

## Comparative Study of Chinese Cuju and Western Football Sport: From the Perspective of Cultural Differences Between the East and the West

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Received 17 June 2019; accepted 20 August 2019

Published online 26 September 2019

### Abstract

Cuju was widely played in the 4th century B.C. in Linzi, the capital of Qi State. While, it was not until the early 19th century that football became popular in the UK. Although the emergence of Cuju was 1,500 years earlier than football, the culture of Cuju had long disappeared into the river of history. However, modern football has developed into the “world’s first sport”, which intoxicates the world fans. Based on the theory of inter-cultural communication, this paper starts from the development of Cuju and football, discusses the differences between Eastern and Western football cultures and analyzes the reasons for them. In modern society, football is not only a competition on the playing ground, but also a bridge of cultural communication between the East and the West. Especially after successfully hosting the Beijing Olympic Games, China has had a deep communication with other countries. Under such circumstance, it is essential to understand the differences between Eastern and Western football cultures.

**Key words:** Cuju culture; Modern football culture; Chinese traditional culture; Western culture; Cultural differences

Yan, J., & Li, Y. Y. (2019). Comparative Study of Chinese Cuju and Western Football Sport: From the Perspective of Cultural Differences Between the East and the West. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 15(3), 16-20. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/11286>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11286>

### INTRODUCTION

Cuju was recorded in the two books *Historical Records, Volume Su Qin Biography* and *Stratagems of the Warring States, Volume Qi*. On December 25, 2000, Mr. Blatter, the President of FIFA, also clearly pointed out that “Football originated from China and passed from there to Egypt, then from Egypt to Greece, Rome, France, and finally to Britain.” So, it is universally acknowledged that football originated from China. Cuju in ancient China was the initial form of modern football. According to the rule of normal historical development, Cuju should have developed into the modern football sport. However, owing to the differences between the Eastern and Western cultures, football eventually replaced it and became the “world’s first sport” today. It can be seen that culture is crucial to the development of football. Therefore, it is necessary for us to have an in-depth discussion between them from a cultural perspective.

### 1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE CUJU AND WESTERN FOOTBALL

#### 1.1 The Development of Cuju Culture in Ancient China

##### 1.1.1 Cuju Culture in Warring States Period & Han Dynasties

Cuju originated from the Warring States Period from 475 BC to 221 BC. It was called “Cuju” or “Taju” at the very beginning. The earliest record of Cuju activities is found in the book *Stratagems of the Warring States, Volume Qi*, which reads: “People from Linzi are very rich and they are all playing the “Yu” (a blowing musical instrument in ancient China which had 36 reeds), the “Zhu” (a stringed musical instrument in ancient China which had 13 chords), the drum and the zither. People also enjoy cock-fighting, dog-hunting, Liu Bo (a kind of ancient game, just like today’s chess playing) and playing football.” Based on these, we can see that Cuju activities were widely played in Linzi (Zibo City, Shandong Province today).

There were two forms of Cuju in Han Dynasty: one as a recreational activity, the other was an activity when people played Cuju to the drum playing and dancing.

### 1.1.2 Cuju Culture in Tang & Song Dynasties

The broad administrative style, enlightened national policy and open foreign policy of the Tang Dynasty provided the fertile soil for the development of Cuju activities. In terms of playing the ball, it was no longer a direct confrontation, but a team competition, whichever side kicked more goals would win the game. Another kind of football culture was that two people played against each other or more people did. Its character was mainly concerning about the height and patterns of kicking. As the poet Wang Wei's said in his poem *Instant Things which happened in the east of city at the Cold Food Festival* that "The ball is often higher than the flying birds, the swing is beyond the weeping leaves of green poplar", which described the height of the kicked ball. It is also recorded in Du Fu's poem *Qingming Festival*: "Wandering and drifting, farther and farther away from the capital, the time had passed for ten years, and now only the custom of playing the Cuju at Qingming Festival was the same.", indicating that the custom of playing football at that time was quite popular; Cuju culture in the Song Dynasty could be roughly divided into two kinds: one way was to set up a goal, usually held at the imperial and noble banquets; the other way was the competition without goals, which was held by common people in the period of Qingming. The kicking method of deciding the winner or loser usually depended on the kicking numbers, which is now known as "fancy football". It was obvious that Cuju was deeply favored by the royal nobles in the Song Dynasty and developed into its heyday during that period.

### 1.1.3 The Declining Culture of Cuju in Ming & Qing Dynasties

Cuju culture began to decline from the Ming Dynasty. In order to prevent soldiers from indulging in playing Cuju, Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, established strict military discipline in the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of his rule, which said: those who played chess, their hands should be cut, and those who played Cuju, their feet should be sliced off. Although this kind of cruel military discipline did not prohibit the love of Cuju culture for all sectors of society, it had greatly held back the further prosperity of Cuju culture. By the time of Qing Dynasty, the feudal ruling class changed the original football culture into ice games to train the Royal Army, which further aggravated the decline of the traditional Cuju culture.

## 1.2 The Development of Western Football Culture

### 1.2.1 Origin of Western Football

Cuju, as a kind of culture, had long been the messenger of communication between East and West. It was originally exported as a pure product. When Cuju arrived in Britain, the king regarded it as a treasure, so it was restricted to

the Royal family and such recreational activities were forbidden from common people. In the 11<sup>st</sup> century, the Danes invaded England. After the end of the war, in order to relieve their indignation, the Englishmen kicked the skulls fiercely and found themselves caught in this "sport". But when they played the skulls, they felt the hurt from their feet, so they replace them with blowing-bladder of bovine, which was the birth of modern football. This patriotic behavior moved the king of England so that he ordered that the royal football be opened to the public. At the beginning of the 12<sup>nd</sup> century, football games began to appear in England, which were recreational activities which held twice a year and usually competed between two cities. The rule was that no matter which side could kick the ball into the other side's downtown area, it would be counted as winning the game. It was so disorderly that the residents and passengers nearby would always fall victims to the game. Therefore, such football matches were strongly opposed by the public, and the British government gave an order that football games only be played on the open ground and those who entered the downtown area be seriously punished. As a result, a special football field came into being.

### 1.2.2 Development of Modern Football

Since the middle and late 17<sup>th</sup> century, football had been gradually spread from Europe and America to the world, especially in some culturally developed countries. With more and more people going to the stadium to participate in this exciting and pleasant sport, it was a sign that the extent of a country's cultural development depended on how well the football went on. On October 26, 1863, Englishmen established the English Football Association, the first Football Association in the world, at the Freemason Hotel on Queen Street in London. In addition to announcing the formal establishment of the Football Association of England at the meeting, it was also formulated and adopted the world's first more conventional football rules, which were recorded in written form. The birth of the Football Association in England marks a new stage in the development of football.

## 2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN FOOTBALL CULTURE

The differences in time, region and environment result in obvious discrepancy in people's ideas between Chinese and Western cultures. Chinese traditional culture emphasizes "harmony" and "unity between human and nature" and advocates "the mean", while western culture is characterized by sense of competition, personality and heroism. The fruits of culture cultivated in the "unfit soil" will also have a mixed unnatural taste. The differences in natural environment and national character can affect the historical process of the development of Chinese and Western football cultures.

## 2.1 Entertainment VS War

China is situated in the east of Asia, surrounded by the sea on both sides of the East and south. There is an insurmountable ridge of the world in the west, while the north is a barren land covered with ice and snow. Relative regional independence has led to the emergence and formation of the Great River Civilization in China. Great unification became a major feature during China's historical process, meanwhile, harmony and stability became an important part of Chinese culture. The relatively stable and peaceful humanistic environment played a vital role in the development of Chinese traditional culture. Agricultural culture occupied an important historical position in traditional Chinese culture. Because of the dependence on land, Chinese traditional values have always attached great importance to agriculture rather than commerce. People believed that "farming was the foundation of life" and "industry and commerce was the root for being poor of the country". All of the Chinese common people wanted to live and work in peace and contentment. Land is their only source for living. Under the guidance of these thoughts, Cuju culture was deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, and could only play a subordinate role during its development process. Performing for entertainment is its only destiny.

Europe is located in the western part of the Eurasian continental plate. Its land area is relatively small, and there are many islands and peninsulas. It has a long and tortuous coastline, which is the basic feature of the European region. Different nationalities have different historical cultures and religious beliefs. Spreading out the picture of history, Europe had never been unified since the collapse of the Roman Empire, which happened in more than a thousand years ago. Due to the limitation of the regional environment, all nationalities and countries had been conquering each other for their own interests and religious beliefs, and the shadow of war had been shrouded in Europe. For the need of war, sports were widely used in military training. With the advent of the era of great navigation, achieving colonial expansion and resource plunder during the war, European invaders also popularized football culture to all parts of the world. Modern football, born in this environment, has its own genes of war. Many people thought that football was the product of war. Others called it "war without smoke" or "war on the green field", which showed the inextricable relationship between football and war.

## 2.2 Introversion VS Openness

The traditional farming society and the Confucian doctrines of the "mean" fostered a cultural character of solemnity, prudence and abstinence; Taoism advocates the value with a quiet and inactive attitude to life, and hope for no competition; Buddhism emphasizes calmness and restraint. In order to consolidate their regime, most of the ruling classes, especially in the Tang Dynasty, adopted the strategy of emphasizing literature rather than military force. The aggression against foreign nationalities was

mostly adopted in a more moderate way. Because of the relative isolation in the region and the highly developed civilization of our own, we simply isolated our country from outside and rejected foreign cultures instead of accepting and tolerating them. The above analysis shows that Chinese Cuju culture has the characteristics of introversion. It is this culture that makes it fail to develop into a competitive sport like modern football.

In the early stage of Western civilization, the pursuit of realistic utilitarianism was manifested. At the background of continual wars among nations and countries, in order to seek the space for survival and development, the football sport for serving war was full of strong competitive spirit. Ocean civilization made western culture even more open up. The openness and assimilation of culture could absorb nutrition from different cultures. Conversely, it was more conducive to the development of its own civilization. The open environment created their open mind and personality. The spirit of open culture is embodied vividly in the characteristics of modern football.

## 2.3 Process Experiencing VS Result-Seeking

Cuju culture is influenced by Chinese traditional culture. Its main core of development is recreation and fitness, the pursuit of process experience, psychological feelings and physical and mental pleasure. In retrospect of history, the embryonic of Cuju sport appeared in Han Dynasty in form of modern football. In Tang Dynasty, because of the prevailing trend of martial arts, Cuju could compete to decide who was a winner or loser. By the Song Dynasty, the function of sports competition was gradually replaced by artistic performance with entertainment as the mainstream. China's attitude towards competition has always been "friendship first, competition second". Therefore, the pursuit of pleasure and the wonderful physical and mental experience become the external characteristics of Cuju.

The values of western culture are influenced by it. Since ancient times, the spirit of seeking for victory has been embodied in western sports. They were bloody in the competitions of ancient western sports. They believed the proverb that "The winner is a king and loser is a bandit". Modern football still upholds this value. Because modern football was not only a simple sport game, but also a high level rising to the spiritual and cultural aspects. People show their excellent national character to the world in the form of competition. Therefore, winning the game is not only a material reward, but also an honor for the country and the nation.

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## 3. THE REASONS FOR THE FAILURE TO BECOME THE MODERN FOOTBALL

### 3.1 Restrained Traditional Culture VS Advanced Industrial Revolution

#### 3.1.1 The Influence of Confucianism on Cuju Culture

Confucianism has always attached great importance to "poetry, books, etiquette and music", the goal of

which was to cultivate people into “elegant and modest” gentlemen. Under the social background at that time, Cuju could be as an entertainment and recreation game, but if it developed into an offensive sports event, it would violate the Confucian ethical norms and ideal personality. However, it did not mean that Confucianism despised sports blindly. Confucius put forward “rites, music, shooting, driving, books, arithmetic” –so called “Six Arts”, but in Confucian’s opinion, although archery and horseback riding were activities related to military affairs, they were not much of a purely sport activity, they should lie in the secondary place. Confucius’s view on “ taking the Tao as the ambition, based on morality, by virtue of benevolence, taking part in activities within the scope of Six Arts, such as rite, music ,etc.”. It emphasized that “arithmetic, book, driving and shooting” were subjects that could only be related with sightseeing, and they should not indulge themselves in such activities, otherwise, if they play with something useless, they would get nothing. So it was just a hobby, not a profession.

### **3.1.2 Development of Productivity and Industrialization**

Influenced by the industrial revolution, a large number of rural people flooded into the cities during the late 19th century, and more than half of the population had lived in cities and towns. With the rise of the middle class and the reform of public education in the 19th century, the development of English football was greatly promoted. The fundamental changes of production technology and economic development made people keep frequent contacts with each other. At the same time, the closed society became more open, the quality of life was significantly improved, working hours reduced, leisure time increased. Once the material needs were met, the spiritual and cultural needs had risen sharply. Therefore, in order to seek the pleasure for life, most people chose to watch sports games, some of them even directly participated in them. It is inevitable that fierce competition, fighting and teamwork spirit among people should rapidly rise.

## **3.2 Bound Religion VS Prosperous Renaissance**

### **3.2.1 The Restriction of Taoist and Buddhist Thought on Cuju Culture**

As another ideological school in Chinese traditional culture, Taoism is a native Chinese philosophical thought. It paid more attention to the attitude towards natural inaction and indisputable life. In Taoist culture, people’s personal emotional impulse was weakened to a very serious extent. They believed that our culture had three treasures: benevolence, thrift and daring not to be the first in the world. This attitude of refusing to take risks and avoiding competition was obviously incompatible with the adventurous and competitive football game. According to the belief of the traditional Chinese people, “If a bird exposes his head, it is easy to be killed by gun.”

and “Losing is a blessing”. They always tolerated it. They thought that losing was sometimes a kind of courage. Although Taoism also attached importance to sports, such as Qigong, Tai Chi and Martial arts, which were closely related to them, they mainly focused on health preservation and fitness, and were suitable for people’s self-cultivation. This kind of sports lacked antagonism and competitiveness, which was far from the modern football culture. Most important of all, they were almost the quintessence of Chinese sports. In such a cultural atmosphere, it was a natural thing that Cuju failed to develop into the modern football.

Buddhism, as a religion, comes from India, and is a product of agricultural civilization in the Great River Basin. Although it paid more attention to logical analysis in the way of thinking, which was slightly different from traditional Chinese culture, it was not very different from Chinese culture in value orientation, restraint and calmness. Zen, which was a combination of Buddhism and Chinese culture, typically embodied this point. Like Confucianism and Taoism, it was also a restraining force to the development of Chinese Cuju.

### **3.2.2 The Influence on the European Renaissance and Reformation Movement**

As known to all, the birthplaces of the European Renaissance and the Reformation Movement are Italy and France respectively. Their profound cultural connotations and strong artistic atmosphere had melted into the personalities of the people between the two countries. After the introduction of the football, it had a unique style, because it was influenced by its own national culture. The Renaissance movement originated from Italy in the 4th century and later spread through the European countries. The guiding ideology of the Renaissance was “humanism”. The basic characteristic of humanism was centered on “people”. It opposed to the feudal church thought centering on “God”, and advocated to cultivate people with healthy and enterprising spirit. It also insisted that through various sports activities, people could have a healthy, harmonious and flexible body, which laid the ideological foundation for the development of modern sports.

The initiator of the Religious Reformation, Martin Luther King, broke the original purpose of the Bible and opposed the restriction of Christianity to human thought. After that, people no longer think that the body was the prison of the soul. The maxim that “Sound thoughts are in the healthy body” was re-emphasized. The Western Renaissance and Religious Reformation also had a tremendous impact on the attitude toward the Westerners’ life and the world. Extraordinary strength, coordinated body, perfect skills and strong arms were admired by people in their aesthetic concept. Western sports expressed emotions through the most primitive body language, and publicized their personality to

show the power of fighting with the nature. And they also believed that they had the ability to overcome any difficulties through their efforts.

### 3.3 Policy Prohibition VS Culture Integration

#### 3.3.1 The Policies of the Ruler as the Political Root of the Declining of Cuju Culture

The majority of emperors in Tang and Song Dynasties attached importance to Cuju and regarded it as a military training activity. Since the Ming Dynasty, soldiers were strictly prohibited from playing it. With the advent of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu rulers who liked to ride horses and shoot arrows imposed stricter bans on Cuju culture. Emperor Shunzhi demanded that it be strictly prohibited immediately. Emperor Qianlong ordered to ban Cuju activities with strict items, so the folk Cuju activities were greatly restricted. The emergence, rise and fall of Cuju were inseparable from the feudal social system in ancient China.

#### 3.3.2 European Colonialism Brought About Culture-Melting

British culture is the source of soccer. From the moment of its birth, soccer had been marked with the brand of war and closely linked with it. Expansion and conquest had deeply affected English culture. English football advocates attack, aggression and risk-taking. Influenced by this culture, English football once dominated the world. When the European colonists landed on the American continent, European culture and ancient Indian culture had always been colliding and merging, forming a unique Latin American football culture. It combined the classical and romantic European culture and Indian culture which was full of impulse and passion, resulting in a unique style of "Samba Football". For more than a hundred years, artistic football which was full of romantic feelings, represented by Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and other countries, had shown courage, imagination, passion and liberty on the football field. This was the typical style of Latin American football.

It seems meaningless to argue that whether the football sport originated from China or not. But, most important of all, we should figure out why Cuju culture was less prevalent than before and eventually disappeared from the historical stage and why western football could lead the trend of modern sports, which deserves our deep reflection from the perspective of culture.

## CONCLUSION

There are some factors leading to the apparent diversities between Chinese and Western football cultures, such as geography, character, value attitudes, religious belief, etc, not only stemming from the football sport itself, but also from the different cultural backgrounds. China locates in Asia and is deeply influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, which pays more attention to the hierarchy etiquette, inaction as well as the circulation of cause and effect. This kind of thoughts made the Chinese sport devoid of essential quality or objective of competition, inclined to self-cultivation and entertainment appreciation while western sports grew up with a cultural embedment based on Christian culture, which were deeply influenced by ancient Greek and Roman mythology. Influenced by these cultural backgrounds, it has some different characteristics from China, such as confrontation, competition and randomness. It is these characteristics that make western football be more likely to attract the attention of the audience. At the background of economic globalization, cultural communication between the East and West are becoming more and more frequent, and football, as an important modern sports culture, will play a vital role in inter-cultural communication.

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