

Interpretation and Practice of Physical Education Policy in Chinese Colleges and Universities (1979–2020)

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ABSTRACT

Research methods such as literature method, mathematical statistics method and logical analysis method are employed in the paper to sort out the evolution of physical education policies in colleges and universities during the 41-year reform and opening up, the practice of physical education curriculum reform in colleges and universities, as well as its deficiencies and flaws. The results show that the guiding ideology of college physical education tends to be perfect and scientific. The ideas including health-first and moral education clear the education targets and optimize curriculum structure. Great leaps have been made in perfecting National Student Physical Health Standard, monitoring and evaluation, enriching learning resources, covering more projects, and deepening curriculum reform, thus realizing remarkable fruits in the integration of sports and education. However, there still remain such flaws that need urgent solution as relatively weak physical education in schools and the poor physical health of college students.

Keywords: Physical education in colleges and universities, Policy interpretation, Practice exploration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Any country or nation that wants to stand out among the nations of the world in the long course of history must be guided and supported by advanced ideas and systems. Ideology serves as the source while system the flow. The construction of sports system supports China's drive to be a strong country in sports. [1] In the past 40-odd years of reform and opening up, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council have attached great importance to physical education in colleges and universities and sound growth of teenagers. They have comprehensively strengthened the top-level design of college physical education and introduced a series of institutional policies. As a result, the reform of physical education in colleges and universities has been continuously deepened,

the policy system has been gradually improved, remarkable achievements have been made on the construction of physical education textbooks, the rich and colorful physical education courses have been carried out, students have garnered outstanding achievements in competitions, and the educational concept of "health first" has also been firmly established.

2. THE GUIDING IDEOLOGY OF COLLEGE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TENDS TO BE PERFECT AND SCIENTIFIC

In May 1979, national exchange on experience concerning college sports and health jointly launched by the Ministry of Education, State Physical Culture and Sports Commission, the Ministry of Health, the Central Committee of the Communist Young League in Yangzhou, Jiangsu promulgated *Interim Measures for Physical Education in Institutions of Higher Learning* based on their existing situation, which heralds physical

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education reform in colleges and universities, and Chinese physical education's embark on the track featuring legalization, standardization and institutionalization. The conference puts an end to the era of unattended and chaotic college physical education, ushering in its sound development. [2]

Several Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education in Schools promulgated in August 1993 clearly pointed out that "quality-oriented education, which satisfies the development of the times, social progress and the urgent need of the socialist market economy, should be strengthened", which marks the first time that the concept of quality-oriented education was officially used. Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening Educational Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Quality-oriented Education issued in June 1999 stated that "a healthy body is the basic premise for young people to serve the country and the people, and the embodiment of the vitality of the Chinese nation. The guiding ideology of "health first" should be followed in school education, and physical education should be effectively strengthened so that students can master basic sports skills and develop good habits of exercising".

Physical education in schools was required to follow the guiding ideology of "health first" in October 1999, when national exchange on experience concerning college sports and health was held. In 2005, *Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Further Strengthening Physical Education Work in Colleges and Universities* required colleges and universities to firmly establish the guiding ideology of "health first" and earnestly strengthen physical education. In the report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed for the first time that "moral education should serve as the fundamental task to cultivate socialist builders and successors who are well developed morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically".

2016 witnessed the launch of *Opinions on Strengthening School Physical Education to Promote Students' Physical and Mental Health and All-Round Development* by General Office of the State Council. In his speech at the National Education Conference in 2018, General Secretary Xi clearly proposed that education should realize the comprehensive cultivation of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, beauty and

community work, so that students can enjoy the fun of sports, strengthen their physique, improve their personality and temper their will. *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Physical Education in the New Era*, issued in October 2020, proposed measures to strengthen physical training in class and after class.

3. THE EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES ARE CLEARER AND THE CURRICULUM STRUCTURE TENDS TO BE REFINED

Physical education courses have emphasized the mastery of sports techniques for a long time since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The Yangzhou Conference, held in 1979, established "physical education courses focusing on strengthening physical fitness". [3] Physical education in schools then mainly strives to realize physical fitness of teachers and students. According to *Physical Education Curriculum Guiding Outline for Common Institutes of Higher Learning in China* in 1992, the teaching goal of physical education is to "allows students to enhance awareness of physical education, enjoy physical ability, form the habit of physical exercise, receive good ideological education, and become builders and successors of the socialist cause with a strong body through scientific physical education and physical exercise." [4] In 2002, the revised *Physical Education Curriculum Guiding Outline for Common Institutes of Higher Learning in China* proposed that the general goal of the curriculum could be described from five aspects: sports participation, sports skills, physical health, mental health and social adaptation, and the educational goal was moving forward from three dimensions to five dimensions. The curriculum objectives can be further divided into basic objectives and development objectives based on the physical differences of students, highlighting the people-oriented education concept and students' individual needs.

Syllabus for General Physical Education in Institutions of Higher Learning issued by the Ministry of Education in 1979 stipulated that physical education courses must be available for students in first and second grade, and for senior grade if needed. The hour period should be 140 hours. In 2002, *Physical Education Curriculum Guiding Outline for Common Institutes of Higher Learning in China* required that courses for freshman and sophomore should include physical education courses (144 class hours in total in four

semesters), and physical education courses should be covered as optional course for junior, senior or graduate students. As for curriculum structure, it can be either on campus or off campus. The number of students is generally about 30. According to *Basic Standards for Physical Education in Colleges* issued in 2014, freshmen and sophomores must take physical education courses, while junior, senior and graduate students must take physical education classes as elective courses. The scores of elective courses are counted into students' credits. In principle, the number of students in each physical education class is no more than 30.

4. NATIONAL STUDENT PHYSICAL HEALTH STANDARD, AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION HAVE BEEN GRADUALLY IMPROVED

The former State Education Commission promulgated *Standards for Sports Qualification of University Students* in 1990, which comprehensively evaluate the physical education status of college students at the undergraduate stage. *Sports Law of the People's Republic of China*, which came into force in 1995, stipulates that "schools must implement *National Physical Training Standard* and guarantee the time students spend on physical activities every day during school". In 2002, the Ministry of Education and General Administration of Sport of China officially promulgated *Standard of Healthy Constitution of Student* trial program. The promulgation and implementation of *Standard of Healthy Constitution of Student*, an important part of *National Physical Training Standard*, follows the idea of "health first, people-oriented" and stays current with the times. [5] In 2013, General Administration of Sport of China revised *National Physical Training Standard*, encouraging teenagers to participate in physical exercise. The implementation of the new *Standard* marks that China's mass sports life has entered a new channel. [6] *National Standard of Healthy Constitution of Student (Revised Edition)*, which came into effect in 2014, made a few adjustments, cancelling the selected test items and increasing the proportion of physical fitness test items. Nankai University issued physical health certificates to 1,582 fresh graduates in 2018, which vividly mirrors its emphasis on physical health of students, as well as its expansion of education standards, channelling students' attention to their physical health.

The 1990 version and 2005 version *Regulations on the Management of Students in Colleges and Universities* stipulate that public physical education is a compulsory course, and those who fail should take it again. The scores in physical education should be evaluated comprehensively combined with attendance, in-class teaching and after-class exercise. Those who fail in public physical education courses are not allowed to graduate and are subject to completion. According to *Basic Standards for Physical Education in Colleges* in 2014, the proportion of exercise content on improving students' cardiopulmonary function shall not be less than 30%, and the weight of test scores shall not be less than 30%. In 2017, Tsinghua University stipulated that students who cannot swim will not be able to graduate. In 2018, Anqing Normal University announced that students who fail to meet their physical standards will not be able to get their graduation certificates. Zhejiang University increased the proportion of extracurricular sports for students (15%). Universities such as Yunnan University of Finance and Economics and Hubei University of Economics have also stipulated the distance students should run after class, and those who fail must retake physical education courses.

5. THE CURRICULUM RESOURCES ARE CONSTANTLY EXPANDED AND A FULL RANGE OF PROGRAMS ARE SET UP

In 1979, the Ministry of Education issued *Syllabus for General Physical Education in Institutions of Higher Learning*, emphasizing that "track and field is the foundation of all sports", taking track and field as the key teaching material. Girls are required to study basketball and volleyball, while boys must choose two from basketball, volleyball and football. In 1995, General Administration of Sport of China promulgated *Outline of the Nationwide Body-Building Plan*, requiring students to master one or two sports skills at school. In 2002, *Physical Education Curriculum Guiding Outline for Common Institutes of Higher Learning in China* set a limit on the number of students in a class at about 30. In 2014, *Basic Standards for Physical Education in Colleges* further promoted the curriculum reform, requiring reasonable arrangement of teaching contents and offering no less than 15 physical education items. In 2016, the General Office of the State Council issued *Opinions on Strengthening School Physical Education to Promote Students' Physical and*

Mental Health and All-Round Development, which required colleges and universities to offer students compulsory physical education courses or elective courses. The course content should be arranged scientifically, and sports teaching should be carried out considering the school's own situation and students' basic sports skills, so as to improve students' specific physical performance. Team sports such as football, basketball and volleyball should be vigorously promoted; basic sports such as track and field, swimming and gymnastics, as well as special sports such as ice-snow should be popularized; and competitive sports such as table tennis, badminton and wushu (martial art) should be extensively conducted. National folk sports should also be further excavated and sorted out to enrich the content of physical education curriculum. [7]

The *Opinions* have constructed a rich physical education curriculum to satisfy students' right to choose physical education based on their interests and the development of their personalities. Utilizing its edge in regional sports culture and national sports resources, Yunnan Normal University conducted traditional minority sports and national aerobics activities. The effective implementation of the *Opinions* can be proved by the colorful course design, such as sailing course of Sun Yat-Sen University, shooting course of Tsinghua University, golf, dragon boat, hip-hop dance course of Xiamen University, rugby course of Northwestern Polytechnical University, archery course of Northwest University, and weight-loss course widely spread on the Internet.

6. IN-DEPTH TEACHING REFORM AND COLORFUL TEACHING CARRIER

Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Educational System Reform in 1985 pointed out that institutions of higher learning shoulder the task of cultivating and bringing up talents who are well developed morally, intellectually and physically. The new era has put forward higher requirements to the new generation of college students in terms of physique. [8] Tsinghua University's slogan "Exercise one hour a day, work healthy for 50 years, live a happy life" mirrors the long-term development goal of lifelong sports, which focuses on students' future health and life happiness. Traditional physical education in colleges and universities falls into the following camps: "three basics": imparting basic knowledge, basic

technology and basic skills; "three stages": compulsory for the first year, optional for the second year, general education for the third and fourth year; "integration": attention is paid to the combination of classroom and extracurricular; "parallel": in freshmen and sophomores, basic courses, special courses and elective courses are offered at the same time.

According to *Physical Education Curriculum Guiding Outline for Common Institutes of Higher Learning in China* issued by the Ministry of Education in August 2002, colleges and universities are required to focus on students' subjective initiative and improve their enthusiasm for physical exercise. Students should have the liberty to choose course content, teacher and class time independently, so as to create a lively and active learning atmosphere. Since 2003, such "three independent" teaching mode has been implemented in universities across the country. Such teaching mode clears the direction and basis for the reform of college physical education curriculum in the new century. The "4+2+2" physical education teaching mode is launched in Tsinghua University. Physical education throughout the undergraduate and graduate stages adopts hierarchical teaching, coed classes and cross-grade classes to meet the needs of students of different interests, different levels and different levels. The sports club teaching mode, further deepening the "three independent" mode, serves as the product of physical education reform in colleges and universities, as well as an organizational form to realize the goal of physical education. [9] For example, thanks to the launch of sports club, students of Hebei University of Technology, Xidian University, Guangdong University of Technology, Hefei University and other colleges and universities are more active in self-learning, which proves its feasibility. In 2005, the club sports teaching mode of Guangdong University of Technology was reported by People's Daily. The sports club of Hefei University has put forward the reform guiding ideology of "people-oriented, health first, for all and team learning", which focuses on the all-round development and future of students. In line with the physical education philosophy of "people-oriented, health first, all-round development and lifelong benefit", Shanghai University put forward the teaching reform idea of "public physical education" in 2009, and constructed the 1+2+3 curriculum system, which has contributed to the all-round development of students.

7. RICH AND COLORFUL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, AND REMARKABLE FRUITS IN THE INTEGRATION OF SPORTS AND EDUCATION

Extracurricular activities, an extension of physical education classes, should ensure that students exercise 1 hour a day. Measures for guaranteeing the time and facilities for students' extracurricular physical activities were mentioned in documents including Interim Measures for Physical Education in Institutions of Higher Learning, *Basic Standards for Physical Education in Colleges*, *Opinions on Strengthening Adolescent Sports and Strengthening Adolescent Physique* and *Opinions on Strengthening School Physical Education to Promote Students' Physical and Mental Health and All-Round Development*. In 2011, "ensure an hour of physical activity a day" was covered into government work report. "Enhancing physical and mental health of young people by strengthening physical and mental exercises in class and after class" proposed by the third plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was included in document of central committee, which offers a new insight for physical education reform. Mobile sports software is adopted by many colleges and universities to urge students to take part in physical exercises. For example, Baotou Teachers' College in Inner Mongolia has introduced World Campus APP to promote extracurricular physical exercise for college students since 2018. The participants of the trial operation in the past two years were freshmen, whose cardiopulmonary function and scores of physical fitness tests both improved. The free breakfast project of Zhengzhou University, coupled with the favorable sports assessment system developed by Zhejiang University and Nanjing University through "mechanism innovation and resource integration", has triggered a boom in extra-curricular physical exercise. Tsinghua University's "Ma Yuehan Cup" competition system runs through the whole year, with more than 40 competitions and 50,000 participants. Nanjing University has organized more than 60 mass extracurricular sports activities, with more than 15,000 participants.

8. CONCLUSION

Since reform and opening up, China's college physical education has born much fruits thanks to government support and better institutional

framework. However, two issues, namely the relatively weak physical education in college and the slow improvement of students' physical health, remain and need to be solved urgently. 2020 witnessed the issue of *Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education and Promoting the Healthy Development of Children and Adolescents*, *Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era*, and *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Physical Education in the New Era*, which guide and motivate the physical education reform of higher education in China in the new era. In the process of building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the orientation of college physical education should be clear, the reform of college physical education and teaching should be deepened, the governance of college physical education curriculum should be strengthened, and the teaching form of physical education should be innovated, so as to establish a more perfect and reasonable evaluation mechanism of college physical education. The leading role of excellent sports teams should be fully exerted, the campus sports competition system should be constructed, and the overall physical fitness and quality of students should be promoted, in a bid to contribute to the Chinese Dream of China's great renewal and the two centenary goals.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Deping Wei contributed to revising and editing and Quanchang Wang wrote the manuscript.

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