Effective market segmentation is essential for obtaining a deep understanding of sport consumers (Rohm, Milne, & McDonald, 2006; Shank, 2004). Generation-based segmentation incorporates variables of age, value, and life experiences defined by historic events, hence dividing age cohorts with shared lifestyles (Chrispell, 1993). Although variations exist, researchers agree on three major adult generations in mainland China: the Cultural Revolution Generation (CRG) (1945 to 1960), the Chinese Baby Boomer Generation (CBB) (1961-1973), and the Chinese Generation X (CGX) (1974-1984) (Hellmut & Deanna, 1998; Liu & Zhou, 2002; Wang, 2000; Wang & Wu, 2008). Major events affecting CRG include the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Great Leap (1958 to 1961), and the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976) (Hellmut & Deanna, 1998). The twelve years from 1961 to 1973 during which the Chinese baby boomers were born witnessed rapid population growth in China, ended by the enforcement of the One Family One Child policy in 1974 signaling the entry of CGX. The CBB went through the Economic Open-up in 1983, Deng’s South Tour in 1992, and China’s entry to WTO in 2002 (Wang & Wu, 2008). For CGX, they grew up with the enormous social and economic transformation of the Chinese society. Consequently, they embrace Western individualism while remaining traditional. For instance, while endorsing filial piety, they also believe in work for happiness and the importance of enjoying themselves (Wang & Wu, 2008).

It is likely that different social experiences and values across the Chinese generations affect their lifestyles and the amount of time allocated to leisure. Empirical evidence led to the conclusion that sport participation may enable salubrious socialization (Chalip, 2006), and sport fanship can contribute to psychological well-being (Wann, 2002). Both sport participation and sport fanship activities take place during leisure time. If these activities have discernable effects on psychological well-being, engagement in leisure activities at a broad scope may also contribute to individuals’ mental health. Further, from a marketing perspective, demographic variables are typically used as the first cut in segmentation (Shank, 2004). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that, in addition to generations, differences exist, based on the Chinese consumers’ education, gender, marital status, and hukou (i.e., the Chinese way of classifying its citizen’s residence into rural and urban zones), in the amount of time devoted to leisure activities, and consequently, psychological well-being. This study examines these effects.

Data from the 2009 Chinese Family Panel Studies (CFPS) were used. CFPS was purported to track social, economic, demographic, education and health transformations of the Chinese society at individual, family, and community levels. For the 2009 study, rural and urban families in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou were surveyed. The adult sample in the 2009 CFPS was included in this study. The average age of the 2,975 participants (51% male and 49% female) was 46.4 years (SD=10.1); 44.9% of the participants belonged to CRG, 32.1% CBB, and 23% CGX. 19.5% of the participants had only completed primary school, 53.9% had completed education through middle or high school, 25.6% had college or university degrees, and 0.9% had a graduate degree. In terms of marriage, 6.2% were singles, 88.3% were married, and 1.6% divorced. In terms of hukou, 46.7% were rural residents and 53.3% urban residents.

Participants reported the average amount of time they spent on leisure activities both during a weekday and a weekend. On average, the participants spent 7.3 hours (SD=4.53 hours) combining a typical weekday and a weekend on leisure activities such as participation in sport activities, watching TV, and surfing the internet. In addition, the participants rated the frequency, from 1 to 5, 1 being almost every day and 5 being never, of experiencing frustration, nervousness, restlessness, hopelessness, difficulty to accomplishing anything, and feelings of meaningless in life. The aggregate score gauging the participants’ overall mental state had an average of 27.86 (SD=2.93). Stata 12.0 was used to conduct regression analyses with dummy variables.

The regression on leisure time was significant (p<.001; R2=.154). Compared to CRG, the baby boomers had 1.14 hours less leisure times (p<.001), and the CGX had 0.5 hours less leisure time (p=.04). In comparison to those with primary education, participants with middle school education had 1.47 hours more leisure time, participants with
The findings suggest that the availability of leisure time does not directly contribute to the Chinese study participants’ mental health. Rather, generations, education, gender, marital status, and hukou had robust effects on mental health. However, patterns of the findings in the two regression analyses mirror each other. This seems to suggest that the amount of leisure time a Chinese individual enjoys is a proxy for that person’s mental health. The extent to which leisure time is available to a Chinese person is heavily influenced by the person’s demographic background. Notably, people with higher education, males compared to females, and urban residents compared to rural residents, enjoyed more leisure time and experienced less negative feelings. This renders the profile of a typical Chinese consumer prone to sport and leisure activities, thus, the ideal target market for sport and leisure products.

In terms of the Chinese generations, CRG had more leisure time and experienced less negative feelings compared to the other two generations. It is unclear whether this is simply the result of less stress as people in this generation are retiring and entering the empty nest phase of their family lifecycle, or indeed there are undergirding generational effects. Future research applying a qualitative approach is needed to examine the effects of social transformation on the ways the Chinese generations interpret lives, and meanings they accord to sport and leisure activities, and in turn, how the derived meanings affect life quality and how the availability of leisure is constrained by one’s demographic background.