

China's Culture Dissemination in Greece: From the Perspective of Olympic Spirit Influences

Xiao MA¹, Guochang CHEN²

¹*Faculty of English Language and Culture, Institute of Hermeneutics, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, Email: kentma@gdufs.edu.cn*

²*Corresponding author: School of Journalism and Communication, Institute of Hermeneutics, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, Email: cgcchen@gdufs.edu.cn*

Abstract: The spirit of the modern Olympics originated in Greek civilization and has become an important means of promoting exchanges among peoples, solidarity among nations, and mutual understanding among civilizations worldwide. Athens, the capital of Greece, hosted the modern Summer Olympic Games for the first time in 1896 and again in 2004. Beijing, the capital of China, is notable for being the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. The experiences of China and Greece in hosting the Summer Olympics back-to-back in 2004 and 2008 have strengthened the Olympic spirit as a new bond of cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between the two countries. Following these events, exchanges and cooperation between China and Greece accelerated. Greece, as the first European Union country to respond to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has become a model for international civilization exchanges, mutual understanding, and shared prosperity, exemplified by the cooperation in the construction and development of the Port of Piraeus. The Olympic spirit has thus become a bridge of friendship, promoting mutual understanding. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Greece will continue to advance in cultural exchanges, enhance cultural mutual trust, and strengthen cooperation and development.

Key Words: the Olympic Spirit Influences; China's Culture Dissemination; Belt and Road Initiative (BRI);

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1. Introduction

China and Greece are excellent representatives of Eastern and Western civilizations. China and Greece have respected each other since ancient times. Greece is regarded as the cradle of Western civilization. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus, on the other hand, believed that "China is the cradle of all culture and wisdom, and the nation favored by the sun god." Ancient Europeans' imagination of mainland China also unfolded through the ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy's description of Ceres. The ancient Silk Road gave the people of ancient Greece the space to imagine China as the "Oriental Other". If traditional Chinese culture was obscure and imaginary to ancient Greece, today in the 21st century, in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China and Greece have a new opportunity to learn from each other's civilizations. From Mount Olympus to Mount Everest, from the Aegean Sea to the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, China and Greece are facing a new historical opportunity for common prosperity. Both being as the world's most important civilization, the communication between China and Greece should take place in an appropriate culture context. "Accessibility is key to the understanding of the meaning of the discourse." (Chen, 2020). With openness and win-win cooperation, the two countries share mutual respect for the wisdom of ancient civilizations as the starting point, the inheritance of the Olympic spirit as a new opportunity for dialogue, and the Belt and Road Initiative as a new idea for civilization development, in the context of the spirit of "Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together", the two countries will continue their cooperation, and set up a model of mutual understanding among civilizations in the international community.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Perspective of Mutual Appreciation of Chinese and Greek Civilizations*

The Clash of Civilization theory holds the view that "relations between states and groups from different civilizations, will not be close and will often be antagonistic." (Samuel Huntington, 1996). However, the friendly practice of mutual understanding between the civilizations of China and Greece breaks this assertion with facts. China-Greece relations were transformed by the mid-2000s, "the fact that Beijing was hosting the 2008 Olympics after the 2004 Athens Olympic offered a unique opportunity to increase cultural contacts and advanced cooperation" (Stroikos, 2022). Given each civilization has its own long history, Sino-Greek people can share the same civilization values and have similar cultural connotations. In recent years, the pace of interaction between China and Greece has accelerated and the areas of exchange have deepened. According to the report, under the promotion of the "Year of Culture and Tourism in Greece and China" (2021-2022), cultural exchanges and

mutual appreciation of civilizations between China and Greece have been carried out frequently. The two countries use cultural symbols, such as art, philosophy, theatre, drama and exhibitions of cultural relics, as a vehicle for dialogue, and moving from “resembling each other” to “knowing each other”. From “acquaintance and knowledge to similarity and affinity” (Cheng, 2022). The commentary article shows in the 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China and Greece, as two long-standing civilizations, “have always appreciated, learned from, understood and helped each other.” (Yan, 2022). According to the Chinese Academic Index Knowledge (CNKI), as of July 2024, most of the comparative studies on the topic of “China and Greece” focus on the long history of Chinese and Greek “myths”, with Greek myths being the most popular, with 65 articles, followed by Chinese myths, with 41 articles. Greek mythology has the largest number of articles, with 65, while Chinese mythology has the second largest number of articles, with 41. Both countries identify with each other as representatives of the East and the West of a long civilization. In Greek mythology, the Olympic spirit is undoubtedly the most spiritual treasure that transcends the ancient and the modern, and the cultural space.

2.2 Research on the Spread and Influence of the Olympic Spirit in Current China

China first bid to host the Olympic Games in 1991, and has so far successfully organized one Summer and one Winter Olympic Games. Beijing became the world's first dual Olympic city. The two Olympic Games contributed to the rooting of the Olympic spirit in the hearts of the Chinese people and to the popularity of the Olympic Movement in Chinese society. Research on the impact of the Olympic Spirit in China mainly centers on its manifestations, communication carriers, and its influence on Chinese values and its own international image. In terms of expression, the Olympic Memory and its carrier, the perfect fusion of Chinese cultural elements and Olympic elements, enhance the Chinese cultural confidence and national identity. (Chen & Liu, 2024). In terms of the vehicle of communication, Coubertin's “Ode to Sport” glorifies peace and emphasizes the important purpose of sport as a vehicle for bringing people from all over the world together, interacting with each other and promoting friendship to promote world peace and unity. (Chen R. & Chen X.F., 2024). The humanistic value of the new Olympic motto, “Together”, which, in the context of the crisis, conveys the original spirit of the Olympic Games and promotes the idea of uniting strengths, coping with change and returning to the humanistic approach, thus promoting the concept of a community with a shared future of mankind. (Wu & Cai, 2023). In terms of the integration of values, the Olympic spirit is intrinsically compatible with China's Global Civilization Initiative, that is, they share the same value concerns, have similar values and have a common value orientation; and sports and physical education based on the Olympic spirit have increasingly become an important element of humanistic exchanges and cooperation on the platform of the Belt and Road Initiative. (Liang & Wang, 2023). In terms of national image, some studies have taken multiple symbols as the dimension of analysis, arguing that the Beijing Winter Olympics, with traditional Chinese culture as its foundation, not only illustrates “Chinese romance” but also integrates and expresses the perseverance and inspirational spirit of the Olympic spirit. (Wang, 2023) It can be said that the spread of the Olympic spirit in China has promoted the cultural exchanges between China and Greece in a multidimensional and in-depth manner.

3. Discussion

Mutual Learning of Culture Content in the Perspective of Olympic Spirit

Since the Opium War of 1840, as the Qing Dynasty was forced to open its gate of authority and market, colonial oppression has caused sentiments of national self-improvement and independence to run high in Chinese society. The Chinese people wanted to get rid of the plight of being colonized and were constantly searching for ways and means of salvation and survival. At the beginning of the 20th century, ZHANG Bolin, the headmaster of Tianjin Nankai High School, made a public speech calling for the participation of Chinese athletes in the International Olympic Games. One of the reasons why modern Chinese society actively promotes the Olympic Movement and the Olympic spirit is that modern China is in dire need of a spiritual force that can awaken national renaissance and break through colonial oppression, “civilizing its spirit and barbarizing its body”. On July 17, 1910, Shanghai “Declaration” article “Chinese sports conference of the herald” issued the famous Chinese “Three Questions on Olympics”, namely, “When can China send a team to participate in the Olympic Games? When will China be able to win the Olympic Games? When will China be able to host the Olympic Games?” (Li, 2018). Since then, China has been pursuing its century-old Olympic dream, which was eventually realized in Beijing in 2008. The Olympic spirit originated in Greece, and China's journey in pursuit of the Olympic dream is also a journey of mutual understanding between Chinese and Greek civilizations.

3.1 Research Design

This study mainly adopts questionnaire analysis and case observation to derive opinions. The questionnaire centers in the themes of perception of the spread of Chinese culture, preference for specific contents of Chinese culture, and the effects of the local spread of Chinese culture in Greece. The age distribution of the respondents concentrated in the 18-25 age group and they are all local Greeks, with educational backgrounds at the university level or higher.

Meanwhile, this study observes and analyzes cases of cultural exchanges that have been widely reported in China and Greece in recent years. The selection of cases takes into account important factors such as the industry, the identity of the representative of the person, the source of the report and the authority, etc. Olympic events, the deeds of cultural figures, Internet bloggers, and cases of economic and trade cooperation between the two sides were selected as samples for observation and analysis.

3.2 Olympic Spirit: Culture Content of Cross-fertilization Combining Tradition and Modernity between China and Greece

According to the investigation of the European Business Review (EBR), a positive attitude towards the Chinese people was expressed by 71% Greek citizens from the poll of Greek agency Public Issue in July 2016. The research emphasizes that “since 2008, the increasingly close ties between Greece and China have caught the attention of the world media”. Undoubtedly, sharing the experience of hosting Olympic events has brought the two countries closer together in cultural exchanges and the friendship of their people. The 2004 Olympics returned to Athens, Greece, where Beijing took over the Olympic flag at the closing ceremony. At the closing ceremony of the Athens Olympic Games, Beijing presented an eight-minute performance titled “From Olympia to the Great Wall of China”. This presentation aimed to demonstrate to the Greek people and the global community the Chinese cultural interpretation of the Olympic spirit. Through the Olympic Games, more Greeks have learned about the development of contemporary China and have had direct contact with a modernized China. The cultural symbols in the opening ceremonies of the two Beijing Olympic Games, the Olympic medals rich in traditional Chinese cultural connotations, and the Olympic mascots that are deeply rooted in people's hearts have perfectly conveyed the spiritual character, aesthetic tendency and value orientation of Chinese culture. From the 2008 slogan “One World, One Dream” to the 2022 theme “Together to the Future”, it shows the development of the Olympic spirit into Chinese culture, and it also fits perfectly with the newly added Olympic motto “Together”. The values of sharing, co-governance and win-win in Chinese culture are presented and transmitted to the world through the Olympic Games. For Greece, the Olympic Games are seen as part of Greece's own cultural heritage and as its contribution to the world at large (Mavrotas, 2022). By expressing its firm support for the Beijing Olympic Games, the Hellenic Olympic Committee recognizes and accepts the Olympic spirit conveyed by China. It can be said that China and Greece have accomplished mutual appreciation and recognition of traditional culture and modern civilization in the Olympic Games. According to the results of the questionnaire, more than half of the respondents to the question “What forms can enhance the understanding of Chinese culture?” believe that cultural exchanges and sports events can enhance the spread of Chinese culture in Greece.

Table 1. Enhance understanding of Chinese culture

Forms	porpotions
Cultural exchange activities	66.67%
Co-operation in running school programmes	50%
Sports events	50%
Economic and trade exchanges	50%

3.3 Olympic Game: A Platform for Cross-cultural Exchanges of Mutual Understanding and Trust between the People of Two Countries.

A 44-member choir of children from the mountains of Fuping County, Hebei Province, China, sang the Olympic Anthem in Greek during the opening ceremony of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Music as an art meets in this moment across the languages of China and Greece, interpreting the unity and hope in the Olympic spirit. According to the questionnaire, Chinese culture resonates well with local Greek respondents. In the history of cultural exchanges between the people of the two countries, there have been both sympathetic exchanges between great thinkers and hospitable exchanges between the people. Nikos Kazantzakis, a famous Greek writer and thinker, is passionate about Chinese culture and has written a biography of his personal experience in China, which provides valuable material for the Greek public to understand Chinese culture. Kazantzakis was invited to visit China again in 1957 and met face-to-face with the Chinese literary scholar Mr. Mao Dun. Kazantzakis commented on the similarities between the cultural heritage of China and Greece, noting that “Socrates and Confucius are the two masks of mankind, and underneath the masks is the same face of human reason”. In June 2024, the statues of another Chinese literary giant, Lu Xun and Kazantzakis, were inaugurated in the Kazantzakis Museum in Crete. The two literary giants, who had never met each other before, had long since met ideologically, and the height of Sino-Greek cultural exchanges was increasing. For the general public, the short video community has also become a new venue for cultural exchanges between Greece and China. Marianna and Sofia, Greek twin sisters studying in China, have received a lot of attention and praise for their promotion of China-Greece tourism on Chinese social media and short video platforms, and the Greek government has encouraged their friendly initiative by awarding them the title of “Ambassador of Greek Tourism in China”. The Greek government encouraged the sisters' friendly initiative by awarding them as “Greek Tourism Ambassadors

in China”. The results of the questionnaire on “Favorite Cities in China” showed that Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Xi'an are well known in Greece and have become the ideal destinations for Greek young people to travel to China.

3.4 Olympic Spirit Promotes Economic Effectiveness of Sino-Greek Cooperation

China and Greece have moved from mutual cultural appreciation to development and common prosperity. Greece is the first EU member state to sign the Belt and Road initiative with China. The two-way investment between China and Greece focuses on maritime transportation, telecommunications and other fields. Among them, the Piraeus Port jointly constructed by China and Greece is a successful example of China and Greece practicing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to the Belt and Road Country Study: Greece, the economic benefits of the Bi-Port project, which is operated by the Sino-Greek partnership, have been favorable, and Greek officials view the project as “the key to unlocking Greece's future investment potential...” (Yiannis Plakiotakis, 2019).

Table 2. 2004-2018 Piraeus Port Benefits

Unit Million Euro															
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Pre-tax Profit	11	7	10	16	-4	3	3	6	2	4	4	11	2	9	19
Taxed Profit	7	5	7	12	-4	2	2	4	1	3	3	8	2	4	13
table 2004-2018 Piraeus Port Benefits from Official website of Piraeus Port Authority, http://www.olp.gr/en .															

As the largest port in Greece and the closest deep-water port to the Far East, the new situation of the maritime hub of Bilbao has not only brought new opportunities to the lives of the locals, but has also made it possible to share the prosperity and development of China and Europe with the guarantee of a transshipment port for maritime transportation. Reversing the stereotype of “stealing our job chances”, the throughput of the Port of Piraeus has steadily exceeded the 5-million-ton mark since 2016, from 680,000 TEUs at the beginning of the cooperation, and has become a top port in the Mediterranean region.

Table 3. Throughput of Piraeus Port Data from: Lloyd's List

Table: Throughput Piraeus Port From: Lloyd's List			
Year	Teu	Year-on-year	World Rank
2022	5,000,948	-5.90%	38
2021	5,311,810	-2.30%	33
2020	5,437,477	-3.70%	28
2019	5,648,000	15.10%	26
2018	4,907,708	18.40%	32

In the midst of epidemics and regional conflicts affecting world trade, the Port of Piraeus has maintained its position as the top port in the Mediterranean region with a throughput of 5 million tons in the last three years. The significance of the exchanges and mutual understanding between the civilizations of China and Greece is worldwide and “in line with the essential requirements for the development of civilization.”(Xiao Junzheng, 2024). It is believed that the value of China is going to be learned by the Greek exporters gradually, “not only as an importing country but also as a hub for the export of Greek products to Southeast Asia.” (George Floras, 2020)

Against the background of the deepening cooperation in the economic and trade fields between China and Greece, the investment of Chinese enterprises in Greece has formed the scale of dozens of investments after more than ten years of development, involving a wide range of industries and fields, covering not only the infrastructure, shipping, finance, real estate and other industries, but also shipping, e-commerce, telecommunication and other fields. It is foreseeable that with the deepening cooperation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the scale of Sino-Greek bilateral investment will be optimized continuously.

4. Current Issue and Challenges

4.1 Chinese Culture Overseas Communication Needs to Explore Diversified Approaches

The survey still reveals some objective problems. Linguistic differences between the peoples of different countries remain a natural barrier to cultural exchange. In the case of Olympic sports. For example, China has become a major gold medal-winning country in recent Olympic Games, while Chinese athletes and coaches in dominant Olympic sports are just known by the local Greek public. In the spring of 2024, DUAN Fang, a member of the Chinese women's national volleyball team, joined a Greek women's volleyball league team, becoming one of the few players to play overseas. In China, individuals learn and understand Greek civilization more through reading translated works of classic ancient Greek philosophers, historians, and dramatists, while contemporary Greek literary and cultural works have still not been popular. The spread of Chinese

culture in Greece was similar in that most of the early knowledge of Chinese culture and thoughts among the Greek people came from the translation of Chinese classics by missionaries. It should not be overlooked that most of the time, exchanges between two countries carried out more by a third-party internationalized language, and lack of bilingual talents are still an urgent problem. In China, there have been universities specializing in the Greek language since 1972, and since the beginning of this century, Chinese universities have established centers of Greek studies. In Greece, four Confucius Institutes have been contracted to teach the Chinese language and to disseminate Chinese culture and traditional Chinese medicine. It should be noted, however, that there is still a shortage of people who are able to exchange ideas in the original languages of the two countries. The vast majority of cultural exchanges are still officially led. Spontaneous cultural exchanges in the form of humanistic tourism, studies in China or Greece, and bilateral consumption in the arts, culture and sports industry are still main directions that can be focused on in the future.

4.2 Public cultural exchange radiates the prosperity of popular culture

With the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative, bilateral exchanges between China and Greece have become more frequent, and cultural exchange activities have become increasingly close. In recent years, the two countries have held many important official and private events such as exhibitions of cultural relics, exchanges of art collections, as well as drama, and the organization of book translations and publications. However, most of the cultural activities are still mainly for public welfare, with the main purpose of promoting and enhancing mutual understanding between people. Although the spread of Chinese culture in Greece has formed a benign interactive situation, more and more Greek people are willing to understand, learn and try to incorporate elements of Chinese culture into their lives, such as learning the concept of Chinese medicine and health care methods. However, Chinese culture has not yet established a mature cultural market and industry in Greek society. A stable and prosperous mass culture industry and mass culture market is the ideal goal of cross-cultural exchanges, and a prosperous market means that cultural exchanges can be self-sufficient, self-supporting and constantly renewed under the impetus of the industry. Therefore, from cultural exchanges of public welfare nature to the breeding of prosperous mass culture, there is still much room for the development of Chinese culture in Greece, and the future goal should be to pay attention to improving the acceptance of Chinese culture in Greece and the effect of localization of Chinese culture.

5. Conclusion

The Olympic motto “Faster, Higher, Stronger-Together” not only conveys the spirit of the Olympic movement, but also expounds the common ideals and common goals of the development of human civilization. China and Greece have centered on the core of the modern Olympic spirit in their international exchanges, which is in line with the value orientation of building a community with a shared future for mankind. As important representatives of Eastern and Western civilizations, China and Greece share common and far-reaching values and worldviews in uniting all human races and promoting common prosperity of the world. China and Greece can commit themselves to becoming a friendship and prosperity model for the exchange and mutual understanding of world civilizations, and bring a new Olympian flame to the current turbulent world situation.

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