

Discussing the impact of the Olympics on women's right

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Abstract: *It seems normal to see female athletes at the Olympics now. There are almost as many male and female athletes, and it is used to men and women competing for medals and honors together. But, the Olympic Games, in the beginning, were banned from women, and even women at a glance at the Olympic Games will be executed. Throughout history, the vast majority of those in power believed that women should not exercise and should focus on caring for children and families. Due to the influence of historical background, participating in the Olympic Games was a dream that many women have never had in the past. Nevertheless, why are women allowed to compete now? How have women, for thousands of years, been beating prejudice step by step through their efforts to participate in the Olympic Games? How did women speak out? What are the inner meanings for females to speak out? This paper will focus on the issues raised above and discuss the impact of the Olympics on women in the context of current events by three periods of feminine waves.*

Keywords: *the Olympic Games, Female athletes, Feminine waves*

1. Introduction

"Today, April 5 th, 1896, the first Modern Olympic Games will be held in Athens." Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, delivered his famous "Olympic Declaration" speech at the fifth anniversary of the French Association of Athletics in 1892. He eloquently pointed out the advantages of sports in national cohesion, human unity, health and happiness, and put forward the revival of the Olympic movement. As mentioned above, in 1896, the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, and Coubertin was rightly called the father of modern Olympic Games[1].

However, it is also he who believed that the benefits of sport do not extend to women. He believed that women's glory came from the quantity and quality of their children, and from the way they trained and encouraged their sons to take part in sports. He thought the Olympic Games open to women is unrealistic, boring, evil and incorrect[7].

Fast-forward for more than 100 years, according to the official Olympic website, 49% of the athletes in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games will be women, which indicates that for the first time in history, all 206 national teams will send at least one woman and one male. The official press release called this Olympic Games "the first Olympic Games with equality between men and women"[5]. Besides, the International Olympic Committee encourages each delegation to send a man and a woman to carry the flag. At the same time, it is not difficult to see through the achievements of the female athletes, women have become an unquestionable and indispensable half of the Olympic and global sports. How did women change from being rejected more than 100 years ago to being an indispensable part of the Olympic Games today? What does it mean to have women representatives in Olympic Games and modern sports? Is it true that today's sports are gender equality?

2. The History of the Female Athletes Waves

2.1 Women in Ancient Olympic Games

Held in the Ancient Greek city of Olympia for 293 games between 776 BC and 394 AD, women were banned from participating in, or even watching, the games on pain of death. Today, people understand the exclusion of women by the Olympic Games from different dimensions, and it is difficult to trace the specific origin of the ancient Olympic Games[6].

Today, historians generally believe that it was a religious celebration in itself and that sports

competitions were held during the celebration to honor the gods. According to myth, Hercules, the Greek sports god, was prejudiced against women, believing that their presence at the festival would make warriors less effective. From the perspective of social concept, some people interpret that the sports in The Greek period were to participate in naked, and it is immoral for women to participate in or watch sports, but others think it is a misunderstanding of modern people.

There are many reasons for banning women from participating in the Competition, such as Zhang Cui's "On the Change of Women 's Role in the Olympic Process": "Women 's participation in sports is not conducive to their maintenance of "lady body", contrary to the ordinary people's aesthetic philosophy... The beauty of women lies in the weakness of the body, gentle temperament," "the ancient Olympic Games are "naked competition" and "naked sports", women who participate in or watch the event have the appearance of bad manners", "the ancient Olympic Games is a very religious color of the sacrificial events, women participate in which blasphemy." At that time, women were unable to participate because of religious and political issues, and men became synonymous with power through the Olympics.

From a practical point of view, the Olympic Games, like other ancient Greek games, were designed to unite the city-states. According to the book *General History of Movement*, under the prominent Greek city-state system, each city-state attached great importance to its own political independence, and how to maintain cultural commonality so that each city-state could ally militarily and politically against foreign enemies became a problem. Regular rodeos are a good way to do this: they keep the attention of the city-states together, but they also compete with each other in a non-war way. From this perspective, the Olympic Games are mobilizing the power of adult men, and women 's sporting needs are not taken into account. In a word, the refusal of women to participate in ancient athletic competitions is the objective fact that women were inferior at that time, which is reflected in religious narration and social structure.

But from the dynamic point of view, women 's participation in sports varies in different periods and city-states. In Sparta, the population of Spartans, as slave owners and ruling class, was only about one-tenth of that of the original helots. In order to promote the prosperity of the nation and consolidate its rule, Sparta invented a kind of eugenics to keep the offspring healthy. One of the methods was to let women participate in sports and exercise before becoming mothers. Therefore, the first female Olympic champion in ancient times also came from Sparta. Kuniska was the first female Olympic champion to win the carriage race in 396 BC and 392 BC.

In the 700 years that followed, a queen founded the women-only Hera Games, the world's first women 's games. The move was pioneered by the smallness of running, a sport that ran only 32 meters for a long time. After the decline of ancient Greece, the Olympic Games were suspended for 1500 years. Later, Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, proposed to resume the Olympic Games, resulting in the first ban on women. "Women 's glory should be the quality and quantity of children, and in sports, women's greatest contribution should be to get their sons to achieve results, not to go on their own," he said. Coubertin also spoke against women 's sports and the Women 's World Games: "Impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and we are not afraid to add: incorrect, such would be in our opinion this female half-Olympiad". Not just him, but men in society as a whole almost believed that good women were meant to be completely attached to men and to have a bunch of children, which was not the view of one person or one era, but a tradition that had been around for thousands of years.

2.2 The First Female Athlete Wave: Women get the right to vote[12]

However, by the end of the 19th century, when Coubertin tried to revive the Olympics, the West was already in the midst of the first wave of feminism. Coubertin intended the modern Games to continue to exclude women, but women no longer complied with this arrangement. At the first modern Olympics in 1896, a woman named Stamata Revithi entered the marathon but was rejected because of her gender. She decided to add a marathon herself. On the second day of the men's marathon, it took her five and a half hours to complete the marathon on her own, and witnesses testified in writing. Her score was not recorded in the official report card, of course, but it got a lot of attention and helped form the foundation of public opinion for the inclusion of women 's events in the Olympics. She is not the first female athlete to compete, but the first woman to challenge discrimination at the Olympics through her actions. This woman, who was supposed to go down in history, was not taken seriously at the time, left no photos, and was promoted without a real name. Whereas, she opened the curtain on women 's Force Awakening and has given more and more women the courage to come forward.

Four years later, the 1900 Paris Games, the first modern Olympics to feature women, even featured posters featuring female fencers. According to the Olympic website, there were 22 female competitors, or 2.2 percent of the total, including the first female winner of the modern Games, 32-year-old Duchess Of Putalus, who won the team sailing event for Switzerland. British tennis player Charlotte Cooper became the first woman to win an independent event. This is the first wave of feminism, mainly for women 's three main rights-for the right to vote, education, employment rights to seek legal protection, because the most significant result of this wave is the empowerment of women 's voting rights, also known as the "women's right to vote movement." She kicked off the women 's Power Awakening and has since given more and more women the courage to stand up and fight the millennial tradition that women can't exercise[8].

Although western feminist movements starting in the 19th century are generally considered to have inherited the liberal and egalitarian ethos of the French Revolution, Coubertin, a Frenchman, was very firmly opposed to women 's participation in the Olympics, perhaps because his nationalist motivation for reviving the Games was at that time. France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 haunted the minds of that generation. Sports was Coubertin 's prescription for the French nation to improve its physical fitness and enhance its military spirit so as not to fall behind in international wars. It also explains why most of his first 15 Olympic committee appointments were British, French and Italian. Because of Coubertin 's resistance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) did not officially recognize women 's events at the first modern Games[2].

But in the 20th century, the tide of affirmative action was unstoppable. A year after Coubertin stepped down, the IOC officially approved women's participation in the Games. In Amsterdam in 1928, the first Olympic Games to officially admit women, the number of female athletes rose to 277, or nearly one in ten. In 1936, Li Sen, a female track and field athlete, was sent to the Berlin Olympic Games for the first time. The proportion of women athletes increased gradually throughout the 20th century, reaching nearly 50% by the time of the 2008 Beijing Games.

2.3 The Second Female Athlete Wave: Equality in law and society[12]

With more and more equal rights movements, the status of women has improved, from the second Olympic Games to allow women to participate in. But in the second to seventh Games, women can only participate in golf, tennis, diving, fencing, archery, and figure skating. It's a women's game, but it's more like having women come over and perform for the male audience. Even so, Coubertin still felt uncomfortable, arguing that the Olympics were sacred, a periodic display of men's physical fitness and strength, based on internationality and with an artistic atmosphere in the background, and women cheering for the warriors on the podium. That's when a woman named Alice Milat came forward to allow women to compete in the Olympics, hosting the French Women's Sports Federation, which applied to the Olympic Committee to add women's programs, especially track and field. By 1922, Mrs. Millie had won the first women's Olympic Games in Paris, France, and this time it was a great success, so she did it again four years later. The IOC later negotiated with the French Women's Sports Federation in the hope that it could be merged and added five new projects. Unfortunately, instead of breaking with traditional prejudices, these new projects have deepened them through rumors. Even if the IOC were to target her, he continued to promote the women's games, such as upgrading the 800m to the 1000m at the women's Games and joining several events that were not expected to be attended by women at the time. With her efforts, the IOC finally agreed to allow women to participate in track and field, allowing them to participate as much as men. Women finally have the right to participate in the Olympic Games freely, but there is a bigger obstacle. The second wave, also known as the "Women's Liberation Movement", occurred in the early 1960s, with the tone of eliminating gender differences, not only in politics and law but also in invisible cultures, customs, criticism of sexism, gender discrimination, and male power, as well as women's autonomy over their bodies, social and family violence against women and sexual harassment[9]. Beauvoir's masterpiece "The Second Sex", "Women are not born, but plastic" became a famous saying in the women's liberation movement, profoundly affecting the second wave of feminism[13].

A woman named Van Nistelrooy first competed in the Olympics in 1936, and although she was only fifth in the group stage at that time, it made her aspire to be an athlete. But that's when World War II broke out and two consecutive Olympics were canceled; there were no Olympics for 12 years, and Van Nistelrooy didn't know how long World War II was going to last, but she kept training. By 1948 she had finally had a chance to compete, and although she was 30 years old and had two children, she had won two or four gold medals, giving her the most gold medals in a single Olympics. Fanny's story has inspired many women, and more and more female athletes are appearing in the Olympic arena, such as Billie Jean

King, a famous American tennis player and 39-time Grand Slam champion[10]; Nadia Comăneci, the first gymnast in the world to get a perfect score, the only athlete with seven perfect scores[11] and so on. Women believe that their inequality in the possession of rights and the lack of freedom exist not only in the public sphere but also in private life. Gender relations, marital conditions, criteria for judging beauty, family life, etc. are all "political" issues like war and the civil rights movement. They adhere to the principle of "shared democracy" and seek to find goals that reflect the common interests of lower and upper-middle-class women to achieve cross-racial, cross-class union among women.

2.4 The Third Female Athletes Wave: Pursue individuality and diversity[12]

The third wave originated in the early 1990s and continues to this day, with no conclusion on the specific connotation and extension. In particular, it emphasizes that women's issues involve, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, customs, multiculturalism, multi-sexual orientation, multi-values, and other issues. There are still a lot of female athletes standing on the podium and facing the world and making a voice for women. Tennis superstar Serena Williams is a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, 14 Grand Slam doubles champions, and four Olympic gold medals. Since giving birth to daughter Alexis in 2017, she has been candid about her mother's stresses and frustrations. In 2018, Williams raised awareness of the maternal mortality crisis faced by African-American women after Alexis was born with life-threatening complications. Last year, she wrote a powerful article for Harper's Bazaar, which discussed the era of discrimination she faced in her career. "In short, it's never easy," Williams wrote. "But I thought about the next girl who looked like me, and I was like, 'Maybe, just maybe, my voice will help her [15]."

Japanese climber Junko Tanaka became the first woman to climb Mount Everest in 1975, climbing the world's highest peak, breaking the gender barrier in her sport. More and more women are following in her footsteps, with women accounting for 20 percent of The Everest climbers in 2019, the largest number in history, The Foreign Post reported.

Three-time Olympic medalist and nine-time world champion, American Hilary Knight is one of the top stars in women's hockey today. As a goal-scoring striker, Knight helped the U.S. win gold at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, their first Olympic title in 20 years. "I hope I'm remembered for my on-ice legacy," Knight said in an ESPN article last year before the Professional Women's Hockey Players Association was launched. "But equally, too, for what I've done off the ice, sparking the change, not just in hockey, but in sport and other industries. Whether it's fighting for equal pay or changing the game in how gender or body image is being reflected, my work is just beginning in many ways[14]."

"We want to pay tribute to female athletes, to history, because the Olympics belong to all." The logo design for the recent Paris Olympics in 2024 has attracted widespread attention, especially among women in the middle. The responsible team said the woman was Mariana, a symbol of tolerance, courage, and creativity, and echoed the 1900 Paris Olympics, which allowed women to participate for the first time[4].

3. Current situation

In general, under the influence of three waves of feminism starting from the 19th century, women's participation in sports and the Olympic Games has achieved great development in the past 100 years.

In fact, women's participation in the Olympics goes far beyond athletes. Japan's Olympic Minister Seiko Hashimoto has been appointed as president of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Organizing committee, replacing Yoshiro Mori, who resigned after making misogynistic comments, NHK reported Monday. Hashimoto, who is 56 years old, is a former speed skater and cyclist who has competed in four Winter Olympics and three summer Games, making her the most decorated Japanese female Olympian. In 2019, she was appointed minister for The Olympics and Minister for Women's Empowerment by then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe[16]. After her appointment, the Tokyo Organizing Committee also quickly increased the proportion of female directors from 20 percent to 42 percent.

Once, women were barred from participating in the Olympic Games for many reasons, but now there are more female journalists devoting themselves to covering the Olympic Games and spreading the Olympic spirit. Ding Xu, the first female journalist in China who took part in sports underwater photography and reported on five Olympic Games, Zhou Chang, who has reported on sports for seven years, and Wang Qinou, who has been to Mount Qomolangma for six times to report on the climbing season. On the Olympic stage, they present the power of women from another Angle, a power that can change the world.

However, there are still many problems that cannot be ignored, such as gender identification in recent years. Since the 1930s, women athletes in the Olympic Games have been questioned as male because of their physical appearance, voice and other reasons. The best way to do this early on is to have athletes naked and examined by medical teams or even female spectators.

Since 1968, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has started the procedure of sex identification through chromosome tests. But there are limits to this method: 504 women who failed the test between 1972 and 1990 were counted. It doesn't tell you whether they were male or female, it just tells you whether they completed the test and were eligible to compete. Although gender identification methods have been tweaked over the decades, there are still many loopholes waiting to be fixed. In addition, the long-standing problem of underpaid women is a reminder that gender equality in the world of popular sports still needs to be worked out.

Gender equality has been one of the most important issues of the Olympic Games and the IOC in recent years, and the IOC has stated bluntly that the Tokyo Games will be the first "gender-balanced" Olympics. But many have pointed out the need to be wary of simply seeking to equalize the number of sports and the number of people involved, as this could symbolise gender equality in sport as a simple numerical comparison. Behind the label of equality, there are still many, many issues worthy of people's concern.

4. Conclusion

The goals and passions of the feminist movement will not diminish over time but will bring greater influence and benefit more people. Stamata Revithi took the first step in women's struggle for the right to move with courage. Alice Milliat used her wisdom to win the right of women to compete in the Olympics. Van Niekerk changed people's minds with her tenacity and inspire athletes of an era. Once I thought it was an ordinary little thing for women to participate in the Olympic Games, however, it is the right that women have fought for nearly 100 years. Generations of women use their methods to break down traditional prejudices, to show the world that women are not weak, and to make the world more equal.

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