

Overseas-oriented Promotion and Publicity of Traditional Chinese Sports - Challenges and Countermeasures

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Abstract: This paper puts narration of the introduction and evolution of the loanword “体育” in China as the beginning, accordingly presenting a new perspective to define the development of Chinese sports and confirm its uniqueness. Meanwhile, it analyzes the challenges from the aspects of domestic cognition, the limitation of traditional Chinese sports and media for publicity, followed by relevant countermeasures to make sure that traditional Chinese sports are promoted and publicized on the basis of Chinese viewpoint, with the insight of a shared future.

Keywords: Overseas-oriented Promotion and Publicity, Traditional Chinese Sports Culture, National Uniqueness, Cultural Recognition and Confidence.

1. Introduction

Overseas-oriented promotion and publicity of Chinese sports culture can be split into two directions. The first one focuses on popular international sports as the main concern, introducing Chinese efforts and its spirits of the era. The second one promotes traditional Chinese sports history, cultures and spirits based on traditional Chinese sports. In recent years, the former direction has seen great success with the enhancement of national strength. The later one, however, remains slow in development and waits for further advance. The narration of Chinese stories requires the engagement of traditional Chinese sports culture, while the effective promotion of traditional Chinese sports culture relies on deep understanding and research on its concept and content. Meanwhile, domestic recognition for and confidence in it should also be instrumental in cross-cultural promotion and publicity. Therefore, this paper, with an elaborate introduction of traditional Chinese sports as requisite, analyzes its challenges and countermeasures during overseas-oriented promotion and publicity, so as to ensure its root in Chinese concept, display of cultural uniqueness and stand on national viewpoint.

2. Evolution of the Word “体育”

The word “体育” translated as “Physical Education” didn’t derive from Chinese ancient times despite a long history of Chinese physical activities. As a loanword, “体育” was first introduced into China by Chinese overseas students pursuing further study abroad during 1901 and 1906. After the Revolution in 1911, the Chinese bourgeois democratic revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen which overthrew the Qing Dynasty, large amounts of new elements were introduced into China and the word “体育” gradually enjoyed a wide use.

The meaning of this loanword has been through a revolution. It at first referred to physical education, an educating process related to activities for health maintenance and cultivation, which corresponded to the international interpretation. Later on, this original meaning could hardly

cover all the goals and contents newly developed during the rapid growth in society and sports career, which led to the explanation for “体育” in both broad and narrow senses. “体育”, in a broad sense, is considered as body activities including physical education, competitive sports and physical exercise, while in a narrow sense, it is only about physical education. A consensus among scholars is that “体育” is a sociocultural phenomenon and an educating process with body activities as medium, integrated development in body and mind as aim, and cultivation of comprehensively developing citizens as ultimate goal. This definition well explains its essence, pinpoints its category, and distinguishes itself from other similar social phenomena.

Therefore, compared with the popular definition of “体育”, traditional Chinese sports should fall into an exclusive interpretation. The difference is essentially the distinction between Chinese and Western culture and value. All in all, the development of Chinese sports can be generally divided into two parts, that is, the period before and after the introduction of the word “体育”.

3. Traditional Chinese Sports

3.1. Implication

Based on what is aforementioned, the true concept of Chinese sports exists before the introduction of “体育”. Traditional Chinese sports, in essence, refers to physical activities generated in ancient times, created by versatile Chinese people, and preserved through a long history. Its diverse and ethnic-characterized forms were developed in reliance on distinct historical foundation, inherited and enriched along with the vicissitudes of ancient politics, economy, science, and culture.

Traditional Chinese sports, in accordance with its evolution and features, can be classified into five categories [1]. The first one is transformed by daily practice, military training, and battle skills, which mainly contains running, jumping, archery and equestrian. Based on different terrains, swimming and skiing were accordingly generated. The

second is martial arts and other health-preserving activities. Martial arts, also called Wushu in China, include the art of attack and defense as its core and requires some apparatuses as coordination. The latter ones involve arts in the regulation of respiration, mind and body position. The third one is entertaining and competitive ball game, such as Cuju, polo, and Chuiwan. The fourth is chess and card games, such as Weiqi (Go chess) and Chinese chess. The last one is folk sports featured by regions, seasons, and national minorities. It ranges from kite flying, swing, dragon dance, dragon boat racing to diabolo (Chinese yo-yo).

In recent years, analyses towards related literature and archaeological data have shown an approximate number of 200 sports activities popular in different periods of ancient times. The categories were influenced by the nurture of traditional Chinese culture and infused with Chinese morality and arts.

3.2. Features

Traditional Chinese sports, originated in traditional Chinese culture, shine with Chinese wisdom.

To begin with, it is less competitive. The ideal, harmony, moderation and inclusiveness in traditional Chinese culture weaken the sense of competitiveness and provocation. For instance, dragon dance puts emphasis on a harmonious relationship between body and mind, between human and nature, in which the influence of traditional Chinese culture is well manifested.

Second, it has educational and social function. In China, a country famous for its agriculture civilization, its traditional ethical education has been throughout the development of traditional sports. Martial arts with the idea of modesty, honesty, humanity, and clemency, for example, is equivalence to the thought of moderation of Confucianism. Therefore, traditional Chinese sports plays its role of demonstration in education and social propriety.

Furthermore, it serves for the masses. After the dynasty of Song and Yuan, many Chinese sports showed a breakthrough from the restriction of rituals and a tendency to entertainment. Sports could be performed or simply played as games, and amateur communities were well organized. The popularization and promotion indicate that traditional Chinese sports has not a high threshold.

Finally, it is an art of fitness and bodybuilding. The thought of body and mind in one place further stresses the combination of health and bodybuilding. As far as what ancient people were concerned, sports are not only an enhancement of physical fitness but also physique in the true sense.

4. Challenges

4.1. The Lack of Cultural Recognition and Confidence at Home

4.1.1. Distorted Uniqueness

From the perspective of lexicology, the loanword “体育”, to a certain extent, refreshes the interpretation of sports in China, but this is also a proof of the uniqueness of authentic Chinese sports culture. The uniqueness, whereas, is now inclined to be deemed as obscurity and a high threshold. As a matter of fact, this distortion is caused by people’s alienation from its core and essence, while alienation has a lot to do with Chinese multinational culture and developments in different regions. Traditional Chinese sports cultures are often subject

to where they originated, and those places are often less urbanized and short of systematical preservation and enough opportunities for promotion due to economic factors. The economic gap between areas, therefore, leads to inter-culturally exchanging gap between tradition and modernization. Uniqueness in traditional sports culture can’t be fully exposed to the public and hence the distortion of its essence. However, obscurity may be the reason to be unique, but being unique should not be the curbs on popularity.

4.1.2. Lack of Cultural Consciousness

At present, the public cultural consciousness towards traditional Chinese sports is yet to be improve. This is particularly shown in the passive understanding of traditional Chinese sports culture, unfamiliarity with its advantages and characteristics, and superficial and incomplete cognition. There are 977 traditional sports in China, among which 301 are of the Han nationality and 676 are of other nationalities [2]. In the face of such a large number of traditional sports with rich content, in-depth exploration, sorting and follow-up development remains in serious deficiencies. The mentality of “Olympics Only” has gradually led many traditional Chinese sports decline [3]. For example, in the China’s Seventh National Games in 1994, Chinese style wrestling with a long history and profound mass foundation was canceled. It was not until January 16, 2016, under the appeal of many, the weightlifting Wrestling and Judo sports management Center of the General Administration of Sport of China reestablished the Chinese Wrestling Association, competition committee and publicity committee.

Besides, such lack of cultural consciousness has something to do with the misuse of traditional Chinese sports in the past decades, which causes prejudice and even hatred. Traditional Chinese sports meet with the same quagmire as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Its demerits have long been overblown. For instance, after the founding of New China, the scarcity of health care resources resulted in the superstition in Qigong, one of the traditional Chinese sports. Fraud and deceit in the name of Qigong pervaded everywhere, which undermined public credibility in Qigong. Even though the superstition has not invaded in other traditional Chinese sports, the disaster of Qigong did encourage broader prejudice, hinder traditional Chinese sports from further capturing people’s attention and impair cultural recognition. Therefore, overseas-oriented promotion and publicity is in the face of deficiency in domestic support and internal motivation.

In the 21st century, one of the merits “养生”, a key concept in traditional Chinese sports, which means enhancing health, prolonging life, curing illnesses and improving physiological functions, has become a neutral word in modern life. It will be positive when people are tired of high pressure in life but negative when people are anxious about poor performance at work. However, “养生”, in a true sense, helps achieve coordination between body and mind by learning skills to control our bodies and regulate our emotions in a right way. It is not an excuse for “Buddha Style” life or being lazy.

4.2. Insufficient Exploration of Inherent Values and By-Products

Traditional Chinese sports, compared with the first direction of publicity which focus on Chinese sports career in modern sports, are promoted in a rough fashion. The first direction, in the hope of presenting the world with energetic Chinese image and national strength, has been fully practiced

with clear slogans and detailed plans, in which talent training and events holding are conducted in order. For example, in 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, technological strength, organizational ability and Chinese cultural charm can be seen in opening and closing ceremonies undertaken by China, reflecting a healthy economy at home and international right of speech. In those events, Chinese spirits of the era, such as the spirit of the Chinese women's volleyball team, have been extracted as a supportive element in promotion and publicity.

However, traditional Chinese sports has certain limitations in exploring what to promote and publicize. Its value mining remains inadequate. There are many intrinsic values and by-products neglected during its cultural exchanges. As a matter of fact, traditional sports culture contains such aspects as values, behavior, and material products, integrating with by-product including traditional sports techniques, ideology, etiquette, clothing, apparatuses. In the current publicity of traditional sports culture, it's often taken for granted that promoting techniques of traditional sports is equated with its cultural promotion [3]. To begin with, the techniques of traditional Chinese sports and its culture have not been well integrated. One-sided emphasis on either technical teaching or ideology imparting will affect the real effect of promotion. Second, not enough attention is paid to the cultural value of related clothing and apparatuses. Those by-products directly reflect the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture and play an important role in effective promotion and publicity. Take martial arts as an example. It can be seen from the lack of cultural and aesthetic value of clothing and apparatuses in international martial arts competitions and teaching that the cultural value of by-products has not yet been fully brought into play.

4.3. Difficulty in Translation

Due to its complexity and different cultural frames of reference, the translation of each name, rule and motion in traditional sports is quite challenging, in which many authentic and idiomatic words and expressions are involved and hard to be appropriately translated. A right understanding of the source language will not necessarily lead to a proper translation of the target language. Misunderstandings are unavoidable, so as the barriers in promotion and publicity.

The traditional sports in the Zhuang nationality is featured as large amounts of complicate classification. There are 194 traditional sports created during their daily production and entertainment.[4] The names of traditional sports in the Zhuang nationality, for instance, contains four metaphors — metaphor of animals, lore, agriculture, and others.[5] The word “王八护蛋” is one of them. In this sport, one person, with a ball under his belly, lies prostrate in a circle to protect the ball. The other person then makes every effort to get the ball. “王八” is a vulgar name of “乌龟” (turtle) in China. “护” means the motion of protecting. “蛋”, which means eggs, is a vivid description for balls. However, “王八” is also a curse in China and “乌龟” has two translations — turtle and tortoise, in English. Therefore, the awareness of a decent expression and suitable pick in words is highly required.

5. Countermeasures

5.1. Further Exploration of Features and Highlight in Merits

Since Chinese traditional sports are less competitive, it has

something to do with its inherent culture and philosophy, and there is no need for blind learning from the Western competitive mode. It will be more effective if the promotion and publicity adhere to its features and accordingly bring out its merits, such as the coordination between body and mind strengthening, between human and nature. The media can carry out specific design and customization according to the classification of traditional Chinese sports. For instance, the promotion of traditional sports with strong dynamic and rhythmic sense, such as Mongolian wrestling and martial arts, can make full use of the visual dynamic effects of video and present with the forms of sports celebrations, live streaming, and sports-related documentaries. As for sports aim at fitness and entertainment such as swing, rope skipping and shuttlecock kicking, competitive reality shows can be produced and held nationwide to encourage mass participation. For static health sports, documentaries are an important medium to dig out its inner spiritual value and meaning, while variety shows of competition planning will only produce a counterproductive result, undermining its essence. Secondly, traditional Chinese sports culture should also take full advantage of oversea media platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, to actively promote traditional sports. When the sports are conducted within reason, participators naturally react to the harmonious atmosphere and accordingly appreciate its merits. Thus, the engagement, recognition and confidence are expected to enhance. Those are the requisite of stepping outward.

5.2. Diversification in Targeted Audience Groups

Traditional Chinese sports culture should focus on the diversity of audience groups. Since it involves the promotion and publicity at home and abroad, different conditions need to be considered. The promotion requires full awareness of the diversity of audience groups in different countries, races, age and cultural background. Based on the existing audience groups, the initiative should be seized to develop potential audience groups so as to expand the audience range of traditional sports culture.

From the perspective of different cultural backgrounds, when Chinese traditional sports is taught to those international students, the emphasis on technical teaching is certainly part of the content, but the theory teaching of cultural value is also the top priority. However, the key determinant of effective promotion lies in taking care of their needs and also limitations in understanding. The teaching effect should be evaluated and adjusted in regularly through questionnaires, tests and other means, so that international students can not only learn the moves, but also understand the meaning of Chinese traditional sports culture.

In terms of audience age, the young generation is the pioneer to receive and spread the modern trends. Their familiarity with the Internet and social media provides them with a positive position to express ideas in the new era. Therefore, promotion work needs to explore traditional sports suitable for young people and optimize specific content.

5.3. Regular Feedback and Adjustment

It is vital to keep up with the social response and the masses' views of traditional Chinese sports culture and make regular feedback and adjustment to ensure that traditional Chinese sports culture meets with public needs. First of all, the audience's appetite and their sense of identity should be

taken as an vital reference. Promotion is people-centered and down to earth to avoid a flat and didactic style. Secondly, the evaluation and feedback mechanism needs to be improve constantly. Experience from fields such as communication can be referred to establish a more scientific mechanism. In the feedback, reasons to success and problems should both be extracted. Effective feedback and adjustment are crucial for traditional Chinese sports to be familiar to people with stronger sense of identity. It's also the premise to let Chinese sports be known by the world. As for the overseas feedback and adjustment mechanism, preparation should be made for a cycle of feedback, improvement, further feedback and improvement. Due to many problems caused by cultural differences, it is important to continue conducting follow-up design and improvement guided by problems in practice.

5.4. Specification in Traditional Chinese Sports Translation

It's beyond doubt that translation, in the global context, is a medium for cross-language communication and cross-cultural exchange. At this point, it's important for translators to be aware of the relation between the nation and the world. In recent years, many scholars have begun to study translation from a broader perspective. Some literature doing research on translation of Wushu underlines its importance. For instance, the book *Discourse and Translator* written by Basil Hatim and Ian Mason defines translation as a communication under a certain social context and thus requires translators to equipped with bilingual ability and bi-cultural insight. Eugene A. Nida, American translators and translation theorist believed that when it comes to the true success in translation, a bi-cultural insight weighs even more than the bilingual ability. The biggest breakthrough in studies nowadays is a closer look at translation under a broader cultural context. Therefore, Chinese traditional sports should not only focus on translation skills but also the cultural distinction in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and mistakes.

6. Conclusion

Through an introduction and analysis of traditional Chinese sports, it's clear that traditional Chinese sports is faced with great challenges in getting domestic recognition and overseas promotion. Its publicity needs to stick to its uniqueness and Chinese wisdom, make full use of media, and constantly carry out cultural exchanges with the outside world. In this paper, the interpretation of the word "体育" further prove the confidence that traditional Chinese sports can be its own school. Besides, the diversity of audience groups facilitates a benign two-way circulation and exchanges of traditional Chinese sports culture at home and abroad. However, due to the limitations of the author's knowledge and cognition, relevant interpretations of traditional Chinese sports culture and solutions to its challenges are still shallow and yet to be further studied. Besides, the author believes that the precondition of overseas promotion and publicity is to raise the domestic cultural recognition and consciousness towards traditional Chinese sports. Therefore, this paper considers more about Chinese environment in terms of solutions. All in all, as an indispensable part of traditional Chinese culture, traditional Chinese sports and its culture should be highly valued and continuously explored. When traditional Chinese sports culture is cross-culturally promoted and publicized in a true sense, Chinese stories will be ever vivid.

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