

How China Plays the Game

A Cultural Perspective on Sports in China

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Abstract

This article examines the history of Chinese sports in relation to sport development and cultural renaissance against the backdrop of the 2008 Beijing Olympiad. The differences between Chinese and Western sports are analyzed from a cross-cultural perspective. An argument is made that the westernization of traditional Chinese sports has had profound implications upon East-West cultural conflict and negotiation. Post-Olympic and future sports landscapes in China are also discussed. It is concluded that both Chinese and Western sports have their place in human culture: Chinese and Ancient Greek legacies represent the two oldest East-West civilizations, and the passing of the 2008 Olympic torch from Greece's Olympia to the city of Beijing precisely marks a shift from Western global dominance to a more balanced yin-yang model where both Western and non-Western cultures have international influence.

Key words: sport, East-West, cross-culture, China, Olympics

Introduction

The 2008 Beijing Olympics placed China squarely in the spotlight of the international stage as it hosted the world's most renowned athletic competitions with remarkable success. China and its close neighbours, Japan and South Korea, have each attained international prestige in the fields of both economics and sports, and each has hosted the Olympics at the juncture of its respective economic rebirth; interestingly, these three East Asian nations are also all influenced by similar philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism).¹ In 2008, all Chinese – citizens and ex-patriots alike – were linked by an intrinsic desire to see China succeed on the Olympic stage in a manner that complemented its economic and political progress (a progress which is far more profound than what the Western mainstream population estimated it would be). Success for China in the 2008 Beijing Olympics heralded a grand renaissance of its culture and its efforts to contribute Eastern ancient wisdom to a harmonious world. There have been a number of studies conducted on sports in China, but minimal literature can be found on cultural studies of Chinese sports; thus, this paper is intended to discuss the sports of China from a cross-cultural perspective in the context of East-West interactions.

History of sports in China

To properly understand, evaluate and discuss Chinese sports development (e.g., its current situation, westernization, future directions), and the cultural differences between Chinese and Western sports, it is important to first examine the history of sports in China.

While terms such as *sport* and *physical education* are in fact imported words in China, this does not signify that sports – as they are understood in the West – did not exist there, as etymologically the word *sport* refers to pleasant pastimes or diversions.² Throughout China's considerable history there are records of numerous games, leisure pastimes, martial arts, meditation practices, and recuperative activities, all of which bear similarities to Western sports but were pursued for different purposes: dragon boat races and certain forms of dance originated as forms of wor-

1 Tu, 'Implications of the Rise of "Confucian" East Asia'. Further references from this work are given later in the text.

2 Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*.

ship; archery and carriage-driving were educational pursuits; qigong (Chinese meditation) was performed as a branch of medicine; martial arts were components of military exercises; and early forms of soccer and wrestling were undertaken as recreation.³ After dominating human civilization for thousands of years, in the mid-1800s China was overpowered and subsequently carved up by foreign imperialist powers, and diverse nations such as Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. all eventually planted their flags on Chinese soil at various points in history. Forced to sign a number of punitive treaties carrying crippling concessions, China was rapidly semi-colonized and thus began its poignant journey towards massive westernization.⁴

Western sports, along with other colonial influences, were introduced in China via four primary channels: semi-permanent visiting workers such as foreign missionaries, business people, and occupying military forces; Western Christian schools and institutions (such as the YMCA); Westernized military and public school systems operated by the Chinese; and returning Chinese who had studied abroad. Many sports events also took hold in schools, especially in institutions of higher education in the late 1800s and early 1900s.⁵

A further incitement, popular from the late Qing Dynasty (late 1800s) through to the New China of the late 1940s, was the national mandate of *saving China through sports* (体育救国, *ti yu jiu guo*). Many scholars noticed the efficacy of sports in strengthening physical health in the general Chinese population, a concern which was likely spurred by the derogatory phrase *the sick man of East Asia* (东亚病夫, *dong ya bing fu*) that had been used to describe – and subsequently shame – Chinese who performed poorly in international sports competitions in the early 1900s.⁶ Physical education training including sports and gymnastics became a requirement in military schools in the late 1800s and, eventually, in general public schools in the early 1900s.⁷

Since the establishment of the ‘new China’ – the People’s Republic of China in 1949 – sport in China has been comprehensively developed as a means to attain political superiority, social unity, and cultural renaissance. Soon after the China’s *Economic Reform and Open-Door Policy* (改

3 Guan, *History of Sports*; Morris, ‘To Make the Four Hundred Million Move’. Further references from these works are given later in the text.

4 Guan, *History of Sports*.

5 He and Hu, *History of Modern Chinese Sports*; Morris, ‘To Make the Four Hundred Million Move’. Further references from He and Hu’s work are given later in the text.

6 He and Hu, *History of Modern Chinese Sports*.

7 Ibid.

革开放) was carried out in the late 1970s, the Chinese men's volleyball team effected a turning point in Chinese sports history when they defeated their opponents for the qualification of the World Volleyball Championship on March 20, 1981. The phrase *Unite and revitalize China* (团结起来, 振兴中华, *tuan jie qi lai, zheng xing zhong hua*) consequently became a slogan to inspire Chinese to reclaim their rightful place of prominence among the nations of the world. Immediately following the success of the men's team, the Chinese women's volleyball team notched up the incredible achievement of five consecutive world championships, and sports then truly became the hope and symbol of China's renaissance. In awe-inspiring contrast to the 1932 Los Angeles Olympiad where the sole Chinese athlete in attendance was eliminated in the preliminary contests, China reached a milestone in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympiad by claiming 15 gold medals and ranking fourth in 140 nations. By then, the label of *the sick man of East Asia* was completely negated.

Undoubtedly, China has achieved international supremacy in competitive sport in achieving its number one ranking in gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. By following an arduous but successful path in sports, the Chinese nation has gained the confidence to fully revitalize the country to its former prestigious world status. Furthermore, sports have played a major role in enhancing the confidence and cohesiveness of Chinese people around the world as they strive unceasingly to rejuvenate Chinese culture and to become a strong, modern, independent, and united nation with a new identity.⁸

Under the government initiative of *Popularization and Enhancement* (of sports) (普及与提高), sports in China are currently promoted and practiced via three channels: competitive athletics, specifically with a view to training for the Olympics (enhancement of sport); school athletics, where sports are included in the curriculum to develop and improve health and fitness for children and youth (popularization of sport); and for health, fitness and recreation as practiced by the general population.⁹

When examining the history of sports in China, it would appear that the Chinese have transitioned from passively accepting western sports that are forced upon them by external culture to actively using these activities as a means to achieve cultural revitalization. By and large, modern sport in China is a product of westernization, and even traditional Chinese sports (e.g., dragon boat racing, kite flying, archery, and martial

8 Xu, 'Modernizing China in the Olympic Spotlight'. Further references from this work are given later in the text.

9 Guan, *History of Sports*; Luo, 'Political Influence on Physical Education and Sport'.

arts) which are based on traditional Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, have been fundamentally transformed under the influence of western ideology – as in the context of the Olympics, for example. Despite the similarities between Chinese and Western sports in terms of leisure or recreational activities, the cultural differences are prominent and deserve a close examination.

Cultural differences between Chinese and Western sports

During the late 1800s, when imported Western sports were first introduced to the country, many Chinese were puzzled by certain aspects of Western culture that permeated the activities. For example, a governor visited a school in China soon after sports were introduced in public education, and after watching the students play basketball for a time he said, “Why do they fight over one ball? Give them more balls.” In all China’s long history there had been no such notions as *physical* education or *sport*,¹⁰ and translating these terms was troublesome because there were no equivalents for these phrases in the Chinese language. Debates surrounding these terms in the context of Chinese-Western cultural interaction became quite heated in the early 1980s and, in fact, have not completely been settled at the present day.

Cultural differences between Chinese and Western societies are to be expected; however, it is crucial to understand that these differences are deeply fundamental and drill down to the way each culture views the relationship between humans and nature, and that between humans and society. Generally speaking, Chinese traditions focus on harmonious relationships, while Western traditions focus on individual performance and on winning. For example, in order to flaunt the prowess of the individual body, in the Olympics of ancient Greek times the athletes performed naked. Competition remains a core trait in Western culture as a way of valuing individualism; in China, however, human-universe oneness has always been stressed,¹¹ which is in diametric opposition to the concept of competition. It is inconceivable to imagine a Chinese or Eastern Indian person performing martial arts or yoga in the nude, simply because it is meaningless to these practitioners to show off individual

10 Lu, *Eastern and Western Approaches*. Further references from this work are given later in the text.

11 Lu, *Eastern and Western Approaches*; Lu and Yuan, ‘The Eastern-Western Cultural Influence’.

human power. Similarly, there is no need to demonstrate an individual's muscular strength against others, because an individual is a relational self and lives an interdependent life.¹² The dao of the golden mean (中庸之道, the ideal balancing point between the extremes of excess and deficiency which is an elemental Confucian precept) in ancient Chinese culture suggests that playing sports is simply for life enjoyment in harmony with nature and others. In contrast, Western sports challenge the self and others at all costs, a practice primarily influenced by the ideology of *the more, the better in life* – or the *higher, faster, stronger* motto so popular in Western sports.¹³ (See Table 1 for a summary of Chinese-West cultural differences. Please note that the chart is intended for the illustration of the binary nature between the two cultures. It is recognized that both cultures fall in between these two conceptual and perceptual perspectives).

Table 1 *Conceptual and perceptual perspectives in Chinese and Western traditional cultures.*

<i>Concept/Perception</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Western</i>
Humans and nature	Human is part of nature (oneness)	Human is separate from nature
Humans and society	Harmony (collectivism)	Individualism
Human and universe	Human is universe in miniature	Human is a minute occupant in universe
Body/mind	Inseparate unity	Separate entities
Method of understanding	Intuition	Reasoning
Aim of life	Health and longevity	Happiness and wealth
Worldview	Holism	Dualism (e.g., body-mind)
Health/fitness focus	Internal organ strength	External muscular strength and body shape
Nature of sports	Individual and non-standardized (for self)	Societal standardized (rules for all)
Purpose of sports	Self-enlightenment	Setting records, challenging self & others
Action	Everything has limits and “golden mean” is the best	The more, the better (e.g., Olympic motto)
Process/product	Emphasis on process	Focus on product (fitness goal, competition records)
Relationship with others	Harmony (interdependence)	Distinction (independence)
Living	“Be”ing	“Do”ing (productivity)

¹² Tu, ‘Implications of the Rise of “Confucian” East Asia’.

¹³ Lu, *East Meets West: A Cross-cultural Inquiry*. Further references from this work are given later in the text.

Reasons behind the cultural differences in sports

The fundamental differences between Chinese and Western cultures result from each culture's interpretation of the universe, nature, and humanity's place within these realms. Ontologically, ancient Chinese culture believes that the universe is an integral and inseparable whole;¹⁴ everything in the universe originates from and is unified within the wholeness, which is regarded as the human-nature (or human-universe) oneness. This human-nature oneness view indicates that 1) humans and nature are fundamentally the same, which means that humanity is the universe in miniature; and 2) humans and nature are essentially connected, which suggests that humans should follow nature and not go against it in order to survive and develop.¹⁵ This ideology also refers to the integral harmony between parts of the self (e.g., body-mind, left-right), between humans and the surrounding environment, between oneself and human society, and so on. Thus, any pursuit – whether it is ancient Chinese martial arts, calligraphy, cooking, etcetera – can be employed as a way to attain *human-universe oneness* (天人合一): the dao, harmony, and one's own heart and true self.¹⁶

As indicated in the table below, ancient Eastern Indian philosophy shares a comparable view. Virtually by definition, it would be meaningless for ancient Chinese or Eastern Indian people to compete athletically in order to demonstrate human power against nature, or one individual's muscular strength against that of another.

Table 2 *Similar descriptions of human energy and human activity in Chinese and Sanskrit.*

	<i>Life force or energy</i>	<i>Energy centre</i>	<i>Energy channel</i>	<i>Exemplary practice form</i>	<i>Polarities of energy</i>
Chinese	qi	dan tian	jing lou	qi gong	yang-yin
Sanskrit	prana	chakras	nadis	yoga	yo-ga

Confucianism, a philosophy primarily developed by Confucius approximately 2,500 years ago, has had a significant influence on the culture and

¹⁴ Zhu, *A fundamental Guide to Yi Study*.

¹⁵ Xu, Zhang and Zhou, *Introduction to the Discipline of Wushu* Further references from this work are given later in the text.

¹⁶ Jiang, ed., *The Theoretical Foundations of Wushu*; Lu, *Eastern and Western Approaches*, 71 – 85.

history of many Asian regions (e.g., China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam).¹⁷ In terms of value orientation, it has also been a central tenet in ancient Chinese sports (particularly marital arts). Confucius himself, although he was adept at archery, carriage-driving, and weight-lifting, in fact discouraged competitions.¹⁸ However, when a competition had to occur, he suggested that it be normalized by *li* (禮, a conceptual system of courtesy, etiquette, and norms) along with the principle of *ren* (仁, *benevolence* or *humanity* – principles that underpin the handling of human relationships).¹⁹ Playing sports according to Confucianism is therefore a way of cultivating one's mind and moral character.

Value systems in Western sporting culture are set as a series of binary opposites – being a *winner* or a *loser* and experiencing the attendant happiness or sadness that results – and so give rise to disharmony. In the ancient Olympics, only one winner was honoured for each event while the other competitors were considered losers; in contrast, Chinese sports were a way to pursue *dao* in the form of *li*. When encountering unavoidable combat where an opponent must be overpowered, the Chinese martial artist must not focus on defeating the opponent and becoming the *winner*, but rather show sincere courtesy and help the opponent get back on his or her feet. Such a scenario precisely demonstrates the virtues of *ren*, *li*, and *he* (和: harmony) that a true martial artist possesses. This interdependent relationship teaches that *hurting others is hurting yourself*, because you and your opponent are not separate entities. Obviously, it is the *process* of finding *dao* via sports that is meaningful, not the *product* – the result of competition with an acknowledged champion.²⁰

In Confucianism, personal value and identity should not be pursued via competition (comparing individual differences), but via collectiveness or interdependence in *he* (harmony), which is the root of creation and the prime element for the development of everything in nature and human society.²¹ Confucius prescribed the following sequence of steps on the path to self-development: cultivate *yourself*; put your own *family* in order; govern the *nation* well; and bring peace to the *world*. Playing sports, to Confucius, is just another method of cultivating one's mind

17 Tu, 'Implications of the Rise of "Confucian" East Asia'.

18 Bi, Gu, Kuang, Liu, Lin and Xiong, *History of Ancient Chinese Sports*.

19 Tu, 'Implications of the Rise of "Confucian" East Asia'.

20 Herrigel, *Zen: In the Art of Archery*; Kleinman, ed., *Mind and Body: East Meets West*; Lu, *East Meets West: A Cross-cultural Inquiry*.

21 Guan, *History of Sports*.

and moral character – which is precisely why the Olympic competitions and other Western sports could never have thrived in ancient Chinese culture, and why Confucius' thoughts on sport would have been anathema to the Olympic athletes of ancient Greece.²²

The westernization of traditional Chinese sports

Since the intrusion of Western influences on China in the late 1800s, there has been a gradual westernization of traditional Chinese sports such as wushu (i.e., Chinese martial arts), Chinese wrestling, dragon-boat racing, kite-flying, and so forth. It has emerged that wushu, out of all other Chinese sports, has great potential as an official Olympic event (by necessity, in a completely westernized form), and this possibility has been vigorously endorsed by the International Wushu Federation (IWUF).²³ The IWUF, currently consisting of roughly 120 nation members, was officially recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2002, and is fully committed to complying with Olympic ideals and all IOC directives. Consequently, there was a wushu competition in the 2008 Beijing Olympics but medals awarded for wushu were not included in the overall Games medal tally.²⁴

There have been two conflicting camps with regard to the issue of whether wushu, an ancient Chinese martial art, should be brought to the Olympics. Those in favour believe that bringing wushu to the Olympics is an opportunity to enhance confidence and pride in Chinese culture within the country, and to raise China's profile and disseminate Chinese culture worldwide; further, it could do for wushu what the Japanese did for judo in the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad and what South Korea did for taekwondo in the 1988 Seoul Olympiad in terms of popularizing it across the globe. Finally, it would be an opportunity to employ the currently developed national and international wushu competitive systems in a major competition.²⁵

On the opposing side, arguments revolve around the viability of including an ancient Chinese sport in an athletic contest that is based upon

22 Shen, 'Eastern and Western sport Culture'; Lu, 'Eastern Martial Arts and Violence Prevention'. Further references from this second work are given later in the text.

23 International Wushu Federation, *Members Info*.

24 Confederation of Canadian Wushu Organizations, *Wushu and the Olympic Movement*.

25 Zhang, *History of Chinese Wushu*. Further references from this work are given later in the text.

an exclusively Western competitive value system. Traditional practitioners maintain that there are essential differences between Chinese culture and Western culture that cannot and should not be compromised. The purposes of learning wushu are to pursue self-enlightenment (to approach the dao) and self-cultivation (to achieve *ren*), and to contribute to one's own moral development and personal health; the intention is not to put on a show for an audience, score points with referees, or impress others.²⁶ Consequently, many wushu masters in Buddhist or Daoist temples, or even citizens in secular society, would not consider competing for an Olympic championship in wushu because the very concept of becoming a champion in that sense negates the purpose of the activity. Another factor impacting the viability of wushu as an Olympic event is that traditional wushu can be dangerous in competition, easily causing severe injuries or even death. Olympic regulations have provisions to protect the athletes' safety, such as not permitting elbow or knee contact and stipulating the use of protective equipment such as gloves. These rules considerably restrain technique execution and fundamentally change or distort traditional wushu. Further, with the intense media coverage at these events, wushu will be disseminated broadly yet the camera lenses may not transmit the true essence of wushu – a compromise dedicated wushu practitioners may find unacceptable. History gives credence to this concern: in earlier Olympiads, Japanese judo and Korean taekwondo were accepted by the Olympics contingent upon changing themselves significantly, which effectively meant abandoning their philosophical essences of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.²⁷

In the flavour of true Western competition, those advocating including wushu in the Olympics have overpowered their opponents: the propulsion of wushu out of mainstream Chinese sport and into the Olympics forms yet another chain link in the seemingly continuous westernization of Chinese traditional sports. As noted earlier, since the mid-1800s China has felt that westernization is the only way to preserve its eminence internationally, and the most effective way to address how many Chinese feel inferior and inadequate in their traditional culture. Numerous Chinese have arduously tried to help the nation gain back self-confidence, self-respect, dignity, prestige, and make constant efforts for strong unity. When Western sports such as track and field, gymnastics, ball games (e.g., basketball, volleyball, soccer) became dominant

26 Back and Kim, 'Towards A Western Philosophy'.

27 Back and Kim, 'The Future Course', Lu, *East Meets West: A Cross-cultural Inquiry*.

in China, particularly in school systems, the project of westernization or reform of wushu was also initiated,²⁸ including 1) changing master-disciple family apprenticeship style (e.g., individualized teaching, oral instruction) to public education format (e.g., group teaching, reading materials); 2) modifying the practice of wushu using Western gymnastic format; 3) establishing corresponding instructor education system; 4) studying wushu with Western theories (e.g., anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, education theories) and Western sports (e.g., track and field, gymnastics, ball games); and 5) developing wushu competitive system (e.g., rules, ranks of referee and athlete).²⁹

Since the early 1900s, traditional wushu in China has been practiced by the general public, and mandated in school education in an effort to enhance health, fitness, self-cultivation, and cultural inheritance. In response to the pressure of westernization, wushu has gradually been modified into two distinct forms: 1) *fitness wushu* (健身武术) for health, rehabilitation, medical treatment, cultivation, and recreation; and 2) *athletic wushu* (竞技武术) which includes both formularized wushu *taolu* (套路, a set of choreographed movements) and *combat* (格斗) including shanda (散打) – a freestyle grappling consisting of a combination of traditional wushu and boxing and taiji tushou (太极推手, taijiquan pushing hand in pairs).³⁰ As it has been developed in line with Western sports such as gymnastics,³¹ this athletic wushu form has become the main vehicle by which Chinese wushu culture is promoted to the world via the world wushu championships and the Olympics.

The westernization of wushu has been reasonably successful in terms of achieving the proponent camps' goals of disseminating the sport outside China and consequently contributing to positive morale within the country; however, the anticipated side effects are also evident.³² Seeking champions and winning medals has become the primary goal of learning and practicing athletic wushu, meaning this westernized form has become an aesthetic performance-oriented art, pursuing Olympic ideals such as *higher, faster, and stronger*. It has completely moved away from its traditional roots in self-defense, self-cultivation and fitness, and has reinforced the misunderstanding of traditional wushu.³³ As a result,

28 Theeboom and De Knop, 'An Analysis of the Development of Wushu'.

29 Zhang, *History of Chinese Wushu*.

30 Xu, Zhang and Zhou, *Introduction to the Discipline of Wushu*.

31 Zhang, *History of Chinese Wushu*.

32 Lu, 'Eastern Martial Arts and Violence Prevention'.

33 Lu, 'Eastern Martial Arts and Violence Prevention'; Zhang, *History of Chinese Wushu*.

many of today's martial artists are similar to gymnasts, searching for an aesthetic in public exhibition and hunting for medals. Ironically, many athletic wushu performers nowadays cannot use wushu, one of the most powerful martial arts, as self-defense in real combat situations because they are focusing on gymnastic showmanship rather than the combative nature of martial arts. In another westernized wushu form, *sanshou*, athletes focus only on the techniques of traditional wushu and care nothing about the concepts of self-cultivation and personal health addressed in traditional wushu.

Thus, as a product of East-West conflict, negotiation, and compromise, westernized wushu both benefits and damages traditional Chinese culture.³⁴ As with many other traditional Chinese cultural practices, wushu might have been introduced to the world with its true essence intact if China, as a result of prior colonialization, had not been westernized to some extent already. It may be beneficial to bring wushu in Western mainstream sports venues, especially the Olympics, as an important way to promote Chinese culture; yet, what is important is to do so while advocating the key tenets of wushu such as human-universe oneness, harmony, cultivation, and health.

The future of sports in China

Two centuries ago, Napoleon described China as a *sleeping dragon* and cautioned that when it awoke, the world would shake. Evidently this giant Eastern dragon has awoken, and its recent development has had tremendous impact on numerous aspects of the global economy.³⁵ In turn, a massive socio-economic-cultural transformation has taken place within modern China.

China is now one of the strongest economic, political, and cultural nations in the world. In this post 2008 Beijing Olympic era, athletic sports in China will not receive the same focus and emphasis as they had prior to the Olympics simply because the desired milestone of enhancing Chinese self-confidence and revitalizing its reputation in international competition has now been achieved. Therefore, once the celebration of China's renaissance during the 2008 Beijing Olympics has abated, the Chinese government will veer away from the formerly successful state-

³⁴ Lu, 'Eastern Martial Arts and Violence Prevention'.

³⁵ Forbes, *China's Economic Outlook*.

run *Olympic Glory-Winning Plan* (奥运争光计划, an elite training model created mainly for the Olympiad),³⁶ and will be less likely to fund athletic sports as aggressively as before. Despite reduced initiatives from the government, China will still continue to support athletic sports through societal sports organizations. Based on the analysis of historical and cultural aspects of sports in China noted above, it might reasonably be predicted that China as a nation will not again bid to host the summer Olympics, as it did with Beijing, since the Beijing Olympics has fulfilled its historic mission of cultural renaissance. Nonetheless, individual cities may wish to host a future Olympiad; Shanghai in particular might submit a bid, as the central government of China is strategically positioning the city to be one of the future economic centres of the world.³⁷ However, as was the case with Japan and South Korea following their turns as Olympic hosts, China as a people will likely be less engaged and interested in the Olympics in general. Another change is that, going forward, China plans to make aggressive efforts to commercialize sports: in fact, sports such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, and weiqi (围棋, Chinese Go Game) have already been largely retooled into club models similar to those used in Western developed countries.³⁸ Yet, as a result of issues such as East-West cultural conflict, rapid economic growth, and political reform, there are challenges which may impede the commercialization of sports in China, and which merit further research.

A long-term strategic plan for sports within China has been developed: the *Fitness for All National Plan* (全民健身计划, a fitness promotion plan for the general public) which has been in practice by the General Administration of Sport of China since 1995.³⁹ In the years following the plan's implementation, mainstream sports have become quite popular. This trend in sports development is part of a long-term government initiative to help build a harmonious society by encouraging people to spend their extra time and money on healthy and recreational pursuits, and it is timely for a number of reasons. First, economic growth ensures ordinary people have reliable incomes and, accordingly, adequate leisure time; increased leisure time, in its turn, provides greater opportunities for recreation and sports. Second, awareness of personal health has been

36 General Administration of Sport of China, *2001 – 2010 Olympic Glory-winning Plan*. Further references to this source are given later in the text.

37 Zhen, *Shanghai Establishes Four Centers*.

38 Huang, 'An Analysis of Sports Business'.

39 General Administration of Sport of China, *2001 – 2010 Olympic Glory-winning Plan*; Xu, 'Modernizing China in the Olympic Spotlight'.

enhanced, creating an environment conducive to pursuing sports. Another trend is that retired people and senior citizens are currently among the most active groups partaking in traditional Chinese sports such as martial arts, qigong, kite-flying, and mountain-climbing. Finally, more profit-making sports clubs are in the making which will serve the rising middle class, and various models of community sports will develop as a result. Unfortunately, acquiring physical resources such as space, facilities, equipment, instructors, and instructional materials will remain a major challenge to this nation, which comprises the largest population in the world; furthermore, unbalanced economic development may result in reduced participation and resources distribution in sports in more underdeveloped areas (e.g., rural areas) where sports are still considered a luxury.⁴⁰

Schools are the prime venue for implementing the *Fitness for All National Plan*, and a series of strategic initiatives have been proposed to put the plan into practice.⁴¹ The most recent proposal introduced by the Ministry of Education of China,⁴² is the *Sunny National Sports for Children and Youth* (全国亿万学生阳光体育运动) program, aimed at promoting sports via school physical activity programs. Both in policy and in the way it is administered, the use of sports should be regarded as a method (rather than the goal itself) of meeting school physical and health education objectives. Rather than teaching or coaching the sports themselves, educators are advised to encourage students to become health oriented, and to develop their own involvement and enjoyment of sports; further, instructors are placing emphasis on the benefits of fostering lifelong active participation in sports and exercise. As the sports are imported curricular content, one challenge the program may face in implementing these initiatives will be how to domesticate the sports to fit into the Chinese educational system – for example, by using cultural negotiation between apposite concepts such as harmony and competition, and collectivism versus individualism, to ensure students can benefit from Western activities while maintaining their Chinese cultural values. Additionally, in response to the changes of national athletic sports strategic plan in the post 2008 Beijing Olympics era, the *Sunny National Sport for Children and Youth* program should take precedence over athletic sports – espe-

40 Liu, *Response to Press*; Xiong, 'The Evolution of Urban Society'.

41 Xie, Lu and Yao, 'Fitness for All National Plan'.

42 Ministry of Education of China, *Sunny National Sports*.

cially with regard to public school systems in China that have limited resources.⁴³

Concluding remarks

Ultimately both Eastern and Western sports have their place in human culture: Chinese and Ancient Greek legacies represent the two oldest East-West civilizations, and the passing of the 2008 Olympic torch from Greece's Olympia to the city of Beijing precisely marks a shift from Western global dominance to a more balanced model where both Western and non-Western cultures have international influence. This symbolic transfer of power is underscored by China's increasing economic and political strength on a global level.

Traditional Chinese wisdoms such as human-nature oneness, harmony, interdependence, and balance are crucial to sustain human existence and, in this increasingly globalized world, both East and West have integrated, negotiated, compromised, and even embraced one other's values to a great extent. Just as there is yin in yang, and yang in yin,⁴⁴ East-West cultural differences can and should complement each other through inter-civilizational dialogue to build a more harmonious world with a shared horizon.⁴⁵

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43 Hao, Chen and Wang, 'A Study on the Combination of School Physical Education'; Liang, Walls and Lu, 'Standards and Practice for Physical Education in China'.

44 Lu, 'An Understanding of Body-mind Relation'.

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