

Research on the Influencing Factors and Countermeasures of China's Sports Goods Exports

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Abstract: In recent years, China's sports goods industry has developed steadily, driven by favorable policies and consumption upgrading, with a continuously expanding industrial scale and increasing market vitality. Meanwhile, the industry is facing intensified competition and obvious structural differentiation. To address these challenges, sports goods export enterprises need to strengthen innovation, improve product quality and brand influence, optimize marketing, and cope with exchange rate and logistics costs to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: Sports goods; export; Specialized, refined, distinctive and innovative development; New quality productivity

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1. Current situation of China's sports goods exports

1.1. Categories of China's sports goods exports

In a broad sense, sports goods are a general term for consumer goods used in sports activities and meeting sports requirements, including sports competition supplies, sports training supplies, fitness and leisure supplies, sports teaching supplies, etc. Specifically, they can be divided into fitness equipment, campus sports equipment, rehabilitation equipment, competition supplies, sports protective gear, sportswear, outdoor sports and leisure supplies, and other sports goods.

From the perspective of exports, the main categories of China's exported sports goods are chemical fiber sportswear, bicycles, and various fitness and rehabilitation equipment. According to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, in 2023, sports equipment accounted for 69.15% of China's major exported products to other RCEP countries, followed by sportswear at 22.49% ^[1]. China is relatively less competitive in high-tech sports products compared with developed countries, with low export volume, while developed countries such as the United States have greater advantages in exporting such products. China's export product structure is relatively concentrated, mainly consisting of low-value-added products.

1.2. Scale of China's sports goods exports

In recent years, China's sports goods have shown strong resilience in export trade. According to the General Administration of Customs of China, China's sports goods exports reached 26.595 billion US dollars in 2023, and 28.396 billion US dollars in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 6.77%. From January to June 2025, China's total import and export of sports goods reached 15.581 billion US dollars, an increase of 1.20% over the same period last year. Among them, exports were 14.901 billion US dollars and imports were 679 million US dollars, with exports up 1.56% and imports down 5.91% year-on-year. The overall export scale is moving towards sustained and stable growth ^[2].

1.3. Major export markets of China's sports goods

China's sports goods are mainly exported to developed countries such as Europe and the United States. In terms of 2024 export volume, among the top six countries, only Japan is an Asian country, and the rest are in Europe and America. The export volume to the United States reached 4.465 billion US dollars, almost the sum of the rest of the countries. According to the General Administration of Customs, in the first half of 2025, China's sports goods exports to the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada were 627 million US dollars, 622 million US dollars, 477 million US dollars, and 500 million US dollars respectively. The United States remained the largest market, and the top markets were still mainly European and American countries ^[2].

1.4. Major trade modes of China's sports goods exports

In 2024, China's sports goods export trade presented a diversified pattern of "traditional dominance and emerging rise". General trade rapidly replaced processing trade as the core support for exports. According to industry reports, the export volume of sports goods under general trade reached 19.69 billion US dollars in 2024, a further increase over previous years. The proportion of processing trade declined, but its high-end development accelerated. Cross-border e-commerce and market procurement trade have developed rapidly with the advantages of "direct terminal access and flexible adaptation". The implementation of agreements such as RCEP has further reduced tariffs and logistics costs, promoting new business forms to become an important supplement to traditional trade ^[3].

2. Problems existing in China's sports goods exports

2.1. Over-concentrated export categories and low added value

China's sports goods export structure is relatively single, highly concentrated in sports shoes and basic equipment for gymnastics and track and field. In 2023, the export volume of these two categories accounted for more than 60% of the total export volume. At the same time, the overall technical added value of China's exported products is low, mostly concentrated in low-end and medium-end basic categories, while the high value-added market is still dominated by European and American brands.

There are three main reasons for this situation:

- (1) China is an important global production base for sports shoes, with a mature and complete industrial chain and large-scale production advantages, outstanding competitiveness in cost control and supply capacity;
- (2) Basic sports equipment such as gymnastics and track and field has low manufacturing thresholds and is widely used in campus sports and public daily fitness, with stable and sufficient market demand;

- (3) Products such as protective gear, professional sportswear, boats, and fishing gear require higher professional technology and manufacturing processes, which need long-term technical accumulation of enterprises.

Related enterprises in China have a short development time in these fields, insufficient technical accumulation, and weak overall competitiveness compared with foreign counterparts.

2.2. Wide market distribution but high concentration on the US market

Owing to economic globalization and the proposal of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative, China's sports goods export trade has developed well around the world. However, due to differences in market demand among countries and constraints of logistics, supply chains and other factors, China's sports goods exports show an unbalanced regional layout. The market share in Asian countries is not high, and the share in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean is even lower. The main reason is that Europe and the United States are still the world's largest sports goods consumer markets. Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific have a large population, and many countries and regions are in a period of rapid economic development, providing a broad market for China's sports goods export trade ^[4]. In contrast, some countries in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean are in the developing stage with limited per capita income and weak demand and capacity for sports consumption.

2.3. Practical dilemmas of "specialized, refined, characteristic and innovative" development of small and medium-sized sports goods enterprises

From the perspective of evolutionary economics, China's sports goods manufacturing industry has long relied on export catch-up, making it difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to transform. The industry is trapped in low-price homogeneous competition, with most technologies introduced or imitated and lack of independent innovation. Enterprises also prefer the low-value-added and stable-income OEM model. At present, the internal and external environment of enterprises has undergone major changes. Path dependence has trapped small and medium-sized enterprises in a solidification effect, stuck in the low value-added links of the value chain, and faced the crowding-out effect caused by Vietnam, Cambodia and other countries relying on primary production factor advantages. Therefore, small and medium-sized enterprises need to select adaptive paths combining capabilities and opportunities during the "opportunity window period". Under the requirements and guidance of the Chinese government to support and encourage the "specialized, refined, characteristic and innovative" development of small and medium-sized enterprises, they should focus on characteristics, vigorously innovate, quickly form new technological advantages, and implement refined management ^[5].

3. Main factors affecting China's sports goods exports

3.1. Favorable factors

3.1.1. Trade facilitation policies

Trade facilitation policies refer to measures such as simplifying import and export procedures and accelerating customs clearance to reduce costs and make trade more convenient and efficient. Trade facilitation policies have played a key role in China's sports goods export trade. For example, the "Single Window" system implemented by the Chinese government allows enterprises to submit all import and export-related documents and information through one platform, greatly improving customs clearance efficiency. Measures such as reducing

unnecessary inspection and quarantine procedures and accelerating cargo release help reduce logistics and time costs for enterprises and improve trade efficiency ^[6].

3.1.2. Cultivation of new quality productivity

With innovation as the core driving force, new quality productivity constitutes a brand-new advanced form of productivity, mainly characterized by leading technology, efficient operation and excellent quality. Its core essence is led by scientific and technological innovation, which is not only a key engine for high-quality economic development, but also can break through the limitations of traditional economic growth models and productivity development paths, injecting new momentum into industrial upgrading and high-quality trade development ^[1]. This is highly consistent with the “specialized, refined, characteristic and innovative” development path of sports goods manufacturing enterprises. The application of digital technology and artificial intelligence in the sports goods industry can replace labor in product R&D, production and manufacturing, quality inspection and other links. At the same time, digital transformation optimizes production and sales processes, effectively improving the overall operational efficiency of enterprises and building a high-quality workforce ^[7].

3.1.3. Support from relevant domestic policies

In terms of industrial development policies, the 14th Five-Year Sports Development Plan issued in 2021 clearly stated that it is necessary to consolidate and expand international sports exchanges and cooperation, actively introduce foreign advanced experience (“bring in”) and take the initiative to go abroad for exchanges and cooperation (“go global”), so as to open up a new situation in sports foreign exchanges and enhance the overall strength of China’s sports development. In terms of export supporting policies, China has also issued a number of preferential measures as follows:

- (1) Export sports goods are exempt from value-added tax;
- (2) The implementation of 100% export bill purchase and 100% tax rebate policy, enterprises can use all export foreign exchange for import or re-export, helping enterprises improve export earnings;
- (3) The establishment of special awards such as export performance awards and foreign exchange earning awards;
- (4) Providing priorities and simplified procedures in inspection and quarantine, customs declaration and other links to reduce the actual export costs of enterprises.

3.2. Unfavorable factors

3.2.1. Exchange rate fluctuations

Exchange rate fluctuations have an important impact on China’s sports goods export trade. Exchange rate fluctuations directly affect the price competitiveness of China’s sports goods in the international market. When RMB depreciates relatively, the price of China’s sports goods in the international market becomes more competitive, which may increase export volume; on the contrary, when RMB appreciates relatively, the price of China’s sports goods rises, which may reduce export volume. In addition, exchange rate fluctuations also affect the profit margin of enterprises, because enterprises may face exchange gains or losses during foreign exchange settlement.

3.2.2. International trade environment

The international trade environment is one of the important factors affecting China's sports goods export trade. Changes in the international trade environment directly affect the export volume and market opportunities of China's sports goods. For example, global economic growth or recession, changes in international trade policies, and the establishment or removal of trade barriers will all affect China's sports goods exports. In an open and free trade environment, Chinese sports goods enterprises can more easily enter the international market and expand export business. However, under the background of rising trade protectionism and increasing trade frictions, Chinese sports goods enterprises may face more market access restrictions and trade barriers, thus affecting the development of export trade.

3.2.3. International logistics costs

The level of international logistics costs directly affects the price competitiveness and profit margin of China's sports goods in the international market. With the growth of global trade, international logistics costs are also rising. Chinese sports goods enterprises need to find cost-effective logistics solutions to reduce logistics costs and improve the price competitiveness of products.

3.3. Enterprise internal factors

3.3.1. Enterprise innovation capability

Enterprise innovation capability is one of the key factors for the success of China's sports goods export trade. In the fiercely competitive international market, innovation capability is an essential competitive means for enterprises. Chinese sports goods enterprises need to develop and create products according to changing market demand. By introducing advanced design concepts and using new materials and technologies, enterprises can improve product performance and functions and enhance product added value.

3.3.2. Product quality

In the international market, consumers have increasingly high requirements for product quality. Therefore, enterprises must strictly control quality to ensure that products meet international standards. Strict control is required from raw material procurement, production and manufacturing to product inspection to ensure product quality. Enterprises also need to pay attention to product safety and environmental protection to meet the health and environmental protection requirements of the international market.

3.3.3. Brand influence

Brand influence can help enterprises establish a good reputation and image, and attract more consumers and partners. Chinese sports goods enterprises need to improve brand reputation and trust through effective brand promotion and publicity. Enterprises need to identify brand advantages and characteristics, and then select appropriate brand promotion channels and methods, such as advertising, participating in exhibitions, sponsoring sports events, etc., to increase brand exposure and influence. In addition, enterprises need to maintain customer relationships and their own image to improve customer recognition and trust.

4. Suggestions for promoting China's sports goods exports

Based on the above analysis, we put forward the following suggestions to promote China's sports goods exports.

4.1. High-quality joint construction of the “belt and road” to boost sports goods exports

In accordance with the “Belt and Road” construction, we will first identify key products for sports tourism equipment, build production bases in countries and regions along the route, and encourage and support capable enterprises to build industrial parks. At the same time, we will strengthen technological R&D and product innovation, and promote connectivity with transportation, infrastructure and other fields in countries along the “Belt and Road” to make China’s sports goods exports more convenient and smooth, so as to solve the impact of exchange rates, environment, logistics and other factors on China’s sports goods exports ^[5].

4.2. Adhere to green development and innovation to accelerate the formation of product brand influence

On the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen technological innovation and cultivate new quality productivity in the sports goods industry; on the other hand, the sports goods industry should optimize the trade structure, keep up with the trend of green development, gradually adopt green production and low-carbon technologies, promote sports goods to a wider market, and strive to gain a firm foothold and make steady progress in the global market ^[8].

4.3. Establish a risk-neutral management concept and view exchange rate fluctuations dynamically

Sports goods manufacturing enterprises should adhere to the risk-neutral principle, rationally respond to exchange rate changes, accurately judge exchange rate risks in each business link, formulate targeted management strategies according to the sources and usage scenarios of foreign exchange funds, formulate efficient and feasible risk control plans, and then build a risk management organization framework with coordinated linkage of business, finance and funds ^[9].

4.4. Actively cultivate new quality productivity for sports goods production

First, enterprises need to continuously increase R&D investment, promote the in-depth integration and application of cutting-edge technologies such as intelligent manufacturing and artificial intelligence with the sports industry, and help China’s sports goods manufacturing industry complete the leapfrog upgrade to a manufacturing power led by technology. Second, deepen industry-university-research collaboration between enterprises and universities, build a close and efficient innovation alliance, build a multi-level open and shared technological innovation platform, and support the R&D and achievement transformation of high-tech and independent intellectual property sports products ^[7]. In addition, it is necessary to vigorously cultivate compound sports industry talents, and encourage R&D personnel to carry out product innovation around overseas market demand, open up overseas markets with high-quality products and enhance brand awareness. Finally, enterprises should rationally allocate resources, focus on consumer demand, continuously improve product competitiveness, create best-selling products in line with the market, optimize the export trade structure, improve product added value, enhance the competitiveness of China’s sports goods, and stabilize market position.

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