

Historical Reasons for the Difference in Football Performance between China and Japan

Beichen Huang*

Wuhan Britian-China School, Wuhan, China

* Corresponding Author Email: shaoyu@ldy.edu.rs

Abstract. The gap between China and Japan in football performance is widening, but few articles have been written on its impact on football from a historical perspective. This article hopes to bring some enlightenment and suggestions for the development direction of Chinese football in the process of studying the historical reasons of the two countries on the performance of football. This article compares the origin, folk development, representative significance, and political aspects of football in the two countries, and analyzes several factors that lead to differences in participation levels from the perspective of commercialization, official support, and historical background. It is concluded that the main impact of historical reasons on Chinese and Japanese football is the formation of a localized and mature football culture in Japan, which is not present in China. Based on this conclusion, it is concluded that the development direction of Chinese football should be aimed at developing and forming its own football culture.

Keywords: Japanese football, Chinese football, Football culture, Sports nature.

1. Introduction

When the topic of football is brought up, it is rarely associated with the history of the country. But in fact, the development of football is closely related to the history of the country. Its impact includes but is not limited to football culture, sports participation, commercialization, relevant policies, etc. In my article, I will explore the different historical experiences of China and Japan that have caused differences in football performance between the two countries today.

A country's success in the World Cup is a measure of its development over the preceding four or more years, and the competition acts as a cyclical assessment of how well football is developing globally. Japanese football has become somewhat known abroad as a result of the team's back-to-back wins in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar over Germany and Spain, the winners of the World Cups in 2010 and 2014. According to the most recent FIFA rankings, Japan is rated first in Asia and twenty-first overall.

The stark contrast to the success of Japanese football is the disappointment of Chinese football. After the failure to take part in the World Cup in Qatar, China was out with zero goals in the Asian Cup. The Chinese men's football team ranked 88th in the world and 13th in Asia through the latest FIFA ranking. In terms of domestic events, dozens of professional clubs have been disbanded, at the same time, many clubs are facing operational crises or even the risk of disbandment. Many people think that this is the lowest period for the Chinese men's football team in decades.

Many existing articles compare Chinese and Japanese football policies, systems or training methods, player selection, etc. However, there are not many articles that practice and compare the football industry with historical reasons. Therefore, this paper aims to make some contributions in this regard.

However, there are many studies on the impact of historical events on Japanese football, such as *From Entertainment to Political Tool: On the Evolution of The Nature of Football in Modern Japan*, by Wenkai Ye. which contributed a lot to this paper. Although there are not many papers on the relationship between Chinese history and football, there are many articles that link history with Chinese sports, including football research. Meanwhile, some articles that study historical events or phenomena also include content related to football.

2. China and Japan Football Development

2.1. The Origin of Modern Football in China and Japan

Generally speaking, the earliest time football was introduced to Japan was in 1873. At that time, British Navy instructor A.L. Douglas and soldiers were training the navy at Tsukuji in Tokyo, and in their spare time, they also taught them how to play football [1]. Modern football was also introduced to China during a similar period. Around the 1850s, as Western countries opened up trade ports in China and established a concession area along the shore, Western expatriates in the loan zone introduced modern football to China.

2.2. The Early Development of Football in Chinese and Japanese Folklore

After the introduction of modern football, there were some folk football activities in both China and Japan. The signing of the Pact of Five Nations allowed a large number of Europeans and Americans to settle in Yokohama Port and Kobe Port for a long time, which gave Japanese people the opportunity to compete with Europeans and Americans who had mastered the most advanced football theory. In 1904, a Japanese team played a match against foreigners residing in Yokohama, which was also the earliest recorded official football activity in which Japanese people participated [1].

Modern football was introduced to the concessions by foreigners earlier, but due to the limited daily life and diplomatic activities within the concessions, a large number of Chinese people did not have early exposure to the sport of football. Since modern times, Sports outside the concessions have inherited the development path of traditional Chinese sports, with traditional martial arts occupying a dominant position for a long time, which is closely related to martial arts being a part of the imperial examination for a long time. However, modern football in the concessions has still had some impact on China. For example, in 1863, a racecourse in Shanghai was transformed into a comprehensive sports field for football matches. This has laid a certain foundation for the development of modern football in China in the future.

In contrast to the attitudes of the Chinese people, the Japanese people welcome and love football. In the report of Dongchao, football journalists have repeatedly expressed the joy of football and the enthusiasm of students for modern sports, reflecting the joy and vitality that football and sports bring to people. As mentioned in the report, students from Tokyo Normal University and Keio University, in order not to miss the opportunity to play, even though the field was not conducive to playing football due to yesterday's rainfall, happily went to S. When reporting on the football of Cihui Medical College, besides mentioning that Cihui divided the team into two groups to compete, it was also deliberately mentioned that nearly two-thirds of the members of the football department would be willing to gather together every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to practice and experience the fun of football. When mentioning the football match between Keio and Yokohama Outsiders, it was mentioned that students deliberately took the tram to cheer for their school's players with flags. The newspaper is guided by the entertainment needs of the public, cooperates with campuses and railway companies, actively organizes sports events, and seeks to maximize commercial benefits. The reason why the public continues to pay attention to sports is not only satisfies their own entertainment needs but also satisfies their yearning for higher education. Under the background of commercialization, the influence of sports has gradually expanded, laying the foundation for the politicization of sports. (It is not difficult to see from these texts that a considerable number of Japanese junior high school students had developed a strong interest in football during this period. In 1918, the New Aichi News Agency (now known as the China-Japan News Agency) opened the curtain for the newspaper to hold football matches. Major newspapers and media outlets such as the Current Affairs News Agency, Osaka Asahi Shimbun, Osaka Daily News, and Tokyo Asahi Shimbun also held football matches one after another. The Japan Football Championship hosted by Osaka Daily News later evolved into today's renowned high school football tournament [1]. In 1907, the first campus football match in Japan was held between Tokyo Higher Normal School and Aoyama Normal School. As a result,

various higher education institutions in Japan, mainly in the Kanto and Kansai regions, launched small-scale amateur football matches. During this period, the two major Japanese newspapers, Asahi Shimbun and Shimbun, began promoting sports events and sponsoring campus football matches to expand their circulation [2].

In the process of modern sports spreading from concessions to concessions in China, the Christian Church and its established Western-style schools played an important role. In the early 20th century, many Western schools run by foreign churches, and modern schools run by Chinese enlightened individuals have taken root and sprouted in China. These schools are growing rapidly like mushrooms after rain, and modern sports ideas have also entered China from Europe through these schools. And the rapid development from south to north, from the coast to the inland. Afterward, some of the earliest modern football leagues were the East China Six University Games that began in 1914, with members including Shanghai Saint John's University, Nanyang Public School, Shanghai Hujiang University, Suzhou Dongwu University, Nanjing Jinling University, Hangzhou Zhejiang University. Later in 1920, Shanghai Fudan University and Nanjing Higher Normal School also joined the competition, forming a single round-robin format. As of the May 30th Massacre in 1925, a total of 11 university football leagues had been held, which played a certain role in the popularization and improvement of football. If Shanghai is a model for the development of football culture in coastal areas, then the typical representative of football culture development in inland areas is undoubtedly Shaanxi. Shaanxi Province advocated modern football in the 33rd year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty (1907). Xi'an Superior Normal University (now Xi'an Normal University) hired Japanese people and once advocated football.

2.3. Modern Football and Its Representative Significance

During the Taisho period, the development of modern football in Japan had already begun to take shape. To demonstrate the rationality of the spread of modern football in Japan, even though newspapers at that time were well aware of the differences between modern football and ancient Japanese cuju, they emphasized the similarity between ancient Japanese cuju and modern English football, both using their feet to play football and highlighting the commonality between Japan and the West as much as possible. It was also emphasized that the characteristic of modern football is a game that should be encouraged for Japanese people who have long been accustomed to sitting at home, which helps them improve their national shortcomings of being inflexible. Believing that football can even compensate for the national shortcomings caused by Japan's traditions not only expresses recognition of the phenomenon of modern football being introduced to Japan since the Meiji Restoration but also reflects the Japanese people's recognition of Western values at that time. Meanwhile, Japanese people also believe that as representatives who align with Western rules, understanding football rules is more important than understanding the sport itself [1].

In China, church schools regard sports as a way of education. St. John's University President Bu Fangji believes that inter-class sports competitions can help students learn self-restraint and self-command, and they will become more generous in competition. Many Chinese educators have also realized the importance of modern sports. Dong Shouyi emphasized that "the importance of sports to a nation cannot be ignored. It is the cornerstone of a nation's development and determines its rise and fall.". From this, it can be seen that Dong Shouyi's view on popular sports believes that the health level of the people is the foundation of the country and national strength and that national rejuvenation and strength enhancement are closely related to the personal physical health of the people. This is similar to the military and national sports ideology advocated by modern China as a "strong country that values martial arts" [3].

2.4. Politics and Modern Football in Japan and China

Around the 1920s, Japanese football and politics became increasingly closely intertwined. The Meiji Shrine Athletic Conference is a professional football tournament organized by the Japanese government, with a mature schedule, system, and personnel such as referees. The establishment of

the Meiji Shrine Athletic Conference signifies the concrete intervention of national power in sports [1]. At the same time, Japan also invited players from its occupied areas, such as Taiwan and the Philippines, to participate in football competitions in Japan. The Japanese government regards football as a tool for ideological domination and national consciousness and vigorously promotes it. Sports were not only used as a means to deal with the Japanese democracy movement and to propagate the idea of loyalty and patriotism but also as a tool for colonial rule [1].

Compared to the Japanese government, the Chinese government's support and emphasis on football are much lower, although there have also been some government-organized football activities in China. The football news reports from 1935-1954 focused on keywords such as "matches," "charity matches," "friendship," and "champions," indicating that football had the function of providing relief to society and enhancing people's friendship at that time. In terms of domestic football, before the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to the lack of formal organizational structures, most football representative teams held friendly matches, as well as football charity matches and labor competitions [3]. In 1924, the Chinese Football Association was officially established, which was also the first official football organization in China.

3. Analysis and Implication

The level of participation in Japanese football was already high in the early stages and included a wide range of social groups. The Meiji Jingu Athletic Games, sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior, set up three qualifying zones in addition to nine competition zones in Japan, as well as Taiwan, North Korea, and Manchuria, which it occupies. The first Meiji Jingu Athletic Games were attended by more than 3,000 athletes selected from Manchuria, North Korea, and Taiwan [1].

Compared to Japan, the Chinese football community always presents a limitation. From initially being limited to the concession area, to being confined to Western-style schools, or only popular in Shanghai, Guangdong, and other regions, Chinese football has always been shown to develop only in a certain group or region. Japan has improved the performance of Japanese athletes in the Far Eastern Games by popularizing sports for all, which has made the Japanese people realize the gap between Japanese sports and Japan [4]. In contrast, the popularity of modern sports in China, especially football, is far less than in Japan.

This paper finds that the popularity of modern football is a major difference in the history of football between China and Japan. Only when football is universalized on a national scale, on a population-wide scale, can a national football culture be created and the foundation for healthy and sustainable football development. The main reasons for this discrepancy are the differences in Commercialization level, Official support, Historical Background and Folk culture, and ideological differences.

3.1. Commercialization Level

Mature football systems often require a lot of financial support for training players, maintaining the field, and so on. Commercialization has been and still is an important factor in supporting football activities.

The newspaper industry was one of the industries that mainly supported the commercialization of Japanese football in the early days. Japanese newspapers have made huge profits from covering soccer events, and as a result, they have continued to cover it on a large scale. To expand the business territory, and compete for the newspaper market and economic benefits, the scope of sports sponsored by major newspapers has gradually expanded to include football. Until the 1930s, when the expansion of Japanese imperialism became more and more rampant, the newspaper's business policy of focusing on the entertainment needs of the people and the market remained unchanged. Through active cooperation with schools and railway companies, the newspaper has shaped the sports movement that emerged in the school into a more mature business operation model [1]. This mature commercial system is the main pillar supporting the healthy operation of Japan's football industry today. In Japan,

schools, amateur clubs, and professional clubs have a clear division of labor, coordinated development of the youth training pyramid has been formed, the perfect youth training system and the implementation of the football philosophy, so that the club can cultivate high-quality football talents, stable club operation, J League organization guarantee so that professional players have the opportunity to obtain satisfactory economic income and clear career planning, skills, on this basis, the league can also be guaranteed, competitiveness [5].

During the same period, the funding sources for Chinese football were mostly short-term, such as government grants for the construction of stadiums, or short-term personal sponsorship of a particular event. However, due to the lack of successful commercialization, this almost equates to unrewarded financial support that often does not last long. This phenomenon has prevented the scale of football activities from being expanded, resulting in the limitations mentioned above.

3.2. Official Support

The Meiji Jingu Athletic Games, which were attended by members of the Imperial Family, show how much attention the Japanese government attaches to football. The government uses football as a political tool to accomplish multiple ends. Sports were used not only as a means to deal with the Japanese pro-democracy movement and to propagate the idea of loyalty and patriotism, but also as a tool for colonial rule. Football is one of the most valued sports due to its already considerable base in Japan and its nature similar to combat. At the same time, modern football is also being promoted by the Japanese government as a sport that embraces new ideas and helps improve the physical condition of Japanese people. At the same time, the Japanese government is also seeking to integrate with international sports at the official level. At the time of the first Far Eastern Games (1913), Japan was the only country in Asia with IOC members.

The Chinese government also wants to improve the health of its citizens through football, which has been included in several major sports events. The most far-reaching impact was the first Chinese Revolutionary League sports meeting of the national school district team held in Nanjing in 1910, which was the first national sports meeting of China recognized by the National Government. At this sports meeting, there are four major competitions: athletics, football, tennis, and basketball [6]. However, the Chinese government has never regarded football as a top priority, so it has never hosted a high-profile and continuous tournament like the Meiji Jingu Athletic Games in Japan. The Chinese government has taken an extremely negative approach to international football outside of Asia.

3.3. Historical Background

The different historical backgrounds are also one of the factors influencing the sport of football, especially when the game is in the initiation phase of the region.

For sports, including football, to be used as a means of making money for major newspapers and periodicals, it is necessary to ensure that the audience for sports is widely followed not only in schools but also in society. In other words, the Japanese people have to have the psychological need to watch sports. Japan's industrialization and urbanization have created the preconditions for this, similar to the fact that sport in Britain has become an important form of leisure for the working class. Ball games filled the need for a large number of rural people to move to the cities, the new industrial population out of the traditional social environment, and the huge vacuum of theatrical entertainment created by the common people and the urban working class [1]. At the same time, after the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese people were very willing to think newly, because they easily accepted football, a Western-style sport that was very different from the traditional sport. Japanese culture has a side that is good at absorbing foreign cultures, but it also has an independent side. Worshipping the strong and being good at introducing and absorbing them in an all-round way, and then implementing local improvements and innovations have become the usual means of Japanese cultural transformation. Reflecting on the absorption of football culture, firstly, Japan is good at absorbing the cultural aspects of Western football artifacts, such as the modernization of stadium facilities, technological research and development of football equipment, and humanized design of football products. Secondly, Japan

is good at learning about the football culture at the Western institutional level, such as the construction of a professional football system, the corporate operation of football clubs, and the design of football training and competition systems. Finally, Japan is adept at transplanting advanced Western football concepts and universal ethics [7].

Although there are still many essences of Japanese traditional culture that have not been abandoned at the core level, such as collective consciousness, hierarchical concepts, the emphasis on reputation, and the will quality of the ninja spirit

Compared to Japan, China was more volatile at the same time, and social instability reduced the demand for physical activity to a certain extent. At the same time, due to the long-standing importance of traditional Chinese sports in the imperial examinations, many people still prefer to participate in traditional sports rather than Western sports.

3.4. Comparison of football cultures

Football culture is the key to the development of football and is the end result of many of the reasons mentioned above. Japan has long formed a football culture that has its own regional characteristics and is compatible with its national culture and social system. The "soccer fever" that broke out after the 90s of the 20th century gave birth to the comprehensive development of the Japanese soccer league, and the number of people involved in the soccer industry at all levels of the country every week can reach 150,000~200,000 people, including sponsors, and the number of sports people participating in soccer has increased exponentially, which can play a pivotal role in Japan, which has a population of more than 100 million. Football culture and league effects are widely spread among people, and at the same time, they also have an effect on social and cultural change, and football is deeply rooted in social culture [2].

Compared to Japan, China's football culture is very undeveloped. Taking campus football as an example, the backward development of campus football in China reflects the backwardness of the entire Chinese football industry to a certain extent. Chinese football lacks cultural symbols, which is also reflected in campus football, the exposure of campus football events is limited to football fields, and even the popularity on campus is very low, so accelerating the development of the surrounding events and creating campus football cultural symbols is an important foundation for the development of campus football events [8]. At present, in the development and promotion of China's youth football projects, the construction of football culture is lacking, and China's football culture should be built at the same time as the teaching of football sports technology and football knowledge [9]. The development of modern football in China has a history of 100 years, but it has never formed a unique football culture, which is not only reflected in the overall construction of football across the country but also the long-term development of clubs [10].

4. Conclusion

The gap between China and Japan in football today is widening, and many of the reasons for this can be found in historical events nearly a hundred years ago.

In the context of the historical background of 100 years ago, Japan had a more stable society, with a declining agricultural population and a large number of people moving to cities, which provided Japan with the opportunity and demand for sports events as entertainment. Newspapers and other organizations saw an opportunity to make profits in football, and in doing so, they formed a mature business chain. As a result, there are a large number of large-scale and organized football events, which of course cannot be separated from the Japanese government's purpose of using football as a political tool. Thanks to this, Japan's local football culture was formed more than 100 years ago, and it continues to develop to this day. This football culture ensures a steady stream of football participation in Japan and its commercial value.

At the same time, due to the unstable society and years of war, Chinese society was not stable, and because of this, the Chinese people's demand for sports activities as a pastime was not high. At the

same time, the social structure of differentiation has made football only spread among a specific range of people and regions and has not achieved true popularity. Many Chinese people themselves are not happy to accept Western sports but insist on traditional Chinese sports, such as martial arts. As a result, the commercial football system did not take shape in most parts of China. From the government level, the government of the Republic of China does not pay enough attention to and long-term planning of football, but only holds some short-term events, or trains football for certain games.

In summary, this paper argues that due to the historical reasons mentioned above, China still lacks a mature football culture compared to Japan, which has led to an unstable number of football participants and therefore a stable football business system. Today, football has become a sophisticated machine, from the support of the bottom of the participants to the top of the game to use the football to make money, and the cycle of investing in football is indispensable. Chinese football, which lacks football culture, lacks the fuel to make the machine run, making it difficult for the machine to run, and even a hundred years ago - investing in football it difficult to make a profit, which is still a major problem facing Chinese football.

Therefore, this paper believes that the development center of Chinese football should make football community-based and localized so that football can be integrated into the life of the Chinese and have its own football culture, to drive the development of the entire football industry and achieve better performance.

References

- [1] Wenkai Ye. From Popular Entertainment to Political Tool: On the Evolution of the Nature of Football in Morden Japan. Shandong University, 2023
- [2] The Cultural Code of the Rise of Japanese Football Yang Changming
- [3] Chang Kai et al., Historical Text Analysis of Chinese Football News Reports (1935-1954), in the 13th National Sports Science Conference 2023: Tianjin, China
- [4] He Shupeng, Research on the Far East Games and Modern Sports Development in Shanghai (1913-1934), 2023, Northeast Normal University
- [5] Research on the Historical Context, Dynamic Mechanism, and Strategic Value of the Transformation and Development of Japanese Football_Yoshitoshi Pu.
- [6] Rong Su. A Study on the Sports Concept in Early 20th Century Chinese Social Thought. Tianjin University of Sport, 2023
- [7] Haonan Liu and Xiaoqiang Shi, Theoretical Logic, Practical Characteristics, and Practical Implications of the Governance of Japanese Professional Football League from the Perspective of Sports Value Framework, in The 13th National Sports Science Conference 2023: Tianjin, China.
- [8] Zou Junxiang et al., Research on the Development of Campus Football Competition System in China: Based on Japanese Experience, in The 1st Hubei Sports Science Conference 2023: Huanggang, Hubei, China.
- [9] The development process of football in Japan and the development path and enlightenment of football projects_Ning Cong.
- [10] The phenomenon of Premier League teams welcoming champions dialysis the lack of Chinese football culture_Wang Li.