

Football and the Modernization of Latin America: Class Will, Nationalism, and National Spirit

Yichen Jin

Minzu University of China, Beijing, China
chelsiekim@163.com

Abstract. Latin America began its modernization process after gaining independence from colonial rule in the 19th century, yet it has long been plagued by political, economic and social challenges. Football is the top sport in Latin America and is closely related to its sociocultural and political-economy contexts. This paper explores the intrinsic connection between football and Latin America's modernization process from the perspective of development anthropology. Football plays multiple roles in Latin American society. It serves as a political tool to reflect class interests, arouses nationalist sentiments to heal the psychological trauma caused by national predicaments, and promotes racial integration as well as the construction of national identity. As both a profession and an industrial system, football not only boosts the economic development of Latin America and enhances social cohesion, but also becomes an important cultural symbol that reflects social issues and carries national spirit. This paper offers a new perspective for studying the cultural and social development trajectories of developing countries in the process of modernization.

Keywords: Development Anthropology, Football, Modernization of Latin America, Sports and Social Development

1. Introduction

As the "world's No.1 sport," football is not only a highly entertaining sport but also much more than that. As an industrial system, football provides a wide range of employment opportunities, including players, journalists, and commentators, generating substantial income. And, teams, media, tourism, and services develop in tandem with the progress of football events. Thus, football events are associated with a nation's soft power and social cohesion, and are imbued with symbolic meanings. These meanings align with collective, ethnic, national, and national identity, and can reflect people's value choices, values, and behavior patterns. For Latin American countries, football, as a national sport, has an extremely high popularity and participation rate. Its social and cultural significance, as well as its political significance, are more intense and distinct compared to other countries. Since the 20th century, Latin American countries striving for modernization have taken divergent paths due to historical, geographical, and other factors. But football has consistently played a pivotal role in Latin American society. On the cultural level, football involves the integration of foreign colonial culture and local culture, and the modern organizational and rule structure combines with the improvisational creativity in Latin American culture. Moreover, in the process of modernization,

football serves as an important way for social mobility, enabling slum children to get class mobility and alleviate structural problems. Though the relationship between football and modernization varies across different countries. Take Europe as an example, the industrialization of football is linked to the urban middle-class culture. The global operation of the Premier League reflects the logic of modernity, with stadiums becoming spaces for transnational capital, such as Manchester City and the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and Liverpool and American capital. The contrast with Latin American football culture reveals the unique relationship between football and modernization in Latin America [1]. Against the background of the post-colonialism and modernization development, football can comprehensively reflect the social culture, class will, nationalism, and national spirit of Latin America, and is closely linked to the modernization process of this region. The study attempts to explore the close relationship between football and Latin America's modernization from the perspective of development anthropology. It aims to explain the unique role of football in the modernization of Latin America and to get a deeper understanding of Latin American society through football. Regarding football as a cultural process in the modernization, it explores how football shapes the social structure and identity of the people in Latin America, rather than confining the analysis to the framework of commercialization and professionalization.

2. Overview of Latin American modernization

The Latin American Independence Revolution took place during the era of the world-wide bourgeois revolution. Influenced by liberalism, the colonial people rebelled against Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. During the independence revolution against colonial rule, many intellectuals deeply influenced by European bourgeois ideas served as revolutionary national leaders, playing a crucial role in national independence, such as Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín, laying the foundation for the Westernization of Latin America's modernization model. Since the 19th century, Latin American countries that had gained independence from Spanish colonial rule have embarked on their respective paths of modernization after achieving national independence. After more than a century of efforts, they have achieved some results in political and economic modernization, and significant changes have taken place in their social, economic, and political landscapes [2].

Throughout the 19th century, after independence, Latin American countries did not develop strongly sufficiently. They experimented with various forms of political reform, but domestic and foreign contradictions remained unresolved. Economically, the development model based on the processing and export of primary agricultural products made the Latin American economy highly dependent on the European and American markets, which was a major hidden danger to national instability [3].

In the 20th century, the modernization reform in Latin America shifted to the economic field. After the 1930s, most Latin American countries entered a period of political stability and established authoritarian governments. The Argentina government, represented by Juan Domingo Perón and influenced by Peronism, promoted a liberal economic development model. However, it still failed to solve the problems of social discrimination, class confrontation, and a large income gap, nor did it change the Creole elite political system since the colonial era. Political and economic corruption and internal conflicts in the country emerged one after another [3]. On this basis, economic nationalism rose, social classes were further divided, and the sharp class contradictions caused by the wealth gap were reflected in all aspects of social life.

After the 1950s, European and American countries strengthened their control and intervention in Latin America. Latin American countries carried out neoliberal reforms, but these exacerbated the

imbalance between productive forces and social relations. The modernization reforms imitating the West not only failed to solve the development problems of Latin American countries but also led to a continuous decline in economic and social development due to their inability to respond to the realities of Latin American society [3]. In addition, wars in Latin American countries, such as the Falklands War between the United Kingdom and Argentina, severely damaged the national economy and national psyche, and nationalism developed more strongly. The development process of Latin American modernization and the problems encountered therein are the common realities and dilemmas faced by Latin American countries.

3. The relationship between football and social development

Sports are a symbol of social development and the progress of human civilization. In the process of modernization construction, sports develop along with the development of the economy and society [4]. At the same time, sports also have important functions and roles in human society. Apart from influencing the physical fitness, spiritual qualities, and sportsmanship of sports ethics of participants, its functions extend to more spheres of social life. Sports play a unique role in politics and the economy, and demonstrate functions in political, economic, and social-cultural aspects. The political role of sports is reflected in that the victory in major competitions can strengthen the national image, enhance national prestige, boost the national spirit, and increase self-confidence and pride, and can also promote international exchanges. Moreover, the economic role of sports is reflected in the formation of a huge consumer market, which expands into a new economic growth point [5].

4. Modernization development and football

4.1. Industrialization development and class will-the Argentina Derby

4.1.1. The politicization of football under peronism

Perón stepped onto the political stage of Argentina in 1943, leaving a deep mark of Peronism on Argentina's economy and society. Peronism, also known as Justicialism, emerged against the backdrop of the widespread development of the national democratic movement of the working class and ordinary people [6]. Justicialism is a multi-class alliance formed by the middle class and military leaders. It incorporates the growing working class into national affairs, implements protectionism in the economy, exclusivism in culture, strengthens state intervention, changes the domestic social welfare policy, and forces capitalists to improve the living conditions of workers [7].

However, the reforms of Peronism did not bring ideal development to Argentina. Instead, they further intensified social contradictions. Against the background of a large number of unemployed workers, in order to reduce people's political complaints, Eva Perón strengthened the connection between football and politics. At this point, the political role of football extends to children who are in the initial stage of their ideological development. From 1948-1955, Eva Perón launched the Children's Football Championship. She used football to cultivate future supporters of Peronism, publicize the national ideology to the parents of the working class, and strengthen the connection between the Perón government and the working class. At the same time, football also served as a form of political mobilization for the working class and a space for the identity and sense of belonging of men from the middle class and below. When football was introduced into Argentina, it

was originally a sport exclusive to the upper class [8]. During Perón's tenure, it became extremely popular among the common people.

4.1.2. The Argentina Derby: Club Atlético River Plate vs. Boca Juniors

Football, as a means of ideological and aesthetic education, thus fully developed under the Perón government. Club Atlético River Plate, founded in 1901 by a group of dock workers, later moved its training ground to the wealthy northern suburbs of Buenos Aires. In 1905, Boca Juniors was also founded in Buenos Aires. Boca Juniors, known as the "people's team," represents the interests of the working class and those below the middle class, while River Plate, the "millionaires' team," represents the interests of the middle class and above in Argentina. The competition between the two teams represents the confrontation between different social classes. The competition is so intense, fierce, and long-lasting that it is called the "Argentina Derby" and is even regarded as the most intense derby in the world. The football confrontation between River Plate and Boca Juniors is the result of various factors such as the economic recession in Argentina during the neoliberal development period, serious domestic social contradictions, and the Argentine government's intention to win the support of the working class. It is an external manifestation of class confrontation and political confrontation and reflects the problems and dilemmas in Argentina's modernization development.

4.2. Nationalism and vicarious satisfaction

4.2.1. Argentina's World Cup victory in 1978

In 1976, military dictator Jorge Rafael Videla seized power in Argentina, using kidnappings, assassinations, and torture to suppress opponents of the military government and create a climate of fear. During Perón's rule, Argentina's economic development was slow, and social tensions were high. In 1978, Argentina hosted the World Cup, and the Argentine team won the tournament for the first time in World Cup history.

However, under Videla's terrorist dictatorship, the 1978 World Cup sparked significant controversy. The tournament was planned by the Argentine military government as a "national image project" aimed at diverting international attention from the military dictatorship and human rights abuses, while reinforcing the legitimacy of its rule by showcasing Argentina's image as a powerful nation. Thus, nationalism that prioritised the preservation of Argentina's national image over human rights emerged as the dominant narrative of the 1978 World Cup. In that tournament, Peru suffered a humiliating 0-6 defeat to Argentina, with the Peruvian team accused of playing a "fixed match." Ledesma submitted new evidence proving that Peru's deliberate defeat was part of a plan implemented by several military governments in South America at that time [8]. The Peruvian military government leader sent 13 political prisoners to Argentina for torture by the Argentines. Videla accepted this task on the condition that Peru lose the game. This was because winning the World Cup would wash away Argentina's poor reputation globally.

4.2.2. The Falklands War and the national hero Maradona

The United Kingdom and Argentina launched a war over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas Islands) in 1982, known as the Falklands War. The Falklands War is regarded as one of the largest and most intense joint operations of the sea, land, and air during the Cold War. The war ended with Argentina's defeat and surrender. The United Kingdom obtained control of the Falkland

Islands, but the Argentine military and civilians never gave up their claim to sovereignty. Argentina's defeat led to a larger-scale anti-government movement, which ultimately caused the fall of the ruling military government. The shadow of defeat in the war hung over Argentina and its people.

Against this background, in the quarter-final of the 1986 World Cup, the Argentine team led by Maradona faced the strong England team. In the hearts of the Argentine people, this game was not just a battle for a semi-final spot but also a battle for national honor and national spirit. Maradona scored two goals in this game, leading the Argentine team to defeat England and advance to the semi-finals. Maradona thus became a national hero of Argentina and a spiritual idol in colonized areas of Latin America. A weak country that had suffered setbacks in politics achieved victory on the football field. The huge cloud of wounded national pride brought by the Falklands War was dispelled by this victory. Maradona was a genuine "spiritual idol" in the context of nationalism. Even though Maradona's first goal, the "Hand of God," was a handball foul, it did not affect his image and status as a national hero in the hearts of the Argentine people.

4.3. National construction-national identity of Brazilian football

An imagined community is a virtual social concept used to describe a collective of people with common values, goals, and identities. It can be based on cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual orientation identities, among others. Nations and ethnic groups are such "imagined communities." [9].

From the perspective of development anthropology, national construction in Brazil refers to the dynamic process in which, as a modern state, it integrates diverse racial, class, and regional groups through the cultural and social processes of football, gradually forming a national community with shared values, emotional connections, and collective goals. Meanwhile, national identity is the self-confirmation of the Brazilian people as "Brazilians" and their sense of belonging and identification with Brazil as an independent country, based on their unique football culture and historical culture during this process.

During Brazil's modernization process, football not only reflected social contradictions but also provided a possibility for building the national identity. The development of Brazilian football has undergone a racial trajectory from racial discrimination to anti-discrimination, through which Black people won the right to play football [10]. At the beginning of the 20th century, football, which was regarded as a sport of the white elite, gradually transformed into an important stage to show Brazil's racial democracy through the extensive participation and continuous struggle of black players. Although it has not fundamentally changed the problems of racial discrimination and social inequality in Brazil, it has promoted racial integration to a certain extent and provided a pathway for social mobility for Black and mixed-race individuals through professional football careers. Therefore, during the World Cup, Brazilian nationalism and national consciousness are fully expressed every four years. Brazilians believe that only football can unify the nation as a whole [10,11].

5. Conclusion

In the context of modernization and modernity, the evolution of football's cultural and social significance amid modernization reflects the achievements and deficiencies of modernization efforts in different periods, as well as the progress and dilemmas of modern countries. Football is the sport that the Latin American people participate in the most. As a specific behavioral system of the people,

football and football-related sports or social activities are projections of the modernization of Latin America and play an important role in the construction of class will, nationalism, and national spirit.

This study has explored the relationship between football and the modernization of Latin America through the dimension of development anthropology, examining how the sport functions as a cultural, political, and economic force in the region. This study shows that football, as a political tool, can reflect different class wills and construct a narrative of nationalism under the background of industrialization. Moreover, as football evolves into popular culture, it plays a role in class differentiation and social mobility, providing channels for class mobility while also being prone to forming a new Western-centric hegemony. Finally, in terms of national construction and national identity, football has also become a symbolic representation. This study still has many problems. In terms of literature, the scope is relatively narrow. It mainly relies on Chinese and English secondary literature, lacking academic works in Spanish, Portuguese and other regional languages of Latin America. Additionally, it overly depends on historical literature and pays insufficient attention to the new forms of football culture in the digital age. In terms of research methods, this research lacks the support of field research. It has not adopted quantitative analysis methods and lacks empirical data support. Based on this, this study needs to add research methods. Fieldwork should be conducted through ethnographic methods, with in-depth contact and interviews with fans and football participants living in the Latin American football culture to understand their specific cognition of football. In addition, in terms of research content, the connection between football and the modernization of Latin America in the new era should be further added, such as the impact of Argentina's World Cup victory in 2022 and so on.

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