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# The Role of Sports in Government-led Social Integration in the Modernization Process of Singapore

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**Abstract**

The relationship between sports development and social integration in Singapore, as a multicultural country, has garnered significant attention. This study aims to investigate the role of sports in the government-led social integration process in Singapore through a review of existing scholarly literature on social integration and sports, employing methods such as literature review, case studies, and theoretical analysis. By framing the government's sports policies in Singapore within the context of nation-building and social consensus building, this study delineates two aspects: the construction of national identity through sports and the construction of social consensus through sports. Building upon this framework, the analysis is grounded in the social integration theories of Habermas and Durkheim, focusing on reshaping solidarity, identity formation, group and individual moral shaping, and the extension of the communication domain. Through this framework, the study analyzes the role of sports as a tool for social integration under government leadership. It concludes that in Singapore's modernization process, sports are a policy tool entirely led by the government for social integration; sports activities provide a common platform for people of different races and social classes; sports hold significant importance for Singapore's national image and community identity; and sports, as a public communication domain, facilitate interaction among society members. However, it also acknowledges that sports still face challenges in social integration related to issues such as race, class, and distribution.

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary society, sports are not merely recreational activities or competitive events but also significant social phenomena profoundly influencing people's lifestyles, cultural identities, and social integration. Particularly in the process of modernization, sports play an

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increasingly vital role in promoting social cohesion, shaping identity, and conveying moral values. The relationship between sports development and social integration in Singapore, a multicultural nation, is of considerable interest. This paper aims to delve into the role of sports in social integration in Singapore, drawing on the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas, and providing in-depth analysis and argumentation on its mechanisms.

Sports, as a social activity, have played a crucial role in the developmental trajectory of Singapore. Looking back at Singapore's history, sports have served various social functions in different periods. During the colonial era, sports activities were mainly introduced by colonialists and were subject to their control and guidance, reflecting the class and racial divisions of that time. However, as Singapore progressed towards independence and accelerated modernization, the significance of sports in nation-building and social integration became increasingly prominent. The government, led by Lee Kuan Yew and subsequent administrations, adopted a series of proactive measures, incorporating sports as a vital component of national strategy, aiming to break down racial and class barriers, promote mass participation, and shape national and community identities.

This paper will combine the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas to conduct a thorough analysis of the role of sports in social integration in Singapore. Durkheim, from the perspective of social cohesion, discusses two types of social integration: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, emphasizing the impact of social structural changes on integration. Habermas, on the other hand, conceptualizes society as a product of communicative actions, highlighting the importance of communicative behavior in social integration. In the realm of sports, these theories can provide valuable insights into how sports promote social cohesion, shape identity, and convey moral values. Firstly, sports play a crucial role in reshaping unity in Singapore's social integration. Through reforms in sports policies and the promotion of mass participation in sports activities, the government successfully breaks down racial and class barriers, promoting national unity and stability. Secondly, sports serve as a significant channel for shaping identity in Singaporean society. Elite sports and community sports are not only vehicles for displaying national image but also important sources of individual identity, contributing to strengthening individual national identity and community belonging. Thirdly, sports activities also play a role in shaping collective morality in Singaporean society. Sports cultivate a sense of collective honor and personal responsibility, promoting the development and maintenance of social morality. Lastly, as an essential component of public communication, sports provide opportunities for shared emotions and building connections, thereby promoting social unity and stability.

By conducting an in-depth analysis of the role of sports in social integration in Singapore, this paper aims to provide theoretical support and practical insights into understanding the impact of sports on social development. By integrating the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas, a better grasp of the position and role of sports in Singaporean society can be achieved, offering valuable references and insights for promoting social cohesion and building a harmonious society.

## 2. Literature Review

Social integration, also known as social cohesion or social unity, has long been regarded as a concept with positive connotations and broad scope (Ekholm,2019). It was first coined by Durkheim in the 1890s (Alba & Nee,1997). Social integration is also referred to as a panacea or a key cornerstone of a fully developed and mature society (Hylton,2011).

Around the 1980s, Western governments began to recognize the role of sports in citizen health and social integration, and started to actively engage in sports activities (Malm&Isaksson, 2019). Nowadays, governments have high hopes for their involvement in sports, including

expecting sports to promote economic growth, reduce healthcare expenditure, facilitate social integration, and foster national identity (Sam,2009). Overcoming exclusion, promoting social engagement, and forming inclusive social organizations and structures have long been regarded as key factors in the process of social integration (Sam,2009).

The positive role of sports in these aspects has positioned it prominently in social integration strategies in many countries. In the United Kingdom, sports are included in the national-level action plans for social integration (Tacon,2018). Ensuring that all organizations at national, regional, and local levels involved in social integration and community development recognize the significant role that sports can play in achieving their goals, and incorporating social integration as a key component of all public sports organization efforts, is essential (Tacon,2018). Sports can bridge and connect social relationships among different groups, thereby forming social networks and breaking down social isolation between individuals and groups caused by factors such as race, region, economy, and culture.

Ekholm conducted research on two community sports intervention projects in Sweden, namely "Inclusive Football" and "Sports Projects," from the perspectives of discourse and governance. The study found that sports serve as an intervention measure. It not only provides a space for strengthening connections among young people from different social backgrounds but also facilitates interaction between these young people and influential role models from diverse backgrounds (Ekholm,2019).

These social role models generally share similar social backgrounds or experiences with the participating young people and are recognized and respected within the community, thus possessing a certain degree of authority (Allen& Kern.etc,2021). By analyzing the combination of discourse and governance and how knowledge and power intertwine, we can understand how the language of social relationships, social capital, and social integration is embedded in the governing ideas that drive the specific sports interventions being examined. These interventions represent characteristics of contemporary advanced liberal social policies and (communitarian) integration in Sweden (Tacon,2018).

Certainly, not all scholars view social integration as an entirely positive concept. Hylton argues that for some minority ethnic groups, social integration strategies may be seen as a less charitable attempt by the state to impose a dominant culture that suppresses their own (Hylton,2010).

While current scholars have conducted extensive research on the role of sports in social integration, much of this research has focused on a micro-level perspective, emphasizing the impact of sports participation on interpersonal relationships, individual health, community cohesion, and so on. However, from the perspective of national modernization, there has been relatively little exploration into the deeper implications of the social integration role of sports on national, societal, and individual levels.

## 3. Research methods

### *3.1 Literature Review Method (Snyder,2019)*

Systematically collect, organize, evaluate, and analyze existing relevant research literature to gain a comprehensive understanding and in-depth insight into the research topic. By conducting a literature search on the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas, the authors systematically review the main viewpoints, theoretical frameworks, and understandings of social integration by these two sociologists, in order to establish a theoretical analysis foundation for the role of sports in social integration in Singapore.

### *3.2 Theoretical Analysis Method (Jasso,1988)*

This is a method based on the foundation of the literature review, which involves in-depth analysis and interpretation of theoretical viewpoints and concepts to reveal the inherent logic and mechanisms of the research topic. In this study, the authors employed the theoretical analysis method to conduct a thorough examination and analysis of the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas, including Durkheim's theories on mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, as well as Habermas's theories on the lifeworld and system integration.

Through theoretical analysis, this study summarized the different understandings and perspectives of these two sociologists on social integration, as well as the insights provided by their theories regarding the role and significance of sports in Singaporean society. This, in turn, provides theoretical support for the research objectives and conclusions of the paper.

### *3.3 Case Study Meth (Fidel,1984)*

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of practical cases regarding sports policies in Singapore. Specifically, through detailed investigations and analyses of cases related to the formulation and implementation of sports policies, as well as the organization and promotion of sports activities, the study comprehensively examines the specific roles and mechanisms of sports in social integration in Singapore.

## 4. Sports and the Construction of National Identity in Singapore

Singapore is a unique multi-ethnic country, and its indigenous multi-ethnic structure is the result of the migration of foreign ethnic groups and the indigenous Malays (Noor,1983). These immigrants mainly come from coastal provinces in southeastern China such as Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, as well as Southeast Asia (Horton,2013). In addition, there are Indians who migrated to Singapore during the British colonial period. Since its inception, Singapore has adopted the "CMIO" model (i.e., Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Others) as its classification standard, delineating the country's multi-ethnic framework (Lian,2016).

From Singapore's racial framework, it can be seen that the Chinese, Malays, and Indians constitute the main ethnic groups of this country. According to the 2020 statistics from the Index Mundi platform on the proportion of various ethnic groups in Singapore's population, the Chinese account for 74.3%, Malays account for 13.5%, and Indians account for 9%. Just as with the diverse racial classification framework, early sports clubs and activities in Singapore also had strict racial boundaries. Before independence, anti-colonial sentiments united the various ethnic groups. In 1965, with the country's independence, the racial conflicts that were previously hidden beneath anti-colonial and aggression sentiments surfaced. During this period, sports clubs also played a role in reinforcing racial segregation barriers.

The early sports clubs in Singapore were established by British colonial rulers, such as cricket clubs, the Tanglin Club, etc. These clubs primarily served as social and sports venues for British male expatriates in Singapore, thus having distinct racial and exclusionary characteristics(Horton,2013). Furthermore, the membership of these clubs not only reflected racial identities but also demonstrated the social hierarchy of the members (Aiyer,2017).

In the 1880s, the Chinese community began to rise and gradually gained power and status in Singapore. With the support of the Chinese entrepreneur Tan Kah Kee, the Singapore Chinese Recreation Club (SCRC) was established to provide sports such as cricket and tennis for the Chinese community. In 1910, Malays established the Malay Football Association (MFA). In 1923, Indian business elites established the Singapore Indian Association to provide sports activities and interaction venues for their ethnic members. Of course, various ethnic groups also

established many other similar sports associations. For example, the Ceylon Sports Club (SSC), established by Ceylonese students in 1928, is not listed here (Chew,2017).

Overall, the development of sports in Singapore has three characteristics. First, the development of sports in Singapore strictly followed ethnic lines. Even for the same sport, different ethnic groups had their own sports associations. For example, in addition to the Malay Football Association, the Chinese also established the Malaya Chinese Football Association (SCFA) in 1911. Secondly, the sports culture of the British colonizers at the time deeply influenced the ways, attitudes, and outcomes of sports development among various ethnic groups. Thirdly, before independence, the development of sports in Singapore was generally a spontaneous grassroots behavior and was not government-led.

The approach of developing sports along ethnic lines later became an obstacle to Singapore's pursuit of ethnic unity and social harmony at the dawn of independence. Sports clubs developed along ethnic lines resulted in immigrant groups evolving into distinct racial communities, with each ethnic group considering itself superior to others, laying the groundwork for racial conflict and national division (Anwar,2014).

As the ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP) and the government under Lee Kuan Yew implemented stringent measures to prohibit racial discrimination in sports clubs and competitions between different ethnic groups. They advocated for sports clubs to open their doors and encouraged members of other ethnicities to join, marking the first intervention by the Singaporean government in sports development. Since then, sports has become closely linked with Singapore's nation-building and development efforts (Horton,2002).

"Elite" is an important term for understanding Singapore's politics, economy, society, and culture. The concept of elite governance pervades various aspects of Singaporean social life. However, in the first two decades after Singapore's independence, the government led by the People's Action Party (PAP) did not actively promote the development of elite sports in the country. Faced with high unemployment, low levels of education, and other social realities, the pursuit of medals and honors in elite sports seemed overshadowed by more pressing issues related to survival and economic development.

Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of Singapore and leader of the first generation of the People's Action Party (PAP), believed that the success of elite sports and medal-winning athletes could serve as a means of propaganda for larger nations to showcase the superiority of their systems.However, for small countries like Singapore, it was believed that such success did not necessarily bring national benefits. Instead, the role of sports was seen as enhancing the physical fitness of citizens to provide healthy and high-quality labor for economic development, as well as meeting national obligations for military conscription and defense needs (Fry,2011).

Taking a pragmatic approach, Lee Kuan Yew emphasized the instrumental value of sports and advocated for the development of sports for all, encouraging the population to embrace the concept of lifelong sports participation. In 1973, during the inauguration speech at the newly built National Stadium of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew reiterated his view on the development of elite sports:

"If they are born with the physical attributes - the coordination of eye and muscle - and with intense and professional training, they can show what human beings can do. But let us not delude ourselves, trying to do this does not benefit us in any way" (Lee,1973).

During Lee Kuan Yew's era, the development of sports in Singapore not only exhibited a pragmatic tradition but also reflected the profound influence of traditional Chinese culture on Lee Kuan Yew as a Chinese individual and his leading policies. In traditional Chinese concepts, sports were not considered a highly serious activity. Compared to academics, career, social status, and wealth, the value of sports was limited. Moreover, physical activities among the upper class in traditional society emphasized calmness and did not advocate vigorous exercise. Peter Horton suggests that, in a sense, the exercise methods resembling quasi-Zen practices, such as qigong and tai chi, bypass the efforts or related sweat involved in heavy physical labor.

As for the lower classes, the physical exertion of "professional players" on the field and the strenuous work of laborers can produce similar effects. In summary, during Lee Kuan Yew's era, sports were primarily used consciously to achieve various political objectives, such as racial harmony, sports for all, national defense construction, and nationalism.

In the 1990s, with Goh Chok Tong succeeding Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister, there was a shift in the paradigm of sports policy in Singapore. During this period, shaping national sports idols and developing elite sports became prominent features of the People's Action Party (PAP) sports policy. After more than twenty years of development, Singapore has achieved tremendous economic success and has become a developed industrialized country led by an authoritarian party (Cheang,2013).

However, despite its economic achievements, Singapore's performance in international elite sports events has been consistently poor since the 1970s, when elite sports were marginalized.With the development of the economy, the income and education levels of the population have significantly increased, and material wealth in society has become more abundant. The survival issues faced by the country after its founding are no longer urgent. Additionally, the widespread use of mass media such as television and the internet, particularly in sports broadcasts, has strengthened the connection between sports and the public.

Through these mediums, viewers not only see the results of the competitions but also the national flags and other symbols representing a country. The performance of elite athletes is closely linked to nationalism and patriotism, making elite sports increasingly public.Based on these factors, Singapore began to emphasize the development of elite sports. In 1993, the "Sports Excellence 2000" (SPEX2000) plan was launched. This plan, renamed SPEX21 in 2001, marked the government's official recognition of the importance of elite sports development (Singh,2000). The plan provided generous material incentives, offering substantial monetary rewards to athletes who won awards at international sports events.

The bonus for an Olympic gold medal, for instance, amounted to $1 million USD, reflecting a distinct "money-based sports" characteristic. The government and businesses jointly increased the budget for this plan by $10 million USD annually, used for the cultivation and naturalization of elite athletes. These support programs included seven core sports (badminton, soccer, swimming and water polo, table tennis, bowling, athletics, sailing) and seven priority sports (bodybuilding, hockey, squash, shooting, squash, taekwondo, martial arts), with the majority of the funding allocated to the core sports aimed at nurturing sports champions.

In addition to this plan, to promote the professionalization of elite sports, the Singapore government introduced the School Sports Assistance Scheme (SEAPS) and the Sports Excellence Assistance Scheme (SEAP). To further enhance the development of elite sports and cultivate elite athletes, the government established the Singapore Sports Institute in 2004 to support priority sports projects and expansion, plan athletes' careers rationally, develop scientific training programs for athletes, provide medical insurance for athletes, and research and apply advanced sports technology achievements.

The government's policies and support have led to increasing calls for nurturing national sports heroes in Singapore. The moment of a elite athlete winning a gold medal, along with their stories of struggle and representing the nation in competitive arenas, transcending and setting records, embodies values of transcendence and resilience, as well as a life philosophy(Rubio,2014). This has positive implications for inspiring national pride and unity.With the shift in sports policy, Singapore's focus on sports has transitioned from amateur to professional. Sports are no longer merely seen as tools for national defense, health, and other societal objectives and policies. Instead, they have begun to be regarded as direct means of nation-building.

## 5. The Construction of Social Consensus through Sports

Singapore is a multiethnic immigrant country, and multiculturalism and openness are its major social characteristics. How to consolidate society into a collective entity rather than disparate interests and ethnic groups was an important social issue the government focused on at the country's inception. Despite gaining absolute control and leadership over social life, the People's Action Party (PAP) still respects cultural differences in race and religion (Chin,2023).

It explicitly recognizes the institutional and constitutional rights to protect the cultural identities of minority groups through state intervention in the public domain, a concept referred to as "hard multiculturalism" by Prakash (Prakash,2019). With economic development, Singaporean government faces not only racial conflicts but also new social stratification and conflicts between immigrants and native residents arising from social development. Therefore, besides emphasizing abstract national identity and integrating it into concrete social policy practices, there must also be an emphasis on enhancing social consensus integration to foster high levels of collectivism in a diverse society.

In light of this, Singapore introduced the "Shared Values White Paper" in 1991, emphasizing five shared values: nation before community and society above self; family as the basic unit of society and community support; consensus through mutual accommodation and compromise; racial and religious harmony and tolerance. These five shared values delineate the priority sequence for the nation, society, and individuals in Singapore.

The socialization of sports in Singapore can be traced back to the Japanese occupation period in 1942(Liao,2021). When Japan occupied Singapore, the previously free and racially distinct sports activities of the British period were halted to expedite Singapore's rapid Japanization. The Japanese military exercised comprehensive control and monopoly over sports. In contrast to the laissez-faire approach of the British, Japan implemented bureaucratic management of sports in Singapore from top to bottom. They established the Shonan Sports Association (SSA) as a national sports control agency, replacing the autonomy of sports organizations and clubs of various ethnic groups (Lim&Hortn,2011).

Ethnic sports clubs were also repurposed under this new structure. With Japan becoming the dominant authority and regulator of sports development, the previously fragmented and exclusionary ethnic clubs and members were now unified under the leadership of the SSA, leading to a weakening of racial divides due to changes in power dynamics. The encouragement of public participation in sports by Japan, aimed at fostering Singaporean identification with the "Shonan national identity" and meeting military needs, led to a linkage between the populace's sports rights and the government for the first time, while also serving as a form of social engineering.These changes not only became the main prerequisites and influences for the later stable central control of sports in independent Singapore; they were essentially the prerequisites and determining factors for triggering a more stable society, centralized authority, and authoritarian governance.

After Singapore gained independence, the government viewed sports as a positive tool for bridging racial divides and building a cohesive society. There was a strong emphasis on encouraging public participation in sports, particularly during the era of Lee Kuan Yew.The government's focus on mass participation in sports far outweighed its emphasis on elite sports. In 1969, Singapore introduced the National Fitness Exercise (NFX) program, which encouraged people to engage in physical activities at workplaces, community centers, schools, and homes, following exercise routines broadcasted on public radio.

In 1973, the National Sports Council (NSC) and the National Sports Promotion Board (NSPB) were merged to form the Singapore Sports Council (now known as Sport Singapore). This organization primarily served as the executive body for implementing the government's nationwide fitness programs until the 1990s. Its aim was to use sports to foster community spirit and build social consensus. Since its inception, the Singapore Sports Council (SSC) has implemented a series of social sports programs, including mass jogging, swimming, cycling, and

family sports, providing a wide range of options for mass participation in sport.Constituency clubs played a crucial role in the SSC's efforts to promote mass participation in sports. Club memberships were open to all residents within the constituency. In 1972, the NSPB organized the first inter-constituency football competition.

With the establishment of the Singapore Sports Council in 1976, regulations were enacted to formalize the role of constituency sports clubs, with the council assuming ownership and development responsibilities. Subsequently, the Singapore Sports Council established sports clubs in each constituency, gradually expanding the range of sports activities from football and basketball to hockey, volleyball, softball, table tennis, sepak takraw, karate, basketball, swimming, and more. In 2002, the regulation was repealed, and constituency sports clubs were renamed community sports clubs and placed under the management of the People's Association (PA).

The People's Association (PA) and Sport Singapore (formerly the Singapore Sports Council) are both statutory boards under the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth (MCCY), funded by the government, but they serve different functions and hierarchies. The former is the government's professional body for sports affairs, responsible not only for community sports but also for the development of elite sports and the sports industry.

It liaises with the Singapore National Olympic Council and the Olympic Committee. The leadership members of the council are appointed by the MCCY.On the other hand, the People's Association (PA) was established in the early days of Singapore to address social and ethnic conflicts and serve as a direct channel of communication between the government, the ruling party, and grassroots communities. According to the People's Association Act of 1960, the chairman of the association is personally appointed by the Prime Minister of Singapore, while the vice-chairman is the minister of the MCCY.

Other board members include senior officials from defense, health, communications, and the respective leaders of constituency community associations, as well as full-time staff of the association. This transition better aligns with the development model of sports in Singapore, especially as the government began to focus more on cultivating elite sports.During Lee Kuan Yew's era, the main focus of Sport Singapore's work was promoting mass participation in sports to encourage community bonding. However, as a statutory board under a ministry, Sport Singapore was legally separate from government agencies and lacked a civil service workforce.

Its resources were insufficient to effectively support the increasingly widespread grassroots activities. Additionally, with Goh Chok Tong's emphasis on developing elite sports and establishing the Singapore Sports Institute to nurture national elite athletes, and with the vigorous development of the sports industry, the scope of Sport Singapore's functions expanded, exacerbating the mismatch between its responsibilities and its resources.In contrast, the People's Association was established with the aim of organizing and promoting collective participation of Singaporeans in social, cultural, educational, and sports activities, fostering a sense of belonging to a multi-ethnic community, promoting community bonding, and strengthening social cohesion among Singaporeans (Choo,1969).

This aligns with the original intention of promoting mass participation in sports. Furthermore, the People's Association's organizational network covers 84 communities nationwide, with over 2,000 grassroots organizations and clubs. Its high-level leadership configuration is unique among Singapore's more than 60 statutory boards. Therefore, in terms of matching responsibilities and mobilizing resources, the People's Association (PA) is more conducive to advancing the socialization of sports and better aligns with the policy goal of promoting sports for the community rather than merely for sports' sake.

The advancement of community sports in Singapore has benefited from the country's housing policy and the People's Association (PA). In the early days, the government replaced the racially segregated community policies with community initiatives aimed at breaking down segregated living arrangements by redistributing housing. In the 1960s, with the establishment

of the Housing Development Board (HDB), Singapore initiated a public housing development program to provide housing for its growing population, encourage family formation, and integrate communities in service of nation-building.

Through allocation and other measures, the public housing program ensured racial integration, with people of different ethnicities living in the same HDB apartment blocks(Sim,2003). The integration of communities and societies in public housing estates was also achieved through resident participation in community organizations.With the support of the People's Association (PA), each constituency in Singapore has its own Citizens' Consultative Committee and several Residents' Committees, serving as "bridges" between the government and the people to meet the needs of HDB communities in each constituency (Mauzy,2002).

Community sports have naturally become an important channel for residents' interaction and participation. With the support of the PA, each constituency in Singapore has its own Citizens' Sports Clubs and clubs, catering to the needs of HDB communities in each constituency(Hamilton,2009). The Community Sports Clubs (CSC), Community Sports Council (CSC Council), and People's Association Youth Movement (PAYM) together form the grassroots organizations for community sports in Singapore.

These organizations are managed by volunteers appointed by the PA and organize various sports programs and events to meet the needs of the community, enhancing interaction among residents.Community Sports Clubs (CSC) are the main channels provided by the People's Association (PA) for community residents to participate in sports activities and events. They are the main bearers of sports programs in the community. Currently, there are a total of 92 Community Sports Clubs (CSC) distributed across various communities in Singapore.

The Community Sports Council (CSC Council) serves as the coordinating body for the community, working with CSCs, other community organizations, and sports institutions to expand residents' public and community connections through sports. The CSC and CSC Council form Singapore's community sports network, collaborating with other social organizations to organize a series of activities, including children's soccer programs, community sports days, and community sports festivals.According to data from the People's Association (PA) sourced from the Singapore Statistics Bureau, the number of sports activity groups organized by the People's Association increased steadily from 4532 in 2020 to 4726 in 2023. These sports activities cover a wide range of 98 sports, including yoga, boxing, swimming, martial arts, qigong, and outdoor adventures.

## 6. Theoretical Foundation

The in-depth analysis of the role of sports in the social integration process of modern Singapore requires the utilization of classic theories of social integration. Social integration theories focus on the real changes in relationships among individuals, groups, and organizations, and how they coordinate with each other to form a highly cohesive social whole, thereby enabling healthy, united, and orderly social development. Based on research needs, this paper selects Emile Durkheim and Jürgen Habermas's theories of social integration as the theoretical foundation.

Emile Durkheim was the first to use the concept of social integration(Durhein,2005). Durkheim describes social integration through collective conscience: “The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the collective or common conscience” (Durkheim, 1893, p. 39).

Social integration is achieved through mechanical solidarity in traditional societies, where cohesion is based on similarities among individuals (Durkheim, 1893). In modern societies, organic solidarity replaces mechanical solidarity, with social integration based on interdependence and specialization (Durkheim, 1893). Given the transition from traditional to modern society and the corresponding changes in individual and social relationships, Durkheim focused on how society continues to maintain solidarity amidst increasing division of labor. In

"The Division of Labor in Society," Durkheim mentioned only two types of social integration: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, representing different social structures and stages (Merton,1994).

Mechanical solidarity refers to social integration based on common beliefs and values, predominant in traditional societies with low levels of division of labor. Members share similar values, beliefs, and lifestyles, and uphold common values and strong collective identity through laws, institutions, morals, and customs (Mechtraud,1955). Organic solidarity emphasizes interdependence and differentiation among members, prevalent in modern societies with high levels of division of labor. Members' interdependence and cooperation increase due to social differentiation, but the collective conscience based on common values and morals weakens.

Anomie, or the breakdown of social norms, is seen by Durkheim as a major threat to social integration, leading to social instability and individual disorientation (Durkheim, 1897). Durkheim believed that the transition from traditional to modern society is a natural process, with individuals being the only existing form of mechanical solidarity in modern society. In his vision of modern society outlined in "Professional Ethics and Civic Morals," Durkheim proposed the concept of a free state that would promote moral individualism, a new type of community, and a free country (Turner,2013).

According to Durkheim, a free state would foster moral individualism or individual autonomy through the interaction of collective emotions and critical thinking. Therefore, the primary task of the state should be to liberate individuals from the oppressive discipline of traditional communities and create a moral, autonomous individual. Society is a complex moral reality, with three levels: moral discipline, collective emotions, and rational autonomy. Individuals attached to communities and associations generate collective emotions through union and collective rituals, which manifest in various collective symbolizations (Møen,2019).

Habermas discusses social integration in terms of communicative action: “In communicative action, participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the presupposition that their cooperation rests on a common definition of the situation” (Habermas, 1984, p. 86). Habermas regards society as a product of communicative action, and social integration is an intrinsic perspective, achieved through normative guarantees or consensus reached through communication, mainly focusing on the behavioral strategies of participants.

Social integration involves the normative structures that underpin social actions and interactions within a lifeworld (Habermas, 1987).This is distinct from Habermas's other viewpoint of "system integration." According to Habermas, as traditional society evolves into modern society, the system and the lifeworld increasingly exhibit a binary structural characteristic. The lifeworld becomes more rationalized, and traditional moral norms no longer play a dominant role as mechanisms of social integration (Fairtlough,1991).

This condition provides conditions for communicative action to become the primary mechanism of social integration, where consensus increasingly relies on negotiation rather than coercion, albeit increasing the difficulty of achieving consensus and the risk of consensus collapse. Habermas conceptualizes the generalized medium of integration as a mechanism to alleviate this risk and communication pressure (Johnson,1991).

When distinguishing generalized social integration media, Habermas adopts Parsons' A-G-I-L structural functional framework: A for Adaptation, G for Goal Attainment, I for Integration, and L for Latency or Pattern Maintenance. These four functions correspond to the behavioral systems of the organism, personality, society, and culture. He applies this framework to divide the social system into four subsystems: money, power, influence, and prestige. Money and power coordinate interaction in the A and G subsystems, while influence and prestige coordinate interaction in the I and L subsystems. As steering media of the system, money and power do not require understanding because they automatically achieve integration(Mouzelis,1992). Based on

this, Habermas believes that the economic (A) subsystem and political (G) subsystem are linked to the differentiated modern society's system integration.

The social domain where social integration occurs is the lifeworld, and the predominant action coordination media in this domain are influence and prestige, which achieve non-systematic action coordination. According to Habermas, the "system-lifeworld" is both divided and interconnected, where the system encroaches into the lifeworld, termed "colonization of the lifeworld." Colonization of the lifeworld refers to the substitution of non-verbal steering media of money and power from the system for influence and prestige, rationalizing the economy and bureaucratically controlling politics, leading to the technicalization of the lifeworld.

This is the adverse consequence of excessive intervention by government and market, where social interactions tend towards formalization and deduction, gradually making the lifeworld "technicized." Therefore, Habermas advocates fostering communicative rationality in the public sphere to cultivate a force in the public sphere that can counterbalance the market and government. Initially focusing on the formation of social norms and values, Habermas's perspective extended to the legal realm, advocating for the establishment of legitimate procedures to achieve an interactive cycle between the system and the lifeworld through legal language. Social integration is also linked to the concept of solidarity, which Habermas sees as essential in contemporary pluralistic societies (Habermas, 2001).

## 7. Theoretical Analysis

Through summarizing and refining the social integration theories of Durkheim and Habermas, this paper attempts to explore "Reshaping Solidarity," "Identity Formation," "Group Morality Shaping," and "Expansion of Communication Domain."

### *7.1 Reshaping Solidarity*

Sports play a crucial role in fostering ethnic unity and national stability in Singapore, a fact that cannot be overlooked. The government's direct intervention in sports affairs has replaced the leadership and discourse of private and ethnic groups, thereby playing a positive role in building a more cohesive and stable nation. In the early days of Singapore's nation-building, sports activities followed the traditions of the colonial era, organized and managed by private entities. However, this social sports structure, marked by class and racial identities and represented by sports clubs, harbored obvious racial and class barriers, becoming a latent factor in racial tensions. In this structure, participants in sports activities exhibited clear similarities in class and racial identities, leading to uniform lifestyles, values, and even beliefs, exacerbating the state of racial division.

According to Durkheim's theory of "social solidarity" and Habermas's theory of social integration, this sports structure exhibited clear characteristics of traditional society, deviating from the requirements of modern nation-building, division of labor, and the generation of social cohesion. In order to uphold national unity and social solidarity, the government of Lee Kuan Yew took proactive measures, banning and reforming colonial-era sports clubs, and promoting reforms in sports socialization. Sports participation transitioned from a symbol of racial and class identity to a social right of Singaporean citizens. Many sports initiatives undertaken by the Lee Kuan Yew government were branded as "national," such as "National Fitness," "National Swimming," "National Cycling," aiming to symbolize and embody the significance of mass participation.

Through transformation and development, the sports movement in Singapore underwent a transition from private to public, from racial to individual, and from closed to open, becoming a public domain open to all citizens regardless of race, gender, or class. This process highlights the government's leading role in the field of sports and its emphasis on reforming and adjusting the social structure. By breaking down existing racial and class barriers and establishing a more

inclusive and diverse sports environment, the government has made positive contributions to Singapore's ethnic unity and national stability.

### *7.2 Identity Formation*

The Singaporean government utilizes sports to construct national and community identities, promoting the formation of a new sense of identity. In this process, both elite sports and community sports are seen as important channels to achieve this goal and are incorporated into the government's major sports policy tools. Firstly, elite sports serve as the primary vehicle for nation-building, holding dual significance internally and externally. Externally, a positive national image helps Singapore better integrate into the global political and economic system, with international sports events like the Olympics serving as crucial platforms to showcase national image and strength.

As a nation heavily reliant on the global market due to its outward-facing economy, Singapore promotes its openness and engagement through elite sports to shape its image as an open nation. Internally, elite sports participate in international activities on behalf of the nation, with athletes from different ethnic backgrounds representing the entire citizenry, thus concretizing the abstract national identity. Moreover, the international achievements in elite sports also serve as a powerful demonstration of the capability and achievements of the ruling People's Action Party, bolstering its legitimacy.

Secondly, community sports, as another vital channel, form the foundation of the government-led national fitness campaign and also serve as an effective tool to reinforce Singapore's policy of racial integration in housing. By organizing sports activities in mixed communities, community sports provide new contexts for communication and interaction among residents of different ethnicities. Through participation in community sports, individuals are endowed with new community identities, which means they may collaborate with people from different ethnic backgrounds and even compete alongside them in inter-community sports competitions. This new sense of identity to some extent weakens the emotional attachment to the traditional residential patterns and the sentiments of racial opposition.

In summary, elite sports and community sports, as core components of Singapore's sports policy, not only contribute to the construction of national and community identities but also foster a more open, inclusive, and harmonious social atmosphere in Singapore. This process is not merely about promoting sports activities but also entails deep reflection and practical efforts towards national and community identity.

### *7.3 Group and Individual Moral Shaping*

Both Durkheim and Habermas have observed the decline of traditional morality in modern society and emphasize the role of morality as a force of social integration. In contemporary Singaporean society, sports play a role in shaping both collective and individual morals, known as " Group and Individual Moral Shaping" in Chinese, with "group" representing collective morality and "Individual" representing individual morality.

Regarding collective morality, Durkheim views society as a ritual order based on collective conscience, formed by interactions and emotions among individuals. Similarly, Habermas argues that typical solidarity is based on morality, which considers equality and the common good. In Singapore, sports serve to cultivate collective pride and responsibility.

Under the comprehensive and strong control of the People's Action Party, elite sports in Singapore have grown with full support from government funding, technology, and talent. The government's expectations for elite sports aim to foster national pride and create a resilient

nation. Through elite sports, the Singaporean government promotes a spirit of determination, discipline, and dedication, shaping a collective morality that can unite people and society.

Regarding individual morality, Durkheim sees the state and professional organizations as important avenues for reshaping individual morality. Similarly, Habermas emphasizes universalization as the principle of morality, with discourse around rights and obligations. The professionalization of sports affects not only economic and social aspects but also values and moral perceptions. In Singapore, the government's policies on universal sports play a crucial role in shaping individual morality.

By promoting universal sports participation, the government encourages individuals to cultivate values of self-discipline, teamwork, and fair competition through sports activities. Additionally, by emphasizing social responsibility and voluntary service, the policy encourages individuals to align personal interests with societal interests, promoting social harmony and development. This comprehensive policy not only promotes the popularization and development of sports but also provides a solid foundation and guidance for shaping individual morality.

### *7.4 Extension of Communication Domain*

The theories of Durkheim and Habermas provide a beneficial framework for understanding the role of sports in the communication domain. Durkheim views the public communication domain as consisting of various rituals, discussions, and public platforms where individuals generate shared emotions through activities such as speeches and ceremonies. Similarly, Habermas regards the public communication domain as a social space generated by communicative actions within the lifeworld, where individuals create shared situational elements through communicative actions and rational motives.

In this context, the transformation of the sports domain in Singapore demonstrates the application and embodiment of Durkheim's and Habermas's theories. Before independence, sports participation in Singapore was often constrained by racial and social class identities, leading to segmentation and division within the sports domain. This situation became a symbol of racial conflict and crisis. However, with the strong leadership of the People's Action Party, Singapore began to dismantle these differences and barriers, and sports participation gradually became a right for individuals to participate equally. Sports venues also gradually opened up to communities and the nation, becoming places where every member of society could participate equally. This change allowed sports to extend as a new public communication domain to every member of society, no longer constrained by racial and social class identities, but becoming the public foundation for interaction and engagement among community residents.

In this process, sports provide a venue for collective rituals and shared emotions, promoting the establishment and maintenance of social cohesion. Through shared experiences and interactions in sports activities, individuals develop shared emotions and a sense of identity, enhancing social cohesion. This collective experience and shared emotion provide the conditions for establishing connections and mutual trust among members of society, helping to alleviate tensions between races and classes and promoting harmonious social development. Sports, as an integral part of the public communication domain, play a crucial role in Singapore's social transformation. By breaking down racial and social class barriers, sports provide equal opportunities for individuals to participate while also serving as a platform for establishing connections and sharing emotions among members of society, thereby promoting the achievement of social cohesion and stability.

## 8. Conclusion

In the process of modernization, sports have fully played a role in social integration, with the People's Action Party (PAP) playing a leading role in this process. Consequently, it can be observed that the populace has played a passive role in this process, being shaped as objects in

this top-down movement. Initially, the rulers of Singapore adhered to a pragmatic approach in the development of sports. The primary purpose of promoting sports during this period was to improve public health and cultivate a qualified labor force to meet the needs of labor-intensive industries.

With economic success and the rise in national status, sports gradually became a megaphone for Singapore to project its voice internationally. However, it is also evident that there has been a poor connection between mass sports and elite sports in Singapore, with a clear dichotomy: mass sports focus on society, while elite sports focus on the nation. There is a lack of coordination between their goals and interests.

Firstly, in the process of modernization in Singapore, sports are entirely government-led tools for social integration. As an authoritarian state, the People's Action Party and its government virtually monopolize all domestic resources, thus wielding absolute authority over the allocation of resources and direction of development in Singaporean sports. Elite sports and mass fitness are the two main policy paths for sports development in Singapore, with the Singapore Sports Council and People's Association serving as the main policy implementers, each with distinct roles yet cooperating with each other.

The former is mainly responsible for the training of elite athletes and the management of sports infrastructure construction, while the latter relies on extensive social networks and accumulated social resources to extensively promote mass fitness.

Secondly, sports play a crucial role in social integration in Singapore, providing a common platform for people of different races and social classes to interact and integrate with each other. The government's policies on mass fitness, the organization of sports events, and the establishment of sports clubs have effectively promoted the popularity and development of sports in society, enhancing social cohesion and stability.

Thirdly, sports hold significant importance for Singapore's national image and community identity. Through the cultivation of elite athletes and the hosting of international sports events, the government successfully utilizes sports as a tool to shape the national image. Simultaneously, community sports activities strengthen residents' sense of belonging to their communities, promoting the harmonious development of communities.

Fourthly, sports activities positively contribute to the physical and mental health, as well as the moral qualities of individuals. Participation in sports helps individuals maintain physical health and fosters qualities such as teamwork and self-discipline, nurturing more individuals with a sense of responsibility and civic consciousness.

Lastly, as a public communication domain, sports facilitate interaction and communication among members of society. Platforms such as sports events and sports clubs provide spaces for people to share joy and emotions, strengthening connections and emotional exchanges among members of society, which helps alleviate tensions between different races and social classes.

However, it is also important to recognize that sports still face challenges in social integration. Disparities between races and social classes persist, and issues such as unequal distribution of sports resources and misconduct in sports activities need to be addressed through joint efforts from the government and various sectors of society.

Future research should focus on improving sports policies, rational utilization of sports resources, and deepening sports education to enhance the positive role of sports in social integration in Singapore. Additionally, further exploration of the relationship between sports and other social factors, as well as the long-term effects of sports activities on individuals and society, is needed to provide more in-depth theoretical and empirical research support for the development of sports and social integration in Singapore.

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