

Research on the Development of Female Physical Education Concept

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Abstract: By using the methods of documentation, historical analysis and comparison, this paper sorts out and compares the concepts of female physical education of the major educators in China and the West before 1949. The main conclusions are as follows: Pre-contemporary Chinese and Western concepts on female physical education did not develop in a straight line, but in a spiral and tortuous way. Educators who have exerted great influence on Chinese and Western education, including physical education, have not fully and perfectly discussed female physical education, reflecting the insufficiency of attaching importance to female physical education, but these scattered discussions on female physical education are of great significance for further summarizing and putting forward the theoretical system of female physical education concept.

1. Introduction

As a very important part of education, physical education is indispensable from education, whether based on the dualism of body and mind, or divided into moral, intellectual and physical education or moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education, or even the theory of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor education. A complete system of educational outlook cannot be lacking in the composition of physical education outlook. Many Chinese and foreign educators' educational thoughts should also include the thinking of physical education and the judgment of its value. Someone concluded that "the concept of physical education is people's understanding of theory and practice gradually formed in the long-term practice of physical education teaching, which is embodied in the understanding of the nature, direction, goal of physical education teaching and how to implement physical education teaching"^[1]. The concept of physical education should include the understanding of the various elements of physical education and their interrelationship, as well as the relationship between physical education and other education.

Women should have accounted for about half of the educational objects in terms of quantity. However, in the long history of education in China and the West, they have been excluded from the formal education system for a long time, and the special research on female physical education is insufficient. The concept of physical education for women is scattered in the writings of some educators, but it lacks systematic and complete arrangement. The differences between the sexes in physiological, psychological and social levels determine that physical education as a means of physical education should fully recognize and pay attention to the impact of gender, and female

sports education concept should be examined and studied separately. This paper combs and compares the concepts of female physical education of the major educators in China and the West before 1949. In order to look forward to the development of the concepts of female physical education, this paper establishes a concept of female physical education suitable for our country and serves female physical education.

As a cultural phenomenon in human society, sports perform differently in different countries and national cultures. The importance, positioning and value judgment of physical education in the whole education system are also different, which causes the East and the West to differ in the concept of physical education. However, with the development of globalization and the strengthening of cultural exchanges among countries, China's concept on education and physical education is bound to be influenced by other countries, especially the western countries since modern times. Therefore, by comparing the Chinese and Western sports education concepts, we can better clarify the main thread of the development of sports education concepts, deepen the understanding of sports education concepts, and look forward to the future development direction of sports education concepts.

2. The source of western female physical education concept

2.1. Plato's concept on female physical education and its impact on later generations

When ancient western educators talked about education, they rarely talked about women's education. "The education of men and women is often summed up by the education of capitalists and uniforms,"^[2] and actually refers to the education of men. "People" actually refers to men. Women are not considered as educational objects, let alone teaching because of sex. The discussion about female physical education is even rarer. However, when we trace the roots, we can still find a few educators to think about women's education.

"Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher (427 BC-347 BC), was the first educator in the history of western education to establish a complete theoretical system of education."^[2] His feminine education thought was reflected in his works (such as *The Republic* and *The Law*).

In *The Republic*, he states, "If we use women indiscriminately, as men do, we must first give women the same education. We always educate men with music and gymnastics. So, in order to use women equally, we must educate women equally with two subjects and give them military education"^[3]. He mentioned that "I don't want to have any reservations about horseback riding or sports training, which is suitable for men but not for women"^[4]. Plato's concept of women's physical education aroused some criticism at that time, which was reflected in his *Republic*. "As for the reform of women's physical education and literary education, especially the issue of women's military training, such as carrying weapons and riding horses, we have to stick to it since we began to discuss it. We are bound to hear the witty and sarcastic remarks of literati and refined scholars. Don't be afraid of them. Plato's concept of education has a certain sense of gender equality. His concept of women's education stems from his emphasis on education, especially the importance of education for the cultivation of talents serving the city state. By educating women, women can serve the city as men. Unfortunately, for a long time afterwards, women's labor was more confined to the family, so the practice of sports and military education for women in order to protect the city-state could not continue in the western society.

Plato's thought also contains a tendency to belittle the body. He believed that "unless we had to, we had to try not to interact with the body, not to be contaminated with the body's desires, and to maintain our purity... beyond the ignorance of the body... Experience all the pure things - maybe, that's to get true"^[5]. This kind of thought can be regarded as the origin of the dualism of body and mind, which is opposite to spirit in the West. Through religion, it penetrates into the hearts of the

people and gradually forms the tendency of "raising the mind and restraining the body" in education. The educational concept of separation of body and mind holds that learning process is a kind of spiritual training that can be "separated", that education and teaching is a pure transmission of ideas and mental training, that rational shaping and knowledge transmission become the goal of education,^[6] Physical education will inevitably be marginalized, let alone the concept of physical education. The famous phrase "I think, therefore I am" of the French philosopher Descartes in the 17th century embodies the idea that rational thinking is superior to physical existence.

2.2. Western modern female physical education concept and its influences on later generations

2.2.1. Modern western educators' concepts on physical education and their influences on later generations

The concept of women's physical education in modern western countries mainly refers to the concept of women's physical education which emerged from the beginning of British bourgeois revolution in 1640 to the First World War. At that time, the western society was influenced by the Renaissance, religious reform and the Enlightenment Movement. The academic circles thought a lot about education, which had a great impact on the then and future generations, and played a role in promoting the development of society. Among them, the representative figures about (female) physical education include Locke, Rousseau, Spencer and so on.

Physical education was first put forward by English empiricist philosopher Locke (1632-1704) in *The Education of Gentlemen*.^[7] Locke questioned the rationalism represented by Descartes. He believed that only a healthy body can have a healthy soul. Physical activity has not only physiological significance but also spiritual value. Physical activity is the prerequisite and necessary basis for promoting spiritual development.^[6]^[8] Here the importance of the body has been re-emphasized by education, and it goes beyond the significance of training the body to protect the family and the country, emphasizing the indivisible integration of physical education and education. Locke is widely regarded as the most influential thinker and liberalist in the Enlightenment era. His works also greatly influenced Rousseau and others.

French philosopher, educator and writer Rousseau (1712-1778) advocated naturalistic education. In his book *Emile*, he pointed out that "to exercise the senses is not only to use them, but to learn the correct judgment through them, that is to say, to learn how to feel"^[9]. Rousseau believes that the development of physical exercise ability of children (educated persons) is the prerequisite for the development of wisdom^[7]. Sports can cultivate people's intelligence, will and good quality^[10]. Rousseau believed that the purpose of female education was to cultivate "a virtuous wife, a sober girl and a lovely mother". Therefore, his idea of female sports education was significantly different from that of men. Rousseau advocated that female sports should not be for women to grow strong and powerful, but for women to grow smart.^[11] He mainly emphasized the role of women in sports for their physical health. Only when they are in good health can they have enough physical strength and feel relaxed when they work. Moreover, women's health is related to their children's health. Although Rousseau's concept of female physical education was advanced at that time, it had to be said that it was a typical representative of serving the patriarchal society and had a great impact on women's education in France and even in the world.

Spencer (1820-1903), an English philosopher, advocated that women should become all-round persons of moral, intellectual and physical development through education. He criticized the wrong concept of women's sports, such as looking at a strong physique as vulgar, charming and fragile, cannot help but like a lady. He believes that school physical education should give girls enough exercise to promote blood circulation and ensure the healthy vitality of organs. He suggested that girls take part in physical exercise, which not only can exercise the girl's body, but also can cultivate

the girl's moral character. In addition, he believes that parents should ensure the nutrition of girls.^[11] His understanding of the importance of sports and nutrition to health remains the mainstream in the West. Spencer's concepts on women's sports were progressive at that time. Even today, they still have reference significance. He not only saw the importance of sports for women's health, but also saw the educational nature of sports.

2.2.2. Liberal feminism in physical education concept

As a product of the interaction between political movements and social thoughts, feminism originated in the 18th century. Marie Wollstonecraft, the pioneer of liberal feminism, published the *Defense of Women's Rights* in 1792, which was a representative work of feminism before the 19th century. In this book, she attributes the foolish and superficial performance of many women at that time (they are called "puppies" and "toys") to the artificiality rather than the nature.^[12] She believes that these women are raised in captivity, "because they are not allowed to go outdoors, so as not to tan the white skin of women, so they are not healthy. Because they are not allowed to make their own decisions, they are not free"^[13]. She believed that education could enable women to acquire rational ability, and denied the social conclusion that women did not have rational ability at that time. Therefore, she opposed the practice of excluding women from education.

Mary Wollstonecraft is arguably the pioneer of liberal feminism, and liberal feminism was the first feminist genre. They strive for equal political rights, economic opportunities and educational rights between women and men, symbolized by the fight for women's right to vote. In order to obtain all the rights of male citizens, liberal feminists tend to deny gender differences and emphasize the commonness of men and women. On this premise, there is no reason to refuse to grant women equal rights. Liberal feminism holds that the inequality of educational opportunities results in the rational difference between men and women, so eliminating the inequality of educational system plays an important role in achieving equality between men and women. Co-education for women and men was once the appeal of liberal feminism, which included giving women the same physical education as men. Promoted by the first wave of feminist movement (from the mid-19th century to the 1920s), a large number of women's schools emerged in the West, and many girls directly entered schools that only recruited boys. When the first feminist movement came to an end, Western women were more and more widely educated. It should be noted that when liberal feminists strive for the equal right of men and women to education, they mainly refer to higher education. Moreover, liberal feminism mainly focuses on the education of women's "heart", i.e. the education of rationality, emphasizing that women's higher education originally belongs to men's fields, such as mathematics, machinery, etc., while the focus on physical education is not.

From Locke's exposition of gentleman's physical education, we can see that the western physical education was mainly confined to the aristocracy at that time. With the development of capitalist society, more and more talents are needed, and educatees are gradually expanded to more people, including female educatees. At the same time, modern sports originated in Britain also experienced the process from aristocrat to civilian. Since the 19th century, women (mainly aristocratic women) have gradually increased their participation in these sports, such as swimming, tennis, bicycle, football and other modern sports. Modern sports have finally entered the field of education. In the field of women's physical education, there have been special training institutes for women's physical education teachers, and there have been women's physical educators and practitioners such as Martina Eastberg and Kencordia Levwin, who mainly teach gymnastics.^[14] With the wider participation of women in sports and more women's access to physical education, a series of problems have arisen. What sports are suitable for women (or what sports are not suitable for women)? Should women use the same rules as men when participating in sports that were originally exclusively male? Should female physical education be carried out only by female physical

education teachers? Should school physical education be carried out separately according to gender differences? What is the purpose of female physical education? To this day, some of these questions have not been answered.

Through the exploration of the western female sports education concept, we can find that physical education is not valued by educators in the entire Western education system. At the same time, as the scholars conclude, "sports is an activity with strong gender characteristics. ... is regarded as a taboo in the field of men and women ^[15], and women's physical education is rarely valued, and theoretical thinking on its practice is not sufficient. However, by sorting out the ideological context related to the western female sports education concept, we can see what trends of thought affect the female sports education, so as to help us understand the western female sports education practice and understand the western female sports education concept.

3. The source of Chinese female physical education concept

3.1. Confucianism (female) concept of physical education and its impact on future generations

Ancient Chinese education and physical education were mainly aimed at men. As the first educator who advocated physical education in the history of education in China, Confucius' adult education included physical education. According to the Analects of Confucius, "Zilu asked how to be a perfect person. Confucius said, "If we have the wisdom of Zang Wuzhong, the restraint of Meng Gongchuo, the courage of Bian and Zhuangzi, and the versatility of Ran Qiu, then we can be regarded as a perfect person." Confucius also said, "Why must a perfect man be like this?" Seeing the demands of wealth and righteousness, meeting danger, we can give our lives and keep our promise in poverty for a long time, so that we can become a perfect person. ^[17]"Confucius' educational concept includes the meaning of all-round development of morality, intelligence and physical education. Confucius educated students with six arts, among which "shooting", "imperial", "ritual" and "music" all included the contents of physical education. At the same time, Confucius paid attention to health preservation, advocated the combination of work and leisure. He liked fishing, hunting, chess, mountain climbing and other activities in his spare time. Confucian leisure culture is also considered as a reflection of Confucian physical education concept. ^[18]

Confucius' outlook on physical education has a positive impact on China's sports culture up to now, but it is undeniable that Confucianism founded by Confucius contains the aspect of despising physical activity and attaching importance to literature but despising military force, such as "Gentleman is engaged in mental work, while the villain is engaged in manual labor." ("*The Spring and Autumn with the Zuo Zhuan*"). At the same time, the Confucian filial piety contains the content of "All for filial piety", and does not advocate fierce and confrontational sports activities. ^[18]Confucianism was originally one of the hundreds of schools of thought in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, but since it was solely respected by Emperor Wudi of Han Dynasty, it was not conducive to the development of sports, and had a profound impact on China's sports education.

Confucian ethics fettered women a lot, and gradually became a system in the Han Dynasty. The *Biographies for Chaste Women* in the late Western Han Dynasty and the *Women's Commandments* in the early Eastern Han Dynasty can be regarded as its systematic expression. Under the restraint of Confucian ethics, feminine aesthetics is characterized by weakness. ^[19]Such as in Ban Zhao's "*Women's Commandments and Prudence*" clearly states that "men value strength while women value weakness as beauty". ^[20] This kind of Female Aesthetics has a negative effect on female sports. In the early Han Dynasty, women could also participate in military sports and leisure sports. At that time, there was no obvious gender awareness in sports, such as Cuju (ancient Chinese football game), swing, Baiju, Liu Bo and so on. However, with the increasingly perfect Confucian

system, women's sports activities in the late Han Dynasty were gradually confined to the courtyard of the deep palace, and the swing became the exclusive participation of women from men and women. In military sports, horseback riding and Cuju in recreational sports gradually faded out of female sports.^[19]

In China's feudal dynasty, women in the Tang Dynasty were less bound by feudal ethics. The exchange and integration of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist cultures and foreign cultures rooted in the native region promoted the flourishing of women's Sports Thoughts in Tang Dynasty, showing the situation of the rise of women's sports pluralism in this period.^[21] In Tang Dynasty, women received less restriction on cultural education than before, and there were more than 100 female writers included in Collected Tang Poems.^[22] For many reasons, there are few records of women's participation in sports activities in Tang Dynasty in historical books, but there are some descriptions in literati's notes, poems and customs. Zhang Ji's Palace Chess depicts the situation of women playing chess; Yuan Zhen's Hu Xuan Nv depicts the situation of women playing Hu Xuan Nv on football; Hua Rui's Palace Ci depicts women learning to play polo. In addition to these activities, women in the Tang Dynasty often participated in Cuju, duck shooting, boat racing, rope skills, pole wearing and so on. The development of women's sports in Tang Dynasty originated from the highly developed economy, politics and culture at that time, the relaxed and open social and cultural atmosphere and the self-consciousness of women's pursuit of fitness, which liberated women from their families in the Han and Wei Dynasties and had a positive impact on the Song Dynasty.^[23]

However, throughout the history of women's participation in sports in ancient China, although there are always relevant records, we can see that Female sports belong to entertainment, recreational activities of aristocratic women, or ornamental projects for women to please men, not to mention the systematic concept of physical education and physical education. The emergence of Neo-Confucianism in the late feudal period of Song and Ming Dynasty has increasingly restricted women, and even achieved the goal of controlling women by making them bind their feet to destroy their body and mind. From the Southern Song Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty, it can be said that it was the darkest period in the history of women's Sports in ancient times.^[23]

3.2. Female physical education concept in modern China

The female physical education in China really appeared in modern times. It was first carried out in the church women's school run by Western missionaries. The nature is also the female sports education concept in the West at that time. Gymnastics, track and field, swimming, basketball, volleyball and table tennis were the main contents of the school's physical education curriculum at that time. These women's schools regard sports as a means of comprehensive education for students. Educators believe that sports can not only help to keep fit, but also help to develop group habits and the spirit of competition and struggle.^[24]

After the Sino-Japanese War, the reformists launched the Reform Movement of 1898, and gradually formed their own ideological system of saving the nation and striving for strength in the process of learning from the West. Promoting women's sports was an important trend of thought in the period of 1898, and also the earliest practice of modern women's sports under the leadership of advanced people in China.^[25]

Yan Fu actively advocates the evolutionary ideas such as "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest". From the perspective of genetics, it expounds the necessity of women's physical strength. "Foot binding is not only a mental and physical constraint on women, but also a serious impact on the development of Chinese women." For this reason, he proposed the era of "self-improvement and conservation", which provided a theoretical basis for the rise of women's sports at that time, and also provided theoretical support for the proposal of Cai Yuanpei and other "junior national

education thoughts".^{[26][27]}

Liang Qichao believed that women's education played an important role in the national strength and influence. After examining the education of various countries, he pointed out that American women's education was the most developed and its national strength was the strongest; Japanese women's education was relatively developed and its national strength was relatively strong. However, if Chinese women can't afford to give birth, if the trend does not change day by day, then China will not be strong every day. [27] Liang Qichao also paid special attention to women's physical education in various countries, pointing out that a strong country and a strong army will make women in middle schools learn gymnastics, and then the children born will be strong and strong. This is also one of the important significance of women's physical education. [28] He also illustrated the importance of women's physical exercise with the example that gymnastics courses in Japanese women's schools are almost the same as those in men's schools. [29]

Under this trend of thought, women's schools and women's physical education are gradually carried out throughout the country. In May 1898, Shanghai Jingzheng Women's School (also known as the "Chinese Women's School") introduced gymnastics into the formal curriculum, which was the first woman's physical education class. In 1902, the patriotic women's school in Shanghai, founded by Mr. Cai Yuanpei, was regarded as "the most beautiful place" by people of the time. Article 1 of the school's running Charter states that "The aim of this school is to promote women's intelligence, morality and physical strength so as to match their patriotism. ".^[24]

In 1907, the Constitution of the Women's Primary School, promulgated by the Qing government, stated that "women's foot-binding is the most devastating, and there is a way to seduce sports, and all schools are forbidden."^[30], the regulations also include gymnastics as a compulsory course for women's primary schools. The elementary school hall must guarantee a four-hour physical education class every week, starting with a professor's game and gradually transitioning to gymnastics; the higher elementary school must guarantee three hours of gymnastics classes every week. The promulgation of the charter marks the entry of the women's physical education curriculum.

In addition to the idea of protecting the seed of a powerful country and saving the nation by sports, influenced by Western feminism, Chinese women began to awaken their self-consciousness and gradually pointed the value of sports to themselves. The Zhenhua Women's School, established in 1905, has set eight goals for physical education, six of which point to the role of physical education in women themselves, including improving their manners, noble entertainment, cultivating their personality, learning health and medical knowledge. By examining women's physical education from the perspective of women themselves, stresses the significance of physical education for women's health and development, and shows the awakening of women's self-worth.^[29] Chen Zaifen, one of the first students in Shanghai Patriotic Girls' School, proposed that sports can protect women from slavery. Sports is as important as moral education and intellectual education for women. Both men and women should take physical exercise. She also criticized the traditional feminine aesthetics which regards weakness as beauty, believing that foot binding, ear piercing, nail cultivation and so on are not conducive to women's sports activities.^[31]

Out of the traditional idea that men and women are different, the development of physical education in women's schools made the training of female physical education teachers a top priority at that time. Women's College of Physical Education came into being in this situation, which resulted in a number of female sports professionals and a small number of female sportsmen in the period of the Republic of China. Among them, Zhang Huilan is the first sports worker to obtain a doctoral degree in China. She has served as the director of the Department of Physical Education of Jinling Women's University twice. She attaches great importance to the popularization of women's sports. She believes that "in order to reform the country, it is necessary to popularize women's

sports first." She hopes to accomplish the goal of popularizing women's sports through the training of female sports professionals.^[32]

In modern China, the concept of female physical education was influenced by Western thoughts. When the country was in crisis and the society was undergoing drastic changes and turbulence, people of insight put forward and put into practice the ideas of "Sports Powerful Country" and "Protect Seeds Powerful State", which promoted female physical education. At the same time, the promotion of women's education has produced their own awakening, but also recognized the importance of physical education for their own development. However, because of the low popularity of women's education in general at that time, women's physical education was not widely accepted.

4. Comparison and conclusion of origins of Chinese and western female sports education concepts

From the foregoing, we can see that the female physical education outlook of China and the West did not develop in a straight line, but in a spiral and tortuous way. As early as Plato's time, the West began to practice, explore, argue and think about female physical education. But in the development of history, western women's right to education has been gradually deprived and restricted. Until modern times, with the rise of Western feminism, it began to reconsider women's equal right to education, which played a role in promoting women's acceptance of physical education. One of the results of the National Social Science Fund Project "The Influence of Foreign Educational Theories on the Development of Chinese School Sports in Modern Times"---"*Study on the Physical Education View of Famous Educators in Modern Times*"^[33], summed up the eleven western education in modern times, but only Rousseau and Spencer mentioned above are involved in the outlook on female physical education. In ancient China, there were few discussions on women's physical education, and women participated in sports practice, but there was no systematic female physical education. Women participate in sports activities in different periods, due to the impact of economic, political, cultural and other environments, but also to varying degrees. In the open-minded period, there are fewer restrictions on women's participation in sports; in the period of deepening female confinement, women's sports as a whole tend to decline. It was not until modern times that real female physical education began to appear in China, and the female physical education in this period was also subject to many restrictions, such as generally in women's schools, teachers by women and so on. Before 1949, Chinese women's physical education was mainly influenced by the "westerly wind spreading eastward". Learning from western and Japanese women's physical education, it can be said that Chinese women's physical education at that time had less audience and lagged behind the west.

Educators, who have exerted great influence on Chinese and Western education, including physical education, have not fully and perfectly discussed female physical education, reflecting the lack of attention to women's physical education. Some of these educators' thoughts play a positive role in women's physical education, but some of them play a negative role, even inhibit the overall physical education, such as the western "physical and mental dualism" and "promoting the mind and restraining the body", the Confucian "attaching importance to literature but despising military force" and "men are superior to women". These ideas have not been completely dispelled in China and the West, and still affect people's ideas and physical education practice, which need to be taken seriously.

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