



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document, This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Sport, Ethics and Philosophy on 5th August 2020, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17511321.2020.1801821>. and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

**Zhang, Xiaolin, Zhou, Aiguang and Ryall, Emily S ORCID
logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6050-4353> (2021)
Philosophy of sports in China: an overview of its history and
academic research. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 15 (4). pp.
556-571. doi:10.1080/17511321.2020.1801821**

Official URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2020.1801821>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2020.1801821>
EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/8643>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

Philosophy of Sports in China: An Overview of Its History and Academic Research

Xiaolin Zhang^a, Aiguang Zhou^b and Emily Ryall^c

^aChengdu Sport University, Chengdu, P. R. China;

^bSchool of Physical Education and Sports Science, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, P. R. China;

^cDepartment of Sport and Exercise, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, UK

Contact Aiguang Zhou tyxy11@qq.com School of Physical Education and Sports Science, South China Normal University, Room 1802, No. 3 East 3rd Street, Guangzhou, P. R. China

Abstract

The philosophy of sports is a relatively young discipline in China which we argue, can be divided into four stages of development over the past four decades. This paper attempts to map the history of this development and provide an indication of how Chinese sport philosophy has contributed to the global development of research in this area. Stage one (1980–1985) focused primarily on ontological issues such as the nature of sport philosophy and the definition of ‘体育’ (Chinese pinyin ‘tiyu’, a term referring to sports, physical education and other physical activities). Stage two (1986–1996) saw an expansion of research and publications in sport philosophy that encompassed a variety of topic areas, including ethics and aesthetics. Scholars also began to introduce foreign works into their own research as well as turning to the traditional Chinese bodies of thought such as, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, to explore philosophical issues in sport. The third stage was a period of relative stagnation (1997–2003) until Chinese sport philosophy expanded steadily, arguably thanks to the awarding of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Over the past 15 years (the fourth stage), Chinese sport philosophy has made further contributions in ontological, ethical and aesthetic study of sports, which is shown in the increasing number of new doctoral dissertations, books and journal papers published. However, it still faces challenges. In recent years, there have been fewer conferences or symposiums on sport philosophy which has led to a decline in academic exchanges, resulting in a divided focus of resources rather than progression within a common community of academic interests. For this to be rectified, there needs to be greater opportunities for academic exchange and dialogue as well as the creation of professional associations and journals for Chinese sport philosophy.

Keywords

China; Philosophy of sport; History

1. Origin and History of Philosophy of Sports in China

The study of the philosophy of sports in China commenced in the early 1980s. Scholars have generally divided the development of Chinese sport philosophy into three stages but have subtle differences. Wang, Wang, and Zhang (2000) hold that a series of academic conferences during 1980–1985 marked the beginning of Chinese sport philosophy; while the publication of several influential books during 1986–1992 consolidated Chinese sport philosophy as an area of fruitful academic research, with the 1990s (1993–1999) being viewed as a deeper stage of development, as philosophic inquiries at that time shifted from theories to practical issues in sports. Likewise, Zhou (2008b) and Yu (2012) have the same division regarding the initiation stage of Chinese sport philosophy. However, their alternative delineation to the later development is that the mid 1980s–mid to late 1990s can be seen as a rapid development stage due to a large number of published works and academic exchanges, whilst the mid to late 1990s to late 2000s/early 2010s is considered the slow development stage due to a lack of academic opportunities for ideas exchange and discussion after 1995 (Zhou, 2008b; Yu 2012). Whilst it is impossible to concisely delineate stages of development, it is clear that there have been loosely identifiable periods of expansion and stagnation of Chinese sport philosophy which has been relatively unremarked upon in the broader, global sport philosophy literature.

This paper aims to more accurately outline and evaluate the development of sport philosophy in China. Unlike the previous studies, this paper is based on a close review of the works published over the last 40 years, including journal and conference articles, books, doctoral dissertations and masters' theses. The data come from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), an important database that contains the academic publications of Chinese scholars. It is currently the world's largest Chinese database, including sub-databases like Chinese journal papers, Chinese doctoral dissertations, Chinese master's dissertations, Important Chinese newspapers and Important Chinese conference papers. CNKI contains a wide range of documents over a long span of time, which can fully reflect the overview and latest developments of various disciplines. The data in this paper were collected by searching the keywords '体育哲学' (philosophy of sports), '体育概念' (sports concept), '体育美学' (sport aesthetics), '体育伦理' (sport ethics), and '身体哲学' (the philosophy of body), respectively, in the sub-database Chinese Journal Papers. The results were manually checked since there are irrelevant (e.g. the retrieval results of '身体哲学' include studies on medicine, music, arts and etc.) and repeated literature (some literature are included in different retrieval results). After deleting 302 irrelevant and 16 redundant journal and conference articles, a total of 1070 papers ranging from 1980 to 2019 were collected. Meanwhile, 16 doctoral dissertations and 119 master theses were found in the sub-databases of Chinese doctoral dissertations and Chinese master's dissertations through the same searching method (Table 1). The book data come from the book catalog of the National Library of China, the largest library in China. By searching the same key words and manual check, a total of 90 relevant books published in mainland China were obtained, including 33 on sport philosophy, 25 on sport ethics, 31 on sport aesthetics and 1 book on body philosophy.

Table 1 Retrieval results from CNKI.

| | Journal and conference articles | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Key words | Retrieval results | Irrelevant results | Valid results | Doctoral Dissertations | Master Theses |
| ‘体育哲学’ (philosophy of sports) | 258 | 11 | 247 | 6 | 14 |
| ‘体育美学’ (sport aesthetics) | 482 | 83 | 399 | 3 | 62 |
| ‘体育伦理’ (sport ethics) | 153 | 3 | 150 | 7 | 42 |
| ‘体育概念’ (sports concept) | 298 | 54 | 244 | | |
| ‘身体哲学’ (the philosophy of body) | 198 | 152 | 46 | | 2 |
| Total | 1391 | 302 | 1086 (-16) | 16 | 120 |

Figure 1 shows the development timeline of the philosophy of sports in China. We argue that contrary to the claims made by previous studies, Chinese sport philosophy has enjoyed a rapid development in China since the beginning of the 21st century, for the number of the books, journal papers, doctoral dissertations and masters’ theses have multiplied, alongside a dedicated doctoral program committed to the study of sport philosophy at South China Normal University launched in 2003. Based on the previous studies and original statistical analysis, we suggest that it’s more appropriate to revise the existing development stage division of Chinese sport philosophy into four stages. Namely, the Initiating Stage (1980–1985), the Developing Stage (1986–1996), the Stagnating Stage (1997–2003), the Expanding Stage (2004 to present).

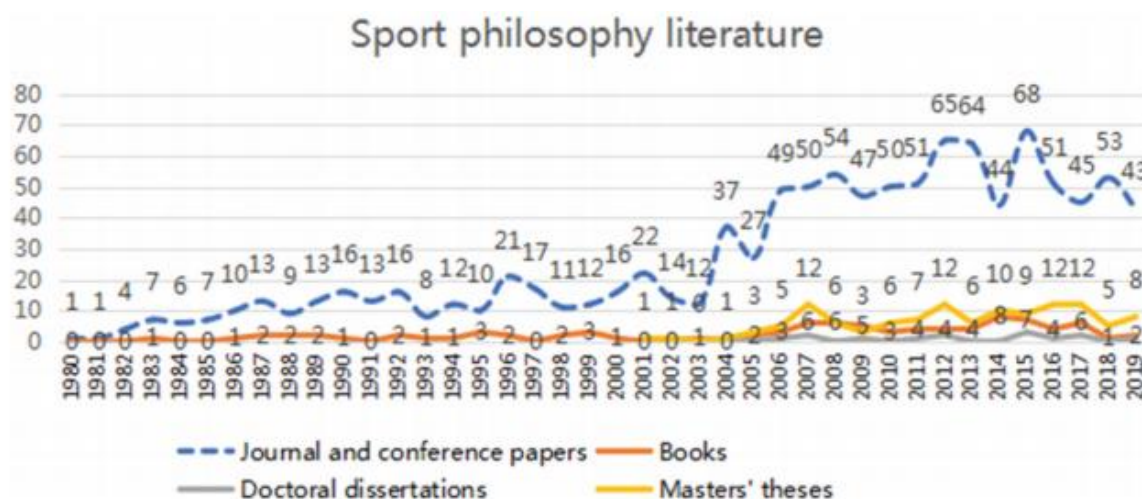


Figure 1 Statistics of sport philosophy literature published between 1980-2019.

1.1 The Initiating Stage (1980-1985)

In June 1981, the first ‘National Conference on Dialectics Studies on Sports’ was held at Shenyang Sport University, which marked the beginning of philosophic inquiry of sports in China. Scholars at the conference acknowledged the importance and significance of philosophic study in sports

science, and this was echoed by other parts of the sports academia in China. In the same year, Cong Lianfan translated the book *Philosophy of Sports* by Japanese scholar Abe Shinobi and got it published the following April. In August 1982, Xi'an Physical Education University hosted the second 'National Conference on Dialectics Studies on Sports', where scholars had a comprehensive discussion on the creation of a Chinese philosophy of sports, including its theories, research subjects, research scope, research purposes and methodologies. Here it was agreed to rename 'sports dialectics' as 'philosophy of sports'.

In 1983, an official body, the Research Department of Beijing Municipal Bureau of Sports (today's China Institute of Sport Science), hosted a conference on sport philosophy, which mainly focused on the institutionalization and systematization of sports science in China. In August 1984, a symposium on sport philosophy and sport economics was held in Quanzhou, Fujian Province. Scholars from multi-disciplines discussed the issues of sports development and the goals of sport philosophy under the new situation in which China was implementing a policy of reform and opening up more generally to the outside world. A multi-disciplinary academic league to discuss sport philosophy was established. In August 1985, another symposium on the theme of 'Philosophical Thinking of the Development Strategy of Sports Science and Technology' was held in Yong'an, a city in Fujian Province, focusing on the relationship between sports and economy, sports and science and technology. In the same year, sport philosophy research was officially recognized by Chinese Sports Science Society. Sport philosophy in China was then strengthened through a series of academic activities and a consensus that research in this area can play a significant role in resolving problematic issues in sports.

1.2. The Developing Stage (1986- 1996)

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Chinese sport philosophy enjoyed a rapid development. An annual academic meeting focusing on theoretical research of sports was organized from 1986 and scholars worked jointly to clarify the nature, function, value and other fundamental issues of sports. A series of influential books on sport philosophy were published, such as *Philosophy of Sports and Physical Education* edited by Shenyang Sport University in 1986, *Introduction to Philosophy of Sports and Physical Education* edited by Long Tianqi in 1987, *Sport Philosophy* by Huang Jierong in 1988, *Sport Aesthetics* by Liu Muwu in 1988, *Introduction to Sport Ethics* by Pan Jingwu in 1989 and *The Philosophy of Sports* by Hui Shu in 1992. These philosophic works greatly promoted the development of sport philosophy in China. At the same time, the courses and programs on sport philosophy were also launched by some sport colleges. In September 1990, during the 11th Asian Games in Beijing, a Conference on Sport Science was held, which included a seminar on sport philosophy. Scholars from the United States, Japan, Germany, Canada and other countries were invited. For the first time, Chinese sport philosophy had international academic exchanges. It was within this development stage that sport philosophy was accepted as an independent subject taught at sport colleges, which resulted in the spread of philosophic thoughts on sports and the cultivation of sport philosophy talents.

1.3. The Stagnating Stage (1997- 2003)

From the late 1990s to the beginning of the new century, Chinese sport philosophy experienced a relative stagnation. During this time, few influential books were published with the exception of Li Liyan's *Savage Civilization* and Zhou Aiguang's *Alienation of Competitive Sports*. For several years, no books on sport philosophy were published at all. Despite Zhou Aiguang's calling for the further

institutionalization and systematization of the discipline of sport philosophy (Zhou 1997), the study of sport philosophy in China entered a relatively stagnating stage and a large portion of the published papers were merely reflective studies on its status, difficulties and challenges. The internal reason for the stagnation lies in the fact that Chinese sport philosophy had not yet formed a full theoretical system, nor closely integrated with practice at that time. Real-life, practical problems occurring in sports received little attention from the sport-philosophical academia. The external reason is that under the conditions of market economy, applied research outweighed more theoretical research and the humanities and social sciences gave way to the natural sciences in the study of sports (Zhou, 2008b). In addition, compared with the initiating stage, the academic exchanges on sport philosophy in this period declined year by year, and there were few large-scale conferences on the subject. This inevitably hindered the development of sport philosophy in China (Hsu 2010).

1.4. The Expanding Stage (2004 to Present)

The Beijing Olympic Games brought an unprecedented opportunity for the development of sports study. As an emerging discipline, sport philosophy has demonstrated its strong vitality. Since 2004, the number of journal papers and academic monographs has risen considerably. Among them, Wang Suhang's *Introduction to Sport Philosophy*, Tan Hua's *Essence of Sports*, Hu Xiaoming's *Sports Value Theory*, Xiong Wen's *Sports and Ethics*, Ma Weiping's *Sports and Men: A Philosophy of Physical Education and Sports*, Yu Tao's *Sport Philosophy Research*, Li Liquan's *Aesthetics of Sport*, Wang Hong's *Comparison of Chinese and European Sport Philosophy*, Liu Xinran's *Existence of Life: Clues of Sport Philosophy, History and Culture*, He Weimin's *Contemporary Study on the Alienation of Sports*, Liu Xuefeng's *Ethic Study of Competitive Sports* and other academic monographs have greatly enriched the connotation of sport philosophy. In recent years, the Chinese government has attached great importance to the development of philosophy and social sciences, creating favourable conditions for the development of Chinese sport philosophy. As a result, greater numbers of graduate students conduct research in sport philosophy. There are now dozens of doctoral dissertations and over 100 master's theses on sport philosophy. However, despite the increase in the body of literature in recent years, the importance of sport philosophy has not yet been widely recognized, which is shown in its lack of academic organization, professional journals, regular academic meetings and international academic exchanges. Many sport colleges have no sport philosophy courses or programs at present.

2. Characteristic Themes in Chinese Journal Articles and Books

After close review of the papers and books collected from CNKI and National Library of China, especially the frequently co-cited ones, combined with the mapping knowledge domains analysis of the key words (see Figure 2), the characteristic themes in Chinese journal articles and books are identified. At the initial stage (1980–1985), scholars mainly focused on ontological issues such as the nature of sport philosophy and the definition of ‘体育’ (Chinese pinyin ‘tiyu’, a term referring to sports, physical education and other physical activities). The long-standing metaphysical debate between ‘大体育观’ (the broad definition of ‘tiyu’ which covers physical education, sports and other physical activities) and ‘真义体育观’ (the narrow/true definition of ‘tiyu’ which exclusively covers only physical education) in China launched during this period of time. At the same time, other issues concerning aesthetics and ethics of sports were also being considered. Regular academic

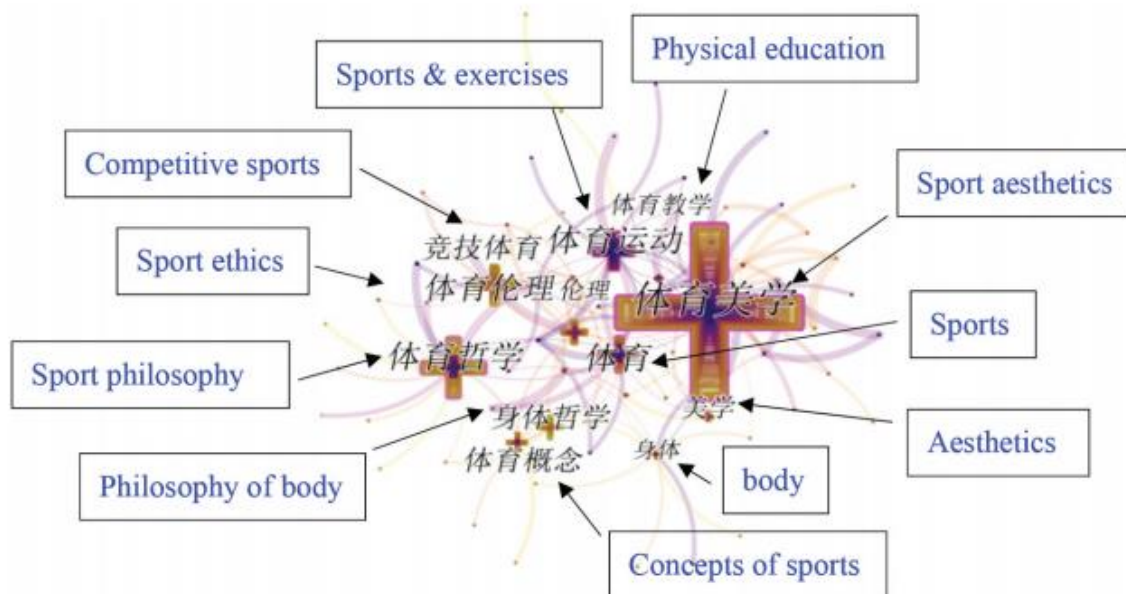


Figure 2 Mapping knowledge domains analysis of the key words.

conferences from 1986 fostered the sport philosophy research, and many influential books on sport philosophy, ethics and aesthetics were published. Meanwhile, scholars began to introduce foreign works on sport philosophy and also turned to the traditional Chinese schools of thought such as, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism to explore China's native philosophy of sports. The new century has witnessed the fast expansion of Chinese sport philosophy, and remarkable progress has been made in the ontological, ethical and aesthetic study of sports, which is shown in the increasing number of new doctoral dissertations, books and journal papers.

2.1. The Nature of Sport Philosophy

China's Reform & Opening-up policy which started in the 1980s opened China up to the rest of the world, and this included academic research. Scholars who were first introduced to the philosophy of sport as an academic area of study during this time disagreed as to its scope. For instance, Gu (1982) believed that sport philosophy bridged sport science and philosophy, whereas, Long Tianqi & Li Xianxiang argued that sport philosophy was a branch of applied philosophy to be underpinned by Marxist theory, and its aim is to identify the general rules underlying sports practice (Long and Li 1987). The early discussion either regards sport philosophy a simple combination of sports and philosophy or a mere sub-discipline, which completely ignored the differences. That's why Hui Shu, another theorist, tried to stress the distinction between sport philosophy and specific disciplines of sports science as well as meta-philosophy which concerns the law of nature, society and human thinking. His approach attempted to understand sports, the unique social and cultural phenomenon, from the perspective of philosophy and with philosophical methods (Hui 1992). Influenced by Japanese sport philosophy, Zhou Aiguang, a student of Akio Kataoka, proposed that sport philosophy should focus on the nature and value of sports, and the key issue is to answer the questions like 'what sport is', and 'what is the significance of sports to human and social development' (Zhou 1997). Zhou's definition on sports philosophy marked a turn from sport itself to human beings. A more radical approach in this regard was adopted by Ma Weiping, who claimed that the philosophy of sports is the study of human beings, and its critical tasks are to concern humanity, emphasize human dignity, and seek human values (Ma 2009).

Apart from the nature of sport philosophy, its relationship with other disciplines of sports science also caused debates among scholars. Hu Xiaofeng and Lu Yuanzhen argued that sport philosophy is a fundamental discipline with guiding significance (Hu 1981; Lu 1995) whilst Xiong Douyin classified sport philosophy a third-level branch of sports science (Xiong 1987). Shao Weide & Ma Chuhong, Wang Kangle & Tai Chongxi also placed sport philosophy under sports humanities and social sciences as a sub-discipline, parallel to sport aesthetics and sport ethics (Shao and Ma 2004; Wang and Tai 2006). An attempt to reconcile these different conceptions was provided by Zhou Aiguang who argued that sport philosophy can be seen as fundamental to sports science from an academic perspective, but located under the humanities of sports in terms of disciplinary structure (Zhou, 2008b).

2.2. Ontological Research: Sports or Physical Education

Another area of debate in the literature is on the Chinese word ‘体育’ (Chinese pinyin ‘tiyu’) which refers to either ‘sports’ or ‘physical education’. In a broad sense, it is a term covering all kinds of physical activities, including those unrelated to sport or games. Its rich connotation causes confusion occasionally, especially in the academic world which requires accurate definition. Behind the long-standing academic debate among Chinese scholars lie historical causes. In late Qing Dynasty, the word ‘体操’ (Chinese pinyin ‘ticao’, literally means gymnastics) was introduced into China from Japan as part of school education. Later, the word ‘体操’ was replaced by the word ‘体育’ (literally means physical education), which was placed under the hypernym ‘education’ and juxtaposed with ‘德育’ (moral education) and ‘智育’ (intellectual education). Years later, ‘competitive sports’ was introduced into China and translated as the same Chinese word ‘体育’, which made it difficult to distinguish whether it refers to physical education or sports by words. Clarifying and defining it since has become a very complex and difficult task. Cao (1982a, 1982b), Huang (1982), Li (1982), Zhou (1982), Wang (1982) and many other scholars joined the debate, trying to identify the essence of ‘体育’. A historic conference held in Yantan, Shandong Province in 1982 further escalated the controversy to an unprecedentedly fierce level that gained widespread attention.

The divergent ontological views on ‘体育’ can be classified into two schools, ‘大体育观’ (the broad definition of ‘tiyu’) and ‘真义体育观’ (the narrow/true definition of ‘tiyu’). The so-called ‘大体育观’ holds that ‘体育’ is a broad concept that covers competitive sports, physical education and other physical activities. Its supporters include Xiong Douyin, Zhou Xikuan, Sun Baoli, Cui Yingbo, etc. ‘真义体育观’ claims that the true meaning of ‘体育’ is the education of the physical, which does not include competitive sports. Physical education belongs to education and sports belongs to culture. The defenders of this view include Lin Xiaofeng, Wang Xuefeng, Jia Xixiao and Dong Ansheng. The dispute between ‘大体育观’ and ‘真义体育观’ is to some extent a language problem caused by translation. With the passage of time, the debate gradually turned to the clarification of the specific meaning of ‘体育’ in a specific time and context. Han Dan compared the definitions of ‘sports’ in more than 20 countries from a legal point of view, and found that there’s no universally accepted definition or criteria (Han 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). Xiong Douyin opposed Han Dan’s division of academic views by region. By reiterating his opinion on ‘大体育观’, he proposed the idea of using Chinese pinyin ‘tiyu’ to replace the words like ‘sports’, ‘physical education’ and other relevant expressions (Xiong 2004). Among the recent theoretical approaches to the debate over the

definition of ‘体育’ are Genus and Difference (Wang 2019; Yang and Chen 1995; Zhou 1999aa) and Wittgenstein’s ‘family resemblance’ theory (Han 2007; Li and Chen 2019).

The latest discussion on this issue took place at a symposium ‘Re-recognition of Sports Concepts and Their Values & Functions’ held by Chengdu Sport University in May 2019. Well-known Chinese scholars like Lu Yuanzhen, Ren Hai, Hao Qin, Yi Jiandong participated. They shared opinions on the fundamental questions as ‘what “体育” is’ and ‘what value and significance “体育” can offer to contemporary human society’. Lu Yuanzhen pointed out that ‘体育’ is both a scientific concept and a popular concept which must be accepted by the public, so it is particularly difficult to define it. For researchers, the process of pursuing the nature of ‘体育’ is more important than drawing conclusions (Lu 2019). Ren Hai believed that defining ‘体育’, on the surface, is a logical problem, but its essence involves the judgment of the value of sports and physical education. To maintain a unified concept of ‘体育’, we need to identify the value it holds (Ren 2019). Hao Qin and Guo Hongwei pointed out that ‘体育’ is a historic and dynamic concept, which needs to be sorted out from the perspective of historical evolution and discourse analysis (Guo 2019; Hao 2019).

The discussion on the concept of ‘体育’ has promoted the development of ontological research of Chinese sport philosophy, yet no major theoretical breakthrough has been achieved. The reason is that many scholars have followed the traditional framework in sport philosophy research and made no substantial improvements in terms of methodology. In addition, much attention has been paid to the definition of ‘体育’, which leads to the lack of ontological research on games, a topic badly in need of theoretical consideration.

2.3. Ancient Philosophy of Sports in China

Chinese scholars have a preference to look for legacy from the ancient great minds. As for sport philosophy, they also turned to the traditional Chinese thoughts like Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, to identify and rebuild China’s native philosophy of sports and physical education.

According to the literature, Confucius’ students were required to master the six arts, including ‘礼’ (rituals), ‘乐’ (music), ‘射’ (archery), ‘御’ (charioteering), ‘书’ (writing) and ‘数’ (mathematics). The six arts are designed to educate students to be well-rounded. Among the six arts, ‘射’ (archery) and ‘御’ (charioteering) are physical education, through which the virtues of ‘仁’ (benevolence) and ‘义’ (righteousness) are cultivated (Wang 2005). Traditionally, ‘乐’ (Chinese pinyin ‘yue’) refers to music, but it is an incomplete interpretation. The Chinese character ‘乐’ also has the connotation of pleasure when it is pronounced as ‘le’, which reflects the Confucian thoughts on recreational sports. ‘乐’ (pleasure) for Confucian is not the ‘happiness’ in daily life, nor is it just an expression of a state of mind. Confucian ‘乐’ is a dignified, moderate and good pleasure since it is closely related to the virtue ‘仁’ (benevolence), advocating the doctrine of ‘中庸’ (golden mean) while opposing any kind of indulgence, and disregarding personal gains and losses (Zhou, 2008a). Confucius advocated the philosophy of whole care for health preservation, emphasizing both internal and external practices. According to Confucianism, cultivating the virtue ‘义’ (righteousness) can promote one’s personality and having leisure activities can enhance the physical body (Lv and Guo 2006).

Confucian philosophy of sports is primarily concerned about ethics, while Taoist philosophy of sports pays more attention to aesthetics (Cao 2003). The Book of Changes embodies the beauty of variability in the creation of all things in heaven and the earth, the beauty of life in the existence of the universe and the survival and development of mankind, and the beauty of spirit in its doctrines of ‘乾健’ (self-discipline), ‘坤厚’ (social commitment) and ‘尚中’ (upholding the golden mean) (Gao and He 2016). Taoist philosophy of sports advocates restraint and harmony, which can lead to balance of our body so that the various functions of the body will not be harmed. It pursues the ‘health of both the body and mind’ and thus to achieve the ‘maximum age one can live’. It regards ‘mental health preservation’ and ‘physical health preservation’ in a dialectical manner. It emphasizes moral cultivation as well, so as to pursue the comprehensive development of men (Xu and Li 2004). The well-known Tai Chi Quan is a prominent embodiment of Taoist philosophy of sports, which demonstrates Taoist philosophy as ‘harmony between man and nature’, ‘integration of knowledge and action’, ‘balance between Yin and Yang’ and ‘wu-wei’ (the strength of nonaction or effortlessness) (Ding 2015).

Buddhist philosophy of sports has also been investigated by scholars. Cai Feng et al examined the influence of the Buddhist doctrines of ‘悟’ (satori), ‘心’ (mind), ‘空’ (void) and ‘禪’ (zen) on traditional Chinese sports, particularly the martial arts of Shaolin temple. He pointed out that the training of Shaolin martial arts is a process of continuous self-perception (悟). Shaolin monks usually practice boxing to achieve the purpose of concentrating (心), because Shaolin boxing is a mental training method as well. The pursuit of selflessness (空) in Buddhism embodies the belief of Buddhism that ‘all laws have nothing’ and the theory of prajna emptiness. When practice Shaolin martial arts, ‘selflessness’ is regarded as the highest level. Buddhism meditation (禪) is the process of liberation for individuals to pursue transcendental spiritual liberation, which is the key to be a master of martial arts. In the practice of Shaolin martial arts, Shaolin monks not only practice boxing or other skills, but also refine and purify their minds (Cai, Zhang, and Zhang 2016).

Ancient Chinese thoughts on sports and physical education are similar in some ways to the European tradition of philosophic study of sports. For instance, Confucian philosophy of sports emphasizes the ethical aspects of sports, especially cultivating virtues through physical training; Taoist philosophy of sports is more concerned about being, particularly intentionality and context; whilst Buddhist philosophy of sports focuses more on the relationship between body and mind, as well as the right way to be.

2.4. Concerns about the International Development of Sport Philosophy

Chinese scholars became more aware of the international development of sport philosophy from the 1990s. Ren Hai published a paper titled *Introduction to the Development of Sport Philosophy in North America*, reviewing the history, the programmes and courses, the major journal and academic organization of sport philosophy in North America (Ren 1990). The subsequent works of Hui Shu, Zhou Aiguang and Yu Tao also depicted the origin and early development of sport philosophy in the western world (Hui 1992; Zhou, 2008b; Yu 2009). In the new century, scholars continued their attention to the development of international sport philosophy. In 2013, Hu Ti & Han Yunfeng participated the ‘Annual Conference of International Association of Philosophy of Sports’ and summarized the topics of the conference in their paper ‘*Hotspots of International Sport Philosophy Research and Their Insights*’ (Hu and Han 2014). Shi Haiwang analyzed all the papers published in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* from 1998 to 2014 by adopting the mapping domains knowledge

method, and revealed the classic literature, important authors and institutions, the key issues and trends in the study of sport philosophy (Shi 2015). Other scholars like Liu and Jin (2015), Yang (2015), Wang, Hu, and Liu (2016), Che and Xu (2018) have also concerned the latest international development of sport philosophy in their papers.

Chinese scholars not only keep an eye on the outside world, but also have tried to introduce relevant works into China by translating or reviewing books. E.g. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Guttmann's *From Ceremony to Record: The Essence of Modern Sports*, Scanlon's *Eros and Greek Athletics* and Suits' *Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* are among the translated books which explore the nature of games and sports. Apart from the translated books, other books like Mechikoff's *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education: From Ancient Civilization to the Modern World*, Paul Weiss' *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry*, DaCosta's *Olympic Studies: Current Intellectual Crossroads*, and Eichberg's *Bodily Democracy: Towards a Philosophy of Sport for All* were reviewed (Fu and Tan 2008; Laing 2013; Ma and Tan 2007; Shi and Tan 2006; Tan and Liu 2014).

2.5. Sport Ethics as A Focus of Investigation

Chinese philosophy is ethics in a sense (Li 2015), and as such ethics is an important part of Chinese sport philosophy. Tan Hua's *Research Objects and Tasks of Sport Ethics* is the preliminary discussion on the concepts, research objects, basic issues, research purposes and tasks of sport ethics in China (Tan 1985). Subsequently, Li Daojie & Zhou Yemin's *Remarks on Sport Ethics*, Pan Jingwu's *Sport Ethics* and *Introduction to Sport Ethics*, and other books have laid the foundation for sport ethics. However, these books were mainly limited to athletic moralities, failing to reveal the inner links between ethics and sports in-depth.

In the 1990s, the development of sports industry led to many ethical problems concerning sports professionalization, commercialization, sports gambling, and doping. Scholars began to reflect on the status of sport ethics in China. Books like Pan Jingwu's *Sport Ethics Research* (1996), Hua Hongxing's *Sport Ethics* (1999) and Zhou Aiguang's *Study on the Alienation of Sports* (1999b) developed basic theory and practice of sports moralities and provided a deeper analysis of the causes resulting in the lack of morality in sports.

The 21st century has witnessed the rapid development of sport ethics in China. Many new topics have interested scholars, including the modern transformation of traditional Chinese sport ethics, comparative research on Chinese and Western sport ethics, the value and moral responsibility of sport ethics, genetic engineering in competitive sports, sport ethics in school physical education, the promotion of contemporary sport ethics and other practical problems of sports in the new era. Among this rich body of literature, the most influential works are Zhao Lijun's *Sport Ethics*, Liu Xiangrong & Liu Xuefeng's *Sport Ethics: Theoretical Perspective and Value Guide*, Xiong Wen's *Sports and Ethics*, Gong Jianwei's *What Kind of Sports Do We Need: Research on the Construction of Contemporary Chinese Sport Ethics*, Zhang Shuhui's *Basic Theory and Core Values of Sport Ethics*, Yang Qihu's *Pursue Justice for Sports: Critical Study on Ethics in Competitive Sports*, and Feng Youmin's *Study on Ethical Spirit of Chinese Traditional Martial Arts*.

2.6. The Development of an Aesthetics of Sport

Aesthetic research on sports in China was greatly influenced by Japanese philosophers in the early days. Scholars such as Nakao Kibo and Kobayashi Shinji all published papers in Chinese academic journals to introduce the nature and research methods of sport aesthetics (Kobayashi and Hu 1982;

Yoshio 1981). In 1984, the first textbook on Sport Aesthetics edited by Hu Xiaoming was published. A year later, Liu Muwu's *Sports Aesthetics* was also published. Together with Huang Jierong's *Aesthetics of Sport* and Jin Dalu's *Sport Aesthetics*, these books laid the primary foundation for China's sport aesthetics study. In the 1990s, six academic conferences on sport aesthetics were held, based on which three conference proceedings were published as well. The early books were general overviews, focusing on the concept and definition of sport aesthetics and its research objects and methods. Some argued that the physical beauty, athletic beauty and spiritual beauty of sports are the concerns of sport aesthetics. Others held that aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic creation are more important. Still others claimed that the key of sport aesthetic study is the relationship between human and sports (Hu 2008).

The discussion on the relationship between truth, goodness and beauty in sports also dominated the aesthetic study of sports. Scholars generally believed that 'truth' means sports activities must conform to the laws of human movement; 'goodness' means that physical activity can enhance people's physical fitness, improve people's motor skills, and enrich social and cultural life; and 'beauty' is the perceptual manifestation of human's natural power in the field of sports (Liu 1990; Xie and Lu 1997; Yang 1996). The value of aesthetic education embedded in physical education also received considerable attention since sports can not only stimulate students' association of beauty, improve the psychological aesthetic structure of students, build a rational athletic image, promote the formation and development of aesthetic consciousness of sports, but also improve the intelligence structure (Wu 2004).

Recent years has seen the turn from generalized aesthetic study to specific sports, which is shown in the doctoral dissertations as well as monographs like Ding Liwei's *On the Aesthetic Characteristics of Table Tennis*, Zhao Ge's *Aesthetic Study on Diving*, Zhao Sumiao's *Aesthetic Study on Basketball*, Ma Wenyou's *Aesthetic Research of Chinese Martial Arts*, and Liu Cheng's *Outline of Basketball Aesthetics*. The combination of aesthetics and specific sports has expanded the research space. However, in recent years, aesthetic study on sports seems to have fallen into a predicament. Many scholars in this field are reflecting on the current status of Chinese sport aesthetics. They found that the existing research has a tendency to divide its research focus rather than concentrating on the essential beauty of sports. Such fragmented studies, rather than progression within a common community of academic interests, will arguably hinder a deeper analysis and interpretation of sports.

3. Future Prospects for Sport Philosophy in China

Chinese philosophy is an independent system to Western philosophy. The different philosophic tradition, together with the fact that the majority of the scholars who study sport philosophy in China are not well-trained philosophers, but physical educators, means that a relatively large portion of current research on sport philosophy in China is merely reflective analysis of and suggestions on sports practices. Studies adopting either an analytical or continental philosophy paradigm are rare. To aid the future development and progress of sport philosophy in China, two directions are likely to result. One is to rediscover the philosophic legacy from the ancient Chinese thoughts like Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Mohism and other Chinese perspectives. The other is to introduce foreign theoretical works on sports philosophy by translating more books and articles. Either way can offer a foundation for the further development of Chinese sport philosophy.

From a practical perspective, China's sports industry still has great growth potential compared to most European countries and the United States where sports industry is highly developed. This is why China has made a nationwide sports-promotion policy, which covers sports culture, competitive sports, physical education and sports for all. The key to a successful promotion of sports is to change people's opinions on the meaning and value of sports. The philosophy of sports is kind of a discipline that can lead people to the gyms and stadiums. Besides, in the process of sports development, many practical problems may rise. To deal with these problems requires not only jurisdiction or technologies, but also philosophic guidance. Therefore, a few more trends can also be predicted. Firstly, the debate over the definition of '体育' will continue. The concept refers to sports, physical education, physical activities and more. The arguments are not likely to be reconciled soon, especially in the circumstance that the vigorously growing e-sports has attracted significant attention from both the practical and academic communities. The nature of e-sports has become a hot topic at present. Questions like whether e-sports is a sport poses a challenge to our metaphysicians. Secondly, the rapid development of sports has given rise to many ethical problems at present. Therefore, sport ethics will continue to be the focus, especially the issues like doping, performance-enhancing technologies, gender, equal payments, commercialization of sports and sports gambling. Thirdly, sports-related social and political issues will be another area of research interest. The program of sports for all is in nature a matter of social issue involving justice and equality. Political concerns may involve studies relating to nationalism as seen in recent years. Fourthly, a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach will be another future trend. At present, it seems that sport philosophy, sport ethics and sport aesthetics are independent from each other in China, which leads to problems as areas are considered independently. Collaboration and integration is needed to carry out more comprehensive and in-depth philosophic studies on sports.

4. Conclusions

The past few decades have witnessed the birth, development and expansion of Chinese sport philosophy. Early scholars usually focussed on the nature of sport philosophy, and then the definition of basic concepts '体育'. At the same time, scholars also tried to rediscover a philosophic legacy on sports from ancient Chinese thoughts. The international development of sport philosophy drew the attention of scholars who later introduced the latest trends and classic works into China. However, due to the geographical and cultural differences and insufficient international exchanges, distinct differences between Chinese and Western sport philosophy remain. For instance, China is keen on clarifying the term '体育', which is in fact a language problem caused by translation, while the West pays attention to the analysis of sport, play and game. Meanwhile, ethic studies on sports in China mainly focus on the moralities of athletes, while western sport philosophers are concerned with a much wider range of issues, such as gender, race, equality, justice, violence, disabilities, genetic technology and doping amongst others. The traditional philosophic thoughts and sports in China has also made the philosophy of sports in China distinctive. E.g. the philosophic study on health preservation, the ethic and aesthetic inquiry of martial arts are the unique contributions.

At present, the philosophy of sports in China faces both opportunities as well as challenges. It has only been recognized as part of the society of sports humanities and sociology in China, and there are very few academic conferences or symposiums on sport philosophy in recent years. To aid the future development of Chinese sport philosophy, an independent academic organization and professional journal needs to be established, which can surely promote academic exchanges. The

good thing is that Chinese scholars are becoming more enthusiastic about sport philosophy and it is promising that the near future will hear more voices from Chinese sport philosophers in the international community of sport philosophy.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Sichuan Federation of Social Science Association [SC19B020]; Tianfu International Sports Events Research Center [YJY201908].

ORCID

Emily Ryall <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6050-4353>

References

- Cai, F., J.H. Zhang, and J. Zhang. 2016. The influence of Buddhist philosophy on shaolin martial arts. *Journal of Adult Physical Education* 06 (32): 87–90.
- Cao, D. 2003. A study on the Confucian and Taoist sport thoughts. *Journal of Guangzhou Physical Education Institute* 02: 127–128+38.
- Cao, X.J. 1982a. Revisit of the sports concept. *Journal of Beijing Sport University* 03: 86–92.
- Cao, X.J. 1982b. Standardization of the concept of sports. *China Sport Science* 04: 31–34.
- Che, X.S. and H.T. Xu. 2018. Research course and trend of sport philosophy and sport ethics in Europe and America. *Journal of Hebei Institute of Physical Education* 02 (32): 28–34.
- Ding, K. 2015. The influence of Taoist culture on the development of Chinese Wushu. Master's Thesis, Beijing Sport University.
- Fu, X.X. and H. Tan. 2008. Cultural philosophic critique on post-Olympism & meta-narrative: Comments on Olympic studies: Current intellectual crossroads. *Journal of China Sport Science* 04: 65–68.
- Gao, H.B. and S.B. He. 2016. The influence of the aesthetics of Zhouyi on the aesthetic thought of ancient Chinese sports. *Journal of Gansu Social Sines* 01: 179–82.
- Gu, Y. 1982. A brief introduction to sports philosophy. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 03: 16–17.
- Guo, H.W. 2019. The cognition and key issues in the study of sports concept. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 05 (45): 24–26.
- Han, D. 1999a. The explanation of international basic concept of physical education and sport. *Sport & Science* 06: 60–62+15.
- Han, D. 1999b. The explanation of international basic concept of physical education and sport. *Sport & Science* 05: 20–22.
- Han, D. 1999c. The explanation of international basic concept of physical education and sport. *Sport & Science* 03: 45–49+44.
- Han, D. 2007. On 'family resemblances', TIYU language and TIYU concept. *Journal of Sports and Science* 04: 47–53.
- Hao, Q. 2019. Discourse construction and evolution of sports concept. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 05 (45): 8–12.
- Hsu, L. 2010. An overview of sport philosophy in Chinese-speaking regions (Taiwan & Mainland China). *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 02 (37): 237–52. doi: 10.1080/00948705.2010.9714779.
- Hu, T. and Y.F. Han. 2014. Research hotpots of international sports philosophy and its enlightenment. *Journal of Sports Culture Guide* 04: 203–06.
- Hu, X.F. 1981. A holistic view of sports—'Revisit the system of sports science. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 02: 1–12.

- Hu, X.M. 2008. Review of sports aesthetic research. *Journal of Physical Education* 10: 1–8.
- Hua, H. X. 1999. *Sport ethics*. Nanjing: Hohai University Press.
- Huang, X.Z. 1982. Discussion on the nature of competitive sports and the definition of sports concept. *Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education* 03: 35–39.
- Hui, S. 1992. *Sport philosophy*. Chengdu: Sichuan Education Press.
- Kobayashi, S. and X.M. Hu. 1982. The meaning of sports beauty and the idea of sport aesthetics. *Journal of Guangzhou Sport University* 01: 101–107+111.
- Laing, H.P. 2013. Comments on Henning Eichberg's Bodily democracy: Towards a philosophy of sport for all. *Journal of Jilin Institute of Physical Education* 06 (29): 4–6.
- Li, D.R. 1982. A discussion on the concept of 'sport' and 'competitive sport'. *Journal of Guangzhou Physical Education Institute* 02: 3–5.
- Li, Y. and Y. Chen. 2019. Metaphor originating from clan: Interpretation of the concept of sport based on cognitive linguistics. *Journal of Physical Education* 06 (26): 13–20.
- Li, Z.H. 2015. *What is morality? – A record of Li Zehou's ethics seminar*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.
- Liu, F.M. 1990. The truth, goodness and beauty of competitive sports. *Journal of Jiangxi Social Sciences* 01: 105–08.
- Liu, T. and C.G. Jin. 2015. A review of the development of western sports philosophy. *Journal of Sports Culture Guide* 05: 195–98.
- Long, T.Q. and X.X. Li. 1987. *Philosophy of sports and physical education*. Beijing: Beijing Sport University Press.
- Lu, Y.Z. 1995. Sports science. *Sport Culture Guide* 01: 48–50.
- Lu, Y.Z. 2019. Sport, an eternal topic. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 05 (45): 1–3.
- Lv, L.P. and C.J. Guo. 2006. On values of physical education in Confucian rites and music education before Qin dynasty. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 06: 47–50.
- Ma, L.Z. and H. Tan. 2007. Comments on sport: A philosophic inquiry. *Journal of Sports Culture Guide* 05: 81–84.
- Ma, W.P. 2009. *Sports and men: A philosophy of physical education and sports*. Changsha: Hunan Normal University Press.
- Pan, J. W. 1996. *Sport ethics research*. Beijing: Beijing Sport University Press
- Ren, H. 1990. The development of sport philosophy in North America. *Journal of China Sport Science* 01: 87–90.
- Ren, H. 2019. Contemporary sport development and the definition of sport. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 05 (45): 4–7.

- Shao, D.W. and C.H. Ma. 2004. Discussion on sports subject classification. *China Sport Science and Technology* 01: 64–66.
- Shi, H.W. 2015. A dynamic visualization study on *Journal of the Philosophy of Sports* (1998-2004). Master's Thesis, Shandong Normal University.
- Shi, L. and H. Tan. 2006. The change of western sports opinion—On a history and philosophy of sport and physical education: from ancient civilization to the modern world. *Journal of Sports Culture Guide* 11: 80–82+79.
- Tan, H. 1985. Research object and tasks of sport ethics. *Journal of Sichuan Sports Science* 04: 13–16.
- Tan, H. and C.Y. Liu. 2014. Body, outlook and sports: On a history and philosophy of sport and physical education: From ancient civilization to the modern world. *Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education* 07 (48): 5–9+46.
- Wang, G.H. 2019. Concept and feature extraction of sport. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 05 (45): 13–16.
- Wang, J.G., X.X. Wang, and X.H. Zhang. 2000. An overview of the Chinese sport philosophy: Development, problems and outlooks. *Journal of Shenyang Sport University* 02: 48–49.
- Wang, K.L. and C.X. Tai. 2006. Discussion on the nature and classification of sports science. *Journal of Beijing Sport University* 11: 1453–56.
- Wang, R.Y. 1982. The concept of sports. *China Sport Science* 04: 25–30.
- Wang, Y. 2005. Confucius' thoughts on physical education. *Journal of Nanjing Sport University* 06: 75–77.
- Wang, Y.S., T. Hu, and L. Liu. 2016. The development and enlightenment of American sports philosophy. *Journal of Sports Culture Guide* 05: 188–93.
- Wu, Q.H. 2004. Aesthetic functions of sports. *Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education* 01: 22–23.
- Xie, X.D. and W.H. Lu. 1997. Harmony and unity about the truth, goodness and beauty of sport. *Journal of Physical Education* 04: 60–61+59.
- Xiong, D.Y. 1987. *Modernization of sport*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Research Institute of Sports Science.
- Xiong, D.Y. 2004. A consideration on the integration and the localization of the conception of 'sport'. *Sport & Science* 02: 8–12.
- Xu, M.K. and Y. Li. 2004. Physical culture of Zhuangzi. *Journal of Physical Education* 06: 62–65.
- Yang, G.H. 1996. The truth, goodness and beauty of sports. *Journal of Tianjin University of Sport* 04: 39–40.
- Yang, Q.H. 2015. Review on western sports philosophy research. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 03 (41): 46–52.
- Yang, W.X. and Q. Chen. 1995. Logic analysis of the sports concepts. *Journal of Physical Education* 01: 44–47.

- Yoshio, N. 1981. Research methods of sport aesthetics. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University* 01: 92–94.
- Yu, T. 2009. *Research on philosophy of sports and physical education*. Beijing: Beijing Sport University Press.
- Yu, X. 2012. Philosophy of sports and physical education in China. Proceeding of the 2012 National Conference on Sport Social Sciences—Reform the Ways of Sport Development. Beijing: China Sports Science Society, 117–19.
- Zhou, A. G. 1999b. *Study on the alienation of sports*. Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press
- Zhou, A.G. 1997. Discussion on the necessity and possibility of establishing the discipline of sport philosophy. *Journal of Physical Education* 04: 31–34.
- Zhou, A.G. 1999a. Logical thinking on the nature of physical education. *Journal of Wuhan Institute of Physical Education* 02: 19–21.
- Zhou, A.G. 2008a. Confucianism leisure philosophy and sports leisure ideology. *Journal of China Sport Science* 11: 72–77.
- Zhou, A.G. 2008b. Sport philosophy. In *An introduction to humanities and sociology of sports*, edited by Z.H. Li, Z. M. Mao, and A.G. Zhou. Beijing: People's Sports Publishing House of China, 51–97.
- Zhou, X.K. 1982. Historical review on sports concepts. *Sichuan Sports Science* 03: 9–17.