

# Review and prospect of the development of school sports ideology in China in modern times

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**Abstract:** *This paper summarizes the related research of school physical education thought in China since modern times by means of literature research. This paper discusses and summarizes the historical experience and lessons of the development of school PE thought since modern times in China. This paper analyzes the historical background of the dominant thought of school physical education in different periods in China. It is helpful to clarify the law of long-term development of school physical education thought, and put forward better suggestions for the future school physical education work, promote the high quality development of school physical education teaching, and provide new basis for the innovation of school physical education theory.*

**Keywords:** *School physical education; Sports thought; In modern times*

## 1. Introduction

School sports ideology refers to the understanding or view of school sports formed directly or indirectly by people in the practical activities of school sports in a certain society and era, and is the theoretical basis for guiding school sports practice, which comes from educational theory and school sports practice, and is constantly enriched and improved in school sports practice. [1] In modern times, while the Western powers used force to storm the gates of China, various educational ideas were also introduced into China, and China's indigenous traditional school physical education ideas were impacted, and the unstable social situation in China always affected the development of school physical education ideas in China.

## 2. A brief review of the history of the development of school sports thinking in China since modern times

### 2.1. The period of military and national sports thinking (1860-1919)

Since the Opium War, various Western ideas entered China, and Western modern sports ideas also impacted Chinese school sports. It can be said that with the beginning of the New Deal in the late Qing Dynasty, the abolition of the imperial examination system, the promotion of science and democracy, the suspension of academies and the reform of school teaching contributed to the rapid development of modern school sports ideas in China. In the early twentieth century, the idea of militarism was introduced to China through students who stayed in Japan, and its ideas were widely disseminated and accepted by the Chinese people. The idea of military nationalism advocated the idea of "strengthening the country and the seeds" and "strengthening the country through martial arts", and the bourgeois democratic revolutionaries, represented by Sun Yat-sen and Chen Tianhua, actively promoted the idea of military national education. The emergence of the idea of military nationalism brought hope for the revitalization of China, which was in the midst of fire and water, and the idea of military nationalism was bound to influence all aspects of social development. School physical education offered a physical education curriculum that incorporated both Chinese and Western ideas in the form of military and civilian gymnastics, and held sports competitions based on gymnastics. Chen Duxiu also strongly advocated the implementation of "military nationalism" and asked the members of the Reed School to "practice gymnastics for two hours a day." The establishment of military academies such as the Huangpu Military Academy and the Baoding Military Academy was also influenced by the idea of military national sports. The idea of military national sports was gradually accepted and implemented by more schools, and gradually became the dominant sports idea. However, the military national sports ideology neglected the cultivation of individual sports interests, and the curriculum was too boring in

form and content, without forming its own independent supporting theoretical system. The military national sports ideology was not all wrong, but it did bring a positive impact to China under the national conditions of internal and external troubles at that time, and made a bold attempt to integrate the traditional Chinese sports ideology with the modernized foreign sports ideology, and to a certain extent made the national sports ideology awaken.

### ***2.2. The period of naturalistic sports thinking (1920-1927)***

The Xinhai Revolution not only overthrew the feudal monarchy, spread democratic ideas and inspired the awakening of the Chinese people, but also introduced the idea of pragmatism and concern for the development of the human subject in Chinese sports thought. Especially after the May Fourth Movement, the idea of natural sports, which was introduced by American missionaries and widely spread by a group of scholars who returned to the United States, such as Wu Yunrui, became more and more vocal and gradually occupied the mainstream of modern Chinese school sports thought. The idea of natural sports advocates the view that "sports is life" and emphasizes the development of children's interests in the natural environment and the cultivation of interests with children as the center.<sup>[2]</sup> The core of natural sports thought emphasizes the unity of mind and body, the harmonious unity of individual mental and physical activities, and the synergistic development. In 1915, Chen Duxiu proposed that sports activities should focus on human nature in his "Message to Youth". Chen Duxiu opposed the idea of "killing" and advocated the idea of "animalistic" school sports for young people in military national education. In 1917, Mao Zedong published "The Study of Sports", in which he re-examined the concept of sports and discussed the importance and necessity of the development of sports in China in a more systematic way with the vision of modern science. The idea of natural sports brought substantial development to the modernization of school sports in China at that time. The idea of natural sports opposed the deliberately archaic gymnastics, enriched the system of sports theory, and began to focus on the laws of physical and mental development of students, enriching the system of sports theory. But at the same time, natural physical education also had limitations of the time, which overly devalued physical exercise, neglected the role of teachers, and "permissive" teaching was too loose and lacked goals, all of which had a negative impact on the development of the foundation of Chinese school physical education in the future.

### ***2.3. The period of coexistence of naturalistic and nationalistic sports ideology (1927-1949)***

In the early 1930s, with the introduction of foreign sports ideas, along with the introduction of ball games, athletics and other "foreign sports" sports, while China's traditional sports such as martial arts inherited from ancient times were called "native sports", the invasion of foreign culture was bound to be rejected by the local culture. As the cultural collision between domestic and foreign cultures intensified, a fierce debate on whether "sports for all" and "sports militarization" were suitable for leading the future development of sports in modern China was in full swing. In essence, this debate is essentially a collision between feudal ideas and advanced ideas. It was inevitable that the "Tuo-Yang" controversy was a continuation of the great collision of domestic and foreign ideas during the May Fourth Movement. In the mid-1930s, Cheng Dengke was the first to publish an article, thus proposing the idea of "national sports" to revitalize China through military sports, enhance the physical fitness of the country, improve the national spirit, and save the country from the enemy. Sports for all and militarization of sports were the core elements of the idea of national sports. Under the national conditions at that time, militarization of sports was the primary task of national sports thought.<sup>[3]</sup> With the rise of the national sports ideology to save the nation, the National Government in 1935 issued the third article of the Manifesto, which recommended that the teaching of civil and military affairs should be given equal importance, and that national training should be promoted to strengthen the people's strength, so as to cultivate the habits of the national group life, and to improve the education of the national body and mind. In this context, physical education once again assumed its mission of educating both the civil and the military. However, in the KMT-ruled areas, the idea of natural physical education still dominated due to the KMT's pro-Americanism and other reasons. Overall, the idea of national physical education prompted a debate on the integration of foreign introduced physical education ideas into Chinese school physical education thought, while Chinese school physical education thought took steps toward a more diversified exploration of development.

### ***2.4. The period of studying Soviet school sports ideas (1949-1966)***

After the founding of the country in 1949, China's school sports ideology gradually changed from

the old Chinese sports ideology to the new democratic sports ideology, in preparation for the creation of a socialized school sports work system. However, the result was a comprehensive rejection of the idea of natural sports, which brought certain negative effects to the development of Chinese school sports thought, and for the socialist exploration of school sports work, Chairman Mao once proposed "health first, study second. The instruction of "health first, study second" required that the healthy bodies of students nationwide be able to cope with the intense study and heavy workload. In particular, in 1951, the State Council issued the Decision on Improving the Health of Students at All Levels of Schools, which adjusted the daily study and rest time for students and made practical requirements for students' health in terms of load reduction, hygiene, food, and health care. [4] Thus the socialization of school sports in China became the main path for the exploration and development of school sports in China. In the absence of experience in building socialism in the early years of the founding of the country, the problems encountered in the construction of school sports in China were similar to those of the Soviet Union, and school sports explorers decided to introduce socialist school sports ideas from the Soviet Union, so as to better create socialist school sports ideas with characteristics suitable for the development of China. The Soviet school sports ideology was guided by Marxism and based on the idea of "master intellectualism", which was a school sports ideology of strong culture and physical fitness, and differed significantly from the capitalist school sports ideology. In the early 1950s, China also explored the road of socialist sports with Chinese characteristics, and the "labor and health system" implemented in 1951 was the first national physical exercise standard in new China. The "labor and health system" is divided into preparatory level, level one and level two according to individual circumstances, covering a variety of physical exercise qualities. Although the "labor and health" system in the specific trial there are many problems, such as physical exercise standards are too high, exercise safety measures are not thoughtful protection, a wide range of sports, etc.. However, it was a preliminary exploration of socialist school sports in the early years of China's founding and provided valuable historical experience for the future development of school sports. However, regardless of the intentions, the actual operation deviated from the conceptualized and abstracted sports set. It shows that the intrinsic meaning and conceptual understanding of school sports at that time was characteristic of a certain period.

### ***2.5. Labor and military instead of sports period (1966-1976)***

From 1966 to 1976, China experienced the unprecedented Cultural Revolution. Under the influence of the Cultural Revolution, the ideological development of school sports in China was subjected to huge deviations, and the achievements of school sports work were completely negated.

### ***2.6. The period of blossoming after reform and opening up (1980-present)***

In 1978, after the "Gang of Four" was defeated, China's school physical education work order could be modeled. 1978, China began to reform and open the country's doors, all walks of life are carrying out thorough reform, China's school physical education thought with the reform and opening up into a period of rapid development. The Ministry of Education promulgated the Physical Education Syllabus, which provided planned guidance for the teaching of physical education in schools. [5] After 1978, China began to focus on the development of school physical education, and the Ministry of Education-led multi-departmental joint issuance of the Notice on Strengthening School Physical Education and Health Work further raised the importance of school physical education in school education. Since the reform and opening up, school sports ideas have blossomed, such as the idea of physical education, the idea of comprehensive development, the idea of happy sports, and the idea of "health first" sports, etc. Each idea has considered the understanding of school sports ideas from different value orientations and different levels.

## **3. Historical experience and suggestions of the development process of school sports thinking in China**

### ***3.1. The relationship between the two views of physical education in schools is viewed correctly from a dialectical perspective.***

The debate on the concept of school physical education has never stopped, and it is divided into a heated debate between the "individual-based" theory, which is based on individual values, and the "social-based" theory, which is based on social values. If we look back at the development of school

physical education in China at various stages, we will find that the first idea of school physical education in China has always been dominated by a great tendency at various stages. The military national sports thought introduced into Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century focused on the development of social values, followed by the natural sports thought introduced from the United States, which favored the realization of individual values. After the founding of the country, under the influence of the general environmental changes, the sports guiding ideology of the former Soviet Union was introduced to pay more attention to the needs of society. Since the twenty-first century, China has gradually begun to focus on the cultivation of individual values. This indicates that the school sports ideology has been influenced by instrumental rationality and historical development. <sup>[6]</sup> In a given situation, school sports ideology is integrated into various social environments. In this process, instrumental rationality has played a role in promoting the development of school sports thought. However, inspecting the development of school sports ideology under a dialectical perspective, the mutual transformation of sports value orientations also reflects that the development of things is not static, and the party that takes the initiative can be suppressed. In the end, the two philosophies move forward together in a struggle and develop together. The individual-based theory that expresses individual value is for the better realization of social value, and the social-based theory that reflects social value is the basis for the realization of individual value. <sup>[7]</sup> Only by rationally analyzing the conditions for the realization of individual educational values and the needs of social development can we better grasp the relationship between the "individual-based" and "social-based" views of school physical education. With the development of education in modern society, the educational concept of showing individual values will become a long-term development trend, and only by meeting the educational goals and individual normative needs can we better meet the social normative goals.

### ***3.2. Correct view of the relationship between the introduction and integration of school sports ideas, inheritance and innovation***

Looking back at the arduous development of school sports thought in China since modern times, starting from the introduction of natural sports thought with humanistic overtones, to the total rejection and indoctrination of other school sports thought, and finally back to the "health first" sports guiding ideology with the similarity of natural sports thought. On the surface, this is the result of copying and "gourd painting" development, but the deeper analysis is the lack of deep cultural heritage in the process of supporting the idea. It is reasonable to say that in the land of China, which has a glorious history and culture of 5,000 years, there should be no shortage of educational ideas based on deep cultural heritage, but the fact is that in recent times, on the one hand, foreign innovative school sports ideas have been continuously introduced into China, causing a great impact on the development of domestic school sports ideas, so that the development of school sports in China is fascinating. But on the other hand, ultimately from the local school sports thinking has been unable to adapt to the ever-changing social changes, and the local school sports thinking lack of rational and objective scientific basis and accept the responsibility of rational criticism, in the long history of being eliminated has been the trend. At the same time, from the materialistic dialectic aspect, the qualitative development of things need a large number of quantitative changes, in order to cross the excessive boundary, resulting in qualitative changes. In the absence of local school sports ideas in China, the introduction of school sports ideas is certainly the most "cost-effective" way to accumulate the foundation. But it is also easy to get lost in it and lose the direction. For the development of China's school sports thought, we need a deeper understanding of the meaning, generation, laws and attributes of school sports thought, scientific and localized transformation of school sports thought introduced into China, so that it is more adapted to China's national conditions, the construction of school sports thought system with Chinese characteristics, which is also an important part of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

### ***3.3. Insist on promoting the diversification of school sports functions.***

The meeting of intrinsic attributes and values has led to the collision of multiple school sport ideas with different values and orientations. In recent times, the dramatic changes in the general social environment have driven the vigorous development of school sport ideas and quietly provided opportunities for the development of multiple functions in school sport. Starting from a single function of strengthening the body, school sports functions have now evolved to include multiple functions in various fields, such as educational, recreational, soothing, and social functions. The idea of school sports with multidisciplinary and multidimensional as a functional development has been formed. Nowadays, the transformation of our social philosophy from instrumental to value-based rationality

also affects the development of school education. The school sports ideology emphasizes more and more the humanistic value orientation, and the school sports ideology has been changed from "strengthening the body, strengthening the country, and strengthening the seed" to "improving the overall health level".<sup>[8]</sup> The function of school sports has changed from single to multiple, and the needs of society for school sports have become richer and richer, and school sports play an important role in the transition from school theory to social practice. The diversified functions of school sports are gradually becoming one of the social values embodied in today's school sports thought. Due to the influence of each school sport ideology and practice background, the different observation perspectives of school sport functions cause the high and low effectiveness of school sport implementation, the primary and secondary focus of school sport's multiple functions and the confusion with other concepts make it difficult to reflect the value of school sport. Therefore, developing more value-oriented school sport functions is an important path to build a contemporary school sport ideology. A deeper understanding of the connotation and value of school sport functions would be more helpful in promoting the development of school sport ideology.<sup>[9]</sup> The current "health first" sports ideology is based on the contemporary context, meeting the needs of society and individuals in all aspects, and is a high level of integration of multiple sports ideas. It is the direction of the deepening reform of the curriculum concept in the new era.

#### ***3.4. Sorting out the evolution of physical indoctrination and improving the theory of physical indoctrination in school sports.***

In the long history of school sports thought, the theoretical perspective of the body level has often been neglected or weakened. In contemporary research on the systematic development of school sports thought, the research method of "meta-analysis" of school sports thought has been continued and developed, and the body perspective hidden in the history of the development of school sports thought has been found to form various clues. Regardless of the period of school sports thinking, they all have more or less hidden the body perspective. Although the initial physical education was based on the laws of physical development, it was influenced more by social structural pressures as society changed, thus departing from the initial development.<sup>[10]</sup> That is, at a given point in time, the physical evaluation of school sports can be overshadowed by the social influences of the time. The social goal of physical indoctrination is considered more as a tool of the times, thus gradually deviating from the real meaning of the body for school sport thinking. School physical education thought is increasingly focused on conventionalized physical instruction rather than relying on the state's will and the unconventional penetration of physical education in the social context. It is evident that the prominence of the right to the body not only negates the instrumental value of the body in a certain sense, but also expresses a different connotation of the body in a subtle way in the context of social progress.<sup>[11]</sup> On a macro level, a new perspective of interpretative research on the idea of school sports based on the body and its view of the body, using the instrumental function of schooling to better achieve developments beyond the body, such as social change, military, and economic aspirations. For the individual, physical education is an important foundation for the development of individual and social values. Education is the foundation of governance, and physical education is a direct dialogue with all aspects of national livelihoods, so studying physical education in school sports has been given more connotation and is an important perspective for building a school sports system with Chinese characteristics.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The relationship between the diversified development of school sports thinking and "health first" sports thinking is like a tributary and a long river, and the tributaries will eventually merge into the long river. The current implementation of "Health First" includes the essence of the diversity of sports thinking. The relationship between multiple sports ideas may be more or less intertwined and different in priority, but within a certain scope, they are interchangeable. The diversified sports thinking led by the "Health First" sports thinking implemented in the background of the times is the inevitable result of the development of education in China.

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