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'Tiyu (体育)' for Development and Peace? An Examination of Attitudes and Possibilities of the People's Republic of China Regarding the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) Movement

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Abstract: The People's Republic of China (PRC) has appeared to be inattentive towards the globally lobbied Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement that endeavors to leverage sport for non-sporting development, currently subscribing to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By adopting the concept of 'tiyu (体育)'—the supposed Chinese counterpart of 'sport'—which also seeks to achieve wider objectives grounded on its premise of 'body cultivation', this paper proceeds with a text-based qualitative study incorporating document analysis and literature review to examine its current links to SDP. The findings suggest that: (1) While the national development foci of the PRC have demonstrated alignment with the SDGs, its *tiyu* policies have not. (2) Mainstream SDP projects have failed to be accommodated in the PRC, although some non-SDP *tiyu* practices have shown a commitment to SDP-desired outcomes. (3) The relative lack of interest in SDP in the PRC has not prevented some *tiyu* scholars from heeding this movement. Accordingly, this paper assesses the prospects of changing attitudes in the PRC toward SDP.

Keywords: *Tiyu*; Sport-for-Development; Sport for Development and Peace (SDP); 2030 agenda; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); People's Republic of China (PRC); United Nations (UN); China



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1. Introduction

Ever since its inception, the United Nations (UN) has been seeking to incorporate sport and relevant activities into its central framework by working to link them with the pursuit of international development and peacebuilding [1]. The ongoing global imperative of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for example, pinpoints sport as 'an important enabler of sustainable development' [2], giving further impetus to the vision of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) that has been advocated by the UN since 2001 and was recognized seven years later as a burgeoning international movement [3]. Underpinned by interchangeable ideas about Sport-for-Development (SfD), SDP aspires to leverage sport for peaceful and developmental outcomes, including conflict reconciliation [4], social inclusion and integration [5], crime reduction and delinquency prevention [6], gender equality and empowerment [7], and poverty alleviation and improved livelihood [8]. This consciousness, however, is not novel but could trace its footprints back to the long-held knowledge of 'sport-for-good' that champions sport as an avenue for molding healthy, moral, disciplined, and competent individuals according to modernist, colonial and, later, neoliberal values, the history of which has inevitably been intertwined with the modernization of China [9,10].

'The aim of United Nations activities involving sport is not the creation of new sporting champions and the development of sport but rather the use of sport in broader development and peace-building activities. While in some instances such activities may lead to the

development of sport, the primary desired outcome is to contribute to overall development via sport-related projects [11].'

The UN claims its emphasis on sport with SDP differs from the traditional 'sport development' model (also known as the development of sport) wherein elite performances, competitiveness, and sport for sport's sake are located [12]. Based on this standpoint, the UN has, in several instances, called for global attention to be paid to SDP by organizing symposiums to yield policies stressing the application of sport in development contexts and sponsoring sport's role in its leading international development strategies, such as the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current SDGs [11,13]. The past two decades have seen the UN effectively selling this idea to international and domestic policymakers who have enacted and promulgated their own SDP policies [14,15], to organizations and practitioners who have implemented and evaluated SDP-featured projects [16], and to academics and researchers who have produced SDP studies to validate or critically examine its promises [17,18]. All of these have led this realm to become an institutionalized sector replete with various stakeholders of divergent interests [19]. These vibrant dynamics, however, are overshadowed by the fact that SDP NGOs—the dominant label of SDP—mostly serve the interests of the Global North to implement short-term projects aimed at marginalized domestic groups within and Global South disadvantaged populations without [20]. This feature of SDP has drawn widespread criticism regarding the often poorly-designed projects [21], which, in the worst scenarios, could reinforce structural inequalities created by neoliberal and neo-colonial ideas [22,23].

The prowess and accumulated successes of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in terms of elite sports and hosting sport mega-events (SMEs) have made it a global powerhouse in sport development [24,25], which continues to have a great interest in globalization both through and in sport for further exerting its soft power [26,27]. Meanwhile, the PRC is among the 193 member states of the UN that have consented to, and accordingly aligned their development priorities with, the 2030 agenda, which is evidenced by the nationally mobilized poverty alleviation campaign declared to have ended extreme poverty within the domestic population [28]. Furthermore, the PRC has continued to work as an 'alternative' actor in international development aid beyond the dichotomy of the first-world giver and third-world receiver [29], in many less-developed countries, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia, where a broad range of development support has been initiated, incorporating sport aid and facility constructions [30]. These three essential manifestations, however, have not prompted an active engagement from the PRC with SDP, with the country appearing to remain less captivated by this global lobby, as recognized by several SDP scholars [31–33]. In relation to the PRC's position of being a co-signatory to the UN's main SDP resolutions and policies [13,34], a series of questions can be asked (1) Why has the PRC thus far adopted an ambiguous stance towards the SDP movement? (2) Has sport (*tiyu*) in China been historically treated as an end itself, instead of a means for other things? (3) How can existing policies, practices, and research in the PRC be related to SDP? (4) And accordingly, how can we foresee the prospects of SDP in the PRC?

To answer these questions warrants a pioneering study to unpack the disparities and comparable aspects between SDP and sport in the PRC. Firstly, the paper reviews the definition and historical significance of sport in China, using the concept and terminology of *tiyu* as raised by Andrew D. Morris [35]. Based on this, we then proceed with a text-based qualitative study targeting pertinent official documents, reports, scholarly literature, media coverage, and online resources [36] with the aim of mapping out the panorama of relevant policies, practices, and research in the PRC. Finally, we conclude our findings and consider the possibility of a sporting paradigm shift from sport development to SDP in the PRC. Darnell and colleagues have pointed out that the academia of SDP has predominantly been exposed as favoring Global North researchers communicating in English, whereas the academic attention from non-Western countries and/or addressing non-English contexts has remained less visible. It is also recognized that, regardless of the budding academic interests to associate hard development efforts with sport development in BRICS countries

such as Brazil and the PRC [37,38], attention to sport and relatively soft development pursuits have remained rare in these emerging nations [31]. By conducting this study, we wish to inspect this ‘lacking interest from the PRC to SDP’ impression with empirical data and thus address the potential discrepancy, while adding to the research repertoire of SDP and helping to tackle the bubble effect of this institutionalized ‘Sportland’ [33].

2. The Instrumental Premise of *Tiyu*—From ‘Body Cultivation’ to *Tiyu-for-Good*

As mentioned earlier, the PRC’s current attitude towards the UN’s framework in global sport has remained vague, highlighting its ambivalent position as a co-signatory to key SDP strategies since their emergence [13,34], as it has not demonstrated noticeable adherence to SDP in terms of policies and practices. Before directly turning to this concern, however, we identify two fundamental questions which must be addressed in order to foreground subsequent discussion. First, considering cultural and linguistic disparities, do ‘sport’ and its Chinese counterpart ‘*tiyu* (体育)’ actually share an identical definition as most Chinese and English literature assume? Second, does the current lack of interest in SDP suggest that the PRC has so far regarded sport (*tiyu*) mainly as an end itself, instead of an instrument for other things? The official Chinese versions of the UN’s SDP strategies provide valuable references to contemplate the first question. Despite the general expression which translates SDP as ‘体育促进发展与和平’ by referring ‘sport’ to ‘*tiyu*’ [39], ‘sport’ has also been varyingly translated as *yundong* (‘运动’) or *tiyuyundong* (‘体育运动’) even within a single UN document (for example, see in *Kazan Action Plan*) [13], revealing the genuine difficulty in appropriately explaining ‘sport’ with an exclusive concept in contemporary Chinese [40,41].

Elucidating this issue fully requires a brief consideration of the significant influence of the Japanese language upon modern Chinese and Korean terminologies, particularly regarding sport-related concepts. For that reason, we have provided Table 1 to compare and discuss the affinities and differences between key sport-related terminologies in Japanese, Korean and Chinese. As illustrated, while terminologies of ‘Physical Education (PE)’ and ‘(Bodily) Exercise’ clearly reveal the same origins with phonetic relatedness in these three languages, matters become confusing when we turn to ‘sport’ in Chinese, because different terms are used in different contexts to convey its ‘fluid’ meanings. No official guidance has ever been given to officially stipulate under which contexts ‘sport’ should be what in Chinese. Nevertheless, there is tacit agreement widely recognized by native Chinese speakers, especially among sport insiders such as the first author. Therefore, when referring to ‘sport’ in a broad sense, for example in the term ‘sport industry’, sport is generally rendered as *tiyu* (‘体育’) by borrowing the original translation of PE. When indicating ‘sport’ in a more limited sense, such as ‘winter sport’, the word *yundong* (‘运动’, borrowed from the translation of exercise) is used instead. These, however, do not encompass all the scenarios in which ‘sport’ is translated, for example by employing terms such as *tiyuyundong* (‘体育运动’) when its function in PE and exercise are both highlighted, and *jingji* (‘竞技’, which originally means competition) when it is hard to apply any of the ‘bodily’ senses for instance to emerging activities such as ‘e-sport’.

Table 1. Key sport-related terminologies in Japanese, Chinese and Korean.

Terms in English	Terms in Japanese (with Japanese Romanization)	Terms in Korean (with Korean Romanization)	Terms in Simplified Chinese (with Pinyin Romanization)
Physical Education (PE) (Bodily) Exercise	体育 (<i>taiku</i>) 運動 (<i>undō</i>)	체육 (<i>cheyook</i>), ‘體育’ in Hanja 운동 (<i>undong</i>), ‘運動’ in Hanja	体育 (<i>tiyu</i>) 运动 (<i>yundong</i>) 体育 (<i>tiyu</i>) 运动 (<i>yundong</i>)
Sport	スポーツ (<i>supōtsu</i>)	스포츠 (<i>seupocheu</i>)	体育运动 (<i>tiyuyundong</i>) 竞技 (<i>jingji</i>) ...

Flying in the face of familiar rhetoric that ‘sport is a universal language’ while opposing the prevalence in existing English and Chinese literature of equating *tiyu* with sport, we thus draw on the notion of *tiyu*—used by Morris [35]—to illuminate a unique Chinese conception that is of direct relevance to physical education, body cultivation, and physical exercise, but is less commonly associated with leisure and play. Notwithstanding its apparent connection to the Japanese concept ‘*taiku* (体育)’, which is an abbreviated translation of the Spencerian idea of ‘Physical Education’ (PE) [42], Morris incisively argued that the Chinese *tiyu* ought to be seen as a broader understanding of physical culture exceeding its original definition as PE [35]. It has become a concept encompassing various forms of physical activity, body cultures, and sports under the overarching idea of ‘body (*ti*, 体) cultivation (*yu*, 育)’, which is ostensibly promised by its very name [35]. As pointed out in existing literature, this premise has, since the very beginning, endowed *tiyu* with the mission to nourish modern, muscular, and capable bodies whereby a stronger Chinese nation could be built for the industrial age [43,44]. This almost social-Darwinian understanding of modern physical activities is still relevant, in the contemporary Chinese context [35,45], which functions to anchor in public awareness that *tiyu* should not only be ‘physical’, but also ‘physically beneficial’. This could be seen as another markedly different characteristic from those of Western ‘sport’, for which whether it must even be ‘physical’ remains open for discussion while its relationships to leisure and ritual activities are often considered essential [46,47].

Although many sport-like activities did emerge, and often prospered throughout the long history of feudal China, this conceptualization serves not only to dispel the myth that considers ‘*tiyu*’ to be a long-embedded Chinese idea, but also to reveal its modernist and nationalist underpinnings that aspire to harness Western-originated paradigms for the sake of the modern Chinese nation. The early phase of modern China witnessed the flourishing of the aspiration to ‘*Save the Nation through Tiyu*’ (‘*体育救国*’) according to which revolutionists and activists zealously advocated *tiyu* as the instrument to cultivate the modern Chinese nation with more robust bodies, thereby equipping the once suffering country with the citizenry and military capable of protecting and reviving nation-state [48]. This is well captured in the first publication of Chairman Mao Zedong, namely ‘*The Study of Tiyu* (体育之研究)’, in which he espouses *tiyu* as ‘a means for maintaining good health (体育者, 养生之道也)’, and hence an indispensable mechanism for constructing a stronger modern nation [49]. Resonating with Morris’ argument which demarcates *tiyu* as a realm ‘far too vast to be merely rendered as “physical education”, “sport” or “exercise” [35], we argue that *tiyu* has been practiced as much more than a means ‘to cultivate the body’, but also as a carrier and an embodiment of broader interests including patriotism, diplomacy, economic potentials and so on.

‘*体育者, 人类自养其生之道, 使身体平均发达, 而有规则次序之可言者也。*’—‘*Tiyu* is the means for human beings to maintain good health, a method that aims to cultivate the body evenly in a regular and sequential manner [49]’.

These broader roles and values of *tiyu* have continued to be embraced since the establishment of the PRC and have even been given more weight in recent decades following the successful hosting of two Olympiads and other SMEs [50]. Facilitating international relations and diplomacy is one such prominent role of *tiyu*, well exemplified by *Ping-Pong diplomacy* that has been seen as helping to reconstruct the diplomatic connection between the PRC and the USA [42] and has been further developed through a series of *tiyu* foreign aid programs aimed at constructing sporting facilities and supporting elite sport development in friendly developing countries [30,51]. Another vital role of *tiyu* is embodied in its unique capacity to boost national pride as ‘a carrier of glory’ in international sporting events [52], which has been amplified due to the PRC’s interest in showcasing soft power through both hosting and dominating international sporting events, in particular the Olympics [24,53]. In addition, with the ever-growing interest in incorporating *tiyu* as a vital element of the national economy [54], we reply to our second question by contending

that *tiyu* has never been seen solely as an end to itself but has always been regarded as a driver of wider goals.

Under the influence of the West's vision of sport-for-good and of 'Muscular Christianity', SDP views 'sport' as a means to other things, rather than an end itself [55], and consequently, 'an important enabler for sustainable development' [2]. Similarly, we term the aspiration to harness *tiyu* to external goals as *tiyu*-for-good, which characterizes the Chinese ambition to mobilize physical activities and sports based on the broader definition of *tiyu*, and for the sake of the Chinese nation.

3. Methods

On the basis of existing mapping-the-field studies in SDP [20,33,56], the primary purpose of this paper is to provide a fairly comprehensive, but not necessarily exhaustive, account of how the PRC's current *tiyu* policies, practices, and research can be associated with SDP. According to Bowen [57], documentary material is considered a staple in qualitative research, on which exploratory studies can be based to unearth meanings, make understandings and acquire empirical knowledge, thereby probing a realm of academic interest that can help guide ensuing studies. Moreover, textual information does not simply depict the reality of an issue 'out there', but also serves to work upon, modify and transform it [58]. Thus, comprehending what is going on and how it will develop in the future in a specific field often requires paying attention to relevant documents and literature, especially at the initial stage of research [59]. Based on the research questions raised and conceptual underpinnings discussed above, we proceed with a text-based qualitative study integrating document analysis and literature review [36], drawing upon existing documentary and scholarly resources, including ongoing policies and official enunciations, project descriptions and reports, media content, internet datasets, and information, as well as academic literature, most of which are openly published and accessible online.

In light of methodological approaches of qualitative research [60], especially those of thematic analysis, we take policies, practices, and academic studies as three predetermined themes to categorize our findings, not least because the current architecture of the SDP sector has primarily consisted of SDP policies, SDP practices, and SDP research as three essential and interrelated dimensions [61,62]. We also take into account the paradigmatic foundations and methods of content analysis and discourse analysis [63,64], thereby helping us to examine these textual data from a relatively holistic and critical perspective considering who produced them, the purposes for which they were produced, the contexts in which they were produced, and what they say and do not say. Additionally, to ensure the accountability and relevance of textual resources, we apply the method of the CRAAP test to inspect five important qualities of the data, including the currency (is the source current?), relevance (is its information germane to the topic?), authority (is the source produced by reliable author or institution?), accuracy (is the information correct?), and purpose (for what purpose is this information produced?) [65,66]. These above are employed for guidance and references for the procedures that are detailed as follows.

To examine the political orientations of the PRC in terms of development and *tiyu*, we first approach the overall development policy (the latest five-year national plan) and the official international development vision of the PRC via online resources available on official government websites (such as www.gov.cn, accessed on 9 August 2022), then give special consideration to the leading health and *tiyu* policies through similar portals of the State Council of the PRC and the General Administration of Sport (*Tiyu*) of China (www.sport.gov.cn and www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/, accessed on 9 August 2022). As the extensive scope of these policy documents is too broad to be fully covered by a single study, following the trail of previous studies on Chinese *tiyu* policies [50,54], we select the top health policy and four of the most significant *tiyu* strategies that cover major political themes of *tiyu* to be followed by other subordinate policies, which we list in the corresponding section. For the extracting and analyzing process of these documents, we design a cascading set of screening questions, including (1) is there any direct reference to SDP or

to the 2030 agenda and the SDGs? (2) is there any facet of the wider expectations of *tiyu* (*tiyu*-for-good) included? (3) how are these objectives positioned and articulated within policies? And finally, (4) is there any procedure raised by policies to explicate, gauge, or evaluate the mechanism of realizing these goals?

Second, we have accessed reliable SDP websites, including sportanddev.com and beyondsport.org, to investigate the current, if any, level of engagement from and within the PRC. In addition to these archetypal SDP activities, we also inspect general *tiyu* practices, SMEs, and *tiyu*-featured philanthropies that can be associated with SDP in terms of purposes and target populations, using pertinent documentary materials gleaned from official websites (such as www.yaofoundation.cn, accessed on 9 August 2022) and trustworthy news sources (such as www.chinadaily.com.cn, accessed on 9 August 2022). Analyzing these documents and discourses involves assessing their relationship with SDP and/or the SDGs, proposed purposes and desired outcomes, as well as their mechanism and evaluation of how external values of *tiyu* can be achieved.

Lastly, we examine existing English and Chinese academic literature published after 2001 (the year SDP was institutionalized by the UN) that seeks to link the PRC with SDP, which are mainly collected from sound academic journals indexed by the Web of Science and CSSCI. The initial searching phase for English literature utilizes keywords including 'sport for development', 'sport for development and peace', 'United Nations and sport', '2030 agenda and sport', 'sport and sustainable development goals' to each pair with 'China'. Likewise, to search for Chinese literature, we use '发展与和平 (development and peace)', '发展 (development)', '联合国 (United Nations)', '2030 议程 (2030 agenda)', '可持续发展目标 (sustainable development goals)' to each pair respectively with '体育 (*tiyu*)' and/or '运动 (*yundong*)'. The distinctions between sport-for-development and sport development [12] are used to guide the principal screening criterion which excludes literature that is irrelevant to the notion of deploying *tiyu* for broader outcomes. Another extracting criterion requires literature to have direct references to SDP, rather than discussing developmental values of *tiyu* in general terms. By applying this procedure for searching via online academic engines such as Google Scholars and CNKI, only less than ten papers were identified, so we adopted a snowballing, manual method by checking bibliographies and through extensive reading to identify the most relevant studies. Additionally, we consider other disciplines within *tiyu* studies that could potentially engage with the themes of SDP. Eventually, 26 academic outputs are collected and scrutinized for this section.

Although we were committed to involving rigorous methodological practices and accountable data resources, we recognize a variety of limitations of this study. Despite the advantages of data availability, unobtrusiveness, and stability, document analysis is susceptible to constraints such as insufficient detail, selective bias, and, on occasion, low retrievability [57], which could potentially make our study somewhat fragmentary, biased, and selective. Engaging with a relatively narrow range of literature in English and Chinese might also induce omissions of academic outputs in other languages, or from other disciplines, such as development studies. Nevertheless, we regard the study as meaningful and valuable as a forerunner of future research on SDP and the PRC by providing initial knowledge and references.

4. Research Findings

4.1. The Overriding Development Foci of the PRC and the Policy Discourses of *Tiyu*

The current overriding development foci of the PRC demonstrate consistency with the UN's priorities, best embodied in the national poverty alleviation strategy for SDG 1 No Poverty. However, *tiyu* has often had a peripheral role in such pursuits. The vision of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind (人类命运共同体) is one such key development imperative of the PRC, which has been frequently voiced by President Xi Jinping on the global stage since 2017 to envision an international community moving towards peace and development based on interdependency, multilateralism, and equality. Despite a sporting

metaphor being invoked to envisage ‘the marathon track towards peace and development (和平与发展的马拉松跑道)’, *tiyu* has not been given particular attention within the main articulation, let alone shown to be potentially useful for peace and development [67]. The latest top national development strategy of the PRC, namely the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 (中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和2035年远景目标纲要) [68], reiterates that ‘peace and development are still key themes of today (和平与发展仍然是时代主题)’ and aims to ‘actively realize the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (积极落实联合国2030年可持续发展议程)’. This strategy does give specific attention to the development of *tiyu*, juxtaposed with various ‘soft development’ objectives akin to SDP’s main pursuits [31], such as rural revitalization and promoting social goods to disadvantaged groups [68]. Nevertheless, these policy discourses have no clear enunciation to indicate that these two themes are interdependent or reciprocal. Instead, they are positioned separately.

The widely accepted health value and body cultivation promises of *tiyu* arguably become the only elements that truly, albeit indirectly, align with the SDGs, given the particular attention featured in the top health policy of the PRC, i.e., the Healthy China 2030 (健康中国2030) [69,70]. This policy heralds ‘a major initiative to meet the international commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (履行2030年可持续发展议程国际承诺的重大举措)’ in terms of public health governance, in which *tiyu* is incorporated as an essential means for better national health and physiques that further underscores its significance, especially when it is espoused as a medical prescription [69]. Meanwhile, the social, economic, and diplomatic outreaches of *tiyu*—mainly under the inspiration of *tiyu*-for-good—are detailed in several existing *tiyu* policies of the PRC, chief among them being The *Tiyu* Law of the PRC (2022 revision) (中华人民共和国体育法, 2022修订) [71], the 14th Five-Year Plan of *Tiyu* Development (“十四五”体育发展规划) [72], the Outline for Building a Leading *Tiyu* Nation (体育强国建设纲要) [73] and the National Fitness Program (2021–2025) (国务院关于印发全民健身计划, 2021–2025年) [74]. In addition to addressing national physical health [71], the economic potential of *tiyu* is also being given increasing emphasis within official orientations with the government, repeatedly stressing that the *tiyu* industry and related consumption should be expected to become one of the pillars of the national economy [73,74]. Its diplomatic and peace functions are also appreciated, with *tiyu* being seen as an indispensable conduit for facilitating domestic and international relationships, particularly in support of the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ and the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ cause [72,73]. Additionally, *tiyu* is identified as effective for delivering social inclusion and psychological well-being to vulnerable domestic populations [75].

Although other expectations such as the educational outreach of *tiyu* have also been underlined in recent years [76], as suggested by Chen and colleagues [50], these policy discourses remained relatively abstract with no indication of precise mechanisms in most of them, while those that do, make no acknowledgement of SDP or the SDGs. Compared with ongoing SDP policies within which development goals, implementing procedures, and evaluation methods are detailed [77], these *tiyu* policies provide little guidance on how to approach and measure the outcomes in terms of social development and peace, possibly assuming that promoting *tiyu* development will automatically bring about such salutary effects. Accordingly, they have been approached largely in a development-of-sport manner [12,78], including constructing more facilities, cultivating more educators, and ultimately increasing more opportunities for *tiyu*, whereby quantifiable goals can offer clear indicators such as the regularity of *tiyu* participation, the average space for *tiyu* per person and the total fiscal scale for the *tiyu* industry to reach [73,74]. This is recognized in Zheng and colleagues’ findings on the increasing political prominence attached to ‘*tiyu*-for-all’ in the PRC, even though elite-level success remains, as before, an overriding priority [54]. Following Darnell and Dao’s argument, we accept that access to sport in the sense of human rights should be treated as an essential target of SDP, perhaps even the most important [79]. Nevertheless, we consider these hard benchmarks of *tiyu*-for-all in

policies, though supported by an awareness of *tiyu*-for-good, to resemble development-of-sport goals that differ from SDP's major interests.

4.2. *Tiyu* Practices for SDP-Desired Outcomes but Not Informed by SDP

The policy orientations of *tiyu* that embrace *tiyu*-for-good but attend little to SDP or the SDGs, illuminate to a great extent why the PRC has hitherto not seemed to be interested in becoming extensively involved in SDP-featured practices. As a result, aligning *tiyu* praxes with development pursuits, let alone those similar to SDP NGOs, has not become a common paradigm in the PRC [80]. According to the renowned SDP platform Sportanddev, there were only six registered organizations located in the PRC out of 1030 registered worldwide, of which only two organizations located in Hong Kong—the InspringHK Sports and HKRU Community foundations—can accurately be considered as SDP organizations (as of 9 August 2022, Sportanddev listed on its website sportanddev.org) [81]. A similar finding emerges from another influential SDP platform, Beyond Sport, where no existing SDP NGO or projects in the PRC were identified (as of 9 August 2022, Beyond Sport listed on its website beyondsport.org) [82]. Despite some sporadic SDP activities in Hong Kong SAR [32], this predicament in part highlights a likely clash between SDP's mounting NGOization [83] on the one hand, and the complex State-NGO relationship in the PRC on the other [84]. While the number of registered NGOs in the PRC has been growing in recent years, pertinent administration and regulation have been much tightened concurrently, under which authorized NGOs are mostly channeled to minimal activities approved by the government, while seeking international funding or partnership has become very difficult, if not impossible [84]. The malfunction, and consequent cessation, in the PRC of the SDP superstar—Right to Play—best exemplifies this conundrum. As a Canada-based organization sourcing international funding, its well-known child-focused projects were reported to lack enough local knowledge of the PRC, taking for granted their trademarked activities could empower Chinese kids despite being grounded on Western understandings [85] (pp. 233–239). As a result, this unfavorable situation for NGOs has possibly served to dissuade other transnational SDP organizations from seeking to operate in the PRC, without adequate political and cultural understanding [85] (pp. 233–239).

The disappointment of introducing quintessential SDP practices to the PRC, nevertheless, does not rule out other possibilities to align *tiyu* with SDP-desired ends that presently adhere to the mandates of the SDGs [86]. Supported by the closer collaboration of the UN and the IOC in promoting sustainable development [87], the most notable examples in the PRC are the commitments of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics towards sustainability and the Olympic legacy. The Sustainability Plan and subsequent reports of this Olympiad reveal well-documented themes and actions explicitly pointing to several SDGs within the UN's framework [88,89], although much of the focus was on environmental issues and the 'hard development' pursuits of SMEs [12,31]. Under the official slogan—'Together for a shared future (一起向未来)'—that aligns with A Community of Shared Future for Mankind (人类命运共同体), the legacy interests of Beijing 2022 revealed apparent coherence with the national development orientations influenced by *tiyu*-for-good, highlighting the health and economic potentials of *tiyu* that would benefit the local and national economy and social welfare, albeit without any reference to the SDP movement.

At the same time, one cannot deny the possibility of achieving SDP-desired outcomes through non-SDP opportunities that are not designed to be 'interventional' [90,91]. One example is the whole-nation soviet-style system of competitive *tiyu* (sports) in the PRC, which has constantly been recruiting semi-professional youth athletes, many of whom are from humble backgrounds [44]. This channel provides a potential livelihood and/or better access to education to numerous youngsters through public institutions at varying levels if they are sufficiently competent, and has resulted in well-known narratives such as 'changing fate through *tiyu* (体育改变命运)' of Olympians and Paralympians representing the PRC [92,93]. Boosted by this appreciation, the *tiyu*-for-good aspiration has been furthered in recent years by efforts to charitably support the development of *tiyu* for the benefit of

underprivileged groups in less developed regions within the PRC. This is the so-called *tiyu* philanthropy (体育公益). According to an authoritative report on *tiyu* philanthropy [94], these philanthropic efforts predominantly work for and invest in goals of constructing facilities and supporting youth talents, which again accord with development-of-sport approaches despite its designated beneficiaries.

Additionally, unlike the unbalanced composition of stakeholders in SDP [33], these philanthropic workings have engaged a diverse range of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, often in collaboration. Among such stakeholders, the state-owned national *tiyu* lottery is probably the leading contributor, prioritizing providing facilities and equipment to underdeveloped regions across the country, and low-cost or free opportunities for training camps or events offered primarily to young people [95]. The civic sector also works as an essential partaker, an eminent exemplar being the Yao Foundation—a *tiyu* charity initiated by the basketball legend Yao Ming—which focuses on basketball-related fundraising and donations to children in under-resourced areas, as well as basketball training programs and youth events [96].

With the increasing cognizance of harnessing *tiyu* for social good, the up-to-date philanthropic salience has been spotlighted in a widely praised documentary film—Tough Out (棒!少年)—which documents how a group of at-risk children managed to acquire new life opportunities through a charitable baseball program [97]. This unexpected blockbuster served as a beacon for educating the general public about the philanthropic value of *tiyu*, and, more importantly, revealed and has perhaps strengthened the ongoing corporate interest in doing charitable projects through *tiyu*, usually by sponsoring extant projects akin to the CSRs-through-sport activities in SDP [32]. These CSR efforts mostly involve cooperation with organizations or institutions in rural or mountainous areas to provide development-of-*tiyu* support to underprivileged children. For instance, the PRC-based financial giant—Ant Group—has famously committed to supporting girls' school football teams in underdeveloped regions, intending to provide educational and professional opportunities to these girls through football [98]. Transnational corporations such as NBA and Adidas have also engaged in various philanthropic works. While the former had previously conducted short-term interventional work for AIDS-affected kids in the PRC [99], more such initiatives have been selected to provide *tiyu*-focused activities such as the football-themed festival for children of migrant workers hosted by Adidas [100]. Moreover, a few PRC-based global corporations, such as Lenovo and Huawei, have implemented their own *tiyu* CSR programs beyond the PRC to reach other countries [101], in tandem with the government-led *tiyu* foreign aid to support developing countries mainly in Africa [30,51].

Suffice it to say, these undertakings and networks of *tiyu* that are associated with philanthropic purposes and development outreach, have covered an extensive spectrum of for which SDP has been striving, regardless of whether they were informed by SDP or not. In particular, the *tiyu* philanthropy resembles SDP activities in terms of project goals, target populations, and even the much-criticized short-term advertisement-like designs. Yet, it is palpable that these actions also predominately work in a development-of-sport manner by giving donations for facilities, organizing training camps, and so forth, most of which lack the development metrics, interventional designs, and evaluation procedures that are widely featured in SDP. While these quests, such as fostering recipients through competitive training to be future professionals or *tiyu*-practitioners, do possess the potential to facilitate individual development, they appear to be merit-based processes, presuming spontaneous development benefits and could be susceptible to exclusivity with the risk of reinforcing inequalities. Therefore, this necessitates considerations such as 'how can underprivileged kids who are not interested in or good at any *tiyu* (sport) acquire something beneficial from such activities?'

4.3. Lack of Academic Interest in SDP from the PRC and Research Attention to 'Tiyu for Other Sakes'

SDP scholars have more than once noted the lack of interest and voice from scholars in the PRC [33,80], notwithstanding that this academic realm is deemed to be a burgeoning field in sports-related studies globally [102]. Given the ostensible language limitation resulting from SDP studies being mostly conveyed in English [55], there is a suggestion that this dearth might be due to an inability of English-based scholars to address non-English publications and vice versa [103]. Nonetheless, as a national of the PRC whose first language is Mandarin Chinese and who has been focusing on this theme for some years, the first author would support the former argument that highlights 'a lack of interest'. The predominant concentrations of existing SDP-related studies on managerial, sociological, and other issues would well situate this scholarly realm within the discipline of humanities and the social sciences of *tiyu* (体育人文社会学) in the official academic system of the PRC. According to an up-to-date quantitative review [104], Cao and colleagues indicate that, while the total amount of research outputs in this discipline (within CSSCI journals) has been mounting since 2009, there has been an apparent inclination toward studies of the *tiyu* industry and business, as three of the top five keywords are #1 *tiyu* industry, #3 *tiyu* management and #5 *tiyu* economy. Although traditional themes such as mass participation in *tiyu*, competitive *tiyu*, and school *tiyu* have retained some salience, it is evident that themes pertaining to SDP have tended to be less commonly studied [104].

Nevertheless, this overall trend by no means implies that no academic attention has been paid to SDP from the PRC. A literature search conducted for the present study identified a small cohort of Chinese studies that have taken note of this global movement, many of them published in recent years, representing a diversion from the main focus of *tiyu* governance research (体育治理研究). These scholarly inquiries are mostly committed to probing future *tiyu* governance for the PRC by seeking insights from other countries and international bodies, not least from the UN and countries such as Australia, wherein bypassing the SDP movement and the SfD philosophy seems very unlikely [105]. For example, Ren and colleagues produced a fairly comprehensive article on the SDP movement [106], illustrating why SDP has been deployed by the UN and how this 'governance system' is linked with the SDGs. With explicit references to SDP, other research has focused on how sport has been harnessed internationally for the SDGs [107,108], and how SfD can contribute to diplomacy and peace [109,110].

Additionally, there have been policy advisory studies, including a preliminary report seeking to integrate S4D initiatives into a holistic framework of *tiyu* in supporting the child-friendly cities initiative in the PRC [111]. Concurrently, a few studies written in English that researched SDP in relation to the PRC were also identified, mostly the work of non-Chinese researchers [32,80,85,112] and a few from Chinese scholars being conveyed in English [113,114]. Not to despite the possibility of such studies in other languages, it could be said that the realm of SDP has yet to attract notable academic interest either in the PRC or from the PRC, within the range of English-based and Chinese-based academic output.

Still, the widespread expectation of *tiyu*-for-good has influenced numerous Chinese papers, although without direct recognition of SDP or SfD, which address topics about '*tiyu* for other sakes' and have disclosed analogous themes to those of SDP. One such focus is on *tiyu* for social capital, in accord with one of SDP's fundamental interests, into which Chinese scholars have delved by examining the potential relationship between *tiyu* participation and social capital, although in most cases they have assumed or probably favored positive findings [115,116]. Similarly, a few PRC-based studies have discussed how general *tiyu* participation can bolster the social inclusion or social integration of migrant workers in urban neighborhoods [117,118]. Moreover, positing *tiyu* as an interventionist tool for alleviating social and psychological problems has also prompted extensive discussion in the PRC, with some crediting other country's sport-based intervention programs (such as Midnight Basketball) for crime reduction [119,120], and others hailing *tiyu*'s effectiveness in dealing with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder [121,122]. Considering other

attention offered to *tiyu* for gender empowerment [123], *tiyu* for international aid [51], *tiyu* for empowering the disabled [124], and so forth, it would be reasonable to expect future scholarly interaction with SDP developing from such academic attention, although how critically they will develop remains unpredictable.

5. Discussion

Given the impression that the PRC has hitherto shown very little interest in the global lobby of sport for development and peace (SDP), this paper provides a preliminary interrogation by critically scrutinizing how the PRC has approached policies, practices, and research that could be related to SDP. In light of the current knowledge and experiences of the SDP movement and SfD philosophy, we also offer a specific focus on how *tiyu*—the Chinese counterpart of ‘sport’ [35]—has been semantically constructed, and nationally mobilized for a vision of *tiyu*-for-good in pursuing external and utilitarian ends, which has significant implications for current *tiyu* policies, *tiyu* practices and *tiyu* studies in the PRC.

The acceptance of and resistance to Western ideologies during the modernization process of China were well reflected in the adaptation of sport and pertinent concepts into the umbrella notion of *tiyu* [35]. Compared to the Western understanding of ‘sport’, *tiyu* embodies the Chinese understanding of modern physical activities not in pastime and playful terms, but in terms of body cultivation and strengthening national physiques. Regardless of being both Western-originated ideas, consequently, *tiyu* (initially translated from Physical Education) and sport have been assumed to have divergent significance on the basis of the imperative for the Chinese nation to survive, adapt and thrive in the modern competitive world. While the values of sport for physical education and body cultivation have been well incorporated into the very foundation of *tiyu*, considering the absence of an exclusive Chinese term for sport, it is doubtful if the leisure and recreational essence of the sport has ever been really taken into account in this conception. By initiating such an agency to filter Western or Japanese imported ideas, the modern Chinese nation has demonstrated its capability to incorporate paradigms from others based on its own interpretation and for its own sake, thereby shaping how sports and physical activities have subsequently been perceived and mobilized in China [10] (pp. 71–73). That said, the primary significance of *tiyu* is its instrumental premise to strengthen the nation’s physical well-being, derived from which, is the vision of *tiyu*-for-good with its additional objectives, such as promoting nationalistic patriotism and showcasing soft power.

Furthermore, despite the increasing awareness of *tiyu*’s wider values that was triggered by hosting the Olympics [50], this enduring tradition of acceptance with resistance has probably led the PRC to prudently consider the idea of linking sport with developmental pursuits that is widespread in the West, thereby resulting in a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards SDP. This is manifested in the political orientations on development and *tiyu* of the Chinese government. The top development foci of the country have attached great importance to peace and development both nationally and globally, currently coherent with the UN’s framework, demanding that each sub-category such as *tiyu* and public health make a concerted effort towards the fulfillment of the SDGs. Ongoing *tiyu* policies, nevertheless, revealed a lack of alignment with either SDP or the SDGs, despite the fact that the PRC has been a signatory to the UN’s key SDP strategies since the early 2000s. While the ‘body cultivation’ premise and *tiyu*-for-good have continued to exert a palpable influence upon how external goals of *tiyu* are articulated, for instance, *tiyu* as an ‘economy booster’ [105], they are anticipated to be achieved through approaches similar to development-of-sport, perhaps based on the assumption that the desired non-*tiyu* outcomes will come about spontaneously.

‘The boom in parasports in China is the result of the country’s active implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [125].’

Admittedly, the long-held aspirations of *tiyu*-for-good are likely to continue to inform forthcoming *tiyu* policies and are probably still significant enough to be featured in na-

tional development strategies, especially in the sense of ‘*tiyu* for better health’. In addition, the growing awareness of policy coherence would require future *tiyu* policies to further align with national development priorities, some of which do subscribe to the UN’s international development frameworks either directly or secondarily. The latest published white paper on China’s parasports (*Canjiren Tiyu*, 残疾人体育), for example, reported that the 2030 SDGs had been progressively substantiated through related efforts [125], which would suggest the prospects for *tiyu* to be more attentively aligned with the UN’s frameworks in supporting major national pursuits such as rural revitalization (乡村振兴), sustainable development and PRC-led international initiatives. However, this is not to claim that future *tiyu* policies are destined for SDP, since elite success and other development-of-*tiyu* pursuits will still weigh heavily [54], as long as the PRC continues to negotiate and engage with the global sporting arena in its own interests.

If to narrowly consider the prevailing SDP programming as its only legitimate exercise, the failure of disseminating sport-based interventional projects by SDP NGOs in the PRC would prefigure an unpredictable or even gloomy prospect for such endeavors. Meanwhile, traditional praxes of *tiyu*, combined with developing *tiyu* philanthropy and the sustainable and developmental outreaches of SMEs, have contributed to, or aim to pursue, a range of SDP-desired outcomes that are compatible with the SDGs, either purposively or unwittingly, and there is no reason to suppose they will cease to do so. The sustainability and legacy efforts of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics mandated by the IOC under its Agenda 2020 [126], for example, have prominently signaled how *tiyu* could be used to leverage numerous development commitments in line with the SDGs, including sustainable infrastructure, local economic boosterism, and green energy [127]. Following the logic of this outstanding exemplar, *tiyu* praxes, in particular mega-events and philanthropic initiatives, demonstrate the likelihood of further combining existing activities with overt development intentions, which would increase their possibilities to align with the global SDP movement. Such prospects could bring about mutually rewarding outcomes, as *tiyu* would be refined to promote more inclusive activities to beneficiaries who might not be good at them, complemented by options to incorporate interventional designs if needed, while procedures of monitoring and evaluation could be developed under tenable theories of change [128]. The SDP sector, in turn, would be endowed with more balanced power relations between stakeholders and new forms of public-private cooperation to tackle the bubble effect [33], more opportunities to confront Western dominance and SDP NGOization [129], as well as creating the potential for broader South-South cooperation [130].

In regard to scholarly attention, our findings uphold the view that this burgeoning academic realm of SDP has yet to engender significant attention either to the PRC or from the PRC. Only a small number of English studies are identified to have linked SDP with the PRC, regardless of whether it is their primary focus. Likewise, *tiyu* scholars in the PRC have approached this topic with limited attention, most of which were derived from the popular academic focus on international *tiyu* governance. Other foci, such as ‘*tiyu* for other sakes’ have highlighted the external functions of *tiyu*, including social capital, which can be deemed as sub-themes of SDP albeit without direct reference to it. While future academic inquiries into global sports governance must provide further knowledge regarding how the UN and the IOC operate within the global sport system to deploy SDP to meet the SDGs and how the PRC can adapt to SfD as a new *tiyu* paradigm [105], the growing number of *tiyu* scholars aspiring to enlarge the PRC’s presence within the global sport academy [131,132] should also guide them towards trending topics such as SDP [102]. These opportunities, however, do not guarantee critical perspectives and managerial advancements of projects from prospective studies related to the PRC, given the lack of typical SDP NGOs in the country and the deep-rooted belief in *tiyu*-for-good.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

In spite of seeking to generally map out the current correlation between SDP and *tiyu* in the PRC, we concede the scope of this study on policies, practices, and studies is lim-

ited, which is also constrained by solely analyzing documentary resources and academic literature. As the real dynamics of SDP are much more complex than merely an interaction of policymakers, practitioners, and academics, future studies are expected to further interrogate the topics and subthemes raised by this paper, not least those to be conducted from the standpoints of divergent stakeholders by drawing empirical knowledge on the ground. For example, how do practitioners and/or recipients of a *tiyu* philanthropic project perceive the claimed benefits of involving deprived youth in sporting activities? Additionally, it would be fruitful to investigate deeper into, and decipher the hidden implications and purposes from, the existing academic discourses in Chinese which almost portray *tiyu* as a panacea for a plethora of problems while regarding SDP as something less problematic to learn from. While the changing trend of policy promises also deserves more attention, prospective studies on *tiyu* and sustainable development are invited to help transcend this academic realm to integrate with broader development and environment studies and other academic disciplines, in answer to the calling of SDP scholars to move beyond the disciplinary silos [133].

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