Difficulties and Countermeasures of Sports Culture Communication in China Under the Background of Sports Globalization

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Abstract. Through literature study, this paper discusses the difficulties and countermeasures of sports culture communication in China under the background of sports globalization. It is believed that the rapid expansion of capital and technology modernization has accelerated the spread and exchange of sports culture which shows the complementarity of identity and diversity. The communication of China’s sports culture is restricted by identity and is strongly influenced by western transnational capital, with an obvious feature of westernization. The intellectual property (IP) rights in sports have not yet formed an effective circular operation, and the defects of the system are still huge constraints on the spread of sports culture in China. The way to enhance the vitality of China’s sports culture lies in diversity. Under the condition that the “de-administration” of sports management has not been completed, it can help us spread sports culture more confidently by taking sports enterprises as the leader and focusing on the capital operation and creative production of sports IP at home and abroad.

1. Introduction

With the development of global economic integration, countries will gradually become identical in the type of sports culture because of the economic driving force. Relatively, however, due to the differences in regional economic environment, beliefs and national main culture, the direction of sports culture communication is also different around the world. Under the background of sports globalization, how to understand the identity and diversity of sports culture directly determines the strategy of sports culture communication in China. Therefore, it is conducive to promoting the exchange and development of sports culture through finding out the difficulties of sports culture communication and putting forward corresponding countermeasures.

2. The Complementarity of Identity and Diversity in Sports Culture

2.1 The Identity of Sports Culture

Sports globalization is characterized by time-space compression. Fans from all over the world can enjoy NBA or the World Cup live broadcast at home, which are the proof of the identity of sports culture. Before the globalization of sports, sports culture was mostly the feature of specific regions. The rise of sports globalization has broken the conventional thinking of restricting sports to cultural accumulation in a certain region. It also breaks the inseparable relationship between sports culture and local customs and values. Football is no longer exclusive to the British, and baseball is not just a national sport in the United States. Even sports such as martial arts and judo, which have a strong oriental flavor, have become one of the popular cultures in western countries.

From the perspective of political economics, sports globalization is first and foremost the spatial agglomeration of sports capital. The capitalist global system is not only the integration of technology, capital and management, but also the integration of a series of game rules, cultural symbols and behavioral values for market operation. Sports culture has become one of new forms of interest in global capitalism. Therefore, it is proposed that sports globalization is the output of a single sports culture [1], which implies the identity of multiple human sports cultures.

Identity also means inequality. From the point of view of cultural hegemony, sports culture is the result of the reproduction of global capitalism. The development of sports globalization not only
promotes the scale growth of sports industry all over the world, but also leads to the increasingly unequal communication of sports culture, eroding the autonomy of weak countries, such as the troubles of players in the development of professional football leagues in South America and the problems of foreign aid in CBA. This unbalanced cultural communication relationship has strengthened the dominant countries that are huge, rich in information production and have global capital influence. For example, the four major professional sports leagues in the United States have a profound impact on the cultural layout of each event. Besides, as for European football, it has gathered almost all the world’s best athletes, coaches and other football culture elements. Therefore, under the background of sports globalization, sports culture communication first results in the identity, which is a dominant mode headed by powerful countries.

2.2 The Diversity of Sports Culture

With the acceleration of globalization, people from all over the world have more opportunities to access different sports cultures. The culture recognized by people is no longer the sports culture of a single country or region, but a more comprehensive global process and transnational relationship, so sports culture will not be homogeneous [2].

Shi Youkuan proposed that sports culture was a certain group’s lifestyle about sports [3], which had group and regional characteristics. The differences in regions and cultural traditions prompt people to have a life-oriented participation in sports and form a counteraction to the identity of global sports culture. Such counteraction has further enriched the sports culture and also maintained its differences, which helps slow down the spread of hegemonic and identical sports culture. For instance, in terms of football, people from different countries and regions show different football cultures, either because of their persistence in religious traditions or their preference for local customs. These differences are manifested in the organization, rules and the game or spectators, which is a counteraction to the identical sports culture.

From this perspective, in the context of globalization, sports culture communication is not a single process, but is restricted by a series of overlapping, mutually determined and complex factors in aspects of economy, politics, science and culture. In the view of scholars who are in favor of the diversity, it should be rejected that sports culture is a pure and intrinsically consistent form. All sports cultures have absorbed different cultures in the process of communication, which gradually become part of the unique sports culture in the group, the region and the society, such as martial arts learning from gymnastics and football learning from rugby. Moreover, the rise and development of sports, such as korfball, SlamBall, beach volleyball and beach soccer, are also manifestations of the diversity of sports culture.

2.3 The Complementarity of Identity and Diversity

It should be clear that the globalization of sports is not a fixed state. Before the Second World War, sports were more spread along with the colonial expansion of Europe and the capital export of the United States, changing from a natural spread to an active expansion, but its direction was single and linear. After the Second World War, the world was no longer absolutely dominated by Europe and the United States. The third world countries began to have more rights, and the interaction of sports gradually increased. The identity does not negate or eliminate the interactive communication of sports culture. The single linear sports culture communication has long been unable to meet the needs of all parties. The unchangeable identity of sports culture can only bring about cultural hegemony, while different sports cultural achievements can be achieved through communication and mutual recognition. When sports globalization really breaks away from national boundaries, it will inevitably be a diverse, complementary and jointly developed global sports culture.

3. Difficulties in Sports Culture Communication in China

The globalization of sports brings about the complementarity of the identity and diversity of sports culture, but in reality, there are still many challenges. The difficulties of China’s sports culture communication are essentially due to the identity of global sports culture.
The 13th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development issued by General Administration of Sport in 2015 pointed out that it was necessary for China to expand the cooperation with international sports organizations, participate in sports affairs, and strengthen its voice. In 2016, it also proposed to actively support overseas mergers and acquisitions of the sports industry, attract international sports organizations and enterprises or schools to China, conduct a number of international and regional matches and cultivate professional sports stars with international influence. Although the country has realized the strategic value of sports culture communication, there is no doubt that this interaction still has disadvantages.

3.1 The External Reason: Strong Influence from Western Transnational Capital

Based on the link between technology and economy, transnational communication groups and sports organizations form a community of interests. However, the global sports market is not neutral, with western values hiding behind it, such as individualism, consumerism, hedonism and commercialism [4]. With the assistance of their home countries, multinational companies, such as Nike and Adidas, import not only capital and sports equipment to other countries, but also the management systems and consumerism. That is to say, promoting the spread of sports culture no longer depends mainly on the power of the state, but on the transnational system of sports globalization, the westernized and unified ideology, and the standardized sports products and consumption habits.

The reason lies in the inequality in the economic status between strong and weak countries. Sports globalization influences on local sports culture and lifestyles and makes the western sports culture impact other countries through transnational capital flows, leading to them moving closer to that culture of western developed countries, thus producing the identity. Whether it is for reasons of market expansion, resource acquisition, cost reduction, or sales promotion, western capital really determines the sports culture of specific regions and groups. It is a proof that China has transformed from a major manufacturing country to a consumption country of sporting goods. Due to the unequal economic status, the sports culture communication in the world is naturally westernized, modernized and Americanized.

3.2 The Internal Reason: Institutional Defects and Lack of Strong Sports IP

The reason why sports can become a global commodity is essentially because of its huge positive externality, which means that the development of sports can drive consumption and economic vitality in the fields such as tourism, catering, entertainment, etc., but any profit-making activities are carried out based on sports IP, whether it is a sports event, a sports club or a sports star. In the world sports system of capital operation, sports culture is transformed into images and information by the media, rooted in people’s mind, creating and strengthening their connection with audiences, thus maximizing the positive externalities of sports.

For example, before the maturity of media, the IP development of athletes is slow, and their popularity only depends on the performance on the field. However, with the advent of technology such as satellite and digital TV and the Internet, the sports tastes of fans have begun to be identical. Sports stars have become well-known celebrities, and fans’ recognition of them has changed. In addition to the level of competition, sports stars also need advertising packaging for appearance and personality. The high degree of commercialization of sports culture is the competition between the global audience and the market, as well as the competition between media broadcasting and product sales.

The value advocated by capitalism and consumerism has made a huge change in sports, which actually displays the production logic of a cultural hegemony, but it is also the only development path that developing countries can largely take. For a long time, China develops sports mostly by adopting the gold-medal strategy, and the policy is more based on the achievements in the world competitions. An extremely strict sports administrative management system has been formed whether in the system construction of sports events, the operation of stadiums or the images of athletes. Faced with the impact of global sports, this slightly rigid sports management has become a constraint on the deep exploration of sports IP and the spread of Chinese sports culture. It means
that, under the condition that the “de-administration” road has not been clarified, China’s sports IP has not yet formed a good and effective circular operation mode. The defects of the system are still the great difficulties of the sports culture communication in our country.

4. Countermeasures of China’s Sports Culture Communication

In terms of the identity of sports culture under the background of sports globalization, Hall, a scholar, once mentioned two kinds of development trends. Firstly, the globalization of sports will provoke the defensive and resistant response of those to be globalized, so that individuals, communities or countries will pursue nationalism and build up protection to avoid the collapse of their own sports culture. Secondly, the sports globalization is developing towards an open post-modern trend, which embraces and coexists with sports cultural differences. These two trends represent two different views of sports culture. The former, rooted in local sports culture, puts stress on the traditional territory of the country, region or community, the internality of sports culture, and the purity and orthodoxy of ethnic identity. The latter is the cultural identity that transcends locality. It focuses on the vitality of sports culture and values subcultures such as extreme sports. In short, the first is a backlash against the identity caused by the spread of sports culture, but this tendency inevitably highlights the conflicts between countries or nations and the world. The second is to build up the third space based on sports culture exchange and interaction, emphasizing the output and input of the global sports culture with decentralization and difference diffusion [5].

Under the pressure of sports globalization, the country or local governments will still develop different sports culture communication strategies and unique sports forms. Optimistically, the development of communication technology and the maturity of market mechanism may, on the contrary, bring a glimmer of hope for local or national sports culture to go global. For example, it has a strong relationship with American Hollywood movies that Chinese martial arts are recognized by the world. Despite the expansion of Western capital, the needs of the market and the region will be considered to make local or national sports culture moves towards the world in the process of sports globalization.

For instance, multinational sports leagues or sports companies will adopt a “two-hand” strategy to shape international brands and sports stars, and at the same time, take into consideration cultural differences of different places by using athletes or sports stars from this region or country as one of the marketing tools. According to the official data released by the NBA, there are a total of 101 international players from 37 countries playing in the league in the 2014 and 2015 seasons [6]. These players are marketing tools and they become the most powerful conditions for sports culture communication and market profitability.

Robertson holds that sports globalization and sports localization are dialectical. The globalization of sports is not only a process of the identity of strong sports culture in Europe and America, but also includes the spread or struggle of local sports culture. In reality, it is difficult for a single value to support the whole system in the development of sports globalization, which is also the reason why sports globalization inevitably has multiple connotations [7]. In other words, the formation of sports globalization also causes anti-globalization. Sports culture communication, under the background of sports globalization, is a long-term, unbalanced and complex dynamic process, in which various sports organizations, sponsors, athletes and spectators have not only been involved, but also have frequently resisted the globalization and even created new sports culture.

Realizing this point, our country could carry out sports culture communication and global sports exchange with a more positive attitude, and constantly adjust itself in a “dialogue position”. Our interlocutors for global sports include grass-roots sports educators, folk sports culture inheritors, local sports enterprises and sports stars, as well as national sports and cultural management departments. In terms of the two development trends proposed by Hall, the latter is favored—neither excluding the hegemonic sports culture accompanied by transnational sports, nor ignoring the local sports culture and its communication demands.

Under the condition of economic intercommunication between China and the world, high-quality sports IP will play an extremely important role. As the de-administration of sports management
system has not yet been achieved in China, local sports enterprises undoubtedly have a long way to go. There are many examples such as buying a stake of Spain’s Atletico de Madrid from Wanda and the strategic cooperation reached by Ali Sports and the American NCAA Basketball PAC-12 League. Besides, Tencent has spent 500 million dollars to grab exclusive rights to the NBA webcast. LeTV Sports has incorporated many copyrights after the first round of financing of 800 million yuan. From the actual impact of these cases, the capital operation and creative production of sports IP at home and abroad will effectively enhance the vitality of sports culture communication in China and strengthen the cultural interaction between China and the countries all over the world.

5. Conclusion

Under the background of sports globalization, the dominant sports culture mode led by developed countries has resulted in the identity. However, through communication and mutual recognition, different sports cultural achievements can be obtained. When sports globalization really breaks away from national boundaries, it will be a diverse, complementary and jointly developed global sports culture.

In the context of sports globalization, the difficulties of sports culture communication in China come from two aspects. Externally, due to the unequal economic status of the country and the strong influence from western transnational capital, sports culture communication has an obvious feature of westernization. Internally, China’s sports IP has not yet formed a good and effective circular operation mode, and the defects of the system are still a huge constraint on the spread of sports culture in China. With the economic intercommunication between China and the world, high-quality sports IP will play an extremely important role. When our country still has not completed the de-administration of sports management system, there is no doubt that local sports enterprises have a long way to go. Taking sports enterprises as the leader and focusing on the capital operation and creative production of domestic and foreign sports IP will help China to actively participate in global sports exchanges and to spread sports culture in a “dialogue position”.

References


