

# On the Ideological Source and the Characteristic of Chinese Sports Spirit

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## Abstract

The Chinese sports spirit is the essence of China formed in the process of promoting the development of the sports cause, and is the living soul of leading the high-quality development of China's sports cause. To study the ideological source and historical characteristics of Chinese sports spirit. The research thinks: in the centennial practice of Chinese sports under the leadership of the Party, the Chinese sports spirit integrates cultural creation, cultural inheritance and cultural exchange, deeply shows the ideological understanding of the Chinese sports practice subject, the nutrition of the Chinese excellent culture and the essence of the western modern sports culture; in the new era, the Chinese sports spirit reflects the people, times, nationality, coordination and world, become the people as the center, the spirit of direction, highlighting the spiritual orientation of cultural confidence, comprehensive and coordinated development and the spirit of the world.

## Keywords

Chinese Sports Spirit, Source of Thought, Spiritual Characteristics, Characteristics of the New Era

## 1. Introduction

Zhang Dainian pointed out that spirit "is the subtle internal driving force in the process of cultural development, and also the basic idea that guides the national culture to keep moving forward." (Zhang, 2003). In terms of time, any spirit has historicity and timeliness (Huang, 2008). Historical significance indicates that the spirit is relatively stable and can exert lasting influence, while contemporaneity shows that it will continuously adjust and evolve with the development of the times, remaining ever-renewed. The Chinese sports spirit, born from the traditional culture of the Chinese nation, is a spiritual civilization achievement created

by the Chinese people through long-term sports practice. It guides the development direction of Chinese sports culture and also directs Chinese sports practice. Accompanying the historical practice of Chinese sports, the Chinese sports spirit has gone through several developmental stages, demonstrating the characteristics of different eras while always playing a “priceless” role. On October 18, 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: “Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era.” This is a major judgment on the historical position of China’s development, clarifying the new goals and strategic arrangements for building socialism with Chinese characteristics. As a component of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, sports have also been entrusted with new historical missions and contemporary tasks. In November 2021, the Resolution of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party’s Centennial Struggle emphasized, “Accelerate the construction of a sports powerhouse, widely carry out national fitness activities, and vigorously promote the Chinese sports spirit.” (*The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2021*). In June 2022, the newly revised Sports Law of the People’s Republic of China clearly stated in the first article of the general Provisions: “To carry forward the Chinese sports spirit and cultivate the Chinese sports culture” (*The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2022a*). The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics witnessed Chinese athletes fearlessly overcoming formidable challenges and achieving remarkable results, vividly embodying the Chinese sports spirit. Throughout the bidding, preparation, and hosting process, participants collectively forged the Beijing Winter Olympic Spirit characterized by “embracing the big picture, maintaining confidence and openness, tackling difficulties head-on, pursuing excellence, and co-creating the future.”

In summary, the era demands of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and the practical development of China’s sports industry have infused new ideological connotations into the Chinese sports spirit. The Chinese sports spirit, which symbolizes the soul and essence of China’s sports, also exhibits contemporary characteristics in its innovation and development. Therefore, we need to stand at a new historical juncture, guided by the Marxist historical perspective, to deeply analyze the ideological origins of the Chinese sports spirit from a theoretical level, grasp its ideological composition and contemporary features, and thereby better promote the Chinese sports spirit in the new era. This will enable us to leverage the guiding role of the Chinese sports spirit in China’s sports industry, contributing powerful spiritual strength to the comprehensive building of a sports powerhouse and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## 2. Interpretation of Chinese Sports Spirit

Conceptual definition represents the abstraction of essential characteristics of things, serving as the logical starting point for scientific understanding. This section, building upon existing research on the “Chinese Sports Spirit” concept, be-

gins by examining the fundamental meanings of “spirit” and “sports spirit”. Considering the current dissemination and application of this concept, it proposes that defining the Chinese Sports Spirit from a cultural studies perspective is the most appropriate approach.

### 2.1. Existing Research on the Concept of “Chinese Sports Spirit”

Since the State Sports Commission officially proposed the concept of “Chinese Sports Spirit” in 1996, it has become a highly attractive and influential research topic in the field of sports science. A literature search on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 1996 to 2022 shows that the academic community has published 150 related papers, 5 monographs, and 2 projects funded by the National Social Science Foundation. While enriching the theoretical achievements of research on Chinese Sports Spirit, these efforts have deepened people’s understanding of it. However, despite scholars discussing the connotation, characteristics, value, and promotion of Chinese Sports Spirit, there are few studies that provide a clear conceptual definition. Most scholars discussing the concept of Chinese Sports Spirit also express their own views based on their research needs, failing to reach a consensus. By reviewing past research on Chinese Sports Spirit, it can be found that existing studies mainly categorize the conceptual definitions of Chinese Sports Spirit into the following three types:

1) From a psychological perspective, the Chinese sports spirit is defined as a psychological state; for example, Huang Li believes that the Chinese sports spirit refers to the consciousness, thinking activities, and general psychological state formed by Chinese people in sports practice activities, with patriotism, dedication, teamwork, fair competition, striving for self-improvement, and happiness and health as the main value standards (Huang, 2007). 2) Philosophically, the Chinese sports spirit can be defined as a form of consciousness. Within the framework of Marxist dialectical materialism, spirit and consciousness are fundamentally synonymous concepts. Therefore, from a philosophical perspective, the Chinese sports spirit represents both the “direct product” and “conscious manifestation” of the Chinese nation’s athletic practices. As Zhang Dagang posits, sports spirit embodies value judgments and conscious aspirations cultivated through people’s engagement in sports activities (Zhang, 2013). 3) Culturally, the Chinese sports spirit is defined as a spiritual culture. Zheng Guohua, for instance, proposed that it is a distinctive cultural ethos created by the Chinese nation in sports, embodying national identity and reflecting value choices (Zheng, Cheng, & Liu, 2007). In summary, existing studies defining the Chinese sports spirit through the aforementioned three dimensions all possess theoretical foundations and rationality, having demonstrated varying degrees of value in both theoretical research and practical applications. However, we believe that when defining the Chinese sports spirit at the psychological level, it should refer to the “spirit of Chinese athletes”—the consciousness, cognitive activities, and general psychological states formed and manifested by Chinese athletes in sports practices. When this “spirit of Chi-

nese athletes” gains significant influence across the sports community and becomes a collective consciousness among sports practitioners—such as Rong Guotuan’s “how many times can one fight in life” fighting spirit, the “patriotic vision and global perspective” table tennis ethos, and the “never give up” women’s volleyball spirit—then the understanding of the Chinese sports spirit should adopt a philosophical definition. When this collective consciousness withstands the test of time, evolves into advanced, leading, and collectively recognized ideological concepts, value standards, and behavioral norms that guide the development of sports culture and practices, it ultimately becomes a spiritual culture.

## 2.2. Defining the “Chinese Sports Spirit” from a Cultural Studies Perspective

From an etymological perspective, the term “spirit” is composed of two characters: “jing” and “shen”. As early as the pre-Qin period in China, the book *\*Zhou Yi\** contained discussions about “jing” and “shen”, stating, “vigorous and upright, pure and refined” and “observing the divine way of heaven, the four seasons remain constant”. The combined use of the characters “spirit” first appeared in *\*Lüshi Chunqiu: Shu Shu\**, where it reads, “The sage examines the appropriateness of yin and yang, discerns the benefits of all things, and facilitates life, thus the spirit is at peace with the body, and longevity is achieved”. Here, the term “spirit” refers to the mind and soul of a person, forming a pair of contrasting concepts with the “body” (referring to physical form) mentioned in the text. Later, the term “spirit” became widely used in Chinese classics and dictionaries, with its conceptual connotations continuously expanding. In modern Chinese discourse, the term “spirit” is commonly interpreted in four main ways (Dictionary Editing Office & China Social Sciences Language Institute, 2016). 1) As a noun, it refers to human consciousness, thinking, and general psychological state, synonymous with the English terms spirit/mind; 2) As a noun, it denotes the essence of content, primarily meaning the core significance, equivalent to the English term essence; 3) As a noun, it signifies energy and vitality, as in “full of spirit”; 4) As an adjective, it describes something vibrant and dynamic, such as “appearing exceptionally spirited”. From a morphological perspective, the term “sportsmanship” is a modifier-head phrase composed of two independent components: “sports” and “spirit”. The relationship between them is one of modification, where “sports” serves as an attributive modifying the central term “spirit”. “Sportsmanship” can also be interpreted as “the spirit of sports”. Since “sports are cultural activities that promote physical and mental development through bodily movement as their fundamental means” (Yang & Chen, 2022). Therefore, the sports spirit refers to the spirit of sports as a cultural activity and cultural phenomenon.

From the perspective of cultural studies, the spirit of culture refers to its essence and core, which constitutes spiritual culture. Rooted in values and beliefs, it occupies the central position within the cultural system. Scholars Zhang Dainian and Cheng Yishan explain “spiritual culture” as follows: “What is spirit? Spirit origi-

nally refers to the antithesis of form. The fundamental spirit of culture should be understood as the concrete manifestation of cultural expressions. These concrete manifestations include artifacts, institutions, customs, etc., while the spirit of culture represents ideology. The fundamental spirit of culture serves as the subtle internal driving force in its developmental process, essentially the guiding ideology that propels national culture forward... In short, the fundamental spirit of culture is what a given culture creates and establishes as its ideological foundation.” (Zhang & Cheng, 1990). From the perspective of cultural studies, the spirit of culture refers to its essence and core, which constitutes spiritual culture. Rooted in values and beliefs, it occupies the central position within the cultural system. Scholars Zhang Dainian and Cheng Yishan explain “spiritual culture” as follows: “What is spirit? Spirit originally refers to the antithesis of form. The fundamental spirit of culture should be understood as the concrete manifestation of cultural expressions. These concrete manifestations include artifacts, institutions, customs, etc., while the spirit of culture represents ideology. The fundamental spirit of culture serves as the subtle internal driving force in its developmental process, essentially the guiding ideology that propels national culture forward... In short, the fundamental spirit of culture is what a given culture creates and establishes as its ideological foundation.” (Li, 2014). Furthermore, considering that since the proposal of the “Chinese Sports Spirit” in 1996, both official and popular discourses on the Chinese Sports Spirit have been widely circulated, such as: “The Chinese Sports Spirit is an important achievement in the construction of socialist spiritual civilization,” “The Chinese Sports Spirit is the soul and essence of China’s sports,” “Promoting the Chinese Sports Spirit to foster the prosperity and development of sports culture,” and “Combining the promotion of the Chinese Sports Spirit with strengthening cultural confidence,” it can be observed that, whether analyzed from the perspective of linguistic concepts or from the general understanding of the Chinese Sports Spirit, “The Chinese Sports Spirit” is a cultural category concept. Therefore, defining the Chinese Sports Spirit from the perspective of cultural studies is the most accurate and appropriate approach.

In summary, this paper defines the Chinese sports spirit from the perspective of cultural studies as the soul and essence of China’s sports culture, a form of spiritual culture. Specifically, it refers to the spiritual culture created and formed by the Chinese nation through long-term sports practice, widely recognized and revered by generations of Chinese sports practitioners. It comprehensively reflects the ideals, values, moral norms, and aesthetic tastes of China’s sports, directly embodying the core values of China’s sports and determining the choice and development direction of China’s sports culture model. The connotation of the Chinese sports spirit includes patriotic spirit of striving for national glory, professional dedication spirit of selfless contribution, innovative rational spirit of scientific realism, fair competition spirit of abiding by laws and regulations, collectivist spirit of unity and cooperation, and heroic spirit of tenacious struggle. The extension of the Chinese sports spirit encompasses all sports spirits created and formed in dif-

ferent periods, events, and figures of China's sports development, including Rong Guotuan's fighting spirit of "how many times can one fight in life," the table tennis spirit of "embracing the motherland and looking to the world," the mountaineering spirit of the Chinese Mountaineering Team of "sacrificing oneself for others and bravely scaling the peaks," the spirit of women's volleyball, women's football, the spirit of perseverance, and the spirit of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

### **3. The Ideological Source of Chinese Sports Spirit in the New Era**

Looking back at the century-long development of the Chinese sports spirit, from a practical perspective, the spiritual and cultural creations of Chinese sports practitioners in practice, including their ideological understanding, values, and spiritual pursuits, are important ideological sources of the Chinese sports spirit. From a cultural perspective, the formation and development of the Chinese sports spirit cannot be separated from the influence of Chinese and Western cultures. On one hand, the Chinese sports spirit is rooted in the unique culture of the Chinese nation, nurturing cultural lineage through the continuity of traditional Chinese culture; on the other hand, in the cultural exchanges between China and the West, foreign sports cultures represented by the Olympics have provided rich nourishment for the Chinese sports spirit. Therefore, the cultural creations of Chinese sports practitioners, the cultural inheritance of the Chinese nation, and the cultural exchanges with Western sports constitute the main ideological sources of the Chinese sports spirit.

#### **3.1. Cultural Creation: The Ideological Understanding of China's Sports Practice Subjects**

The Chinese sports spirit is implicit in the sports practices of the subject, manifested as the individual's spiritual temperament, value judgments, and the influence, penetration, and radiation of other social practices. Generation after generation of Chinese sports practitioners, as the practical and creative subjects of the Chinese sports spirit, embody its spiritual qualities and value pursuits, which are both the manifestation of the Chinese sports spirit and an important source of its ideological inspiration. The successive leaders of the Party are the chief designers of Chinese sports, and their sports ideologies also directly influence the development direction and spiritual characteristics of Chinese sports.

##### **3.1.1. Exploring the Sports Philosophy of Chinese Communist Party Leaders**

1) Mao Zedong's thoughts on sports. The young Mao Zedong placed great emphasis on sports. Drawing on his own experience in physical exercise and applying the perspective of dialectical materialism, he conducted a meticulous analysis of sports, forming his own views on sports. In the book "Research on Sports", Mao Zedong elucidated his understanding of the essence of sports, its functions, the relationship between sports and intellectual education, moral education, as well

as sports methods, and proposed the idea of “moving to defend the country,” which means engaging in sports to strengthen the physique, revitalize the nation, and save the country. The guiding principle of “developing sports for the country and the people” runs through Mao Zedong’s thoughts on sports. From the call during the Anti-Japanese War to “strengthen the iron bones of the working and peasant classes to defeat all enemies” to the inscription of the new China “develop sports to enhance the people’s physique”; from “strengthening the body to fight Japan” to “good health, good study, good work,” all reflect the essence of “for the country and the people” in Mao Zedong’s thoughts on sports. This ideological understanding not only pointed the way for the new China’s sports but also established the direction for the formation of the Chinese sports spirit.

2) Deng Xiaoping’s Sports Philosophy. As the second-generation core leader of the Party, Deng Xiaoping creatively proposed the reform idea of building a socialist sports system with Chinese characteristics on the basis of reasonably inheriting Mao Zedong’s sports philosophy. He emphasized the need to start from the specific realities of Chinese sports, boldly reform, and “seek truth from facts” to forge our own path. Based on this philosophy, the former State Sports Commission formulated various sports reform measures and published the “Draft Decision of the State Sports Commission on the Reform of the Sports System” in 1986. In 1993, the State Sports Commission issued the “Opinions on Deepening Sports Reform” again, promoting the development of Chinese sports reform in a more rapid manner. Under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping’s sports philosophy, the concept of continuous reform became the fundamental approach for advancing China’s sports cause, while the Chinese sports spirit also demonstrated the characteristics of “seeking truth from facts” and “reform and progress.” Deng Xiaoping further closely linked sports with the construction of socialist spiritual civilization, proposing for the first time that “sports are an important aspect of socialist spiritual civilization construction,” highlighting the spiritual and cultural attributes of sports and further fostering the Chinese sports spirit.

3) Jiang Zemin’s Sports Philosophy. Building upon Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping’s sports theories and directives, Jiang Zemin guided China’s sports development under the “Three Represents” guiding principle. He emphasized that sports are intrinsically linked to the advancement of socialist productive forces and the fundamental interests of the people. Through sports development, citizens have enhanced physical fitness, achieved holistic well-being, and developed comprehensive capabilities. “Sports not only meet individual needs for daily life and productivity, but also form the foundation of national quality and serve as a vital indicator of a nation’s comprehensive strength.” (Jiang, 2006). He further elaborated that sports can enrich people’s spiritual and cultural lives, cultivate the spirit and concepts required by the new era, and constitute an essential component of advanced socialist culture. Therefore, we must attach great importance to the profound spiritual impact sports exert on the nation and its people. Guided by this philosophy, the Sports Commission meticulously summarized various sports

ethos concepts previously proposed, systematically organized them, and ultimately articulated the Chinese Sports Spirit—a guiding principle representing the progressive direction of advanced socialist sports culture.

4) Sports philosophy from Hu Jintao. At the Third Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee, Hu Jintao proposed to adhere to a people-centered approach and establish a comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable scientific development concept. This is not only an important strategic understanding for coordinating socialist modernization but also a new guiding ideology for China's sports development under the new situation. "Adhering to a people-centered approach" means aiming for the all-round development of individuals, promoting sports development from the fundamental interests of the people, and insisting on developing sports with people as the center, subject, and purpose. "Comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development" requires balancing sports development with political, economic, social, and ecological progress, coordinating urban-rural and regional sports development, and promoting coordination among competitive sports, mass sports, and the sports industry to ensure sustainable development across generations. Hu Jintao also emphasized the important role of sports in building a harmonious society, believing that the Chinese sports spirit demonstrated by China—striving for national glory, abiding by rules, tenacious struggle, teamwork, and upward striving—plays an irreplaceable and unique role in cultivating socialist spiritual civilization, shaping and reinforcing mainstream social values and ethics, and providing spiritual motivation for the people. Therefore, he pointed out: "Sports are a symbol of social development and human civilization progress, and an important reflection of a country's comprehensive strength and social civilization level." (*General Administration of Sport of China, 2010*).

5) Xi Jinping's Sports Philosophy. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping, standing at a new historical starting point, has comprehensively deployed the development of China's socialist sports with Chinese characteristics from the perspective of the overall development of the Party and the country in the new era. He has made a series of important statements, decisions, and instructions, forming a scientific, rigorous, and richly substantive new era of China's socialist sports philosophy with Chinese characteristics, which guides all aspects of China's sports development. A prominent feature of Xi Jinping's sports philosophy is its people-centered approach, primarily manifested in upholding the supremacy of the people. It regards the people as the main body in developing sports, takes the promotion of the all-round development of individuals as the starting point and goal of sports work, adheres to the principle that sports development is for the people, the process relies on the people, and the results are shared by all the people; secondly, it focuses on building a strong sports nation and implementing the sports philosophy of comprehensive and coordinated development. "Sports carry the dream of national prosperity and the rejuvenation of the nation." (*The Central People's Government of the People's*

Republic of China, 2017). General Secretary Xi Jinping integrated the sports cause into the broader context of the “Two Centenary Goals” for planning, proposing that the primary task of sports work in the new era is to comprehensively build a sports powerhouse. To accelerate the construction of a sports powerhouse, it is necessary to deepen sports reforms, update sports concepts, and promote the comprehensive and coordinated development of mass sports, competitive sports, the sports industry, sports culture, and sports diplomacy. Third, it is essential to strengthen cultural confidence and promote the spirit of sports. The Chinese sports spirit is the core of sports culture and determines the nature and direction of Chinese sports culture. Therefore, we must vigorously promote the Chinese sports spirit, combining its promotion with the reinforcement of cultural confidence to provide strong spiritual strength for the development of sports and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Fourth, it is crucial to establish the concept of sports diplomacy in building a community with a shared future for mankind. Sports serve as a “catalyst” for fostering friendship and a “lubricant” for resolving conflicts. General Secretary Xi Jinping fully leverages the diplomatic attributes of sports, transforming national sports diplomacy into sports diplomacy, using sports language to tell China’s story well, and advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. Xi Jinping’s sports thought accurately grasps the laws of sports development in the new era, aligns with the demands of the times, provides theoretical guidance, scientific direction, and fundamental principles for China’s sports, and has been closely integrated with the practice of sports under socialism with Chinese characteristics. It has also influenced the core value level of China’s sports, exerting significant and far-reaching historical impact on the Chinese sports spirit.

### **3.1.2. The Value Pursuit of Chinese Athletes Is Sublimated**

If the sports philosophy of successive Chinese Communist Party leaders has established the spiritual positioning and direction of Chinese sports spirit from top to bottom, then generations of Chinese sports practitioners have been practicing this spirit from bottom to top in their daily work. Among them are both household-name star athletes and coaches, as well as unsung sports administrators and staff working behind the scenes. Regardless of their identities, statuses, or roles, as members of Chinese sports, they all embody the spirit of Chinese sports through their actions and enrich it with their transcendent life pursuits and values. Representative athletes include table tennis player Rong Guotuan, who declared “How many times can one fight in life? If not now, when?” and won China’s first world championship with his fighting spirit; Wang Fuzhou, the mountaineer who led the Chinese Mountaineering Team to conquer the world’s highest peak, Mount Everest, twice during China’s challenging development period, proving that “no height is too high to climb, no rock too hard to break”; and footballer Rong Zhixing, who trained diligently and fearlessly for his country’s honor while demonstrating exemplary sportsmanship and moral conduct. Representative coaches include Xu Yingsheng, the head coach of the 1970s table tennis team, who proposed

the theory of playing table tennis well with dialectical materialist characteristics; Yuan Weimin, the head coach of the 1980s Chinese women's volleyball team, who built a tenacious and never-say-die team through his unique "coaching philosophy" and won the world championship five times consecutively; and Shang Ruihua, the 1990s Chinese women's football coach, who led the team to win the Asian Cup twice and claim the Asian Games gold medal, truly shaping Chinese women's football into a top-tier team in Asia and planting the spiritual seed of "Steel Roses" for it. In addition, there were important sports administrators such as He Long, Rong Gaotang, and Wu Shaozu, sports international exchange personnel like He Zhenliang, Zhang Qing, and Wei Jizhong, as well as outstanding sports researchers. In short, in the unfolding history of China's sports, countless advanced sports figures and outstanding sports workers have written the most vivid footnotes to the Chinese sports spirit through their words, actions, and brilliant lives. The highly individualized spirit and value pursuits demonstrated by them have also enriched the Chinese sports spirit with important ideological content, which has been inherited, continued, and innovatively developed by generations of Chinese sports people.

### **3.2. Cultural Heritage: Drawing Nourishment from the Fine Culture of the Chinese Nation**

The excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, nurtured over 5000 years of civilization, the revolutionary red culture, and the advanced socialist culture, all nurtured in the great struggles of the Party and the people, are interconnected, continuously developed, and constantly elevated. These three elements are dialectically unified in the practice of contemporary socialism with Chinese characteristics, collectively forming the main body and mainstream of Chinese culture (Tang, 2019). The reason why the Chinese sports spirit is named "Chinese" is that it has always been rooted in the unique cultural soil of the Chinese nation, and has continuously drawn ideological and cultural nourishment from different historical stages, showing distinct national characteristics.

#### **3.2.1. Rooted in the Excellent Traditional Culture of the Chinese Nation**

The excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation is the crystallization of wisdom accumulated by the Chinese nation throughout its long history of survival and reproduction, serving as the root and soul of the Chinese nation. From personal aspects such as thinking patterns, behavioral norms, and life pursuits to broader societal mechanisms, customs, and moral principles in China, all are permeated and influenced by the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Traditional sports projects of the Chinese nation are concrete manifestations of this traditional culture in the field of sports. The philosophical contemplation of "harmony between heaven and man" in Tai Chi, the advocacy and adherence to "unity of knowledge and action," the emphasis on "harmony of form and spirit, combination of movement and stillness" in Chinese martial arts, and the focus on "etiquette first, morality foremost" vividly interpret the essence of the traditional cul-

ture of the Chinese nation. Through the inheritance and development of traditional sports projects, the spirit of Chinese sports has also drawn rich ideological nourishment from traditional culture, reflecting the unique cultural temperament and national character of the Chinese nation. Confucius's "worry about the Way, not poverty," Qu Yuan's "long sighs and tears, lamenting the hardships of the people," and Gu Yanwu's "taking the world as one's responsibility" all demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and mission toward the nation's future and destiny, forming the traditional cultural foundation of the patriotic spirit in Chinese sports. Additionally, the collectivist spirit of unity and cooperation, the heroic spirit of tenacious struggle, and the spirit of selfless dedication and professional commitment in Chinese sports can all find corresponding ideological roots in the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Therefore, the traditional culture of the Chinese nation is an important ideological source for the spirit of Chinese sports.

### **3.2.2. Forging Red Culture in the Revolutionary Period**

The Chinese people, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China in revolutionary practice, took Marxism as their guide, absorbed and integrated the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, and created red culture. Red culture not only embodies a rich spirit of revolutionary struggle but also deeply rooted the ideals and beliefs of the Communist Party of China, serving as a precious spiritual treasure for the Party and the country. Red sports culture is a component of red culture, a derivative culture that manifests the inner red spirit through the external forms of sports activities. During the revolutionary war period, the Communist Party of China united and led the broad masses of military and civilians to actively carry out various forms of sports activities in revolutionary bases and within the Red Army, adapting to local conditions, timing, and personnel. This enhanced the physical fitness of military and civilians in red areas, inspired the spirit of struggle, cultivated ideals and beliefs, and shaped and spread red sports culture. The red sports spirit, with its main content of "standing on the people, uniting as one, strengthening the body, defending the homeland, and striving hard," had a wide influence at that time, injecting red genes into the Chinese sports spirit and providing important ideological content. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chinese sports continued to carry forward the tradition of red sports culture formed during the revolutionary period, inheriting the red bloodline and promoting the development of new Chinese sports. This was first reflected in the organizational management of Chinese sports. In 1952, Marshal He Long became the director of the State Sports Commission. He selected some outstanding cadres from the army to manage sports, bringing the excellent style of Chinese soldiers—"brave and tenacious, intelligent and flexible, obeying commands, and abiding by discipline"—into the sports system. From national to provincial and municipal sports teams, athletes were strictly required, and the methods and experience of managing the army were used to manage sports teams. In sports training, Chinese athletes also emulate the PLA, honing their combat

will by adhering to the training principles of “three stricts and one big”—strictness in training, strictness in discipline, strictness in approach, and strictness in execution. The emphasis on organization and discipline in the management of China’s sports teams, the willpower of Chinese athletes who fear neither hardship, fatigue, nor injury during training, and their tenacious fighting spirit on the field, all demonstrate a close connection with the traditions of red culture, becoming a unique feature of China’s sports.

### **3.2.3. Melted and Cast into Advanced Socialist Culture**

Advanced socialist culture is the socialist culture formed under the leadership of the Party and the people of China in the process of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, which is oriented toward modernization, the world, and the future, and is national, scientific, and popular. Since the 18th National Congress of the Party, the 24-character socialist core values proposed by the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core have been a high-level summary of advanced socialist culture, providing specific guidance for cultural development in all industries in the new era. As the spirit and values of the sports industry, the Chinese sports spirit has also been endowed with new connotations under the guidance of socialist core values, further refined and elevated. At the national level, the Chinese sports spirit of striving for national glory, unity and cooperation, and respect and friendship embodies the value concepts of prosperity, democracy, civilization, and harmony; at the social level, the Chinese sports spirit of scientific pragmatism, law-abiding, and fair competition reflects the value concepts of freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law; at the individual level, the Chinese sports spirit of patriotism, dedication, contribution, perseverance, and friendship embodies the value concepts of patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness (Du & Li, 2021). In short, the socialist core values, which symbolize the advanced socialist culture, provide a new value content that meets the requirements of the times for the Chinese sports spirit in the new era, and the Chinese sports spirit is constantly enriched and improved on the basis of its original connotation.

## **3.3. Cultural Exchange: Synthesizing the Essence of Western Modern Sports Culture**

The Chinese sports spirit is not only rooted in the cultural soil and sports practices of China, containing a wealth of unique cultural characteristics of China, but also, in its development process, it has absorbed the strengths of foreign sports cultures, making up for the cultural deficiencies of traditional Chinese sports, demonstrating the advantages and unique features of the integration of Chinese and Western sports cultures.

### **3.3.1. The Value Guidance of Modern Olympic Movement Culture**

In 1896, under the advocacy of Pierre de Coubertin, the first modern Olympic Games were successfully held in Athens, marking the beginning of the era when the Olympic movement swept the globe. As the Olympic movement spread world-

wide, modern Olympic culture became the most important and prominent form of expression in world sports culture, profoundly influencing sports in various countries. In China, since the modern era, the Self-Strengthening Movement established new-style schools that hired foreign instructors to teach military drills and gymnastics, introduced physical education classes, and brought in modern sports such as high jump, long jump, football, pole vault, double pole vault, and boxing. The YMCA and church schools in China also began organizing sports competitions and games. Additionally, foreigners living in the concessions in China and Chinese students who returned from studying abroad collectively brought popular Western sports to China. At that time, the Chinese people were attracted by this new form of Western sports culture and began to actively learn the forms and ideas of the Olympic movement, hoping to showcase their national character through Olympic events and make their voices heard among the nations of the world. The “Three Olympic Questions” posed by the Shen Bao in 1910, Song Ruhai’s translation of “Olympic” as “I Can Compete” in 1928, and Liu Changchun’s solo participation in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics all reflected the admiration and reverence of the Chinese people for the Olympic movement and the Olympic Games. After the reform and opening up, China’s sports returned to the Olympic family on an unprecedented scale, engaging in comprehensive and multi-level exchanges and integration with Olympic culture. On one hand, China actively participated in the Olympic Games and continuously achieved breakthroughs in athletic performance; on the other hand, it widely promoted Olympic education and scientific research domestically. The Olympic spirit, represented by “mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity, and fair competition,” emphasized the Olympic motto “faster, higher, stronger, together” and the value concept that “participation is more important than winning,” which were deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people and widely accepted. This provided important ideological content for China’s sports and the spirit of Chinese sports. In particular, the Olympic movement’s emphasis on “fair competition” proposed that fair competition is the core of sports activities (Bian & Zheng, 2007). It makes up for the lack of relevant cultural resources in China’s traditional sports and improves the connotation of Chinese sports spirit with “abiding by laws and regulations” as the main content.

### **3.3.2. Sports Assistance from the Socialist State of the Soviet Union**

The cannon fire of the October Revolution in 1917 led to the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Federal Republic (commonly known as the Soviet Union), the world’s first socialist state led by a Marxist party. From then until its dissolution in 1991, the Soviet Union actively developed its sports sector: it established the All-Union Sports Committee, formulated and implemented the “Labor and Defense System,” organized mass sports activities, and conducted sports science research. The Soviet Union achieved comprehensive development in sports culture, education, competitions, and organization; in many fields, it represented the world’s top level at the time. In the early years of the People’s Republic of China,

as a member of the socialist bloc during the Cold War, China began to “one-sidedly” follow the Soviet approach, comprehensively learning and “replicating” Soviet experience. In the 1950s, to enhance sports technical skills, China repeatedly invited Soviet experts to lecture in China, explaining competition rules, tactical essentials, and more (Huang, 2022). The Soviet Union sent sports theory experts in batches to help China compile sports textbooks such as “Sports Theory”, “Exercise Physiology”, and “Exercise Anatomy”, dispatched renowned coaches to assist in cultivating competitive sports talents, and provided China with multifaceted support ranging from academic disciplines to sports practices. At the same time, China proactively sent its athletes and sports teams to the Soviet Union and some socialist countries for study and training, participating in friendly matches to enhance their athletic performance. Through these exchanges of knowledge, guidance, and mentorship, China’s sports professionals quickly absorbed the Soviet Union’s advanced sports techniques and scientific knowledge, broadening their horizons and instilling in China’s sports community a value system that respects science, knowledge, and talent, which fostered the “scientific and pragmatic” spirit of Chinese sports. In 1960, when Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, the Soviet Union abruptly announced the withdrawal of all its aid experts, tore up contracts, and halted assistance to China. After losing direct Soviet support, the influence of Soviet sports culture on China’s sports gradually diminished.

### **3.3.3. The Successful Example of Japanese Competitive Sports Culture**

Another significant influence on the Chinese sports spirit came from Japan’s competitive sports culture in Asia. In 1964, Japan hosted the Olympics for the first time, and Ohtani Hirofumi, known as the “Devil Coach”, led the Japanese women’s volleyball team to defeat the Soviet Union, a strong Olympic contender, and won Japan’s first Olympic championship in history. The dazzling success of the Japanese women’s volleyball team at the Olympics gave hope to Chinese sports figures, who were also Asians, and inspired the Chinese women’s volleyball team to learn advanced techniques, tactics, and training methods from Japan. At the invitation and arrangement of Premier Zhou Enlai, Ohtani Hirofumi led the Japanese Beike women’s volleyball team to visit China and helped train the Chinese women’s volleyball team. Ohtani’s unique training methods and the intensity of his training shocked the Chinese sports scene at the time. The State Sports Commission gathered officials from sports commissions and coaches from various sports teams to observe Ohtani’s training intensity and methods on-site. Ohtani’s high-intensity training approach left Chinese coaches in awe and deeply moved them. After returning to Japan, Ohtani Hirofumi convened a national training conference in Shanghai, where the State Sports Commission explicitly required Chinese coaches to increase the intensity of sports training and to “eliminate arrogance and pamperedness.” Arrogance refers to athletes being overly proud, looking down on others, claiming to be the main players, and considering themselves special—acting arrogantly in victory and dejected in defeat. Pamperedness manifests as “fear of hardship, fear of exertion, fear of sweating, and fear of high-intensity training.”

(*Sports Daily*, 1964). At the training conference, the State Sports Commission advocated the “Three Unafraid” principle in sports training—unafraid of hardship, fatigue, or injury—and summarized a crucial training principle for China’s competitive sports: the “Three Froms and One Big” approach. The “One Big” component, emphasizing high-volume training, was developed through learning from Coach Masahiro Matsuo. This demonstrates how the Japanese competitive sports culture, represented by Matsuo, has profoundly influenced volleyball training in China as well as training and competitions across various sports, strengthening the tenacious spirit of Chinese sportsmanship.

#### 4. New Era Characteristics of Chinese Sports Spirit

The Chinese sports spirit reflects the positive values, collective emotions, and cultural zeitgeist of China’s sports during a specific period, presenting a dynamic evolution of “time, events, and trends” (Li & Wu, 2022). It is necessary to analyze in combination with specific social and historical contexts. Since modern times, the Chinese sports spirit has always been closely related to national development and national rejuvenation. For example, during the “standing up” stage, the spiritual orientation was “strengthening the body and serving the country through sports,” while during the “prosperity” stage, the spiritual positioning was “bringing glory to the country and revitalizing China.” Entering the new era, facing changes in the principal social contradictions and the development of sports, and embarking on the historical journey to achieve strength, the Chinese sports spirit has become even more prominent, reflecting the contemporary connotation endowed by Xi Jinping’s socialist sports thought with Chinese characteristics in the new era, demonstrating the new era features that keep pace with the times.

##### 4.1. People-Oriented: The Spiritual Foundation of Putting People First

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has, in response to new era demands and practical requirements, upheld the Party’s governance philosophy centered on serving the people. It innovatively proposed the “people-centered” development concept, which emphasizes development for the people, development relying on the people, and shared benefits from development outcomes. As a vital sector closely tied to people’s daily lives, sports have consistently implemented this people-centered approach, highlighting the fundamental role of sports in serving the public (Zhang et al., 2021). In 2017, President Xi Jinping emphasized: “To accelerate the building of a sports powerhouse, we must adhere to a people-centered philosophy, position the people as the driving force behind sports development, and make meeting their fitness needs and promoting holistic human development the fundamental starting point and ultimate goal of sports work.” The new era of Chinese sports ethos, rooted in Xi’s seminal discourse on sports, highlights the value standards of “health and happiness, all-round devel-

opment,” actively addressing the diverse sports demands people have for a better life. Unlike past priorities focused on national sports needs and competitive sports development, current efforts concentrate on safeguarding public sports rights, implementing the national fitness strategy, and advancing the comprehensive development of both mass and competitive sports. For instance, the newly released “14th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development” requires fully mobilizing the public’s enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity in sports participation, strengthening public sports services, and building a higher-level public fitness service system to meet people’s growing needs for a better life. Moreover, the new era of Chinese sports increasingly emphasizes its educational attributes and nurturing value, reaffirming the value orientation of sports in promoting individual growth. In August 2020, China’s General Administration of Sport and Ministry of Education jointly issued the “Guidelines for Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education Reform,” emphasizing the integration of competitive sports talent cultivation into the national education system. This initiative aims to steer sports toward broader educational applications, fully leveraging sports’ educational potential. Concurrently, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council released the “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Sports in the New Era,” which further outlined strategies to deepen sports-education integration, establish collaborative talent development mechanisms, and realize sports unique dual functions of intellectual stimulation and emotional cultivation. Ultimately, the new era’s Chinese sports ethos will be guided by people-centered values in sports development practices, with the core principles of “sports for the people, sports relying on the people, and sports benefiting all citizens” serving as its fundamental orientation, thereby highlighting the people-centric spirit at its core.

#### **4.2. Timeliness: Spiritual Orientation Along with the Dream of a Strong Country**

Since modern times, the nation has been weak and impoverished, suffering from the contempt and bullying of Western powers. Therefore, the Chinese nation has always shared the common aspiration to strengthen the nation and its people through the development of sports. From “saving the country through sports” to “serving the country by revitalizing sports,” from “revitalizing China” to “building a sports powerhouse,” the Chinese sports spirit has always accompanied the dream of a sports powerhouse, documenting the patriotic sentiments, struggles, and collective memories of the Chinese people, accumulating tremendous strength for realizing the dream of a strong nation. In the new era, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core attaches great importance to the role of sports in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, effectively linking the “China dream” with the “sports powerhouse dream,” and outlining a grand and beautiful vision, ushering in a new era of building a sports powerhouse. In August 2019, the “Outline for Building a Sports Powerhouse” was officially issued, clari-

fyng the overall requirements, strategic tasks, and specific projects for building a sports powerhouse at the national institutional level, ushering in an unprecedentedly bright prospect for realizing the dream of a sports powerhouse. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: “To accelerate the construction of a sports powerhouse, we must promote the Chinese sports spirit.” (*The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2017*). In the new era, vigorously promoting the Chinese sports spirit not only helps to comprehensively flourish Chinese sports culture, strengthen positive value guidance, and enhance the soft power of sports culture, but also creates favorable external cultural conditions for accelerating the construction of a sports powerhouse. It can effectively inspire the patriotic enthusiasm of the broad masses of the people, unite and advance the spiritual strength, and provide spiritual guidance for the people. “Great undertakings require great spirits.” The Chinese sports spirit in the new era gathers consensus, unites strength, inspires the heart, and boosts morale, providing a common spiritual pillar and powerful spiritual motivation for realizing the dream of a sports powerhouse and the dream of China’s great rejuvenation.

#### **4.3. Ethnicity: Spiritual Positioning Highlighting Cultural Confidence**

General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed: “‘Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, extensive, and profound form of confidence.’ ‘Strengthening cultural confidence is crucial to the nation’s prosperity, cultural security, and the independence of the national spirit.’ (*Academy of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, 2022*)”. To achieve the goal of becoming a sports power, we should combine the promotion of the Chinese sports spirit with a firm cultural confidence,” he said (*Research Team of the General Administration of Sport of China, 2022*). Cultural confidence refers to a nation, a country, or a group maintaining sufficient confidence in their own culture, and this confidence is built on the foundation of cultural awareness. Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong was the first to interpret “cultural confidence” and “cultural awareness,” proposing the developmental process of cultural awareness as “each appreciates its own beauty, appreciates the beauty of others, shares beauty together, and achieves universal harmony.” The Chinese sports spirit is a spiritual and cultural product formed by absorbing excellent foreign sports cultural resources with the mindset of “appreciating the beauty of others,” based on a full awareness of its own cultural characteristics. Moreover, the Chinese sports spirit adheres to the position of Chinese culture, inherits revolutionary red culture, and develops advanced socialist culture, representing a valuable achievement in the spiritual and cultural construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, the Chinese sports spirit in the new era possesses the spiritual quality of demonstrating cultural confidence, while the inheritance and promotion of the Chinese sports spirit by Chinese sports reflect the spiritual character of confidence and awareness. In 2022, the Beijing Winter Olympics were successfully held under the attention of the world, with

venues like the “Ice Ribbon”, “Snow Ruyi”, and “Snow Dragon”, as well as opening and closing ceremony scenes such as “Yellow River Water” and “Willow Branches of Affection”, skillfully blending Chinese traditional culture with sports, showcasing the historical origins and unique advantages of the Chinese sports spirit. On the Olympic stage, Chinese athletes dare to strive and excel, pursuing athletic achievements while emphasizing clean gold medals and moral gold medals, vividly interpreting the Olympic spirit and the Chinese sports spirit, and perfectly presenting to the world the confident, self-reliant, and open image of the new era China.

#### **4.4. Coordination: The Spirit of Comprehensive and Coordinated Development**

Entering the new era, the principal contradiction in Chinese society has undergone a transformation, with the people’s growing needs for a better life encompassing all aspects of politics, economy, society, and culture. Regarding sports, people are no longer satisfied with its single function but expect to achieve diverse sports values such as fitness, education, leisure, entertainment, and social interaction through high-quality sports and cultural life. However, due to the limitations of past development concepts, China’s current sports still face many imbalances (such as uneven development across the five major areas of a sports powerhouse, disparities in sports development between urban and rural regions, and imbalances in competitive sports) and inadequacies (including a single supply of public sports services for national fitness, a shortage of high-level competitive sports talents, and insufficient support from sports social organizations), making it difficult to meet the people’s new expectations for sports and cultural life. In October 2022, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was successfully held in Beijing. In the report of the 20th National Congress, regarding sports, it clearly proposed to “promote the comprehensive development of mass sports and competitive sports, and accelerate the building of a sports powerhouse.” ([The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2022b](#)). Among them, building a sports powerhouse is the central task of China’s sports development in the new era, while “comprehensive coordination” is the new development philosophy to accomplish this central task. Therefore, in response to the public’s new expectations for spiritual and cultural life in sports and the requirements of implementing the construction of a sports powerhouse in the new era, the Chinese sports spirit embodies the spirit of “comprehensive coordination” and becomes the key to addressing the issues of unbalanced and inadequate sports development. In the field of competitive sports, the Chinese sports spirit pursues the values of bringing glory to the nation and tenacious struggle, inspiring Chinese athletes and enhancing the overall strength of competitive sports. For example, in 2018, the General Administration of Sport of China issued the “Implementation Outline for Engaging 300 Million People in Winter Sports (2018-2022)”, focusing on implementing the strategy of “expanding winter sports southward, westward,

and eastward” to address the shortcomings in China’s winter sports development. The “Outline for Building a Sports Powerhouse” released in 2019 proposed “comprehensively promoting the popularization and improvement of football, basketball, and volleyball”. In the field of mass sports, the Chinese sports spirit aims for health and happiness, implementing the national fitness strategy and contributing to the construction of a healthy China. The newly issued “National Fitness Program (2021-2025)” requires increasing the supply of sports facilities for all, including sports parks, national fitness centers, public sports venues, fitness equipment, and public ice rinks, as well as diversified supply and digital upgrades of sports venues, equipment, and facilities closely related to public participation in sports activities.

#### **4.5. Global Vision: Embracing the Spirit of Universal Harmony**

Sports, expressed through human physical activities, transcend cultural barriers and become a universal language for communication. Regardless of nationality, race, skin color, or gender, everyone can find happiness and enjoy life through sports participation, shaping and expressing a shared sports spirit. Therefore, the sports spirit, with its core values of peace, development, competition, fairness, integrity, and unity, not only represents the ideal form of sports but also reflects the universal values of all humanity. The Chinese sports spirit is an important component of the global sports spirit. On one hand, it embodies the common value pursuits of all humanity in sports activities; on the other hand, it showcases the unique spiritual and cultural qualities of the Chinese nation, presenting a perfect blend of national identity and global perspective. Moreover, deeply influenced by traditional Chinese values such as “universal harmony,” “world peace,” and “harmony and unity,” the national character and the aspiration for rejuvenation inherent in the Chinese sports spirit do not conflict with the universal pursuit of global harmony. In fact, it is precisely the Chinese sports spirit, which pursues “national rejuvenation”, that can truly reconcile with the universal pursuit of global harmony at the methodological level. In March 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the vision of “building a community with a shared future for mankind” to the world, advocating for a global community characterized by lasting peace, universal security, shared prosperity, openness, inclusiveness, and a clean, beautiful environment. Research indicates that the Chinese sports ethos and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind share common ideological roots, aligned value principles, and profound conceptual similarities (Zhu & Xu, 2021). The two complement each other and enhance each other. Therefore, the spirit of Chinese sports in the new era will, together with sports, convey the beautiful vision of the Chinese people seeking peace and common prosperity, showcase the new image of the Chinese nation as confident, open, generous, and sincere, connect hearts and promote exchanges through sports activities and international competitions, build a community with a shared future for mankind, and enable the world to develop and progress together, reflecting the broad spirit of “one

world, one family”.

## 5. Conclusion

“Great undertakings give birth to great spirits, and great spirits guide great undertakings.” Under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China, China’s sports industry has undergone an extraordinary historical journey, creating and developing the Chinese sports spirit, which is characterized by “glorifying the nation, selfless dedication, scientific pragmatism, law-abiding conduct, teamwork, and tenacious struggle,” inspiring generations of Chinese people to strive for excellence and pursue their dreams. In historical practice, spiritual culture often exerts its influence subtly in a “spontaneous” form, while rational reflection by the subject transforms it from “spontaneous” to “conscious”, thereby achieving greater cultural value. Standing at a new historical starting point, this article employs the perspective of historical materialism to trace the historical origins of China’s sports industry, exploring the ideological sources and contemporary characteristics of the Chinese sports spirit, thereby enhancing the theoretical understanding of the Chinese sports spirit. In the future, it is essential to continue uncovering the value connotations and promotion pathways of the Chinese sports spirit at the practical level, leveraging its due roles in value guidance, consensus-building, public education, and development promotion, to gather tremendous spiritual momentum in the context of building a sports powerhouse and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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