

# The Reflection of Chinese Traditional Culture in Sports from a Communication Studies Perspective

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## Abstract

Since ancient times, Chinese traditional culture has been regarded as a treasure, carrying the wisdom and spiritual essence of the Chinese nation for thousands of years. With the development of the times, an increasing number of communication channels have emerged, allowing Chinese traditional culture to reach the world. Sports have also become an important part of this process. This paper explores the manifestation of Chinese traditional culture in sports from the perspective of communication studies, using rhythmic gymnastics as an example to analyze how traditional culture is inherited and innovated in modern sports.

**Keywords:** communication; culture; sport; symbol.

## Cultural Communication in Communication Studies:

In the realm of communication studies, communication is essentially the transmission of social information. This process hinges on the use of symbols (language, text, gestures, or images), since the intangible essence of information can only be conveyed through these symbolic forms.

Cultural communication, a specialized concept within communication studies, involves the dissemination and sharing of cultural elements such as values, customs, and beliefs through diverse media and channels. It transcends mere information transfer; it is about constructing and reproducing cultural meanings and social identities. Given the abstract and profound nature of cultural information, the role of symbols in cultural communication becomes all the more crucial.

## Communication Symbols in Sports:

In the world of competitive sports, communication symbols are often strikingly visual. Take the 2024 Paris Olympics as an example. The Chinese table tennis team's uniforms were adorned with the color red and featured the Chinese dragon motif. Red, a symbol of Chinese culture, embodies

celebration, passion, and triumph. This vibrant color in the uniforms not only conveyed an uplifting spirit but also mirrored the athletes' tenacity and glory on the field. The dragon, a revered mythical creature in Chinese culture, represents strength, nobility, and good fortune. These symbols, as vessels of traditional Chinese culture, both highlight national identity and express the profound cultural value they carry.

As global sports continue to evolve, niche competitive sports like rhythmic gymnastics, synchronized swimming, and ice dancing have gained more attention. In these sports, communication symbols have become increasingly diverse. Unlike traditional sports, they blend elements of dance and music. Within the framework of standardized competition rules, athletes are given greater freedom to showcase their unique artistry.

## **The Dissemination of Chinese Traditional Culture through Rhythmic Gymnastics:**

As one of the Olympic sports, Rhythmic Gymnastics (RG) is a sport based on natural and rhythmic movements with hand-held light apparatus, accompanied by music. It is also a kind of artistic competitive gymnastics, known as "the carpet ballet."

In rhythmic gymnastics, athletes are judged not only on their technical skill but also on their artistic expression. They frequently employ music, choreography, and costumes to convey a distinctive artistic flair. On the international stage, these elements often function as powerful symbols, embodying the cultural identity of their respective countries.

Rhythmic gymnastics originated in Europe at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when the European education reform and the development of female sports had a great impact on rhythmic gymnastics. In the 1950s, rhythmic gymnastics was widely carried out and gradually developed into a competitive sport. In recent years, China's rhythmic gymnastics has made rapid progress. At the same time, it has also made more innovative and bold attempts. We no longer blindly pursue the traditional European ballet style, but integrate more and more traditional Chinese cultural elements into the RG exercise, so that our traditional culture and sports collide with new sparks.

When it comes to traditional Chinese culture, we have to mention the well-known Dunhuang murals. Dunhuang murals are the treasure of ancient Chinese art. It rooted in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, located in Mogao District near Dunhuang City, Gansu Province, which was an important cultural exchange center on China's ancient Silk Road. The caves have preserved more than 45,000 square meters of murals, more than 2,000 colored sculptures, and more than 50,000 handwritten documents. The murals of the Mogao Caves depict the scenes of production and labor, social life, and architectural forms of various ethnic groups in ancient times, which have

different aesthetic characteristics and artistic styles from the secular paintings. This magnificent heritage is famous for its extensive and profound artistic connotation.

The music and dance depicted in Dunhuang murals are a major highlight, featuring unique dance moves that are elegant and brilliant. Almost every mural contains dance images, which are exquisite. Among the numerous Dunhuang dance styles, the flying apsaras are particularly representative. In Dunhuang Cave 209, there are as many as 154 figures of flying apsaras. Actually, the flying apsaras were prevalent in Dunhuang murals during the Tang Dynasty, and their hairstyles and costumes were close to the real women in Tang Dynasty China. In addition, the dance poses in Dunhuang murals have very distinctive characteristics, such as the rich variety of hand shapes, the graceful, angular, and curved arms, the three bends in the body, and the emphasis on body curves. These postures have gradually become symbols of Dunhuang culture, and in turn, have evolved into representations of traditional Chinese culture.



At the 2022 Tokyo Olympic Games, the Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team integrated the Dunhuang dance into the RG exercise of five balls, presenting a wonderful performance for the audience. In rhythmic gymnastics, the ball, as a round apparatus, is mainly used by rolling. Gymnasts show their smooth and soft beauty through rolling the ball on different parts of their bodies. The characteristics of the ball are perfectly matched with the beauty of curves in Dunhuang dance. Integrating Dunhuang elements into gymnastics movements not only greatly improves the aesthetic appeal and artistry of the moves, but also endows them with cultural value.



The Chinese team finally won the fourth place in the group all-around, which was the best result achieved by the Chinese rhythmic gymnastics team since the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, marking a historic breakthrough. More noteworthy is that our artistic score was the highest in the competition, indicating that the combination of traditional Chinese culture and rhythmic gymnastics has been recognized by the world.

In recent years, we have also tried to use other RG apparatus as the symbols to reflect different traditional cultures and make more innovative designs. For example, at the 2024 Paris Olympics, the Chinese gymnasts ingeniously employed ribbons and balls, using the ribbons to evoke the strings of a guzheng—a traditional Chinese zither. One of the gymnasts simulated the action of playing guzheng by twitching the ribbons, while the other two gymnasts rolled the balls on the ground, as if the wonderful notes flowed out naturally.



Through such ingenious and bold attempts and designs, we presented the mysterious and abstract traditional culture and heritage to the world audience through visual performing art forms, allowing people to feel the artistic beauty contained in traditional Chinese culture in the most intuitive way.

## Conclusion:

In fact, not only artistic gymnastics, but also more and more other sports have integrated traditional culture into them and brought them to the world's competitions. For example, the ice dance athletes Wang Shiyue and Liu Xinyu interpreted the painting A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains, the artistic swimming women's duet performed the Green Snake, etc.



We can find that these sports events themselves are artistic, and they are the combination of performing arts and competitive sports. They have also become carriers of culture and heritage, making culture enter people's lives in a more vivid and intuitive way, so that more people have the opportunity to experience its profound cultural heritage and artistic value closely. At the same time, more importantly, our traditional culture itself is art, and the combination of sports and culture is also the collision of different arts. With the continuous updating of people's aesthetic concepts, we have reason to believe that more creative and imaginative cultural elements will be integrated into sports events in the future, bringing us more wonderful visual feasts and cultural experiences.

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