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A Historical Review of Elite Sport Development in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Hong Kong, one of the most visible non-sovereign entities on the international stage, has a distinctive profile as a previous British colony and current Special Administration Region (SAR) of China with the retention of an independent sporting status. However, research on elite sport development in this region remains relatively uncharted territory. This study provides a panoramic view of Hong Kong's elite sport development since 1842, specific to four phases identified, namely the infancy of sport (1842-1950), the inception but slow development of elite sport (1950-1973), the rapid growth of elite sport (1973-1997), and further expansion of elite sport development (1997-2019). The discussion of each of these periods will follow the same structure: political context, government sports structure, financial support and high-performance achievements (i.e. at the Olympic Games and other major competitions). This paper is expected to provide a unique and in-depth context for further studies concerning policy analysis and governance study particularly for non-major Olympic participants with a relatively distinctive political and sporting status.

Keywords: Hong Kong; elite sport; political context; historical review; periodization

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Introduction

Government interest in elite sport most notably (gold) medal success at the Olympic Games has burgeoned over the past two decades. According to Grix and Carmichael, governments' interest and concomitant substantial investment in elite sport is propelled by their pursuit of the enhancement of international image, national pride and identity,

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as well as motives such as increasing sport participation, public health and social cohesion.² As Houlihan stated, elite sport success has become the 'irresistible priority' in many countries and the quest for elite sport success has arguably become one of the most dominant characteristics of sport development in the last decade.³

Despite a plethora of research on elite sport development in Western countries and ever-increasing research attention directed to a wide range of Asian nations and regions including (Mainland) China, there is a dearth of exploration of elite sport development in Hong Kong and of the fundamental political, economic and social context within which sport has been embedded. Research on Hong Kong's distinctive profile as a previous colony of the United Kingdom (UK) and current Special Administration Region (SAR) of China with the retention of an independent sporting status, and research on the impact of this 'special' status on elite sport development in Hong Kong remains relatively uncharted territory, despite some exceptions (e.g. Bridges, Ma & Zheng). Thus, this study will present an analysis of the historic pedigrees and *status quo* of elite sport development and changes in Hong Kong.

The development of elite sport in Hong Kong is summarized in four phases: (1)

1842-1950 – the infancy of sport; (2) 1950-1973 – the inception and slow development of elite sport; (3) 1973-1997 – the rapid growth of elite sport; and (4) 1997-2019 – further expansion of elite sport development. The analysis of each phase will be structured around four elements: political context, government sports structure, financial support and high-performance achievements (at the Olympic Games, the Asian Games, the Commonwealth Games and the National Games). The value of this article is reflected in two aspects. First, this research provides a panorama of elite sport development in Hong Kong. Second, this article thoroughly discusses the impact of political changes including government involvement in sport. The remainder of the paper comprises four additional sections – literature review, research methods, findings and discussion. Corresponding to the four periods identified, the findings section is further divided into four sub-sections.

Literature Review: Hong Kong’s Political and Sporting Status and Sport in Hong Kong

Hong Kong’s Status

Extant research on Hong Kong’s political status presents a high degree of coherence and convergence. Hong Kong, which is well-known for its scenery, economic competitiveness and dynamics, and cultural vibrancy, is deemed one of the most important international cities for finance, trade, tourism and shipping in the Far East.⁴

As an SAR of China governed by the *Basic Law*, Hong Kong not only enjoys a degree of autonomy in governing its political affairs, but also continues to retain the capitalist

economic and social systems left by their former colonizers.⁵ It is ‘the most visible and powerful non-sovereign entity in the international system’.⁶ With respect to its sport, Bridges argued that ‘Hong Kong finds itself in a rather anomalous situation in terms of its global sporting status’.⁷ Yu-wai Vic Li highlighted that Hong Kong became an ‘ordinary’ sporting player that regularly participated in and occasionally bid for international and regional games, thus turning to global and regional sporting games as part of its brand-building campaign to make itself famous as a global city.⁸ Yang also stated that, sports in Hong Kong not only draw on the experience of Western modern sports, but also have been significantly influenced by traditional Chinese culture.⁹

Sport in Hong Kong

There have been a noteworthy number of research publications, most notably descriptive studies, on Hong Kong Sports in recent years. Ma summarized sport history in Hong Kong and divided it into two phases, namely prior to 1997 and after the handover in 1997.¹⁰ His study provides a unique view that tracks the development of Hong Kong sports according to historical evolution, and analyzes the characteristics of sports development in Hong Kong with considerable historic details presented.

Some other scholars have studied and interrogated sport development in Hong Kong from policy and other perspectives. For instance, Zheng recaptured the development of sport policy in Hong Kong after it returned to China’s sovereignty in 1997 and focused on government involvement in sport.¹¹ Lam centred on the sport culture including the development and administration of sports and sporting events of

Hong Kong.¹² He found that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) plays a key role in supporting and organizing sports and recreational programs, which bolsters the LCSD's aim of promoting the long-term well-being of the residents in Hong Kong. He and Dong gave primacy to the elite sport management system and operational mechanism to explore the development model and direction of Hong Kong sport in the new century.¹³ Furthermore, Li and Yang stated that Hong Kong is deeply marked by community and civil society both in elite sport and mass sport development, thus presenting consistent with the role and impact of social community that permeate the region.¹⁴

Despite these studies' significant contribution to the literature on the development of sport in Hong Kong, there is still a necessity for systematically reviewing how sport is developed and improved throughout Hong Kong's history with a specific focus on elite sport *per se* and on the relative significance of elite sport compared to, and its interplay with, major mass events within the entire realm of sport in Hong Kong. The present study, as noted above, aims to capture the development of elite sport in Hong Kong since 1842 and delve into the impact of political changes on government's involvement in sport.

Synthesizing Zheng, Bridges and Ma, sport development in Hong Kong can be divided into four phases.¹⁵ More specifically, the establishment of the Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong (ASF&OC) in 1950 was the first turning point that signalled Hong Kong elite sport's official participation in the Olympics on the international stage. The Council for Recreation Sport (CRS) founded

by the then government in 1973 was the second milestone, which heralded government's serious involvement in elite sport development. In addition, a new era dawned for Hong Kong in 1997, a watershed in political terms, which witnessed Hong Kong's return to China and elite sport expansion in Hong Kong. This paper will thus analyse four periods: (1) 1842-1950 – the infancy of sport; (2) 1950-1973 – the inception and slow development of elite sport; (3) 1973-1997 – the rapid growth of elite sport; and (4) 1997-2019 – further expansion of elite sport development.

Research Methods

Research Design: Single Case Study

This research is predicated on a single case study research design.¹⁶ The selection of Hong Kong mainly rests upon the criterion of specific significant cases – Hong Kong was a former colony of the UK with Western heritage, but is also an inalienable part of China and concurrently an independent Olympic delegation, which is distinctive on the international sporting stage.¹⁷ Hong Kong has a long history of elite sport development, evidenced in Hong Kong's relatively early participation in the Commonwealth Games, the Asian Games and the Olympic Games and some notable sporting achievements as a small region. It is worth noting that the research squad's linguistic proficiency in English and Chinese, existing knowledge on elite sport in Hong Kong and familiarity with document sources, combined with the research team's rich network within elite sport community in Hong Kong facilitated the collection and careful analysis of sufficient data

Data Collection

In addressing elite sport policy trajectory and recent trends in Hong Kong, a qualitative research strategy was deployed and data were sourced from official and semi-official documents. Sources of data ranged from official annual reports of relevant sport authorities and governing bodies in Hong Kong, academic publications and other types of documents, to newspapers, television programmes and other internet resources. The authors classified all resources into primary sources and secondary sources. Congruent with the focus on the political context, government policy documents issued between 1840-2019 and Hong Kong's preparation for the Olympic Games, the Asian Games and the National Games provided the primary sources. For instance, data were mainly gathered from printed and online publications (including annual reports) issued by government and quasi-governmental organizations, ranging from the Hong Kong Government and Chief Executive Report, Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Sports Commission (SC) and Elite Sports Committee (ESC) in particular, to the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI).

Official printed and internet document sources were complemented by academic publications including books, journal articles and theses written by prominent international and Chinese scholars such as Jinming Zheng, Marcus Chu, Glos Ho and Brian Bridges.¹⁸ These data were supplemented by data from semi-official mass-media outputs such as influential local television programmes most notably but not limited to Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK),

newspapers and e-media including South China Morning Post, Ta Kung Pao, and Sing Pao Daily News.

The present study was also facilitated by Hong Kong's distinctive advantage of a bilingual policy. In other words, most organizations including sport governing bodies publish documents and release information in both English and Chinese. Hence, the majority of documents have both English and Chinese versions, which could limit any potential misunderstanding in the analysis. This bilingual policy was analogous to an automatic back translation (between Chinese and English) process espoused by Brislin and was therefore effective in ensuring the consistency between languages and enhancing the quality of data.¹⁹ All these data sources combined to satisfy the criteria for the selection of documents suggested by Scott – 'authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning'.²⁰

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed to process all qualitative data gathered from documents.²¹ Responding to Ryan and Bernard, the research questions and theoretical frameworks (structure of each period identified) of this research, namely political context, government sports structure, financial support and high-performance achievements, directed the theme identification process.²² Themes and sub-themes were reviewed and verified by other members of this project, who acted as 'critical friends'.²³ The first of the four periods identified is exceptional with respect to the structure because of Hong Kong's initially low level of elite sport development and the

region's concomitant lack of participation in international and regional sports events.

Findings: Elite Sport Development in Hong Kong in Different Periods

1842-1950

British colonization has had an important bearing on Hong Kong's sport development. After the first Opium War (1840-1842), Western civilization started to be introduced and promoted throughout Hong Kong, during which a variety of Western sports were also imported. However, sport development had been constrained for a long time because of limited resources, the size of the population and the economic capacity of Hong Kong. Prior to the 1900s, sports activities had been mainly organized by non-Chinese groups and participants were confined to foreigners such as military, businessmen and foreign government staff, eliminating the involvement of Chinese residents.²⁴ Possible explanations of the absence of Chinese resident participation lie in the fact that the Chinese population devoted itself to physical work throughout most of each day and week, that Chinese labourers had a very low social status, and that they had little interest in foreign sports.²⁵ But even if some local Chinese residents did show some interest in sport, they were largely excluded from sport clubs.²⁶ In the late nineteenth century, the British forces and other expatriates formed sports clubs in Hong Kong, such as the Victoria Recreation Club (VRC, established in 1849) and the Hong Kong Cricket Club (HKCC), but both clubs excluded Chinese residents.²⁷ Thus, at this stage, sport development in Hong Kong catered mainly for Westerners.

By the early twentieth century, the increasing number of Chinese who chose to

migrate to and settle in Hong Kong further spurred the need to interact with British residents and assimilation to the British way of life 'became essential for those who wanted to become successful and influential'.²⁸ Concomitantly, some Chinese had set up their own clubs and were introduced via such clubs to British sports activities such as cricket, badminton, rugby and tennis. Furthermore, missionary schools were actively involved in introducing sports into school curricula.²⁹ The Chinese Young Men's Christian Association (Chinese YMCA) of Hong Kong was created in 1901, aiming to promote sports activities to Chinese residents.³⁰ In 1907, The Chinese YMCA established its clubs covering sports such as tennis, cricket and swimming, which attracted many Chinese residents. As Zhao observes, the Chinese YMCA played a critical role in sport development in Hong Kong.³¹

While the popularity of certain sports in Hong Kong was fleeting, the attractiveness of football to Hong Kongers has been longstanding and consistent, a product of the UK sports tradition. In 1910, Mok Hing created the South China Athletic Club which marked a 'significant milestone in the history of football development in Hong Kong'.³² In 1922, the club was finally renamed South China Athletic Association (SCAA), a name which has been maintained ever since. The SCAA pursues the promotion of football and other types of sports in Hong Kong.³³ Since its inception, the SCAA has been actively involved in various competitions and attained notable achievements, enjoying a high reputation in both Hong Kong and Mainland China. Moreover, the SCAA had a profound impact on Mainland China. Guan (1997) argues that the SCAA's remarkable achievements had significantly improved national

aspiration, arousing the patriotism of the Chinese and strengthening the cohesiveness of the nation.³⁴ Additionally, the SCAA had not only promoted football throughout this period, but also advanced the development of some other ball games most notably but not limited to volleyball, basketball and table tennis as well as fostering swimming, martial arts, track and field and other sport activities. All these achievements made by the SCAA combined to spawn considerable interest in sports among the younger generation of Hong Kong and motivated Chinese citizens to organize other sports clubs.³⁵

Although Hong Kong was a British colony, Hong Kong had been eligible to send athletes to compete in international sports events by being included in the Chinese delegation before the 1950s.³⁶ The Chinese Amateur Athletic Federation of Hong Kong was created in 1916, responsible for raising funds to support Hong Kong athletes' participation in national sports events and selecting competitive athletes to partake in the Far East Games.³⁷

According to Bridges, the Japanese invasion and the Second World War that spanned 1931 to 1945 naturally 'disrupted sporting activities and economic problems of dealing with an influx of refugees from China'.³⁸ During this period, millions of immigrants from Guangdong, Shanghai and other financial cities in Mainland China moved to Hong Kong, prompting a rapid population growth. By the end of 1950, Hong Kong had had over 2.2 million people.³⁹ Ma also noted that by the end of Japanese occupation in 1945 (during the period 1941-1945), sports development in Hong Kong had been paralyzed for a few years.⁴⁰ The impact of war, including social and economic

crises, resulted in the crumbling economic and social conditions of Hong Kong. Therefore, the Hong Kong government did not take sport seriously until the 1970s.⁴¹

The high-performance achievements, according to the study of Ma and Lam and Chang, were few and mostly depended on sports clubs.⁴² Relatively speaking, the performance of athletes from the SCAA was distinctive during this period. For example, in the Far Eastern Championship Games (precursor to the Asian Games) from 1913 to 1934, the Chinese National Football Team won eight out of the ten titles, and players came mainly from the SCAA. It is noteworthy that among many footballers in Hong Kong during this period, Lee Wai-tong had won five consecutive Far Eastern Championships in 1923, 1925, 1927, 1930 and 1934 with his teammates. In addition, he represented China at the Berlin 1936 Olympic Games which was the first occasion on which China competed in Olympic football, and Lee was acclaimed as the 'Soccer King of Asia'.⁴³

1950-1973

Political context and government sports structure

After the Second World War, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was officially founded and recognised by a range of nations including the UK. However, in the early 1950s, because of the outbreak of the Korean War, in combination with other tensions between the new PRC regime and Western countries, Hong Kong became the only place for PRC to transfer, collect and retain foreign resources, material and finance.

Furthermore, many people possessing considerable financial assets and thousands of low-wage labourers migrated to Hong Kong, making substantial contributions to Hong Kong's transformation into an economically strong developing industrial city. These factors together enabled Hong Kong to enjoy economic development which provided its sports development with a powerful impetus.⁴⁴

As Zheng points out, Hong Kong's sport development ushered in a new period in the 1950s, marked by the landmark event of the creation of the Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong in 1950.⁴⁵ The initial idea for establishing a federation embracing all sports activities was raised by Mr. J. Skinner, who was motivated by the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) decision to accept teams from colonies for the first time and concerned that Hong Kong had been unprepared for the 1950 British Empire Games.⁴⁶ The Amateur Athletic Federation (AAF) was set up by Sir Arthur Morse, Mr. J. Skinner and other colleagues on 24 November 1950, with Morse elected as the President.

In 1951, the AAF changed its title to the 'Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong' (ASF&OC). The ASF&OC was immediately recognized by the IOC in 1951 as the Olympic Committee representing Hong Kong on the international stage so that Hong Kong was qualified to participate in the Olympic Games as an independent delegation.⁴⁷ As Ma pointed out, the ASF&OC had been the only regional sport organization in Hong Kong before the emergence of the Council for Recreation Sport, which could send sports teams to participate at the Helsinki 1952 Summer Olympics in the name of Hong Kong.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the ASF&OC still

focused on the mass sport dimension by holding an annual Sports Festival with other organizations from 1958, bringing to the public a programme of athletics, badminton, hockey, table-tennis and a mass physical training demonstration. Its aims were to integrate sports leaders to publicize certain sports.⁴⁹

Despite the aforementioned achievements made by the ASF&OC, sport development remained at the margins of the policy agenda of the colonial Hong Kong government. In the 1950s and 1960s, local non-governmental organizations had sprung up, and the Hong Kong Table Tennis Association, Softball Association, Hockey Association, Badminton Association and other sports associations had been established consecutively and later became subordinate members of ASF&OC. However, because of a lack of financial support and official trials, athletes had to raise funds by themselves or seek financial support from the chairman of sports organizations.⁵⁰

In the late 1960s, Hong Kong underwent drastic social disturbances including the Star Ferry Riots in 1966 and the 1967 Riots. Workers and teenagers went on strike protesting against the British Colonial government and clashed violently with the Hong Kong Police Force.⁵¹ Lam and Chang argued that 1967 was a defining moment in Hong Kong's history,⁵² because it opened a window for the governor to reconsider the social conflicts and the solutions to fix them.

Financial support

As noted above, sports activities including training, equipping and competing overseas were primarily under the aegis of the organizations themselves. For instance, the funds

of the Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong contained the annual subscription of a certain amount of money from its affiliated associations and its own way of raising financial support.⁵³ In the 1950s, to raise funds to compete in the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games, the President of the ASF&OC wrote some letters appealing for government assistance, yet the funds that the governments promised to furnish were insufficient because of the government's lukewarm attitude towards involvement in sports activities. Additionally, the Federation also resorted to appeals to wider society for support. Most notably then President of ASF&OC Mr. Kwok Chan wrote to the community to ask for the donations and support of all sports-loving individuals.⁵⁴ However, the organization was still devoid of funds, and the federations continued to seek assistance from the government from time to time. It was not until 1970 that a donation of HK\$3 million was distributed by the Governor to 'establish the Sir David Trench Fund for Recreation for the provision of recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities and related purpose with the aim of encouraging the meaningful use of leisure by young people'.⁵⁵ This was the first official funding specifically for recreation and sport; and it remains significant funding sources until the present day.

High-performance achievements

Hong Kong made its Olympic debut in 1952 in Helsinki, which was a milestone in Hong Kong's sports history. Two male athletes, Cheung Jin-man and Sonny Monteriom and two female athletes, Cynthia Eager and Irene Kwok Kam-ngor, had qualified

through internal selection to compete in swimming.

Hong Kong took part in six consecutive Olympic Games from 1952-1972. At the Melbourne 1956 Games Hong Kong sent two athletes competing in swimming, and at the Rome 1960 Olympic Games, it had four athletes competing in swimming and shooting. The number of athletes and sports reached a new high at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 where 39 Hong Kong athletes competed in seven sports including athletics, boxing, cycling, hockey, sailing, shooting and swimming. More importantly, compared to the poor results that Hong Kong team had obtained in the three previous Olympic Games, the Hong Kong squad made notable progress in Tokyo, even though it did not win a medal. The lightweight boxer Law Hon-pak beat a Spanish opponent, and ranked ninth in the event, which was the first time that Hong Kong's athlete had reached the top ten of the Olympic competition.⁵⁶ At Mexico City 1968 and Munich 1972, Hong Kong ten athletes. While no Hong Kong athletes won a medal, some improved their personal records during the competitions.

The Commonwealth Games (known as the British Empire Games from the 1930s to 1950s) has enjoyed a reputation for 'maintain(ing) the best traditions of sports endeavour among Commonwealth Nations as well as exerting a benign political influence'.⁵⁷ The first Empire Games was held in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada, and Hong Kong made its debut in Vancouver, in 1954. Hong Kong won its first medal – a silver medal in lawn bowls at Vancouver 1954, yet it took Hong Kong another 16 years to gain its second medal.

Hong Kong was invited to be a member of the Asian Games Federation (AGF)

in 1952 and participated in the second Asian Games held in Manila in 1954 for the first time. Mr. Stephen Xavier, who competed in the 100 meters and 200-meter sprints, won a bronze medal in the latter event, bringing home the first medal for Hong Kong in its first regional Games. Since then, Hong Kong has maintained its attendance at all editions of the Asian Games and from 1958 to 1970, Hong Kong won three silver medals and two bronze medals overall.

The Second World War and the Korean War launched a window for elite sport development at an ever-accelerating pace in Hong Kong. First, many migrants from Guangdong, Shanghai and other places in Mainland China flowed into Hong Kong, rapidly the population size. Second, because of the severe confrontation between PRC regime and Western countries, Hong Kong became one of the very few places for PRC to maintain its links with the West, and it attracted substantial assets and resources from Mainland China. Against this backdrop, Hong Kong was gradually transformed into a developing industrial city, and sport gained in popularity among the public. However, elite sport developed slowly compared to mass sport., and because of a lack of official support for training and competition in international sports events, Hong Kong's elite sport performance was relatively unexceptional.

1973-1997

Political context

Hong Kong's new manufacturing industries started to thrive in the 1970s, fuelling its rise as a manufacturing centre in the Far East. During this decade, Hong Kong's

industrial landscape evolved from smaller enterprises into mainstream and large-scale manufacturers and exporters, particularly applicable to the sectors of timepiece, textile, apparel, electronics and jewellery, in all of which Hong Kong ranked top in the world.⁵⁸ In addition, the ground-breaking Hong Kong Subway, the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), the implementation of the nine-year free and compulsory education system, and the program of expanding public housing, contributed to the sustained and exponential economic development in Hong Kong in the next two decades.⁵⁹ The steadily rising economy in Hong Kong had significantly improved the living standard of people, thereby, the development of sport had become a natural demand of citizens for entertainment and recreation. The development of economy also underpinned the development of sports, thus giving rise to the unprecedented sport development from 1973 to 1997.

In the early 1970s, because of the increasing public demand for sport, as Bridges points out, the Hong Kong government began to raise the policy status of sports development for the majority of the population, evidenced in the establishment of the Council for Recreation Sport (CRS) in 1973, which has been identified as a defining moment in Hong Kong's sport history that signalled the government's *ad hoc* attention to sport.⁶⁰ The then British Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, in the words of one of his staff, had 'a tremendous concern for the recreational needs of the people in Hong Kong'.⁶¹ Although the establishment of the Council for Recreation Sport was conceived as a desire by the government to combat social disturbances and distract public attention from political issues in the aftermath of the 1967 Riots, the CRS did

enhance the development of mass sport and contributed to an improvement in the health standard of the population.

From the 1970s to 1980s, the issue of Hong Kong's future and its future relationship with Great Britain and China became the central theme and a certain degree of uncertainty about the future befell the general public in Hong Kong. In 1979, Sir Murray MacLehose made his first visit to Mainland China and discussed the future of Hong Kong with Deng Xiaoping (the then *de facto* political leader in Mainland China), and several rounds of negotiations were held to address Hong Kong's future between the Chinese government and British government from 1982. Given the marked difference in the social systems between Hong Kong and Mainland China, Deng Xiaoping put forward the concept of 'One Country, Two Systems'.⁶² After several major setbacks and stalemates, China and the UK finally reached an agreement on Hong Kong's future. In 1984, the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* was signed. The successful negotiation between China and the UK addressed the historical issue that originated from the nineteenth century ceding of the territory to the British Empire, and the tensions between the two countries were peacefully resolved. This laid the foundation for Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability, resulting in providing a lever of a robust social security for the development of sport in Hong Kong in the following years and having a catalytic role in Hong Kong government's development of sport.

Government sports structure

As a British colony, the government's sports structures in Hong Kong were

fundamentally shaped and substantially influenced by the British counterparts. Bridges concluded that sport policy in Britain in the 1990s remained ‘irrational and incoherent’, leading to the lack of a systematic government-led structure for sports development in Hong Kong in the colonial era.⁶³ The Urban Council (Hong Kong Island and Kowloon including New Kowloon) and the Regional Council (New Territories excluding New Kowloon) have been leading recreation and sport provision including building and operating sports facilities and hosting local leisure and cultural events.⁶⁴ In the 1980s elite sport started to gather momentum, evidenced in the creation of the Jubilee Sports Centre (JSC) in 1982. The JSC was the first bespoke organization responsible for elite sport affairs in Hong Kong, the establishment of which significantly raised the prominence of elite sport on the government’s policy agenda.⁶⁵ At the very beginning, the JSC was famous for its first-class facilities, coaches and management, the facilities and venues and the training centre was the largest in Asia.⁶⁶ In 1991, the JSC broadened its scope of work and was upgraded to become the Hong Kong Sports Institute, the largest elite sports training and research centre in Hong Kong.⁶⁷

In addition, the Hong Kong government invited British sports experts to Hong Kong for investigation into, and research on, Hong Kong sports development. The experts produced the report ‘The Way Ahead’ and strongly recommended the establishment of an institute ‘responsible for funding policy and coordinating the sports organizations in Hong Kong for enhancing the development of sport and recreation in accordance with the British and European sports structure model’.⁶⁸ Within this sports system, all sports organizations remained autonomous and independent, and the

government would sanction the use of public funds to the related organizations to promote specific sport via this institute. Hence, the Hong Kong Sports Development Board (HKSDDB, which evolved from the Council for Recreation Sport), a quasi-governmental organization, was established in 1990.⁶⁹ As a result of the overall planning on Hong Kong sports development and the need to avoid the wasting of human, material and other resources, the Hong Kong Sports Institute was incorporated into the HKSDDB in 1994, thus becoming the sole organization for providing services for elite sport in Hong Kong. The HKSDDB made great contributions to elite sport development in the 1990s. It launched two Five-Year Strategic Plans (1991-1995 and 1996-2000) for Hong Kong sport, and formulated the policy of 'Target Sports' according to which a small number of sports would receive more incentives and resources. Badminton, squash and swimming were initially identified in 1991 as the 'Target Sports', and later windsurfing was included in the list. In 1992, rowing, table tennis and football and in 1995-96, tennis and wushu were added to the list.⁷⁰ The increased government support enabled these nine sports to welcome a rapid development and athletes in these sports to realize achievements on the continental and even wider international stages during the 1990s.

Moreover, according to Ma, the Amateur Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong (which became the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, removing the word 'amateur', in 1999) and its affiliated 67 associations of individual sports and 1,400 sports clubs combined to act as the cornerstone of sport in Hong Kong sport.⁷¹ The individual sports affiliated to the ASF&OC were not only

independent financially, but also had freedom with respect to the selection and training of sports teams, and every single association was eligible to participate in sports events held by their corresponding International Federations (IFs). The ASF&OC's remit mainly included overall coordination and selection in the events of the large-scale international sports games. Before Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, there had been 60 sports associations in Hong Kong which were, to some extent, indicative of people's active engagement in sports activities and Hong Kong sport had made remarkable progress in this period.⁷²

Financial support

The funds for sports development including elite sport and mass sport in Hong Kong stemmed from multiple sources,⁷³ mainly including government allocations, funds from sports associations, commercial sponsorship and revenue.

The substantial contributions to elite sports development through Government grants cannot be underestimated. The income of the Hong Kong Sports Development Board mainly relied on government funds. For example, as Ma stated, the government allocated HK\$63 million to HKSDDB per year from 1994 to 1996.⁷⁴ Subsequently the government grants were increased to HK\$78 million in the year of 1996 to 1997, and the government sanctioned the use of another HK\$100 million for the preparation for the Atlanta 1996 Olympics. Moreover, the government also set up a total of HK\$100 million of government funding in a trust fund for elite sport development.⁷⁵ The government funds for elite sport were often allocated for enhancing and rewarding

athletes' performance, improving coaches' professions, upgrading sports facilities and participating in sports mega events.

Commercial sponsorship also accounted for a considerable part of total funds. In the early 1970s, leading positions in Hong Kong sports associations were often held by wealthy merchants. These business entrepreneurs used to be major sponsors of sports activities. In the late 1970s, commercial sponsorship prevailed as a dominant source of funding for sports activities. In 1987, the income of commercial sponsorship was HK\$45 million. In 1991, the Hong Kong Sports Development Board established a sports consultation and sponsorship service promoting cooperation between sports associations and sponsors, resulting in receiving HK\$500 million in commercial funds in the coming four years.⁷⁶ Furthermore, as He and Dong point out, to commend the outstanding achievements made by athletes and motivate them to improve their performances, the HKSDDB encouraged the business community to provide commercial sponsorship for rewarding of outstanding athletes,⁷⁷ and the first project for financial awards to exceptional athletes was launched.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) is one of the leading organizations that financially supports sport development. It donated HK\$1.4 billion to build sports facilities, developed sports activities consecutively from 1957 to 1996, and a total of HK\$26 million of these funds was given to HKSDDB, HK\$20 million of which were used to establish the HKSDDB trust fund. Moreover, the HKJC had supported the daily expense of the Jubilee Sports Centre until 1986, and donated HK\$350 million to the JSC in 1988. The HKJC inaugurated a sport sponsoring funding scheme for setting up

sports facilities which was later managed by the government.⁷⁸ Other social and individual foundations also sponsored Hong Kong sport in various ways.

High-performance achievements

As Ma has summarized, after a slight decline in the number of participants and sports events in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the number of Hong Kong athletes and the number of involved events in the Summer Olympic Games reached a new high in the 1980s (except for the 1980 Moscow Olympics when Hong Kong joined in the international boycott).⁷⁹ At the Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Game, Hong Kong sent 47 athletes competing in ten sports, and in total, 48 Hong Kong athletes attended eleven sports at Seoul 1988. It was not until the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games that Hong Kong celebrated its first ever Olympic medal. Lee Lai-shan, who secured clear and convincing advantages from the early stages, won the first medal – a gold medal in wind surfing for Hong Kong, preceding many of its neighbouring countries and regions including Singapore (Rio de Janeiro 2016), Chinese Taipei (Athens 2004) and Malaysia (no Olympic gold medal thus far). Her success has been lauded as an immortal moment in Hong Kong's sports history.⁸⁰ Moreover, at the 1996 Paralympic Games, Hong Kong athletes won five medals in four different events and even broke the world record in the 4×100 metres (T34) relay. However, except for the gold medal gained at the 1996 Olympics, Hong Kong failed to win a medal of any kind at the remaining Summer Olympic Games held during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

Compared to the Olympic Games where the most outstanding athletes

participate across the world, thus providing Hong Kong's athletes with relatively limited 'niche area' for striving for medals, local and regional sporting events including the Asian Games, the East Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games had become the main stage for the majority of Hong Kong's elite athletes to pursue glory. The performances of Hong Kong athletes at the Asian Games has continued to progress since the 1970s. Hong Kong won its first Asian Games gold medal at Seoul 1986 when Catharine Chen Kuk-hung ranked first in women's tenpin bowling. The Hong Kong delegation had won one gold medal, eleven silver medals and 19 bronze medals at the Asian Games from 1974 to 1994, and medals spanned tenpin bowling (1 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze medals), table tennis (3 silver and 1 bronze medals), shooting (3 bronze medals), sailing/windsurfing (3 silver and 1 bronze medals), wu shu (martial arts) (2 silver and 3 bronze medals), swimming (2 bronze medals), judo (3 bronze medals) and rowing (1 silver and 2 bronze medals).⁸¹

At the 1993 East Asian Games, Hong Kong achieved unprecedented success, winning one gold, two silver and eight bronze medals and ranking sixth in the medal table. Badminton, martial arts and swimming contributed medals to the Hong Kong delegation.

Hong Kong also participated in the Commonwealth Games between 1970 and 1994, winning its first gold medal in 1970 and five gold medals in total from badminton, shooting and lawn bowls. Lawn bowls was the largest contributor to Hong Kong's medals.⁸²

Since the 1970s, Hong Kong has thus enjoyed a relatively steady period of development.

With the economic boom and increased demand for national reputation, sport, especially elite sport, was valued by the government. The creation of the Council for Recreation Sport in 1973 demonstrated the increased salience of sport at the government level. The establishment of the JSC in 1982, specifically for elite sport training, could be regarded as an example of increased salience. To enhance the efficiency of policy making and funding allocation, the Hong Kong Sports Development Board was founded in 1990. Elite sport development accelerated during this period. Moreover, Hong Kong started to harvest elite sport success during this period with its first Asian Games gold medal in 1986 and its first Olympic gold medal in Atlanta in 1996. However, during the period, with these exceptions, Hong Kong's competitiveness on the international stage remained comparatively limited, despite the significantly increased government input, and the growth of public attention and enthusiasm.

1997-2019

Political context

The year of 1997 witnessed one of the most important political events in China's history – the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty as an SAR under the 'One Country, Two Systems' formula.⁸³ Enshrined in the *Basic Law* governing Hong Kong, the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle is the guiding principle in Hong Kong's development in the post-handover era and espouses Hong Kong's retention of its capitalist system for 50 years. However, the *Basic Law* also stipulates that as an SAR, Hong Kong is 'an

inalienable part of the People's Republic of China' (Article 1) and enjoys 'a high degree of autonomy' and independent 'executive, legislative and independent judicial power' (Article 2).

The 1997 handover heralded a new chapter in Hong Kong sports development as well. Hong Kong's approaches to sport development in the colonial era remained largely unchanged after the handover in 1997. For instance, 'the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall, on its own, formulate policies on sports. Non-governmental sports organizations may continue to exist and develop in accordance with law' (Article 143). As the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, envisaged, sport in Hong Kong would 'enter a new era with the return of Hong Kong to its motherland and the government of Hong Kong SAR would concentrate on the sport development in Hong Kong'.⁸⁴ Consequently, the Hong Kong government has adopted a series of practical policies on the development of mass sport and elite sport since 1997.

Elite sport has 'developed more rapidly and systematically, with the government playing a more proactive role in providing policy and financial support and more funds directed from non-governmental most notably commercial sources in the last decade'.⁸⁵ There were various reasons explaining the Hong Kong SAR government's continuous support for elite sport development including the bidding for and hosting of sports mega events. The most noteworthy rationale was that 'athletes' success in the international arena, brings glory to Hong Kong people',⁸⁶ accompanied by the desire for the establishment of a 'distinct Hong Kong identity',⁸⁷ the promotion of Hong Kongers'

image of ‘global citizenship’,⁸⁸ and to ‘elevate the status of the Hong Kong SAR to a centre for hosting international sports events and improve the SAR’s international image’.⁸⁹ In fact, as Zheng noted, Hong Kong government’s growing emphasis on elite sport including the hosting of mega sports events was mainly premised on the consideration of enhancing Hong Kong’s soft power.⁹⁰ In Tung Chee-haw’s address, Hong Kong is ‘pursuing international recognition of its status as an “Asian World City”, and expressed elite sport achievements and the hosting of mega-sports events are regarded as an effective way of boosting Hong Kong’s pursuit of these policy objectives, enhancing Hong Kong’s soft power’.⁹¹ Thus, ‘it is evident that elite sport entails a soft power function for Hong Kong concerning its global image, visibility and a distinctive Hong Kong identity’.⁹²

Government sports structure

In the aftermath of the handover, Hong Kong underwent major structural reforms. The Home Affairs Bureau was created in 1997, one of whose important roles is to improve the liaison and communication among all communities. The Urban Council and the Regional Council were reformed to provisional councils and disbanded by the end of 1999. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department was established in 2000 to take over more sports and leisure affairs particularly in the wake of the termination of the Urban Council and Regional Council. Later, led by Home Affairs Bureau, an *ad hoc* team conducted a review of Hong Kong sport development and a sports policy review entitled *Towards a More Sporting Future* was promulgated in 2002, which is a landmark

event in Hong Kong sport development in the new era. In this report, two significant alternatives were put forward. The first initiative was to reform the then existing government sports structure, for example, to establish an advisory body concerning sport policy-making and to reappraise the role of Hong Kong Sports Development Board. The second accent was to put forward the three objectives of Hong Kong sport, namely (1) Promoting ‘sport for all’; (2) Fostering high performance sports; and (3) Equipping Hong Kong to host international sport events. The three objectives guide the direction of Hong Kong sport.⁹³

According to this review, HKSDB was dissolved on 1 October 2004 because of the overlap of responsibilities with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI) was incorporated and became the sole delivery agent of the government to implement elite sport policies, which was the most marked organizational change for elite sport development. Furthermore, the Sports Council (SC) was established as an advisory organization in 2005. Following the three objectives, the Community Sports Committee (CSC), the Elite Sports Committee (ESC) and the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC) were founded to underpin the SC. The former reform confirmed the leading status of the HKSI as the headquarters and fortress of elite athlete training in Hong Kong ‘or the factory of Hong Kong’s elite sports success’.⁹⁴ The administrative system of sport development in Hong Kong became increasingly mature and complete after the handover. According to Ma and Lau and Chan, there are five organizations that are the most influential in (elite) sport development in Hong Kong, which are the Home Affairs Bureau, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the

Hong Kong Sports Institute, Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong and Sports Council.⁹⁵ Figure 1 presents a summary of the current sports organizational structure in Hong Kong.

(Figure 1 about here)

The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) is responsible for sport and leisure, recreation and culture and youth development in Hong Kong at the government level.⁹⁶ In general, the HAB oversees ‘the overall formulation and implementation of sports policies, coordination of strategic planning of sports and recreational facilities, and decisions on the related funding allocations’.⁹⁷ The focus of the Home Affairs Bureau is on the social and cultural functions of sport and the interaction with Mainland China.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (a branch department of the Home Affairs Bureau), sets its sights on developing and managing a wide range of sports for community and recreational facilities for use by the general public. An additional area of the ambit of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is the promotion of school sport and physical education in the SAR, working in partnership with the Education Bureau. The School Sports Programme is the most notable output of the LCSD’s support for school sport.⁹⁸

The Sports Council is an advisory organization offering advice on policies, strategies and funding plans of Hong Kong sport to the SAR government. The Sports Council comprises the Community Sports Committee, the Elite Sports Committee, and

the Major Sports Events Committee. The Community Sports Committee mainly counsels on broader participation in sports through partnership with different sectors of the community as well as in funding priorities for supporting community sports programs. Since 2007, the Hong Kong Games (HKG) organized by the Sports Council and co-ordinated by the CSC has been hosted biennially, aiming to promote the ‘Sports for All’ culture in the community. The 18 District Councils, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee, and the eight National Sports Associations, are co-organizers.⁹⁹ The HKG has not only enhanced communication among the 18 DCs and promoted sport culture but also, as Mr Lau Kong-wah, the ex-Secretary for Home Affairs, addressed in the Seventh HKG Opening Ceremony, ‘can also identify young athletes with potential for further training to become elite athletes in future and bring glory to Hong Kong’.¹⁰⁰

The development of high-performance sports is under the aegis of the Elite Sports Committee which provides policy direction to the Hong Kong Sports Institute, and advises on funding priorities for supporting high-performance sports and athletes. In comparison, the Major Sports Events Committee’s ambit is specific to providing advice on strategies and initiatives for ‘hosting major sporting events through partnership with sports associations, the tourism industry and the private sector and on funding priorities for major sporting events’.¹⁰¹ In 2004, the ‘M’ Mark System was launched by the Major Sports Events Committee to bolster the National Sports Associations’ capacity for hosting mega international events and further projecting the image of Hong Kong as an ‘Asian sports events capital’.¹⁰² Hong Kong’s investment

in hosting sports mega events has come to fruition in recent years, illustrated by reference to a number of sports mega events hosted in Hong Kong, most notably 2017 UCI Track Cycling World Championships, which have also been instrumental in promoting elite sport development and enhancing Hong Kong's elite sport competitiveness.

The HKSI was established in 2004 as a quasi-governmental organization, and it is mainly funded by the government and considered as the stronghold of elite athletes' development by providing a high-quality training environment and comprehensive support services including training support services, dual career support and retirement support. The Elite Training System is based on the conviction that athletes could receive full-time training as well as academic development simultaneously. Therefore, the Sports Scholarship Scheme, backs the system and provides athletes with wide-ranging support including direct financial support, elite training programme and dual career development.¹⁰³ Remarkable athletes and athletes with disabilities in Tier A sports and outstanding individual athletes who do not pertain to Tier A sports are beneficiaries of this scheme. Junior athletes and potential athletes could also receive support from HKSI such as Elite Training Grants and local training support respectively. Except for well-equipped training facilities, advanced sports science support and accommodation, they could also enjoy academic support through the Memoranda of Understanding signed by the Hong Kong Sports Institute and nine local universities and the partnership with 27 local secondary schools.¹⁰⁴ The universities and secondary schools can provide more flexible arrangements for full-time athletes and student athletes. At present, there

are about 1300 elite athletes at the HKSI, including 500 full-time athletes. The EVSS is applied to identify and stratify the high-performance sports which could be the legitimate recipients of the Sports Scholarship Scheme. Only sports and events that are contested at the Olympic or Asian Games are eligible for support under Tier A* and Tier A, and sports in which athletes have the potential to perform to a very high standard at the Olympic Games, are positioned as ‘Tier A*’ sports. Badminton, cycling, table tennis and windsurfing are recognized as Tier A* sports, 16 sports (i.e. athletics, billiards, equestrian, fencing, gymnastics, karatedo, rowing, rugby sevens, sailing, skating, squash, swimming, tennis, tenpin bowling, triathlon and Wushu) are identified as Tier A sports, and there are 13 Tier B sports.¹⁰⁵ Amongst these sports/disciplines, Tier A* sports are subject to additional funds and resources to enhance training.

Moreover, Paralympic Sports in Hong Kong have also been funded by the HKSAR Government. Yu Chui-ye, one of the world-renowned wheelchair fencers, has competed in four Paralympic Games from 2004 to 2016 and won seven gold medals, three silver medals and one bronze medal for Hong Kong. She ascribed her success to the work of the Hong Kong Sports Institute and the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which had provided her with first-class training support and dual career development.¹⁰⁶ A new EVSS for Para Sports will be enacted from 1 April 2019. Boccia, para badminton, para table tennis (physical disability), wheelchair fencing, para swimming and para table tennis (intellectual disability) are included in the Tier A rung of the EVSS ladder. Elite para athletes of Tier A and Tier B sports will receive funds from Elite Training Grant for Athletes with Disabilities (ETGD). In 2018-2019, 30 full-time and 30 part-

time senior para athletes as well as 119 potential para athletes in 14 para-sports received direct financial support from the Hong Kong Sports Institute.¹⁰⁷

Additionally, The HKSI provides elite athletes with retirement support. Funded by Government, the HKSI implements an Athlete Development Support Programme to provide the practicing athletes with life skills, vocational training and coaching apprenticeship programmes, which are beneficial to their second career. For the full-time athletes retiring from sports training and competitions, a one-off bonus through the Elite Athletes Performance Recognition Scheme (EAPRS) has been sent to eligible applicants by the HKSI since 2015.¹⁰⁸ So far, 27 retired athletes have benefited from the EAPRS. (reference) Furthermore, SF&OC has implemented the Hong Kong Athletes Career and Education Programme with Government funding to support the serving and retired athletes by providing education counselling, life skills training, career support activities and a mentorship programme.¹⁰⁹ These series of initiatives provide support for the future development of the elite athletes.

In 1999, The ASF&OC removed the letter 'A' denoting 'Amateur' and was officially changed to the SF&OC (Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China), because professional athletes started to be permitted to compete in the Olympic Games by the IOC. The SF&OC has also played a significant role in the development of elite sport regarding Hong Kong's participation in major sports events including the Olympic Games, Asian Games, the East Asian Games, and the promotion of the Olympic movement in Hong Kong.¹¹⁰ The central responsibility of the SF&OC is coordinating the development of local sports organizations and leading Hong Kong

delegation to participate in major sports events. The government provides a subvention to the SF&OC to meet its personnel, office and program expenses and to assist the SF&OC in organizing seminars and training courses for staff and officials of National Sports Associations (NSAs).¹¹¹

As the local governing bodies of individual sport, the NSAs are members of their respective Asian Federations, IFs and the SF&OC and responsible for coordinating local sports organizations, promoting their respective sports in Hong Kong, organizing multi-sports competitions and training coaches and referees.¹¹² At present, there are 79 NSAs affiliated to the SF&OC, many of these NSAs operate in the form of a limited company, and some NSAs even become highly successful business entities.¹¹³

To summarize, Home Affairs Bureau, as the government organization responsible, leads the orientation of elite sport development, whose roles include policy making, funding allocation and decision making. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department, as one branch of Home Affairs Bureau, is promoting mass sport participation and funding NSAs by a Sports Subvention Scheme which can also identify young athletes with potential, and train high-level coaches and world-class umpires for individual elite sport. The Sports Council, and, in particular, the Elite Sports Committee, gives advice to the Home Affairs Bureau concerning elite sport policies and funding allocation, acting as a bridge linking the Home Affairs Bureau and Hong Kong Sports Institute. The HKSI is the delivery agent of government support, implementing policies, distributing funds and training athletes. The HKSI also collaborates with the SF&OC, NSAs and other sport-related organizations in Hong Kong and overseas for cultivating

talented athletes and promoting training program for elite athletes. SF&OC's remit is to select athletes for International multi-sport events with the help of HKSI and publicize the Olympic Movement together with Home Affairs Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The five organizations work efficiently with their respective responsibilities and cooperate to promote Hong Kong elite sport development.

Financial support

There are two major funding sources for sport development: public and private sectors. However, as Lau and Chan noted, government subvention is the main financial source, especially for elite sport.¹¹⁴

Since 1997, the Hong Kong government has injected various types of funds to support the development of sport. In 1997, the Hong Kong government allocated HK\$300 million to set up an Arts and Sport Development Fund (ASDF) to help the Hong Kong Sports Development Board accomplish its objectives of developing sport in Hong Kong, a subsidiary fund under the Sir David Trench Fund for Recreation, which is one of the major funding sources for the development of sport in Hong Kong. The government has injected capital four times since the establishment of the ASDF. Between July 2010 and February 2019, 975 sports projects with a total approved amount of about HK\$831 million were funded.¹¹⁵ A recent fund approved in January 2019 saw the injection of HK\$1 billion into the sports portion of the Arts and Sport Development Fund to strengthen the funding support for sports organizations to train

athletes and host events. Currently, the Arts and Sport Development Fund (sports portion) supports such sports projects in the cases of athlete preparation for and participation in major international games, hosting international sports events, the development of local football, the development of team-sports, and other one-off initiatives that are important to the development and promotion of sport in Hong Kong.¹¹⁶

Football, as a traditionally popular sport in Hong Kong, has experienced a stagnant period in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the Hong Kong Men's Football Team won the gold medal at the 2009 East Asian Games, recapturing the attention of the government and the residents. In 2011, Project Phoenix was launched by the Home Affairs Bureau to revive all-level football development by allocating HK\$20 million a year. Furthermore, a five-year strategic plan entitled *Aiming High-Together* was initiated in 2015 after the termination of Project Phoenix and the HAB increased the funding support to HK\$25 million a year.¹¹⁷

Equally notably, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department administers and manages a Sports Subvention Scheme which offers annual subvention to the National Sports Associations for developing each individual sport. The subsidised sports programmes include international events, training programmes and development schemes. The NSAs had obtained funds from the statutory Hong Kong Sports Development Board before 2004-2005, and it has received subvention from the Sports Subvention Scheme after the dissolution of the Hong Kong Sports Development Board in 2004. In 2019-2020, 60 NSAs were recipients of the Sports Subvention Scheme

funds, and the amount of subsidy ranged from approximately HK\$ 1.2 million to over HK\$18 million.¹¹⁸

As the delivery agent of the Government's elite sport development system, the Hong Kong Sports Institute has enjoyed a marked growth of funds in the last decade, including a notable increase in the government subvention figure, from the initial HK\$ 95.8 million in 2004-2005 to HK\$ 596.2 million in 2018-2019. In addition, it should also be noted that the government changed its financial support plan to the HKSI in 2011. Instead of offering direct annual subvention, the government established a HK\$7 billion Elite Athletes Development Fund (EADF) to provide the HKSI with a stable and long-term source for future funding for its operations. This has created a distinctive way of supporting the HKSI by capitalizing on the annual investment return on the capital.¹¹⁹ In 2018-19, over \$590 million was allocated to the HKSI from the EADF by the government. Additionally, the proportion of government subvention and funds has also dramatically risen from 54% in 2004-2005 to approximately 84.1% 2018-2019 following the notable increase in the EADF allocated to the HKSI. In January 2019, the government additionally ratified an injection of HK\$6 billion to the EADF.

The government also funds the hosting of major sports events. Under the 'M' Mark System, more than HK\$100 million was allocated to the organizers of the 'M' Mark events in the last decade and the number of the events increased from four at the very beginning to 14 events in 2019.¹²⁰ 'Major Sports Events Matching Grant Scheme' was set up to encourage sponsorships from business and the private sector. The government allocated HK\$500 million in 2019 to update this scheme, aiming to attract

more sponsorships. For the Fifth East Asia Game held in Hong Kong in 2009, the government invested HK\$1 billion in building sports venues and upgrading sports fields, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong authorized HK\$300 million towards the cost of the construction of Tseung Kwan O Sports Ground and other facilities, and over HK\$700 million were allocated for the improvement and innovation of sports facilities.¹²¹ In addition, the construction of the oft-quoted Kai Tak Sports Park commenced in 2019 and the government is the funder of the total HK\$30 billion of the construction expenses.

The private sector also contributes to sport development in Hong Kong. Hang Seng Bank, Hong Kong Bank Foundations, Bank of China Scheme, and independent trusts such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club, have been highly generous in financially supporting Hong Kong's elite sport development. In January 2016, 'there [were] 80 corporations which had joined the Core Sponsor Group to become the sponsors of a major sports events (e.g. the Hong Kong Marathon, the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens, and the Hong Kong Cricket Sixes)'.¹²² Moreover, some special award schemes are provided for medal-winners in high-profile events by the private sector. For instance, the Hang Seng Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme was launched to 'allocate HK\$1.11 million for medallists at the Twelfth National Games in 2013 with a gold medallist receiving HK\$300,000'.¹²³ In recent years, the HKJC Trust sponsored the Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme for giving prize money to outstanding athletes at the 2016 Olympic Games, including 'HK\$3 million awarded for gold medalist, HK\$1.5 million awarded for silver medalist and HK\$0.75 million awarded for bronze medalist',¹²⁴

although no Hong Kong athlete won any medal of any colour at Rio de Janeiro 2016.

In a similar manner, individual foundations from prominent business families have donated funds to general sport affairs and elite sport development, such as the Li Ka Shing Foundation, Tsang Hin Chi Sports Foundation and most notably Henry Fok Sports Foundation which have invested hundreds of millions of Hong Kong dollars into sport development in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The Fok Family, particularly Timothy Fok and his father Henry Fok, has been committed to sport development and pursuit of elite sport success in Hong Kong and have been described as the ‘head’ of Olympic Sport in Hong Kong.¹²⁵

High-performance achievements

Since the handover and reunification in 1997, Hong Kong has continued to participate in international sports events including the Olympic Games in the name of Hong Kong, China. After winning its first gold medal at the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games, Hong Kong has won another two medals at the 2004 and 2012 Olympic Games respectively. Li Ching and Ko Lai-chak, winning Hong Kong’s first silver medal in table tennis at the 2004 Olympic Games, were celebrated as a defining moment in the history of this sport in Hong Kong. Lee Wai-sze won a bronze medal in women’s keirin at the 2012 London Olympic Games and she was acclaimed as the Goddess Cyclist from Ngau Tau Kok which is a public housing estate where she grew up.¹²⁶

In addition, as a city located in a tropical area, Hong Kong started its Winter Olympic journey at Salt Lake City 2002, although the events contested by Hong Kong

athletes were confined to short track speed skating and alpine skiing.¹²⁷ In comparison to the Olympic Games, Hong Kong's recent performance at the Paralympics has been particularly noteworthy, demonstrated by the achievements of Hong Kong athletes' in winning three gold medals at the 2012 Paralympic Games, two gold medals at the 2016 Paralympic Games and a record of five gold medals at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games (see Table 1).

(Table 1 about here)

In addition to the Olympic Games, regional sporting events have been the primary platform for sporting achievements by Hong Kong athletes in international competition. In the context of the Asian Games, Hong Kong has won at least one gold medal at each Games since Bangkok 1998, and at the most recent Jakarta 2018 Asian games, Hong Kong made a breakthrough by winning 46 medals in total. Moreover, Hong Kong has demonstrated how it values the East Asian Games by taking part in every Games since 1993 and successfully hosting the Fifth East Asian Games in 2009. Table 2 summarizes Hong Kong's Asian Games medal performance since Bangkok 1998.

(Table 2 about here)

After the handover in 1997, Hong Kong stopped participating in the Commonwealth Games, and it started to send athletes to compete in the National Games of China. Hong

Kong has won at least one gold medal at every Games since 1997. Table 3 provides more detail.

(Table 3 about here)

Hong Kong's advantage sports/disciplines and main sources of success are salient examples of the blend of British heritage and Chinese influence, in accord with its distinctive history. Prominent examples of its colonial history include football, swimming and windsurfing, whereas table tennis, badminton and fencing resonate with the close tie between Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Hong Kong ushered in a new era after the handover to Mainland China. Although the fundamental economic system is slated to remain unchanged for 50 years, the government administration is confronted with reforms. Sports in general and elite sport in particular has been regarded as a strong and powerful avenue for promoting Hong Kong's image to the World and of enhancing the identity of the local residents. Therefore, it is inevitable that the governmental sports structures have evolved and the funds directed to elite sport development have risen. The Hong Kong Sports Development Board was dissolved and instead, the Sports Council became responsible for making suggestions to government concerning policy-making with the Hong Kong Sports Institute in charge of allocating funding and elite training. With more interaction with Mainland China, Hong Kong has also been able to make progress in badminton, table tennis, cycling and fencing at the Olympic Games and the Asian Games.

Discussion

This research reviews Hong Kong's elite sport development and analyses the impacts that the political, economic and social factors have had on elite sport development since 1842. The main findings in the four time periods are (1) The political, economic and social vicissitudes have constrained the stage and boundary of Hong Kong elite sport. For example, after the Second World War and with the establishment of PRC, the Communist Party has prevailed in East Asia. With the outburst of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the political atmosphere in Hong Kong was deeply influenced. Workers and teenagers supported by the 'leftist camp' protested against British colonial rule, and clashed violently with the Hong Kong Police Force in 1967.¹²⁸ This was the largest-scale demonstration in the colonial history of Hong Kong. However, it opened the policy window, unconsciously embracing the promotion of sports development. The riots in the 1960s unexpectedly raised the salience of sport in the eyes of the colonial government, even though the primary impetus was to combat the social disturbances and distract public attention from political issues in the aftermath of the riots by providing initiatives such as creating Council for Recreation Sport to release emotional energy'.¹²⁹ In a similar sense, Mainland China has confronted with the Korean War during 1950-1953 leaving sport development stagnant. When in the closing stage of the war, sport in general and elite sport in particular were once again on the government's policy agenda, most notably with the creation of The Central People's Government Committee of Sports (precursor of the General Administration of Sport of

China) in November 1952 and the establishment of The National Artistic Gymnastics Team in November 1953.¹³⁰

(2) Hong Kong's elite sport development is imprinted with the heritage of the UK and later with the mark of Mainland China. Illustrative examples are the creation of the YMCA in 1901, promoting tennis, cricket and swimming and the success of football in Far Eastern Championships in the 1920s and 1930s. It is also worth noting that the first Olympic gold medal was won by Lee Lai-shan in windsurfing a sport of British origin. However, when Hong Kong's future was settled by the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* signed in 1984, the links were strengthened between Hong Kong and Mainland China and Hong Kong's elite sport development was influenced more by Mainland China. For instance, Shen Jinkang, the former head coach of the National Cyclist Team was accredited to Hong Kong in 1994, and later cultivated the world champion racing cyclist Wong Kam-po and led the Hong Kong team to top ranking in Asia. Furthermore, Hong Kong imported many excellent players in badminton and table tennis from Mainland China such as Wang Chen, Zhou mi, Li Ching and Ko Lai-chak, who secured medals in International competition and brought glory to Hong Kong. In addition, led by the Mainland coaches, the Hong Kong teams, including the cycling team, fencing team and swimming team had more opportunities to train at facilities in mainland China such as in Yunnan province and Guangdong province, which helped to enhance their performances. Cycling and fencing have been stable medal-winning sources at the Asian Games.

(3) The extent of government's involvement is rising and determines the

salience of elite sport and the policy outputs. In other words, the evolution of elite sport policies reveals the changing ideology of the colonial government and the HKSAR government. In the early stage (before 1960s) sport peripheral to the government's policy agenda. Sport development was promoted by the civil organizations and clubs. In the 1960s-1970s, sport reached the government's policy agenda, being seen as a way to combat political unrest by releasing young people's energy and deflecting their attention. The policy instruments were comparatively limited, mainly establishing the Sir David Trench Fund for Recreation and forming the Council for Recreation Sport. It is worth mentioning that during the 'MacLehose Years' (from 1971 to 1982), the profile of elite sport was enhanced as it was valued by the then British Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose as an integrator of policy objectives, helping to improve living standards, ameliorating colonial government's image, and building Hong Kong people's sense of belonging.¹³¹ Accordingly, the first elite training centre the JSC was established in 1982 with the support of the then government and the Hong Kong Jockey Club. After the handover to Mainland China, the salience of elite sport was enhanced with the changing of government's policy objectives. Elite sport was valued as a demonstration of soft power, a way to improve the Hong Kong people's sense of identity, and a function to build social cohesion. Therefore, the government formulated a series of initiatives to promote elite sport development, including reforming the government sports structure by disbanding the Hong Kong Sports Development Board and establishing the Sports Council; setting up and increasingly injecting funding to develop elite sport training, rewarding outstanding athletes and hosting major sports events; and proposing

programmes to help elite athletes with dual career and personal development. Accordingly, the Hong Kong delegation's medal-winning capacity was enhanced gaining 6 gold medals and 28 medals or above from the 2006 Doha Asian Games and subsequently made a historical-breakthrough by winning 8 gold medals and 46 medals at the Jakarta Palembang 2018 Asian Games. However, the medal winning capacity at Summer Olympics has been sporadic with one medal in every eight years since 1996.

Therefore, three concomitant issues are worth noting for the policy practitioners and stakeholders. First, from the historical review, elite sport development has been subject to political, economic and social vicissitudes and the government's reaction, to some extent, has been passive. However, proactively setting objectives and formulating related policies has contributed to high-performance achievements. A notable exemplar is Mainland China. Mainland China has become one of the super powers at Summer Olympic Games in last two decades partly due to the launch of *The Outline of the Strategic Olympic Glory Plan* by GAS, which defines the objectives of mechanism and system reform, the fundamental capability development and the performance targets at Summer and Winter Olympic Games.¹³² It is a long term strategy covering 1994-2000, 2001-2010 and 2011-2020, which not only indicates the directions for related organizations and stakeholders but also promotes the consistency and continuity of policy implementation. In comparison with what went before, the Hong Kong Sports Development Board launched two Five-Year Strategic Plans from 1991 to 2000, but these terminated in 2000 with no further plans. The government is recommended to make a long-term comprehensive policy with defining objectives and realise them

incrementally.

Second, as a small region and a former colony and witnessing handover, Hong Kong arguably initially followed an imitative strategy,¹³³ indicating its dependency to some degree on its colonial ruler concerning sport development. On one hand, the imprint the UK left on Hong Kong resulted in success in windsurfing and cycling at Olympic Games and Asian Games which the UK dominates at Summer Olympics in the last two decades, although the head coach of cyclist team is from Mainland China. In addition, the competitiveness Hong Kong demonstrates in snooker, squash and rugby proves the influence of the UK. On the other hand, Hong Kong's notable progress in badminton and table tennis illustrates the close tie with Mainland China by importing successful players, hiring world-class coaches, training in Mainland and communicating sport science. However, it remains an open question as to who Hong Kong should learn from with regard to elite sport. If Hong Kong wants to repeat its triumph at the Olympic Games, it will need to consider which sports should be prioritized in the work of the Hong Kong Sports Institute? The EVSS is criticised because it cannot provide financial support to young athletes who play newly developed sports until he or she has won medals in international or regional competitions. The issues of what type of niche elite sport market Hong Kong should focus on, and what sports should be prioritised, are issues which will need to be addressed by stakeholders.

Last, the growing focus of government on elite sport is reflected in the increasing financial support provided by government. The Arts and Sport Development Fund (Sports Portion) was set up in 1997 by the government to help develop sport

including supporting athletes preparing for major international games with start-up capital of HK\$300 million. In 2019, an injection of HK\$1 billion was made to the sports portion of the Arts and Sport Development Fund. The Elite Athletes Development Fund (EADF) was established with a HK\$7 billion injection by the government in 2011 to provide the Hong Kong Sports Institute with a stable and long-term source of funding. In 2019, an additional HK\$6 billion was injected to EADF to strengthen the operation of HKSI. The government also initiated incentives and awards to encourage elite athletes to pursue high performance at major sports events. An Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme was established in HKSI providing cash incentives to medal winners at the Olympic Games and other major international games. For the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the award was as high as HK\$3 million for a gold medalist, HK\$1.5 million for silver medalist and HK\$0.75 million for bronze medalist. Unfortunately, no medals of any colour were won by Hong Kong athletes. The government keeps allocating substantial funding to elite sport, while the medal winning capacity at the Summer Olympics is sporadic. How to render such a funding strategy effective and efficient is a long-standing conundrum for officials.

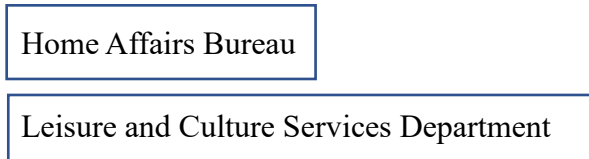
This paper contributes to the literature on elite sport development by exploring the case of Hong Kong. There is a plethora of studies focusing on ‘successful’ nations and regions on the international stage. However, there is a dearth of research on regions similar to Hong Kong which is a non-sovereign entity with independent sporting status. It is intended that this holistic and multi-faceted review of sport development in Hong Kong since its inception enrich understanding concerning the interrelationships

between politics, economics, social change and sport development.

Future researchers are encouraged to undertake comparative studies on regions similar to Hong Kong such as Puerto Rico, Bermuda, Barbados and Cayman Islands, which are non-sovereign entities but independent sporting status, and while (as we hope this paper has demonstrated) evaluation of literary sources and documents can provide significant insight, other data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews with key stakeholder representatives would provide useful insights into the rationale for strategic choices made in relation to achieving elite sporting success in such environments..

Figure 1 Hong Kong Sports Structure

Government



Quasi-Government Organisation



Non-governmental Organisations



Table 1

Table 1. Hong Kong’s Summer Olympic performance since 1996.

Edition	Host city	Number of competing sports	Number of medals
1996	Atlanta	10	1 Gold (Sailing/Windsurfing)
2000	Sydney	9	
2004	Athens	10	1 Silver (Table Tennis)
2008	Beijing	11	
2012	London	13	1 Bronze (Cycling)
2016	Rio de Janeiro	9	

Source: Sports-Reference (SR, 2016b).

Table 2

Table 2. Hong Kong's Asian Games medal performance since Bangkok 1998.

Edition	Host city	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Place in the gold medal table
1998	Bangkok	5	6	6	13
2002	Busan	4	6	11	16
2006	Doha	6	12	10	15
2010	Guangzhou	8	15	17	11
2014	Inchon	6	12	24	13
2018	Jakarta	8	18	20	13

Sources: Sports-Reference (SR, 2018b).

Table 3: Hong Kong's medal performance at the National Games of China since 1997.

Edition	Host city	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1997	Shanghai	2	0	0	2
2001	Guangzhou	2	2	1	5
2005	Jiangsu	1	0	3	4
2009	Shandong	2	1	4	7
2013	Liaoning	1	4	3	8

*At the most recent 2017 National Games in Tianjin, the General Administration of Sport of China (GAS) cancelled medal ranking and changed the calculation method for athletes' performance.

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