

# Differences and Similarities between Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's Thought on Sport-From "The Study of Sport" and "Ode to Sport"

Zhong Tingting<sup>1,a</sup>, Dai Bin<sup>2,b,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Physical Education and Sport, Yunnan University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650500, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Physical Education and Sport, Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650500, China

<sup>a</sup>1974469302@qq.com, <sup>b</sup>2530425859@qq.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** On the basis of literature review and historical analysis, this paper makes a comparative study of Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's sports thoughts from *Research on Sports* and *Ode to Sports*. According to the research, the differences in theoretical sources, value orientations and practice methods prompted Mao Zedong and Coubertin to form their own sports thoughts. Different sports thoughts affect the different presentation of sports values. Mao Zedong explained sports: seeking the way of sports to save the country, Coubertin's integration of sports and education: the essential attribution of sports people; Mao Zedong praised sports: the fruit of sports education is clear; Coubertin competes and struggles: the Olympic spirit of human nature is revealed; Mao Zedong shaped sports: cast the soul of sports civilization, Coubertin peace, friendship and progress: the eternal pursuit of building a community with a shared future for mankind. Through the works of great men, learning the thoughts of great men, and comparing the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western sports culture, it is conducive to enhancing the cultural self-confidence and sense of belonging of our nation, and promoting the exchange and reference of world sports culture.

**Keywords:** Mao Zedong; Gubaidan; Sport Thought; Implications; Development

## 1. Introduction

Mao Zedong's thought on sports, as the guiding ideology of sports in China since the founding of New China, has always emphasized the physical exercise and healthy growth of young people. In his youth, he wrote "The Study of Sports" to realize the purpose of saving the country and the people through the power of sports, and his sports ideology of "developing sports and strengthening the people's physical fitness" is still of great significance in guiding the construction of a sports powerhouse and the realization of the goal of the development of mass sports for the whole community. The journey of the revival of the Olympic Movement was a lifelong endeavor of Coubertin, without whose persistence the Olympic Movement would not have flourished, and who has played a great role in promoting the development of sports in the world. "Ode to Sports" was composed by Coubertin in praise of sports, and his thoughts and ideas on sports are released in all aspects in this poem. The "Study of Sports" and the "Ode to Sports" have lasted for a hundred years and are still glittering and celebrated by the world. The organic combination of the two is a manifestation of cultural progress and an important theoretical cornerstone for the interactive development of sports in various countries.

## 2. The Formation and Development of Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's Sporting Thought

### 2.1 The emergence of Mao Zedong's sports ideology in "Research on Sports"

#### 2.1.1 Interpretation of sports: searching for a way to save the country through sports

A Study of Physical Education begins: "The national power is weakening, the martial arts style is not being revitalized, and the physique of the nation is becoming more and more fragile."<sup>[1]</sup>With only a few figures, it almost sums up the essence of "national conditions" summarized in the basic national conditions of modern China with internal troubles and foreign aggression. Great powers covet our territory and attempt to carve up our territory. Feudal forces enslave our people, imprison our people's

thoughts, and find a nirvana road to protect our country and strengthen our species, and save our country from subjugation. These are the primary problems that China needs to solve urgently. Mao Zedong broke free from the shackles of traditional Chinese and Western sports concepts, combined Chinese and Western cultures, and used the method of comparison between ancient and modern times. He drew inspiration from examples such as Zhongni's use of archery in Germany, the sword fighting style in Germany, and Japan's strength over Bushido. He introduced the idea of sports saving the country to the world. Sports are a way for humans to nourish themselves. Today, he discusses the effectiveness of a country's prosperity and strength, based on the physical strength of its people. [2]The question of how to get clear water is a matter of having living water from the source. The Study of Physical Education and Sports has established the academic status of physical education and sports with the momentum of a painting in the sky, and has also penetrated into the hearts of people with the idea of saving the country through physical education and sports, and has become the cornerstone for the development of physical education and sports with Chinese characteristics.

### ***2.1.2 Commendation of sports: the fruits of sports in educating people***

The body is the carrier of knowledge and the abode of morality. In his youth, Mao Zedong, during his studies at Hunan Normal 1, integrated the Western philosophy of epistemology and pragmatism, the essence of sports of Paulsen and Rousseau and others, that is, the equal importance of three kinds of education, and that the all-round development of human beings and the highest good of social progress originated from the perfect development and training of life.[3]It is the theoretical basis and connotation of Mao Zedong's thought on sports, which constitutes a practical view and methodological sprout that is relevant to the actual situation in China. The deviation of the value orientation has resulted in the lack of martial arts spirit and the national spirit of the people.[4]Physical education is the most important thing in our lives. The Study of Physical Education fills in the gaps in early childhood physical education, and on the premise of conforming to the laws of physical and mental development and the level of functional development of adolescents, it points out the different effects of physical education that should be utilized by school education at different stages of students' age and level of their mental development. At the elementary school level, physical education promotes knowledge through action and emphasizes body building; at the secondary school level and above, physical education governs sex through action and emphasizes comprehensive development.

### ***2.1.3 Shaping sports: casting the soul of sports civilization***

"Research on Sports" was born after "The Power of Mind". Both of them are the insights of Mao Zedong's analysis of Paulson's work "Principles of Ethics". The former is an idealistic view of inspiring and strengthening the national will to save the country; The latter is the materialistic concept of strengthening the physique, reshaping the spirit of advocating martial arts, and improving the national physique to protect the country and strengthen the race. To make a living and to defend the country. "Research on Sports" is an important milestone that marks the transition of young Mao Zedong from voluntarism to materialism. "[5]Civilization in its spirit, barbarism in its physique" is synonymous with Mao Zedong's view on sports civilization."Civilized in spirit, barbaric in body" is synonymous with Mao's concept of civilization in sports. If the spirit and body are not complete, we cannot talk about the harmonious development of the body and mind. Sports should create a strong and healthy nation, awaken the spirit of martial arts to revitalize China, and make a sound spirit reside in a sound body. From Mao Zedong's first published "Study of Sports" to the poems he published in his middle and late years, the courage brought by engaging in sports in his youth highlights his core value of "dare" to be the first, and constitutes the military soul of the Red Army. In the construction of the civilized road of sports with Chinese characteristics in the new era, to shape the Chinese style sports spirit and build the soul of sports civilization, the CPC people should carry forward the spirit of being the first in the world. As long as they are willing to climb, dare to be the first in the world, innovation can be made, a new world can be created, and they can be happy.

## ***2.2 The emergence of Coubertin's ideas on sport in the Ode to Sport***

### ***2.2.1 Integration of physical education and sport: attribution of the essence of the sportsman***

Coubertin always emphasized education, and the formation of his educational ideas was influenced by the ancient Greek culture and the bourgeois education of England at that time. When he was a teenager, Coubertin was interested in sports, such as fencing, horseback riding, boxing and other sports that he was good at. After graduating from university, he chose to engage in education and sports, believing that education was the most important part of modern life and that sports had the function of

promoting educational reform. 1912 Gu Baidan completed the poem "Ode to Sports", in which he frequently mentioned the spirit of sports culture and the important function of physical exercise. In this work, he frequently mentioned the important functions of sports culture and exercise. In his writing, sports have the functions of guiding the positive social atmosphere, shaping healthy personality and purifying people's hearts. As the founder of the Olympic movement, Coubertin wanted to educate young people through Olympic sports in the spirit of peace, friendship and fairness, and further contribute to the construction of a beautiful and harmonious world. For this reason, this work of poetry has an educational function.

### ***2.2.2 Competitive Struggle: The Olympic Spirit of Human Nature Revealed***

Coubertin once said, "Competition is the cornerstone of sport and the prerequisite for its existence."<sup>[6]</sup>The so-called "survival of the fittest" was confirmed in the era of war and chaos. As he sang in his Ode to Sport: "Ah, sport, you are courage! The whole meaning of muscular exertion is to dare to fight."<sup>[7]</sup>In the early days, sports were used as an important means of military training, necessary for the recovery of borders and the pacification of wars, like the ancient Greeks' battles of city-states and the Spartans' warriors' competitions. Based on the historical background of the Franco-Prussian War, Coubertin was keenly aware of the prominent role of sports in cultivating the courage of all people. Therefore, the concept of courage in "Ode to Physical Education" has stood the test of practice, and it can be seen from that time that physical education is connected with moral education and aesthetic education, and has the potential effect of promoting the overall development of human beings.

### ***2.2.3 Peace, friendship and progress: the eternal quest to build a community of human destiny***

"Pursuing peace and building a beautiful and harmonious society" is the desire for peace in the Olympic sports ideology of Coubertin. Being in a war-torn era, Coubertin was deeply influenced by the ancient Greek spirit of peace, unity and fraternity in the early days of his life, and he believed that sport was not only a simple physical exercise and training, but also more realistic in building a harmonious society, promoting exchanges among countries and realizing world peace. "Ah, sport, you are peace! You create happy bonds between peoples."In the poem, he clearly expressed the important role of sports in strengthening exchanges among peoples, establishing friendly relations among nations and promoting world peace. The Ode to Sport is a concentrated manifestation of the Olympic thinking of Coubertin, who devoted his whole life to the inheritance and development of the Olympic movement, and who made a great contribution to the process of promoting the world towards a more peaceful and better place.<sup>[8]</sup>Peace and development is not only the theme of the present era, but also the unchanging common wish of people all over the world from ancient times to the present. Up to now, the peace concept of "Ode to Sport" by Coubertin still has theoretical significance in promoting the development of modern Olympic Games as well as the exchange and development of global sports culture.

## **3. A Comparative Analysis of the Implications of Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's Thought on Sport**

### ***3.1 Ideological resonance: Mao Zedong and Coubertin's genuine concern for the idea of sport***

#### ***3.1.1 Harmony and Difference, Beauty and Beauty***

Mao Zedong's thought on sports is an integral part of Mao Zedong's thought that best highlights the upward force of Chinese sportsmanship, and at the same time demonstrates the unique advantages of the sportsmanship of the Communist Party of China, with "sports for the people" as the theoretical purpose and practical core of Mao Zedong's sports theory and practice, and with "sports for the people" as the core of Mao Zedong's sports theory and practice.<sup>[9]</sup>The liberation of all mankind and the realization of communism are the highest ideal and the ultimate goal of the struggle.

The sea embraces all rivers. From the Olympic flag, which symbolizes the common participation of the world, to the Olympic Charter, which points out that the Olympic spirit is the spirit of "mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity and fair competition", it also clarifies the role of sports in promoting the diversified development of the world, safeguarding the interests of people of all ethnic groups around the world, and promoting consensus, prosperity and progress around the world.

#### ***3.1.2 Strengthening of the body and spirituality through sport***

Sports brought physical strength to Mao Zedong, who was weak and sickly from childhood, and

then shaped his tenacious will. The transformation of sports from strong to weak leads to his understanding of "the integration of body and mind". Sports is strong enough to strengthen the will, which is the precursor of life and career. In his revolutionary career in the future, Mao Zedong more closely linked the concept of transformation of strength and weakness with revolutionary practice. His book *A single spark can start a prairie fire* optimistically pointed out the prospect that the Communist Party of China will win, and put forward the slogan of "building up the physique and fighting Japan easily", which clearly defined the role of sports in the national crisis, improving people's sports and inspiring the national spirit.

The spirit of the fire is in the body of the athletic and agile. The Olympic Games should celebrate the rhythmic, rhythmic spring, energized by the service of the spirit.<sup>[10]</sup> Symbolizing all things, expressing the spirit of the nation, the poet was inspired by the world's admiration for the beauty of sports. Gubertin practiced modern chivalry and believed that the "character of the athlete" is the materialization of the Olympic moral values, and that the athlete who is a blend of superior sportsmanship, a strong body and a sound mind is the true embodiment of the Olympic Spirit.

### ***3.2 The difference in reality between Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's ideas on sport***

#### ***3.2.1 Different theoretical sources***

The Chinese civilization has a history of 5,000 years, with the birth of the Hundred Schools of Thought around the I Ching, the true source of the Way. Through the Spring and Autumn Period, the Hundred Schools of Thought and the Han Emperor's exclusive respect for Confucianism, the traditional Chinese culture represented by Confucianism was gradually formed. The world has been imbued with the virtues of humility, moderation and harmony. Mao Zedong received traditional education since he was a child, so he must have been exposed to traditional Chinese philosophy, and based on the excellent traditional Chinese culture and the spirit of Western sports philosophy, he formed a sports ideology that not only respected the unity of man and heaven, emphasized the development of physical fitness, but also paid attention to the cultivation of the will and highlighted the spirit of transcendence of the ego.

The West worshipped warriors, and the fact that territories were conquered by force of arms gave the Romans a "martial" character.<sup>[11]</sup> Gladiators and the arena are the epitome of Western competitive sports and the model of strong civilization. Coubertin's preference for history, especially ancient Greek history, and his deduction from ancient Greek sports civilization to ancient Roman sports history, promoted the germination of Coubertin's sports ideas and the formation of young Coubertin's Olympic views, inheriting the connotations of promoting peace, opposing war, celebrating harvest, and praying for blessings in the ancient Olympic Games.<sup>[12]</sup>

#### ***3.2.2 Different value orientations***

The concept of the development of the value of mass physical education is "to develop physical education and sports and to strengthen the people's physical fitness". The mountain is the people, the people are the mountain, Mao Zedong's thought on sports comes from the wisdom of the people, and must rely on the people and serve the people. Satisfying the people's yearning for a better life, leveraging the socialist attributes of mass sports, and realizing the transformation of the national "sense of sports achievement" from normative value orientation to genuine psychological state.<sup>[13]</sup> The heart of the people is what you have to fight and defend.

"The Olympic Games are the hymn of male athletes only" is a narrow view of the development of the value of competitive sports education. Gu Baidan was deeply influenced by the Olympic values of ancient Greece, and believed that women should not engage in public competitions, mercilessly refusing to let women out of the Olympic gates, misinterpreting the true connotation of competitive sports, which is not conducive to the promotion and popularization of the Olympic movement, and even less conducive to the free and comprehensive development of human beings.

#### **4. The Implications of Mao Zedong's and Coubertin's Sporting Thought for the Development of Modern Sport**

##### ***4.1 "There must be a way to move": the concept of rules in sports can contribute to the construction of China's legal system and enhance people's legal awareness***

Comrade Mao Tse-tung, in his Study of Sports, said: "Man, being a rational animal, must have a way of moving". The text emphasizes that the sense of rational rules is an important distinguishing mark between humans and animals, and that the idea of rules is embedded in sport. In his Ode to Sport, Coubertin sings: "O sport, thou art progress! You warn people to follow the rules, to take care of physical and mental changes at the same time", considering that the unity of the body and mind is realized in compliance with the social norms. Both authors explain that sports contain rules, and that the development of sports is closely related to people's awareness of rules. Tracing back to the ancient times, the success of sports competitions is based on certain rules, and athletes consciously build up a sense of respect for others, obedience to instructions, and competition in the process of participating in the competition. First of all, the concept of rules advocated by Mao Gu has an important theoretical significance in perfecting the system of sports laws and rules, which can promote the comprehensive development of international sports by "checking and mending" on the basis of previous research. Secondly, "Laws and regulations are the life of the people, the basis of governance, and are used to prepare the people".<sup>[14]</sup>As a qualified citizen, awareness of legal rules is essential. By conducting courses related to laws and regulations, students can gradually adapt to the social "rule view" in a subtle learning process, thereby improving their personal moral cultivation and behavioral norms. Finally, "without rules and regulations, no circle can be formed", whether it is the International Olympic Games, the National Games or the school sports meeting can not be separated from the sports laws and regulations, the inheritance of the sense of rules and regulations can lay a solid ideological foundation for the construction of a harmonious and beautiful international environment.

##### ***4.2 "Internal and external cultivation": the concept of physical education and health can promote the implementation of the strategy of a healthy China and the construction of the two major civilizations in a coordinated manner***

Mao Zedong and Coubertin, as outstanding contributors to the sports industry, have always been concerned about the people. Their sports thoughts have all revolved around the key word "physique" and made many efforts to promote the physical and mental development and physical health of the masses. For example, Mao Zedong mentioned in his book "Research on Sports" that "people can enhance their physical functions and achieve the best state of health through physical exercise and improvement of physique. In his famous masterpiece Ode to Sports, Coubertin also sang, "Oh, sports, you are the fertile ground for cultivating human beings. You can strengthen national physique and correct deformed bodies through the most direct way." The poem clearly stated that sports is the most direct way for human beings to lead to health. First, the effect of sports lies in strengthening the physique. Based on the political background such as the Healthy China Strategy and the National Fitness Program, we will vigorously promote mass sports, enrich its project types, and the vast number of social instructors will consciously assume the role of coaches, thus improving the effectiveness and safety of mass participation in sports. Second, the effect of sports is to increase the will. Matter determines consciousness, and consciousness reacts on matter. Through carrying out some endurance and challenging sports, we can cultivate students' strong will to never give up and persevere, and improve their ability to cope with problems. Third, the effect of sports is to improve knowledge. The sports health concept advocated by Gu and Mao laid a theoretical foundation for the follow-up sports workers, further improved their knowledge system on the basis of previous research, and then improved the standardization, rationality and scientificity of their sports theory.

##### ***4.3 "Enterprising": the concept of sports innovation can accelerate the construction of Chinese-style sports modernization and tell a good story of Chinese innovation***

Mao Zedong in his youth linked the development of sports with the rise and fall of the country, violently attacked the old society's view of education as "emphasizing literature over martial arts", and wrote in the article "The Study of Sports" that "sports are matched with moral and intellectual education, and moral and intellectual education are all based on the body, and there is no morality and intelligence without the body. Without the body, there is no morality and intelligence." He closely linked sports with moral education and aesthetic education, and made a dialectical exposition of them,

and his concept of physical fitness and the philosophical idea of "heaven and earth are only moving" were the embodiment of his innovative sports thinking. The revival of the modern Olympic Games until 1912 began to reveal some shortcomings, and Coubertin took positive measures in this regard, and "Ode to Sports" was composed during this period. His idea of "sport is a kind of beauty, fun, progress and peace" explains that sport not only has the functions of fitness and entertainment, but also is linked with politics and economy. The "innovative view" of Gu Mao's two major sports ideas is still of great significance in promoting the innovative development and creative transformation of modern sports. In terms of innovative development, on the basis of the theory of "three simultaneous development of education", the concept of "five simultaneous development of education" is put forward, and the concept of "physical and spiritual development" is developed into the promotion of comprehensive development of human beings. The development of "physical and spiritual at the same time" is the embodiment of the innovative development of modern sports. In terms of the second creative transformation, as the international emphasis on sports has been raised, the high frequency of sports events has brought many benefits, and cultural exchanges among countries have become more frequent, political respect has been raised, and economic radiation has been expanded, which is no longer only a medium for maintaining friendly relations among countries, but also plays an irreplaceable role in promoting the development of global sports culture.

## 5. Conclusion

To summarize, although Mao Zedong and Coubertin were born in different times and had different educational backgrounds, their understanding of the functions of sports resonated with each other. The ideas of "harmony and difference", "beauty and commonality", "life goes on and on", and "sport strengthens the body and builds up the spirit" are the real concerns of both of them. The study concludes that from the perspective of the history of sports development in both the East and the West, Mao Zedong and Coubertin's ideas on sports have played a pivotal role in the development of sports in the world. On the basis of the local national culture, they share a common stage of transformation, which to a certain extent reflects the future trend of the development of sports thought.

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