local sport administrations see our club as a threat. They think our club monopolized the hockey market.

Referring to the conflicts between the local government and the club, the participants from local sport system also talked about their feelings on the conflict among different actors in women’s ice hockey in China. Specifically,

Now the hockey players are in the free market. We don’t have many female players in China, and the private clubs can use a higher payment to recruit those players. We spent time, patience, and energy to train those players, and when they were well trained, they started to play for those clubs rather than for us…that’s a huge loss for us (local sport teams). – The coach of the local hockey team

The private clubs recruited all the elite hockey players from the local teams… yes, in the private club, our income is increased largely. Therefore, the local teams are not as good as before, because we left for the clubs. – The professional hockey player of the local team

Besides the conflicts between the private club and the local government, the issue between the private club and the CIHA, which is the central hockey administration in China, was also substantial. Another professional hockey player who was playing in the private hockey club expressed her perspectives on the issue between private hockey club and the CIHA,

Umm…, as far as I know, private companies would like to invest in the hockey market. However, the CIHA doesn’t approve the format of commercialized hockey. Those private actors want to adopt the structure of the NHL, and actually it is good for the beginning of the hockey market. However, the government did not authorize the right to those private companies who wanted to build the league. Therefore, those private actors cannot make economic profits.

For women’s hockey, it was not easy to make a profit due to the conflicts between national team and the private club, which was reflected in the interview with the manager of HC KRS,

We haven’t made any profits through the women’s team… We are hoping for the best and have tried our best to help make girl’s hockey more popular in China. Generally speaking, within one year, we have spent over ¥80 million on the women’s professional team, and almost received no profit. What we are doing is just helping those girls in the national team realize their hockey dream in 2022. Right now, we have to help the national team cultivate and train hockey players in different professional leagues. What we can do is target on our long-term goal for both profit and professional market.
However, sometimes, the national team officials don’t agree with the concept of hockey marketization… they were conservative.

In line with the club manager, the hockey player in the professional hockey club shared her view,

We signed a contract with the private club. However, when the national team needs us, there would be some conflicts between both sides. I feel both sides are not willing to compromise. The club is not happy because we signed the contract. However, the government won’t provide support if the club doesn’t listen to the national team.

Another major conflict among those actors within the women’s hockey in China was the issue between academic study and hockey playing. Youth hockey players had to choose either to continue their education or give up studying for playing hockey as an athlete. This is reflected in the following statements,

When I started to play hockey, I wasn’t thinking too much about how the future would be like. After mastered all the basic techniques, in fact, I didn’t want to continue. Because my family members didn’t have the intention of me turning into a professional hockey player… They just wanted me to build up the body and have a hobby. I chose to stop the practice after elementary school, so I could focus on my academic studies in middle school. – Hockey player from the professional club.

Nowadays, in Beijing, hockey is popular, but it is limited in elementary schools. There are few hockey games in secondary schools. My daughter is in the 11th grade now and she will go to college next year. Currently we are not sure about her hockey career, but she doesn’t want to give up hockey… She is very good at hockey but as a parent, I also don’t want her to give up the academic work and only focus on hockey. – The parent of the hockey player.

Those girls training in our academy lack of basic studies. They spent all of their time on hockey and did not study well when they were young. We are worried about their future… when they finish here and apply for colleges, their academic performance is their weakness. We are trying our best to improve their academic work now. – The CHA official

In addition, the coaches of professional club, youth club, and local hockey team also mentioned their concerns of hockey players’ lack of education. A common phrase used by those coaches was that “the players lack of education, sometimes they could not understand what the coach was talking about.”
Lack of Resources

Participants in this study expressed that there were limited resources for women’s hockey development in China, especially in the years before 2015. One of the important resources was the funding for women’s hockey. When talking about the funding for women’s hockey in China, the manager of the national women’s hockey team stated,

Women’s hockey in China used to be very poorly funded, really… even the national team didn’t have enough money… not far from nowadays, maybe, some years ago, the team went abroad for tournaments, the team even did not have enough jerseys for all the players. For the 2010 Winter Olympics, the team even did not have enough money for the flight to Vancouver! At last, a company helped us and paid all the travels for the national women’s hockey team.

Besides the women’s national hockey team, the local hockey teams also did not receive enough funding. According to the coach,

We don’t see more funding for our school. Maybe those hockey clubs and local teams got some money…, but we didn’t. I hope we could receive more funding and support… but for the girls in my team, although at least 30% players from my team can be recruited by the national team, nobody pays attention to them.

In addition, the hockey facilities also limited the development of women’s hockey. According to the CIHA official

To be honest, nobody pays attention to the management of the facilities. By the end of 2018, there were only 334 hockey rinks in China, and very few of them could work as a professional hockey arena for hockey clubs. Most of the hockey rinks were for training the kids in those youth hockey clubs. – The CIHA official

Most importantly, as discussed before, there are not enough women hockey players in China (IIHF, 2019). Although there are more youth women hockey players, adult professional players are still in need. Many participants mentioned that recruiting female hockey players is the most difficult task in China, respectively,

In China, there are around 200 professional or semi-professional women players. There are more youth players, especially those players who were born after the year of 2006. But those players are not what we need now. Within the current pool of players, there are
only around 100 professional players throughout the country. – Hockey coach of the professional club

When I was playing for the national team, there were not many female hockey players in China. It was painful… For us, we could not retire… even if we were injured, we had to stay in the team and could not go home… some of us were married…it was very difficult during that period. – Hockey coach of the youth hockey club

The main problem of women’s hockey in China is the hockey population. Many girls don’t want to play hockey. Although it says we have around 250 registered players, in fact, within those registered players, some of them are too old to play any advanced games… In addition, we almost don’t have any hockey teams in high schools and colleges in China. – The CIHA official

_Hockey Foundation/Culture is Weak_

The weak foundation is another challenge for women’s hockey development that emerged from the collected data. In this study, most of the participants in this study felt that the women’s hockey is in a very low status. In addition, some participants thought the hockey culture in general is also not strong. For example,

Another challenge for women’s hockey development in China is that we have a weak foundation. The men’s national team is not good… so hockey is not a strong sport for us to win medals in mega events. If the men’s team performs well around the world, people in China will know hockey better. Then people will accept women’s hockey. – The GSA official

I feel that right now the Chinese women’s hockey has a low status. There is a big gap between us and the top teams in the world. Years ago, we were dominate in Asia…, but now it is hard for us to maintain the top three in Asia. – Hockey player from the local team

People prefer to invest in men’s hockey because it is more exciting. In China, both the government and the private actors would like to invest in men’s hockey. So, it is a challenge for women’s hockey…All the hockey fans know the NHL, but few of them know there are also women’s leagues. – Hockey player from the professional club

Regarding the hockey culture in China, most of the participants mentioned that people in China did not even know what hockey is. Fans in China could not enjoy women’s hockey, and
they think hockey is only for the people who are living in the cold areas. This was reflected in the following sentences,

You know…, we don’t have a hockey culture. For the fans in China, most of them couldn’t enjoy the high-quality hockey games… somehow, they don’t know the essence of hockey… when the national team were training in Finland, we watched the game between Finland and Canada. The game was much more exciting than any men’s hockey game in China. – The manager of the national women’s hockey team

Hockey is really not popular… people don’t know what it is. Sometimes my daughter went to practice with her hockey bag. Our neighbors thought the hockey bags were for fishing… Whenever you tried to explain hockey to them, they would mix hockey with another winter sport, curling. – The parent of the girl hockey player

The weak hockey culture made Chinese TV stations not broadcast hockey games often.

One of the professional hockey players worked as a guest commentator for the NHL games when her team was not in the hockey season. She expressed her disappointment at the Chinese media,

Those professional commentators even don’t know some hockey terminologies… and, it’s interesting that we don’t see hockey games on TV very often, because our national team’s performance is not good, so they don’t know how to advocate hockey. Maybe hockey administrators are afraid that people will notice the bad performance of the national team.

**Immature Market**

Participants were asked questions about the women’s hockey market in China. Almost all of them expressed that women’s hockey in China needed a professional league as well as a collegiate league. They addressed that a hockey league would be helpful for professional players because they need to play more games, get higher salaries, and it would be much easier for them if they play games in China, rather than in a league in other countries. For example, the hockey player from the professional hockey club said,

The top priority is that we need a hockey league in China immediately. We are expecting this, and it is our biggest expectation. We players always discuss about it… and we also complain that they (the government and private actors) have planned for the league for more than two years, but why don’t start the league? If we could have a league in China, we don’t have to always travel.
Second, the manager of HC KRS expressed that he wanted a women’s professional hockey league, because it would enlarge the number of professional women hockey players in China, which would help attract more hockey fans, and help the national team get more hockey talents. This idea is reflected in the following comments,

We need to build up a sound system the Chinese women’s hockey market. We must have a league in China and attract more professional women players from in and out of China, so that we could guarantee the league. If we have enough elite players, it will help improve the performance of the national team.

Additionally, a professional player also expressed the expectation of a collegiate hockey league in China. For example,

Other than the professional league, we also need a collegiate league… now you see, most of the youth hockey players have to give up hockey after their elementary schools… if there is a collegiate hockey league, they would continue playing hockey… it’s like how we develop our basketball.

In addition, participants in hockey government and hockey clubs also expressed that there were not enough experienced employees for the hockey industry in China because of the immature hockey market. According to the official of China Hockey Academy,

My employees expected me to get more sponsorship for us and raise their salary… because the academy is special… we don’t have enough employees so we have to borrow some staff from the CIHA… and they have to work in both places but get payment from only one side. They don’t have other benefits, and sometimes they have to give up their weekends and holidays.

Problems of the CIHA

The CIHA is working as a leading organization for women’s ice hockey development in China. In recent years, the CIHA utilized some creative strategies such as making a “crossover hockey team” to help develop women’s hockey in China (Li, Nite, Weiller-Abels, & Nauright, 2019). However, there were still many problems existing in this organization. Some participants felt it largely impacted the development of women’s hockey in China, and they also criticized the
CIHA. For example, the coach of the professional hockey club felt it was unfair that the crossover hockey team received more funding,

The CIHA organized a “crossover hockey team” in order to enlarge the youth hockey players for the national team…but the players are from skating or field hockey players… now they are playing hockey! Now this team received much more funding from the government, way more than any local hockey team or club… But they could not win any game internationally… Can you imagine that?

In line with the coach, the manager of HC KRS expressed his opinion on the CIHA’s management strategy,

I feel their (the CIHA’s) management for the national team is poor. There are many problems on the recruitment of hockey players… sometimes I see the plans on the trainings and matches. To be honest, it is not like a professional national hockey team, and for them, there is still a long way to go.

Additionally, even the manager of the Chinese women’s national hockey team was not satisfied with the CIHA’s marketing strategies. For example,

Before 2017, the CIHA was the hockey department belonging to the GSA in the government. In 2017, with the sport reform, the CIHA was separated from the GSA and worked as an independent organization… The officials there did not know how to market the women’s hockey, and it did not get much sponsorship. Right now, we are in the year of 2019, the CIHA still receives money from the government.

Further, even the professional hockey players could recognize the unprofessional managing strategies of the CIHA. Players in the professional hockey clubs and the local hockey teams were always influenced by the CIHA’s management. It was reflected in the following sentences.

The CIHA is in charge of the hockey development in general… However, it always changes the director, and each director has his own managing philosophies… so we can see the policies are changing all the time… sometimes I feel disappointed because there are only around 900 days left to the 2022 Winter Olympics! – Hockey player from the professional hockey club

Problems of Private Clubs

Another challenge in the organizational level is the problems of the private clubs. As an important part of women’s ice hockey in China, the private hockey clubs, especially HC KRS,
the professional hockey club playing in the professional leagues of Canada and Russia, have accelerated the ice hockey development in China (Li & Nauright, 2018). However, many participants still suggested that there were many problems in those private clubs. For instance, the coordinator of the BOC shared her idea,

In China, the women’s hockey clubs are polarized… you know, HC KRS is rich, and it is an advanced professional hockey club. However, I know another women’s hockey club in Hebei Province… and they don’t have much support. The owner has to sell his own house and cars to support the club…

Regarding the management of the private hockey club, the professional player felt it was not professional. She explained,

I feel the management of the club is too bad… Although our team has both Chinese players and foreign players, they always rely on the foreign players… We barely have the opportunities to play during the games. In addition, they did not do a good job for our training.

In addition, the CIHA official also discussed the problems of the private hockey clubs in China. He felt that all of the private hockey clubs in China were not professional. For example,

We don’t have a real professional hockey club for women players. Maybe HC KRS could be one… and there are other clubs in northeastern China and Zhejiang Province, and they organized those clubs just for promoting hockey.

The manager of the women’s national hockey team concurred with this opinion,

I feel that, those private hockey clubs are still adopting the “government-like” structures, including HC KRS. The club is playing in the Russian league because it was funded by different parts including some Russian investors… and its mother company is a resource cooperation based in Hong Kong.

Micro-level Challenges

Challenges at micro level also emerged from the collected data. The professional hockey players, the hockey government officials, along with the coaches suggested that there were trust issues in women’s ice hockey in China because the career path is not clear for professional hockey players. Additionally, some participants also expressed their concerns on the cost of
playing hockey because it is really expensive to play hockey in China.

Trust Issue

Participants in this study stated that an important factor that challenges the women’s hockey development in China was the unclear future for hockey players. This is reflected in the commentary of the hockey coaches,

For the girls in my team, they don’t know if they could have a bright future… maybe they play hockey for ten years and then they don’t know what to do…, and they are afraid of that! Perhaps some of them even could not become professional players… so the parents don’t want their daughters to take the risk to play hockey. – The hockey coach of the local team

Although we have more girls playing hockey, after elementary school, what are they going to do? How many schools have hockey teams for girls? … If they choose to play hockey as professional players, how much money can they get? Additionally, we are afraid that after 2022 Winter Olympics, the hockey development will not keep going… – The hockey coach of the youth club

Officials of the hockey organizations in China shared similar sentiment as the hockey coaches. For example,

I think the job market is not good for our women’s hockey players. What are they going to do after their hockey career? If we don’t have a good strategy, then we could not recruit enough players… This is also the greatest concern for their parents. – The CHA official

Right now, the women hockey players in China have a relatively short career. I stayed in the national team for 15 years before retirement. But many players who were younger than me retired very early now…because they could not see any hope. Most of them have a concern about their future. They are insecure about their job career. – The GSA official

Playing Hockey is Expensive

In addition to the trust issue, participants in this study conveyed that playing hockey in China is expensive. They felt that hockey is not a sport for ordinary families, and only the rich ones could afford it. The GSA official and the CHA official conveyed their opinions on the hockey participation. Specifically,
Hockey is a sport for entertainment, and it is not for everybody... Hockey is a high consumption that requires people’s higher income... Therefore, not many people play hockey..., we don’t have many elite players because it requires a lot of money. – The GSA official

In fact, hockey is an expensive sport. Not many families could afford the expenses for their children to play hockey. On average, per year, including coaching fees, hockey equipment, and renting the rinks, each family has to spend more than six figures for their kid. – The CHA official

Summary

All participants in this study talked about the challenges for the development of women’s ice hockey in China. First, at the macro level, the challenges were from gender norm, the traditional Chinese culture, and the government. In addition, more challenges such as the tension among different actors, lack of resources, weak hockey foundation, immature hockey market, problems of the CIHA and problems of private clubs were emerged at the meso level. Finally, trust issue and the high cost of playing hockey were the challenges at the micro level.

Perspectives for Successful Implementation

This section presents the perspectives about how to successfully develop Chinese women’s ice hockey. All participants answered questions about their perspectives on how to encourage successful implementation of women’s ice hockey. In line with the challenges, there are also the three categories described, including perspectives of successful implementation at macro, meso, and micro levels.

Perspectives of Successful Implementation at Macro-level

Building Women’s Hockey Culture

Many participants realized that the hockey culture in China is not popular. Within the societal level, the first theme emerged from the data was building women’s hockey culture. Each
participant acknowledged that the Chinese women’s national hockey team used to achieve many successes in 1990s and 2000s. Therefore, women’s hockey culture should be built by emphasizing the splendid history of women’s hockey team. According to a professional player,

Actually, the Chinese women’s hockey used to be good. When I was young, the performance of women’s national team was much better. You know, in China, the government would like to support those sport teams that have a potential to get a good result in the Olympics. That’s why they are trying to make hockey popular… I feel, we have hope.

The official of China Hockey Academy shared her opinion,

I feel the history of Chinese women’s hockey is exemplary. In the 1998 Winter Olympics, the national women’s hockey team did pretty good. And in 2002 and 2010 Winter Olympic Games, the Chinese women’s hockey team got the 7th place. So, before 2010, the team was at the top level around the world. It was hard for a team sport! We are advocating it… so people will be proud of the women’s team. I feel Chinese women’s hockey players have a dedication to hockey!

In addition, compared to the men’s national team, women’s team did much better in the international games. According to the manager of women’s national team, women’s hockey culture could be built through highlighting the comparison between women’s team and men’s team. She said,

We have a potential to be one of the top teams around the world. The performance of women’s team was good, and the ranking of women’s national team is much higher than the men’s team. Therefore, the government wants to promote it, and it would be great if women’s team could bring a medal for China! At least there is some hope for the women’s team.

Patriotism

The culture of women’s hockey was also enhanced by patriotism. As discussed previously, women’s sport in China has a splendid history influenced by the national spirit (Lu, 2010). For women’s hockey, it also enhanced Chinese people’s patriotism, so that people who are working with Chinese women’s ice hockey would be full of enthusiasm. The professional hockey players captured this philosophy when asked questions about playing hockey in China,
I think ice hockey is a team sport, just like the women’s volleyball, which could greatly prove and represent our national spirit. If the team sports are developing well, the country is powerful!... Everything I have done, it is not only for myself, it also represents “Chinese Women’s Hockey.” So, I have my responsibilities... I am playing for the country and I am trying to bring honor to my country. In return, I can also gain some achievement by playing for our country. – Hockey player from the professional club

For me, I have to care about my current situation... I am playing hockey like an icon for the women’s hockey in China... I will keep training hard so that I could be better. Everything I am doing is not just for myself... it represents women’s hockey in China. – Hockey player from the professional club

In the national team, we have 18 players, but we need to stick together and have a united thought during the games. In that way, even if we are not strong in skills and strategies, we could also beat the others. – Hockey player from the local team

The hockey government officials also reflected on the value of patriotism on women’s hockey culture,

We need the hockey culture... You know, among those winter sports, hockey is the only team sport... so hockey represents a nation’s strength. It is not just a sport... It is a symbol of the humanistic strength of a nation. That’s the most important. – The GSA official

Sport is a way of holding together the national strength. We have economic growth, but people still need to see the national flag rising in the mega events... this kind of national proud gives us a higher expectation on women’s hockey. – The CHA official

In addition, a hockey coach mentioned,

For the girls in my team, some of them haven’t thought much about their future. However, their idols are the women players in the national teams. They always say that they want to play hockey as good as those “big sisters” in the national team. So, in their mind, those national team players are their role models.

Changing People’s Bias

At the macro-level, changing people’s bias is also necessary. As previously discussed, participants in this study admitted that there was bias regarding women’s ice hockey in China. However, when asked about how to change people’s bias, participants shared varying opinions. Hockey coaches felt that when referring to this sport in the Olympics, people may not hold a
strong bias against female athletes. For example, the coach of the professional club stated her opinion,

I feel there is some gender norm here. But in sport, the bias is not as much as in our society. Right now, you see, I think 80% of the Olympic medals were won by female players… Therefore, I feel, at least in sports, the bias is not as strong as before, so we should let people know it and promote women’s hockey.

In line with the hockey coach, the CIHA official also felt that people’s bias could be changed by advocating the performance of women’s sport achievement in the Olympics, but he also expressed that there was a long way to go,

Our initial to promote women’s hockey was to encourage girls to participate in this game, and let people know that hockey is not only for men. I feel people’s view is changing gradually… people started to get familiar with women sport in the Winter Olympics, and the achievement of women sports in China also helped people realize that women can also play hockey. But yes, the women’s hockey is still at its beginning stage in China.

Regarding changing the bias on women’s ice hockey, the CHA official suggested that the combination of traditional culture and globalization would be useful. The following was her response,

I feel the gender bias and negative impact of cultural influence is weaker. Our culture can merge into the globalization process of sport. Although we emphasize the traditional culture, we also should value the spirit of sport, like other (western) countries… which also brings us the resolution for perfection. Although we have the gender norm and traditional Chinese culture impact, if we could enhance our communication with other countries, there will be more girls playing hockey in the future, and hopefully some of them will choose hockey as their career. The cultural impact will be nothing if we could create more job opportunities after their retirement.

For the private hockey clubs, they market women’s hockey because it is easier to understand compared to men’s hockey. According to the manager of HC KRS,

We would like to market women’s hockey so that people could change their bias for a little bit. It is much easier to understand women’s hockey because body checking is banned in women’s hockey, and it emphasizes skills and speed. It is fun to watch women’s hockey. Therefore, if a person doesn’t know hockey, they would learn it faster by watching women’s hockey.

In addition, another appropriate approach to reducing people’s bias is having
entertainment celebrities promote hockey. Many participants in this study stated that it was a
creative way to promote hockey in China. In recent years, a TV station has created a program,
which invited some entertainment celebrities to promote ice hockey (Baidu, 2019). The GSA
official acknowledged the effectiveness of the TV program. She explained,

The TV entertainment program is good. It attracts many girls and their parents to watch. It uses entertainment celebrities to promote hockey because people in China barely know hockey. And the TV program helps people understand this game.

The parent of a hockey player recognized the importance of the TV program although he did not like it. He explained,

People do not know what hockey is. By watching the entertainment hockey program, they could know some basic knowledge about hockey, the rules, the positions, etc. I have to say that now it is an efficient way. But I don’t want it. Neither basketball nor soccer needs a movie star’s help!

In addition to those perspectives mentioned above, participants understood that there should be a long-term goal to make people in China change their bias and accept women’s hockey. For instance,

I am positive on the development of women’s hockey in China. I don’t feel the national team is going to perform that well in the Beijing Winter Olympics. However, I feel that the training of our youth hockey players is much better. So, in the next five to ten years, the national team will be strong, which will help with the growth of women’s hockey. – The GSA official

In fact, we need to have a long-term goal for women’s hockey in China. The cultural impact and the gender norm should be changed. We need time, and you should also give time to the government, as well as the market. When people are familiar with hockey and women’s hockey, you can finally build up a sound hockey system. – The manager of women’s national team

*Utilizing the Government Power*

Another theme that emerged from the data is utilizing the government power. In China, the government power is still dominant in sport areas and has provided much support for women’s sport teams (Lu, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative to discuss about the government
power on women’s ice hockey development. Participants in this study discussed the government power and acknowledged that in the current period, the development of women’s ice hockey in China still relies much on the government power. In fact, the state and local governments have provided much support for the women’s hockey development. Specifically,

The national government, and the local governments provided us many supports. For example, they help us secure our home arena, providing security guards for the hockey games…in addition, the local government will reward us according to our final rankings in the professional hockey league. I feel they are doing a good job. You see, the Shenzhen municipal government also provided two dormitory buildings for our players. – The manager of HC KRS

The state government gives the CHA much funding. Right now, around 100 players in this academy don’t have to pay for their training and study. So, I would say, the government helped a lot. Otherwise, those youth players won’t have many opportunities to continue their hockey dreams. – The CHA official

Besides the funding and facility support, the government has set out some policies to support hockey development in China. According to the coordinator of the BOC,

Since 2015, there has been some policy support for hockey development. Currently, in Beijing, the government made a policy to make sure each district will have at least one hockey arena. And it also made policies to support schools to build hockey rinks… in addition, it also changed the policy for the registration of professional women hockey players. Now, I feel, it is easier for them to transfer to other teams.

Another classical policy which is called “Hockey from north to south, and from east to west”, was established to help expand ice hockey from the traditional areas to other areas in China (Pan, 2018). According to the CIHA official,

The GSA has made it a general policy, which requires the state government and local governments to build more facilities, invest more money, and train coaches for women’s hockey. In addition, we are advocating the “Inline Hockey” in southern cities, I feel it is pretty helpful.

Furthermore, in order to help professional hockey players to secure a job after their retirement, the government is also working on some policies. For example, the GSA official shared this information,
The hockey players should know the challenges after their retirement. Right now, we are going to make a specific plan for retired hockey players. The GSA established a committee for them, and try to help them find some jobs such as hockey coach and P.E. teacher…

In addition, the political leader’s call for promoting winter sport is acting like a powerful enhancement for hockey promotion. Many participants shared their opinions,

In my opinion, we develop women’s hockey because President Xi’s call “Encourage 300 million people to get involved in winter sport.” I feel it helps develop women’s hockey. The government knows that those kids in the schools may not become professional players in the future, but it helped with the hockey popularization. – Manager of the national women’s hockey team

Right now, hockey is becoming popular. The president called for the participation in winter sports…can you imagine that? How powerful it is! Which provincial governor would not follow his call? You see, many elementary schools organized their own hockey teams! – The hockey coach of the local team

Moreover, some participants addressed that the government’s adopting “hockey diplomacy” would be useful when promoting ice hockey in China. Specifically,

In China, we are adopting “hockey diplomacy.” Last June, our president and Russian president watched a youth hockey game together in Tianjin. And the Chinese Prime Minister, when visiting Canada, was also involved in some hockey events. Therefore, the development of women’s hockey in China is necessary. – The CHA official

I remember some years ago, the presidents of China and Russia sat together and watched a hockey game. Since then, China started to develop hockey. If the political leaders pay attention to it, hockey will be popular accordingly. – Hockey player of the professional club

_Uutilizing Mega-events_

The participants in this study stated that mega-events such as Winter Olympics and Hockey Tournaments are opportunities to promote women’s hockey development in China. Most of them discussed how the Winter Olympics brought hockey popularity whereas some of the participants also mentioned other events such as the IIHF World Tournament. The manager of the national women’s hockey team voiced an intriguing perspective during the interview, which
is reflected in the following statement,

The state is utilizing Winter Olympics to popularize hockey, and we would like to advocate the performance of the women’s hockey team so that it will attract people’s attention to this sport. After all, women’s team have a higher chance to win a medal… if people know hockey better, then the hockey market will be stronger.

In line with the manager of the national team, the coordinator of the BOC stated that women’s hockey developed a lot because of the 2022 Winter Olympics. Specifically,

Because we are going to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, women’s hockey received its development. In my opinion, hockey is the most valuable game in the Winter Olympics… So, people give hockey teams a higher expectation. In addition, if the women’s team can get a better ranking in the Olympics, it will play in a better division in the IIHF Women’s World Championships. However, if not for the 2022 Winter Olympics, I don’t think we would develop women’s hockey so vigorously.

Other than the Winter Olympics, other mega-events such as IIHF hockey tournaments accelerated women’s ice hockey development in China. According to the hockey player of the professional hockey club,

Some years ago, China hosted an IIHF Hockey World Tournament in Beijing, which helped with the hockey promotion. In 2019, China hosted this tournament again. It will greatly help people know what hockey is. People can either go to the hockey arena or watch the games on TV.

Perspectives of Successful Implementation at Meso-level

To Continue Sport Reform

Participants in this study were asked to talk about their opinion on the sport reform in China. As previously discussed, the sport reform in China has brought both positive and negative impacts on the development of different sports (Liu, 2010; Lu, 2010; Xia, 2015). Members of the hockey administration pointed out that continuing the sport reform will be very helpful for the development of women’s ice hockey.

In the past, hockey was within a small circle, and only the sport administrations cared about women’s hockey. But right now, sport attracts the attention of the whole society, and the sport reform is helpful for its development. The reform expanded the resources of
investment for women’s hockey teams. In addition, the government is adding money to it.

The CIHA established a special foundation for the development of Chinese women’s ice hockey. The funding is mainly from sponsors and donations from our society. Usually the CIHA could get around ¥2 million per year, which is used to make hockey training camps with the IIHF. In addition, the CIHA also made a developing foundation for women’s hockey, which will also bring several millions to women’s hockey development. – The CIHA official

The sport reform has helped us find some new ways to organize our resources. Because we have more sponsors, we are able to have more strategies to solve our problems. Right now, we don’t have enough youth players, but we can utilize the funding and try to find some players from the field hockey and roller hockey. Therefore, we organized a crossover team and now they are practicing ice hockey. – The GSA official

In line with the hockey administration officials, the CHA official shared her idea,

Now we are experiencing the sport reform. Although there are some shortcomings, the direction of reform is correct. We need to rely on both government funded hockey schools as well as the youth hockey clubs in the market, so that we could find more youth talents.

**Hockey and Education Combination**

Almost all of the participants in this study conveyed that it is important to always consider education because it is one of the biggest concerns that players and their families have. Some of the cities, such as Beijing and Heilongjiang, have started to combine hockey and education (Li & Nauright, 2018). The combination of hockey and education was seen as a good strategy for the participants. Specifically,

One of the most important strategies is to make winter sports popular in schools. We need to develop hockey in schools and let the education departments encourage women’s hockey in schools. They can put hockey training into their P.E. curriculum, so that students can practice hockey every week. The government will give schools some funding and schools can also get their own sponsors. – The GSA official

We can see there are more youth players now. And girl players increased a lot. Because in Beijing, hockey is combined with education, and the parents think that their kids could get into a better school by playing hockey. In addition, some high school hockey players are planning to apply for Ivy League universities because they are good at hockey! – Hockey coach of the youth club
Currently, playing hockey could be helpful for children to apply for better schools. According to the parent of a youth hockey player,

For the parents in Beijing, if they want their daughters to play hockey, their purpose is that hockey is helpful for a better education. It is much easier for a girl hockey player to be admitted to a better elementary school, middle school, or high school. For my daughter, her team won the second place of the national championship. Right now, she doesn’t have to take the college entrance exam to be admitted to universities. In addition, if she wants to go abroad for education, it is easier for her to apply for colleges in the United States.

Even the professional hockey player expressed that combining hockey and education could be great,

I feel if they could combine education and hockey, that would be perfect. If there are more hockey rinks in colleges, there will be more spectators. We should copy the format of college basketball, and build a college hockey league… I wish I could have received enough education before my professional career.

Additionally, in order to further combine hockey and education, in 2019, the CIHA established the Chinese Hockey Academy (CHA) at Beijing Sport University with the help of HC KRS.

According to the CHA official,

Right now, the establishment of Chinese Hockey Academy is necessary. We see many youth hockey players give up playing hockey when they start their secondary schools… you know, in China, most parents would like their kids to choose study rather than hockey. Or they would send their kids abroad to play hockey while receiving education. The purpose of the CHA is to train the youth players who are 15-17 years old for both hockey skills and academic work. Then they could apply for universities that have hockey teams.

The manager of HC KRS also expressed that this club has done much to help their players receive high quality education. For example.

Right now, we have built a hockey middle school in Beijing, players in this school will receive high quality education. So, it would be easier for them to apply for universities in North America. We also cooperated with Harbin Sport University. If some youth players are good, they will be recruited by its sport school and then admitted by the university. Additionally, some professional players in our team are college students, and we offer them scholarships.

The combination of hockey and education is a good concept to promote women’s hockey
in China. Therefore, the hockey administration started to adopt this approach. The CIHA proposed a policy that could guarantee youth hockey players to receive higher quality education.

According to the CIHA official,

For children and adolescents in China, there is more academic pressure. It would be great if they could get their further education or go to universities by playing hockey. Some of them could also apply for universities in North America. Therefore, I made a plan that requires 1000 elementary schools, 100 middle schools, and 10 universities in China to organize their own hockey teams.

**Building Hockey Market**

Participants in this study expressed that the actors in Chinese women’s ice hockey are working on building of a hockey market in China. Although the government power is still dominant in the ice hockey area in China, people are paying more attention to the sport reform in hockey. Right now, the CIHA is leading the work of building the hockey market, and making rules to regulate it, which is reflected in the official’s discussion. For example,

Speaking of building hockey market in China, the market area of hockey has been enlarged. In those more developed cities, Beijing and some southern cities, there are more clubs, coaches, youth hockey players, and hockey games. And, the direction of our supervision has been changed. In the past, we were mainly in charge of the national hockey teams. Right now, we are focusing more on the youth hockey development and the building of hockey market for the private clubs…Currently, we are making the rules for the hockey market in China. Soon, there will be standards for the coaches, players, referees, hockey managers, and nutritionists. In addition, as I mentioned before, we have already made the standards for the hockey facilities and equipment management.

In line with the CIHA official, the coordinator of the BOC expressed her perspective on the market building,

At least the market has been built in Beijing, because the clubs and parents are participating in hockey. It is a free market and is barely guided by the government. The girls’ families can decide how much money they want to spend on hockey, and they can choose whatever clubs they want to play for.

For the private clubs, they are building the hockey market by cooperating with professional women’s hockey leagues in other countries even though they are faced with many challenges.
When talking about the hockey market, the manager of HC KRS stated,

We are in the process of organizing a hockey league with Russia now. In the past, we were playing in the CWHL... you know, the leagues in North America were ceased... but now clubs from China, Russia, and Finland are holding a professional women’s league, and it is called the WHL.

*Traditional Hockey Area*

Participants in this study also expressed that it is important for the government and private actors to utilize traditional hockey area for the development of women’s ice hockey in China. They suggested that traditional hockey areas should be utilized so that people could cultivate hockey culture from those areas. Particularly, professional hockey players talked about their opinions on utilizing traditional hockey areas,

Hockey atmosphere is pretty good in some traditional hockey cities such as Harbin and Qiqihar. In those cities, people are quite familiar with hockey because they have teams playing in the Asian Ice Hockey League (AIHL) years ago. Watching hockey is seen as a common activity to spend their spare time there. The local government is making hockey as a city brand to attract tourists. I feel it is very useful. – Hockey player from the professional hockey club

Right now, we have to rely on the traditional hockey areas... you see, most of the women players are from Harbin and Qiqihar... In the national hockey tournament, the Harbin women’s team is still dominant, so for the national team, we still need players from there. – Hockey player from the professional hockey club

In China, most people still think hockey is a sport for people in cold areas. This sentiment can be seen in the previous quotations from the CIHA official and manager of the national hockey team. The coach of the local hockey team also admitted that the cold areas should be advocated for hockey. During a discussion of her perspectives regarding the traditional hockey area, she addressed,

Because of the weather, you know, it is easier for children in the northeast to play hockey. We have a longer winter, and in many months, kids can play hockey outdoor in the afternoon, after they finish their schoolwork. They just play for fun, but we could work like scouts and try to find some talented players.
Contribution of Private Clubs

The private clubs have made many significant contributions to women’s hockey development in China (Li et al., 2019). Numerous news reports have reported that HC KRS set tryout camps to recruit talent for the national team in and out of China (Sun, 2017). When interviewed, hockey players from the professional hockey club discussed the benefits they received when playing in the clubs and professional hockey leagues, which was reflected in the following statements,

The private hockey club (HC KRS) helped us a lot. For example, my income increased a lot, and my quality of life is much better than before. The club is a real professional club… although sometimes I feel the hockey jersey is ugly… I have nothing to complain. In addition, I have more opportunities to learn from those foreign players and coaches.

Additionally, the manager of HC KRS also stated that their club helped Chinese hockey players improve their hockey skills. For example,

We also changed their training and matches. Before they joined us, the quality of their training and matches was pretty low. Now they have learned how to protect themselves and how to extend their hockey career… we are a professional women’s hockey club.

In addition, he also mentioned that their club also helped in advocating women’s ice hockey in China,

I think most people in China started to know women’s ice hockey because we have built a “national club”… we let people know that hockey is not only for boys. It’s a platform for girls and women. We know parents in China pay more attention to girls’ education, so we are advocating women’s ice hockey by making role models. For example, you will see many reports on one of our players, who graduated from a world-famous university and she is playing for us right now. She is smart, beautiful, talented, and also plays well!

The government officials also admitted the contribution of the professional hockey clubs, which was reflected in the following statements,

The private club is an organization that cannot be replaced by any actors in the government. We cannot make a team that is playing in the women’s professional league for a long time abroad. However, those clubs, like HC KRS, are very important. They pay those players a higher salary, and they can also get some benefits from the government. – The CIHA official
Secondly, one of their plans was to naturalize foreign players to improve the performance of the women’s national team. Many documents have reported this approach before (Li & Nauright, 2018; Li et al., 2019). Participants in this study also discussed this topic and many of them acknowledged that it was a good strategy for the current women’s ice hockey development. Specifically,

The private clubs are naturalizing foreign players. I feel it is a good strategy. If we could get a good result in those mega events, the hockey will become more popular. Why don’t we use it? Hockey is in its globalization process, and we should accept it. If we have enough good naturalized Chinese women players, we will have enough good players for our women’s hockey league. We should have a long-term goal! – The CHA official

If we want to popularize women’s ice hockey in China, we have to make the national team stronger in the Olympics, so that people will pay attention to it (hockey). But…how do we improve the performance of the national team? It is impossible if we just rely on the native players… we are hiring some players who are North Americans of Chinese heritage so that in the future our government can grant them Chinese citizenship. They could then play for China. – The manager of HC KRS

Other than the professional hockey club, many youth hockey clubs also played an important role in the women’s ice hockey development. The parent of a youth hockey player mentioned to me,

Look at my daughter’s club. The owner was an amateur hockey player but now he is doing business and he is pretty rich. He just wanted to make some contribution to women’s hockey, and he invested in that club… I don’t think he can get any profit.

Family Support

Another theme emerged in the organizational level was family support. Currently, parents are starting to take the leading role in the development of ice hockey in China (Li, 2016; Li & Nauright, 2018). The BHA was founded by some parents initially for organizing youth hockey tournaments and games (Li, 2016). Government officials in this study acknowledged the family support. For instance, when asked to talk about parents of the hockey players, the manager of the national women’s hockey team stated her idea,

I feel parents in Beijing are rich and powerful. The Beijing Hockey Association was
founded by a bunch of parents. They did that just to help their kids to continue their hockey dreams. Some of the parents are powerful, and they could solve many problems for hockey.

In line with the manager of the national hockey team, the coordinator of the BOC also acknowledged the parents’ contribution to the hockey development,

In Beijing, parents of the youth hockey players are supporting hockey development. They organize games and tournaments, then they contact the government to ask for help, to regulate the market, which is totally different from the structure of other sports in China.

The CIHA official also added to this point of view,

In fact, before we won the bid for Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, there were already some girls playing hockey. Nobody called for them to participate in this game. Their families supported them… In China, many local hockey associations were founded by parents, and it is not like the hockey structure in other countries.

In addition, the professional player from the local hockey team also expressed her opinion on family support in the development of women’s ice hockey in China. She stated,

The parents in Beijing are willing to spend money for those girls (who are playing hockey). My teammates from Beijing told me that playing hockey cost their parents a lot of money, even more than playing golf! No wonder we can find more girls playing hockey here (in Beijing).

Another professional hockey player was influenced by her parent to play hockey, for example,

My father played hockey before, so when I was young, he encouraged me to try hockey. I also tried figure skating and speed skating, but I felt those sports were boring. When I tried the hockey skates, I fell in love with it.

According to the parent who was interviewed,

Of course, it is our obligation to support my daughter… she chose hockey because of me… and we want her to be happy and successful. She is the goalie in her team and I barely miss her games. I often go with her to the games even if she is playing games in other cities.

Perspectives of Successful Implementation at Micro-level

*Advocating the Benefits of Playing Hockey*

Another theme emerged from the micro level was advocating the benefits of playing
hockey. Participants in this study expressed their feeling about the benefits of playing hockey and acknowledged that playing hockey had brought hockey players many advantages such as a healthier body, a higher cognitive function, and a better concept of teamwork, etc. Players and coaches each conveyed their observation,

Gradually, people started to realize the benefits of playing hockey. For those girls’ parents, they noticed that the boys learned about the concept of teamwork by playing hockey, so they also wanted their daughters to participate in this sport. Right now, most of the families have only one child. Hockey can help those girls enhance the concept of teamwork. – Coach of the youth hockey club

Hockey can help those players build a better character. Those girls in my team will never cry because of the hard work. Only not performing well would make them cry. Some parents send their kids to play hockey because they feel their boys are too effeminate, or their daughters have a weak personality. – Hockey coach of the local sport team

Hockey could bring me the concept of a well-developed personal character. I feel I am growing into a better woman by playing hockey. In addition, it makes me stronger and healthier, and we have fewer injuries compared to other athletes. Hockey is a very difficult sport. You have to control your hands, feet, and your body… it requires a better cognitive function. – Hockey player from the professional club

In addition, the parent of the youth hockey player also expressed the benefits that hockey had brought to his daughter,

In fact, if you play hockey well, it means that you have a good cognitive ability and a higher IQ. I feel hockey is a perfect sport for my daughter, because she needs to coordinate her arms and legs while her mind is working, and she also needs to keep her balance.

The Actions of Coaches and Players

The coaches and players also have their own ways to deal with the challenges they meet. Participants in the women’s national hockey team, local teams, as well as professional clubs expressed their approaches to overcoming different challenges. For example, in order to make the girls in accordance to the traditional gender norm, the coach of the local sport team shared her strategies,
For my current players, I encourage them to adopt some hobbies of girls such as singing, playing musical instruments, drawing, and so on. If they are not with hockey, they may waste their time on their phones…and my players like doing those things!

The coach of the professional hockey club also stated her ways of treating the conflicts between hockey and traditional gender norm,

If they are in a match, they must show their power, and hit or use their body if necessary…but if they are not in a game or training, I require them to act like a woman, and dress prettily. In their daily time, it is a wrong time to be muscular.

The hockey players also shared a similar opinion,

In daily life, if I am not playing hockey, I am a soft and humble girl. However, in the hockey training and games, those concepts are not allowed. For a hockey player, it is very unprofessional to be humble in a hockey game! – Hockey player of the local team

Other than hockey, in daily life, I am just a normal girl. I don’t feel I am like a man even if I am a hockey player. When we are not on the hockey rinks, we gossip, wear make-up and skirts… we are not different from other girls. – Hockey player of the professional club

Other than the traditional gender norm, coaches and players also shared their perspectives on how to adjust themselves for the challenges of the coach-athlete hierarchy. The following statements reflected their ideas,

As a coach, besides the hockey training, I also encourage my players to learn basic knowledge, as well as foreign languages. For one thing, they have foreign teammates, and sometimes they go abroad for hockey games. For another, they can also learn some advanced hockey skills from the hockey videos of western countries. – Coach of the professional hockey club

I feel my head coach and her team have a good strategy. I feel respected, to be honest, and if there are some misunderstandings, we will communicate with each other. There are many good coaches in the professional teams… we respect and listen to each other. But if we are in the games, we will absolutely listen to our coaches. – Hockey player of the professional hockey club

Improving Women Players’ Social Capital

According to the participants, it is vital to improve women player’s social capital. Almost all the participants in this study consistently indicated that sometimes playing hockey could
improve women’s social capital. The following statements reflected participants’ opinions,

Many people think girls playing hockey are pretty cool. You know, not every family can afford those expensive hockey gears, and many girls are not brave enough to hold those hockey sticks. We don’t care that much, and we have got swag! – Hockey player of the professional club

I feel women’s hockey players are pretty cool. Other than hockey, I don’t see any other sport that requires players to wear so many gears… if you watch figure skating for players’ beauty of femininity, then watching hockey is for their beauty of toughness. If the figure skaters are princesses, then the women hockey players are knights. – The manager of the national hockey team

My daughter is a famous student in her school. Playing hockey made her popular in her school because she was recruited in the U18 national team. She also works as a coach for her school team. Sometimes the school invites her to present hockey knowledge as a guest lecturer. She is very proud of that! – The parent of the youth hockey player

Summary

Almost all participants talked about their perspectives on how to promote the development of women’s ice hockey in China. First, at the micro-level, it is necessary to build women’s hockey culture, advocate patriotism, and use multiple ways to change people’s bias on female hockey players. At the meso-level, participants think that it would be useful if hockey practitioners could continue the sport reform, combine education and ice hockey, utilize government power and mega-events, build a hockey market, advocate the traditional hockey areas and encourage the club’s contribution as well as family support. Finally, at the micro level, coaches, players should find their own approaches to improve women players’ social capital.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to understand the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China, and understand how women’s ice hockey navigated the institutional complexity within the Chinese gender role and cultural norm to acquire legitimacy as well as how the competing logics impact the identity of Chinese women’s ice hockey. Throughout this chapter, results will be discussed in light of the research questions and theory base from which this dissertation emerged. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do the actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey navigate institutional complexity to acquire legitimacy?

RQ2: How do the competing logics impact the identities of organizations within Chinese women’s ice hockey?

The findings of this study suggested that there were challenges in the development of women’s ice hockey in China at the macro level, meso level, and micro level, and participants provided their perspectives on how to successfully achieve the goal of women’s ice hockey development. To further understand the findings of this study, I applied the theoretical construct of institutional pluralism, institutional work, institutional logic, and organizational identity. Given the multiple logics at different levels, actors at different levels adopted varying forms of institutional work to find ways to incorporate institutional structures that mitigated the fact that there were multiple logics in existence. The case of women’s ice hockey in China offered an example of how the actors legitimimized women’s ice hockey as a hybrid institution.

In this study, actors adopted multiple forms of institutional work to alleviate institutional pluralism to finally legitimate the institution of women’s ice hockey in China. Data collected in this study indicated there were multiple logics existing at different levels of women’s ice hockey
At the macro level, the state government possessed powers to expand the popularity of Chinese women’s ice hockey, change people’s bias against it, and define its nature. For example, participants in this study mentioned that a TV program was produced to build the cognitive legitimacy of women playing hockey, which was very successful. It helped the audience understand that ice hockey is for both boys and girls, and it also attracted many girls and parents to watch hockey games. Previous scholars have suggested framing cognitions would be helpful for the creation of an institution (Nite, 2017; Nite, Ige, and Washington 2019; Woolf et al., 2016). However, this study emphasized how the state government make people accept women’s ice hockey widely rather than stating its value. By watching the TV program, more people in China accepted that ice hockey is for everyone, and more girls started to show interest in this game. Another institutional work that is useful for the legitimacy of an institution is boundary work (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Similar to previous research (Nite, Ige, & Washington, 2019; Woolf et al., 2016), in this study, actors at the macro level enlarged the area for ice hockey playing by expanding geographic boundaries. For example, a policy was established to expand ice hockey from traditional areas to the southern areas of China. By expanding the ice hockey area, more facilities were built and more youth hockey players were recruited. However, in the
current study, rather than expanding the boundaries of membership, actors of women’s ice hockey in China expanded its geographic boundaries. The expansion of geographic boundaries also brought some practice change within Chinese women’s ice hockey. For example, the GSA started to develop “Inline Hockey” in order to make women’s ice hockey popular in southern cities in China. Furthermore, the government bodies (i.e., the GSA and the CIHA) worked on establishing rules to regulate the behaviors of clubs, facilities, managers, referees, coaches, and players. Meanwhile, they also utilized mega-events to make women’s ice hockey a “national project” for all the actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey. Those works showed that at the macro level, the government logic has directed women’s ice hockey to “patriotism” and “nationalism.” Therefore, although the logic of ice hockey was not in line with the traditional Chinese culture, and the image of female hockey players was contradictory with the Chinese gender norm, people in China accepted women’s ice hockey because it would bring honor to the country. Previous scholars have highlighted that following the dominant logic would effectively alleviate the conflicts within the Chinese elite sport system (Zheng et al., 2018). In this study, at the macro level, the logic of government served as the dominant logic, and it helped diminish the negative influence of the Chinese gender norm and traditional culture on the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

At the meso level, the CIHA and HC KRS were two main actors that adopted multiple strategies to mitigate conflicts within the institutional complexity in Chinese women’s ice hockey for legitimacy. Participants in this study mentioned that some years ago, the CIHA was separated from the government because of sport reform. Since then, it started to work as an independent entity to advocate the marketization of women’s ice hockey. On the other hand, due to its characteristics, the CIHA was also seen as an association that connected closely to the
government. In addition, in 2019, the CIHA established another organization, the CHA, which represented the interests of education and hockey playing. Thus, in this study, the CIHA worked as an entity to balance the logics of government, business, and education. This would be consistent with the idea of building a hybrid organization to shape the competing logics (Gillett & Tennent, 2018; Svensson & Seifried, 2017). A hybrid organization is an organization that “incorporate elements from different institutional logics” (Pache & Santos, 2013). Previous studies have found that creating a separate unit under a broader organizational umbrella could help balance the competing logics (Battilana et al., 2012), which is a common approach to minimize the internal conflicts among competing logics (Skelcher & Smith, 2015; Smith & Lewis, 2011). In this study, the CIHA was the only independent entity that received funding from the state government, which helped support the national women’s ice hockey team, build more hockey rinks, fund middle and elementary schools for their hockey development, etc. Meanwhile, it also led the work of building the ice hockey market in China. The CIHA made standards for the hockey facilities and equipment management, and sent staff to the CHA to help get more sponsorship. To address the parents’ concerns regarding their children’s academic performance, the CHA guaranteed that the youth hockey talents they recruited would not abandon their academic work. Moreover, the CIHA proposed a policy that could guarantee more youth hockey players higher quality education. Thus, the abovementioned findings of this study suggest that as a hybrid organization, the CIHA incorporated the elements from the government logic, business logic, and education logic to legitimate Chinese women’s ice hockey.

HC KRS was another hybrid organization existing at the meso level, which engaged in institutional work to change the previous institutionalized “patriotism” and “nationalism” of Chinese women’s hockey to gain legitimacy. With its business logic, the club improved its
players’ income and joined the professional hockey leagues in other countries. Additionally, the
HC KRS followed the direction of government logic by naturalizing some foreign players and
building youth national training camp for the national team. Further, HC KRS also built hockey
schools in Beijing, took joint actions with Harbin Sport University, to guarantee opportunities for
higher education for its youth players. In this way, HC KRS mitigated the logic of education and
logic of ice hockey. Previous literature noted that actors are able to create new institutions by
adopting new practices through mimicry (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In this study, entities
such as HC KRS adopted unfamiliar templates of action and brought changes to the context of
women’s ice hockey in China. For example, HC KRS’s joining the professional leagues in other
countries indicated that it wanted to mimic the structure of the world-class professional hockey
clubs. In this way, it introduced a mature pattern to women’s ice hockey market. Through
participants’ perceptions, mimicking the structure of advanced hockey leagues and clubs was
good for the beginning of the women’s hockey market in China, and they expected that there
would be a professional hockey league like the NHL. This finding was similar to the research of
Dowling and Smith (2016), which showed that by incorporating the funding process of another
organization, the creation of OTP shaped the institutional settings, and challenged the status quo
of elite sport in Canada. In this study, HC KRS adopted strategies of mimicking professional
hockey clubs as well as the structures. The institutional work of HC KRS demonstrated that
women’s ice hockey in China was not only a sport for winning medals in mega-events such as
the Winter Olympics, it was also an institution for professional players and clubs.

At the micro level, coaches and professional players adopted their own practices to
change people’s bias, diminish the conflicts between traditional gender norm and ice hockey, and
thus legitimate women’s ice hockey. For example, at the individual level, coaches expressed that
they would encourage the female players to adopt some “girls’ hobbies” such as singing and playing musical instruments. In addition, the professional female players in their responses indicated they “do not feel like men” because they are “ordinary girls” in their daily lives. This result is similar to previous research literature that in order to gain legitimacy, practices can be involved in the process of decoupling (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). Participants in this study also expressed that female hockey players used ice hockey to increase their social capital because playing hockey was seen as being “cool,” or being “swag.” Individuals in this study coopted people’s negative impression to gain social capital, as well as draw people’s attention to support women’s ice hockey. This finding corresponds with Helms and Patterson’s (2014) study on how MMA organizational actors make their organization more acceptable. They found that MMA organizational actors used stigma to correct people’s negative evaluation. In this study, rather than ignoring people’s bias, hockey players actively reconstructed the attribute of playing ice hockey from “masculinity” to being “cool” and persuaded audiences to reconsider their bias on regarding female hockey players, so that they could make women’s ice hockey in China more acceptable.

So far, my discussion has concentrated on explaining how actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey navigated the institutional complexity to finally legitimate the institution of women’s ice hockey in China. Hybrid institutions are defined as “an institutional arrangement governing the interdependencies among discrete property holders and regimes” (German & Keeler, 2010). According to Haveman and Rao (2006), a hybrid institution is built through opportunities created by blending mechanisms. In this study, at the macro level, the state government alleviated the negative influence of conflicting logics by legitimating the institution as “nationalism.” At the meso level, the CIHA and HC KRS legitimated women’s ice hockey by
building hybrid organizations. At the micro level, coaches and players legitimated women’s ice hockey by reconstructing the attributes of ice hockey. Therefore, the institutional work of the different actors at different levels collaboratively legitimated women’s ice hockey in China as a hybrid institution (See Table 2 and Figure 1).

Table 2

**Institutional Logics, Actors, and Institutional Work at Different Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Logics</th>
<th>Key Actors</th>
<th>Institutional Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro level</td>
<td>Gender norm, Government</td>
<td>State government</td>
<td>• Framing cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Expanding boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso level</td>
<td>Business, Government, Education</td>
<td>The CIHA, HC KRS</td>
<td>• Nationalize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Educational opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mimicking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro level</td>
<td>Ice hockey, Career development</td>
<td>Coaches, Ice hockey players</td>
<td>• Adopting feminine hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Correcting negative evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Legitimating process of a hybrid institution.*
Within the institutionalization process of women’s ice hockey in China, as discussed before, findings in this study explored that organizations such as the CIHA and HC KRS were influenced by multiple logics and had to deal with the tensions among those logics. Organizational identity refers to “the criterion of claimed central character, the criterion of claimed distinctiveness, and the criterion of claimed temporal continuity” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, P. 265). In this study, the organizational identities of the CIHA and HC KRS were also influenced by the competing logics.

HC KRS served as a hybrid organization, and it constructed a novel organizational identity that balanced those competing logics in the context of women’s ice hockey in China. Actors like to adopt “hybrid” identities to diminish the conflicts caused by different logics (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Rao et al., 2003). Data collected showed that HC KRS has put much effort to manage its women’s ice hockey club, train players for the national team, and build hockey schools. Those practices contributed to the creation of a collective identity. The creation of the shared identity obtained HC KRS a sustainable balance among those logics because as a commercialized ice hockey club, it also included the government logic and education logic.

While the parent company of HC KRS put much investment in its women’s team, it continued to expand its hybridity of cooperating with the government while chasing its long-term goal of making profits and leading to build a domestic hockey league in China. This was similar to Battilana and Dorado’s (2010) study. In their results, the creation of a common organizational identity could help new types of hybrid organization balance the competing logics. In the current study, HC KRS adjusted its managing format to meet the need of a national women’s ice hockey team, and reduce parents and players’ concerns on education by building schools and cooperating with the university.
Similar to HC KRS, the CIHA is another hybrid organization within the context of women’s ice hockey in China. The CIHA also created a hybrid identity because it also had to adopt multiple practices to deal with tensions and conflicts from logics of government, business, and education. Participants in this study mentioned that the CIHA used to be a department of the government. Influenced by the government logic. The purpose of the CIHA was mainly to serve the national teams. Because of this character, the CIHA only had a single identity at that time. In 2017, the CIHA was separated from the government, and it worked as an independent organization while it still received funding from the government. Since then, the logic of business started to act in the practices of the CIHA and its identity was impacted in the meantime. The government logic continued to be active and the CIHA still spent great effort serving the national teams while it also led local teams and private clubs to build a hockey market in China under the logic of business. In 2019, in order to better develop women’s ice hockey and recruit more youth players, influenced by the logic of education, the CIHA built the CHA, which guaranteed that the youth hockey players could receive high quality education while keeping their training of ice hockey. Therefore, throughout the institutionalization process of women’s ice hockey in China, the CIHA has been operated under competing logics of government, business, and education. The single identity no longer existed because of the adding characters and distinctiveness, hence a hybrid identity.

Theoretical Implications

This study pointed out the ways to legitimate women’s ice hockey in China by the institutional work at different levels of a pluralistic environment. In short, actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey constructed a hybrid institution, which combined institutions at different levels that made Chinese women’s ice hockey legitimate and continuous. In addition, at the meso
level, the CIHA and HC KRS worked as hybrid organizations and constructed hybrid identities that balanced competing logics.

The findings of this study suggested that actors within a pluralistic environment could construct a hybrid institution to gain legitimacy. Haveman and Rao (2006) stated that “blending mechanisms created opportunities to build hybrid institutions” (p. 977). This study demonstrated how the actors constructed a hybrid institution by different mechanisms within different levels. At the macro level, the government logic served as the dominant logic to alleviate people’s bias from the traditional gender norm and culture. At the meso level, the establishment of hybrid organizations helped legitimate women’s ice hockey. At the micro level, the practices of coaches and players made audiences reconsider their bias on female hockey players. Previous studies have discussed the construction of hybrid institutions and highlighted the translation of an external institution in the construction of hybrid institution (Boxenbaum, 2006; Zeitlin, 2000). However, this study found that the hybrid institution could be built through institutional work at different levels within women’s ice hockey in China. In order to legitimate a sport, actors may adopt strategies through institutional building blocks at the macro level, meso level, and micro levels.

Within the legitimacy process, the establishment of hybrid organizations may be helpful for connecting the legitimacy process among different levels. According to Kraatz and Block (2008), hybrid organizations usually exist in an institutionally pluralistic environment. In this study, it was noted that the CIHA and HC KRS were hybrid organizations in the context of Chinese women’s ice hockey that dealt with the institutional complexity caused by multiple, and competing logics. Previous studies that discussed the hybrid organization within sport settings suggested that becoming a hybrid organization would help sport clubs survive (Skirstad &
Similarly, in this study, as a professional hockey club, HC KRS adjusted its organizational structure and became a hybrid organization so that it could better survive in the context of women’s ice hockey in China, and further legitimize it. In addition, the CIHA, an independent organization separated from the government, also evolved as a hybrid organization within the pluralistic environment. The CIHA incorporated logic of government, business, and education to leverage women’s ice hockey, gain pragmatic legitimacy and maintain the institution. The creation of the CHA was similar to Edwards and Washington’s (2015) study that the emergence of the CHI could help remain NCAA’s competitiveness.

Findings of this study also suggested that competing logics could impact the organizational identities. For example, competing logics made HC KRS adjust its managing format to meet the need of national women’s ice hockey team, build schools and cooperate with the university to construct a hybrid identity. Additionally, the CIHA also reconstructed its identity under the influence of multiple competing logics. Glynn (2017) stated that identity usually works as the causal antecedent for the institutionalization processes, the consequence of institutionalization process, as well as the consequence of institutionalization. In this study, two hybrid organizations, namely CIHA and HC KRS, acquired a hybrid identity as a consequence of the institutionalization of women’s ice hockey in China. During their process of legitimizing the women’s ice hockey in China, they incorporated more logics and their identities were impacted by those competing logics. By dealing with those conflicts, the organizations made significant changes. Along with those changes, the CIHA and HC KRS brought more characters and distinctiveness to their identities while the previous ones continued to exist. Consequently, through legitimating the Chinese women’s ice hockey, they acquired a hybrid identity. Previous studies have discussed that actors and organizations who adapted to a hybrid identity would be
able to comply with plural institutional logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Skelcher & Smith, 2015), which contributes to bridging between institutional theory and organizational identity literature. However, little literature has addressed the relationship between institutionalization and organization’s hybrid identity within a sport context (Gammelsæter, 2011). In this study, I investigated the hybrid identity within the setting of women’s ice hockey in China. It might interest scholars in sport management to further research on hybrid identity within sport settings.

Individual actors such as coaches and players also adopted some strategies to accommodate the pluralistic environment. Participants mentioned that sometimes they used some strategies to “act like a female” in their daily life so that people would not forget about their femininity even though they were professional hockey players. This strategy helped people accept women hockey players within Chinese gender norm and traditional culture. However, it also suggested that female hockey players did not get the same opportunities to be viewed equally. In the era of “post”-feminist, inequality still remained on the agenda of gender and sport (Scraton & Flintoff, 2013). Critical feminist theory suggests that women are marginalized and treated unequally by society (Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Messner, 2011). In this study, within the legitimacy process of women’s ice hockey in China, those players had to avoid showing their “masculine” characteristics off the rinks in order to follow the social norm, making themselves acceptable. Previous studies have examined women’s sport in China with a critical standpoint (Li et al., 2019; Liu, 2010; Xia, 2015). Li and colleagues (2019) found that the Chinese government and private hockey clubs adopted strategies to reduce the gaps of inequality. However, critical feminist literature has paid little attention to the individual level of women’s sport. This study suggested that even at the individual level, female hockey players were still marginalized. Thus,
more research is needed to understand how female athletes deal with the gender norm at the individual level.

Practical Implications

Although this study mainly focused on the theoretical discussion, it could also be informative to some private clubs and individual players. First, this study highlighted that for a sport club, cooperating with the government and mimicking the professional club structures would be helpful to popularize the sport and promote the club. As a private actor, HC KRS worked as a “national club” and cooperated with the government, training players for the national team, to help develop women’s ice hockey although it is officially a professional hockey club running for profit. It also adopted the structure of professional clubs in North America. Similarly, Guangzhou Evergrande Football Club (Evergrande FC) in China cooperated with the government, helped to find the head coach for national teams, and adopted the management structure of Real Madrid (Chen, 2016). As such, Evergrande FC has successfully dominated the Chinese Super League (CSL) for the past decade and helped boost the soccer market in China (Li & Liu, 2016). Thus, cooperating with the government and mimicking a professional organization from the top leagues would be helpful for developing the sport and the club itself.

This study also emphasized the role of education for female athletes. The results of this study suggested that female hockey players in China lacked education because they had to spend most of their time practicing hockey skills, which limited their professional development as well as their opportunities to receive higher education. Besides, parents were less willing to let their daughters participate in hockey training due to the concerns about their academic studies and future career options. In addition, the results also indicated that better educated hockey players would learn new skills better and sooner, and for youth hockey players, receiving a better
education would be helpful for applying universities as well as relieving parents’ concerns. Therefore, the current study suggested that balancing academic studies and sport training would bring more benefits for youth players in their professional development.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provided insight to understand the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China and understand how women’s ice hockey navigates the institutional complexity within the Chinese gender role and cultural norm. However, there are also some limitations to this study. First, the sample size of this study is relatively small. Due to some unexpected events, I was not able to interview more participants although I had made several attempts to gain access to more players, coaches, and hockey administrators. In spite of this, I still successfully interviewed some key people in professional hockey clubs, local teams, as well as the hockey administrations. As such, further studies are encouraged to investigate the cultural impact on Chinese women’s ice hockey with a larger number of participants. Additionally, despite the contribution of qualitative research method to sport management literature, more quantitative research and mixed method research with a larger sample of participants is highly recommended.

Second, since all of the participants in this study were from China, this study might be biased due to their perspective of some certain ideology. Only Chinese professional coaches and hockey players were recruited for this study. Thus, in the future, it would be beneficial to access the perspectives of some foreign players and coaches working in the professional clubs in China.

This study may also provide a starting point for future research into the different levels of institutionalization processes of a sport. Further research may benefit from the creation process of hybrid institutions. Considering there were three different levels and actors adopted different forms of institutional work within their own levels, it is important to investigate in which level
the legitimation process will work more efficiently, especially after the mega events such as the Olympics. Second, at the meso level, the CIHA and HC KRS have constructed hybrid identities to balance multiple competing logics. However, both of the hybrid organizations have unique characteristics. The CIHA closely connected to the government whereas HC KRS was an ice hockey club running for profit. Further studies may consider examining and comparing the process of identity building in those two kinds of hybrid organizations within sport settings. Finally, rather than the organizations’ identities, the female ice hockey players’ identities have been shown to be related to their organizational context (DiCarlo, 2016; Pleak, 2002). Therefore, it may be valuable to examine how the hybrid organizations impact the female ice hockey players’ identities.

Conclusion

Women’s ice hockey in China was facing challenges in a pluralistic environment from different institutional logic orders. This case study explored the challenges existing within the development process of women’s ice hockey in China and pointed out the ways to navigate the institutional complexity within the Chinese gender role and cultural norm. Based on the findings of this study, there were challenges at the macro level, meso level, and micro level of the pluralistic environment within women’s ice hockey in China. In addition, participants also expressed their perspectives on how to successfully develop the organization. Findings in this study indicated that the actors within Chinese women’s ice hockey constructed a hybrid institution, which combined institutions at different levels that made Chinese women’s ice hockey legitimate and continuous. In addition, at the meso level, the CIHA and HC KRS worked as hybrid organizations and constructed hybrid identities that balanced competing logics. This study contributes to the sport management literature through a novel approach of construction of
hybridity. At the micro level, coaches and players legitimated women’s ice hockey by reconstructing the attribute of ice hockey. In addition, through legitimating the Chinese women’s ice hockey, competing logics assisted organizations acquiring hybrid identities. Finally, this study also provided several useful suggestions for female ice hockey athletes.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR ICE HOCKEY PLAYERS
1. Tell me how you got involved as an ice hockey player.

2. Tell me your experience playing ice hockey in China.

3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of women ice hockey development in China?

4. What are the challenges you have met as a female ice hockey player?
   - Does the traditional gender norm conflict to women’s ice hockey? If yes, how did you deal with those conflicts?
   - Does the traditional Chinese culture impact the development of women’s ice hockey in China?

5. How does the sport reform impact women’s ice hockey in China?

6. Tell me how you think the duty of the society, government, and clubs to the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

7. Describe some of the mechanisms that your club, ice hockey association, and local and state government have done to support the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

8. Are women ice hockey players seen differently than female players in other sports?

9. How would you describe the identity of women’s ice hockey in China?
   - How would you describe the identity of your club?
   - What are the most significant features or your team?
   - How would you describe the identity of yourself?
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR TEAM COACHES
1. Tell me your job description.
   - Are there certain aspects of your job that are valued as more important than others?
2. Tell me your experience coaching ice hockey in China.
3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of women ice hockey development in China?
4. Who evaluates your job performance?
   - What are the primary criteria with which the evaluator(s) are concerned?
5. What are the challenges you have met coaching a female ice hockey team?
   - Does the traditional gender norm conflict to women’s ice hockey? If yes, how did you deal with those conflicts?
   - Does the traditional Chinese culture impact the development of women’s ice hockey in China?
6. How does the sport reform impact women’s ice hockey in China?
7. Tell me how you think the duty of the society, government, and clubs to the development of women’s ice hockey in China.
8. Describe some of the mechanisms that your club, ice hockey association, and local and state government have done to support the development of women’s ice hockey in China.
9. Are women ice hockey players seen differently than female players in other sports?
10. How would you describe the identity of Chinese women’s ice hockey during your time there?
   - How would you describe the identity of the club you worked in?
   - What are the most significant features or that team?
   - How would you describe the identity of yourself while you were working there?
   - What kinds of expectations do you think Chinese people have for you? How about your family? The club administrators? Players? and the fans?
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR CLUB ADMINISTRATORS
1. When you were hired at this club, what was/is your job description?
   • Are there certain aspects of your job that are valued as more important than others?

2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of women ice hockey development in China?

3. Who evaluates your job performance?
   • What are the primary criteria with which the evaluator(s) are concerned?

4. What are the challenges that your club has met?
   • Compare to men’s club, what are the specific challenges for women’s club?
   • What are the specific challenges due to the sport reform?
   • What are the specific challenges due to the traditional culture?

5. Tell me how you think the duty of the society, government, and clubs to the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

6. Describe some of the mechanisms that your club have done to support the development of women’s ice hockey in China.
   • What are the supports you have got from the ice hockey association, or the local and state government?
   • What are the pressures you have got from them?

7. Are women ice hockey players seen differently than female players in other sports?

8. How would you describe the identity of Chinese women’s ice hockey?
   • How would you describe the identity of the club you worked in?
   • What are the most significant features or the it?
   • How would you describe the identity of yourself?
APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR CHINESE ICE HOCKEY ADMINISTRATORS
1. When you were hired at this association, what was/is your job description?
   • Are there certain aspects of your job that are valued as more important than others?

2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of women’s ice hockey development in China?

3. Who evaluates your job performance?
   • What are the primary criteria with which the evaluator(s) are concerned?

4. What are the challenges of developing women’s ice hockey in China?
   • Compare to men’s ice hockey, what are the specific challenges for women’s ice hockey?
   • What are the specific challenges due to the sport reform?
   • What are the specific challenges due to the traditional culture?

5. Tell me how you think the duty of the society, government, and clubs to the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

6. Describe some of the mechanisms that the association have done to support the development of women’s ice hockey in China.
   • What are the supports that the association, the local government, or state government provided for Chinese women’s ice hockey?
   • What are the pressures that the association gives to the women ice hockey clubs?

7. Are women ice hockey players seen differently than female players in other sports?

8. How would you describe the identity of Chinese women’s ice hockey?
   • How would you describe the identity of the women’s hockey clubs/teams?
   • What are the most significant features of them?
   • How would you describe the identity of your working place?
   • How would you describe the identity of yourself?
APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS OF YOUTH HOCKEY PLAYERS
1. Tell me how your child got involved as an ice hockey player.

2. Tell me your experience watching ice hockey in China.

3. Do you belong to any fan’s organization?
   - What are the primary criteria of joining the organization?

4. In your opinion, what is the purpose of women ice hockey development in China?

5. What are the challenges do you think for developing women’s ice hockey?
   - Does the traditional gender norm conflict to women’s ice hockey? If yes, how did you deal with those conflicts?
   - Does the traditional Chinese culture impact the development of women’s ice hockey in China?

6. How does the sport reform impact women’s ice hockey in China?

7. Tell me how you think the duty of the society, government, and clubs to the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

8. Describe some of the mechanisms the club, ice hockey association, and local and state government have done to support the development of women’s ice hockey in China.

9. Are women ice hockey players seen differently than female players in other sports?

10. How would you describe the identity of women’s ice hockey in China?
    - How would you describe the identity of your child’s hockey club?
    - What are the most significant features or the team that you are supporting?
    - How would you describe the identity of yourself?
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