

# Research on the International Communication of Traditional Sports under the Background of Globalization

-- A Case Study of the Phoenix Boat Race in Guangyuan City

Li He, Jiameng Sun \*

School of Foreign Language, Chengdu University of Information Technology, Chengdu Sichuan, China

**Abstract:** As an important means of promoting friendly exchanges between nations, sports have received a great deal of attention both at home and abroad. However, in a world where sports have joined the trend of globalization that is now on the rise, the dominant position of Western sports calls for the internationalization of traditional Chinese sports. Based on the methods of field investigation and literature research, this paper presents an in-depth analysis of the problems encountered in the internationalization of Chinese sports focusing on Phoenix boat race in Guangyuan city, Sichuan province. It proposes implementable strategies for the development of traditional sports and the international exchange and promotion of Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Phoenix Boat Race; Traditional Sports; International Communication; Globalization.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Concept of Globalization and Sports Globalization

The concept of globalization is driven by the technological revolution and the information economy. Originated in the economic sphere, globalization is vital for the whole society, which leads the way to social change and narrows gap between different countries and regions.[1] Sports, as an important part of society also are affected by the trend of globalization. Hence, "sports globalization" was born in time. However, so far, no clear definition has been established. Some scholars believe that it is the result of the interconnectedness of world sports, while others think the cultural aggression and economic exploitation in developing countries caused by developed countries represented by the United States are the main motive of this trend.[2] Roll into all, a large number of scientists are attracted by this issue, and there is a long way to go in the exploration of "Sports globalization". With the joint efforts of all scholars, in the future, it will be clear inside.

### 1.2. The Impact of Globalization on Traditional Sports

Beyond all questions, the globalization trend is a terrific chance for the development of traditional Chinese sports, but westernization has become the main character of the globalization of sports since the industrial revolution. [3] Take Olympic Games as an example, most of the typical sports items, such as Athletics, Canoe, Modern Pentathlon, Boxing, etc., are western sports. As for traditional Chinese sports almost nowhere to be seen.[4] A conclusion can be drawn accordingly, that is, influenced by Western sports, traditional Chinese sports are far from global, hence, various approaches should be explored in line with the further development of traditional sports.

Meanwhile, it is shown that the role sports have played in

diplomacy should not be underestimated. Sports have always been an important tool of diplomacy, ranging from Ping-pong Diplomacy in 1971 which led to the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, to a unique ceremony design for the 2022 Winter Olympics—"Not One Less", representing China's faith in upholding the principle of unity, peace, and friendship. It is evident that sports diplomacy has become an important platform for friendly exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries, as well as an essential way for China to convey the concept of equality and mutual benefit to the world which are in tune with traditional sportsmanship.

## 2. Cultural Value of the Phoenix Boat in Guangyuan

### 2.1. The Origin of the Phoenix Boat

#### 2.1.1. The Yearning for Phoenix

The phoenix boat race held annually on September 1st is a typical event of traditional sports and it is one of the first projects to protect and promote the intangible cultural heritage of sports in China.[5]The "First National Phoenix Boat Festival" was held in 1999 and 2005 respectively with the approval of the State General Administration of Sports.[6]The reason why the phoenix boat race has indomitable vitality and has become an important spiritual wealth of China lies in its long history. According to *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*, the phoenix looks like a chicken, all over in different colors, the floral pattern on the head is in the shape of "德", and the wing is covered by "羲" while the back pattern is in the form of "礼", the chest pattern is "仁", and the pattern of the belly is "信". All of those are symbols of prosperity and loyalty. For this reason, it was regarded as the most auspicious animal by Kings throughout ancient times. Soon after, the kind sacred object of good fortune became popular among the folk, and people attach their hopes to the phoenix, expecting that the phoenix could bring them health and fortune. Besides, the phoenix is also a

symbol of equality, traditionally, people had more of a vision of the dragon as a symbol of imperial power. But this changed dramatically during the celebrated Tang Dynasty. At a time when popular consciousness was still determined by the ruler, the emergence of empress Wu Zetian greatly impacted the mindset of the people. As a result, society changed radically during her reign, with liberal ideas prevailing and the status of women qualitatively improving. Guangyuan was therefore not only the birthplace of the empress but also liberal thought and the awakening of women.

### **2.1.2. People's Worship of Empress Wu Zetian**

In Guangyuan, tradition has it that the first empress in history—Wu Zetian was born under the guidance of a black dragon in JiaLin River. During her reign, she valued the talents of poor families, focused on the advancement of women, reduced taxes, and created an open cultural environment. In return, she was embraced by people who show their worship to her by touring the bay, taking a colorful boat ride decorated with phoenix patterns, singing, and dancing. Over time, this custom has become a norm. People in Guangyuan are extremely proud of Wu Zetian, for the purpose of reflecting her effective governance strategies with both toughness and softness, the phoenix boat race is regarded as the best way.

## **2.2. Unique Cultural Values Embedded in Phoenix Boat**

The invention of the phoenix boat was the manifestation of the Tang Dynasty's prosperity. On the one hand, during the Tang dynasty, society was in a state of openness which was a stage of cultural inclusion, and various ideas were shared, bringing a great impact to people's minds, leading to the renewal of people's knowledge which laid the foundation for the birth of the phoenix boat culture.

On the other hand, the promotion of the phoenix boat is an embodiment of female values. By analyzing its exterior, it is found that it has a phoenix-like appearance, rich in colour and full of details. In traditional Chinese culture, the inheritors of detail culture are usually women. [7] In the matrilineal society woman was the dominant force in society, and possessed sovereignty, but with the rapid rise in male status later on, for a long time, woman has always been at the bottom of the social ladder. Consequently, for a period of time, sports become a male-dominated activity, but the emergence of the women-only phoenix boat race allowed the value of women to be reflected in. Thus, the existence of phoenix boat is a great way to remind people of the importance of women.

Moreover, it's a typical representative of the combination of traditional sportsmanship and modern sportsmanship. First of all, although the scale of competition in traditional Chinese sports is not as large as that of the Olympics, the pursuit of fairness is one of the commonalities between the two.[8] In traditional sports events, the emphasis is always on "martial virtue", which is also valued in modern sports. In the case of the phoenix boat race whose scale is very small, the pre-race scrutiny is very demanding, with competitors having to pass drug tests, identity checks, and fitness tests before they are allowed to take part in this competition. In addition, the spirit of modern sporting events is essentially, the pursuit of the "The essence is consistent with nature" proposed by Zhuangzi in ancient times. In 2008, Beijing Olympic Games adopted the "Green Olympics" as a key theme, with the entire event based on the premise of respecting nature, low-carbon and environmentally friendly construction materials, as well as

the emphasis on the environmental protection work during the whole competition. Last but not least, traditional sports and modern sports are functionally identical in that they both aim to strengthen people's bodies. Traditional sports such as Tai Chi and Wushu emphasize the mobilization of all parts of the body, therefore, it greatly improves people's physical health level. This is also highly in line with the "mass participation" advocated in modern sports.

## **3. Dilemma of Internationalization of Traditional Sports - Case Analysis on Phoenix Boat Race**

### **3.1. Geographical Restrictions**

#### **3.1.1. Economic Deprivation**

Traditional sports often originated in relatively remote regions, inaccessibility, and economic underdevelopment lead to a low reputation of them, which can be seen from the composition of participants. The phoenix boat race is held annually but geographically restricted to Guangyuan, and only for a few days on Daughter's Day, the participants are mostly the locals. Although since 2005, Guangyuan has invited foreign students from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia to participate in the tournament, but international sports events generally refer to all kinds of intercontinental and worldwide comprehensive games with considerable influence held by the world's individual sports organization. [9] According to this definition, it has never been an international competition. In fact, In China, most of the traditional sports are popular only where they originate, such as Crossbow shooting in Yunnan, Guizhou, and other regions, ethnic style of wrestling welcomed in Mongolian and Uighur, and so on. Under-developing economy often results in a low exposure rate of traditional sports, which has become the major obstacle to the internationalization of traditional sports.

#### **3.1.2. Low Level of Literacy**

Economic deprivation often results in a low level of literacy, and the poverty of an area leads to certain amounts of illiteracy, which has become one of the factors hampering the internationalization of traditional sports. The poorer the area, the lower the quality of the people. According to statistics, in 1986, the People's Republic of China issued the Nine-year Compulsory Education policy. In 2002, a policy for the total eradication of illiteracy was introduced again. Under the guidance of dual policy, people living in remote areas have learned how to read and write, but this is a long-term process during which the communication of culture was at a standstill, which means that the mass of time that could've invested in promotion was at last wasted. Even now, a significant number of people from poor areas still lack the awareness of developing their initiative in cultural communication, but traditional sports are often traced in these remote and impoverished regions. Consequently, the distinctive traditional sports were only confined to the local area.

### **3.2. Decrease of Publicity Subjects**

As western competitive sports are rapidly emerging and becoming popular worldwide, in China, sports items with western style can be found almost everywhere. The courses offered by schools and exercise facilities provided by gymnasiums are rarely associated with traditional sports. Fewer opportunities for young people to engage in traditional

sports events, consequently, their interest in traditional sports is gradually fading away. By interview, there are generally four divisions in the phoenix boat race; junior women (under 16 years old), young women (under 18 years old), adult women (18 to 40 years old), and veteran women (over 40 years old). In Guangyuan, however, races are only for the adult division, not for the young ones under the age of 16. Youngsters have no sense of involvement, so they are forced to miss the perfect chance to cultivate their interest and are inclined to shift their attention from traditional sports to activities that make them feel involved, such as basketball, football, badminton, etc. Hence, given training carriers of traditional sports in China, the publicity subjects are far from sufficient. From the perspective of globalization, there are only three universities in Guangyuan, and none of them have the international student program. This situation indicates a low number of foreign friends who have access to traditional sports. Putting these two points together, this paper holds that the inadequacy of the subject of promotion is a weak point in the internationalization of traditional culture.

### **3.3. Outdated Approach to Strategy Advancement**

People are now living in an era of network information which makes the establishment of sharing platforms across different countries and regions possible and provides a promising opportunity for the communication of traditional sports. However, through extensive research on popular and important information interaction platforms like MicroBlog, Tik Tok, and Zhihu, it was found that the number of traditional sports which are promoted on the above platforms is extremely small and few traditional sports promoted both in English and Chinese. Taking the phoenix boat race as an example, through an investigation of The Official Tourism Website of Guangyuan as well as other key information exchange platforms and a visit to the 2022 Daughters' Day in Guangyuan, it is found that not only almost no information about the phoenix boat race can be found on the website, but also it is mainly promoted by the means of local media coverage and paper publicity. Moreover, the brochure on the phoenix boat was only subordinate to the Daughters' Day ones and was not advertised independently. It shows that traditional sports cannot get enough attention based on "Addition" approach to promotion.

Simply put, traditional sports events such as the phoenix boat race have not been widely promoted, which is fundamentally due to the lack of initiative of the local government to make use of time. Thus, sports communication methods lagged behind the times. However, the fate of traditional sports is usually determined by the way how publicity keeps up with the advance of the times. In that case, a new way of promoting traditional sports is expected to be explored.

### **3.4. The Lack of Attractiveness**

An analysis of the scene of the annual phoenix boat race reveals that the format of the competition is similar every year, which can be roughly summarized as four tracks, each track is 800 meters long and 12 meters wide with the adoption of the timekeeping system, and the winner is the team that takes the least amount of time. To a certain extent, the phoenix boat race and the dragon boat race have great similarities. However, because of the long historical standing and immense popularity of dragon boat race, phoenix boat race still belongs

to the category of the dragon boat race and have difficulty gaining attention. That was evident in the reaction of the audience at the 2022 Daughter's Day in Guangyuan, when the game was in the full swing, a few spectators not only didn't pay attention to the game, but even played their mobile phones, they said; "The competition is the consistency of every year, and there is no difference with the dragon boat race". Even one audience said, "it is not the process that counts, it's the result". In a long run, this kind of perception will gradually be engraved in people's minds.

According to literature research, the phoenix boat race in Guangyuan is not unique in terms of the extension of its activities. The phoenix boat culture which has rooted in Honghu city, Hubei province, is rich in history, moreover, with the unique techniques for making phoenix boats and enough publicity, compared with the single-format phoenix boat race in Guangyuan, it is more attractive. Hence, how to bring innovation to traditional sports like phoenix boat race both in terms of event design and institutional level, is a problem must be solved for traditional sports to go international.

## **4. Implementable Strategies to Promote the Internationalization of Traditional Sports**

### **4.1. Diversity of Publicity Methods**

As mentioned earlier, traditional sports are promoted in an extremely single way, so, it is necessary to take advantage of the trend of "Digitalization" to visualize traditional sports and present sporting events to the public through the use of modern science and technology, to provide people with the most realistic live game scenes and enable them to experience the power of traditional sports.

As the main promoter of traditional Chinese sports culture, it is essential to meet the needs of young people and appeal to their interest in traditional sports by developing a game that specifically encompasses traditional sports events. Through the game software, competitions can be taken part in traditional Chinese sports events without the limit of time and space. A reward system should also be created to expand the scope of the publicity.

At the same time, special attention should be paid to the brand effect of traditional sports, making the best of their uniqueness, and establishing their brand. For instance, in 2014, in Qingdao, Shandong Province, a mechanism was implemented to establish international and domestic large-scale sports events led by the "Sailing Capital" and to create 2-3 international and domestic brands through which the sailing culture in Qingdao has grown increasingly. [10] Lessons can be learned from those existing cases which focus on the leveraging the brand effect to better promote the internationalization of traditional Chinese sports.

### **4.2. Cultivation of International Publicity Talents**

The cultivation of talents is an important way for the internationalization of traditional sports. This paper mainly discusses the solutions from the perspective of international publicity. Through investigation, in China, the sports English major is almost set in sports colleges, like Chengdu Institution of Physical Education and Beijing Institution of Physical Education. However, given the varying level of economic and

educational conditions in different regions, most universities and colleges with English or translation major, Sports English was only offered as an elective course, and there are differences in the quality of international publicity talents. Thus, universities and colleges are expected to reprogram their majors, that is, to set Sports English as an independent subject, making it more targeted in teaching and learning. An equally important strategy should focus on the establishment of a specialized system for traditional sports, including setting up courses on traditional sports, holding lectures and running knowledge competitions regularly, etc. [11]

More opportunities for students to put theory into practice are expected to be provided. Universities and colleges should cooperate with local enterprises and institutions, seeking more practical opportunities for students and designing some simulation tests to ensure that students can review what they have learned in a timely manner. As for some regions without colleges or universities, the multicultural exchange between East and West is necessary so as to form an educational resources-sharing mechanism, which is conducive to narrowing the gap between East and West in terms of talent development capabilities.

### 4.3. Combined Effort of All Sectors of Society

In the process of internationalizing traditional Chinese sports, sole power from only one part is far from enough. More efforts united by individuals are required. First of all, local media and schools remain the mainstay of publicity, but as mentioned before, the birthplaces of traditional sports are generally in economically disadvantaged areas. As a result, there is a lower influence of media and standards for education. Therefore, at the national level, the government should give policy support and provide sufficient funding to expand the influence of local media and improve the level of regional education.[12] More importantly, the full play to the advantage of sports diplomacy should be given and the establishment of friendly relations with other countries should be made, providing more opportunities for traditional sports to go abroad.

At the social level, society as a whole should shift some attention from economic development to the cultural perspective, creating a friendly atmosphere for sports development. While at the individual level, people are encouraged to take the initiative to acquire knowledge about traditional culture, participate in competitions related to traditional sports to enhance people's sense of involvement and belonging, make the most of their knowledge to promote the internationalization of traditional sports culture and update their knowledge in a timely manner for the sake of contributing to the spread of traditional sports culture.

### 4.4. Innovation in Traditional Sports Culture

The lack of innovation has become one of the most serious problems in the process of internationalization of traditional sports. It is suggested that the innovation of traditional sports should be acquired in the following aspects. First of all, it is important to explore and develop new forms of competition that combine the functions of competition, entertainment, and fitness, making traditional sports accessible to more people for any purpose.[13] Meanwhile, regularization is a necessary step that should be taken in the internationalization of traditional sports, which means the development of traditional sports is no longer just dependent on traditional folk festivals with fixed timings, but can exist independently. It should

mainly reflect the need for innovation in the schedule of the events, changing the original format and establishing a specialized agency to manage. The emphasis on the uniqueness of traditional sports should also be given full attention, fully excavating the cultural connotation embedded in it, and finding out the difference between traditional sports and modern popular sports in order to give full play to their advantages.

## 5. Conclusion

With globalization speeding up economic and cultural exchanges between countries and regions, sports have stepped onto the international stage and become an important method to promote friendly exchange around the globe. Hence, how to promote the globalization of traditional Chinese sports has become one of the most concerned issues of scholars today. Due to the limited time and resources and personal experience, there are plenty of limitations when writing this essay. With a purpose of learning through practicing, this paper discusses the difficulties encountered in the internationalization of traditional sports in China and proposes corresponding solutions with a case analysis of the phoenix boat race in Guangyuan city, Sichuan province. The author aims at making a modest contribution to the dissemination of traditional Chinese sports culture and holds a belief that the subject of this study is a typical representative of traditional Chinese sports. If it can be combined with other cases related to the promotion of traditional sports to study, compare and learn from each other, the results will play an important role in promoting the internationalization of Chinese traditional sports.

## Acknowledgments

Fund projects:

2023 College Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project of Chengdu University of Information Technology "Research on Cross-cultural Promotion and Publicity of Chinese Traditional Sports Spirits from the Perspective of Sports Diplomacy" (202310621258).

2022 Education Research and Reform Project of Chengdu University of Information Technology "Student-competency-centered Development of Core Values through Interpreting Course Reform of Translation Major" (JYJG2022026).

## References

- [1] Yiming Zheng, Chaoying Zhang. A Marxist Perspective on Globalization, Anti-globalization and De-globalization[J]. *Marxism & Reality*,2018,0(4):8-15.
- [2] Lixin Chen. The Research Status and Prospects of Sport Globalization at Home and Abroad[j]. *Journal of sports and science*,2009,30(04):54-55.
- [3] Cai Li. International Communication of National Traditional Sports under the Background of Globalization[J]. *Journal of Shenyang Sport University*,2014,33(03):131-135.
- [4] Wu Xu, Song Peng, Lu Yu. Internationalization of Chinese Traditional Sports Under the Background of Belt and Road Initiatives [J].*Journal of Shenyang Sport University*, 2020, 39 (03): 123-129.
- [5] Dunxiao Lu, Research on the Origin and Development of the Phoenix Boat Race in Daughter's Day in Guang yuan [J], *Sichuan Sports Science*,2018,37(05):83-86.

- [6] Zhengmin Zhang. Historical Evolution and Humanistic Value of Guangyuan Phoenix Boat --Cultural Anthropological Understanding of a Folk Sports Activity[J]. Journal of Chengdu Sports University, 2010,36(10); 30-32.DOL. 15942/ j. jcsu. 2010. 10.009.
- [7] Huawen Chen. The Cultural Inheritance of The Dragon-boat Festival: the Phoenix-boat Race and Women Participation[J]. Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Edition),2016,38(05):115-119.
- [8] Zhanqi Wang. The integration of traditional Chinese sports culture and modern sportsmanship[J].SPORT & STYLE, 2020 (12): 208-209.
- [9] Xiaotong Tang. The Spread Effect of Large Scale International Sports Competition Events on Social Development[J]. Journal of Guangzhou Sport University, 2007, (01):26-28.
- [10] Haiyan Han. Shine the City Brand of "Sailing City", Help Build an International Fashion City·[J]. Openings,2021(33):72-75.
- [11] Linlin Kong, Ronghao Chen. Study on the Inheritance and Development of Chinese Traditional Sports under the View of Culture. [J].Journal of Guangzhou Sports University, 2019, 39 (4):71-75.
- [12] Chenchen Sun, Huaxing Deng, Rongpie Song. Globalization and nationalization: the cultural identity of Chinese traditional national sports: [J].Journal of Physical Education, 2018, 25 (5): 30-34.
- [13] Jilin Yin, Naiqiong Li, Ning Chen. Reality, Times and Way Out: Revival of Chinese Traditional Sports Culture from Perspective of "Chinese Dream" [J].Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education,2020,54(1):5-11.