Classification of Folk Traditional Sports

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Keywords: Folk traditional sport, Classification, Concept.

Abstract. This paper expounds the classifications of folk traditional sports at home and abroad by the method of document consultation. It classifies folk traditional sports into competitive category, game and entertainment category and wushu & san shou category according to the aims of participating in folk traditional sports and the completion of folk traditional sports competition regulations.

The Definition of Traditional National Sports

According to documentations of sports, the word “Sports”, appeared in a paper of a French journal discussing children physical education in 1760. Now “physical education” is widely used to refer to “sports” in general. At the end of the 18th century, Germany scholar, Johann Christoph Friedrich Guts Muths, categorized and synthesized all kinds of sports activities into one word “gymnastics”. In 19th century, the new definition that sports is the education by means of body movement came into being. Therefore, in a quite long period, “gymnastics” and “sports” coexisted and were used without difference. It was not until the beginning of 20th century, was the word “sports” served as a unified term in the world[1].

Chinese people has a long history of participating in sports activities. But Chinese words for sports first appeared in early 20th century of Qing Dynasty when a large number of overseas students crossed over to Japan for further study and came back to China with the word “sports”, i.e.[2]. In 1923, the word “gym course” was officially changed into “P.E” in “Outline Draft for Middle and Primary School Courses”[3].

When “sports” first entered into China, it meant the education for physical health, accords with its interpretation in foreign countries[4]. As the development of the society and sports events, the purpose and content of “sports” have greatly gone beyond of the original understanding of “sports” whose definition can be explained from the perspective of broad and narrow sense. When used in its broad sense, sports generally means sports activities, including physical education, competitive sports and body exercises. And it refers to physical education when applied in its narrow sense[5].

Sports events are mainly classified into two major types, one of which originated from ancient Grace, Rome competitive sports as well as European and American recreational events. They are popular all over the world irrespective of country, nation or district, such as athletics gymnastics and ball games. Another group is nation-specific, for example Chinese Tao yin, shadow boxing and wushu, Indian Yoga, Japanese Sumo and Korean Taekwondo. These events developed from traditional sports events of fitness, military and recreational activities.

In Chinese ancient books and records, there are at least dozens of words expressing the concept of “Minzu”(Folk), but “Min”(people) and “Zu”(nationality) had never combined to be used as a single word[6]. The word “Minzu” first appeared in, “Joshua Descended to the Kingdom of Canaan” from “Eastern Western Monthly Magazine” in 1837 written by western missionaries[7]. It was not until the beginning of 20th century that the word “Minzu” became popularized by Japanese intellectuals putting together “Min”and “Zu” to form a word, which means the word “Minzu” is actually a product of translation, i.e. a special outcome of translingual cultural activities between Chinese, Japanese and western countries[8].

The word is widely used with different meanings in different situations. On the whole, there are two major meanings in broad and narrow sense. For broad sense, it means various communities coming into being through history or at different historic stages, such as primitive, ancient, modern
and contemporary nationalities, or even clans and tribes. It can also mean various people of a country or a district, for instance, Chinese or Arabic people. As for the narrow sense, it means all kinds of national communities, like han, Mongolian, man, hui or Tibetan in China. In the present paper, the research are conducted within the concept of Chinese nationalities.

According to Chinese official records, China now is composed of 56 different nationalities, such as han, man, hui, zhuang, as well as Tibetan, Mongolian, Uyghur.

Chinese folk traditional sports is a generic term for sports activities of various national groups in some districts in Chinese history. It mainly deals with activities for removal of diseases, fitness, wushu practice and recreation. Chinese folk traditional sports are a primary component of Chinese sports undertakings and they are precious cultural heritages of Chinese people. After the founding of new China, Chinese government pays special attention on developing folk traditional sports and has sorted out over 1000 events\(^9\), like Dragon boat racing, kites flying, yang ge, qi gong and Tai chi boxing.

The role and importance of traditional folk sports in the national campaign of fitness has been noticed problem of classification of folk traditional sports can foster its important role in giving better guidance for Chinese fitness exercises. Based on research on folk traditional sports in recent years, we elaborate and make comparison on common classifications of folk traditional sports so as to provide reference for future research.

Classification of Traditional Folk Sports

Theoretical Basis

Classification means to categorize things into more regular and scientific groups according to their different features. The classification of traditional folk sports aims to generalize its nature based on fully understanding of its common characters\(^10\). So in order to categorize traditional folk sports, we should first grasp its nature correctly, which is a series of practice promoting harmonious development of body and mind aimed at improvement of physical fitness and health, mainly through way of body exercises. Only by grasping the essential features of traditional folk sports can we distinguish it with other activities of production, living or art and can we elaborate basic questions within the scope of traditional folk sports with great depth from micro as well as macro perspectives.

The classification of traditional folk sports should be based on its nature, which is the primary premise to ensure the accuracy of classification, and unified standard should also be adopted. The division must be done in a hierarchical manner, which means the extension of each subterm should be mutually exclusive and the sum of the extension of the obtained subterms should be equal to the extension of the parent terms\(^11\).

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1) Major Classification Methods and Their Merits and Demerits

The concept and classification of traditional national sports have always been the key problem in the field of sports theory. However researchers haven’t come to a conclusion on this issue. Traditional folk sports activities deal with traditional culture and customs, mainly organized in activities of festivals celebrations, social contact between lovers, religion and sacrifices. Consequently traditional folk sports are characteristic in many perspectives, which shows great diversity in its function and form. The diversity of function means these sports activities can not only promote socializing of individuals but also normalize social values. The functions can be educative and political, improving people’s physique and quality. Function diversity leads to that of classification. The form of traditional folk sports is diverse, being recreational and competitive, collective and private, instrumental and free-handed, organized and casual. So there exist various opinions on the way of classification in research, but on the whole the starting point involves the following perspectives.
Classification Based on Nature and Function

According to the nature and function of traditional folk sports, we can classify them into three categories, namely recreation, competitiveness and fitness-health promoting.[12] Recreational sports are full of enjoyment, and they are conducted in a joyful atmosphere. Their participants hope to get refreshed and relaxed in these activities such as kicking Jianzi, Shabao and playing fire dragon. Competitive sports such as Pearl Ball, swing, Chinese wrestling and Shenu, are proceeded in competition terrain with special instrument and on other special conditions under the guidance of the game rules. And their participants compete with each other in wisdom, strength, skills and tactics. Fitness-health promoting sports such as Dao yin, Taichi boxing and Qi gong, are for the purpose of promoting fitness, keeping healthy, and preventing diseases.[13] This kind of classification can better emphasize the nature of recreation and culture in traditional folk sports. However, there is some drawbacks in this way of classification. For example, there lies some overlaps for some events according to this classifying standard, such as Wushu. Some events of Wushu can be classified into competitive sports, and then Nanquan, a subset of Wushu, can also be grouped into competitive sports, but when it is conducted in nongovernmental situation, it should be categorized into fitness-health promoting sports. So Wushu should be treated as a specific system as it is fully developed within China.

Classification Based on Ethnic Groups

In some research, traditional folk sports are classified according to ethnic groups, such as "Chinese Traditional Sports Records". Traditional sports events are listed through this way of classification, but without further secondary classification. As is known, in Chinese long history, there has been continuous communion and communication between different ethnic groups out of consideration of war or intermarriage, and because of that, traditional sports events have been continuously integrated and improved and a lot of events commonly shared and favored by different ethnic groups come into being, such as Dragon boat, flying kites and dragon and lion dance and so on. So these events are the crystallization of various ethnic groups and their classification cannot be conducted simply from the perspective of ethnic groups, for they cannot be categorized into any of a single ethnic groups.

Classification Based on Competitive Events

In some books and articles, traditional folk sports are introduced and classified according to competitive events in folk sports meetings; for example “Text Books for Folk Traditional Sports” and “Traditional Folk Sports Teaching and Training” introduce and elaborate some events according to this way of classification, but fail to mention specific rules and facilities of most sports events, unhelpful for discovery, development and population of these events. According to development stages at present, some events are classified into 5 categories, fossil, primitive, growing, relatively mature and mature types.[14] This method of classification conflicts with the principle that things are continuously developing. It is still needed to be studied whether all events that has been sorted out can be grouped into the mature type.

2) Classification Based on Participants’ Purpose and Development Stages of Rules

After detailed discussion and research on the above classification method, this paper categorizes traditional folk sports into three major events’ groups, namely competitive, recreational and Wushu, according to participants’ purpose and development stages of game rules, so as to give reference for further studies.

Competitive

Competitive sports emphasizes competitive skills, mainly referring to sports contest like athletic gymnastics. Here “competitive” means the essential characteristics of traditional folk sports events, like competition and confrontation. These events are held in competition terrain with special instruments, all regulated by certain rules of the events. They are carried out for competition of wisdom, strength, techniques and tactics, and the purpose lies in obtaining excellence and victory during the competition.[15] There are a large number of competitive traditional folk sports events,
with a wide range and different requirements for leading factors of competitive ability. Accordingly
we classify competitive traditional sports into two subclass, physical and technical. For athletes of
physical sports events, their improvement of competition results rely greatly on athletes’ quality.
Physical sports can further be classified into speed, strength and endurance, the first two of which are
“embodied in fast, rapid, resolute, strong and amazing strength, and the last features strong will and
sustainment of competitive intensity beyond ordinary human beings. Performance improvement for
technical sports athletes has high requirements on athletes’ quality as well as techniques and
skills[16]. Technical sports can also be divided into performance and confrontation; the former
involves accuracy and elegance, “abilities to complete special techniques with high accuracy and to
complete difficult move and display sports move elegantly”. Confrontation includes net screen,
simultaneous and fighting, displaying athletes ability to confront directly under certain conditions.

Recreational

Games are not only invented for recreation but also voluntary activities aiming at training survival
techniques and cultivating intelligence. Games classified into mental and active, are also kinds of
sports activity. The former includes playing chess, building blocks and playing cards and the latter is
mostly regulated, collective and competitive such as chasing, relay and activities using instruments
like balls, sticks and thread.

In this paper, relaxing sports and folk activities aiming at having fun through games are all
classified into recreational sports, which are less regulated and more for games and recreation.

We can again classify recreational sports into intellectual and active sports, and the latter contains
5 subclasses like running and jumping, hitting, lifting, dancing, and juggling (see Figure 2).

Running and jumping type: these sports activities are mainly carried out through running or
jumping with certain instruments or by participants themselves.

Hitting type: means to hit or collide with some instruments or parts of bodies barehanded or with
the help of certain tools, so as to get amused or keep feet.

Lifting type: this is a type of game and recreational sports events that people enforce their own
strength or compete with each other by means of holding or lifting something heavy or other
participant’s body.

Dancing type: namely sports dance, a combination of dance and traditional folk sports, aims to
promote mental and physical health in an artistic way.

Joggling type: entertainment sports events are generally active games including acrobatic shows.

Wushu

Wushu, i.e. Kungfu, martial arts, is a Chinese traditional sports event and a precious culture heritage
accumulated and enriched from long-term social practice with extremely wide mass base.

Wushu may originated from primitive societies when people fought against beasts with primitive
tools like sticks and poles. Later people invented weapons with more lethality to fight for treasures
with each other. Human beings not only made weapons but also accumulated some skills of attack,
defense through combats.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Wushu has been inherited, systemized and
developed as excellent national heritage. Martial arts associations of all levels has been established,
and China has special institutions to develop martial arts. Wushu has been listed as official
competition event and national martial arts competitions or performance conventions have been held
many times.

Wushu has an explicit sports attribute with rich connotation and deep moral, featuring in common
characteristics of keeping fit and healthy of human sports as well as Chinese cultural characteristics
of philosophy, science and art. It epitomizes Chinese wisdom in sports activities and reflects the
glory of national culture from a different perspective. Therefore, in a broad sense, Wushu is not only
a sports event, but also a national sports event, a precious cultural heritage from long term
accumulation of Chinese people [17].
There are many ways of classification for Wushu according to different standard of classification. Based on Chinese Library Classification (1999th edition), there are 6 categories of Wushu, namely Chinese boxing, apparatus Wushu, dual and collective Wushu performance, attack and defense Wushu and Wushu qigong (see Figure3).[18]

Chinese boxing, is a generic term for unarmed skills of Chinese Wushu. Influenced by many factors, it has developed into many schools of boxing in long term social practice with various styles and characteristics. Though varied with different features, boxing skills of different schools are comprised of techniques like hand and move model, skills of hand move, pace and kicking, as well as actions such as jumping, balance, falling and tumbling.

Apparatus Wushu, as its suggests, is an event carried out with certain apparatus and can further be classified into subclasses according to the instruments applied, namely knife, spear, sword, stick or soft weapons.

Dual Wushu, the event carried between two or more participants with fixed movements, which may be comprised of kicking, beating, wrestling and grabbing based on single practice of boxing or apparatus Wushu. There are three kinds of dual Wushu, barehanded dual, apparatus dual, barehanded and apparatus dual.

Attack and defense Wushu: it is an event with two or more participants hand in hand combating with each other using skills like Sanda. There is no fixed movement in this event.

Collective Wushu performance: it is an event of 6 or more participants perform with bare hands or instruments. Formation and pattern can be changed, and this event can be accompanied by music with well organized patterns and coordinated movements.

Wushu Qigong: Qigong is a kind of exercise developed from various life practices aiming at preventing and cure diseases, keeping healthy and prolonging life, developing potential by way of regulating mind, breath and body.
The present paper classifies Chinese traditional folk sports into game and recreational sports, competitive sports and Wushu. Game and recreational sports includes intellectual and active games, the latter covers running and jumping, hitting, lifting, dancing and juggling. These sports activities are performed to satisfy humans’ mental demands after they have acquired basic survival abilities. Competitive traditional folk sports includes strength and technique, the former including speed, strength and endurance and the latter covers performance and confrontation. Wushu are classified into 6 categories, Chinese boxing, apparatus Wushu, dual and collective Wushu performance, attack and defense Wushu and Wushu qigong.

There haven’t been any unified classification standard for Chinese traditional folk sports so far. These classification methods varies with different observing or research perspectives and various emphases but they are all for rapid and better development and promotion of traditional sports with life-oriented, social, and scientific demand of nation-wide fitness program. Traditional folk sports are a major component of Chinese traditional culture with deep cultural and historical meanings. In order to further develop traditional folk sports systemically and steadily, we suggest that relevant research groups and societies shall be established and we shall select, improve, advertise and recombine these sports events making them more scientific, standardized and social. Government should organize specialists and folk artists to reform the traditional sports events so as to better show their national characteristics and making them symbols of the relevant ethnic groups. Furthermore we should intensify the efforts in popularizing the more mature activities of fitness to serve more people.

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