

# Analysis of American Campus Cheerleading Culture

## —Take *Bring It On* for Example

Liu Qing

School of Foreign Language,  
China West Normal University,  
Nanchong, China  
Email: [759905773@qq.com](mailto:759905773@qq.com)

### Abstract

*Cheerleading, which was born in the United States, has been quickly promoted to the world. And it has a broad prospect. Based on the movie Bring It On, which tells a story of campus cheerleading competition, this research wants to explore the American campus activities from a cultural perspective, and take cheerleading for example. Firstly, this research explains the definition of campus culture, cheerleading, and cheerleading culture briefly. Then, my research summarizes the spiritual culture, material culture and cheerleader culture from the film. Finally, this research analyzes the cheerleading situation in China. My research aims to take advantage of the knowledge and culture in this paper to help provide theoretical support for extensive development of campus cheerleading culture in China.*

**Key Words:** American campus culture; cheerleading culture; cheerleader

### 1. Introduction

First of all, this research would like to make a brief introduction of the movie, including its content and main characters in this movie. Besides, it is necessary for my research to explain the purpose of my writing this passage.

#### 1.1 The Brief Introduction of *Bring It On*

*Bring It On* is a 2000 American teen comedy film that was directed by Peyton Reed and written by Jessica Bendinger. This movie tells a story in campus. There is a famous cheerleading squad of Rancho Carne High School in San Diego called Toros. Under the leadership of their predecessor, it already won the fifth consecutive national cheerleading championship. Torrance Shipman, who is elected to replace the old team captain, is aiming for a sixth consecutive national title. But they meet a strong opponent - a black cheerleading squad headed by Isis in Crowe High School. To her surprise, their original captain had secretly copied the opponent's dance. After Torrance Shipman has known that, as a captain, she has to reorganize their dance, not only make it reborn, but also make it perfect enough to win the championship. At this time,

she falls in love with Cliff, a boy who is careless about the reputation. After a series of events, at the end of the movie, Torrance and Isis find respect in each other, and Cliff and Torrance share a romantic kiss.

## 1.2 The Purpose of This Dissertation

Having been a student for almost twenty years, a person will have a deep feeling about campus culture all the time. To be honest, the learning atmosphere really has significance on students, therefore, the construction of campus culture, absolutely, is very important. I think this topic is meaningful.

The reason why this research choose American cheerleading culture as the source material is because the cheerleading are a group movement that originated in the United States and fully embodies the American campus culture. In the last 30 years, it is quickly promoted to the world and the popularity of this activity is acknowledged. Moreover, this movie, *Bring it on*, completely present the cheerleading culture in American campus.

## 2. Literature Review

Before the reading of this passage the readers should have some necessary knowledge, and realize some main concepts, which help to understand the passage. Besides, this research will analysis and make a conclusion of some relevant passages, finding some common sense in this area and put forward a new idea.

### 2.1 Definition of Key Concepts

This passage talks about the culture presented in the movie *Bring It On*, which relevant to campus culture, cheerleading culture and cheerleader culture. Therefore, this research will offer a brief explanation about these terms, in order to help understand this paper.

#### 2.1.1 The campus culture

Campus culture, as an environmental and educational force, exerts enormous effects on students growth, whether beneficial or adverse. Everyone may have a similar feeling for being a student once is the same experience of everyone. The ultimate goal of campus culture construction is to create an atmosphere where students' sentiments can be cultivated, students' healthy personality can be built, and the overall quality of students can be improved.

#### 2.1.2 The cheerleading and cheerleading culture

Cheerleading originated in the United States, and remains predominantly in America. Cheerleading ranges from chanting, to intense physical activity for sports team motivation, audience entertainment, or competition based upon organized routines. Competitive routines typically range anywhere from one to three minutes, and contain components of tumbling, dance, jumps, cheers, and stunting.

Cheerleading culture refers to the general methods summed up in the process of various cheerleading activities of different countries and regions all around the world, tangible and intangible, material and spiritual, content and form.

## 2.2 Related Researches

The research on American campus culture is universe, and this research has made a brief conclusion according to the already literature material. Generally speaking, studies on America cheerleading are mainly focused on the following research issues.

### 2.2.1 The definition of cheerleading

When it comes to the definition of cheerleading, the authors of the previous studies on this aspect have the same conclusion. Many scholars mention that the cheerleading always appears in the form of a team, combined with Dance, Cheer, Partner Stunts, Tumbling, Basket Till, Pyramid, Jump and other action techniques. And this kind of team need play with music, clothing, team changes and marked items. The cheerleading competition has the gender, number and time limit.

### 2.2.2 The status of American cheerleading in the United States

First of all, the American cheerleading has wide coverage. "It is estimated that about 500,000 people attend the summer cheerleading, and today's cheerleading are no longer affiliated with the game, and the members of the cheerleading are not limited to women; it exists not only in American universities and Middle school, and even in primary schools and kindergartens, the importance of the cheerleading of American universities and secondary schools has been comparable to the school's basketball team or football team."

Secondly, the American cheerleading has the great influence. Shen Liuhong mentioned, "Cheerleading, like boxing competition, is sponsored by competing groups. Global cheerleading association is one of the largest sponsoring group, it sponsored the game is ESPN television broadcast of the main program. According to statistics, it holds more than 10 games every year, and each game was watched by 40 million to 50 million families on average."

Thirdly, American cheerleading has actual strength. "Cheerleading movement originated from the United States, and promoted by Japan. Currently, these two countries are the best in the competitive level, participation group, and sport training."

### 2.2.3 The feature of American cheerleading

American cheerleading is good at taking advantage of various of skills, and American cheerleading have a strong appeal, which is mainly reflected in its slogan, its exaggerated and powerful dance, its music full of passionate, as well as variety of changes in participants' expressions.

## 3. The Cultural Presentation

The previous researches mainly focus on the definition of cheerleading, the history of American cheerleading and the features of American cheerleading. Their research is definitely very helpful for us to figure out what is American cheerleader. However, this research pays attention to the American cheerleading culture in our campus, take it as a kind of culture force, which can make a profound influence on us students. This research will study American cheerleading from spiritual and material aspect by means of analyzing a relevant movie called *Bring It On*.

This film reflects the spirit of an era, a series of films reflect a country's spiritual and material culture. Influenced by Western New Christian, sport activities in American sports film takes entertainment and competitiveness as the basic model, emphasis on the spirit of higher, faster, and stronger, which in line with the Olympic spirit. However, the sports pay too much attention to personal performance, lacking of team spirit and dedication. This paper will analyze the cultural connotations of *Bring It On* from three aspects: spiritual culture, material culture and cheerleader culture.

### 3.1 The Spiritual Culture

First of all, we talk about spiritual culture in this film. As we all known, campus culture varies from country to country, region to region, but the American campus cheerleading cultures have something in common, and presented in this film. American cheerleading coaches and athletes encourage every student to participate their activities, they hold the idea that what with a good academic performance, what with a healthy body, a guy can be admitted to be an excellent student. American people have a strong interest in football, rhythmic gymnastics and other sports, enthusiasm; unrestrained, intuitive is a concrete manifestation of the aesthetic of the United States. In this film, Torrance Shipman, the new cheer captain, want to win the national championship for the sixth time, but there are many difficulties waiting for her to overcome. In a few weeks, she reorganizes the dance, and practice again and again to be skilled. It is her making every effort to save her team and keep her reputation that present the spirit of American campus sports in cultural level, what emphasize on individualism as well as heroism.

The spiritual culture is also embodied in the management systems including the internal management system, personnel management and training management system, fully shows the American cultural background. There are two types of American campus cheerleading management systems, dependent and independent. The cheerleading activities, apart from group activities and physical education, are directly managed by school leader. As early as 20 years ago, there were specialized organizations in some areas in the United States, when the loud voice, the excitement and the passion are the prerequisite for cheerleading. They have to own a certain explosive power, have the ability to mobilize the mood of the audience. American schools pay great attention to train athletes to improve the ability of competitions. Hence, the cheerleading squads in American campus are often given the opportunities to participate in competitions and accumulate experience.

Thirdly, what is worthy of learning is the attitude of cheerleading members. The girls in American campus try their best, finding ways and means to be one of the cheerleading. Once they have been a member of the group, they will try various devices to be the winner. For example, in *Bring It On*, every girl spares no effort to fight for the honor. Although the Toros have been the winner five times, they also study diligently and train hard, and this is a very precious spirit. What's more, they are happy with what they are doing, and they are serious with what they are doing. Even they finally lose the game, but the cheerleader Torrance and Isis find respect in each other.

### 3.2 The Material Culture

In addition, this research talks about the material culture. When it comes to the material culture, this research believes that it can be much easier learnt than spiritual culture.

Sports material culture, as the preface of the culture, is mainly referred to physical forms such as venue, funding, products and other structures. The sport competitions are generally held in the gymnasium of famous university, such as carrier dome of Syracuse University in *Bring It On*. What is the general feature of these gymnasiums in university is their capability of accommodation. For example, the carrier dome of Syracuse University is capable of accommodating about 32,000 people. What's more, the structure of the gymnasium is humanized. For instance, the top of this gymnasium is divided into two layers, inside and outside. Thus, in the frozen winter, the snow will be melt by the hot air inside, in order to create a better game environment for the athletes and audiences, so that the athletes can do themselves justice playing for their teams, and the audiences can view and admire the competition in a comfortable environment. Otherwise, in the freezing winter, the athletes, affected by the weather, are not able to give full play to their advantages, which will have a bad influence on the quality of the competition. Similarly, in the cold winter, the audiences are not willing to go out. As a result, the competition cannot be regarded as a successful game.

Therefore, the advanced facilities and the comfortable environment is the guarantee of an important event.

The fund is a necessary material condition. This film reflects that the funds of American cheerleading are mostly derived from the benefits created through the own efforts of the group members. For example, the group members of Clovers in the film has solved the financial problems by themselves. When Torrance suggest getting her dad's company to sponsor the Clovers, the team leader Isis rejects this kind of help and gets her team to Nationals by appealing to a talk show host. Finally, the Clovers becomes the biggest winner and guard the reputation.

In fact, except the approach presented in the movie, the American cheerleading has two other ways of raise money. On the one hand, school is a stable source. The school's financial support can guarantee the cheerleading squad a basic economic. On the other hand, society can give the appropriate help. The cheerleading committee brings a lot of income to the American cheerleading. In the United States, cheerleading races are promoted to every corner of the country as a sporting product. It establishes a good relationship with the media and takes advantage of the media, so that the people of the United States are fascinated. It makes full use of newspapers, radio, television and other media, not only vigorously promoting itself but also received a high amount of money of the television rights. In the United States, about 500,000 players participate in cheerleading summer training camps each year. And the produce of music is also carried out as a professional department. In addition, clothing, as a representative of the image, also forms a huge market. Many companies are selling cheerleading affiliated products online. At present, there are about 50 huge companies serve for the cheerleading in the United States.

### 3.3 The Understanding of the Cheerleader Culture

Moreover, this research will talk about the cheerleader. To be honest, the majority of American girls once had a dream of cheerleader. The school's annual event is the cheerleading performances, the girls are all dream to be cheer captain that will bring glorious, and being a cheerleading is an important way to become the man of the hour. As the lyrics in *You Belong with Me* by Taylor Swift, "But she wears short skirts. I wear T-shirts. She's cheer captain. And I'm on the bleachers." We may get that cheer captain present a special status.

The first cheerleader in American history called Johnny, who was in Minnesota University. Then, after dozens of generations of joint efforts, the cheerleading has been added into a lot of modern elements, including gymnastics, paper balls and some difficulty skills, fascinating cheerleading' popularity throughout the world.

Some may only find the glory and status of being a cheerleader can bring to us, and neglect the difficulties and challenges a cheerleader may undertake. As the saying goes, "The larger the capacity the greater the responsibility." In fact, there are some qualities a cheerleader should possess.

Almost all enthusiasts require that aspirants be super humans both outside and inside. Regardless of circumstances, they should be calm, abundantly enthusiastic and take the responsibility. The National Cheerleading Association and its founder, Lawrence Herkimer, have set standards for cheerleader. And the standard he set seems impossible for a grown adult, let alone a teenager, to fulfill. In addition to good physical condition and athletic ability, a cheerleader should always being friendly, so that he can never showing temper, discourtesy, or lack of interest. What's more, a cheerleader is able to try his or her best to cooperate with teachers as well as the school organization. What is indispensable is that a cheerleader is supposed to be a model, showing lots of enthusiasm, in order to cheer the team, school, or other cheerleadingup. "A cheerleader should not display undesirable emotions such as crying, anger, or rage at any time. What he or she should do is to highly respect the advisor and hold the respect of fellow students."Herkimer added.

In fact, a cheerleader, under the pressure from the society, is supposed to set a good example for friends, school, and community. Beside the sport activities, he or she should do well at his or her studies. And, as if the above were not enough, an essential characteristic of the cheerleader is popularity; the word “popular” and the necessity of being so are repeated numerous times. Divoky and Schrag suggest: “By junior year the girls know whether they’re popular enough to try out, and they’re not willing to go out and make a fool of themselves if they’re not.”

#### **4. The Cultural Differences between Chinese and American in Campus Cheerleading Culture**

With the continuous evolution of the cheerleading, it doesn’t take too much stretch of the imagination to realize that only when we find our deficiency can we improve our level. By comparing Chinese and American campus cheerleading, we can be aware of the differences between us, then we can adopt their strong points and overcome our weak points, thus we can try our best to narrow the gap between China and the world strong teams in the field of cheerleading.

##### **4.1 The Difference in Mechanism and Coaches**

It is easy for us to find that the level of American coaches is very high, which on account of the mature operation mechanism they have, from arrangement to training, organization to sponsorship. A series of work can be accomplished effectively. On the contrary, Chinese cheerleading team, which is in its early stage, has narrow development chance, few competition opportunities, and the overall level is lower, no matter in publicity, training, selection, rule-making, special training and so on. China has not developed a special cheerleading cultural wealth what affects the integrated professional level of coaches. What’s more, China’s traditional culture has formed the cultural core of “harmony”, which constitutes the cultural characteristics of “integrity, closeness and observance” of Chinese traditional culture. Under the influence of this kind of culture, our cheerleading squad pays attention to the already known concepts and traditional habits, what, to some extent, affected the coaches’ creativity, thus affecting the overall level of our cheerleading project.

##### **4.2 The Difference in Participants Physically and Mentally**

The differences of education system lead to the differences in physical quality between American students and Chinese students. China emphasis that “test makes a good man” while the United States hold the belief that “quality makes a good man.”Therefore, Chinese students grow up with “heavy text”, overwhelmed by the homework of Chinese, Math, English and so on, while American students participate in social practice as part of their exams, and their diversified form of education leads students at all stages to the training of the project.

Mentally, Westerners attach great importance to cultivate the agility and tenacity of young people through various exercises. Americans believe that the cheerleading movement is a silent battlefield, where full of battles, and it is an appropriate situation where the personal values can be embodied. On the contrary, Chinese people, influenced badly by the “harmonious symmetry”, hold the idea that the cheerleading movement is the place for communication between different countries, the place to show friendship. Chinese put forward the slogan “friendship first, competition later”, limiting the player’s personality display.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Through the analysis of American cheerleading culture, and the comparison of campus culture between America and China, this paper attempts to provide some reference for the vigorous development of school campus culture and sports in China. After reading this paper, we have aware of the reason of the development of American campus cheerleading. They have improved sport facilities, which guarantee



activities can be held smoothly. And the Americans have a positive and active attitude. We Chinese can absorb some advantages and apply them according to national conditions. Firstly, Chinese should develop a right conscience towards cheerleading sport first, pay attention to it and respect it, constructing a harmony campus culture. In addition, schools can build a powerful management system for sports to guarantee ordered and effective sports. What's more, schools should improve infrastructures such as high quality gymnasium, playground, and basketball court and so on. Then, students should cultivate themselves according to the cheerleader's standard.

## **References**

- [1] Andrew B. Don't bring it on: the case against cheerleading as a collegiate sport. New York: Pocket, 2013.
- [2] David, Isaacs. "Cheerleading is not always safe." Journal of Child Health13.2 (2000): 53-65.
- [3] Jeffrey A. Ross. Aerobic Dance and Cheerleading. New York:Springer,2010.
- [4] Pamela J. Short skirts and breast juts: cheerleading, eroticism and schools. London:Routledge,2006.
- [5] Tatiana Dobrescu,Elena Moldovan. The Influence of Cheerleading Extracurricular Activities on the Motor behavior of Middle-school Pupils. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,2014.
- [6] Glenn G Fort, Frank G Fort. Cheerleading as a cause of splenic rupture. American Journal of Emergency Medicine,1999.