

# Inheritance and Integration: Modern University Sports in a Fusion of Cultures

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**Abstract:** By employing literature review, comparative analysis, and historical analysis methods, this study examines and compares the characteristics and value orientations of Chinese and Western sports cultures. The findings reveal that due to cultural differences, Western competitive sports have long dominated university campuses, while traditional Chinese sports have been marginalized or neglected in universities. Such an approach to university sports overlooks the cultural psychological values of the participants, casting doubt on the development, effectiveness, and innovation of university sports. The study concludes that, amidst the collision and interaction of these two distinct sports cultures, Chinese university sports should both inherit the traditional Chinese sports culture and draw on the essence of Western competitive sports culture. By integrating the cultural structures and value orientations of both into an organic system, a new perspective on Chinese university sports can be established, meeting the trends of modern development in Chinese university sports.

**Keywords:** Traditional Sports, Western Sports, Humanistic Spirit, Competition, Sports Culture, University Sports

## 1. Introduction

This article delves into the inheritance of traditional Chinese sports culture and the differences and integration between it and Western sports culture. The article first emphasizes the basic function of traditional Chinese sports culture, which is the pursuit of harmony between body and mind, aiming for health and longevity. It introduces ancient health preservation practices such as Wu Qin Xi (Five-Animal Exercises), Tai Chi, and Confucius's views on health preservation and moral cultivation. Then, the article describes the value orientation of traditional Chinese sports culture, including courtesy, peace, and the Doctrine of the Mean, and points out its limitations in modern society, especially the lack of competitive spirit. It further analyzes the characteristics of Western sports culture, from the awakening of humanistic spirit in ancient Greece to the emphasis on the irrational role of individuals in modern sports, as well as the manifestation of individualism and diversified development models in Western sports culture. In addition, the article discusses the performance and influence of Chinese and Western sports cultures in university physical education, pointing out that Chinese university physical education should inherit traditions while actively absorbing the competitive spirit and scientific training methods from Western sports culture. Finally, the article summarizes the reflection of values in Chinese and Western sports cultures, emphasizing the importance of mutual reference and integration of the two cultures under the background of globalization, and proposes the construction of a new perspective on Chinese university sports to promote the comprehensive development of university physical education. Through this integration, talents with comprehensive personality and physique can be better cultivated to meet the needs of modern society for physical education.

## 2. The inheritance of traditional Chinese sports culture

### 2.1. Strengthening the body and performance

Traditional Chinese sports culture emphasizes harmony between humans and nature, pursuing the unity of inner and outer, the integration of form and spirit, and the oneness of body and mind. It advocates nourishing the heart through tranquility and the body through movement, combining both to cultivate

one's character and nurture one's nature, with "health" and "longevity" as the ultimate goals. From this, ancient health preservation has recognized practices such as Daoyin breathing exercises, the Five Animal Frolics, Indian massage techniques, imitating the movements of bears and birds, minor labor skills, Yijin Jing (Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic), Baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Silk), and Tai Chi, all of which essentially aim for longevity, "to eliminate diseases and make the body light and agile," "those who practice three times in order every day, after a month, all diseases will be eliminated," "carefully promote this meaning, what is the end? To prolong life and keep the spring of youth eternal" [1]. These are precious methods summarized by the ancients for strengthening the body and extending life, the way humans nurture their own lives. Confucius was not only a great educator but also a health preservationist. He believed that "benevolent people live long," "great virtue must lead to great longevity," and strengthening moral cultivation is an important means to extend life and stay young. Among them, he said in the "Analects of Confucius - Ji Shi": "A gentleman has three things to beware of: when young, the blood and qi are not stable, to be cautious about lust; when strong, the blood and qi are vigorous, to be cautious about fighting; when old, the blood and qi have declined, to be cautious about greed." He regarded "abstaining from lust, fighting, and greed" as the key points of health preservation at different stages of life.

In addition, traditional Chinese sports culture also has comprehensive sports characteristics such as competitive performance, entertainment, artistic appreciation, and interest. In terms of dance, such as the Miao people's "Lusheng Dance," the dancer performs while playing, making rapid rotations, low steps, rolls, handstands, and other skillful movements, which are difficult to complete without a certain foundation of training; and the Li people's "bamboo pole dance," the strikers alternate between kneeling and squatting, the rhythm gets faster and faster, the difficulty increases, and the pole jumper cleverly jumps among the separation and height changes of the poles, showing various beautiful postures; there are also the Dai people's sword dance, stick dance, peacock dance; the Hani people's bamboo tube dance; the Zhuang people's bronze drum dance, etc., all of which reflect that dance and sports activities are inseparable, a kind of physical activity that enhances physical fitness. These have a profound impact on the formation of ethnic traditional sports culture and enrich the content of ethnic traditional sports culture. The beauty of form, posture, rhythm, and harmony displayed in these humanistic spirits are symbols of the Chinese nation's temperament, strength, and sentiment.

## 2.2. Courtesy and harmony

In traditional Chinese agricultural culture, the Chinese people have gradually developed a cultural character that emphasizes moderation and pursues harmony. As Mr. Liang Qichao said, "Chinese philosophy pays great attention to the relationships between people," while "Greece and modern Europe focus on the relationship between people and things." [2] In traditional Chinese culture, coordinating interpersonal relationships is given top priority, guided by the idea that "propriety is used, and harmony is the most valuable." Confucianism establishes its system with the dual unity of "rites" and "benevolence" at its core. Confucian culture is a Chinese culture characterized by ethics, and Confucianism always revolves around ethics as the core to build its value system. The principle of moderation and the value standard of Confucian thought have become the criteria for the Chinese people's conduct. It requires people's thoughts and actions to be based on "moderation and constancy," and to "be solemn, cautious, and restrain personal emotions and desires as the standard for handling affairs, to oppose extreme one-sidedness, and to achieve the purpose of being open-minded and harmonious" [3]. This is the core idea of moderation. In Taoist thought, the Taoist concept of "guarding the feminine, being humble, not competing, and inaction" is advocated, which also has an important influence on the cultivation of the cultural taste of the people, making traditional Chinese sports culture more focused on the overall harmony and unity, and downplaying the competitiveness and contention of sports.

In ancient China, great importance was attached to emotional ethics and moral concepts. These concepts were fully reflected in the field of sports, and they also have a positive significance in regulating people's sports behavior and creating a peaceful sports atmosphere. Mencius believed that righteousness is more precious than life and is worth exchanging for life. Therefore, he advocated that people should have the spirit of "a great man," "wealth and honor cannot corrupt, poverty and humbleness cannot shift, power

and force cannot bend, this is called a great man." This thought of "dying for benevolence" and "preferring to be a jade broken than a tile intact" gives traditional Chinese sports a deeper cultural connotation, making traditional Chinese sports culture show an ethical value orientation characterized by tolerance, courtesy, and peace. In summary, the core issue of concern in the values of traditional Chinese sports culture is the individual and the relationship between the individual and society. The advantage lies in the extreme emphasis on morality, and the disadvantage lies in the lack of competitive spirit. Traditional Chinese sports need to go to the world, but it is not smooth sailing, and it is even less conceivable to fully globalize Chinese national traditional sports, because this issue is not a simple sports issue after all, but a fundamental cultural concept issue, and the difficult journey of Chinese martial arts to apply for the Olympics is a good example.

### **3. Analysis of the characteristics of western sports culture**

For the West, the evolution of sports culture is roughly divided into three developmental models according to different cultural themes of the times: The first is the ancient Greek period. People shifted from exploring the essence of nature through religious mythology to understanding themselves. Humans became the measure of all things. Thinkers with simple emotions pioneered the understanding of the human world. The humanistic spirit of social culture manifested as the awakening of human self-consciousness, and sports were included in the category of humanities in civic education. The second is the modern bourgeois education that began with the Renaissance, which showed a different approach to physical and mental development in sports education from the ancient Greek period. Sports during this period were characterized by opposition to divinity and advocacy of secular life and the spirit of science. The third is modern Western sports, which emphasize the irrational role of humans, resist the suffocation of human nature by scientific rationalism, and promote human nature by correcting the mistakes in the development of human nature with an irrational approach, and comprehensively safeguard the rights to physical and mental health of people. Western sports represent the Western humanistic system. It pays special attention to health methods and means in maintaining the right to healthy human existence, protecting the right to healthy human existence in the form of law.

However, Western sports culture is influenced by Western maritime culture, showing a positive yearning for practical benefits, pursuing competition on an equal basis, and striving to obtain the greatest personal benefits. This differs from the stable and non-competitive traditional Chinese sports influenced by agricultural culture. On this basis, Western society has long formed principles of dealing with issues based on individualism and utilitarianism. They admire the outbreak of strength and intense competition, especially evident in the ancient Olympic Games. A "physical education" has been formed with the core of Protestant ethics, integrating the use of scientific experiments, anatomy, physiology, modern medicine, etc., focusing on the beauty of strength and speed, valuing external physical beauty, and valuing the display of human life [4]. Therefore, Westerners generally admire a strong and aesthetic physique and agile and vigorous sports, and are willing to pay arduous efforts for it.

#### **3.1. Individual-Centric: the social benchmark of western sports culture**

Ancient Greece is the birthplace of Western sports culture. Due to geographical limitations, with three sides surrounded by the sea and scarce arable land, the lives of ancient Greeks were closely connected to the ocean. In the process of challenging nature, they gradually developed an open-minded, pioneering, and competitive national character. At the same time, the secularization and personification of Greek society allowed the unique aesthetic and entertainment consciousness of the ancient Greeks to develop fully, forming a sports style based on personal principles and personality, which constructed Western sports with individual development and the display of personal vitality as the main body, and has been passed down and developed in Western society through generations.

By the Middle Ages, due to the supremacy of divine power over royal power in Western society, everything was dominated by religion and the church, fundamentally negating the secular value of humans, and as a result, sports were banned. Only knightly sports and chivalrous sports were preserved as the only forms of sports activities. It was not until the religious reformation was driven by the modern Renaissance movement that the dialectical relationship of "the unity of soul and body" was confirmed, clearing the

ideological obstacles for the development of sports and opening the door to the era of modern sports. The emerging bourgeoisie more clearly put forward the humanistic educational concept centered on "people."

In Western sports culture, the individual or self is independent, separated from others, and an individual with personal spirit. This society, which takes personal personality as the main body, strongly advocates personal struggle, making "individualism" a philosophy of life and a value standard, which is a dominant spirit in Western sports culture. "Self-interest" is the core content of Western sports culture; "adventure, publicity, freedom, competition, equality" are typical principles of life and conduct centered on self-development. Therefore, the creed and virtue of "competition as the most valuable, natural selection, and survival of the fittest" in Western values are thus established [5].

Western sports culture, centered on the individual, was born under such a concept. In competitions, their motivation and principles for participation almost all represent the individual, and participation in various sports events is purely out of personal will, respecting personal interests and hobbies, especially prominent in some world competitions. They engage in sports competitions adhering to individual rights, respecting referees and rules, and valuing contractual relationships. In competitive sports, they fully affirm personal struggle goals and the realization of personal value, pushing individual heroism to the extreme.

### **3.2. Diversified Culture: the development model of western sports culture**

The market economy based on maritime trade has always been the economic foundation for the emergence and development of Western sports. The core of the Western commodity economy is characterized by mutual exchange of resources, maximization of benefits, and openness and extroversion. The diverse lifestyles of Westerners are shaped under the special background of this humanities and economic-foundation. In addition, the unpredictable climate and harsh living conditions of living by the sea have fostered their personalities that dare to take risks and resist tenaciously. They strive to be strong, dare to fight, and work hard to develop external resources for survival, advocating "individual competition and freedom" centered on the individual. Their life potential and wisdom are fully utilized in this process of striving and progress. A typical characteristic of Western historical development is that its culture is diverse and dispersed, showing a divergent nature, which also makes the division of ethnic groups diverse and dispersed in terms of region. Especially since the Renaissance, the development of Western sports culture has fully confirmed this feature.

Different cultural backgrounds and different sports cultures produced by different ethnic groups and countries have not been rejected in the process of integrating into Western sports practice, but have been well integrated and merged. At the same time, when people choose to use these sports projects, they also reflect the distinct "diversity" of cultural characteristics. A variety of games and entertainment projects from different ethnic groups, regions, and cultural backgrounds have gathered together to form Western sports culture. Through continuous integration and development, they have ultimately formed a complete system of Western sports and have become the mainstream of world sports culture today. The modern Olympic movement, which attracts worldwide attention, is a great contribution of the diversified humanistic values of Western sports to world sports.

## **4. Clash of east and west sports cultures**

Due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, modern Chinese sports have not developed into sports aimed at competition and winning like those in the West. Instead, under the influence of traditional culture, a traditional sports culture that focuses on disease prevention, performance, and entertainment has emerged. It emphasizes "uniting the mind and intention, regulating the breath with intention, promoting form with breath, and integrating form with spirit," bringing "heart, intention, breath, form, and spirit" into a state of mutual balance and harmony in Yin and Yang. This approach integrates the human body with nature and the changing seasons. This unique form of health-oriented sports, born out of traditional culture, contrasts with the Olympic spirit of "Faster, Higher, Stronger": one pursues the continuation of life, while the other pursues the quality of life. This reflects the different values of Chinese and Western sports cultures.

Today, the Chinese traditional sports philosophy that emphasizes "nurturing life and cultivating character," combining training with nourishment, and balancing movement with stillness has great appeal to Westerners. They are trying to draw nourishment from the Eastern way of life and methods of health

preservation. For example, Western sports concepts dominated by the Olympic spirit, such as "peace and friendship," "fair and equal competition," "sports for all," and "participation is key," are gradually being absorbed by traditional sports. In summary, traditional sports with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism at their core, and Western sports with Protestant ethics, competition, and transcendence at their core, represent two different cultural streams. Clearly, Chinese and Western sports must carry the colors and characteristics of their respective core cultures.

Chinese traditional sports culture, influenced by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist thoughts, has formed a unique style that integrates health preservation, moral education, and restrained entertainment. Under the immense influence of Western Olympic sports, Chinese traditional sports culture is no longer a self-sufficient entity in a closed environment but is rapidly developing amidst the currents of integration and competition with Western sports culture. At the same time, as modern society continues to evolve, people are gradually recognizing the specific value of modern sports in cultivating a person's comprehensive development in character and physique. The collision, game, and integration of Chinese and Western sports cultures will inevitably lead to a new revolution in human life sciences, with the ultimate result being the harmonious development of the human body and mind.

## **5. Comparison of sports values in Chinese and western Universities**

Under the influence of different cultures, diverse sports cultures have had a significant impact on the development and evolution of physical education in Chinese universities through various media. This has not only made Chinese university sports highly resilient, inert, and conservative, but also fostered the notable characteristic of "emphasizing intellectual education while neglecting physical education." This characteristic lacks an understanding of the educational function of sports, highlighting only the political function of sports. While the collectivity, skill, and performance aspects of sports activities are fully demonstrated, students' intrinsic needs and physical culture and aesthetic awareness have not developed well [6]. The main manifestations are: currently, Chinese university sports, in terms of form, content, and organizational systems, are similar to those in the West, but university sports have only grasped the form and not inherited the essence. For example, the school sports meetings have basically become a tradition in various universities in China, but students and teachers who can correctly understand the value and function of the school sports meetings are only a small minority, which seriously affects their attention to and passion for participating in the sports meetings. In addition, due to the influence of the lack of systematic and scientific training methods and specialized competition rules in traditional Chinese sports, traditional martial arts, entertainment, health-preserving Tai Chi, and fitness Qigong have long been the mainstay of university physical education courses, with few other traditional Chinese sports included, which to some extent hinders the reform and innovation of university physical education courses. Since ancient Chinese sports activities were almost all subordinate to other social activities, there is a lack of necessary internal connections between related sports activities, and physical education courses have not formed an independent theoretical system.

Western sports culture emphasizes competition and the pursuit of efficiency, valuing contractual rules. Influenced by this background, university sports in the West focus on training methods that emphasize the development of aesthetically pleasing muscles during exercise, pay attention to the aesthetics of the human form, and stress the external movement of the body. They advocate for the exploration of the body's physical potential to enhance athletic performance and enrich one's spirit. In the dissection of sports movements, there is an emphasis on the analysis of knowledge and action, the principles of physics and mechanics, and the exploration of human anatomy and physiological functions. They use scientific research methods and experiments to pursue intense competition and sports performance. Based on this, a systematic scientific theoretical support has been formed, with clear competition rules and strict requirements for venues and equipment. As a result, competitive university sports are highly valued and have become an important part of university education in Western countries. For example, Yale University has the most teams among the Ivy League schools. Sports competitions between schools are major events at universities, where the competitive spirit and team spirit that Americans take pride in are cultivated. Although schools do not have mandatory physical education courses, more than 80% of students participate in various sports activities and competitions. Students enrich their extracurricular cultural life in college, cultivate their teamwork and

aesthetic abilities, as well as a sense of fair competition and tenacious spirit [7]. In China, university education has a clear inclination in its view of the value of university sports. It either focuses on the material value of university sports (the improvement of sports skills and physical fitness) or on the spiritual value (the enhancement of lifelong sports awareness, aesthetic appreciation ability, and the spirit of hard work and endurance). The difference mainly lies in the traditions and philosophies of each school. For example, Tsinghua University and Peking University both pay great attention to the political function of university sports in serving national political interests. Tsinghua University's philosophy of physical education is to "work healthily for the motherland for fifty years"; Peking University's philosophy of physical education is "the integration of science and technology with people, and the equal importance of cultivating the body and the mind" [8]. American universities are different; they focus on both, trying to find the best integration point when material and spiritual aspects collide, and pay more attention to the comprehensive value of university sports. For example, Yale University, when cultivating personal qualities and character, takes into account both "developing physical strength, speed, flexibility, and endurance" and "tempering willpower and cultivating spirit" to achieve the goal of cultivating high-quality talents [9]; Harvard University identifies "personal honor" as a "linking point" between the material and spiritual functions of university sports. This "linking point" is to highlight the honor of Harvard University. Therefore, Harvard University believes that only winning honors for the school is the most important value.

## 6. Conclusion

The value orientations of Chinese and Western sports cultures respectively reflect the social and cultural psychological values of different ethnicities and nations [10]. Due to historical and geographical reasons, Western competitive sports (such as track and field, basketball, volleyball, tennis) have long dominated university campuses, while traditional Chinese sports (such as lion dancing, dragon dancing, ethnic wrestling, ethnic dance, etc.) are often marginalized or overlooked in universities. Such an approach to university sports neglects the cultural and psychological values of the participants, calling into question the development, effectiveness, and innovation of university sports. Although traditional Chinese sports are highly conservative, they also have innovative and integrative aspects. Therefore, Chinese university sports should not only inherit the traditional Chinese sports culture and promote the humanistic spirit of Chinese sports but also actively draw on the competitive spirit of Western sports and the essence of Western university sports culture. By integrating the cultural structures and value orientations of both into an organic system, a new perspective on Chinese university sports can be established to meet the trends of modern development in Chinese university sports.

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