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“Frisbee on football field”: the intergenerational conflict between two sports at grassroots level in China

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Abstract

Ultimate frisbee has gained great attention and enjoyed explosive growth in China from 2019 to 2022 (especially in 2022), but has also aroused heated controversies in cyberspace, typically in the football community. This paper explores the forms and underlying reasons for conflicts between the two sports. Through field observation, in-depth interviews, and a survey of amateur participants in both frisbee and football, the paper finds that conflicts between the two sports, which arise from ultimate frisbee's quest for legitimacy, are exaggerated as a result of the mediatization of sports. The study further revealed that Frisbee, as an alternative sport, exhibits notable cultural distinctions from football, a traditional sport. This divergence in sports culture mirrors the generational gap. Consequently, the conflict between the two sports is more of an intergenerational conflict within the realm of sports culture, reflecting the overall transformation of Chinese society.

Keywords: Ultimate frisbee, Intergenerational conflict, Alternative sports, Legitimacy

Introduction

In 2022, ultimate frisbee went viral on Chinese social media, featuring beautiful young girls wearing tights and yoga pants running alongside men on a football field. As an emerging alternative sport, non-mainstream and rebellious spirit are the genes of ultimate frisbee (Leonardo and Zagoria 2005). With mixed-gender competition, a refusal of physical confrontation, and an emphasis on social media exposure, these non-mainstream elements have led to intense conflict between ultimate frisbee and other mainstream sports, especially football. Due to the shared reliance on football fields by both frisbee and football, it seems that these two sports are competing for space. Many short videos circulating on social media and online sports communities depict frequent verbal and physical conflicts among participants of the two sports. Football enthusiasts often complain that ultimate frisbee players "occupy" football fields. Critics argue that frisbee is perceived more as a social activity like dating or social networking, rather than a sport involving physical confrontation. Female participants, in particular, are sometimes

labeled as "frisbee socialite"(飞盘媛 Fei Pan Yuan).¹ This reminds us of Wheaton's description of the poser surfers, "There are a lot of blond, blue-eyed people who arrive on weekends in campervans on surfboards, and they don't even go in the water" (Wheaton, 2004).

In fact, frisbee was introduced to China as early as the 1980s. In 2019, the General Administration of Sport of the People's Republic of China put Frisbee under its regulation, and released the "Rules of National Frisbee Competition (Trial)" in 2021. It has, so to speak, gained "legitimacy" as an officially recognized mass sport. However, why do these two sports appear in conflicts in both physical and virtual spaces?

How should we interpret these conflicts in sports? While these two amateur sports may seem to be competing for time and space, a more nuanced understanding can be achieved by taking a closer look at the commercial data related to football fields to see whether ultimate frisbee is complementing or competing for time and space on football fields (inclusive demand or exclusive demand). More importantly, amid China's rapid development and transformation, these disputes might represent a shift in sports culture among different generations of Chinese people. Could it be said that ultimate frisbee is a "trendy sport" for the younger generation while football is an "interest sport" for the middle-aged and the elderly? Is this cultural shift the fundamental cause of the conflict between these two sports?

Frisbee and football: origins, culture, and conflicts

Like other alternative sports, ultimate frisbee was born on campus and among young people. It began as a metal can of pie thrown by college students for fun. Later, the can of pie evolved into a plastic disc and the prototype of the frisbee appeared.

In the late 1960s, faculty and students at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, the United States, invented a new sport based on football, replacing the ball with a disc, which is now known as ultimate frisbee. A year later, Joel Silver, a Columbia High School teacher, formulated the first set of official rules, which were later revised to form today's version. In the 1970s, ultimate frisbee gained increasing popularity, and the first university competition was held in the United States. In 1975, the sport expanded to the international level, and teams from all over the world participated in the World Frisbee Championships. In the 1980s, the first World Ultimate Frisbee Championship was held in Sweden, and it was also performed as an exhibition event during the World Games in Germany. In 2001, the sport was recognized as a medal sport at the World Games in Japan.

As an alternative sport, ultimate frisbee emphasizes the playfulness of sports and welcomes a wide range of participants. However, there is a contradiction between the sports culture that frisbee promotes and the actual situation. Andrew Thornton (2004) argues that frisbee presents a different sports and cultural identity: gender equality—anyone can participate in this sport, and it rejects physical confrontation and a win-at-all-costs competitive attitude. But he also mentioned that the sport failed to produce significance

¹ Frisbee socialite is a term used to describe some of the women playing frisbee. These female participants, who deviate from the traditional athlete look by often wearing tight tracksuits and looking sexy, post pictures of themselves playing frisbee on social media. Some people think they play frisbee not for sports, but to show off their bodies, or for other reasons unrelated to sports. The appearance of this statement caused a heated debate on Chinese Internet, and soon set off a wave of anti-stigma, which is a relatively fierce phenomenon.

beyond the existing mainstream sports' dominant structure, ideal and practice. Pattison (2011) believes that frisbee attracts a specific group of people who are predominantly white, urban, heterosexual, middle-class, university-educated, and white-collar professional participants. This observation is also proved by an empirical study on frisbee (Kerins et al. 2007). Thornton explains the homogeneity of frisbee participants. Radical activists in the 1960s created ultimate frisbee, which was welcomed among the ruling class and middle class in North America. Extreme sports like ultimate frisbee were originated in Ivy League universities in the United States. Membership was usually based on friendship. In short, they argue that social network attributes have invisibly shackled the sport, making it sometimes hard to be accepted by other groups.

Moreover, binary classifications such as male/female, violence/peace, and competition/cooperation have led people to perceive frisbee as a non-violent and cooperative sport, a sport that is feminized. "Male values are exorcised and female values nurtured." (Markula 2005). The unconventional rituals and performances associated with ultimate frisbee can be off-putting to those grounded in principles of traditional and competitive sport, potentially causing them to be turned off by what they believed as peculiar practices.

To explore the formation of conflicts, it is insightful to delve into the origin, development, and culture of football. Modern football originated in English public schools in the mid-nineteenth century. Rules of football were established, banning hacking and the handling of the ball. Unlike frisbee, which avoids physical confrontation, football avoids reckless behavior, but normal confrontations are allowed. In fact, football was initially designed to restore order in English public schools and to develop young players into "muscular Christian gentlemen" (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1999). By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become the dominant sport among urban working class. Football then rode the wave of globalization to become a popular sport in Europe, Africa and South America. An empirical study showed that football is popular in all age groups and regions (Hulteen et al. 2017).

Football can be divided into professional football, amateur football, and campus football. Amateur football, or grassroots football in the context of this article, refers to the leisure activities of amateur sports enthusiasts that usually played on community football fields. In China, the social transformation and the football market brought by professional football have laid the foundation for the emergence of grassroots football in China (Xu and Pu 2014). According to Sun and Yi (2016), grassroots football in the Chinese context "has both official and folk, professional and non-professional attributes". The complex attributes of grassroots football mean that its conflicts with frisbee are diverse, and the reasons behind it are worth exploring. However, scant attention has been directed towards the origin and history of grassroots football, as well as the broader football culture.

In general, from a historical perspective, both frisbee and football in China have undergone a process of localization. The competitiveness of the former has been weakened while its social attributes have been strengthened; the latter has clearly been depoliticized, but its characteristics remain ambiguous. comparatively speaking, the contradiction between frisbee and football appears less prominent in Europe and America, where the multiple use of sports fields has reduced venue competition.

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the following questions: Firstly, as an alternative sport, frisbee poses a challenge to mainstream sports. Its rules are partially derived from football, but it avoids physical confrontation, which leads to an inevitable contradiction in sports culture. How is this conflict manifested in China, and how did ultimate frisbee gain its legitimacy? Secondly, can the changes in sports culture be viewed as intergenerational conflicts in sports? From a macro perspective, how do these changes reflect the characteristics of China's ongoing social transformation?

Literature review

Studies on new sports have surged since the twenty-first century, and new sports have been dubbed "extreme", "alternative", and other names. Wheaton (2004) clarifies the differences between these names by using the term "lifestyle sports". She believes that lifestyle sports provide an alternative for the traditional sports, emphasizing active participation and serving as a reflection of the lifestyle. Subsequent studies have shown that there is a tendency for the lifestyle sports to go "mainstream" (Salome and van Bottenburg 2012). The difference between lifestyle sports and traditional sports seems to be narrowed. Lifestyle sports are becoming more organized and institutional, and the number and scope of participation are also expanding (Kidd 2008). The story maybe different in China, though. Therefore, it becomes necessary to discuss the culture and significance of the emerging movement typified by the recent "ultimate frisbee frenzy" in China.

Reality, cyberspace and mentality: the fight for legitimacy of frisbee

Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions. (Suchman 1995). Suddaby et al. (2017) categorized legitimacy into three types: property or power; a process (legitimation instead of legitimacy); and a social perception. Specific to the field of sports, the social legitimacy of any particular sport depends on people's recognition of what it is, how it is played, and how it is related to and different from other sports (Woods 2021). In exploring the dynamic development of frisbee, this paper adopts a perspective that views legitimacy as a process of the legitimization of frisbee. Drawing on Langley's (2007) perspective of process thinking, we dynamically examine the research phenomenon from various perspectives such as sports, activities, events, changes, and temporal evolution. We also attempt to categorize the popularization process of ultimate frisbee into different stages.

The conflicts between frisbee and football first manifested as a contest for sports landscape. As Lewis (1979) pointed out, the sports landscape provides an "unwitting biography, reflecting our values" in tangible, visible form. The leisure sports participation of different groups may vary with changes in space, social mobility, or culture, affecting the relationship between leisure and the environment, the overall characteristics of the leisure landscape, and the utilization of venues and environments (Raitz 1987). The field of ultimate frisbee and grassroots football overlaps, but the former lacks some fixed signs that can be regarded as frisbee venues. When frisbee events are held, relative signs are put up, but the field remains the appearance of a football field during normal times. Ultimate frisbee presents a "soft landscape," and because of a lack of permanency of spatial

organization, the social or economic priority was given to more dominant sporting forms (Griggs 2009).

As Griggs notes in his field notes, “ideal spaces are far from common and those that would be ok are usually booked up by football”. Finding suitable and pre-marked venues still has a long way to go before ultimate frisbee can compete by generating sufficient social or economic demand in such an environment.

In addition to the competition for physical space in sports landscapes, the battles on social media are also worth paying attention to. Sports provide valuable content and audiences for social media, while social media provides necessary exposure and income for sports organizations (Rowe 2011). The clashes on social media can be viewed from two perspectives: one is the creation of negative legitimacy (e.g., stigmatization) for ultimate frisbee by other groups, and the other is the establishment of positive legitimacy for itself. The former attempts to stigmatize the sport, while the latter can reach a wider audience at a low cost, thus becoming a “real” sport (Lindemann and Cherney 2014), as well as promoting athletes, giving them greater visibility, and connecting athletes and fans (Woods 2019).

The conflicts and differences in reality and cyberspace are underpinned by different mentalities and sports cultures. These ideas are reflected in the motivation and degree of participation. Sport participation experiences, motivations, and constraints also change over the life cycle (Lim et al. 2011). Green’s (2005) sports development model provides a framework for studying the underlying ideological differences, which involves recruitment, motivation, socialization, and commitment in the process by which people become involved in.

Intergenerational conflict of sports culture

Ultimate frisbee may be considered “alternative” at present, but what is an alternative sport? These are activities that either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and to mainstream sport values. (Rinehart 2000). This definition implies the connotation of cultural change in sports. Alternative sports may have elements of mainstream or residual sports, but the main difference is that “they have not gained widespread acceptance from mainstream audiences” (Rinehart, 1998). Other differences include debates over team and individual sports, the importance of professionalism in sports, professional or amateur status, and the lifestyle, aesthetics, and competitiveness of sports. The popularity of other sports such as skateboarding and parkour also indicates that people’s sports ideologies are constantly changing, and participation in alternative or adapted sports is rapidly increasing in North America and Europe. In the United Kingdom, this represents a significant cultural shift as these activities have challenged and replaced traditional team sports (Griggs 2012).

Understanding and analyzing the behavior and ideas of a generation has become a window to decipher social transformation in the course of changes and historical evolution. To define intergenerational conflict, one must first clarify the definition of generation. The meaning of “generation” is rich, and its definition has evolved in academic research at different periods (Attias-donfut and Arber 2000). Roughly speaking, the term “generation” is defined based on biological attributes and social attributes. The former divides the population based on age, such as the

terms "post-2000s" and "post-90 s"; the latter emphasizes the influence of society on "a generation," such as the term "Generation Z". Defining generational boundaries is difficult because socio-biological criteria are numerous and contradictory.

This paper aims to explore the age differences between frisbee and football, which objectively exist. However, defining intergenerational conflict solely based on age differences is not appropriate and sufficient. Mannheim (1952) used sociological standards to link the formation process of generations with social changes. He pointed out that people born in the same period, experiencing comparable social changes, and forming unique "historical social consciousness" or collective identity would form their unique attitudes and behaviors, making them different from preceding generations. This definition is in line with the meaning of "generation" that this study intends to explore. It focuses on social attributes rather than biological attributes, and explores the power conflicts between different generations in possession and use of public goods and social resources, as well as the differences and splits in ideology, values and cultural preferences behind these interests (Wu 2006). According to the attributes of sports groups and the development status of sports, frisbee enthusiasts and their associated sports culture are regarded as "youth generation", while football enthusiasts are correspondingly labeled as the "adult generation".

Collisions between generations can lead to intergenerational conflict. Referring to the article on the legitimacy struggle in skateboarding by Dumas and Laforest (2008), intergenerational conflict here is defined as follows: in a rapidly changing society, the "adult generation" may not be able to adapt to different social conditions and may oppose the new thinking patterns of the "youth generation." Meanwhile, facing opposition from the "adult generation," the "youth generation" tends to legitimize its own way of life. The conflict between these two generations in this process is intergenerational conflict.

The intergenerational conflict within sports culture manifests in two aspects. Firstly, there is the legitimacy issue, wherein the sporting activities of the "youth generation" are frequently disregarded as legitimate sports by the "adult generation" and are instead viewed as recreational activities for young people. As a result, the youth generation constantly emphasizes the legitimacy of their sporting activities as normal and friendly and strives to have them recognized as such. Secondly, there is competition for valuable forms of capital, including the ownership of public spaces (Edmunds and Turner 2002). The youth generation believes that the adult generation has greater economic and political capital to control these spaces, and that the access to these spaces is restricted by the adult generation to conservatively control social and cultural resources.

In essence, intergenerational sports conflict implies that the two generations cannot consider each other's identification and choices as target reference. The internal sports culture and values of each generation are influenced, and at times constrained, by the different cultures and societal values they inhabit. As a result, the sports values and ideals of the youth generation often surge ahead of those held by the adult generation, and the latter tends to turn a blind eye to or struggle to understand the innovative sports ideas of the youth generation, thus giving rise to the intergenerational sports conflict.

The transformation of sports culture and Chinese society

The conflict between frisbee and football extends beyond the controversies within these two sports and their participants; it reflects the conflict between new and traditional sports, also known as the collision between subculture and mainstream culture. From the perspective of Chinese sports history, different sports concepts have emerged in different periods since the founding of New China. The significance of the frisbee and football controversy lies not in determining who is right, but in the sports cultural changes reflected by the conflict itself.

Throughout history, significant differences have existed between the sports culture of the early years of the People's Republic of China and the present day, particularly in the choice of sports and motivations for participation. The government's promotion and public's participation in sports were motivated by the pursuit of physical fitness and health. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued instructions on health work, calling for relaxation exercises, ball games, running, mountain climbing, swimming, tai chi, and other sports activities. Initiatives like the "Labor System" (later changed to Exercise Standards) encouraged exercises during workdays in factories and enterprises, and government organs and institutions advocated inter-office exercises, broadcast gymnastics and other activities.

Since the 1990s, Chinese sports has undergone significant growth in terms of participant, with motivations and forms of participation have become more diversified (Xiong 2007). The influence of urbanization on sports views cannot be ignored. With economic development and social progress, the relationship between people and the social environment has become increasingly close. Xiong (2007) pointed out that as sports infrastructure, participation modes, and sports values change, urbanization has driven the social and cultural reconstruction of sports. This "reconstruction" is a transformation. As urban populations have increased and even become crowded, sports spaces have decreased, so people have turned to parks, squares, and streets to engage in sports, leading to the emergence of street sports such as hip-hop dancing, parkour, and skateboarding (Wang and Wang 2016). The emergence and introduction of these street sports were considered alternative in China at the time and were referred to as "sports subcultures" because they were not mainstream. However, the development in recent decades has made skateboarding and other sports gradually go mainstream and even enter the Olympic Games. Yang and Liu (2015) believed that capitalism in the twentieth century developed into a pleasure-themed leisure activity or subculture form, and the involvement of commercialism made the sports subculture transform into the mainstream sports culture. The emergence of this subculture and its confluence with the mainstream is a reflection of societal change.

Research methods

This paper employs a multi-method approach including participatory observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaire survey. The participatory observation period lasted from August 2022 to February 2023. We joined over ten WeChat groups and go to the fields, to observe how frisbee events are organized, and the interaction on the field, mainly in Guangzhou. This allows us to observe different kinds of clubs,

including university campus teams, clubs for greenhands, and clubs which join different levels of competition.

Active members were identified and interviewed. The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured approach, in which the interviewees were divided into three categories: frisbee participants, football participants, and venue operators. A total of 13 interviewees were interviewed (see Appendix 1 for the list of interviewees). Different questions were prepared in advance for different types of interviewees. We use a combination of online interview and offline interview, mainly online interview, and each interview lasted about one hour.

For frisbee participants, organizers of frisbee clubs and individual players were interviewed to explore their reasons for participating in frisbee sports, how they learn about frisbee, their social media engagement, and their opinions about the online controversy between frisbee and football. For organizers, interviews focused on their motives for organizing frisbee clubs and the level of professionalism, as well as how they organize a frisbee event. Organizers shared their insights into venue and time choices, their preference for football field, and their considerations influencing the selection of a particular football field at a certain time. Additionally, senior frisbee players were asked to analyze the reasons behind the emergence of the frisbee trend in China and future development path.

For football participants, interviews were divided into two parts based on the timeline of frisbee's development in China, namely "before the frisbee frenzy" and "after the frisbee frenzy". Given the apparent conflict between frisbee and football over venues, the interviews aim to analyze venue disputes by researching whether football enthusiasts had to alter their sports venue, time and frequency due to the rise of frisbee. At the same time, the study also investigates football enthusiasts' understanding of frisbee and football, exploring information through the investigation of the types of their sports partners, sports motivations, understanding of frisbee, and spending habits. Furthermore, with regard to the social media performance of football enthusiasts, such as posting SNS updates and participating in online discussions, their image and performance in the virtual space were analyzed to answer how the conflict between frisbee and football enthusiasts on the internet arises.

For venue operators, the interview was also divided into two parts, "before and after the frisbee frenzy" to examine the business scope, popular time slots, prices, and booking methods for the venue. By comparing and analyzing the changes before and after, this segmentation aims to explore the sports that were played on football fields before the frisbee frenzy, such as rugby, flag football, baseball, and corporate team building. The study also seeks to understand the venue operator's attitudes towards these sports and the criteria for accepting or rejecting a particular sport on the football fields. Additionally, the study intends to investigate the pricing of the venue due to claims on the internet that frisbee has caused an increase in prices and occupied football fields. Questions were raised to learn about the pricing of the venue during the year and popular time slots in a week, and whether the price varies for different sports. If so, the study seeks to understand the reasons for the differences and whether there are overlaps in popular time slots between frisbee and football. Moreover, the

study also collects feedback from venue operators on the impact of the popularity of frisbee on various aspects of the venue.

To compare the two sports communities, the study adopts Green's (2005) sports development model and designs a questionnaire that divides sports participation into four concepts: recruitment, motivation, socialization, and commitment. The questionnaire includes four sections: personal basic information, sports participation, social performance, and sports concepts.

The first section collects demographic data from the survey participants to analyze the basic characteristics of frisbee and football participants in China, including their gender, age, education level, city of residence, occupation, income, and marital status.

In the second section, dedicated to sports participation, participants were queried about the channels of contact, duration of contact, frequency of participation, types of sports groups, and types of activities organized for frisbee or football, to obtain information on the degree of participation in frisbee or football. According to the "recruitment" concept in Green's sports development model, the study investigates the ways in which frisbee and football players first learned about the sport to compare the differences in the dissemination channels of the two sports. While both ultimate frisbee and football are team sports, their organizational forms differ. Football activities are usually organized among acquaintances who already have some form of social connection, such as alumni and colleagues. In contrast, many frisbee club activities currently use a community-based registration system, where frisbee players may not be familiar with each other. This phenomenon is often seen among frisbee activities in China. As a result, frisbee is labeled as a sport with strong social networking characteristics. Therefore, in the questionnaire, we designed questions about the types of people the participants usually play with and the types of activities they usually participate in.

The third section, addressing social performance, encompasses aspects such as the frequency of sports information sharing and feedback, the development of relationships with team members, the perception of frisbee socialization, the experience brought by frisbee community operation, the platform for obtaining sports information, and attention and participation in the controversial debates between football and frisbee. Socialization refers to the way in which sports participants integrate into teams and subcultures (Green 2005). In addition, this study expands the spatial dimension of "socialization" by extending it to virtual space, that is, investigating the social media participation of the respondents.

The fourth section, centered on sports mentality, examines motivation and commitment. The study examines the motivation for sports participation, willingness to spend money and time, sports achievements, understanding of sports, and opinions on the controversies between frisbee and football. "Motivation" is the reason for the respondents to participate in a sport. This section analyzes the reasons behind the controversies of the two sports on the Internet by comparing the different motivations of frisbee players and football players. Combined with the concept of generation proposed above, this paper investigates the spending habits and the understanding of sports purpose of the two groups, aiming to analyze whether there is a difference in sports concept between Frisbee and football, and whether they contribute to intergenerational conflict. At the end of the questionnaire, we present a list of hot topics in the controversies between

frisbee and football in 2022, and opinions of the two groups are collected to accurately grasp the core conflict behind the controversies.

The main data used in this paper are from frisbee and football clubs in different cities in China, mainly in Guangdong, covering 18 provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government and special administrative regions. We used a combination of targeted group surveys and non-random sampling surveys. The targeted group mainly included several large-scale, well-established, and well-known frisbee clubs in Guangzhou, such as Lychee Frisbee Club and Vision Frisbee Club. A total of 403 questionnaires were received, and 388 effective questionnaires that could reflect the research content were obtained by eliminating some samples that were incorrect or had incomplete information, with an effective rate of 95.8% (See Additional File 1: "Questionnaire responses").

In terms of the age structure of the survey population, the oldest is 60 years old, the youngest is 15 years old, and the average age is 28 years old. Among them, the population aged 18–25 accounts for 53.3% (207 people), being the largest proportion; the population aged 26–33 accounts for 26% (101 people), ranking second; and the population aged 34 and above accounts for 23.2% (90 people). In terms of gender ratio, the male-to-female ratio is 1:0.56 (249:139). The study divides the survey subjects into three groups: "only participate in frisbee sports", "only participate in football sports", and "participate in both frisbee and football sports". Among them, 129 people "only participate in frisbee sports", 166 people "only participate in football sports", and 93 people "attend both frisbee and football sports".

Research findings

The legitimization of ultimate frisbee in China: a four-stage process

As mentioned earlier, we consider legitimacy as a process, namely, legitimization. It is usually understood as a "multi-level process" or a "collective process in which leaders, followers, and stakeholders participate in the meaning creation process" (Nielsen and Rao 1987). In the case of frisbee sports, this process involves frisbee promoters, enthusiasts, opponents, and official organizations, all of whom worked together to construct the process of legitimizing frisbee. In a review of the development of frisbee in China, Ma (2015) divided the development process of Chinese ultimate frisbee into four phases. However, Ma does not provide a basis for the division, and his study is based more on the his own experience. The article was written eight years ago, and it referred to the period after 2011 as the "period of development climax," which is obviously not the case nowadays. Therefore, this paper undertakes a comprehensive review of relevant literature, with a particular focus on the legitimization process, and combines interview data to provide a new categorization of phases.

Phase I (Around the 1980s–2007): Introduction of frisbee.

Ultimate frisbee was first introduced into China in the 1980s, as reported by a number of authoritative media (such as Southern Weekend and the Paper). During this period, frisbee lacked regular competitions. Although Shanghai International Ultimate Frisbee Open was held in Shanghai in 2000 (Ma 2015), most of the participants were foreigners working in China and exchange students (Gu and Hu 2016). Frisbee occupied a niche

market characterized by small-scale venues, limited organization, and sparse competitions. People's understanding of frisbee was constrained, with no official organization in place.

Phase II (2007–June 2019): Gradual development.

The development of frisbee competitions signified further popularization of the sport. The first China Ultimate Frisbee Open in 2007 was chosen as the starting time of the second phase. At this time, the number of competitions increased, and there were also competitions among college students. However, there were still some problems: the organization of competitions was not professional enough (Ma 2015; Jia 2014); The geographical locations of the competitions were uneven (Gao 2010), and the proportion of foreign participants in the competition was still high (Jia 2014). Apart from competitions, the number of frisbee participants gradually increased during this period, mainly from two groups: university students, and clubs established by frisbee enthusiasts among working professionals (Liang and Luo 2017). The former was the mainstream, as mentioned by several interviewees.

"When I was abroad, I came to know frisbee. After returning to China, the first wave of people playing frisbee in Shantou were mainly foreign students and expatriates. I started playing with them and their foreign teachers at Shantou University. " (Frisbee participant, Interviewee Q, February 23, 2023)

"I was introduced to frisbee when I was in college by an English teacher who taught me how to play." (Frisbee participant, Interviewee X, February 24, 2023)

During this time, the problem of venues began to emerge. The frisbee community mostly consisted of university students who used the sports fields of various universities and did not have their own venue. The availability of university sports fields became pivotal for frisbee's growth. The achievement of legitimization during this stage was the increase in the number of competitions and participants. However, the sport faced problems such as insufficient field facilities and the limited promotion of frisbee sport, which also has a foreshadow of the field contention between frisbee and football in the future. Without the support of the sports administration, the official role is missing at this stage of development, resulting in a deficiency of professionalism.

Phase III (July 2019–March 2022): Standardization and institutionalization.

In July 2019, the Chinese Extreme Sports Association established the Frisbee Project Committee, marking an official start of standardized management. The institutionalization of frisbee is considered a crucial moment because it implies official recognition, which is an important process of legitimization. Suddaby and other scholars proposed that the process of legitimization includes three aspects: persuasion/translation/narration, theorization, and recognition/classification (Suddaby et al. 2017). "Classification" means that organizations need the approval of social stakeholders in order to gain legitimacy.

After the establishment of the Frisbee Committee, the China Extreme Sports Association (FCCESA) focused on standardizing frisbee rules, constructing industry service platforms, and establishing a comprehensive frisbee ecosystem. The committee aspired to organize three major independent events: the National College Ultimate Frisbee League, the National Frisbee Professional League, and the National Ultimate Frisbee

City Series. At the end of that year, the National Frisbee Sports Promotion Committee (NFSPC) was established. FCCESA operates purely as a mass sports organization, while NFSPC hold the official endorsement of the General Administration of Sport of China (GASC), and is responsible for organizing national, regional, and city-level competitions under the guidance of the Social Sports Center of GASC.

The main difference between Phase III and Phase II is that official institutions are no longer absent, and the authorization of management institutions is an important part of the legitimization process (Suddaby et al. 2017), making the development of frisbee more standardized and efficient.

Phase IV (April 2022–present): Rapid growth.

Around April 2022, there was an exponential surge in information about frisbee and related searches. However, the growing popularity of frisbee was accompanied by a lot of discordance. In June and July, numerous media organizations reported stories of frisbee and football competing for venues, sparking discussions about the emergence of “frisbee socialite”. On July 7, the Social Sports Center of GASC issued a notice stating that China’s first Frisbee League will be held in the second half of 2022. The competition will be held on 11-a-side football fields, according to the document. With official endorsement, although there were still negative comments online, the amount of negative news about frisbee decreased significantly.

During the summer of 2022 and the following National Day holiday, frisbee’s popularity reached its peak. With the reopening at the end of 2022, frisbee experienced a resurgence after a winter lull, but the scale in the spring of 2023 was not as impressive as the year before.

Understanding the conflicts between frisbee and football in physical and virtual space

Physical space: the exaggerated battle for space

As mentioned earlier, frisbee was played in college sports fields for a long time before gaining popularity, and gradually moved to commercial football fields.

“At first, we didn’t have enough money to rent a field, so we played in some corners of the field. Once we had about 10 people, we decided to rent a field to give everyone a better experience. At least there was space for running, so that everyone could make progress. Later, we started renting fields ourselves, and at that time, we didn’t dare to charge too much money because, in the frisbee community, everyone felt like they didn’t need to pay, so we only charged 20 yuan, but it was actually not enough.”
(Frisbee organizer, interviewee Y, February 26, 2023)

The competition for venues intensified as frisbee gained popularity. Before the pandemic, frisbee was mostly played on college campuses. In Guangzhou, for example, most schools were no longer open to outsiders, prompting frisbee enthusiasts to look for new fields, with commercial football fields became the best choice. However, comments suggesting that frisbee was “stealing” football’s field started to emerge. Opinions on whether frisbee is taking away football fields differs between football enthusiasts and frisbee enthusiasts. 47% of football players believe that frisbee is indeed taking away football fields, while 40% of football players hold the opposite view. In contrast, over 80% of frisbee players believe that frisbee does not “steal” the field from the football. It is fair to say

that frisbee players as a whole do not believe that frisbee poses a threat to the field use of football. This involves the idea of field use among survey respondents. In the survey on "What kind of field should frisbee be played on?", "dedicated frisbee field" was the most popular field for both frisbee and football fans, followed by "parks, green spaces, lawns, squares and other open spaces", and then followed by "multi-functional sports fields". The two groups generally agreed that frisbee could be played in those three fields, but attitudes diverge significantly on whether frisbee could be played on football fields. While 68% of frisbee players believe that it is acceptable, with an approval rate even higher than that of "multi-functional sports fields", less than 10 percent of football players share the same view.

Another question in the questionnaire "Have you personally experienced situations where you could not play football due to frisbee?" attempts to look at the frequency of frisbee vs. football field conflict from the perspective of personal experience of the survey respondents. Only 14% of football players have been actually affected by frisbee while playing football, while 86% of football players have not had such experience. Analysis shows that the two groups have different views on the use of field rights, but there is no significant conflict in reality. According to observations from field operators, there are few conflicts over field usage.

"We still prioritize whoever gets in touch first. Football and frisbee don't really conflict with each other. We are not running the fields for public benefit, so we will give the fields to whoever gives the money. It is not that important about the type of sport." (Venue operator, interviewee L, February 25, 2023)

In terms of supply and demand of venues, multiple aspects need to be considered, such as the location of the sports fields, the number of fields, and the convenience of its surrounding transportation. In September 2022, the Mu Sheng Yuan Sports Field in Panyu² rented out their venue 410 times (each time for 2 h), with frisbee and baseball accounting around 5% (21 times) of the total usage. We can preliminarily conclude that the physical space conflict between football and frisbee, while present, was not severe.

Many football enthusiasts in China maintain a rational perspective on this issue.

"When booking venues, some people often rent the fields out to frisbee because they are willing to pay a higher price. It is normal for the highest bidder to win in commercial venues. If someone is willing to pay 3000 yuan for a field while the other only offers 1600 yuan, the venue owner would naturally prefer to rent it out at a higher price." (Football enthusiast, Interviewee Z, February 19, 2023)

Initially, when constructing football fields in China, consideration was not given to accommodating many other sports. Sports such as baseball, rugby, and frisbee lacked adequate venues, with their field requirements being almost the same as football. It was foreseeable that they would ultimately turn to football fields. This shows that alternative sports are attempting to challenge the concept of mainstream sports, including their

² The venue is quite large, with 16 football fields. According to the venue manager, "comparatively speaking, we have sufficient space here, which can accommodate all kinds of sports." Therefore, the booking ratio of the venue can indicate that ultimate frisbee does not pose a threat to football to some extent. However, the downside is that the venue is far from the nearby subway station, and the "last mile" problem has a greater impact on the ultimate frisbee community.

space and time. When discussing the legitimacy of frisbee using football fields, we can easily notice many differences between the two. As Bale (1994) suggested, the "hardness" of parameters varies in different sports. In frisbee, space and rules are "soft" and lack permanent spatial organization. When frisbee is played on football fields, markers are used to designate scoring zones and boundaries, but these markers disappear when the event ends. However, the marked lines and fixed goal posts on a football field emphasize the football community's ability to exercise power over the frisbee community. By imposing territoriality, it excludes the "less important" uses of this space.

China's ultimate frisbee fields are undergoing development. For example, Guangzhou has built the first frisbee park, Zhongluotan Town Frisbee Park. Unfortunately, this park, while only serving as a training ground, is far from the city center and does not meet competition standards. In October 2022, Sihai City & Lychee Frisbee Field officially opened in Guangzhou. In November 2022, the USP in Foshan opened for trial operations, the field was built in accordance with frisbee competition requirements.

"At the beginning, we only rented to frisbee sports, and we did not accept football bookings because we did not even have a goalpost. But now, with the change in market demand, we have started to accept football, starting with youth training. Because the goalposts for youth training can be moved, we don't have to fix them in place. However, during the prime time in the evening, we still focus on renting for frisbee and do not accept football." (Venue operator, Interviewee LZ, March 18, 2023)

As mentioned earlier, the challenge of finding suitable venues for frisbee persists and becomes more evident as the sport gains popularity. According to data from the General Administration of Sport of China, China's per capita sports field area in 2022 is 2.62 square meters, while countries such as the United States and Japan have nearly 20 square meters. There are only 135,900 football fields in China, far fewer than the 1,102,800 for basketball and 935,300 for table tennis. When it comes to football fields, the per capita area is even smaller, and the available sports fields are severely insufficient. Although different sports have different spatial requirements, the field can be "softened" to accommodate more sports. The "softening" of sports landscapes is a good solution in the current situation where sports resources are scarce. Rather than designating the use of the field, and having pre-marked fields, it is better to allow the use of the field to be more diverse.

Virtual space: the dual role of social media

Between June and July 2022, social media platforms (such as WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin) and online sports communities (such as Hupu, Zhibo8, and Dongqiudi) were flooded with stories about the conflict between frisbee and football. These includes direct conflicts between frisbee and football on the field (such as disputes over field occupation, pollution, and injuries to children, and football fields prohibiting frisbee) and off the field (such as resistance to the sale of frisbee at the Beijing Guoan Football Club, backlash against a football legend who created a frisbee club, and heated debates over the use of an 11-a-side football field for the first national frisbee competition).

Frisbee's presence on social media can be examined from two distinct angles. On the one hand, social media contributes to increasing frisbee's popularity, while on the other hand, it reveals the resistance or "negative legitimacy" attached to this process. These two are interdependent at the outset. When observing the comment sections on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Zhihu, and Weibo regarding frisbee information, criticisms were directed at both some frisbee participants and the sport itself. Criticisms of frisbee participants encompassed aspects such as attire, with yoga clothes and delicate makeup becoming subjects of attack. Some netizens claimed that "frisbee socialite" are not here to play sports, but rather to take pictures. The reduction of the female body to a cultural symbol of frisbee was noted. In our survey, 74% of frisbee participants disagreed with the term "frisbee socialite", while 33% of football participants agreed with this label.

The social attributes of frisbee have become the target of criticism, ranging from dating, seeking life partners, to more disgraceful speculations. Sports motivation was the most questioned. In fact, independent sample t-tests are not significant so that there is no difference in motivation between the two sports. According to our questionnaire survey results, the top priority is to maintain physical healthy and seek entertainment, while the secondary motivation is benefits for interpersonal communication. Appearance and personal improvement are the least important. In other words, their sports motivations are actually similar. The difference is that frisbee sport has more pronounced social networking motivation and it is less competitive than football.

Operators of frisbee sports are also aware of the dual effect of "mediatization". From a marketing perspective, sports serve as valuable contents and provide audience for social media, while social media provides necessary exposure and revenue for sports organizations. It is precisely through those controversial topics that frisbee activities have been able to gain greater exposure. A venue operator said:

"Whether it's the rules of the sport, the venue, or the mode of promotion, it will gradually become normalized. There will be specialists to manage, promote and train. People will know that frisbee is a very normal sport activity." (Interviewee F, venue operator, February 25, 2023)

A frisbee community operator talked about how they tried to use media to change the initial stereotype:

"We still believe that positive feedback should be gained through action. For example, in the national final of Lingnan Championship in July of last year, we invested a lot in live broadcasting, using six cameras. That game was very intense and exciting. We hope to promote it through such things and let everyone see what real frisbee sports are all about.

Previously, novices took pictures or recorded videos of them playing frisbee during the frisbee frenzy period, but now that the frisbee craze stop, and it is time for everyone to truly understand frisbee." (Interviewee Y, February 26, 2023)

In addition, since the conflict initially occurred between frisbee and football enthusiasts on the football field, people are easily led to believe that these negative biases mainly come from the football enthusiasts. However, whether it involves football enthusiasts who have been interviewed or the 166 survey respondents who only participate in

football sports, the majority of people's opinions on the phenomenon of frisbee's popularity in 2022 are relatively rational and they do not overly deny this sport.

By generating buzz, frisbee has managed to become part of the broader social media cultural landscape, and the acquisition and distribution of Internet attention resources has created strategic benefits and random incidents for frisbee organizers (Johnson et al. 2006). Mediated sports provide a large number of virtual communities, allowing fans to form a closer virtual social network. As the initial hype faded and more specialized activities were introduced, frisbee sport has spread to more locations, become widely accepted, and become normal to people's life. As a trendy lifestyle, frisbee is accepted and recognized by most participants. Once the new social phenomenon becomes part of the status quo, the legitimacy process maintains its stability and makes it less vulnerable to challenge.

Differences in sports culture: the underlying cause of intergenerational conflicts

The controversy between frisbee and football extends beyond conflicts over venue and social media, also it has deeper disparities in sports culture. As discussed earlier in this paper, the disputes over venues were exaggerated, and there is no strong hostility between the two sides on social media. So why are the controversies between frisbee and football amplified and got intensified attention?

Through collecting data, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, this study found that China is at a critical transitional point, the "young generation" is voicing their opinions and seeking their own position in the mainstream sports culture dominated by traditional sports favored by the "adult generation". This is why the disputes between the two are so significant. Specifically, frisbee enthusiasts and football enthusiasts have different understandings of the purpose of sports, spending habits, social attributes, and different ways of organizing sports, reflecting cultural differences in sports.

Demography shows obvious intergenerational differences

According to the demographic information gathered in our research, frisbee and football enthusiasts represent two "generational" groups. They are influenced by different social and historical backgrounds and formed different sports ideologies, which is the fundamental reason for the above-mentioned conflicts.

This study found through questionnaires and interviews that people who play football are mainly middle-aged, while frisbee players are mainly young people. Based on the basic age structure reflected in the questionnaire, football covers a broader age spectrum, ranging from 16 to 60 years old, while frisbee has limited participants beyond the age of 45. The 2-tailed significance probability of independent sample t-test for two age groups is 0.000, less than 0.05. With the average age of Frisbee (25.90 years old) less than the average age of football (32.44 years old), there is an obvious generation gap between frisbee and football enthusiasts. When conducted field surveys and in-depth interviews at football fields, we do find that middle-aged people appeared more frequently while participants of frisbee competitions are mainly young people.

Therefore, it can be said that the differences in age between the participants of the two sports are objective and have intergenerational characteristics. The manifestation of this intergenerational difference in sports culture is that football represents the "adult

generation” sport with a deep historical background, mature development, wide audience, and widely recognized sports ideology, which leans towards traditional sports, such as athletic competition, pursuit of strength, and the aesthetic sense of movement generated through confrontation. In comparison, frisbee is a recent, fashionable, trendy, and niche “young generation” sport.

The social attributes of frisbee are stronger than football

The social attributes of frisbee are one of its most prominent features, encompassing both its social media presentation and its role in fostering social relationship.

Regarding social media presentation, we conducted a survey to collect the impressions of frisbee and football groups towards frisbee, allowing them to choose the word that best describes their understanding of frisbee from 35 words. Most football enthusiasts believe that frisbee is closely associated with "internet celebrities", "photography", "posing" and "taking photos for sharing". These perceptions are not accepted by frisbee enthusiasts. The differences between the two groups are notable. Football enthusiasts tend to believe that the frisbee community likes posing, willingly shares contents, and has a higher exposure rate on social media. This idea is backed by our field research result that professional photographers would not be hired to film at football grounds, but frisbee organizers we interviewed all said that the club arranged for photographers to capture and share images immediately after the game in the WeChat group for the members to post.

However, the survey results refute the football group’s understanding of the frisbee community. We found that frisbee enthusiasts have no significant difference from football enthusiasts in terms of the tendency to share on social media. The two-tailed significance probability of the independent samples t-test for the sharing situation was Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.134 > 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference between the two groups. This finding suggests that the football community has a misunderstanding of the frisbee community.

Moving on to the social relationship bonding aspect, our initial research found that football activities are usually organized among acquaintances with identity connections. Sports partners mainly consist of classmates, alumni, followed by football enthusiasts, colleagues, and friends who have already known each other in real life. This explains the organizational structure of football activities. That is to say, most participants in football have certain real-life connections, although unrelated to football initially, developed into a football-friend relationship because they shared the same interest. However, in the case of frisbee, social club activities currently adopt online community sign-up approach. Frisbee players are not familiar with each other at the beginning, which provides space for social relationship bonding. One organizer said that some frisbee players who participated in the activities were single and managed to find their life partners within the community.

“Most of the members did not know each other before they came here and they gradually became familiar with each other. Even some of them became couples, maybe twenty or thirty pairs. Through sports, they communicate and interact, and they are more likely to open up their hearts, then they will naturally get to make some

friends.” (Frisbee organizer, interviewee Y, February 26, 2023)

How do we understand the social relationships that arise from sports? And how strong or weak is frisbee social interaction? The study of Kerins et al. (2007) provides a reference. They divide sports participation into three categories: temporary participants who lack a strong desire to enhance their skills and knowledge because improvement is not important for them to enjoy the activity; active participants, who adjust their time slightly for sports activities but rarely take precedence over family life, social relationships, and professional status, may find meaning in the excitement of social relationships and participation; serious participants, who often participate in sports activities, have a specific team or location, and the meaning of their participation or self-worth is derived from the intensity of the movement and the recognition of other players. Their research showed that 40% of players dabble in ultimate frisbee, while only 20% are serious participants.

Similar findings were found in our study, with 25% of frisbee participants falling into "casual", 60% had been participating for less than a year, and only 44% had regular and frequent participation. That is to say, most frisbee enthusiasts do not emphasize the regularity of sports and the steadiness of their companions. Clearly, their gains from sports activities are not strictly generated by sport itself. Combined with field investigation and in-depth interview, we find that frisbee group realizes self-value in the social relations forged during frisbee activities, where social attributes and sports attributes coexist. Grassroots football groups, on the other hand, are more likely to be recognized in sports activities.

Therefore, social attributes of frisbee are stronger than those of football, while sports attributes of football outweigh those of frisbee.

New sports reach sports enthusiasts in new ways

As early as the last century, football and other traditional mainstream sports have entered the life of the Chinese people. Whether through large-scale sports event, or physical education classes in primary and secondary schools, football have deeply penetrated into the life of the Chinese people. According to the results of the questionnaire, among the ways to learn about football (multiple choice question), television and radio are the most important way, with 64% of respondents choosing this channel. Others are newspapers and magazines (33%), school physical education courses or training classes, and the Internet (both personal computer and mobile devices). Lesser people are introduced to football through friends or colleagues, through corporate team building, and through social campaigns such as "Football in the Community".

In contrast, the situation with ultimate frisbee is markedly different. The main source people learn about it is through friends and colleagues, followed closely by the internet (including personal computer and mobile devices), both of which account for about 50% of the total. Participation in clubs, organizations, or internal company activities (such as team building) ranks third, while social promotion campaigns (such as ultimate frisbee into communities and campus) rank fourth. Fewer people learn about frisbee through newspapers, magazines, television, or radio.

As mentioned above, Frisbee was first introduced into China by foreigners, overseas students and other people with overseas exchange experience. According to the in-depth interview, a large part of them started to promote frisbee on campus and recruited more participants through interpersonal network. The explosion of frisbee on social media in 2022 brought frisbee to people's attention. Frisbee clubs also released information about organized activities and attracted more participants, which helped frisbee gain recognition through the internet. Furthermore, participants in frisbee events recommended their friends and colleagues to join the activity. Thus the two main channels for exposure to frisbee are through friends or colleagues and the internet. This is very different from football's situation, which is an "institutionalized" sport for all ages, with football games at school, training camps in society, professional football clubs, professional leagues, and football matches at all levels and types of competitions, making it easy for people to access football without relying on interpersonal communication and online information.

This difference is directly reflected in two ways. First, football mainly spreads through traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, while frisbee mainly relied on acquaintance introduction, new media, community involvement, team building and other new communication modes. Generational differences are significant. The former represents mature communication channels, while the latter is innovative and using modern technologies. Second, in terms of promoting the sport, the "adult generation" sports that have already been institutionalized, using education and training, live broadcastings, and professional games to promote the sport throughout the country. As a new sport, frisbee faces challenges in following the traditional promotion path without official support. Instead, it relies on more cost-effective network, more accurate interpersonal communication and other ways. This is not only the efforts of the "youth generation" to find space in the traditional field of the "adult generation", but also to expand the new way of sports promotion, which is a manifestation of the transformation of Chinese sports culture.

The "fixed" football versus the "flowing" frisbee

Football activities are usually organized among acquaintances who have a certain social relationship with each other ("playing with acquaintances"). In contrast, frisbee enthusiasts mainly play with "strangers".

Our survey shows that in the field of football, about 87% of respondents indicate that their sports partners are generally fixed, with acquaintances making up the majority. About 82% of respondents participate in football activities with a fixed team. In the contrast, about 39% of respondents participated in frisbee state that their frisbee sports partners were not fixed, a proportion much higher than the 13% for football. In addition, 25% of respondents participate in frisbee activities as individuals, without fixed time and frequencies, and 30% of respondents indicate that they had a basically fixed team, but with an unpredictable activity schedule. Comparatively speaking, football activities are more fixed in terms of playmate, time, and frequency. During interviews, some frisbee participants state that they do not insist on participating in activities in a particular club or field, but rather choose activities based on whether the location and time matched their schedule for that day. Since this involves participating across different clubs, the

participants are not bound to any particular clubs either. It can be said that compared to football activities, frisbee players show a more fluid characteristic, which can be said that they have a stronger "mobility".

It can be seen that the "adult generation" represented by football usually develops sports relationships based on pre-existing social relationships. People first form a social group and then develop sports relationships, and establish fixed sports habits because of common interests. In contrast, the establishment of sports relationships in the "youth generation" represented by frisbee is based on the sport itself. They may have no intersection in daily life, but gather because of their love for the sport. This is also because the "youth generation" has the "niche" characteristics that make it difficult for them to find people with the same hobbies in social groups. This indicates that the mode of making sports partners in Chinese sports culture may be gradually changing from a social identity outside of sports to an identity based on sports itself during the process of social transition.

In addition, the differences in fixed and fluid characteristics are also prominent subjectively. When asked "Which type of people do you prefer to play sports with?" over 80% of football participants expressed a preference for playing with familiar individuals, while only 59% of frisbee participants said the same, indicating that the "youth generation" is more inclusive of sports partners and does not change their feelings about sports based on familiarity. Their rejection of unfamiliar partners is also weaker than that of the "adult generation". In contrast, the "adult generation" is more fixed and closed in their selection of sports partners, showing clear generational differences, which may also be a partial reason for the football community's lack of understanding of frisbee.

Frisbee is more open and inclusive than football

Frisbee is more open and inclusive compared to football in terms of specific sports ideologies. The questionnaire explored the differences between the two groups through two questions. The first question was "Can men and women compete together in competitive sports?" Because frisbee is a mixed-gender sport, although there are also high-level single-gender competitions, currently many competitions are mixed-gender, with teams consisting of both men and women. On the other hand, football matches separate men's and women's teams. Therefore, although both groups chose "can compete together" as the main option, the group that participated in frisbee had a significantly higher percentage of choosing "yes" at 87%, compared to football participants at 66%.

The second question was "If there was a new sport that just entered China, would you be willing to try it?" Frisbee participants were clearly more enthusiastic about trying new things, while football participants were more conservative and mostly chose "it depends on the specific situation and personal interest". This shows that the youth generation's sports choices have a distinct openness, and they are willing to try new things.

From the above analysis, it becomes evident that the attitudes of the participants in ultimate frisbee and football towards gender in competitive sports and their willingness to try new things are different, which is also one of the manifestations of intergenerational conflicts.

Based on the above analysis, there are differences in the demography characteristics, ways of accessing sports, sports partners and activity organization types, understanding

of sports, and social attributes between the two groups of frisbee and football participants, indicating an intergenerational difference. Generation is actually the fundamental logic behind these conflicts, because different generations have different sports ideologies, so clashes between generations result in intergenerational conflicts. Moreover, the conflicts reflect the changes in Chinese society in the field of sports culture.

Conclusions and discussions

The phenomenon of the rising popularity of frisbee in 2022 is the reason for this study. Through the analysis of past literature and news reports, interviews with relevant people, and questionnaire surveys of participants in frisbee and football sports, we have obtained longitudinal data on the legitimization process of frisbee in China and compared it with the mainstream football sports culture. Spanning approximately six months, the study encapsulates the period when frisbee sports first became popular, then experienced a lull after the pandemic control was lifted, and then revived again during the Chinese New Year. Unfortunately, much of the data collection was completed recently, making it difficult to conduct a longitudinal analysis, and thus relied on other literature and personal experiences of frisbee participants, which may inevitably result in some omissions.

The study shows that the competition for sports fields between frisbee and football is not as antagonistic as reported in the media. The underlying cause of the conflict is the lack of sports resources and the exclusivity caused by the "hardness" of sports fields. Building more suitable, unmarked fields for a wider range of sports events would be a better approach. The frenzy of ultimate frisbee has gone through an unprecedented path, as one respondent said in the questionnaire, "frisbee sports have gone through ten years of development in the past year". The conflicts on social media have also allowed frisbee to gain more understanding and attract more people to participate in this sport. The conflicts behind the controversies show that this youth generation and emerging sports patterns have many differences from the adult generation and traditional sports patterns. Frisbee sports showcase increased female participation, younger age groups, and robust participation and social attributes, reflecting the social needs of the "youth generation".

We can also look at the conflicts between frisbee and football from a macro perspective. Over the past few decades, China has undergone a transition from an agricultural, rural, and relatively traditional society to an industrial, urban, and modern society. Hangsheng believes that when we talk about "social transformation", we are emphasizing the transformation of social structure. In this sense, "social transformation" and "social modernization" are synonymous (Zheng 2009). In other words, China's social transformation is a process of its social life and organizational patterns moving from traditional to modern. Sports culture is a part of social culture, and the transformation of sports culture is a microcosm of social transformation. The conflict between frisbee and football indicates a conflict between the new and traditional cultures. The popularity of frisbee in China and its community sports mode may represent a way of "modernization" in sports. We can clearly see the evolution of modern sports values. Compared with the early days in this country, when sports activity was a tool only to develop strong bodies, modern sports have a richer connotation in its values. From a motivational perspective, people participate in sports to maintain their health and derive satisfaction from leisure activities. It is worth noting that the social function of sports is increasingly becoming

the main motivation for participation. As living standards and disposable income see marked improvement, there is a growing willingness among individuals to allocate material resources for sports.

Supplementary Information

The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-023-00202-8>.

Additional file 1. Questionnaire responses: demographics, participation, social media performance and sports mentality of frisbee and football participants.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their thanks to the reviewers for their valuable comments in the earlier version of this paper. They also would like to thank the interviewees who participated in questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Special thanks to several football clubs, frisbee clubs and venue operators in Shanghai and Guangzhou for their important data and help.

Author contributions

SL: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, supervision, editing and rewriting. YJ: data curation, formal analysis, investigation, writing original draft. YC: conceptualization, investigation, writing original draft.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-for-profit sectors.

Availability of data and materials

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the supplementary materials.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Received: 24 April 2023 Accepted: 7 December 2023

Published online: 22 January 2024

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