

POLICY TRANSFER AND LEARNING FROM THE WEST

Policy transfer and learning from the West: Elite basketball
development in the People's Republic of China

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Abstract

The paper examines the engagement of the People's Republic of China with global sport using basketball as an example. Following a discussion of the priority given to national elite team sport success in contemporary China the paper explores the range of mechanisms which facilitate sport globalisation and focuses particularly on evaluating the utility of the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing. The examination of the concepts is achieved through the exploration of a series of questions relating to recent developments in basketball in China including how the need for reform of the domestic system was recognized and articulated, who was instrumental in transferring policy, which countries were identified as suitable exemplars and which policies were transferred. The article draws on data collected from a number of sources including official government documents, news media, a series of interviews with Chinese officials from key governmental organisations. The paper concludes that the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing provide significant insight into the process and of China's engagement in basketball and identifies a series of tensions arising from the process which impact upon contemporary sport policy.

From 1978, the year of Deng Xiaoping's announcement of the 'open door' policy, until the mid 1990s the term 'globalization' was, according to Yu, 'so politically sensitive that Chinese scholars avoided mentioning it [as the concept] ... was perceived as a synonym for capitalism' (2009, p. 149). It was not until president Jiang Zemin referred to the trend toward economic globalization in 1998 that the issue of globalization was discussed more openly within China and only gradually did the discussion begin to explore the interplay between economic aspects of globalization and the cultural and political (Yu, 2002; Tian, 2005). According to Yu (2009, p.155) the Chinese government acknowledged that 'it is inevitable that [Western countries] will seek to export their worldviews and value systems along with their capital'. It is arguable that an analysis of the recent development of basketball, more than any other sport, provides a unique opportunity to explore the interplay of globalization and contemporary Chinese identity - between a quintessentially American cultural export energetically promoted by the NBA and a resurgent Chinese nationalism. The complexities of the interweaving of globalization and nationalism are reflected in the response towards individual Chinese players who have been successful in American teams and the persistent under-achievement of the men's national team. While the Chinese basketball star Yao Ming, who plays for the Houston Rockets, has been referred to as the 'poster child of globalization' (Larmer, 2005 p68) and hailed as 'an icon of confidence for China' (Xu, 2008 p.210) the lack of success of the Chinese national team has been a source of deep national disappointment and an improvement in the

fortunes of the national team has become a preoccupation of the government.

The recent history of basketball in China resonates along the economic, cultural and political dimensions of the broader debates about globalization. In economic terms market reforms have created one of the fastest growing economies in the world and have also, in part, been responsible for the remarkable rise in China's standing on the international sporting stage (Hong, 2008; Tan, 2008; Tan and Green, 2008). The growth of basketball in China and the relationship between the country and the NBA epitomizes many of the sharp dilemmas and deep tensions that engagement with a highly commodified global sport generates. Balancing the interests of the nascent commercial league and clubs with those of the national team, the unease at an open international transfer system and the provision of financial incentives for players are indications of China's ambiguous relationship with commercialized sport. The tensions and ambiguities are also evident at the cultural level where China has had to reconcile the emergence of a star culture which has threatened to jeopardize national ambitions for Olympic success with an acceptance of an effective incentive structure for both players and coaches. However, it is the state which has played the central role in facilitating globalization and continues to play the central role in attempting to manage the economic and cultural consequences of that engagement. While this paper takes account of economic and cultural impact of globalization in basketball the main concern is with the political sphere and, in particular, the role of the state. Specifically, the aim of the paper is to evaluate the utility of the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing in understanding the

mechanisms of globalization in relation to state policy for basketball. The paper begins by situating the discussion of sport globalization in the context of contemporary China and continues with a discussion of policy transfer and lesson drawing as a pair of related concepts that have emerged in recent years as attempts to understand the mechanisms of the process of globalization.

Sport and contemporary China

Generalising about any country runs the risk of replacing analysis with caricature and in relation to a country as vast, dynamic and diverse as China the risk is even greater. Consequently, assessments of contemporary China's social, cultural and economic position vary significantly with even assessments of China's economic performance and prospects prompting disagreement (see Guthrie 2006, Chang 2001; Kwong 1997). These caveats notwithstanding, a consistent theme running through many of the general and sports-specific analyses of contemporary China is the apparent paradoxes that the country exhibits. Such paradoxes include those between economic deregulation and a highly interventionist state (Fukuyama 1992), between the ideology of market socialism and Confucianism (Bell, 2008), and between the growth of an atomistic consumerism and the maintenance of political collectivism (Dillon 2009; Guthrie 2006). In the cultural sphere there are more clearly defined tensions between tradition and modernity and between an embrace of westernization and a defence of Sinification. In seeking to explain these tensions Yu argues that they are the product of two

urgent objectives, the first of which is the desire to 'accomplish modernization so as to resolve China's economic and cultural backwardness; the other ... to gain independence and break the "semi-colonialization" of Western dominance' (2009, p.128; see also Dillon 2009). In order to achieve these objectives China 'has had to learn from the West' (Yu, 2009, p.131), but has also had to consider 'how to preclude foreign control while learning from the West' (Yu, 2009, p.131).

A number of writers explain the high emphasis placed on Olympic medal success and success in the major team sports such as basketball and soccer as reflecting China's concern to put its "century of humiliation" behind it. Bell explores the deep sense of disappointment felt in China at the repeated failure of its men's soccer team to achieve even modest levels of international success and notes that 'many Chinese cheer for other soccer powers with long and magnificent histories and traditions. To a certain extent, they are cheering for themselves or for China vicariously' (2008, p.100). Lovell argues even more forcefully that the desire for international sporting success is driven by a need for international affirmation, both symbolic and substantive, of China's status as a world power. 'In the post-Mao era, this desire for recognition has manifested itself in the near pathological yearning for international prizes and "face" – for Nobel Prizes, for entry to the WTO, for Olympic gold medals and, of course, for the prestige of hosting the games themselves' (2009, p.13). This assessment is reinforced by Xu (2008, p.268) who notes that the 'state-driven championship mentality still reflects a combination of Chinese can-do confidence and the country's lingering inferiority complex'. Lovell also argues that the symbols of recognition that China seeks are

western defined and that 'A sense of entitlement to Western-based international plaudits reveals both a confident belief in China's superiority *and* an anxious need for that belief to be affirmed by the west' (2009, p.14). Brownell explains the political and social significance of sporting success as a legacy of a social Darwinist view of nations in which China perceived itself to have cast as the "sick man of East Asia", an insulting label that the Chinese believed was applied to China by Japan and the West. For a century, the goal of erasing the label ... has been the justification for the quest for international sports success" (2008 p.342).

Globalisation, lesson drawing and policy transfer

The caution exhibited by Chinese scholars in discussing globalization due to the perception that it was synonymous with capitalism reflects not only the importance of America and Europe in globalisation, but also the imprecision of the concept which has been variously described as internationalization, deterritorialisation, westernization/Americanisation, universalisation and liberalization all of which were attempts to give greater descriptive precision to the broad concept of globalization but which reflect very different sources, trajectories and balances of ideological content (Scholte, 2003). This definitional vagueness notwithstanding a constant element in the globalization literature is the increased permeability of social and political systems. In relation to sport policy Houlihan (2009, p54) noted that 'By the mid 1990s there was a clear acceptance that an increasing number of policy issues were now embedded in a series of supra-national policy networks'. The acknowledgement of increasing permeability of the domestic by the global

prompted research along two dimensions, the first of which related to questions of the calibration of depth of penetration of the local by the global and particularly whether distinctions could be made between the mere epiphenomenal penetration at the level of transitory fashions in sports products, the level of penetration which affects state policy (e.g. to begin to fund elite international sports or to shift funding from traditional to Olympic sports), or the much more significant level of penetration which causes change in the more deeply held values and attitudes of a culture (e.g. regarding the participation of women in sport or the autonomy of sports organizations). The second dimension was a concern to understand the mechanisms by which the permeation of domestic social and political systems took place. Suggested mechanisms include external imposition, the intentional scanning by domestic actors of the international environment in search of ideas, processes and policies to import and the unconscious absorption of external ideas.

An example of external imposition would be the role of the World Anti-Doping Agency in shaping the practices of domestic sport federations in the area of anti-doping by requiring compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code as a condition for participation in the Olympic Games. While the domestic response to doping is strongly influenced by an increasingly firmly established and elaborate international policy regime other mechanisms of globalization are far less easily identified (Houlihan 2009). The concept of path dependency is one such mechanism and implies that 'the trajectory of change up to a certain point constrains the trajectory after that point' (Kay 2005, p533). It might be argued, for

example, that once a government has taken the decision to value Olympic sport success it is substantially locked on to a sequence of decisions which include the investment in sport science, the financial support of athletes to enable them to train full time and the adaption of domestic competition structures to suit preparation for international events. A related mechanism is mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) which suggests that when faced with a high level of uncertainty organizations (including governments) will imitate, though not necessarily consciously, the organizational form, policies and practices of those organizations and governments that appear to have been successful in addressing a particular issue or problem. Evidence of this mechanism can be found in the significant elements of the elite sport development system designed in the Soviet Union and refined in the former East Germany that can be found in many countries including Australia, the UK and Japan.

The concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing as mechanisms of globalization sit comfortably with the more intentional mechanisms as they rely on the initiative of domestic agents. The exploration of the utility of the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing is particularly timely given the country's recent hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and our relative lack of knowledge of the policy processes underlying sport development in general and basketball development in particular in China.

The next section provides a brief background to the early development of basketball in China. The review is followed by a discussion of the concept of policy transfer which provides the basis for the analysis of a series of questions

relating to basketball in China including how the need for reform was recognized and expressed, who was instrumental in transferring policy, which countries were identified as suitable exemplars and which policies were transferred? The article draws on an empirical study of the impact of globalising forces on sport development in China, involving data collection from a number of sources including official government documents, news media, a series of 32 interviews with Chinese officials from key governmental organisations, such as the General Administration of Sport (GAS), and from a range of key quasi-governmental organisations including the Chinese Basketball Management Centre (CBMC), Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) and the Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG). Interviews were also conducted with 14 Chinese sports academics from inside and outside China.

The interviewees were selected on the basis that they: i) were, or had been, in senior positions; ii) were involved at a strategic level of decision making; and iii) had been involved in sport policy/management deliberations over several years. The interview schedules were organised around a similar set of themes to allow for triangulation (of response) between interviewees from the sports organisations, government agencies and sports analysts. The key themes included: i) evidence of voluntaristic (intentional) lesson drawing; ii) evidence of tangible indicators of transferred policy and/or lessons drawn; iii) sources of potential incompatibility between jurisdictions; and iv) the potential salience of (any) lessons drawn for future decision making and practice.

The Political and Policy Context

Through its connection with YMCA missionaries and Church universities, basketball was introduced into China in 1895 and spread throughout the country (Yang and Jiang, 1997, p. 34). During the early twentieth-century, China was, indeed, one of the countries serving to globalise basketball through the YMCA (Veseth, 2005). Following the promotion of the YMCA and Church universities, Chinese students attended Springfield College to learn about basketball, which had a significant influence on the embryonic development of elite basketball in China. Among these students were Dong Shouyi, Song Junfu and Mou Zuoyun, who not only became national basketball coaches for the Far East Games and Olympic Games between 1930 and 1950 but also took senior positions in the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) from the 1950s to the 1980s. Unfortunately, the onset of World War II and civil war between the Kuomintang Party (KMT), led by Chiang Kai-Shek, and the Chinese Communist Party, meant that the development of elite basketball was slow. Generally speaking, before the mid-twentieth century the popularity, playing and administration of Chinese basketball were far from mature (CBA, 1991).

After the creation of the PRC in 1949, China began re-building its elite basketball system, mostly learning from the USSR. With the help of Soviet experts, China gradually built up its own initial training and competition system. To speed up the development of elite basketball, the Chinese government sent its best basketball team, the 'Bayi' army team, to play a series of friendly matches with Eastern bloc countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania in

1954. It also dispatched its two national teams (men's and women's) to the USSR to be trained by Soviet coaches (CBA, 1991, p. 104). The Soviet model, with its competition system, ranking system of referees and basketball players and training system, was imitated (with some success) by the PRC - the men's and women's basketball teams were both ranked first in the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) in 1963 (CBA, 1991, p. 124-145).

Unfortunately, China's ambition to make its mark in the world basketball arena was destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. The Vice Premier, He Long was accused of 'taking the bourgeois road' (*Zhou ziben zhuy daolu*) and died in jail in 1969, and numerous administrators, elite players, coaches, and referees were 'purified' and persecuted, many basketball facilities were destroyed and international sports contacts virtually ended (CBA, 1991, pp. 153-154). Due in part to the catalytic events of the early 1970s, and especially to what become known as 'ping-pong diplomacy', China re-established its national team in 1973 (CBA, 1991, p. 156) and began reintroducing the modern basketball system after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977.

Following China's 'open door' policy, the PRC was eager to raise its profile in world basketball but there were two main policy challenges which faced the Chinese government. One was how to raise rapidly the profile of Chinese basketball through the development of successful national teams and the second was how to establish an effective domestic league to support and contribute to the national goal. The response to these two challenges is discussed in more detail below. A third challenge arose as a consequence of Deng Xiaoping's advocacy of

a market economy in China in early 1992 and concerned how the Chinese government would handle the issue of commercialisation in relation to the transfer of players and the commercial interest of clubs and sponsors.

Interrogating policy transfer

What is policy transfer?

There is much definitional ambiguity in the literature regarding the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing (cf. Evans and Davies, 1999; James and Lodge, 2003; Page, 2000). Therefore, in order to provide some conceptual clarity to what follows, policy transfer is generally conceived of as a broader concept than lesson drawing as it takes account of ideas of diffusion and coercion rather than just the voluntaristic activity of the latter. In line with Evans and Davies' (1999, p.366) analysis, which problematised boundary definitions of both concepts, for the purposes of this article 'policy transfer is defined in Rose's terms as an action-oriented intentional activity'. For Rose (2005, p.16), 'A *lesson* is the outcome of learning; it specifies a programme drawing on knowledge of programmes in other countries dealing with much the same problem'. A further critical insight is that 'Lesson drawing cannot be politically neutral, because politics is about conflicting values and goals [and] there is rarely complete political consensus, even about scientific and technical matters' (Rose, 1991, p.22). This argument draws attention to the discussion in the next section, where it is evident that there were/are tensions between the Chinese government's desire to build a strong national team and those of commercial interests to establish a profitable

professional basketball league in the PRC after the mid-1990s.

Lesson drawing is not a theory of *how* policymakers learn. It is about what is learnt, the programmes that public officials develop in order to deal with immediate substantive problems. The immediate substantive problems in the case of elite basketball development in the PRC were twofold. First, a chronic lack of funding within the national sport budget in the early to mid-1990s and second, the persistently poor performances of Team China (men and women) in the late 1990s which failed to qualify for the FIBA World Championship for the first time since 1978 (Xu, 1998). Policymakers are therefore driven by the need to dispel such dissatisfaction and instead of new knowledge per se they preferred the assurance of doing what had worked before, or been effective elsewhere. Therefore, searching is instrumentally directed and in part, due to the fact that policymakers have insufficient time or the knowledge to be continuously seeking policy innovation (cf. Evans and Davies, 1999; Rose, 2005). Indeed, Houlihan (1991) suggests that governments' preference for solutions in respect of sport policy are those that promise an immediate impact, are cheap and are simple to administer. Lesson drawing 'presupposes that even though a programme may be new to a government considering it, something very much like it will be in effect elsewhere' (Rose, 1993, p. 24).

Defining the need for reform

Any search for lessons in other jurisdictions is initiated in the hope that a programme that is viewed as working well there can be transferred to the

borrowing jurisdiction (cf. Rose, 2005). This section therefore explores issues surrounding why both state and non-state actors in China engaged in the intentional lesson drawing form of policy transfer. Here, the related question of Who transfers policy? is also considered. In exploring the reasons why these actors engage in this activity, the distinction between voluntary and coercive transfer is highlighted – yet, as revealed in the examples below, at the margins the distinction between the two remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, it is argued that there is evidence not only of voluntary transfer but also of ‘indirect coercive transfer’ (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, pp. 348–349).

In respect of voluntary transfer, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 346) suggest that ‘the primary catalyst ... is some form of dissatisfaction or problem with the status quo’. Of equal significance is Hough’s (2006, p. 8) observation that the ‘voluntary adoption of external models and approaches’ may well be modified considerably to take advantage of a party’s particular ideological beliefs. The ideas promoted for the development of the Chinese Basketball Association League (CBAL) and the establishment of the Chinese Basketball Management Centre (CBMC) in the mid to late 1990s are suggestive of voluntary lesson drawing. Li Tieying, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) and a State Councillor (1988-1998), argued that ‘Following the development of Chinese sport, the problem of investing more in the national sport budget and generating extra sport income is a highly critical issue’. Li Tieying went on to claim that ‘the sport system has to transform the ideas, and ways of thinking and working which were formed by the structure of the planned economy, into the objective

requirements of a market economy in which we need to reform boldly in order to explore new ways to facilitate Chinese sport development' (Li, T.Y. 1996, pp. 5-6).

Following Li Tieying's speech, an official internal document, The Recommendations of the NSC On Deepening Sport Reform, was issued in 1993 in which it was stated that 'We have to learn how they govern and run sport in other countries of the world, including advanced capitalist countries, so that we can go ahead and discover a variety of forms and ways to reform' (NSC, 1996, p. 152). With the confirmation and support of these high-ranking political actors, the director of the NSC Ball Games Department, who was then in charge of Chinese basketball reform, announced that 'In order to reform the Chinese basketball system, especially the structure of the competition system, we will be bolder and take a much bigger step to push the basketball competition system towards the market, and also actively transform the system in the direction of commercialism' (Yang, 1994, p. 14). In addition, Xin Lancheng, the first CBMC director (1997-2002), acknowledged that the former Soviet model had difficulty in dealing with a sport that was now increasingly commercialised and professionalised (Xin, 1998, p 4).

The scale of the problem was amply illustrated in the late 1990s when the PRC not only failed to qualify for the FIBA World Championship in 1997, but Team China (men and women) and young national squads were also defeated by other Asian countries, including Japan and South Korea in a series of international basketball competitions (Xu, 1998). In order to address the problem the government organised a National Basketball Conference in 1999 (Zhu, 2005, p.

49). According to the CBMC director, key conclusions from the conference were to (somehow) maintain links between the professional and non-professional arms of the sport, and to 'learn from other countries and transfer their experience of developing professional basketball to our own situation' (Xin, 2000b, p. 20). Consequently, in 2003 the new director of the CBMC, Li Yuanwei, travelled to the United States to examine how the NBA and NCAA ran their systems. These experiences from abroad inspired Li Yuanwei to propose the 'Northern Star Project' (the so-called CBA League 10-year Reform Project 2005-2014) in 2004. The aims of this project were to shape the CBA League to become the largest global professional basketball league apart from the NBA and to achieve top three status for the women's team and top six for the men's team at the 2008 Olympic Games (Li, Y.W. 2004). With specific regard to elite basketball in the PRC and lesson drawing from other countries, and especially from the NBA, the statements from Chinese political and sport leaders and the policy documents and projects noted above reinforce Dolowitz and Marsh's notion of voluntary transfer.

If we accept as accurate this rationale for voluntary Chinese government intervention and subsequent lesson drawing there is still a need to consider whether there is any evidence for claiming a degree of indirect coercive transfer? Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 349) highlight two factors indicative of what occurred in the PRC. First, these authors argue that 'A country can ... be indirectly pushed towards policy transfer if political actors perceive their country as falling behind its neighbours or competitors'. Indeed, Bennett (1991, p. 43) argues that 'fears of being left behind on an important public issue can trigger

attention. The cumulative effect of action elsewhere may translate into a feeling of insecurity about being the odd-man-out'. Clearly, policymakers in the PRC were concerned with worsening basketball performances at the elite level, particularly at global mega events such as the FIBA World Championship and Olympic Games. Indeed, the CBMC director 'felt sorry' that the Chinese national basketball teams lagged behind other countries and could not contribute a medal to Team China in the 2004 Olympic Games (Li, Y.W. 2005). He also acknowledged that the comments of domestic and foreign media (especially *Singaporean Lianhe Zaobao*) after the 2004 Athens Games stimulated him to argue that China could not achieve sport superpower status until its national teams win medals in basketball, football and volleyball in the Olympic Games. Li Yuanwei emphasised that 'the highest goal to develop [elite basketball] in the PRC is to win medals in the Olympic Games' (Li, Y.W. 2005).

The second factor highlighted by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 349) refers to the emergence of an international consensus acting as a push factor – a form of mimetic isomorphism – with regard to a particular policy area, and 'when a common solution to that problem has been introduced in a number of nations, then nations not adopting this ... solution will face increasing pressure to join the international "community" by implementing similar programmes or policies'. In this regard, the successful NBA market model and high profile of Team America emerged as a possible solution for solving the country's two policy problems of under-funding and poor performance of the national teams. According to a senior CBMC official, since the establishment of the CBMC in 1997, 'the national

basketball budget from the GAS has been stagnant and the vital income to support the elite basketball system has been heavily reliant on the market' (Interview, 13 January 2006).

In order to generate extra market income, the CBMC director and the first vice director of the Competition Department in GAS, travelled to America in 2003 and 2005 respectively in order to explore how to run the CBAL along the lines of NBA marketing approaches (see Li, Y.W. 2005; Guo, 2005). Earlier, Li Yuanwei had acknowledged that 'the way the NBA runs its professional basketball is far better than the CBA in terms of serving fans, sponsors and media' (Li, Y.W. 2004). Indeed, the CBA attempted to learn from the NBA in running its CBAL and in 2003 it turned to ZOU Marketing Inc. - one of NBA's cooperating companies (Bi, X. 2005) - for strategies to re-engineer the men's 10-year-old professional league (Li, Y.W. 2004). With the help of ZOU Marketing Inc, the CBA established the Northern Star Project in 2004 - a strategic planning process that resulted in a new CBAL business model (ZOU Marketing Inc, 2007).

The CBMC director understood that greater recourse to market principles was paramount, especially for fans, sponsors and the media, in order for Chinese basketball to compete successfully with the NBA (Li, Y.W. 2004). The director was also aware, however, of the priority of the national teams and claimed that 'It is the primary mission for any director of a National Sport Management Centre in Olympic Sport to raise the profile of national teams in the international competitions and this is becoming even more vital under the huge pressure to prepare for the 2008 Beijing Games' (Li, Y.W. 2006b). Essentially, after suffering

heavy defeats in a series of international basketball matches in the late 1990s, the Chinese government began to alter its attitude towards Chinese basketball players' foreign transfer affairs. Indeed, in 2000, the then CBMC director acknowledged that they had to send their key players to international basketball clubs in order to raise the performance of the national teams (Xin, 2000a, p. 28).

Xin's ideas were echoed by his successor, Li Yuangwei, who argued that the main strategy for world class teams, such as Argentina, Greece, New Zealand, Republic of Lithuania and Puerto Rico, was to send more of their players to join world class basketball clubs. For example, Li Yuangwei stated that 'there were 12 players in the 2004 Argentine Olympic Team, of which 11 players had played in American and European basketball leagues'. He also noted that 'the NBA and Australian Basketball Leagues can offer better chances than the domestic CBA league to hone the skills of Chinese players ... We should take a more positive attitude towards foreign transfer affairs and send more Chinese players abroad' (Li, Y.W. 2005).

In respect of the point raised earlier regarding how these two types of transfer (voluntary and indirect coercive) merge at the margins, the example of voluntary transfer and the first example cited above regarding indirect coercive transfer, reveal that there is little to choose between the two types. Yet, whichever theoretical nuance is applied, it is evident that policymakers in China engaged in a large degree of intentional lesson drawing, at least with regard to the development of the CBAL and the NBA market model during the 1990s and early 2000s.

The developments surrounding the establishment of the CBAL and the

CBMC also allow us to explore the sub-question, Who transfers policy? Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 345) suggest that there are 'six main categories of actors involved in policy transfer': elected officials; political parties; bureaucrats/civil servants; pressure groups; policy entrepreneurs/experts and supra-national institutions. Political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants and supra-national institutions are significant here. In respect of political parties and bureaucrats/civil servants, it should be remembered that Communist China is a one party-state. All major political decisions have to be approved by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and especially by the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). Party leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping, in the late 1970s promoted an 'open door policy' which implied not only an economic involvement with the capitalist world – through trade, investment and technology transfer – but also an opening to ideas and cultural forms originating in the West (Knight, 2003, p. 318). The open door policy was not fulfilled until the 'Southern China' remarks of Deng Xiaoping underlined the importance of reform and strongly criticised his opponents (Fewsmith, 1997, pp. 496-497).

Affected by Deng's remarks, the meeting of the PSC on 12 February 1992, endorsed the 'necessity' of upholding the 'one centre' of economic development and called on the Party to 'accelerate the pace of reform and opening to the outside world' (Fewsmith, 1997, pp. 499-500). Following the decision of the PSC, Li Tieying, a PSC member and a State Councillor (1988-1998), encouraged the National Sport Commission to adopt a western approach, or more accurately a capitalist approach, to revitalise the Chinese elite basketball system (NSC, 1996,

p. 152). Li Tieying's argument was echoed by the sport minister, and vice sport minister, both of whom held that, in order to improve standards and compete with advanced basketball nations in a short period of time, China must learn from those countries (Wu, S.Z. 2000a, p. 9).

With the confirmation and support of these high-ranking party and political actors, there was a platform upon which to establish the CBMC to manage the new professional basketball leagues – Jia A (Chinese Basketball Association League) and Jia B (Chinese Basketball League). It also paved the way for the sport officials in the GAS and the CBMC to introduce new ideas, knowledge and resources to support the Chinese elite basketball system. The key sport officials involved directly in policy transfer were: i) directors of the Ball Game Department in the NSC in the mid-1990s, Yang Boyong and Zhong Tianfa who introduced the basketball club system; ii) the first director of the CBMC (1997-2002), Xin Lancheng, who continued the policy of 'exporting human capital' (*Song chuqu*) and 'bringing foreign resources in' (*Qing Jinlai*) (Xin, 2000a, pp. 22-29); and iii) Xin Lancheng's successor, Li Yuanwei, who drafted the Northern Star Project from ideas learnt from the West, and especially from the NBA.

Although political party officials and civil servants had a dominant role in the process of policy transfer, supra-national and extra-national institutions also had a substantial influence on the development of the Chinese elite basketball system. Most significant were IMG (the sports, entertainment and media company), NBA, NCAA, the United States Basketball Academy (USBA) and Infront Sports and Media (ISM). For example, IMG signed a six-year commercial contract with the

Chinese government in 1995 to help China establish its basketball club system - Jia A League (CBAL) (Interview, senior official, Chinese Basketball Industry Development Company, 10 January 2006). The NBA, NCAA and USBA supported the CBMC's policy of 'exporting human capital' and 'bringing foreign resources in' in order to raise the profile of Chinese national teams (Xin, 2000a, pp. 22-29). And ISM promised to help raise China's position in the FIBA world rankings and to 'honour' China on its own soil at the 2008 Beijing Games by recruiting top foreign coaching staff, nutritionists, scouts, psychologists and other fitness training experts into China (ISM, 2007b).

Searching for examples

From 1995 the Jia A (Division 1A) League was fully sponsored by IMG and a special league championship named CNBA in Division 2 was organised by the Chinese government and supported by the Hong Kong-based Jing-Ying Company in 1996 (Xue, 1997). Not only were the rules of CNBA copied from the NBA, but 32 American players and eight American coaches were also introduced to eight teams of the CNBA by the Jing-Ying Company (Liu, H. 2002, p. 414). According to the then director of the NSC's Ball Game Department, 'the CNBA is an experiment in Division 2. It does not matter if the CNBA is not successful. Once it does become successful we will have a model for the reform of Chinese basketball' (cited in Xue, 1997). Although the CNBA was very successful and fully supported by the vice sport minister, Xu Yinsheng, it collapsed in the same year due to financial problems in the Jing-Ying Company (Wang, et al., 2008, p. 19).

Supported in the main by the NBA, NCAA, USBA and ISM, the Chinese government continued the policy of 'exporting human capital' and 'bringing foreign resources in'. Indeed, the government had been using these two approaches since the late 1970s in order to reach out to improve the performance of the national squads (CBA, 1991, p. 204). There were several elements to exporting human capital. The first was that the Chinese government began sending its national teams to be trained abroad, especially to NBA clubs in the early 1980s. This reached a peak in the early 2000s when national teams were trained at the USBA. After the CBMC was established in 1997, the Chinese government began contact with the USBA, which is known for player and coach development and has a strong link with the NBA and the NCAA. In early 2000, the CMBC began to send their national men's, women's and junior teams to be trained by coaches from the NBA and NCAA in the USBA (USBA, 2007a).

The second element was that, after 2000 the Chinese government encouraged domestic professional clubs to send their best players to play abroad, especially with the NBA, in order to improve their skills and knowledge. The then CBMC director emphasised that 'We have to send our key players to be honed in the international basketball clubs in order to produce world class star players' (Xin, 2000a, p. 28). By the end of 2008 five Chinese players were playing or had played in the NBA (see Table 1), all of whom were sent to be trained at the USBA before being drawn by NBA teams (USBA, 2007b).

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition, since the beginning of 2007 three Chinese basketball players have been recruited into the NCAA to develop their skills (Wu, G. 2007). Moreover, one of the key decisions of the National Training Conference of Basketball in 2000 was to 'send a group of high potential early young players to be trained in America or European countries' (Xin, 2000a, p. 28). From 2005, 40 of China's top junior players (around 12-17 years old and 2 metres high) were trained by American coaches at the USBA, which was the second group of tall teenage players sent by the Chinese government (Yang, 2007). China's professional teams also train annually in the United States using USBA's facilities (USBA, 2007c).

The third element was to create greater international competition opportunities for national teams. Constrained by a limited budget for international contact, this arrangement was not implemented until the signing of a contract in 2006 with ISM, which became the exclusive global marketing partner for China's national basketball teams (ISM, 2006). With the help of ISM, the men's Team China Basketball team increased their competition opportunities to 30 international friendly matches per year against qualified opponents from America and Europe (Hu, 2006). In 2007, with the aid of global resources (e.g. ISM) seven Chinese national teams, including the men's, women's and junior teams, with support from the GAS, travelled the world competing with other national squads or foreign professional clubs (Du, 2007).

The fourth element was to send Chinese coaches (especially national coaches), referees, administrators and scientists abroad to gather new knowledge

but this policy was not applied consistently until the failure to qualify for the FIBA World Championship in 1997 and the heavy defeat of two junior national teams (U17, U20) in the Asian Championship in 2000 (Liu, F. 2000, p. 15). In 2000, the then CBMC director initiated a new plan to select 10 Chinese candidates to go abroad and train to coach national basketball teams (Xin, 2000a, p. 27).

According to a senior CBMC official, most Chinese coaches sent by the CBMC were trained at the USBA or in NCAA universities that had strong links with the USBA (Interview, 5 January 2006). One decision of the 2005 National Conference of Basketball was that, from 2006, the CBMC would set up a group of national reserve coaches who were required not only to learn English, computer/IT and basketball knowledge in China for 18 months, but also to be trained for five months in NCAA universities and to be involved in management and coaching affairs of NCAA basketball teams (Interview, senior official, CBA Training and Research Department, 13 January 2006). Indeed, the CBMC signed a five-year contract with the University of Memphis (an NCAA university) in 2007 to which 15 elite coaches were dispatched (CBMC, 2007).

The second main approach adopted by the NSC (GAS) was to bring in foreign resources. During the 1980s most invited coaches came from the NBA, NCAA and American national basketball teams (CBA, 1991, p. 210). After the club system was introduced in 1995, the Chinese government encouraged domestic clubs to introduce foreign coaches and foreign players to participate in national matches in order to facilitate Chinese elite basketball development. The classic case here was the CNBA where the Chinese government introduced 32 American

players and eight American coaches to participate in the eight CNBA teams.

Although it is quite normal to see foreign coaches employed in Chinese basketball clubs, the government did not introduce foreign coaches into its national teams until 2004. The CBMC director stated that 'it was very difficult for me to make this decision during that period because this was a controversial issue which was strongly linked to national pride, honour and confidence' (Li, Y.W. 2004). But he also emphasised that 'introducing foreign coaches to help Chinese national basketball teams speed up their performance is a vital choice that must be made because we are in unusual circumstances which led us to take this kind of unusual approach' (Li, Y.W. 2006a).

In addition to introducing foreign coaches and players, the Chinese government also understood that in terms of scientific training and support, Chinese basketball seriously lagged behind its counterparts in America and European countries. In this regard, the CBMC vice director claimed that 'At this moment, scientific research and support for Chinese basketball lags far behind Western countries, which is a great obstacle to the development of the Chinese basketball training system'. In 2006 the government cooperated with ISM to implement a comprehensive technical development plan for the national teams. According to the agreement, ISM would recruit top foreign coaching staff, nutritionists, scouts, psychologists and fitness training experts to support these basketball teams (ISM, 2006).

What was transferred from the United States?

It is rarely possible to quantify the extent of policies transferred or lessons drawn. As Dolowitz et al. (1999, p. 719) observe, 'Governments do not provide convenient lists of what they borrow or from where they borrow'. However, the problem is less daunting in relation to 'action-oriented learning – that which takes place consciously and results in policy action' (Evans and Davies, 1999, p. 368). A key aspect of this definition is the element of intentionality, which makes an agent essential to the policy transfer process. In this respect, the intentional activity of China's 'open door' policy was driven by CCP party leaders which set the foundation for political and sport leaders (state actors) such as Li Tieying, Wu Shaozu, Yuan Weiming and Xu Yinsheng to transform basketball's administrative structure. This transformation included the establishment of the CBMC, introducing a club system, and the setting-up of 'economic bodies' (*Jingji shiti*) (companies).

The intention to learn from advanced capitalist knowledge and systems provided unique opportunities for non-state actors (basketball bureaucrats) to cooperate with extra-national institutions (IMG, Jing-Ying Company, NBA, NCAA, USBA and ISM). The transfer of advanced capitalist knowledge and systems for building a global professional basketball league and to raise the profile of Chinese national teams was a primary goal (Li, Y.W., 2004). There are at least three key elements of such learning from the West, and especially from the NBA: i) the club system; ii) the training system; and iii) the commercial system. Given space constraints, we concentrate on the club and commercial systems here.

In respect of the club system, following similar developments in Chinese football (Tan, 2008), the assumed 'successful' club system from Western European leagues, with its promotion and relegation mechanism and 'home and away' matches, was introduced by NSC sport officials with the help of IMG in 1995 (Interview, senior official, CBA Comprehensive Department, 6 January 2006). In 1997, the director of the NSC's Ball Game Department reported that 'the new club system had increased the enthusiasm of basketball players and coaches for participating in competitions, and this began to set fire to China's basketball market and positively promoted the development of Chinese elite basketball'. The director went on to claim that 'we will carry on attracting foreign investment and introducing foreign players to create a good environment for Chinese basketball to become more professional, ... we will exploit the Chinese basketball market to the full' (Zhong, 1997, p. 1).

The European 'relegation and promotion' system was abandoned in 2004 in favour of the NBA model with 'regional and final matches' due in part to the problems experienced by Chinese football. According to the CBMC director, 'The new CBA league is learning a negative lesson from the experience of Chinese Football, but also a positive lesson from those internationally successful professional leagues'. Li Yuanwei not only wanted to prevent clubs from corrupt competition by ending the relegation rule, but also to allow clubs to have more time and energy to devote to attracting and servicing fans, media and sponsors by adopting the NBA market model (Li, Y.W. 2005).

In relation to the commercial system, in the Northern Star Project, the

Chinese government acknowledged that ‘there is huge pressure to compete with the NBA for limited domestic basketball resources’ (CBA, 2004). As discussed, in order to deal with this pressure, the CBMC director and the vice director of the Competition Department in the GAS travelled to the United States to learn more about the NBA’s commercial and marketing approaches. According to the Northern Star Project, the Chinese government appeared to ‘clone’ the NBA in order to run the CBAL. Some of the most significant policies and practices transferred from the NBA were: i) the administrative structure of CBAL; ii) the competition system; iii) the draw system; iv) salary caps; and v) the CBAL Charity Project – the first three of which are discussed in more detail.

In discussing the administrative structure of CBAL, the CBMC director announced that the first stage of the Northern Star Project was to establish the CBAL Company or CBAL Office and to recruit an international CEO to manage the new organisation (Li, Y.W. 2005). The CBAL Commission and CBAL Office were established in 2005. The function and structure of the two new institutions is very similar to the NBA Commission and NBA League Office. But key differences were that the CBAL Commission was not just composed of 16 club owners, but six CBMC top officials and four representatives from wider society were also included (Interview, senior official, Beijing Duck Basketball Club, 2 June 2006). In addition, the position of manager of the CBAL Office was not designated as a CEO, as was the NBA Commissioner, David Stern. The position of manager was instead assigned to senior CBMC officials - Hao Guohua, director of the National Team Department since 2008 and his successor, Zhang Xion, director of the Marketing

Department in the mid-2000s.

As for the CBAL competition system, NBA models such as the Eastern and Western Conference, NBA Summer League, Pre-season, Regular season, NBA Playoffs and All-Star Game were all adopted (Li, Y.W. 2005). Under the CBAL competition system highlighting the South and North Conferences, the 14-16 CBAL sides were to be divided into different groups for preliminary round-robin competitions based on their geographic locations. The top four teams from each group would qualify for the second phase where the final champions would be decided after knockout rounds.

With regard to the draw system, in 2002 the CBA set up a draft system similar to that of the NBA in the form of a 'temporary transfer' market in which each club had to release its surplus players to be temporarily transferred to (or borrowed by) other clubs for one year. Through this NBA draft transfer system, the CBA allowed lower placed clubs priority in acquiring transfer-listed players, the players themselves having no rights to choose their preferred club (Interview, senior official, CBA Competition Department, 13 January 2006). According to the director of the CBAL Office, who was in charge of domestic transfer affairs, this 'temporary transfer system' was not very successful in achieving a balance between rich and poor clubs due to the reluctance of the CBAL clubs to release their potential first team players who they had trained (Chen, 2007). Although the CBA set the maximum quota for the number of key players that each club could keep out of the temporary transfer market (10 in the 2005-2006 season and 8 in the 2007-2008 season) (CBA, 2005a, p. 18), the new policy that attempted to force each CBAL

club to release more players into the temporary transfer market, appears only to have succeeded in increasing the overall number of transfers, not the quality of players transferred (Interview, senior official, Beijing Duck Basketball Club, 7 January 2006).

Although Hao Guohua declared that ‘the NBA transfer system is a perfect commercial model’, he conceded that ‘we can’t achieve it at this moment due to our “policy of whole country support for the elite sport system” in which not only are one third of CBA clubs tightly linked to the provincial sport bureaus, but also we have to make sure that all clubs have their reserve teams’ (cited in Hou, 2007). Hao Guohua went on to state that ‘This is a structural conflict which exists within the Chinese basketball system itself. We still have to resolve the domestic transfer affair otherwise the whole CBA league will lose its vitality’.

Discussion and Conclusion

In contrast to global football, where there is no single dominant country, the relationship with global basketball was strongly affected by the relationship with American basketball, and especially the NBA. The evidence presented in this paper indicates clearly that China was involved in extensive voluntary policy transfer as the government sought to improve rapidly the quality of Chinese elite basketball coaches and players. However, the analysis of basketball highlights three related issues concerning policy transfer and lesson drawing as mechanisms of globalisation namely: first, the capacity of the ‘importing’ country

to control the partners it is learning from especially if the latter's cooperation is required to effect policy transfer; second, the extent to which policy can be transferred into different political and social-cultural environments; and third, the extent to which lessons are adequately understood.

As regards the problem of controlling partners in the learning process Chinese officials were clearly aware of the risks of working closely with the NBA. According to the CBMC director, a unique opportunity was created for the NBA to make inroads into the Chinese basketball market, especially among the younger generation (Li, Y.W. 2005). In 2004, the NBA began its NBA China Games (NBA.com, 2007) and in 2006 generated approximately \$US50 million in revenue from China – the league's largest market outside the United States – as part of the overall NBA revenue of almost four billion dollars (Su, Z. 2007). David Stern, NBA, had indicated that part of global ambition of the NBA was to generate half its revenue from outside the U.S. with China a prime new market. In 2007 the NBA also announced the establishment of NBA China, to be led by the former boss of Microsoft's China operations with the ambition to establish a NBA-managed Chinese domestic league (China Daily.com, 2007). The Chinese government understands well that the bringing-in of such foreign resources increases the pressure on limited domestic basketball resources (CBA, 2004). In order to deal with this pressure in 2007 the CBA organised The Summit of Chinese Basketball Development and invited NBA Commissioner Stern to speak. Stern proclaimed that 'the NBA is going to cooperate with the CBA and GAS to organise a China-NBA League' (cited in Li, R., 2007). Following the summit, the CBMC

director responded to the proposed China-NBA League by reiterating the primacy of national team success stating that 'the ranking of Team China Basketball in the 2008 Beijing Games will play a key role in deciding whether the NBA can establish a league in China or not' (cited in Lan, 2007a). In addition, Li Yuanwei maintained that 'If the NBA wants to organise a China-NBA League, they must cooperate with the CBA'. However, it remains to be seen whether global ambitions of the Chinese government can contain the global ambitions of the NBA while at the same time relying so heavily on NBA expertise, methods and organisational templates.

The second issue relates not only to the transferability of lessons and the degree to which transplants can be successful without the risk of cultural or political rejection or distortion, but also to the extent to which lessons have to be transferred as a whole or whether the importing country can be selective and only import the bits of the lesson that it likes. The Chinese government's priority was the rapid development of successful national teams rather than the establishment of a viable professional league. Initially, the professional club system was regarded as an essential means for rapid development, but by the late 1990s, it was seen as a barrier to it due to the problems associated with match-fixing, high payments to players and the transfer of players. A central tension within China's emerging elite basketball system was the struggle to integrate effectively the lessons learnt from the club-focused and highly commercialised NBA system with traditional forms of authoritarian political control. More specifically, tensions arose between the priorities of commercial clubs and national team development; second, between the highly paid and internationally mobile sports stars and the

centrally controlled elite development system; and third, between commercial sponsors and the government.

The tension between the interests of the commercial club sector and those of the government were exemplified: first, by the government's transfer of many commercial rights from the clubs and to the CBMC; second, by the removal of players from clubs for national team training and competition without compensation to the clubs; and third, by expelling from the league a club which refused to release players for national duty.

The tension between players and the government can be illustrated by the government's decision to assess the fitness of club players on the grounds that while they were sufficiently fit for club level competition they were not fit enough for international competition. Consequently, the CBMC, by-passing club coaches, introduced a fitness test with the threat that if players did not pass the test they could not play at club level (Interview, senior official, CBA Training and Research Department, 27 December 2005). A second example of the tension between players and the government is the reluctance of some US based players, for example Wang Zhi-Zhi, to return home to play for the national team.

The third tension, between multi-national companies and government, can be illustrated most clearly by the NBA's attempts to expand its global market by introducing NBA China Games. The government set two conditions, one being to play by FIBA rules (which are those which apply in Olympic competition) rather than NBA rules, and the other being that two Chinese NBA stars, Yao Ming and Yi Jianlian, should return to China to play for the national side in the NBA China

Games rather than remain in America to play for their NBA teams (Liu, X., 2007). Although an agreement was made by both sides to play by FIBA rules, two foreign players replaced Yao Ming and Yi Jianlian in the NBA China Games (Sun, 2007a), and the tension between the commercial interests of NBA and the national interest of the CBMC remains. A second example concerns Infront Sports and Media (ISM), the exclusive global marketing partner for the country's national basketball teams, which arranged a series of friendly matches for the national team which were lucrative but which did little to improve the quality of the national team. According to the head coach of the men's Basketball Team 'Due to the huge pressure from ISM, the Chinese men's Basketball Team has to adhere to ISM's commercial arrangements to compete in friendly matches, but this has a negative impact on our systematic training' (cited in Yuan, J. 2007). Indeed, the director of CBMC noted that 'there were only five good contests among these friendly matches' (Sun, 2007b).

China's experience of lesson-drawing from the West resonates with more general observations on the phenomenon (Dolowitz et al., 1999; Hulme, 1997) in two respects. First, as Dolowitz et al. (1999, p. 729) observe, policy actors working within an increasingly complex and dynamic policy environment embark on policy transfer as part of a search for ready-made policy solutions; in other words, 'there is considerable pressure to look for a "quick fix"'. This was certainly the case with China's concern to create a basketball team that would excel at its home Olympic Games. However, Dolowitz et al. also argue that two factors were particularly important in facilitating the transfer of policies in their study of the

United States and the UK: a shared language and the 'shared contemporary commitment to neo-liberalism' (p. 730). The substantial evidence of policy transfer taking place across linguistic boundaries and indeed of transfer across ideological boundaries in relation to elite sport development (Houlihan and Green, 2008) notwithstanding there were clear difficulties reconciling market principles with the ambitions of an authoritarian government.

The final issue relates to the extent to which lessons are adequately understood. It was mentioned earlier that it is natural that countries looking for solutions to domestic problems will seek out those other countries which appear to have tackled similar problems successfully. On this basis America would appear the obvious choice for not only does the country have the most commercially successful league system but it also has consistently successful national men's and women's teams. However, it is arguable whether the success of the national team is 'despite' rather than 'because of' the strong club structure. In basketball in the US, as is the case in relation to soccer in many countries, the tension between the interests of clubs and those of national teams has intensified over recent years. As was noted earlier while the club system was initially considered to be an asset for national team development it was soon redefined as an impediment suggesting that the lesson from US basketball was imperfectly learned.

With regard to the value of the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing it is argued that their utilisation in this analysis has provided significant insights into the engagement between China and global sport. In particular the

analysis emphasises the importance of exploring the mechanisms by which engagement between the domestic and the global takes place. While we have demonstrated the centrality of intentional lesson drawing and policy transfer to the development of domestic policy for basketball the study also makes clear that the globalisation process is extremely complex not only in relation to the mechanisms that facilitate the process but also in relation to the tensions between powerful global actors. In addition to evidence of lesson drawing there was also evidence of mimetic isomorphism with China seeking the security of a 'proven' model of elite basketball success. The potential for tensions between powerful global actors is amply illustrated by the troubled relationship between the Chinese government and the NBA not only in relation to the NBA's ambitions to establish a Chinese league but also in relation to its perception of China as a source of talent for the core US market. It is arguable that nowhere in contemporary Chinese sport is the strain of managing engagement with global sport more apparent than in relation to basketball.

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Table 1: Chinese elite basketball player transfers to NBA clubs

Player	Year of transfer	Transferred to	Club playing for in late 2008
Wang Zhi-Zhi	2001	Dallas Mavericks (NBA)	Bayi Rockets (CBA)
Mengke Bateer	2002	Denver Nuggets (NBA)	Beijing Jinyu Ducks (CBA)
Yao Ming	2002	Houston Rockets (NBA)	Houston Rockets (NBA)
Yi Jianlian	2007	Milwaukee Bucks (NBA)	Milwaukee Bucks (NBA)
Sun Yue	2008	Los Angeles Lakers (NBA)	Los Angeles Lakers (NBA)