

The Chinese Sports Spirit: A Catalyst for the Global Ascent of a Sports Powerhouse

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the pivotal role of the Chinese sporting ethos in building a sporting powerhouse and its underlying mechanisms. Through literature review, case analysis and empirical research, it systematically examines the historical origins, core values, cultural significance and multidimensional impact of this ethos on national sporting development. Findings reveal that the Chinese sporting ethos not only provides clear value guidance for national development at the policy level but also consolidates formidable social cohesion at the societal level. It motivates athletes' competitive drive at the sporting level while enhancing the international influence of Chinese sport at the cultural level. The findings offer fresh perspectives on understanding the role of sporting ethos in national development, providing crucial theoretical and practical guidance for building a sporting powerhouse. Future research may explore cross-national comparative studies and long-term tracking research to delve deeper into the dynamic evolution of the Chinese sporting ethos and its enduring impact on this national endeavour.

KEYWORDS

Chinese sporting ethos; Building a sporting powerhouse; Mechanism of action; Cultural soft power

1 Introduction

In today's era of globalisation, sport has become a significant manifestation of a nation's comprehensive strength. Building a sporting powerhouse is not only an inevitable requirement for the development of the sporting sector but also an integral component of the nation's overall development strategy. The concept of a sporting powerhouse encompasses multiple dimensions, including outstanding achievements in competitive sport, the widespread promotion of fitness for all, the vigorous development of the sports industry, and a profound heritage of sporting culture. In recent years, the Chinese government has placed high priority on building a sporting powerhouse, introducing a series of policy measures to advance the comprehensive development of the sporting sector. However, throughout this process, the unique value and vital role of the Chinese Sporting Ethos—a core driving force in the nation's sporting endeavours—has yet to receive adequate systematic research and exposition ^[1].

The Chinese sporting spirit, as a distinctive cultural phenomenon, embodies rich historical connotations and cultural value. It serves not only as the spiritual pillar underpinning the development of China's sporting endeavours but also constitutes an integral part of the Chinese national spirit. From ancient martial arts and traditional sports like cuju to modern international sporting events such as the Olympic and Asian Games, this spirit has consistently permeated these activities, inspiring successive generations of Chinese sportspeople to strive relentlessly. This ethos manifests not only in athletes' competitive performances but also in society's collective passion for and engagement with sport. It embodies the Chinese nation's spirit of unity, striving, and innovation, serving as a powerful driving force propelling China's sporting endeavours forward ^[2].

However, against the backdrop of intensifying global sporting competition, how the Chinese sporting spirit can fulfil its unique role in building a sporting powerhouse has become a matter worthy of in-depth exploration. On one hand, building a sporting powerhouse requires robust spiritual underpinnings to ignite societal enthusiasm and participation in sport ^[3]. On the other, as a form of cultural soft power, the Chinese sporting spirit must demonstrate its distinctive appeal on the international stage to enhance China's global sporting influence – a challenge that demands urgent attention. This study therefore aims to explore the inheritance and development of the Chinese sporting spirit within the context of building a sporting powerhouse, analysing its mechanisms of action to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for this endeavour.

2 Core essence of the Chinese sporting ethos

2.1 Historical origins

The formation and evolution of the Chinese sporting ethos are intrinsically linked to the historical trajectory of the Chinese nation. As early as ancient times, China witnessed a rich array of sporting activities, including martial arts, cuju (an early form of football), archery, and board games. These pursuits served not only recreational and competitive functions

but also carried profound cultural significance. For instance, martial arts emphasised 'veneration of martial prowess and moral virtue,' prioritising the unity of body and mind, reflecting the Confucian ideal of 'cultivating oneself, harmonising the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world.' *Cuju*, meanwhile, became a widely popular sport in both imperial courts and among the populace during the Tang Dynasty, mirroring the prosperity and openness of that era. The spiritual essence embedded in these traditional sports—such as courage, resilience, unity, and wisdom—laid the foundation for the formation of the Chinese sporting spirit. Entering the modern era, the introduction of Western sporting culture propelled China's athletic endeavours towards modernisation. Throughout this process, the Chinese sporting ethos continually absorbed the essence of foreign cultures while preserving its distinct identity. Particularly after the founding of the People's Republic, sport was entrusted with the vital mission of invigorating national spirit and strengthening national cohesion. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Chinese sporting community championed the slogan 'Bring Honour to the Nation,' spurring athletes to strive for excellence on the international stage. During this period, the core of the Chinese sporting spirit centred on patriotism and collectivism. Since the Reform and Opening-up, the Chinese sporting spirit has further enriched and evolved, incorporating contemporary elements such as innovation and scientific rigour, becoming a powerful driving force for the comprehensive development of Chinese sports ^[4].

2.2 Core values

The core values of the Chinese sporting spirit constitute its most vital component. These values not only motivate athletes to strive valiantly on the field but also shape society's perception of and engagement with sport. Firstly, 'striving for excellence' stands as one of the most distinctive features of the Chinese sporting spirit. The outstanding achievements of Chinese athletes on the international stage are underpinned by countless hours of sweat and dedication. This spirit of perseverance embodies the Chinese nation's resilience in the face of adversity and its courage to challenge itself. Secondly, 'unity and cooperation' is another vital aspect of the Chinese sporting spirit. Whether in team or individual events, athletes deeply understand the power of unity. This ethos manifests not only in seamless coordination on the field but also in society's collective support for sporting endeavours. Furthermore, 'winning glory for the nation' embodies the patriotic sentiment of the Chinese sporting spirit. Athletes intertwine personal honour with national prestige, a spirit that not only motivates competitors but also ignites national pride and patriotic fervour among the populace. Finally, 'scientific pragmatism' represents a vital facet of the modern Chinese sporting ethos. With the continuous advancement of sports science, the Chinese sporting community increasingly emphasises scientific training and management. This pragmatic approach not only elevates athletes' competitive standards but also propels the sustainable development of Chinese sports ^[5].

2.3 Cultural implications

The Chinese sporting ethos is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, embodying rich cultural connotations. Confucian philosophy emphasises 'cultivating oneself, harmonising the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world.' This ethos permeates the Chinese sporting spirit, motivating athletes to strengthen their bodies through physical exercise and thereby contribute to the nation and society. The Daoist concept of 'unity between heaven and humanity' has also profoundly influenced the Chinese sporting spirit, stressing the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. This philosophy manifests in modern sport through the protection and respect for sporting environments. Moreover, the concept of 'harmony' within traditional Chinese culture is reflected in the Chinese sporting ethos, emphasising the maintenance of harmony and respect within competition. This cultural dimension lends the Chinese sporting spirit its unique appeal. Simultaneously, the Chinese sporting spirit has absorbed outstanding elements from modern sporting culture, such as the Olympic motto: 'Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together.' This fusion not only renders the Chinese sporting ethos more contemporary but also enhances its influence on the international stage. Through such cultural integration and innovation, the Chinese sporting ethos serves as a bridge connecting traditional Chinese culture with modern sporting culture, showcasing the cultural confidence and open-mindedness of the Chinese nation ^[6].

2.4 Modern interpretation

In contemporary society, the Chinese sporting ethos continues to be imbued with new, era-specific connotations to meet the demands of evolving times. With the widespread promotion of the national fitness campaign, the Chinese sporting ethos has expanded beyond competitive sports to encompass sporting activities across society. It emphasises the vital role of sport in personal health, social harmony, and national development, championing the concept of a 'Healthy China'. Concurrently, against the backdrop of rapid growth in the sports industry, this ethos has integrated innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, driving the diversified development of the sector. Moreover, as Chinese sport gains increasing influence on the international stage, the global dissemination of the Chinese sporting ethos has become

increasingly vital. Through international sporting events, cultural exchanges and other activities, this ethos showcases the unique appeal and cultural value of Chinese sport to the world, enhancing international understanding and recognition of China. In the new era, the Chinese sporting ethos serves not only as the driving force behind the advancement of China's sporting endeavours but also as a significant manifestation of the Chinese nation's cultural soft power ^[7].

3 The mechanism of the Chinese sporting ethos in building a sporting powerhouse

3.1 Mechanism at the policy level

At the policy level, the Chinese sporting ethos provides clear value guidance and spiritual impetus for building a sporting powerhouse. When formulating sports policies, the Chinese government consistently integrates the core values of the Chinese sporting ethos, emphasising concepts such as 'winning glory for the nation' and 'striving for excellence' to motivate athletes and sports professionals to strive towards the goal of becoming a sporting powerhouse. The General Administration of Sport explicitly states in multiple policy documents the imperative to promote the Chinese Sporting Ethos and cultivate high-calibre athletes possessing patriotic sentiment and international competitiveness. This policy orientation not only charts a clear course for the development of sport but also drives progress in sports infrastructure, the popularisation of sports education, and the growth of the sports industry through policy incentives and resource allocation. Furthermore, guided by policy, the Chinese Sporting Ethos fosters deep integration between sport and other domains such as education, culture, and health. Joint policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education and the General Administration of Sport emphasise the significance of sporting spirit in youth education, proposing to cultivate perseverance, teamwork, and patriotic sentiment through sporting activities. This cross-departmental policy coordination not only elevates sport's status within national development strategies but also lays a robust social foundation for building a sporting powerhouse ^[8].

3.2 Mechanisms at the societal level

At the societal level, the Chinese sporting ethos provides robust social support for building a sporting powerhouse by uniting societal forces, stimulating public participation, and strengthening social cohesion. Values such as 'unity and cooperation' and 'winning glory for the nation' within the Chinese Sporting Spirit have galvanised societal attention and support for sporting endeavours. Whenever Chinese athletes achieve outstanding results on the international stage, the entire nation celebrates, with this sense of national pride and patriotic fervour further propelling the widespread development of the national fitness campaign.

Through the popularisation of sporting activities, the Chinese Sporting Spirit promotes social harmony and health. The widespread implementation of the national fitness campaign has not only enhanced public physical fitness but also strengthened social cohesion and centripetal force. In recent years, marathon events have proliferated nationwide, attracting substantial participation from ordinary citizens. This engagement has not only heightened public health awareness but also fostered community interaction and social harmony through sporting activities. Furthermore, the Chinese sporting ethos has further propagated positive social energy and advanced societal civilisation through forms such as sports volunteering and charitable sporting initiatives.

3.3 Mechanisms at the competitive level

At the competitive level, the Chinese sporting ethos provides core competitiveness for building a sporting powerhouse by motivating athletes to strive for excellence, elevating athletic standards, and cultivating outstanding sporting talent. Values such as 'striving for excellence' and 'scientific pragmatism' within this ethos inspire athletes to continually challenge themselves and surpass their limits during training and competition. The tenacious fighting spirit demonstrated by the Chinese women's volleyball team in numerous international competitions has not only secured victories but also inspired countless young athletes to pursue sporting careers. Through scientific training and innovative concepts, the Chinese Sporting Ethos has elevated the competitive standards of Chinese sport. Recent breakthroughs in training methodologies, sports medicine, and athletic technology within China's sporting sphere owe much to the ethos's guiding influence. The historic breakthroughs achieved by the Chinese athletics team in sprint events stem from the integration of scientific training methods and technological innovation. This fusion of science and spirit not only enhances athletes' performance but also bolsters China's overall competitiveness on the international stage.

3.4 Mechanisms at the cultural level

At the cultural level, the Chinese sporting ethos provides crucial cultural underpinnings for building a sporting

powerhouse by disseminating Chinese sports culture, elevating international standing, and strengthening cultural soft power. This ethos serves not only as the driving force behind China's sporting development but also as a unique embodiment of Chinese culture. Through international sporting events and cultural exchanges, it showcases the distinctive appeal and cultural value of Chinese sport to the world. The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and 2022 Winter Olympics demonstrated China's high sporting standards, conveying the profound heritage and distinctive allure of Chinese culture through cultural events such as the opening and closing ceremonies. This cultural dissemination not only elevated the international influence of Chinese sport but also strengthened China's cultural soft power on the global stage. Furthermore, the Chinese Sporting Spirit, through international exchanges of sporting culture, has fostered mutual understanding and integration between Chinese and foreign sporting cultures, propelling the development of global sporting culture.

4 Discussion

4.1 Research findings

The findings indicate that the Chinese sporting ethos has played a significant role in advancing the development of a sporting powerhouse. At the policy level, it provides a clear value orientation for the formulation of sports policies, motivating athletes and sports professionals to strive towards achieving the goal of becoming a sporting powerhouse. At the societal level, it fosters social cohesion by uniting societal forces, stimulating public participation, and strengthening social solidarity, thereby providing robust societal support for building a sporting powerhouse. At the competitive level, it motivates athletes to strive for excellence, elevate athletic standards, and cultivate outstanding sporting talent. Culturally, it enhances China's international image and soft power by disseminating Chinese sporting culture.

4.2 Theoretical contribution

This study enriches the theoretical framework linking sporting spirit to national development. Through systematic analysis of the historical origins, core values, and cultural connotations of the Chinese sporting spirit, it reveals its unique mechanism of action in building a sporting powerhouse. This discovery not only offers fresh perspectives on understanding the role of sporting spirit in national development but also provides valuable insights for other developing nations.

4.3 Practical implications

The findings hold significant practical guidance for building a sporting powerhouse. Firstly, policymakers should further integrate the Chinese Sporting Spirit into sports policies, driving comprehensive development through policy incentives and resource allocation. Secondly, at the societal level, efforts should be intensified to promote and disseminate the sporting ethos. This can be achieved through nationwide fitness campaigns and social activities, thereby enhancing social cohesion and public engagement. Furthermore, competitive sports should focus on cultivating athletes' fighting spirit and scientific training methodologies to elevate performance standards. Finally, at the cultural level, international exchanges and cooperation should be strengthened. Utilising sporting events and cultural exchange programmes can enhance the global influence of Chinese sport.

4.4 Research limitations

Despite significant theoretical and practical contributions, this study retains certain limitations. Firstly, it primarily relies on literature reviews and case analyses, lacking extensive quantitative data support. Future research may collect and analyse relevant data to strengthen its persuasiveness. Secondly, the study predominantly examines the operational mechanisms of China's sporting ethos, with insufficient comparative analysis of other nations' sporting spirits. Future research could undertake cross-national comparative studies to better understand the similarities and differences in sporting ethos across nations and their impact on building sporting powerhouses.

5 Conclusion

This study has thoroughly examined the essence of the Chinese sporting ethos from four dimensions: historical origins, core values, cultural connotations, and modern interpretations. It has analysed its operational mechanisms in building a sporting powerhouse across four levels: policy, society, competition, and culture. Findings indicate that the Chinese

sporting ethos exerts a significant driving force in this endeavour, providing crucial theoretical and practical underpinnings for policy formulation, social mobilisation, competitive enhancement, and cultural dissemination. This research not only enriches the theoretical framework linking sporting ethos to national development but also offers vital practical guidance for building a sporting powerhouse. By systematically analysing the operational mechanisms of the Chinese sporting ethos, this study provides valuable reference for policymakers, sports professionals, and the general public, thereby contributing to the comprehensive advancement of China's sporting endeavours.

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