

The Construction of Modern Health:

A Study on The Content Evolution of Women's Physical Education Textbooks in Modern China

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Abstract

During the Republic of China period, under the dual influence of Western cultural input and social ideological liberation, the compilation and implementation of women's physical education textbooks became a key factor in promoting women's physical liberation and social change. This study focuses on women's physical education textbooks, aiming to explore their dual role in the development of women's sports: on the one hand, textbooks closely link sports with patriotic consciousness through nationalist discourses such as "healthy women defending the country"; on the other hand, the systematic curriculum system based on textbooks and the establishment of professional colleges such as women's physical education normal schools have promoted the large-scale development of women's physical education and triggered deep-seated social changes. Women's physical education textbooks during the Republic of China period were not only a medium for the transmission of sports skills, but also a reflection of the transformation of gender concepts - its scientific transformation of traditional body concepts and health discourse promoted the transformation of women from "disciplined objects" to "autonomous and healthy subjects", providing a unique gender practice path for social change.

Keywords

Women's sports, physical education textbooks, sports ideas, sports health.

1. Introduction

From the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, driven by the dual influence of Western cultural input and the liberation of social thought, Chinese women's sports achieved a paradigm shift from the margins to the mainstream. This process not only gave rise to specialized women's sports organizations, but also promoted the formation of a textbook compilation system that interweaves local and foreign knowledge (Serra et al, 2022). During this period, the content of women's sports textbooks showed a significant modern transformation: on the one hand, Western sports represented by basketball, swimming, and dance were localized through the compilation of textbooks; on the other hand, traditional physical skills such as martial arts and gymnastics were included in women's sports courses after scientific transformation, reflecting the interactive tension between "Western learning coming to the East" and "traditional reconstruction".

The compilation of textbooks adopts a multi-knowledge production path, including both independent creation by domestic educators and systematic translation of Japanese, European and American sports literature. Its form has expanded from a single technical manual to a comprehensive teaching text that integrates anatomical and psychological theories. It is worth noting that the construction of gendered health concepts has always been running through the textbook reform: progressive training programs based on women's physiological

characteristics, graphic presentation methods that fit psychological cognition, and the deep integration of the discourse of "exercise to strengthen the body" and "health and national defense" mark the historical shift of women's bodies from traditional discipline objects to modern health subjects. This transformation process not only reflects the disciplinary exploration of modern Chinese physical education, but also reflects the complex connection between women's physical liberation and nation-state construction during the social transformation period.

This study takes the physical education textbooks and sports thoughts from the 1920s to the 1930s as the research objects, and deeply explores the characteristics of women's sports and the influence of women's sports thoughts. On the basis of inheriting the previous research on sports thoughts, it innovatively starts from women's physical education textbooks to analyze the characteristics of women's sports in the context of this period.

2. Overview of Women's Physical Education Textbooks during the Republic of China Period

As a relatively independent group of women in the social structure, given their special social and family responsibilities in the process of social development and progress, the social status of women has experienced a significant improvement in the past century, both at the international and domestic levels. Focusing on the publication and dissemination of women's sports textbooks from the 1920s to the 1940s, both competitive sports and mass sports benefited from the widespread dissemination effect of mass media.

Through these textbooks, women learned the theoretical and practical skills of women's sports and achieved outstanding achievements in the field of sports, which marked the rise of an unprecedented force. Since the 1920s, women's sports education has made significant progress in breadth and depth, and textbook construction has also made many achievements (Serra et al, 2022). During this period, various factors promoted the development of women's sports textbooks, and the number of publications has increased significantly compared with the past.

According to incomplete statistics, 20 women's physical education textbooks were published between 1920 and 1941. These textbooks are rich in content and diverse in form, covering the practice methods, teaching matters, and rules and standards of various sports such as basketball, swimming, and dance. From traditional sports to emerging sports, from foreign translations to the teaching of domestic experts and scholars, to sports illustrations and teaching papers, all are involved. By analyzing the development trend of the publishing industry for about 20 years since the 1920s, it can be observed that before the 1930s, although the publishing industry grew, its development speed was relatively slow. Entering the 1930s, with the further development of the economy and society, the publication volume of women's physical education textbooks gradually increased (Lodge & Reiss, 2021). However, with the outbreak of the war, the publication volume fell into a trough again.

This study first explored gymnastics and martial arts textbooks. Textbooks in this field are favored by the majority of women, and there are abundant relevant research literature. For example, journals such as "Diligence Sports Monthly" and "Women's Magazine" have published women's gymnastics teaching methods, and innovatively simplified and reorganized the traditional gymnastics and martial arts systems to create more refined textbooks. In 1936, Ruan Weicun's "Illustrated Guide to Women's Gymnastics" was not only suitable for housewives to exercise, but also for school girls to learn professional skills. Its action diagrams and text descriptions greatly facilitated the implementation of women's physical education (Yan et al, 2021).

At the same time, in order to promote women's sports, domestic scholars actively translated and compiled foreign teaching materials, such as the "A Wonderful Way to Relieve Women's

Physical Deformity: Balance Gymnastics" textbook published in the "Ta Kung Pao" in 1934. Looking back at this period, women's physical education textbooks have achieved significant evolution in both content and form. Through systematic compilation work, the types of textbooks have been enriched, and their professionalism and practicality have also been significantly improved (Lodge & Reiss, 2021).

Especially in the fields of gymnastics and swimming, the relevant textbooks fully take into account the specific needs of women, from simple analysis of movements to scientific teaching methods, which significantly promotes the popularization and progress of women's sports. These textbooks not only meet women's needs in fitness and beauty, but also provide them with convenient ways to learn and exercise. The diversification and specialization of textbooks have laid a solid foundation for the subsequent development of women's physical education.

3. Findings: Women's Physical Education Textbooks in the Republic of China

3.1. The content is more in line with women's sports standards

With the popularization of women's education and the improvement of their social status, physical education textbooks designed specifically for women have emerged. These textbooks pay more attention to women's characteristics and needs in content construction, including multiple dimensions such as physiology, psychology, and social roles. In the field of physical education, textbooks for women usually formulate more scientific and reasonable sports standards and teaching plans based on women's physical characteristics and athletic ability.

During this period, school physical education paid attention to the ability needs of female students at different stages of development, and formulated scientific sports standards accordingly. According to the "Detailed List of Physical Education for New Middle School Girls" compiled by the Ministry of Education, women's physical education courses not only include basic gymnastics, but also gradually introduce women's self-defense, dance, ball games and other projects. This series of projects aims to improve women's physique and fully considers women's physiological characteristics, including flexibility, coordination and endurance. At the same time, these projects are also committed to cultivating women's coordination, flexibility and self-protection ability, which is more in line with the normative requirements of women's sports.

Therefore, as society pays more attention to women's sports, more and more women's sports textbooks begin to pay attention to the differences in women's body structure, psychological emotions, physiological fitness, etc., update the content of textbooks and sports standards, and design sports projects and training methods suitable for women. This not only reflects the awakening of women's consciousness and physical liberation, but is also the inevitable result of social progress.

3.2. Maintaining body shape and paying attention to health are the main motivations for women to participate in sports

In the traditional ethical system, women are advocated to practice customs such as "foot binding" and "chest binding", which reflects the pursuit of the ideal female image in Chinese feudal society, that is, having a child-like body shape, conveying a symbolic meaning of desirelessness, innocence, and holiness, and avoiding excessive attention to the body. However, since the 1920s and 1930s, with the popularization of the concept of "healthy beauty", the word "health" has begun to be used to advocate women's participation in sports. Although the word 'health' is very common, its deep meaning is not widely understood. 'Health' is the opposite of weakness and contains the connotation of movement and vitality (Lodge & Reiss, 2021). The core of this concept is to promote the healthy growth of the body to achieve a healthy and

natural body shape, challenging the traditional social aesthetic standard of women as "weak and powerless". The popularization of the concept of "healthy beauty" reflects that women have begun to pay attention to the shaping of their own bodies and pursue a healthy lifestyle, thus promoting the rise of national fitness and forming a new social outlook. This concept also promotes the awakening of women's self-awareness. By participating in various sports activities, women have experienced strong power both physically and mentally, thereby improving their status in society and family and enhancing their self-identity.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the issue of women's health received widespread attention from all walks of life. There are many discussions on the ways to achieve women's health, including reasonable work, a good mental state, a balanced diet and adequate sleep (Wang et al, 2021. pp. 35-46). As an influential publication at the time, Women's Magazine had many reports emphasizing the important role of sports in promoting women's health. Traditional ethics believed that women could enjoy life without hard work, but Ye Zengjun pointed out that this concept actually restricted women's ability to survive independently and only gave them superficial comfort. Sports made up for the shortcomings of women's lives, allowing them to fully exercise their body functions through daily activities and improve their quality of life. There were more than ten reports on women's health in Women's Magazine.

Modern educational institutions and public sports organizations have begun to pay attention to the development of women's sports activities. Given the differences in the physiological structure of men and women, traditional male sports training methods are not completely applicable to women. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on sports activities for women and promote these appropriate sports methods. Teachers and parents should work together to guide children to choose appropriate sports and cultivate their habit of continuous participation in sports activities. In addition, the article "Healthy Construction" also emphasizes that health is achieved through continuous physical exercise. Especially urban women, they need to improve their physical strength by participating in sports activities such as hiking and gymnastics. At least ten minutes of physical exercise every day has a positive significance for maintaining and improving health. Young women should adopt a scientific lifestyle, ensure adequate sleep time, and strengthen their physical strength through activities such as hiking and walking. Therefore, women's health is closely related to physical exercise, which has become a key means for women to maintain physical health (Yan et al, 2021).

Maintaining body shape and paying attention to health have become the core motivations for women to participate in sports activities. This view has had a profound impact on the development of contemporary women's sports. The two main motivations for modern women to participate in sports activities are to maintain body shape and pursue health, and based on personal interests. With the improvement of women's social status and the widespread dissemination of the concept of "gender equality", health has become one of the important criteria for modern life. Women shape and pursue body aesthetics through participating in sports activities. In addition, people generally agree that "interest is the best mentor", so in the education system, schools set up a variety of physical education courses to meet students' interests and hobbies. For women's physical education, it is necessary to comprehensively, deeply, systematically and accurately analyze the behavioral characteristics of female college students in the process of physical education teaching, and use diversified teaching methods and strategies to implement teaching activities in a targeted manner, so as to cultivate their habit of lifelong physical exercise.

In the process of physical education teaching, teachers not only bear the responsibility of imparting sports technical knowledge and skills, but also shoulder the mission of stimulating students' interest in sports. They guide students to exercise scientifically based on their personal preferences and cultivate students' fitness attitudes, abilities and habits. The goal is to enable students to accumulate a wealth of fitness knowledge in campus life and deeply

experience the fun of fitness through practice, thereby laying a solid foundation for lifelong sports and creating the necessary prerequisites.

It can be seen that with the increasing emphasis on body shape maintenance and health, the female group has begun to abandon the traditional optimistic attitude and actively participate in the trend of sports. Sports activities have become a key way to pursue a healthy body. This concept has a profound impact on modern women. They take health as their primary goal and choose and participate in sports activities according to their personal interests.

4. Discussions: Roles of Women in The Development of Sports During the Republic of China

Under the current situation, more and more people with lofty ideals tried to save the country through sports, and sports were given strong political significance. At the same time, women were included in the ranks of patriotism and national salvation, and ideological liberation movements such as the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement also provided women with more ideological weapons and space for action. From the previous description, it can be seen that during this period, educators and sports experts improved and remade women's sports teaching materials, thereby promoting the rise and development of women's sports ideas.

4.1. Systematization of women's sports based on teaching materials

The Republic of China period was a critical stage in the development of women's sports education. During this period, China began to strengthen sports education for women, and promoting the development of women's sports became a new trend. This change not only challenged the traditional role of women, but also opened up a new path for the health of the whole people and the future of the country. The number of women's sports textbooks has increased significantly from the relatively small number in the early Republic of China to the obvious increase in the 1930s, reflecting the increase in government promotion and social acceptance (Serra et al, 2022). These textbooks not only cover basic sports theory and sports skills, but also include knowledge in sports psychology, physiology, etc., providing women with more comprehensive sports education.

However, with the gradual introduction of Western sports ideas, some textbooks gradually emphasized the combination of sports and education, theory and practice; distinguished the physiological differences between men and women, and better provided theoretical support for the development of women's sports; the sports in the textbooks are also more diversified, such as basketball, volleyball, track and field, swimming, tennis, etc., to meet the sports needs of women at different levels.

4.2. Camp construction: Women's sports schools are springing up

The rise of women's sports thoughts has promoted the construction of women's sports schools. In the early years of the Republic of China, some knowledgeable people began to try to establish women's sports schools, recruiting female students to teach sports theory knowledge and physical exercise, and the construction of women's sports schools has entered the initial development. In 1912, Shanghai Women's Sports School was established, which was the first sports school in my country specifically for women. Since then, similar sports schools have been established in Beijing, Guangzhou and other places. The establishment of these schools has provided women with the opportunity to receive physical education and played a positive role in improving women's physical fitness and status (Serra et al, 2022).

In the Provincial First Women's Normal School, physical education teaching is not only related to the physical training of students, but also to their future teaching ability as teachers. However, the school did not hire a special physical education teacher in the last semester, but was only

guided by the Sports Committee, which was considered inappropriate. Therefore, it is recommended that professional physical education teachers should be hired to be responsible for physical education teaching to ensure the quality of teaching, showing the importance of provincial departments to this situation (Wang et al, 2021. pp. 35-46).

After the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, my country entered a difficult period of resistance. During this period, all walks of life were hit by the Anti-Japanese War and gradually shrank, and the construction of women's sports schools was no exception. Despite various challenges, women's sports schools still held their ground. During this period, women's sports schools were not only responsible for physical education, but also undertook the important tasks of cultivating patriotism and improving national quality. Students from many women's sports schools played an active role in the Anti-Japanese War and made significant contributions to national independence and national liberation.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the historical process of the development of Chinese women's sports in the first half of the 20th century, revealing the process of women's sports gradually gaining social attention and taking root in the Chinese social and cultural soil under the influence of Western culture and the liberation of social thought. The study found that the number of women's sports textbooks increased significantly during the Republic of China period, and the content also tended to be diversified, covering a variety of sports such as basketball, swimming, and dance. With the deepening of the understanding of the value of women's sports, sports activities are no longer regarded as a marginal leisure method, but have become a key way to improve women's health and physical fitness. In addition, light equipment exercises and freehand exercises became the forms of exercise commonly adopted by women at that time. These exercise methods fully considered the physiological characteristics of women, aiming to effectively improve health while avoiding the possible harm caused by excessive exercise.

In summary, the development of women's sports during the Republic of China period not only reflects the awakening of women's self-consciousness, but is also an important symbol of social progress. At present, women's sports are moving towards a more professional, diversified and personalized direction, and the lessons learned from this historical stage are still of great reference value for the future development of women's sports.

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