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# PROFESSIONAL WUSHU ATHLETES: POTENTIAL ATHLETIC/PERSONAL DISSONANCE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Kinesiology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

by

Yang Zhang (Sunny)

August 2014

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## The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

# PROFESSIONAL WUSHU ATHLETES: POTENTIAL ATHLETIC/PERSONAL

# DISSONANCE

By

Yang Zhang (Sunny)

# APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY

# SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2014

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#### ABSTRACT

#### PROFESSIONAL WUSHU ATHLETES: POTENTIAL ATHLETIC/PERSONAL DISSONACE by

#### Yang Zhang (Sunny)

The success of Chinese professional athletes is attributable to the government-run elite sport system; it is seen as one of the most effective and successful systems at nurturing high-skilled athletes. However, within the Chinese professional sport system, tensions between athletes' athletic skills and overall personal development have been widely documented. Among all studies, very few have employed in-depth interviews with professional wushu athletes. In this study, the researcher utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with professional wushu athletes from three of the 25 professional wushu teams in mainland China. The study was conducted in order to understand the potential conflicts between athletes' athletic skills development and overall personal development. Findings revealed that athletes bear the training at great cost to their future potential as self-sufficient members of Chinese society. Their academic, social, and vocational skills are subject to deep neglect that negatively impacts their post-competition careers. The system considers investment in preparation for the post-competitive lives of the athletes to be a distraction from, or even an impediment to, their success in competition. It is suggested that the Chinese sport system undertake a review and reformation of its approach to wushu training to provide athletes with the skills needed to successfully navigate a life outside of athletics.

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#### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

The outstanding performances of elite Chinese athletes in several recent Olympic Games have impressed the sporting world. The success of these athletes is attributable to the government-run Chinese elite sport system; it is seen as one of the most, if not *the* most, effective and successful at nurturing high skilled professional athletes. The Chinese elite sport system, officially named the State General Administration of Sport (SGAS), is organized directly under the state council (The State Council, 2008). The Ministry of Labor (1992) defines Chinese professional athletes as those who study, live, train, and are governed by professional sport teams and whose salary and other spending are funded by national fiscal expenditures.

While this sport system has been successful in developing athletes' professional skills, scholars call for reform due to the enormous sacrifices it demands of Chinese elite athletes (Di, 2011; Qi, 2010). A review of literature revealed how professional athletes may lose their basic rights as children under this system (Hong, 2004). Issues such as retirement, education, and inappropriate communication with the media have also created pressure to change the system (Yi, 2011). One such instance was revealed recently in a news conference with Ye Shiwen, a female Chinese swimmer who won two gold medals in the 2012 Olympics. Her response to every question asked by reporters was, "I am excited, and the training was very hard" (NS091, 2012, p. 1). One reporter even asked her if she was a robot who knew only training, competing, and winning medals (NS091, 2012). Jian and Qi (2011) described that,

during international competitions in the 1960s-1980s, Chinese athletes and coaches were not permitted to go out alone. Any interviews sought with Chinese athletes had to be approved by their coaches and Chinese authorities. Additionally, everything they said and did was strictly controlled. In the 1990 Olympic Games, diving champion Fu Mingxia was directed to answer any and all questions with "I don't know." Consequently, she answered "I don't know" even to questions such as "Do you miss your father and mother?," "How old are you?," "Is your training hard?." A U.S. newspaper satirized the interview by titling its coverage of Fu Mingxia, "*One Can Only Say 'Don't Know' Chinese Girl Won the Championship*" (Jian & Qi, 2011, p. 128).

Under this isolated, quasi-military<sup>1</sup> training system, Chinese professional athletes focus most of their time on training and competing, leaving little time for education or other activities (Wan, 2012). Therefore, it is an "open secret" that most elite athletes obtain diplomas without completing the official educational requirements. Huang and Wang (2012) claimed that even though the sport system has now addressed athletes' education and retirement issues by implementing new policies, these policies are not really beneficial unless they take athletes' overall personal development into account. Moreover, Sun (2012) and Sun and Du (2012) suggested that the entire sports system needs reform, beginning with addressing athletes' overall personal development as the foremost factor and avoiding the tying of athletes' personal interests to a team or national goal.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Although quasi-military may be thought a value-laden term, its use is prevalent in academic research, and it is what many athletes used in interviews.

The researcher is one of only a handful of former professional athletes in a position to conduct academic research on the population of professional athletes. Because professional wushu athletes are almost completely absent from positions as researchers, this researcher was uniquely able to collect valuable information regarding the potential conflicts between the overall personal development and athletic skill development of professional wushu athletes that result under the Chinese elite sport system.

This thesis may be of interest to people who call for reform in the Chinese professional sports system because it gives a voice to professional athletes. This study could also be attractive to Chinese professional athletes who might be the direct beneficiaries of the system's reformation.

#### **Study Rationale**

The effects of systemic deprioritization of athletes' fundamental education, ability to form and maintain normal interpersonal relationships, and career preparation have been previously explored; however, studies employing in-depth interviews and direct exploration of the professional wushu athletes' own perspectives have rarely been undertaken.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, the tension between Chinese professional wushu athletes' athletic skills and overall personal development were examined, utilizing a semi-structured interview approach. To fully understand the relationship between athletes' wushu skills and overall personal development, this thesis first briefly addresses social and

historical aspects of this elite sport system and wushu, Chinese martial arts. Within this broader context, an understanding of how the system was established, the nature of the social environment, its purpose, changes made along the way, and the conflicts between the professional athletes' athletic development and their overall personal development become clearer.

Semi-structured interviews with professional wushu athletes were conducted in order to understand their opinions and attitudes toward (a) their education and training, (b) the development, or lack thereof, of social skills under the sport training system, and (c) any conflict between the development of athletic skills and vocational skills. In this study, the researcher attempted to understand what best serves the mutual interest of athletic skills development and overall personal development and where the "balance point" between them might lie, from the athletes' own perspectives.

#### **Definition of Terms**

 Well rounded development (Chinese: 全面发展) refers to moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education, and they are the criteria for overall personal development in youth education (Chinese: 德, 智, 体, 美, 劳) (Han & Guo, 2003; Sun, 2010). These criteria are the most often repeated and followed in the educational system for Chinese students in general and have also been applied to Chinese professional athletes. The well-rounded developmental goal

was proposed during the "Reform and Opening up Policy"<sup>2</sup> in 1978, and it has become a widespread slogan in mainland China.

- 2. *Intellectual education* (Chinese: 智育) governs the imparting of cultural and scientific knowledge and skills to students for developing their intellectual capacity; it is the most important component of education (Zhang, 2012).
- Social skills (Chinese: 社交技能) are generally regarded as being the ability to interact with other people in appropriate and effective ways (Segrin, 1992, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985, 1989).
- Labor education's (Chinese: 劳育) goal is to nurture positive attitudes towards work and the skills to accomplish it. This prepares them for future employment and also contributes to their overall personal development (Han & Guo, 2003; Sun, 2010; Xu, 1985).
- 5. *Chinese professional athletes* (Chinese: 中国专业运动员) are those who study, live, train, and are governed by, professional sport teams, and whose salary and other spending are funded through national fiscal expenditures (Ministry of Labor, 1992).
- 6. *Wushu* (Chinese: 武术) encompasses a set of attack and defensive martial skills that have been handed down from generation to generation in Chinese society, including basic attack and defensive movements, a background in traditional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The "Reform and Opening up" refers to the economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping, the nation's leader after the Mao Zedong era ended. Economic reforms include reforms within China that involved the decollectivization of agriculture, the privatization and contracting out of industry, and the opening of China to foreign investment. The "Reform and Opening up" policy has delivered an unprecedented economic growth over the past three decades in China.

Chinese culture, and fundamental physical and mental training and conditioning (Li, 2006).

- 7. Competitive wushu, (Chinese: 竞技武术) also called wushu sport, refers to elite training and standing in wushu athleticism, intended to enhance wushu skills for the purpose of attaining outstanding achievements in sporting competitions. Competitive wushu emphasizes professionalization, high proficiency in fundamental skills, physical endurance, competitive motivation, and psychology. Originating in the 1950s, it has become a fully developed sport system (Zhang, 2004). Competitive wushu includes two distinct disciplines: *taolu* (prearranged performance routines conducted on a regulation carpet) and *sanda* (freestyle fighting between two people on a raised stage). Interestingly, in July 2011, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that wushu and seven other sports would be added to the Olympic shortlist for inclusion in 2020 (Zhao, 2011). However, in December 2012, according to the scheme of the International Wushu Federation (IWUF), only four events of wushu taolu discipline were recommended to the IOC because wushu sanda had not vet included women's events in world and continental competitions (Wang, 2012).
- 8. Wushu taolu (Chinese: 武术套路) "is a set of connecting stylized movements choreographed according to certain laws, embodying the philosophical connotation of attack and defense" (International Wushu Federation, 2013, para. 1).

#### Limitations

The limitations faced by this study include

- The small sample size. This study employed qualitative, in-depth interviews, so the sample size was statistically small. It should also be noted that the number of wushu athletes who merit and receive training under the official system and attain high levels of competitive ability is itself an elite subset of the population who may practice wushu recreationally or non-competitively.
- The translation and idiomatic shift. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, yet the final writing is in English. It is therefore possible that the meaning or expression of important ideas and themes in this paper may deviate somewhat from the interviewees' intended meaning.
- 3. The seasonality. The National Games was hosted in 2013, and during that year, team coaches and management were tending to focus all efforts and attention on the athletes who would compete in the National Games. Other athletes might return home or practice on their own. Athletes' attitudes and thoughts during this year may vary relative to the other three years of the competition cycle.
- 4. The lack of representation for social or ethnic minorities. The selected three teams were not in areas with significant populations of ethnic minorities, and the interview subjects were predominately of the Han ethnicity.
- 5. The researcher's "insider" status. The researcher was a professional wushu taolu athlete for almost six years. The "insider" status of the researcher has the potential to introduce bias and preconceptions into the data. The potential for

bias or preconception may influence what questions the researcher asked and how the researcher interpreted the data and composed the results.

Even though the "insider" status might impact the result and is seen as one of the limitations of this study, it allowed the researcher to gather data not obtained by other researchers. Participants likely felt more relaxed and comfortable sharing information with a former member, and it was easy to establish rapport and trust between the researcher and the participants. In addition, to have a similar background with the interviewees helped the researcher quickly grasp important information provided by the participants and assisted the researcher to probe deeper in areas interested.

#### Delimitations

- The study did not cover the discipline of wushu sanda, since the training methodologies and focus differ vastly from the discipline of wushu taolu. Wushu sanda is perceived and promoted as a combat sport while wushu taolu is more closely aligned with the goal to pursue height, difficulty, artistry, and uniqueness (Li, 2006).
- 2. Wushu teams from Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan as well as the People's Liberation Army were not represented in this study. Rest of the Chinese professional wushu taolu athletes were either on provincial teams (n = 22), autonomous regional teams (n = 5), or municipal teams (n = 4), total N = 31. Within the 31 professional teams, there were only 25 professional wushu teams. The study drew on 3 professional teams from the 25 provincial, autonomous

regional, and municipal wushu teams from the mainland that were administered by the Chinese sport system.

3. The researcher limited participants in the study to active Chinese professional wushu taolu athletes from three professional wushu teams in mainland China, including elite wushu athletes of both genders and all ages who are actively competing. During the time they were in the professional team, these athletes lived and trained in the same environment as professional athletes from other sports, as the National Games includes all Olympic sports, with the addition of wushu (Zhao, 2011).

#### Chapter 2

#### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this study was to understand the conflicts between the development of athletes' athletic skills and their overall personal development, using a semi-structured interview approach. The first section in this chapter provides references that give context regarding the historical and social environment, and systems, within which Chinese professional athletes undergo their personal and The second section briefly reviews the literature that professional development. describes wushu as a competitive sport to shed light on the daily activities, training regimen, and the physical and mental challenges and responsibilities that the interviewees face during their development. The third section examines how various scholars have approached the relationship between athletes' education and training. The fourth section describes research on the effect of the system's quasi-military governance and training-imposed isolation on the development of the athletes' social skills. Then, issues in the literature that relate to retirement or subsequent employment are presented, which indicate the importance of developing vocational skills for post-competition careers. Finally, the semi-structured interview method is addressed before the conclusion.

#### **History of the Chinese Sport System**

After the establishment of People's Republic of China, the All-China Sports Federation (ACSF) was constructed according to the former framework of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation (CNAAF) of the Republic of China (Sun & Zhao,

1999). In August 1950, the ACSF engaged in an exchange with the U.S.S.R, sending a delegation to study the Soviet sports system, and the Soviet Union sent a delegation to China to give seminars relating to administration, athlete and judge ranking, and training systems for competition sports (Lin, Du, Xu, Wang, & Ye, 2000). However, like the original CNAAF, the ACSF was a non-government organization, expected to promote sport activities among ordinary people for military and economic development.

By July 1952, the political "two Chinas" issue had fully emerged, where both the ACSF group (in mainland China) and the CNAAF group (in Taiwan) each claimed the exclusive right to represent China in international competition. The "two Chinas" issue emphasized the importance of, and close ties between, international policy and sport to Chinese officials, and mainland China's government quickly established the Sports Ministry (later to become the State General Administration of Sport (SGAS), an official government organization, to replace the non-government organization, the ACSF, in November that same year (Zhang, 2007). He Long was appointed the first minister of this sport system.<sup>3</sup> He had been 1 of 10 marshals in the army and 1 of the 15 top national leaders just below the position of Chairman Mao Ze Dong. According to the policies of the new China, the purpose of the SGAS was as much political as it was professional. The development of this sport system as a social institution had been greatly influenced by the ideals of the Communist Party; therefore, this research also considers the development of the SGAS vis à vis the historical evolution of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> He was Vice President of the People's Republic of China National Defense Committee and Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China from 1954 until he was persecuted in 1969.

Chinese society.

#### The initial development of the SGAS (1952-1966).

The emergence of the "two Chinas" issues on the international political stage strongly influenced the founding and policies of the SGAS, but meanwhile, the sports system of the Soviet Union accelerated its initial development and focused on results and achievement. In 1952, the Soviet Union placed second on the Olympic medal table in its first participation and accumulated points on par with the U.S. team (W. Fan, H. Fan, & Lu, 2010). The Soviet Union's success inspired China's ambitions to quickly raise its international reputation and be successful in the international sports realm, even though the country had only very limited resources. Thus, the Chinese delegation visited Moscow on their way home from the 1952 Olympic Games to study the Soviet sports system.

Ultimately, the Chinese adopted and integrated the Soviet approach, including its training, competition, ranking, and administrative systems into its own programs (Lin et al., 2000). For instance, the Soviet Union at the time required government bureaux above the county level to establish sports committees. This style of sports administration fit the Chinese top-down, centralized style of government perfectly. In 1956, the SGAS issued general rules to guide each province, city, municipality, and county to establish a subsidiary GAS at each level, establishing the elite sports system as a pyramid-like continuum. Because China actively attempted to avoid connections with, or exposure to, countries that either had capitalist systems or did not establish diplomatic relations with China, the Soviet model provided the most accessible

template.

During this period of the SGAS's development, the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine occurred from 1959 to1961. These historical events were disastrous for China and its people; the resulting financial shortfalls and famine culminated in 45 million deaths (Dikotter, 2010). In response to famine and financial crises, the government-run sports system changed its policies to concentrate its limited resources on producing elite athletes for international sport events (Fan et al., 2010).

During the decade of 1952-1962, the volume and frequency of China's main international sports competitions and activities were 76% with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries (Lin et al., 2000). However, in 1963, China began to have sports competitions with not only the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries (a total of 26 % of the total international sports competitions and activities) but also with Asian, African, and Latin American countries (a total of 74 % of the total international sports competitions and activities) since Indonesia hosted the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) in 1963.

GANEFO was proposed by the President of Indonesia in 1962 as a counterpart or competitor to the Olympic Games and it was clear then, if not before, that standing in sports and political alignment were intertwined. Of the 68 countries invited, 51 countries responded favorably to their invitations to the GANEFO, (at the time this represented more than 70% population of the world) with 48 countries joining the first GANEFO event in Jakarta, Indonesia, in November of 1963 (Sie, 1978). Meanwhile, the IOC saw the GANEFO as a threat to the Olympic Games. Therefore, after the

first GANEFO, the IOC stated that athletes who participated in GANEFO were ineligible to go to the Olympic Games and they also suspended Indonesia, an IOC member. The IOC's actions notwithstanding, Chinese elite sport attained its second great success when Chinese athletes returned home from GANEFO with 66 gold medals and first place on the medal table. In addition, China also placed first with 113 gold medals in the first Asian GANEFO (a different and regional event from the general, original GANEFO) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 1966 (Discover, 2008). Seventeen Asian countries participated the First Asian GANEFO, which was seen as a counter to the Asian Games which were held under the auspices of the IOC. The second GANEFO games never occurred and the GANEFO organization collapsed due to the withdrawal of Indonesia in 1965 and China in 1966. China dropped out of the GANEFO because of the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from May of 1966 to October of 1976, described in the next section.

#### The development of the SGAS under the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

The 10 years of the Cultural Revolution obliterated much of previous Chinese society. Every societal tradition and institution, ranging from education, culture, industry, and agriculture, to arts and sports, was purged and remade in the philosophical image of the Revolutionaries. Because sports activities were seen as bourgeois entertainment, the previous achievements of sports were completely disavowed, and the existing sports system was critiqued for disengaging with the leadership of the Communist party (Mi, 2009). Competitive sport development under the Cultural Revolution can be separated into two distinct time periods: before, and

after the famous "Ping Pong Diplomacy" in 1971 (Dai & Ling, 2008).

During the first part of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1971, China's participation in all international sporting events was canceled, most sport teams were disbanded and the existing sport regulation system completely collapsed. Several coaches, authorities, and three famous table tennis players were persecuted and died. Minister He Long was himself tortured both mentally and physically, and died on June 9th, 1969 (Mi, 2009). The government imposed martial law from March 1967 to August 1972 in response to the civil disorder resulting from the disruptions created by the Cultural Revolution (Wang, Y., 2010). The first half of the Cultural Revolution evoked such fear of persecution that it almost eliminated elite sports in China entirely. Nevertheless, "Ping Pong Diplomacy" illuminated the development of competitive sports.

The events that would give rise to "Ping Pong Diplomacy" took place in Nagoya, Japan, from March 28 to April 7 1971, when both the United States and China participated in the 31st World Table Tennis Championships. During this period of the Cold War, China and the Soviet Union had faced off against each other in military clashes along their common border; meanwhile President Nixon was trying to find a way to extricate the United States from the Vietnam War. Both nations realized that better mutual relations were essential to enabling each country to deal with its challenges, but the level of mutual distrust was so high that official overtures, whether from Chairman Mao or President Nixon, were met with refusal and failure. Fortunately for all, during the Cultural Revolution, Beijing had nevertheless retained

membership in a very few international sports federations, including the World Table Tennis Federation. During the 31st World Table Tennis Championships, Glenn Cowan, a table tennis player from southern California, missed his own bus and had to jump onto the Chinese team's bus instead. Zhuang Zedong, then a three-time world champion, took the initiative and greeted Cowan with a gift of a silk painting. Cowan was overjoyed to have received a token of friendship from Zhuang, but had nothing at hand to present in trade. The following day, Cowan made a specific effort to find Zhuang and present him with a t-shirt, printed with a peace symbol and words "Let it These informal efforts by two international athletes led eventually to the Be." invitation of the U.S table tennis team to visit China in 1971. This table tennis team was the first official American delegation of any kind to visit China since the establishment of the new People's Republic of China. The actions and achievements of "Ping Pong Diplomacy" spoke louder than a hundred diplomatic pronouncements would have in expressing the desire of mainland China for more normal relations with the U.S. (Xu, G.Q., 2008).

"Ping Pong Diplomacy" opened the door to diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China, and consequently, some former sport authorities in China, who had earlier been persecuted, were gradually returned to their former positions within the SGAS. This led to a short recovery from the previous deterioration of the elite sports system.

By November 1973, China had renewed its membership in the Asian Games Federation, and attended its first Asian Games since 1949. However, as China's participation within these Games emphasized "Friendship First, Competition Second,"

the competition during this period was not taken too seriously on a professional level; the political influence, however, was heavily emphasized. From 1971-1976, while almost everything including the most important internal components of the SGAS was still negatively affected by the Cultural Revolution, elite sports survived and recovered somewhat, nurtured on account of their diplomatic and political influence.

#### "Juguo Tizhi," the whole nation support sport system period (1979-present).

The concept of "Juguo Tizhi" was officially explained by the Minister of Sport in 2001, directing central and local sport governing bodies to utilize their power to channel adequate financial and human resources in support and development of elite sports for the overall glory of China (Fan et al., 2010). Well before this official pronouncement, however, the functional reality of this concept had already begun to find expression, starting at the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Eager to project an image of competitiveness with western powers, China started to make great efforts toward social and economic reform. In 1979, China renewed its membership of the IOC, as participation and success in international sports competition was seen as one way to project that image onto the world stage despite its relative economic poverty. In February 1979, this priority was made openly clear for the first time during a national sports conference that elite sports should have priority over mass sports (Fan et al., 2010). Consequently, the acquisition of gold medals in international sports competitions became the highest priority of the SGAS, for the purpose of introducing a new image of China to the Chinese people, as well as to the rest of the world at large.

Beginning in 1982, China won 61 gold medals in the Asian Games and for the first time topped the medal table, and since then, China has maintained its leading position in this realm of Asian sports. In 1984, when the U.S.S.R. boycotted, China attended and claimed both its first Olympic gold medal and placed fourth on the overall medal table (Curriculum Committee of Sport History, 1996). The Chinese people met this achievement with great enthusiasm, even though attaining fourth place at the medal table was largely due to the absence of the Soviet Union and East Germany. Subsequently, in 1985, an "Olympic Strategy" was produced to further confirm the idea that the priority of use for the nation's limited sports resources should be toward winning international gold medals (Fan et al., 2010).

The central government made the acquisition of gold medals the central and primary objective of the SGAS; subsequently, progress towards and maintenance of that goal became the driving force behind the organization and design of all SGAS policies and systems. For instance, Minister Li Menghua was expelled from the SGAS and replaced by a new Minister after a relatively poor showing in the 1988 Olympic Games, where China won only five gold medals and placed 11th on the medal table (Hong, 2004). Arguably, Minister Li was not to blame; the presence of strong competition from the U.S., Soviet Union, and East Germany was the practical reason why China fell to 11th place from 4th on the medal table, but the central government accepted no excuse. The winning of Olympic medals, preferably gold medals, remains the overriding priority today, and failure often follows a public apology or sometimes expulsion. For example, the Minister of the General Administration of

Sport of Henan province apologized that athletes in his province did not obtain any of China's 51 gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (Zhong, 2008).

While obtaining gold medals remained the central government's unflinching mission for the SGAS, practical changes in the organization began in 1993. Before 1993, elite sports were all administered by the central government, funded and run under the planned economy. However, increasing economic openness steered the SGAS to face an increasingly market-driven economy. Therefore, the idea of the "Chinese Sports Market" was raised at the national sports conference for the first time in 1993 and approved two years later by the China State Council (Fan et al., 2010). The SGAS was directed to create western-style elite sport clubs, operating in relation to the market-oriented economy, albeit initially only for certain highly commercialized sports, such as soccer and basketball. The ultimate goal, however, remained the acquisition of Olympic gold medals.

In July of 2001, China won the bid to host the Olympic Games in Beijing, and winning second place at the medal table in the 2004 Olympic Games was a stepping stone for China to top the Olympic medal table for the first time in 2008. Although many scholars now call for system reforms, none dared to challenge this system even a little prior to 2008, since the Chinese were so dearly focused on topping the medal table as they hosted the 2008 Olympic Games. Afterwards, however, the Minister of Sport said that while China would maintain "Juguo Tizhi," it was also open to suggestions for improvement (Xu, L. Q., 2008).

#### Wushu, Chinese Martial Arts, in Chinese History and Society

Wushu, better known in the west as Kung Fu, is an important component of Chinese culture heritage and a complex system encompassing many disciplines. The continued practice and pursuit of wushu is considered a Chinese national treasure, an art and tradition for all Chinese regardless of social standing, not the privilege of a select few. It has become a widely popularized modern global sport and enjoys mass participation in China.

The western concept of sports and sporting competition was introduced to China after the First Opium War in 1840; wushu underwent a process of modernization against the background of massive social transformation. During this process, part of the practice of wushu gradually developed into a form of sport, with its basic movements of attack and defense and traditional Chinese culture as its foundation. Competitive wushu evolved further after the establishment of People's Republic of China.

# Process of wushu's modernization under the background of massive social transformation (1840-1952).

Wushu has a long tradition, yet it is not static; it lives in its practitioners who are in turn affected by changing society, and therefore social transformations influence the development of wushu. One very significant event was the introduction of the western concept of organized sport, one of many western ideas introduced after the time of the first Opium war in 1840. Exposure to western ideas also brought with it exposure to western industrialized technologies; firearms soon supplanted wushu and its tools as the primary weapon of the Chinese military.

In 1901, the Chinese military abolished its traditional national wushu exam, used since the Tang Dynasty (702 B.C. to 1901A. D.) for selecting its military officials. As a side effect of this abandonment, wushu and other traditional sports widely disappeared from Chinese public schools. At the same time, western sports were introduced to both the military and schools, and therefore wushu and other traditional Chinese sports lost much of their prominence in Chinese society (Curriculum Committee of Sport History, 1996).

Wushu enjoyed a resurgence about a decade later, after the success of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's bourgeois democratic Xinhai Revolution in 1911. The Republic of China was formally established in the wake of this revolution, which ended over 2000 years of imperial reign in China. In 1915, the new government's National Education Association passed a resolution that wushu be made an integral part of physical education in schools, and the Chinese Department of Education ordered that wushu teachers be trained in normal universities (Zhou, 2003). According to Filipiak (2010), one characteristic of the education system during this time period was a militaristic style influenced by countries such as Germany and Japan.

"New Wushu" was to combine the western approach to organized sports with traditional wushu techniques and training, and Ma Liang was the first person tasked with administering and accelerating the development and modernization of wushu (Ma, 2012).

As acceptance and influence of western sports progressed rapidly in China, wushu also developed through active promotion by the Chinese government and elite

public figures. Conflicts between indigenous and foreign sports inevitably arose due to cultural differences, just as they did in every other area of culture where the values of the West and China differed from one another (Chinese: 土洋之争). Students returning home from overseas argued that sports in general should be reformed around global or western scientific standards, and largely denied the cultural or competitive value of wushu while the national essence schools acknowledged the value of sport sciences, but nevertheless continued to support wushu. Thus, "scientific wushu" was born of this period, and consequently the development of wushu was accelerated by the practice and application of sport sciences (Zhou, 2003).

Two wushu organizations played a crucial role in transmission of wushu into the 20th century: a non-governmental organization, the Jing Wu Athletic Association (established in Shanghai by Huo Yuanjia in July 1909), and a governmental organization, the Central Martial Arts Institute (established in Nanjing by the nationalist party of the Republic of China in 1928 for the propagation of wushu) (Zhou, 2003).

Huo Yuanjia, a national hero and martial artist, founded the Jing Wu Athletic Association. It was a nationwide wushu organization that offered instruction and organized large wushu demonstrations and performances. The association invited a number of prominent wushu experts in China to teach their techniques to disciples. The association welcomed diverse genres, styles, and traditions of wushu. Jing Wu was known in particular for teaching and passing down knowledge to all, including female students. Traditionally, the knowledge and techniques of wushu had been

passed down only to sons, or disciples who would regard their masters with as much respect and loyalty as their biological parents. As stated in Zhou (2003), according to informal surveys, Jing Wu grew from a single branch center in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province in 1914, to 42 branches and more than 400.000 members by 1929.

The Central Martial Arts Institute's mission was to promote wushu and improve public health. This institute received support from government and had authority over almost all wushu-related official affairs. Moreover, its works were to investigate wushu and physical education, teach wushu and sports, and compile wushu books. After its establishment, the Nationalist government issued a general order that provinces, cities, counties, districts, and villages should found wushu institutes of their own. According to the government's outline of organization, by the end of 1933, 24 provinces and municipals founded wushu institutes, with more than 300 institutes on the county level. The chiefs of these wushu institutes were usually the head of the local government or people with seniority and prestige (Sun, 2008).

The institute only organized two National Tests over its 21 years history, even though its charter provided that the test should be held annually. Participants who passed the county level were able to compete at the provincial level and, thereafter, at the national level. National Tests were divided into two sections; preliminary and final. Passing the preliminary competition determined eligibility to compete in the final. The preliminary competition revolved around individual (non-sparring) performances of forms, or taolu, while the finals centered around free combat, or sanda, between paired participants often involving full contact strikes and wrestling (Sun,

2008). Inadequate protective equipment, rules, and safety measures, led to deaths and the infliction of permanent disability during these National Tests, particularly the finals; many, however, were never documented due to clampdowns on the press (Wang, 1987).

Over time, many people suggested that the theory and practice of western sport competition, such as the Olympic Games, could be a great model for wushu competitions. Eventually, taolu competition was reshaped to fit the western model of sports and judging criteria were recalibrated to a ten-point scoring scale, similar to gymnastics. Meanwhile, competitive sanda was abandoned temporarily, and in 1989, free combat competition returned as an official competition event as wushu sanshou, complete with revised regulations and safety measures (Curriculum Committee of Wushu Curriculum, 2004).

#### Competitive wushu, a component of the Chinese sport system (1952-present).

In April 1923, when wushu competition was organized and held individually for the first time, there were not even rules and judges (Ma, 2012). As China began participating in international competitions, wushu competitions gradually became increasingly standardized, which introduced periods of rapid progress and refinement. After the non-governmental ACSF was replaced by the SGAS in 1952, competitive wushu was steadily integrated into the official sports system.

In 1952, the SGAS created a board of Chinese traditional sports and placed it in charge of wushu and other traditional sports. By 1954, an official department for wushu was established under the SGAS's training and competition division. In the

same year, the SGAS selected a number of elite wushu athletes to establish New China's very first Chinese elite wushu team, yet this team was also disbanded by the end of the year due to reorganization. Despite the shaky start in organizing a national team, wushu nevertheless gained traction as a demonstration sport event, held regularly on the national level since 1956.

In 1959, the first National Games of the People's Republic of China was held in Beijing, and wushu became one of a handful of Chinese traditional sports to be initially included. This official recognition led most provinces and municipalities to found their own teams starting in late 1959 and early 1960 (Zhou, 2003). Adding to wushu's visibility, the Games awarded 19 gold medals to this sport across different competition events;<sup>4</sup> this made wushu, the sport, have the third most gold medals compared to other sports in the National Games (Wang, 2005). Moreover, from 1993 onward, competitive wushu became the only indigenous Chinese, non-Olympic, sport to remain in the National Games; this special distinction is one of the reasons that competitive wushu continues to enjoy specific governmental support under the "Juguo Tizhi" system (Wang & Tao, 2008).

In order to push wushu into the world's most prestigious sporting event, the Olympic Games, the wushu officials made extensive changes to the rules for competitive wushu in 1996. Many modern sports, such as gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, diving, and synchronized swimming, etc. were used as references, and as a result, for the first time wushu had a system that gave athletes two separate groups of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This total was reduced to total 12 gold medals, 7 for taolu and 5 for sanda, in the 2013 National Games (Wang, J., 2010).

scores for different aspects of their performances (Li, 2006). This was done to make the rules more scientific, objective, and better conform to the requirements of the Olympic Games and therefore provide opportunity for wushu to be an official sport event in the Olympic Games. In 2003, wushu officials enacted another complete overhaul of the wushu taolu rules, adding another separate judging group for evaluating difficulty techniques.<sup>5</sup> Judges were distributed into three groups, labeled "A", "B", and "C", examining the quality of the wushu movements, overall level of performance, and execution of difficulty techniques, respectively.

The first Asian wushu championships were held in Yokohama, Japan, in 1987, and wushu has been an official sport event in the Asian Games since 1990. After the establishment of the International Wushu Federation (IWUF) in 1990, beginning in 1991, the wushu world championships, held every two years, has, until very recently, hosted the highest level of wushu competition in the world (Curriculum Committee of Wushu Curriculum, 2004). After 12 years, in 2002, the IOC officially recognized the IWUF which now counts 148 member states from five continents (International Wushu Federation, 2013). In addition, wushu taolu was shortlisted for inclusion in the 2020 Summer Olympics and as of September 2012, 177 out of 204 IOC members have expressed their support for wushu to be in the 2020 Olympic Games (China News, 2013).

As noted previously, the World Wushu Championships were the venue for the very highest level of competitive wushu, but the highest level of wushu competition in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Difficult techniques in wushu taolu involve balances, leg techniques, jumps, etc. For example, jumps include jumping front, inside, outside kicks, butterfly twist, or flips, etc.

China occurs at the National Games and other competitions held annually, such as the National Wushu Taolu Championships or National Elite Wushu Taolu Championships, due in large part to increasing disparities in skill between Chinese national athletes and athletes from other countries.

Over the past two years, officials have heightened their efforts to maximize wushu taolu's social values, benefits, and market potential. Thus, two more competitions, the Grand Prix Competition of Wushu Duilian, established in 2010,<sup>6</sup> and the "King of Kings" China Wushu Taolu Tournament, established in 2012, were added for professional wushu taolu athletes. These competitions combined music, lighting effects, staging, and presenters into their programs propagating via media. The officials attempted to combine professional wushu taolu performance with commercial operations and to attract and integrate social resources (Jiang, 2012). These competitions differ vastly from traditional wushu competitions in their presentation, style, and execution.

## **Professional Athletes' Education Issue**

From the preceding historical review of the Chinese sport system, it can be seen that the Chinese sport system was established in 1952 originally for political purposes, and that the personal and social education of professional athletes during the mid 20th century was not the focus of much social debate. The primary reason for the lack of such interest was that the collective number of professional athletes was quite few. There was, in the eyes of most people, little to worry about regarding their welfare;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Duilian is a performance consists solely of the display of a prearranged demonstration of fighting set by two or more wushu taolu athletes.

their careers were secured in that no matter what their level of formal academic education, once they joined a professional team, they would enjoy government housing, support, salaries, and prestige (Li, 2010). Additionally, during the Cultural Revolution, the entire country's education system was semi-dysfunctional, and most people at the time were forced to prioritize survival and subsistence over ambition and education. Therefore, the athletes' lack of education did not evoke much concern. Now, with the number of professional athletes rapidly increasing, and the increasing social and economic attention paid to the value of education and human capital, the priorities of the existing system are increasingly seen as being no longer appropriate, even detrimental, to the long-term livelihood of professional athletes.

Di (2011) performed a study, producing a time chart reflecting the amount of time that elite athletes currently spend on training versus studying. The study included all five professional general sports training camps, including the national team. Athletes in the study spent over 40 hours per week in athletic and competitive athletic skills training, but only 6 hours of academic studying per week at most. Di explained that of the goal of winning gold medals was prioritized over everything else, leading to a neglect of the non-physical aspects of the athletes' education, even though education itself contributes to the development and maturation of athletic skills and personal development. Under the existing system, only success in competition and the winning of Olympic or national gold medals carries significance, such that the value of training methods and the efficacy of training methods is judged solely by that metric. Di claimed that this overemphasis on the physical aspects of education to the detriment

of the personal, professional, and academic aspects of education was perpetuated both by the goals of the system and by the career ambitions of the coaches who supervised and dictated the specifics of the athletes' training regimen. Under this system, the sports system has set all the priorities for athletes' education without input from, or accountability to, other official or unofficial organizations.

That athletes suffer from being poorly or under-educated is supported by at least anecdotal evidence. A former national weightlifting champion reported that her academic education was equivalent to the third grade, leaving her without the skills needed to earn a good or comfortable living in the outside world (Sina, 2006). Another professional athlete remarked, "Sometimes they would bring a teacher to our training camp to give us a lesson. We, athletes, were of different ages yet were all in the one class. I couldn't understand the lessons but no one worried about this" (Liu, 2012, p.1).

Gou (2010) pointed to internal (personal) and external (systemic) causes that led athletes to possess only average to low levels of education. The internal cause is that athletes are essentially removed from family starting as young as six or seven years old. In many ways, they have not had a normal developmental childhood or even been raised in a family unit, thereby lacking conventional instruction in, or teaching of, social or moral self-discipline. In addition, training and competing in order to win medals is very much their full-time job, again starting from ages as young as six or seven years of age. This is compounded by external, systemic causes that stem from their environment; the entire sport system is under the total control of the sport bureau.

The chief and overriding goal of the sport bureau is to win medals; therefore, athletes' education is largely neglected or viewed as a distraction from the athlete's primary job.

Hong (2004), revealed that out of over 8,000 professional athletes in China, two thirds are child athletes, and when amateur or non-competing students are included in the numbers, roughly 400,000 children train in 3,000 sports schools throughout the country. Dai (2004) stated that most of these children came to these schools before the age of nine. In the early stages of their instruction, these children study academic subjects in the morning and participate in physical and sport training in the afternoon. Of these, less than five percent will have been evaluated as having sufficient potential for selection by a professional team. But once a student demonstrates that potential, the emphasis on their overall schooling changes completely and the academic side of their education is all but abandoned. Selection at a young age is usually regarded as necessary to build the foundation for an elite athlete, regardless of the cost to the student's development or maturation in any context beyond competition. Since so many professional athletes in training are children, it is imperative to the system to ensure that the systematic education program is appropriate to athletes' overall personal and developmental needs.

Some scholars proposed that the reform of the Chinese sport system should include a revision of its approach to education, combining both athletic or competitive training with academic and professional education functionally equivalent to a level of education from an outside, ordinary school (Pan, 2003; Xiong, 2002; Yu, Shen, Yang, & Song, 2004). Unfortunately, the current competitive examination-oriented

education system applied to most students in China does not allow students to have sufficient time for an activity as involved and full-time as training for elite, professional competitive sports. Athletes who would attempt to integrate into the regular education system, equipped only with the time they have outside of their training schedule, will rarely (if ever) be able to keep up with "normal" students on academic subjects. Therefore, being a "student-athlete" in China may mean still training with the team and later attending university on a remote or part-time basis at best, or in name only at worst.

According to Tian's research (as cited in Lu, 2001), across all ages, 8.53% of Chinese professional athletes had received academic instruction equivalent to the elementary school level, 37.32% at the junior and senior high school level, 33.59% at the Zhongzhuan level (equal to high school diploma, but emphasizing vocational or professional skills after high school), 18.54% at the Dazhuan level (equivalent to three years of college after high school), and only 1.72% were at bachelor's degree level. These numbers indicate one of the most negative aspects of this system – statistical evidence that the overall level of professional athletes' education suffers from neglect and deprioritization relative to the goal of competitive excellence.

Zhu and Kang's (2005) study was on the correlation between academic study and sport training for wushu student-athletes' (that is, mostly retired professional wushu athletes who train and compete for their university team and physically take university classes). They found, unsurprisingly, that athletic skill was positively related to the amount of training time these students spent with their university wushu teams.

Nevertheless, under their schedules, neither their daily training nor their prior competition training substantively impacted the time that student athletes spent on academic study. The time spent on training also did not impact participants' grades from classes This was explained in part by preferential treatment, favoritism, or accommodation; participants with higher athletic levels were allowed opportunities to sustain a reduced course load, receiving more credits for their grades, or other factors or considerations meant to mitigate the time burden of their academic education. These privileges helped enable wushu student-athletes to maintain average grades in their classes relative to their peers at the university. This study, however, suffers from some limitation in scope and possible selection bias; the researchers collected data from the 4 best teams out of only 14 sport institutes under the auspices of the Ministry of Sports. However, besides these 14, there are more than a hundred universities that recruit professional athletes in China that are not under the Ministry of Sports or eligible to compete in the Intercollegiate Wushu Competition. Additionally, many other potential wushu student-athletes, after they retire from their professional teams, stop practicing wushu because their universities do not have a school wushu team.

Xu and Xue (2011) analyzed the nature of professional athletes' basic education in national teams. They found that athletes possess wide-ranging educational backgrounds, partly because they were recruited from different regions by various schools. The national teams contained 84% of athletes who studied academic subjects less than five hours per week. Forty-eight percent received no class instruction in general education at all for a year or longer. Regarding the content of

the academic classes that the athletes did take, the athletes themselves perceived that they needed foreign language instruction most, then vocational or professional development next, but athletes from provincial professional teams may have different priorities. Xu and Xue suggested in conclusion that the approach to the education of athletes should be different from the methods and structure applied in public schools.

The majority of the research (Pan, 2003; Xiong, 2002; Xu & Xue, 2011; Yu et al., 2004; Zhu & Kang, 2005) highlighted the gross imbalance between the effort put into competitive training versus the effort applied to education in professional teams. This study attempts to uncover how athletes themselves make sense of their education within a system prioritized for competition and the winning of gold medals, and the researchers sought to go beyond previous research and survey the athletes' views via an in-depth interview approach with the athlete.

# Athletes' Social Skills Development under the Quasi-military Governing and Isolated Training Methods

The Chinese elite sports system is very closely associated with the Chinese military. The sport system has been under the control and supervision of a marshal, and two major-generals during its history, and has been directed by the military for 46 out of its 60 years of existence. In addition, there is the Bayi PLA (Chinese Liberation Army) sport team, that almost always places in the top three on the National Games medal table (7 out of 11 times, historically), and the athletes and coaches from the PLA sport team consistently express that they would always keep in mind their responsibility as soldiers, not to disappoint the people and the army, and win glory for the people and the nation (Administration Government Website, 2012). Marshal He Long was appointed to be the first Minister of this sport system. In 1964, he proposed that sport should have a military-inspired system of administration and government, and this institution became a feature of the Chinese sport system that endures to the present day (Li, 2012).

The military influences in the system are most evident near important competitions, as athletes are disciplined and conditioned almost like soldiers. Prior to annual championships, professional teams impose stricter rules in order to enforce focus and prevent distractions. For example, many professional athletes are forbidden to go outside the school grounds except on Sundays, and even then they must return before 7:30PM for a weekly intra-team meeting. Key competitions, such as the National Games, usually result in a policy of total isolation; teams either go to a remote place or stay almost isolated within their own team campus, focusing only on improving athletic competition skills and preparing for the competition for months at a These quasi-military governing and training methods are imposed for the time. purpose of enforcing focus on team goals and preventing the introduction of any outside distractions during preparation. Defiance of the rules brings punishment upon the athletes. For instance, a 22 year-old table tennis athlete on the national table tennis team was dismissed from the national table tennis team to his provincial table tennis team for having a girlfriend, which was, predictably, considered to be a distraction to his training (Li, 2005).

But distraction or not, the need for social interaction is inherent in human psychology; people interact and seek out relationships, and failure to develop social

relationships robs individuals of the ability to function both personally and professionally in normal society. Many scholars (Liberman, DeRisi, & Mueser, 1989; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Xiao & Li, 2004) have opined that athletes trained under such isolating circumstances, removed from family and prevented from interacting with people outside of a competitive context, are incapable of fitting into regular society after post-competition retirement due to a lack of, or very incomplete, prior social and psychological experience.

For instance, Xiao and Li (2004) observed that athletes under this system are essentially tools for implementing and achieving specific governmental and national missions (namely, the acquisition of gold medals in the name of the country). Therefore, training is the athlete's full-time job; achieving victory and glory for their city, province, and nation is an obligation and a duty. Under the system's priorities, anything that might distract from that duty is viewed as improper, undesirable, or counterproductive. It could be expected that the physical and psychological demands on Chinese professional athletes, coupled with the restrictiveness of this sport system, may isolate them from people outside of the sport field and diminish their opportunities for developing interpersonal skills.

Other countries also have similar situations. Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) reported that female student-athletes at two universities in the U.S. also stated that they were feeling socially isolated. Similar to the Chinese professional athletes, these American student-athletes also lived, ate, and studied almost exclusively with their fellow student-athletes. The isolation is usually furthered by the great deal of time

athletes must devote to their sport.

Liberman, DeRisi, and Mueser (1989) identified several factors that need to be considered related to deficits in social skills. One of the factors was isolation; social skills are learned from observation and experience, and the lack of appropriate role models results in a lack of opportunities to obtain those or any feedback related thereto. Chinese professional athletes live and train in a team environment intentionally isolated from the outside world and are discouraged from experiencing life in any context that might distract them from the national goal of winning gold medals, and are almost universally isolated from family.

Social skills are generally regarded as being the ability to interact with other human beings in appropriate and effective manners (Segrin, 1992, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985,1989). Appropriateness in a given context means that one's behavior has to meet social expectations, values, or norms, and are not considered as negative to others (Segrin, 2003). Appropriateness can be achieved with the capability to recognize and interpret subtle signals that define the circumstance, and responding accordingly.

Li (2011) stated that after years of socially isolated training under the quasi-military governing system, athletes lack accurate perceptions of the outside world, of society as a whole, due to a lack of experience or exposure. Cheng (2010) also pointed out that consequently, athletes were often confused about their future, unaware of traditional moral standards or philosophies, spent their salaries frivolously without understanding the need for savings or retirement planning, and had low

awareness of the law.

Cao (2008) wrote that athletes in general have their own minds and beliefs, and are hoping to achieve something; nevertheless, after extended years of constant military-style discipline and almost exclusive attention on improving athletic skills, athletes' behaviors and thoughts are restrained and reserved out of habit and uncertainty. Common sense would predict that the longer an athlete stays in an isolating environment, the greater gap they have apart from society as a whole.

According to the athletic skills levels, new comers or junior athletes, who possess lower athletic skills levels, might not have adequate opportunities to communicate with other people because they do not have as many competitions as senior athletes. In addition, there is not only a lack of opportunity to communicate with other people, but as children their absolute, unquestioning obeisance to the senior athletes, coaches, and other assistant personnel is expected. It is an open secret that senior athletes bully newcomers; indeed, this kind of hazing is even regarded as tradition. Even famous sports stars Yao Ming and Liu Xiang endured such bullying (Gao, 2011).

Even though senior athletes could make friends nationwide at the various competitions which they attend, the opportunities are limited by constant institutional scrutiny. Wang Pingyi, a basketball coach, recalled one occasion in the 1980s, during which he was ordered by a Chinese official to submit a written document describing in detail a brief conversation with a stranger in the hotel lobby, immediately after the conversation ended (West China City Newspaper, 2010). G.Q. Xu (2008) stated that before the Chinese team's departure for the thirty-first World Table Tennis

Championship, "the government issued instructions on how to deal with the Americans: when the players met with the Americans, they were not allowed to greet them or talk with them first, and if the Chinese team played a game with the Americans, the Chinese were not permitted to exchange team flags but could shake hands" (p.129). These restrictions not only discouraged athletes from initiating social contact with anyone outside their teams, they also colored foreign perceptions of Chinese athletes as being distant, diffident, or puppets of the Chinese government and discouraged strangers or foreigners from initiating contact as well. In past times, the athletes were usually accompanied by political officers and chaperons. Nowadays the team members are not always under official escort, but the above behavior still usually occurs, even if only as tradition born of habit.

Segrin (2003) wrote that, in order to interact effectively, one's behavior has to attain the actor's intended goal(s) or maximize the reinforcement in that particular interaction. Within a strong team culture of obedience or subjugation to authority, athletes have very few opportunities to be convincing and decisive. Athletes do talk to one another, yet due to the pervasive "team culture," born of military tradition and political focus, it could be expected that effective communications rarely happen between newly selected athletes and senior athletes. For many people, childhood and early adulthood include many formative experiences, but childhood and early adulthood for Chinese professional athletes may absent in these experiences.

Chen (2010) found that in an amateur sport school both sport teams in residence that were studied evinced "small group" phenomena, wherein athletes actively or

subconsciously engaged in stratification by skill level, with more experienced, more skilled athletes occupying the center and newcomers relegated to the periphery. However, even within a given stratum, athletes may be peers without being friends due to the inherently competitive nature of their jobs.

Actually, due to the competitive quota restrictions, which refers to the restricted number of athletes of representing the city, province, or nation in significant competitions, there is naturally internal competition within the team itself for the privilege of representation (Gong, 2011). To illustrate, for the annual national wushu championship, a team may send only 12 athletes total - 6 female and 6 male - to participate. Moreover, the available team positions are furthermore restricted by event and specialty; for example, within the six female athletes, only two may compete in long fist, two in southern fist, and two in taichi,<sup>7</sup> so there is intra-team competition as well – which can influence or bias the formation of friendships and relationships. In addition, athletes also compete for attention from coaches, teammates, or assistant personnel because they would treat athletes differently according to their athletic achievements.

Yukelson (2010) wrote that the interpersonal communication problems and conflicts have ranged from interpersonal jealousies within the team to power struggles, control issues, perceived injustices, and coach-athlete as well as athlete-athlete inequities.

The more open athletes can be with one another, the greater the chances for them

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Long fist (chang quan), southern fist (nan quan), and taichi (tai ji) are the three hand styles in modern wushu taolu competitions.

to develop mutually supportive, healthily productive, or constructive relationships, including informal mentorships, trust, and cooperative training (Orlick, 1986). Intra-team competition has its benefits as well, but the degree to which they have been propounded by conditions in Chinese "team culture," whether they have crossed over into regions of diminishing or negative returns, should be investigated.

All in all, what the above shows is that relative athletic skill level is a powerful factor that impacts how athletes form and shape their relationships with one another, which in turn affects personal, professional, and team goals accordingly. While this might, at times, not seem too different from competitive teams anywhere in the world, the purpose of this study is to see, under these quasi-military and isolated training methods of China, what are the professional wushu athletes' own perspectives and understanding of the mutual interest of the athletic skills and social skills development.

#### **Vocational Skills Development for Athletes' Post-competition Retirement**

Minister He Long always told the coaches and athletes that the reason to play sports was not for fun, nor for learning professional skills, nor for personal fame or wealth, but for the party, the people, and the glory of the nation (Deng, Ma, & Wu, 1993). This established the heavy responsibility and expectations that Chinese professional athletes have shouldered ever since, and this also revealed why the nation used to take responsibility in terms of these athletes' post-competition career.

This sport system was wholly conceived and implemented under a centrally planned economy, and serves the nation's political and diplomatic goals first and foremost. However, as mainland China progressively adopts or converts to a more

market-driven economy, the limitations of a sport system that continues to operate in the manner of a planned economy become more and more apparent, especially as the experiential gulf widens between the life experiences of athletes living under a centrally-planned tradition and the life experiences of ordinary people. To illustrate, the sport system is one of very few organizations that remains under full centrally-planned control and administration in China, due to the system's past successes in winning Olympic medals and the nation's continued desire for medals. These professional teams were state-run institutions, so retiring athletes were placed into various institutions by means of administrative action by the Department of Labor and Department of Personnel (Li, 2010). Such placements worked under a centrally planned economy but now, the Department can no longer ensure professional athletes a good future in this way, because other organizations or departments are not as bound to cooperate as they were under a fully planned economy. Meanwhile, the sport system was not doing anything more to provide its athletes with opportunities to plan and develop other working capabilities for their post-competition retirement, should administrative placements be unavailable.

Minister He said that, "We should treat athletes as our brothers and sisters. They win glory for the nation, so we should not abandon them. For athletes, we should not take care of them for only a while but take responsibility for their entire life" (Song, 2008, para. 37). Before 1993, athletes could rely on a stable job for retirement because elite sports programs – including the support structures for athletes' retirement – were entirely run and financially supported by the government's centrally planned

economy. The year of 1993, however, was a turning point for the system as China's gradually increasing openness and increasingly market-driven economy removed the SGAS' ability to make and deliver such assurances.

As the market economy gradually took hold, Xu (2007) said "market forces were unleashed on what was once a sports system that cared for its athletes from cradle to grave, leaving tens of thousands of others out in the cold when they had passed their athletic peak and could no longer win attention and profits for their sports associations" (para. 5). In 2003, a new policy further changed the situation, and since then the athletes themselves have had to take responsibility for their own employment after retirement from competitive sports.

Zhou and Chen (2004) found that elite Chinese rowers typically retired at an average of 25 years-old, relatively young ages compared with elite rowers from other countries. They pointed out that worrying over their post-competition career was one of the causes. Petitpas, Danish, Mckelvain, and Murphy (1992) mentioned that it is possible that by reducing anxieties over athletes' future career concerns, they might be able to better focus their energies on the current task, athletic performance goals. Retirement from a competitive athletic career at a relatively earlier age happens for Chinese athletes from many other sports, such as in swimming (He & Zhao, 2006), track and field (Yu, 2008), and wushu sanda (Wang, 2006) as well as wushu taolu (Zhang & Zhang, 2007). For Chinese wushu taolu athletes and gymnasts, their retirement happens at even younger ages, therefore, they are left out in the cold at a very young age with few other vocational skills.

Despite the broader social-environmental changes in the rest of the economy, the primary focus of both the professional teams and athletes themselves is still to maximize the athlete's athletic skills. Athletes devote almost exclusive energy into their training and competition, and the teams largely ignore or are unconcerned with the difficulties athletes will face following the conclusion of their careers. Thus, when professional athletes retire from teams, many become unemployed – and often, unemployable (Xie, Liu, Li, Zhao, & Zhang, 2004; Zhao & Wang, 2011).

Most Chinese professional athletes have to face their eventual disengagement from their sport, so they must develop other skills to be able to live--or even care for--their own personal needs in ordinary society. Through general (non-specific) survey methods with 208 professional wushu athletes and 54 wushu coaches, Zhao and Wang (2011) found that both the athletes and coaches considered lack of the skills required by the job as the most urgently pressing matter of post-competition retirement issue, which was itself precipitated or exacerbated by the lack of academic or vocational education and a lack of professional or even official guidance in terms of employment.

Petitpas et al. (1992) summarized a list regarding the most frequently mentioned issues of the athletes' post-competition career development. The first one was, again, that athletes reported having no skills except those directly related to their sport. Outside of sport, athletes felt insecure about other professions.

On top of the inadequate skills, Petitpas et al. (1992) pointed out that athletes could only identify a few social supports after their disengagement from sports. The

majority of the athletes' support systems were for training and competition rather than post-competition retirement. In addition to the insufficient support system, athletes are also uncomfortable seeking help from others. The athletic system had taught them not to be insufficient or to reveal weakness to others.

Wooten (1994) stated that many young student-athletes thought that other people would handle things for them because they are special. These irrational views precluded their preparation for life after sport.

The exclusive devotion to sports was believed to be the way to perfecting athletic skills, yet it left many athletes vulnerable to considerable anxiety. Athletes who fear the declining of sports skills might invest even more energy into sport training rather than post-competition preparation (Petitpas et al., 1992).

Shurts and Shoffner (2004) indicated that people obtain preferences about various activities via a multitude of learning experiences, and based on these various learning experiences, individuals make unique generalizations about themselves and their role in society. However, athletes only have a narrow set of potential options due to limited exposure to learning opportunities. Thus, confusion and uncertainty about choosing a career path can be viewed as a natural consequence of limited exposure to learning opportunities.

Although many athletes are confused and uncertain about what to do, they desire to quickly establish themselves in a new career or activity. However, athletes progress more slowly in their career development than do their non-athlete peers (Martens & Cox, 2000). Most of the athletes did not view their sports participation as

a career but more as a type of play, yet athletes' training and competition seems often to win out over post-competition career preparation.

Petitpas et al. (1992) outlined a career assistance program for elite athletes. The authors indicate that promoting athletes' confidence in post-competition planning could be via asking them to identify the transferable skills that they acquired through sports participation. Transferable skills such as self-discipline and commitment were seen as skills brought from the playing field to the real world.

The single-minded pursuit of athletic excellence may restrict or hamper the development of emotional and psychological maturity, independence, or self-sufficiency. Murphy, Petitipas, and Brewer (1996) conducted research with 124 NCAA Division I intercollegiate student-athletes in the U.S.. By examining the relationship between the self-identity variable (i.e., identity foreclosure and athletic identity) and career maturity, they found both identity foreclosure and athletic identity were inversely related to career maturity, even within the overwhelmingly privatized, market-driven system long dominant in the United States sports system. Identifying too strongly and exclusively with their sports and failure to explore any other identity beyond that of a competitive athlete correlated with delayed career development. Student-athletes who are in revenue-producing sports, especially male varsity student-athletes, might be at risk for the development of their career decision-making skills, as they lack a "backup plan" for employment should they fail to transition to a professional athletic career. Athletes who have been immersed in their sport to the exclusion of other activities will have a self-identity that is composed almost

exclusively of, and therefore inextricably dependent on, their continued involvement in sports (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). Baillie and Danish (1992) suggested that overly developed, narrowly focused athletic identities are less prepared for post-sport career. Unfortunately, Chinese professional athletes are mostly identified - both by themselves and others - only in their capacity as professional athletes, until they leave their teams.

Blustein and Phillips (1990) reported that the dependency in terms of decision-making is positively associated with athletes' identity foreclosure. These athletes doubted their own ability and instead of acting in an autonomous manner, they let others make decisions for them.

As cited in Wooten (1994), Pearson and Petitpas predicted that the transition of athletes to their post-competition careers would be more difficult if athletes (a) too strongly base identity on athletics, (b) have a gap between level of ability and aspiration, (c) are inexperienced with career transition, (d) lack ability to adjust because of affective or behavioral, or both, deficits, (e) lack supportive relationships, and (f) were limited in resources to cope with career transition.

Werthner and Orlick (1986) conducted in-depth interviews with 28 of Canada's best amateur athletes retired from competition. They found that the majority of these retired athletes faced some degree of difficulty in the transition out of their sport career. The past sense of accomplishment, emotional support from family and friends, good health, and finances are also significant factors in dealing with the transition. When athletes are financially dependent on their sports participation and possess few skills to

earn a living outside of sport, or do not have sufficient financial resources to fall back on, retirement may cause extreme distress. Many Chinese professional athletes received some money from the government to help with finding a job after retirement from their teams, yet the amount of money was not enough for such a purpose.

As Xie et al. (2004) pointed out, injuries sustained in training and competition, a low level of education, lack of other vocational and social skills, and obsolescent expectations of a changing governing system are major issues in retirement. The retirement stipend does help, but it falls far short of addressing these deficiencies.

Almost all researchers (Petitpas et al., 1992; Zhao & Wang, 2011) writing on professional athletes' retirement issues have come to the conclusion that athletes' lack of working ability, or other professional or vocational skills, are major causes of the unemployment and retirement issues in the sport system.

Currently, only about one-fourth of the most outstanding professional wushu athletes can expect a job from, or with, sports teams, yet most of these few athletes ended up doing work unrelated to their former sport, in an office, for example (Qi, 2010). Therefore, it is very important for professional athletes to develop other skills so that they can support themselves and have enough employment options and opportunities to secure work in a market-driven economy.

## **Semi-structured Interview Techniques**

A research method is selected because of its ability to provide maximum opportunity for accurate and exhaustive communication of ideas between the researcher and the subject (Cannell & Kahn, 1968). Studies that focus on

respondents' lived experience often rely on in-depth interview strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and interviewing provides a useful means of access for the researcher to understand participants' perceptions and how they make sense of certain phenomena or events (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Semi-structured interviews involve a number of predetermined questions and answer-contingent probes that allow researchers to go deeper than the original answer to their scripted questions. The order of these questions is logical and consistent, yet the questions are also expected to be flexible in both the order and content. Thus, semi-structured interview techniques help the interviewer to explore other interests or dig down into areas that apply more directly to the study as it develops (Chwalisz, Shah, & Hand, 2008).

Berg (2004) suggested that after the interview guide was developed, the researcher should pretest the question guide. First, the question guide could be critically examined by people having expertise on the topic or a person fitting the type to be studied in order to identify questions that are poorly worded, emotion-laden or offensive, demonstrating the researcher's biases, personal values, or blind spots. Second, the researcher should practice the interviews to test the effectiveness of the interview and if the information being sought will be achieved.

In terms of rapport building, Berg (2004) indicated that if the interviewer could establish some sense of common ground with the respondents, one avenue of building trust could be opened. Moreover, at the beginning of the interview, the researcher should always begin with relaxing topics, which not only help in establishing a rapport

but also situate participants into a more comfortable environment. Finally, the researcher might consider offering self-disclosures of personal information and developing genuine relationships with the respondents beyond the boundaries of interviewer and interviewees (Cotterill, 1992). While self-disclosure is important in building rapport with the interviewees, researchers need to constantly remind themselves that in the semi-structured interview, the researcher is the instrument manufacturing distance. That the researcher must build rapport yet remain the researcher, is important, and the researcher also needs to be careful not to make the interview center around aspects of the researcher. The purpose of establishing trust is to reduce the interviewees' fears and anxieties as well as to make them feel more comfortable with the idea being interviewed (Berg, 2004).

Maxwell (2005) indicated that the researcher is the primary instrument used in the interviews and is part of the world he or she studies; therefore, the researcher has a powerful and inescapable influence on information collected from interviewees, yet reducing such an effect is not the goal of qualitative research. To prevent the undesirable consequences that result from the researcher's impact, the researcher must attempt to understand how he or she could influence the data collected as well as avoiding asking leading questions (Maxwell, 2005).

According to Dale (2000), the bracketing interview also allows for in-depth examination of the researcher's preconceived thought regarding the topic. By confirming such presuppositions, researchers could be more aware of their potential bias in the study. Dale suggested that the researcher participate in a bracketing

interview with an experienced qualitative researcher not involved in the study. He also stated (Dale, 1996) that the researcher write down his or her preconceived notions and make them visible from the initial stage of the study, which might make the researcher a better listener and help him or her avoid misunderstandings of the phenomenon. Bracketing interviews also help to examine how well the interview guide flows and if anything seems to be missing; it puts the researcher in the position of the participants to experience what it is like to be asked the questions. Even though bracketing interviews could help lay out the researcher's biases and perceptions of the topic, it is impossible to achieve total bracketing, or objectivity.

## Summary

This section has addressed the historical and political underpinnings of the Chinese government-run sport system. Even before wushu became an officially recognized and supported competitive sport, it had been influenced by, and faced pressure from, forces and ideas external to China. As China experienced more exposure to western concepts, whether by force, diplomacy, or the consequences of increasing global communications, wushu, as a national treasure, had to compete against western sports in presence and popularity. During the early history of wushu as a modern competitive sport, the Chinese government operated a top-down regime of command and control and maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union. During this time of strong relations and cultural exchange with the U.S.S.R, the then newly-reorganized Chinese government patterned many of its administrative structures and practices off the Soviet communist system. Nowadays, with society changing

rapidly in response to a gradual move towards a market-driven economy, this sport system still remains, for better or worse, operated mostly as though it were still part of a centrally planned economy. The sport system, once very effective in its goals, now experiences limitations and failings due to administrative and economic discontinuity with today's changed social and economic environment. One of the most debated issues involves the personal and economic viability of former elite professional athletes, including wushu athletes, once they retire from competition. Through semi-structured methods, this study attempts to understand athletes' views on both the institutional emphasis on the development of their athletic skills and the development of their academic, social, or vocational skills needed to navigate society at large.

#### Chapter 3

#### Method

The purpose of this study was to understand athletes' attitudes and opinions toward their development of athletic skills and overall personal development from their own perspectives, including and accounting for any inherent bias that might result from the scope of their life experiences. This chapter first describes the participants of the study. Next, the semi-structured interview method is addressed. Then, it outlines the data collection procedures, and establishes guidelines for interpreting the interviews, as well as the academic rigor necessary for this study.

## **Participants**

Other than the Olympic Games, the National Games are China's largest sport event, and wushu is unique in that it is the only non-Olympic sport to be included therein. Therefore, it can be said that wushu, more than any other, represents the "Chinese" culture and history in competitive sports. Wushu in China does not have one single national team; when national representation is required or needed, a representative team is selected from the rosters of 26 professional wushu teams that were either provincial teams (n = 22), autonomous regional teams (n = 5), municipal teams (n = 4), or the People's Liberation Army (PLA) team (n = 1), total N = 32. However, the PLA wushu team was excluded since it is not administered by this Chinese sport system. In addition, geographically, only the mainland professional sport teams are represented, as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan were also excluded because their teams operate under very different economic and political circumstances.

This study's research participants (N = 20) were Chinese elite professional wushu taolu athletes hailing from 3 out of 25 professional wushu teams, not including the PLA wushu team, in mainland China. The participants were active competitors, representing both genders (Female = 10, Male = 10), who covered almost all competition age categories (range 15-28; M = 21) and the possible longevity range of the professional sport training (range 2-16; M = 9.35), see Appendix E. Twelve of the 20 participants competed in the final of the 2013 12th National Games. As professional athletes, participants had been living, training, and studying in sports training camps, in proximity to other professional athletes. Eligibility and selection criteria for the study were based on relative ranking or skill, and on the official competition results of the 11th National Games, leading to a survey sampling three One team was selected from the top 10 ranked teams, one from the next 10, teams. and one from the remaining 11 teams. Furthermore, these three teams were selected so as to represent China's three major geographic regions - the eastern, central, and western regions - based on level of economic development and location. These teams also were selected based on accessibility via convenience and past association between the researcher and the teams.

Participant selection within each team was according to the availability of the athletes and their knowledge of the sports system. For example, the researcher asked the coaches and athletes to recommend participants who would be able to talk about the development of their athletic skills, education, social skills, and vocational skills in the teams. Interviews were in an order based on availability of the athletes, and they

were conducted entirely in Chinese Mandarin.

#### Instrumentation/Interview Guide

This research included a brief demographic information sheet and an interview guide.

*Demographic Information Sheet:* All participants were filled out the demographic information sheet prior to the interview (Appendix C). This preliminary questionnaire requested the interviewee to indicate the most convenient and comfortable time and place for the interview. Other basic information about the subjects, including pseudonym requested, years training in the team, equivalent education level, and athletic skills and ranking were also included. Finally, participants provided their email address, as well as the best way to re-establish communications should the need for any checks or clarification arise.

*Interview Guide:* The questions in the interview guide related to athletes' attitudes and opinions about their sport training, education, social skills, and post-competition career, which were the four main factors investigated in this study. The interview focused upon how athletes would describe the relative balance or imbalance between the development of their competitive athletic skills development versus other skills relevant to their overall personal development.

The interview started with general descriptive questions, wherein athletes were asked to describe what they would consider to be a typical day on their team and what joining the wushu team meant to them. After obtaining a general idea of that interviewee's team training schedule and their perspective on the training environment

as a whole, the researcher asked the interviewees questions about how they would describe the team environment regarding their academic, social, and vocational development. Their attitudes and opinions toward their own overall personal development followed. Next, the researcher asked the surveyed athletes to identify the potential imbalance between the development of athletics and overall personal development in the team. Finally, participants were asked whether they had any suggestions in order for the team to better serve the athletes for their personal development (see Appendix D).

### Procedures

After the interview guide was developed, it was emailed to two former professional wushu athletes and two professors in a wushu department in a university, in order to identify questions that were poorly worded, offensive, or emotion-laden.

Then, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview with a retired professor of San José State University, who has expertise in qualitative research, according to the definitions outlined in Dale (1996, 2000), who speaks both Chinese Mandarin and English, and who was interested in taichi on a personal level. The bracketing interview was conducted to identify and account for the interviewer's bias or presuppositions that would otherwise taint the data (Shertock, 1998); in addition, the bracketing interview provided the opportunity for the researcher to be in the position of the participants and developed the experience of being asked the questions (Dale, 1996). The researcher deemed the bracketing interview a necessity, as she was raised as a professional wushu athlete in the Chinese sport system and has firsthand

experience with the subject of this study. For the relative significance of objectivity of observation and subjectivity of perspective on the findings, the bracketing interview was conducted to explore the researcher's own views on the Chinese sports training system, and the issues in terms of education, social skills, and the development of vocational skills during her tenure in her professional sports team environment. By examining the verbatim transcript of the bracketing interview, the researcher learned that her team experiences were limited to that of a young junior athlete and did not go through many of the experiences of many professional athletes. Compared to older senior athletes, young junior athletes usually submitted to more and stricter team regulations. The researcher attributed her self-identified introversive personality to being the result of some of her negative team experiences, such as unnatural relationships with coaches, senior athletes, or other young athletes under great competitive pressure. In addition, the researcher left the team when she was only 16 years old, so her recalled attitudes regarding vocational skills development could be vastly different from those older active athletes who were facing the issues in real life. After acknowledgment and identification of the researcher's own natural preconceptions toward the study's subject matter, the researcher used those observations to refine her grasp of the essential structure of the phenomenon under review (von Eckartsberg, 1998). The interview guide was given to the professor twenty minutes prior to the bracketing interview for review and preparation (see Appendix D).

Prior to going to the field, the design of this study, such as who the participants were to be, what the purpose of the study and procedures were, and how to ensure confidentiality, and so forth, was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain approval for the data collection. IRB members reviewed the submitted materials to ensure that various government and university regulations created to protect participants and facilitate ethical research were upheld. Since the IRB board was not familiar enough with wushu and Chinese sport politics, they required the researcher to answer the following question: "If the results of this study reflect poorly on the social developmental aspects of the training regime, does the intrusive nature of the political system put participants at either disciplinary or financial/career risk?" (A. Filip, personal communication, April 3, 2013). More complete and reinforced materials were provided that removed this concern from the IRB board. The researcher began to collect data after the revised IRB protocol was approved (see Appendix H).

Prior to the official interviews, the investigator contacted four head coaches of three professional wushu teams (one team has two coaches, one for men and one for women) in mainland China, both in person and via phone, to get oral permission for interviewing their athletes, and the coaches' written permissions on the institutions' letterhead were later obtained by fax.

According to Berg (2004), novice interviewers should not conduct interviews immediately with the researcher's subjects. Therefore, the researcher first ran three pilot interviews with retired professional wushu athletes in order to refine and hone the

questions and process to be used to gather data from active athletes in China. The researcher contacted three retired professional wushu athletes in a university in China to request their participation in the preparation for the actual study. Next, the researcher sent the interview guide via email two days before the scheduled date of interviews to allow time for any needed preparation. Each pilot interview was transcribed and analyzed in order to revise the interview guide and help direct the researcher to explore more useful data during the subsequent data collection.

The researcher was introduced to the potential participants by the coaches and athletes she knew previously on the first day she arrived at the team's location. The researcher supplied each athlete with the consent form and demographic information sheet while notifying these athletes regarding the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from this study anytime and at will (see Appendix A and C). When athletes returned the consent form and demographic information sheets, they received the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) for the interview preparation, and a copy of the consent form, signed and dated by the investigator, for their own records. Furthermore, the study involved adolescent athletes who were under 18 years old; in addition to the assent form for all athletes, participants under 18 years old were also provided with envelopes and stamps to mail the parental consent form to their parents/guardians for signature (see Appendix B). Athletes were asked to suggest three convenient time slots for the interview at least a week later, and the researcher received the consent form signed by the parents/guardians on the actual day of the interview, prior to the interview.

Moustakas (1994) indicates that allowing participants time to think and consider the situations they are being asked to describe would result in richer and more accurate data. Therefore, the athletes were provided with the interview guide on the first day of meeting, and interviews were scheduled to take place at least one full day later (see Appendix D). Participants were also invited to choose or provide a pseudonym in order to help maintain confidentiality and anonymity during data collection.

To maintain confidentiality, the verbatim transcripts, tape recordings, and information sheets collected from the participants were kept under lock and key and not distributed or made accessible in any way to any person other than the researcher during the collection of all data. Afterwards, any personally identifying information was purged, made anonymous, or subjected to renaming. Places, events, names of friends, or other information that identified participants directly or through inference was substituted by asterisks. The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim, subject to the confidentiality-preserving measures described above and then destroyed immediately afterwards.

## **Data Collection**

The semi-structured interviews with the professional wushu athletes surveyed in this study were conducted entirely in Mandarin Chinese, as this was the only language understood by the athletes. The researcher gathered participants' opinions and attitudes toward their athletic skills and overall personal development via these interviews, which were separated into three parts based on the following subtopics: (a) education and training, (b) the development of social skills and athletic skills within

their team and training environment, and (c) development of vocational skills for their post-competition career.

To ensure a complete record, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim afterwards, subject to being made anonymous and confidentiality requirements. To maintain confidentiality and candor, athletes were verbally reminded before the interview started that all the recorded information would only be accessible to the researcher and used exclusively for this research. Each interview was scheduled to take at most two hours, not including breaks.

Appointment times and venues were selected and confirmed via the first meeting and subsequent contact via cellphone, email, social network such as Tencent QQ and Sina Weibo, or other channels of verbal communication. The interviews themselves began with the straightforward, relaxing descriptive questions, such as describing a typical day in a regular training schedule. After these descriptive questions, each participant was asked to express his/her own view on education, social skills, and post-competition career prospects while articulating his or her personal sense of the relationship between these issues and their wushu skills training and development. A broad interview guide was used to provide and suggest probing questions that were important to gathering the substantive data for this study. These questions were used where participants did not address or volunteer sufficient information naturally on their own initiative (see Appendix D).

## **Data Analysis**

The original audio recordings of the interviews were destroyed after transcription

into a written medium (Word documents). The researcher endeavored to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees by redactions, edits, and the use of pseudonyms within the transcriptions where appropriate. For ensuring the validation of the information, the researcher emailed each participant his or her respective transcript for accuracy in the recording of their opinions, attitudes, and experiences toward the study subject matter, including the authority to make additions, deletions, or edits as appropriate. One female athlete from Team B requested that the researcher delete two pages of her verbatim interview transcript as she worried such information would reveal her identity and therefore put her in jeopardy with regard to her position on the team. Afterwards, the final edited versions of the transcripts represented the study data and research analysis commenced (Bloor, 1997).

The researcher read the transcriptions several times to obtain a sense of the participant's meaning (Dale, 2000). Following Cote, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993), the researcher identified small "meaning units" and encoded them in the participant's own words. This process was to break individual transcripts into separate parts, "de-contextualizing" the information, which were then sorted and tagged according to the idea, information, or concepts presented. The initial tags were assigned to each diverse meaning unit while sorting out the first verbatim transcript, and as all the transcripts were under scrutiny, more tags were added onto the list every time a new idea was revealed. The researcher then listed and compared subgroups of tagged data to see if they could be conceptually grouped or clustered under higher-order themes, thereby "re-contextualizing" the collective information

from disparate interviews into a set of categories, or general dimensions. Inductive inference was applied to establish categories as they emerged from the analysis of the interviews (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The categories were judged by using constant comparative method; the meaning units and tags were similar within the category yet distinct from other categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Smith, 1990). Patton (1980) referred to these criteria as internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. To ensure the consistency of coding, the researcher developed definitions, or rules, for assigning meaning units, tags, and higher ordered themes into categories (Weber, 1990).

After organizing and collating the data, the researcher worked with three professors, one of whom was an expert in qualitative research methods and especially the interview method, and the other two were experts in the wushu field, all at a university in China. The researcher called and emailed each professor several times to discuss the analysis of the data. An electronic version of the categorized data was sent to each of the three professors when they were finished. The researcher conferred with the professors in order to benefit from their domain knowledge, discussing the interpretations, themes, and conclusions that could be supported therefrom. These professors were in the study only peripherally; their role was to test the rigor of the researcher's interpretation of the data by challenging and testing the strength of the evidence procured during the data collection phase (Dale, 2000; Maxwell, 2005). Once the researcher sorted the data, one statement from each category was translated into English for the write up phase of the study.

To verify the translation accuracy, all the translated English statements were translated back into Chinese again by a professional English translator and interpreter. Then, both the translated and original Chinese statements were compared and examined by a high proficiency native speaker of Chinese, who obtained his Ph.D in Educational Administration. After he highlighted the statements that were not close in meaning, another professor, who specialized in Language/Literacy and Bilingual Education in English and Chinese, determined whether the researcher should edit the English translations for these highlighted statements.

## **Academic Rigor**

In addition to the bracketing interview, which focused on reducing, accounting, or compensating for any bias on the part of the researcher, the raw data itself in the form of verbatim transcripts of the interviews were submitted to the participants themselves for verification and representative accuracy (mentioned previously). Moreover, peer review with other people who were experts in wushu and interview methods also helped ensure the validity of the interpretation and conclusions drawn therefrom. Dale (1996) stated that using participants' own words, in the first person voice, to show the readers what the participants expressed, is essential for ensuring evocative description and validity. Thus, from categorization and aggregation of the small meaning units within the transcripts and from tagging to the presentation of the final draft, the researcher attempted to use the participant's own words, verbatim, whenever possible.

### **Summary**

This methods section defines the research participants who were active professional wushu taolu athletes hailing from 3 out of 25 professional wushu teams in mainland China. Consent from both coaches and athletes was obtained prior to the Two instruments, a demographic information sheet and an interview guide. interview. were utilized for the purpose of data collection. Before interviewing the potential subjects, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview with a retired professor and conducted three pilot interviews with retired Chinese professional wushu athletes Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to for preparation. understand athletes' opinions and attitudes toward their own athletic skills and overall personal development, which includes (a) athletes' education, (b) social skills, and (c) vocational skills for post-competition careers. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim afterwards for the data analysis. The researcher read the transcripts several times to obtain a sense of the participant's meaning, and identified small "meaning units", tags, higher-order themes, and eventually the general dimensions. To ensure the strength of the evidence procured during the data collection phase, the researcher worked with three professors in China. Tools to establish academic rigor in this study included a bracketing interview, pilot study, member check, peer review, as well as using participants' own words whenever possible.

### Chapter 4

#### Results

This study was designed to analyze the potential conflicts between the development of professional wushu athletes' athletic skills and their overall personal (education, social and vocational) development. This chapter contains four sections relating to the four main factors: training, education, social skills, and vocational skills. The first section briefly describes the training circumstances of the surveyed professional teams, summarizes athletes' attitudes and opinions toward their training, and reveals athletes' suggestions for the training regimens. The next three sections are divided into three subsections. The first subsection describes situational factors and circumstances such as the educational system within the sport institution, the athletes' social activities and environment, and the assistance with athletes' post-competition careers, if any, provided by each of the teams surveyed. The conflicts between athletes' training and their education, social skills, and vocational skills development are summarized in the second subsection. Following the conflicts section, the specific synergies between athletes' training and personal development and other factors that did not cause conflicts are also briefly explained. The third subsection reports participants' suggestions regarding how the sports programs can be improved.

## Introducing of Training in the Professional Wushu Teams

# Environmental conditions and circumstances of professional wushu team training.

Teams A and B (but not Team C) were divided into several branches, for instance,

Taichi and Duilian teams, women and men's teams, and first and second tier teams. For teams that were sectioned into branches, they participated in national competitions as a single team yet organized as separate entities during training.

Training varied by season and according to the competition schedule. For instance, the program took external factors such as weather and temperature into account; a three months winter training might focus on strength and conditioning training, and its result would manifest gradually in spring which would help prepare for the qualifier usually set up during spring. Training was generally adjusted before and after competitions; teams' daily training schedules before competitions usually mirrored the times of day they would ultimately expect to be competing on the day of the event, for example, morning and afternoon, or afternoon and evening. In all cases, a typical training session would last approximately 2 hours (see Appendix F for full training schedules of Team A, B, and C).

Team A and B sometimes visited the Research Institute of Sports Science to consult experts on optimal strength training and conditioning. The most talented athletes usually received more attention from both their coaches and the institution's authorities. This attention sometimes included personalized training plans different or separate from the rest of their teammates, as well as individual sessions or appointments with the Research Institute of Sports Science.

Some coaches did not supervise every training session. For instance, during most of the year, the athletes on Team B conducted conditioning training on their own, and athletes with Team A and Team C sometimes practiced by themselves in the

afternoon or evening training session.

At the time of this study, the typical monthly wage for an athlete from Team A was approximately 2000 RMB, Team B was 3000 RMB, and Team C was 1000 RMB, or approximately 333, 500, or 167 US dollars, with potentially a few hundred RMB more depending on their athletic achievements; salaries were after deductions for medical insurance, retirement pension, unemployment insurance, and housing fund. However, many surveyed athletes did not become official members and therefore received no salaries or benefits even after training professionally for many years; while the team paid most of their training and living expenses, they still needed to cover around 100 RMB, or approximately 15 US dollars, per month on their own, despite not having a salary. Additionally, Team B's athletes used to receive 13 months' worth of salary per year; this was recently canceled.

On top of monthly salaries, a bonus of up to 2000 RMB (\$ 333) for Team C or several thousand RMB for Team A and B would be assigned at year's end, based on overall competition performance. Certain achievements were worth much more – the athletes of Team C said that a gold medal at the 2013 National Games would be worth a reward of 700,000 RMB, or approximately 117,000 US dollars. Nevertheless, athletes usually received much smaller amounts than what the administration stated.

Another recognized benefit was the standing policy that their team membership allowed them access to favored admissions processes to universities without competition from students from ordinary schools, along with reimbursement of half or all tuition and the option of remote study.

One forth of the participants had already previously been members of other professional wushu teams before joining their current ones. They felt that their current teams performed better than their previous teams at fostering either their athletic or personal development and in all cases leading to better future careers.

# Athletes' attitudes and opinions toward professional wushu training. (see Appendix G, Table 1)

## Athletes' opinions toward the training regimens.

Many of the athletes across all surveyed teams regarded their training as arduous, even onerous. These athletes had come to associate the physical and psychological rigors of professional training with negative impressions, such as excessive intensity, fatigue, pressure, boredom, and even outright fear and pain.

Five participants from Team C alluded to the incredible intensity of their training:

I feel that my life had never been this hard before. I was shocked by the intensity when I first arrived. Training in my previous amateur team is completely different from the professional team. I feel that the training regimen here is too hard, it's cruel. (C2, P. 558)

Professional training demanded much from an athlete's endurance, both

physically and mentally. Five of the six athletes surveyed from Team C described the

sheer physical fatigue and psychological burnout caused by over training, and six more

participants from two teams also mentioned the emotional and psychological pressure

that comes with being professional athletes.

Think about it; every week, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, my body can handle the training, but after that I start to get really tired; people are most likely to be injured when trying to do complex movements at high speed and full strength despite being fatigued and in pain. There is not a single half day break in between Monday through Saturday to recover. (C5, P. 693)

Not only is the human body not meant to take this amount of training, there is also

unbearable psychological and professional pressure. I think this [amount of training] is just not right. (C2, PP. 562-563)

A few participants in each team accepted that their training was quite tiring, but

nevertheless believed that the amount of training was acceptable and necessary to

reach the standard and quality for professional athletes.

If local semi-professional teams and the wushu schools kept increasing the amount of training, there wouldn't even be any need for distinct professional teams. Yes, we have a higher quality of training, with dedicated facilities and coaches, but most of it is just about practicing more and more. If they spent more time on training than we did, they could catch up with the professionals. Professional teams need to increase the quantity of training in order to maintain our competitive edge. (A8, P. 227)

A number of athletes also found their training in general to be monotonous and

boring, particularly after practicing the same repetitive daily or weekly training

regimen for years. The monotony was at times mixed with fear, as they felt that not

only did they know what was coming and how much it was going to hurt or how tired

they were going to be, there was no way of escaping it.

When I was young, I was afraid of training every day. Today, you would be afraid of stretching, and tomorrow, you would be afraid of running. Everyday, you felt the fear of anticipation and the pain of actually doing it. (C3, P. 615)

On a similar note, two athletes related painful memories of the forced stretching

exercises used to increase their flexibility beyond comfortable limits:

I remember when I was running, I saw a junior athlete was crying and calling for help while being stretched by the coach. When I saw what he was going through, I cried too because I remembered that same pain myself. It touched my heart. When I was still a child, I remember being stretched by having several people sitting on me at the same time, let's say, four adults. My previous coaches and the seniors sat on me to stretch my toe, which was very painful, like physical torture. They stretched my waist (lower back) to the degree I could not straighten it afterwards and it hurt even to breathe. After they stretched my shoulders and back, I couldn't lift my shoulders afterwards for the pain... We were frequently injured by the amount of force applied to our bodies during these stretches by other people and we had no authority to resist or refuse; we did not dare to say anything but to train continuously. (C3, P. 631)

Despite the above mentioned negative feelings toward the overall intensity or brutality of training, participants noticed that effective or scientific training is closely correlated with the improvement of athletic skill. Some of the athletes made a distinction between quality of training and quantity of training. Four participants commented positively on the effectiveness of their training.

Our coach is outstanding, and he knows each of his athletes very well. ... For instance, \*\* (one of the athletes), the coach knows his physical capability and muscle type, because \*\* has excellent athletic ability, and the coach knows how to train him effectively rather than just make him train very hard...the training is scientific, that is, we do not train very much but we improve a lot. From my own perspective, our training is scientific,... The coach has effective coaching methods, and our training usually pays off. (B3, P. 405)

However, seven other participants considered their training to be relatively

ineffective or inefficient. Some of them also observed that inefficient or ineffective

approaches to training have a negative effect on morale, which in turn negatively

affects the amount of effort an athlete applies to his or her training.

To train so much and everyday, you will feel exhausted for sure. You don't want to practice, you relax during warm up, you try to slack whenever you can, the quality of the movements are gone, and the chance of injury increases when you do any difficult jumps without concentration. Therefore, I feel that training should be more scientific.... In addition, the training arrangements are not so good as well. Every day, both the morning and afternoon training are about wushu techniques. Only on Wednesday, after techniques training, will we do some strength and conditioning training. This strength and conditioning training is relatively simple and unsophisticated, such as legs and arms strength training. The important small lateral muscles, some of the abdominal muscles, legs' lateral and back muscles are rarely targeted for conditioning. In my personal opinion, the training is not scientific and not tailored to what best fits our development. (C5, P.P 717, 693-694)

## Athletes' philosophy on training.

Although the training was frequently regarded as being brutal or cruel, athletes

nevertheless claimed that dedication to training was usually in their own best interests; but even when it was not, they were nevertheless forced to train because training with the team was the best or the only choice they had.

Over half of the participants agreed that the primary factor in the efficacy of

training was the athlete's own level of effort and dedication. For instance, six

participants said that the most motivated and focused athletes tended to improve the

most. Moreover, nine also said that effort and hard work was required to remain

competitive:

Especially for professional athletes like us, we don't need a coach to force us to train. We are diligent and studious because we have ambitions, and we try our best to achieve them. Sometimes young athletes need someone who will push you to train and tell you it is for your own good, but once you are mature enough, you would know what you get out of it and why. That is why I train. (B5, P. 478)

Four more participants also reported that they trained hard because they felt that

they owed it to their parents, and to achieve in order to bring them pride.

I have already been doing it for 10, 11, or 12 years [professionally], and it is really not easy. But if I do not achieve something, I would feel sorry for myself and also sorry for my parents who have treated me so nicely, supporting me all the way no matter what or how I do. (C2, P. 555)

Twelve participants surveyed also revealed that they felt obligated to train out of

a sense of professional pride. Within this system of professional competitive sports,

these participants noted that competitive sports training was their official job, and for

some, the only life they have ever known.

It is just like that; you eat, sleep, train, and that is all! (C2, P. 584)

No matter what, right now, the first thing is to concentrate on the training because that is our responsibility and our job that we must do. Training must be the

paramount priority. (B5, P. 468)

Training professionally over many years, participants also considered the possibility that they would not be able to adjust to a different lifestyle very easily, for the sheer amount of time and effort they have already spent on it has made it an ingrained part of their lives.

I feel I do not want to give up because I have been training for so many years, and it is really not easy to think about. If I gave up now, I would feel it would be a pity. Even though the pain and the injuries are unbearable, in my mind, I still will not give up. Thinking about it, for so many years, all of my time was spent on wushu training. I have not learned anything else I think. (C2. P. 569)

Another consequence described by eight participants is that professional wushu

training is a very focused specialty that offers few avenues for career options. After

training professionally for a number of years, they have little choice but to continue

down the career track of a professional athlete, as the job opens few opportunities

anywhere else.

For the most of the time, you have no choice. You could think about utilizing this team as a stepping stone for seeking better opportunities, but if there are not any, certainly, I will keep training. (B4, P. 437)

Right now, everything is all about living day to day, so I train here; actually, I do not want to train anymore, but I have nowhere to go. (C1, P. 504)

According to the participants, the problem of having "nowhere else to go" could

be attributed to the sports programs' consuming focus on their professional training.

The athletes find their experiences and expertise limited exclusively to training and

competition in their professional sports; education is watered-down and simplified to

very low or even trivial standards, other vocational skills are not taught, the cloistered

training environment limits the development of their social acumen and "street smarts",

they do not learn how to do business, and all of their social skills are developed in the

context of navigating internal team politics and living every day of the year with curfews, travel restrictions, and limited communications according to sports institute regulations.

If I went back to study, I could not catch up with other students for sure. The reason was that I have been in the professional team for three or four years already. You know, going back to study, there would be a "generation gap". Let's say that I was in sixth grade when I came to the team and did not attend middle school [for three to four years].<sup>8</sup> If I were to go back to school, based on my age, I would be in high school<sup>9</sup> but I would be very behind. I could try to catch up starting at the seventh grade level, but then I would be in seventh grade and three to four years older than all of my classmates, and to be fifteen or sixteen years old in a class of twelve year olds would be very awkward, for them and for me. (C4,P. 656)

## Motivations to train.

This section summarizes the various motivations for training professionally

mentioned by participants. The most direct benefits for being a professional athlete

are, of course, the development of athletic skills and opportunities to compete in high

level wushu tournaments, which are only available to professional wushu athletes in

China.

This professional team provides me a platform, where I can pursue my dream, to prove that I can be one of the best [wushu athletes]. This platform is only available at professional teams, and no other place can provide the opportunity for you to go to the national or international competitions. (C6, P. 719)

In addition, there are also benefits that come along with outstanding athletic skills

and achievements. For instance, there are material rewards as well as other benefits,

such as being admitted to a college through a special recruitment track for professional

athletes.

Anyway, I want to be better [at wushu] and win championships. I think, firstly, it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Middle school in China is seventh grade to ninth grade.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> High school is from tenth grade to twelfth grade.

is for honor, and secondly, it is for money. But I do feel that, depending on whether you win a championship or not, the benefits differ a lot. (C2, P. 555)

Seven athletes specifically mentioned preferential recruitment tracks to

universities as a compelling benefit for being a professional athlete.

Actually, I joined the team as a way to get into college in the first place. I want to win the title of national elite athlete and then go to a college. (A8, P. 206)

According to the athletes, all these benefits made professional training a better

choice or even a fast track for life development in contrast to attending public schools.

At that time, it felt like going to a professional team could lead to better future opportunities, at least better than going to school everyday. ... It was a short cut with less pressure compared to attending public school from elementary school to college. (A1, P. 1)

## Athletes' suggestions for training in the professional wushu team.

Two participants from two teams opined that their training schedules should be reconsidered. They were of the opinion that some of the schedule was merely training for the sake of training, or the physical equivalent of busywork.

One athlete further noted that the extensive amount of time spent training was often neither efficient nor scientific, and simply assumes that "more is better." He explained that most people can really only maintain an intense focus on training for a limited period of time, so the extra time spent training was really not very productive. He also stated that the physical intensity of excessive training could be wasteful or even counterproductive if experts for conditioning, strength training, nutrition and sports psychology were not available, as the length of an athlete's competitive lifetime depends on his or her health and mental condition.

Another athlete also noted that the system, whether by design or practice, tended towards favoritism or elitism, tending to "make the rich richer and the poor poorer" in

terms of access to resources and training facilities. If star athletes continued to have better access to everything at the institution, even peers with great talent would be disadvantaged and not developed to their full potential.

Two athletes from Team A similarly suggested that more athletes, not just the star athletes, be permitted to perform, compete, or practice with other professional teams. They believe that increased exposure to other athletes would help them recognize individual areas for improvement, accumulate experience, and better prepare themselves for the psychological demands and circumstances of competition. Presently, such opportunities are mostly limited to athletes with higher athletic skills.

Moreover, two more participants said that the branch teams should be combined, as overspecialization and compartmentalization made it more difficult for isolated athletes to share knowledge and experience in learning and refining certain core difficult techniques, particularly jumping techniques and specific technical requirements in competitive wushu taolu.

## **Conflicts Between Training and Education**

# Environmental conditions and circumstances of professional wushu team educational provisions.

At the time of this study, all three institutions had educational programs. Nevertheless, coaches' efforts on athletes' education was particularly meaningful to members of Team C when their official team provisions for academic education in the past ten years are considered: Team C's administration had neither hosted nor provided any academic classes for its students for the past ten years, a situation that changed (coincidentally) only one month prior to the beginning of this research. Informal education in Team C for the last decade was essentially limited to the memorization of poems, three-character scriptures, and calligraphy practice during spare time, supervised by assistant coaches. Before Team C moved to the present location, one of the reasons no schooling was previously provided was location; the training camp was relatively remote, on what they called an "island", and a teacher's normal commute would have been inconvenient.

At the time of this writing, Team B provided education equivalencies to elementary, middle, and high schools for all athletes, with courses similar to those provided in other public schools, including Chinese, math, English, history, ideological and political education. However, Team A only provided courses for fifth to ninth grade, and Team C only provided courses from seventh to twelfth grades, with only Chinese, English, mathematics, and ideological and political education (Chinese: 思想 政治) courses provided. For Team A and C, although athletes might receive textbooks for other subjects including physics and history, there was no formal instruction provided for any subjects other than those specifically listed above.

Athletes had a great deal of room for autonomy or initiative in approaching their education within the team's programs. Almost all participants enrolled in either a higher or lower grade than their actual educational level warranted. For instance, an athlete skipped sixth grade because the sixth grade teacher was too strict for her liking, and another athlete skipped sixth grade because all his teammates were in seventh grade. Some athletes registered for 5th or7th grade as it was the lowest level provided in Team A and C, yet their actual level of education were lower. Other

athletes might repeated seventh grade even after finishing ninth grade.

Team B's athletes were required to take an entrance exam and enroll initially in either the first year of middle school or the first year of high school, and could not start the school program at any other level. Nevertheless, for them it was a formality; the study participants indicated that no matter what their score on this test, they would be admitted anyway.

Moreover, some athletes rarely skipped classes, for fear that their coaches would discipline them if their school teachers reported their absences. Others would skip school attendance regularly and just take the final exam at the end of the semester. Rewards of 2000, 1000, or 500 RMB, or approximately 333, 167, or 83 US dollars, were said to be available to Team B's athletes for good school attendance, but participants said that none of the professional athletes could receive that prize.

In all cases, the classroom environment tended to be undisciplined in that many athletes were chatting, eating, sleeping, or on their phones during lectures. One participant from Team A said that her teacher even played a movie or Korean drama for an entire morning instead of teaching or lecturing. There were no mid-terms, but finals were held; however, answers were provided beforehand.

Due to the strenuous and extensive training schedules, Team A's and C's educational programs would include classes in the evening or during the weekend; each class lasted 40 minutes. However, since the educational program in Team B was more formal and not only catering to professional athletes but also student-athletes<sup>10</sup>,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Student-athletes are students who pay money from their own pockets in order to train at the school,

classes were held every morning from Monday to Friday. Before reaching 10th grade, athletes on Team B are required to attend school and cannot excuse themselves for additional training, but at 10th grade and after, they could opt to forego school on three mornings for more training instead. Athletes were also generally permitted to skip classes about one to two months prior to each competition. In addition, student-athletes and professional athletes were not placed into the same classrooms unless there were insufficient professional athletes to maintain a separate class. The educational schedules for all teams included the same summer and winter breaks as in other public schools.

While subsidized, education was not provided free to athletes; for instance, each semester's courses cost an athlete from Team A 200 RMB or Team C 100 RMB, or approximately 33 or 17 US dollars, in order to attend.

For all three educational programs, only Team B could award middle school and high school diploma; other educational programs were not qualified to issue them. Therefore, athletes reported that they had to obtain high school diplomas from other places, such as private wushu schools or local sports institutions, in order to meet the requirements for attending university.

Some participants were enrolled in either an undergraduate or graduate program. They were admitted to their respective universities through special recruitment; their universities either waive the usual entrance requirements for national level elite athletes, or require a very low score for the national first class athlete. Of these

as opposed to professional athletes who are selected by the school's administration and paid salaries to maintain a professional career as a wushu athlete.

athletes, only a few attended their university in person, but all athletes could compete for both their teams and universities. Participants mentioned that they were allowed to apply their athletic achievements as credits to raise the scores on their college courses; for example, one athletes described that she did so when she would not otherwise have passed a class (where 60 is the minimum passing score), or when she simply just wanted to raise her score up into the 80s. This was the policy when she was attending the undergraduate program, but she also indicated that the applicable policies always change over time. Most athletes were attending their universities remotely, and in name only. In addition, a couple of athletes reported needing to travel to the university each year to take final exams or physically set foot on her university for only a few days to train and compete for the university.

Standards for grading and attendance for athletes attending university are relaxed in the extreme. This very loose administration was one of the characteristics of the special recruitment admission track for wushu athletes, wherein an athlete could almost expect to simply receive a diploma after four or five years of remote study, depending on the university and the major. They were often not even required to take any mid-terms or finals for any of the college courses and assumed that someone, perhaps the professor, handled the exams for them. Strikingly, one participant was already in her junior year and yet did not even know which department or college into which she had been accepted.

There were some administrative restrictions that did not universally favor professional athletes. For example, Team C did not permit male athletes to enroll in a

university until they were at least 20 years old, as it was expected that on average their competition career would last at least another 4-5 years. According to the participants, historically many athletes would leave the team after being admitted or graduating from their universities, so the team had an interest in delaying that route of departure. Similar to Team C, in 2013, Team B's administration declared a new policy, stating that athletes could apply for college study if they placed among the top eight at any official national wushu competitions representing Team B. Under this policy, the team would reimburse half of their tuition so long as they remained active athletes.

For Team B, participants were admitted by various universities, but all universities are in the same city. Athletes in Team B were not required to attend their universities in person; however, they might be encouraged to attend university courses, three times a week, on Monday and Thursday morning as well as six hours on Sunday. According to the athletes, these classes were much easier to pass compared to the same courses provided on campus for other students.

Undergraduates could be recommended for admission to graduate school if they reached their university's individual standard (the way almost all professional athletes use for entering their university's graduate program). At a university, specific competitive achievements, for instance, attaining first place in the world championships, world youth championships, national collegiate, and national university games would make athletes qualified to be admitted by the school's graduate programs. Nevertheless, according to athletes from Team B, due to the different qualities of the courses, athletes who attended these off campus courses rather

than the "regular ones" might not be qualified for recommendation to their own school's graduate program, even considering athletic achievements that otherwise met the school's requirements to be recommended.

### Conflicts. (see Appendix G, Table 2)

## Training vs. education.

In this part, the conflicts between athletes' training and education are identified by athletes. Also, according to the attitudes and opinions regarding athletes' education expressed by the participants, the potential external causes of the conflicts are grouped together and listed. The potential internal causes follow. Then, other miscellaneous factors are briefly described, which included the associations between training and education as well as other attitudes and opinions about education mentioned by the participants.

Since both athletic skills development and education can each require a tremendous amount of time and effort, athletes within a professional sports system would be encouraged or required to devote most of their time and efforts on training and competition. They are career specialists and, as such, are expected and required to prioritize the vast majority of their time for athletic endeavors over their educational ones.

Firstly, certainly, [anything] should not occupy the time meant for training. This is a huge conflict; study and wushu training really conflict with each other. You can not balance them out, you really can not. If you spend all your time on wushu training, you have less time for study, and if you put your time on education, your time for training will be less. Both study and training take time to be good at. It is not like you can become skilled in something new in a minute, you need accumulated time to reach a high level of skill at anything. (C4, P. 663)

There were also fifteen athletes who claimed that they could not spend time on their schooling due to the fatigue caused by training, or that they did not devote time to study because it might leave them less rested or too tired to do well at their sports training.

Sometimes you would want to study, but you know that you would feel more tired at practice the next day. And even if you want to study after training, the material does not register into your mind when you're reading it. You feel tired and weary and not in the frame of mind you need to be able to learn. Last time I was preparing for the examinations for the teaching credential, and I had the intention to study for it; however, after training and coming back from the infirmary, I just felt too tired to do it. (C5, P. 699)

Six athletes mentioned that they had to attend the classes intermittently as a

concession to their sports training and competition. They would usually attend school

twice a week only, and ask for leave one and a half months before each of their

competitions. Moreover, two athletes also described that attending every class would

result in a lot of missed training and a commensurate negative impact on their athletic

skills improvement.

By attending school in the morning for two years, she missed every morning training session from Monday through Friday every week (wushu techniques training was scheduled in the morning, and conditioning and strength training in the afternoon) ... She therefore only practiced wushu techniques on Saturday mornings, so for these two years, she did not significantly improve either her wushu techniques or jumps. She did go to the training halls in the early afternoon on Monday and Thursday afternoon to practice by herself from 2pm-3pm, and then she would join us for conditioning training, but it was not nearly enough for her to keep up with the rest of us, skill wise. ... Starting from the 10th grade, the team petitioned to allow her a reduced attendance schedule, attending Monday and Thursday classes only, and this was much better for her competition career. (B3, P. 386)

Although the time and effort requirements and schedule conflicts made it

pragmatically difficult for these professional athletes to pursue education, the overall

attitude that many of them had towards education was also relatively dismissive. Many focused on developing the ability to produce outstanding athletic performances and were barely concerned about their education.

... after all, education is valued quite lowly in this institution. (Do you think it is even possible to alter athletes' attitudes and thoughts?) Very difficult. Most of the athletes are not even concerned about their education because in their minds, being good at the subjects taught in school is no use at all, but the athletic achievements will help them make actual progress toward their life goals. (B4, P. 441)

Even the athletes' parents tended to be indifferent towards education, once they started their careers as professional athletes. Their attitudes toward education tended to differ before their children joined the teams, however. Four athletes recalled that their parents used to be very strict about their education; eight others indicated that their parents gradually focused their own attentions toward their children's sports training and no longer seemed concerned about the quality of their education after they joined the professional team.

(What are your parents' attitude toward your education?) They rarely mention it; they just tell me that I must train hard, and training is my way out for the future. (What about education?) They did not say anything. (A7, P. 186)

For 19 out of 20 athletes , they joined the team while under 18 years old and in school, but once they started training with the team their parents or legal guardians were no longer able to supervise their education. Once they were training with the team, their coaches were responsible for the athletes' training and sometimes, but not always, they would also supervise their athletes' education. Unfortunately, it is not difficult to conceive that the coaches mainly emphasize their athletes' physical training, as pursuing education is thought to impose a cost on an athlete's focus on physical

training. Most coaches would perceive an inherent conflict of interest between

encouraging an athlete's education and focusing on the specialization of athletic ability

to professional competitive levels.

Earlier, the coach would say that you only need to be good at wushu. We had to train in the evening; perhaps, the coach was thinking that even though we were supposed to go to classes [in the evening], we would not be able to learn anything but sleeping ... I used to have intentions to study, but the coach would not allow us to. The coach thought we should mainly focus on wushu training, and as long as we win the title of national elite athlete, we would get admitted by university and receive the diploma. Right now, I think our coach still does not realize how much education means to us because the coach is successful in her own career, and she probably does not think about us. The coach just pays lip service saying that you should study hard. (C2, PP. 558, 565-566)

The coach did not want me to go to classes because of the low quality of training. [The coach] only cares about the athletic achievement. ... Because there were trainings in every Wednesday and Friday morning and relaxing in the afternoon. I also had classes every Wednesday and Friday mornings, and the time just conflicted with each other. He let me train in the afternoon, but by myself, I would not train as much and as intensively. He did not want me to go to the classes, so I stopped going. (A3, P. 57)

## Potential external causes of conflicts.

The athletes directly identified the above conflicts during their interviews, but the data and observations collected during research also indicated other potential conflicts. The professional teams were established mainly for athletics training; the education system was almost an afterthought and therefore problematic. The team training environment as well as athletes' surrounding social environment also negatively affects athletes' education. For example, three participants from Team A said that when athletes came to the professional team, they effectively gave up or abandoned their normal education.

I think it is not the athletes' fault but the fault of the sport system. The entire

system expects that you will be training since childhood, and when you get into a professional team, you forego normal studies. It is almost always like this, at any team. Athletes join the team at a relatively young age without strong autonomous capability, so it is not up to them. It would be helpful if the professional teams are similar to sports schools, where you spend half of the day studying, and half of the day training However, right now a professional team is all about training, and school is little more than a formality. (A5, PP. 121-122)

Athletes said that the institutions only provided them educational programs because they were required to do, not because they had any real concern for the athletes' education.

Because these professional sports institutions prioritize training over almost everything else, the educational programs were not designed to excel or deliver outstanding education, but merely to satisfy minimal education requirements, usually with no more resources than absolutely necessary, especially time, which would compete with a training schedule. Not surprisingly, these limitations impacted the effectiveness of teaching and learning. When reviewing the athletes' education for quality and effectiveness, almost every part of the program was problematic in one way or another.

Five athletes commented that the management of their school system was very loose.

For example, in the institution's high school class, when all the professional athletes were together (sometimes professional athletes study together with student-athletes, or non-professional athlete), the teacher did not maintain discipline, and the class management was very loose; I am not sure about what other classrooms (for the student-athletes) are like. Anyway, I think ours was probably very loose by comparison. (B3, P. 389)

Eight participants indicated that the teachers were unable to manage their classes.

The class environment! (Laugh) I think that our wushu team is pretty well-behaved, but other teams, such as wrestling and so forth, are not. They

made the teachers mad everyday.... a teacher once tried to manage the class, but nothing changed. One day, the teacher brought a stick, this long (she gestured about two feet long), to wield as a threat. He/she thought the students would be afraid of it, but no one was. People were eating or playing with their phones as usual; anyway, it was funny! (C2, P. 560)

Five people said that teachers were just there to give lectures, and did not go to

much effort to engage their students. It seemed that the teachers did not particularly

care if the athletes understood the lessons or not.

Actually, I am eager to learn English, but I have a very poor English foundation. The teacher here seemed to have the attitude that, "no matter to me whether you understand or not, I am just here to finish my lecture, and then I'm going to leave." (B2, P. 334)

Moreover, athletes attended classes that were not matched to their actual

educational level. Ten participants revealed that the material being taught was often

either well above or beneath the athletes' actual degree of preparedness. Frequently,

with subjects that required more study, such as English and math, these participants

indicated that they could not understand the material being taught. The lessons for

other courses, usually the more culturally familiar subjects, were often too easy or

redundant, such as the lower level Chinese and ideological and political education.

For example, English, I completely could not understand it. When I was not able to understand [the seventh grade English], it became even more difficult to understand [the higher level English courses]. This made it harder for me even to be interested in learning English. (B3, P. 390)

After years of relative educational neglect or misalignment, most athletes fell so

far behind in their schooling that they felt that they could never catch up. For example, one participant was attending a 7th grade equivalent class at the age of 19 years. Fully one quarter of the participants felt it was not even appropriate for them to be in classroom, because the disparity between their actual level of education and the level they were supposed to have for their age.

The team provides classes from 7th to 12th grade. I actually want to go there to study, but I think it is inappropriate for me to enroll in the class to learn. It is inappropriate because I have already graduated from college. ... To sit in the middle school classroom while you have already graduated from college... I did not go also mainly due to "saving face". (C4, P. 658)

According to three participants in Team B, the school system in their institution

was "not bad" or better compared to the system in other professional teams. Even so,

eleven athletes surveyed, including four of five participants from Team B, deemed that

they did not learn anything from their schools, or that what they learned in these

programs was not useful to them.

... (So, you mean these provided course were not very useful?) Not useful, not useful at all; plus, there were only four classes in the morning. For me, it was not very helpful. ... (Did you learn something?) I did not learn anything from these classes, at least I did not. (B5, P. 473)

In addition, as described in the previous sections, the rewards and career

opportunities that motivated sports training were numerous and comprehensive, but no

compelling career rewards or penalties were associated with education. Six athletes

indicated that their education was not related to the coaches, teachers, administrators,

or their own interests.

I'm not motivated because if we do not even know whether we could get into a college, then I don't know why we even attend 7th-9th grade. ...; I do not mean that it is not important, but I would be lazy while attending school. (A7, P. 185)

Three participants said that no one took any responsibility for their education.

The administrators do not have time and are unwilling to supervise this (athletes' education), and they will not [supervise athletes' education]. They think athletes should always train, and study would divide your [attention on training]. (B3, PP. 402-403)

Not only was the educational system within the sport institution problematic, the

overall team environment in general was also not conducive to self-study. While a

couple of athletes said they did not read any books at all for many years, six athletes pointed out that they were not able to study by themselves in their personal time because their teammates' antics, recreation, and other activities were a constant source of distraction.

Actually, I know that I should study, but the atmosphere is just not for learning. You just feel that you are alone, and the rest of your teammates are playing video games, watching TV shows, and so forth. You, by yourself, just do not feel you could ignore all these and go on to study. (B1, P. 293)

Within this team environment, it could be expected that athletes barely study or

review what they learn in their classes. This is compounded by intermittent attendance or interruptions caused by the competition schedule, which make it not only

difficult to keep pace with, review, or even remember the course material, but also to

catch up after an enforced absence. Therefore, another side effect of the team

environment reported by five athletes was that they generally could not retain what

they had read and learned.

Even if you really understand [what you learn in class] at the moment they are teaching it, you do not have opportunities to practice and use them; therefore you forget what you learned within two days. When the next week you should learn something new, you already forget what you learned from the previous lesson. To illustrate it, you learned how to say something in English, yet you have no one to talk to since everyone speaks Chinese. To chat with foreigners with this little English, you probably do not have the guts. So, you forget it right after you learned it. (B2, P. 336)

Fourteen athletes only first realized the importance of education the moment they

encountered difficulty navigating environments outside of the team setting, or when

they realized that education was valued much higher in the larger society than it is in

the teams. Unfortunately, because of the training regimen described in the social

skills sections, athletes are very rarely exposed to other circumstances and are rarely in

contact with people other than athletes and administrative staff. Therefore, almost none of the athletes, especially the junior athletes who had yet to travel for tournaments or demonstrations, took their education seriously when still training professionally with the teams.

The last external cause of the conflicts was other people's attitudes toward athletes' training. While some athletes noticed the conflicts in their parents' and coaches' attitudes toward both their training and education, other participants only discussed their parents and coaches' indifferent attitudes toward their education without connecting these attitudes with their training. For example, while nine people revealed that their parents would like them to study when there was time for it, there was still no substantive support or attention paid to their education.

They do not really care about my education. As long as I say I like it, they will let me do it. However, from their point of view, it is good for me if I learn something more, but it is not a priority. (C3, P. 619)

In conclusion, training was prioritized over education to a degree that rendered educational measures problematic and ineffective. All the factors listed in this section indicated that no one was interested in elevating athletes' actual educational level, everyone being focused or even fixated on the athletes' physical training to the exclusion of all else.

## Potential internal causes of conflicts.

The four chief identified internal causes of educational conflict are athletes' personal attitudes toward education, their ages, their personalities, and their ability to focus or concentrate on learning, discussed below.

Fourteen athletes indicated that no educational effort on the part of a student was properly motivated unless that student really understood or had realized the significance of education and its value to his or her personal interests. However, athletes were convinced by the sport system that the sports training was their first priority and that education was not very important to their professional situation or career goals. Nearly all the participants said they should and needed to train hard, but for most, education was not an imperative for them.

I try to learn as much as I can [in school], yet it is not necessary to be good at it. If I learned something, it would be good for me, but if I do not, it really does not matter. (C2, P. 568)

Students who started their athletic careers at a younger age were at greater disadvantages with regard to education. Participants said that generally, athletes are selected when they are still in grade school, so they could be training in the team for many more years than athletes who had joined the team when they were in high school. There is a natural conflict at work; the more years an athlete gets to train athletically, the better his or her chances are to attain championships and the highest levels of skill. But conversely, this also means that the quality and circumstances of the education for those students who start younger also begins to suffer at an earlier point in their lives. Thirteen participants indicated that when they were young, they did not see the significance of education, and indeed did not even really know how or what it means to study hard.

Maybe when people were young, they were unable to understand the significance of education, but when they were more mature, they would at least try to learn some thing and would not be so ignorant to think of play all the time. Same here, when I was young, I was thinking about play and having fun all the time. Right now, I limit my own play time, and currently, it is much better [regarding self-learning]. (C5, P. 698)

The last factor mentioned by three athletes was that the athletes' inborn or

ingrained active personalities made it harder for them to sit quietly in order to study.

Athletes have a harebrained heart, which keeps them moving in the gymnasium all the time. For these outgoing people, sitting quietly in a classroom is very difficult, even uncomfortable. I could learn something, and I am also able to listen to others' suggestions; however, to calm down to read a book or practice calligraphy is hard for me to do. ... I feel like if I managed to calm down enough to read, I might have trouble bringing my energy level back up for training. These two conflict with each other. You just cannot calm down to study and pay attention to the teacher. ... I would like to calm down to study, but it is beyond my control, and I will feel tired. .... Study and training are two diverged roads. (A8, P. 209)

On a similar note, nine participants also mentioned that they were unable to

concentrate on learning, which could be caused by the great environmental difficulties,

including outside distractions, disruptions, or other nuisances created by themselves.

I was a trouble maker [in my class], and I was dawdling away my time there. I do not know why I could not concentrate on learning. (B5, P. 472)

### Other miscellaneous factors.

#### Associations.

Some students came to understand the value of certain applicable subjects in their education through personal or individual discovery. Five participants understood that there were subjects within their education, such as sports or wushu related knowledge, that complemented their sports training. Some of these athletes were able to utilize what they knew about sports sciences and wushu theories to advance their training, or their athletic experiences could in turn lead to better understanding of the sports or wushu related knowledge. Unlike many of the factors discussed above, which detracted from education, this type of applied experience was a positive factor in motivating study.

Moreover, twelve athletes revealed that their education in general was positively related with their athletic skills improvement in general. With a higher educational level, athletes would be able to understand their sport better, and they would be more likely to think how to train more effectively rather than just train hard.

For wushu practitioners, the ability to understand is essential; there will be times when your skill level reaches a plateau, and further advancement is really only possible through a strong educational foundation. No matter whether it is spear, straight sword, broadsword, staff, or taichi, you must understand the mechanics and the underpinnings of the art and really know what you are doing. You bring in your own understandings, feelings, and the wushu theories into your own sets, including the choreographing and the movement's rhythm of the speed. ... These understandings are connected to your educational foundation. If a child only knows to train hard through physical effort, it is ineffective training. A higher educational level enables you to train intelligently, to refine your technique instead of only becoming physically stronger and you will know where to start effective training. You are able to have deeper understanding of this sport, which will be very helpful for the athletic skills development. (A5, PP. 120-121)

Additional factors relating to education.

Since athletes did not receive a systematic education, three participants in Team B

emphasized they were learning via life experiences and interpersonal communication,

and what they learned was no less important than what was learned by people in the

public schools.

I think, knowledge is articulated within life; it is not necessary to always come from a book or classroom. As long as you want to learn, life is already a learning process. (B5. P. 475)

There were a couple of athletes enrolled in English lessons outside the team, and

one student's parents paid a tutor to teach him at night inside the team. However,

because of financial limitations, most other athletes were unable to sign up for a class

outside the team to learn what they needed or were interested in.

I feel I am an illiterate, so I want to learn something; however, I am not able to learn by myself [without other people's help]. I'm thinking to sign up for a class outside, yet the salary here is too low, so I do not have extra money for studying outside the sports institute. Therefore, I have to learn slowly by myself. (C1. PP. 504-505)

#### Athletes' suggestions for education in the professional wushu team.

The athletes had a number of thoughts and suggestions as to how the nature and quality of their institution-sponsored education could be improved. As noted in previous sections, athletes have identified (lack of) discipline, conflicts of interest with sports training, poor content, and poor matching of grade levels as flaws within their current arrangements. Most athletes already had opinions as to how these problems ought to be addressed.

Many (fourteen) athletes suggested that their coaches ought to have responsibility for supervising athletes' education, because the athletes already recognize their coaches as authority figures and this relationship would allow a coach to motivate or apply needed pressure to athletes who otherwise displayed problems with focus and discipline in education under the current system. Two went so far as to say that the only authority that would be able to provide that discipline were the coaches or authority figures who had a known relationship with the coaches. However, a minority (four) of athletes were emphatic that their athletic coaches should not be responsible for athletes' education due to the likelihood of conflicts of interest. As previously noted, it is commonly thought among wushu athletes that the system, including the students and coaches within, unofficially regard time spent on education as time stolen from sports training and competitive development. They further disagreed with the suggestion because although athletes do regard their own coaches as authority figures, the same would not necessarily be true for coaches who were not specifically their own wushu coach, as the student-teacher relationship would not have been firmly established. Moreover, many educational classes were mixed, with wushu students attending class along with students studying other sports or from other teams; it would not really be possible to have a single coach teach a mixed class and have the desired student-teacher relationship with athletes across different disciplines. One participant specifically stated that the administrative separation of sports training and educational training should be required, in order to prevent conflict of interests by a single administrator. Two participants suggested military officers or authorities within the institutions should fill that role.

The athletes noted quality of instruction along with discipline to be an issue as well. Only some of the athletes had much of an opinion regarding the desired qualifications for their teachers; evidently, more of them believed that authority and discipline were more immediate problems. Regarding teachers' qualifications, five athletes would like to have teachers who were experts in their field, such as having full professors teaching sports psychology and even basic English. Another two participants said a university student would be sufficiently qualified to teach the material at the level at which it was being presented to them.

A few athletes expressed interest in smaller or exclusive classes. Three athletes from two teams believed that focus and discipline would improve if the wushu team had its own dedicated class sessions, instead of the current arrangement where classes

are shared with other sports teams or other students. Another participant would have liked to have an individual tutor rather than share classes.

The survey reveals that most of the participants would prefer educational course material that they themselves, even with limited experience in the outside world, could immediately appreciate as being useful and practical in life. The first and foremost most popularly desired subject was English, sought by a majority (17) of the participants. Twelve participants expressed interest in courses related to sports science that would serve them as professional competitive athletes and possibly later as coaches or teachers. Of these twelve, seven proposed classes in wushu theories and history, and six others desired possible classes in sports-related disciplines, with five of those specifically naming sports psychology. Other scientific subjects relating to sports, including sports anatomy, sports traumatology, and sports economics were also mentioned once by study participants. Four more were not able to indicate specific courses they wished to have added to their curriculum, but expressed a desire for more subjects so long as they were useful or practical.

A significant proportion of the surveyed athletes also suggested improvements in quality for their current curriculum. Ten athletes mentioned their Chinese courses, three participants mentioned their math classes, and three athletes from Team C mentioned their courses in ideological and political education and current affairs as subjects they were presently being taught, yet felt that the usefulness or quality of the courses themselves was lacking. Eight participants were interested in courses that interested them personally, vocational or professional interest aside, ranging from

history (5), geography (3), drawing (2), management (2), music (2), computing (1), chemistry (1), physics (1), design (1), and general psychology (1).

Opinions were scattered and divided as to how to schedule educational classes, however. As noted previously, sports training dominates an athlete's schedule. Four participants suggested that classes should be in the morning and training should take place in the afternoon, but four other athletes thought educational classes would be best scheduled at night. Two more athletes said classes should take up two to three hours a day or approximately eight hours a week, not including time for assignments and homework. These opinions appear to reflect individual preference more than any organized or scientific basis for scheduling.

Though some of the suggestions made above appear to be fairly ambitious or reflective of a desire for a higher quality of education, the athletes also harbor doubts about how much education they would actually be able to accumulate given their primary roles as competitive athletes. Three athletes stated that they would have liked to start their education from the lowest or the most basic level instead of being arbitrarily advanced to a grade well beyond their previous schooling. Two athletes said that it might be good for athletes if they "really" graduate from middle school as a minimum level of education, but one also added that 9th grade equivalency might be too difficult for professional athletes on their professional schedules. Most participants revealed that they were mainly concerned about whether they had sufficient general knowledge for daily life. It is possible, even likely, that some of these reservations are born from their current educational experience, which frequently

leaves them feeling lost or unable to catch up.

Athletes also made suggestions beyond the structure and content of the classes themselves, occasionally offering ideas that went beyond modifications to the existing approach to in-institution classrooms. Such suggestions included integrating professional sports teams entirely within universities, permitting prospective athletes to graduate from ninth grade before turning completely over to professional training, conditioning opportunities to go outside the team to train and perform on minimum levels of academic performance, or to require all athletes to pass basic educational requirements to be qualified to compete in their competitions in order to level the professional playing field.

#### **Conflicts Between Training and Social Skills Development**

## Environmental conditions and circumstances of professional wushu athletes' social skills development.

The investigator asked participants to describe their environment and surroundings outside their sports institution, the governing methods and the rules applied by their team, and what they usually do as well as who they communicate with on a daily basis, in order to provide an understanding of the context surrounding the development of their social and interpersonal skills.

According to the athletes, most professional teams were generally located in remote areas. Even so, all three teams participating in this study were all located in relatively prosperous locations. Team C's participants indicated that their training environment changed one month prior to the study, giving them a change of perspective on their social circumstances. Previously, they were living and training in relative geographic isolation, or, as they put it, "on an island." Simply traveling to the closest village would have cost an athlete about a tenth of his or her salary, and reaching the nearest urban area would have cost one sixth.

Team C's training regimen still reflected some of the more traditional, isolationist approach to training. The participants from Team C described their training camp as "semi-isolated." That is, only senior or elder athletes are allowed to go outside of the training camp in their spare time and even then only from 10am-5pm every another Sunday. Younger athletes were generally confined within the camp for the entire year except for a 7-10 day long break after the annual tournament around September or October. Athletes were given the daytime of the first day of Chinese New Year as free time, but they were required to return the same night. While most of the rest of China spends more time, up to a week, celebrating the New Year, the athletes of Team C are given only most of one day. Exceptions for leave were, however, permitted for urgent eventualities.

The participants from Team A and B said that the team rules and governance were "semi-isolated," in that there were at least nominal regulations imposed on their personal activity. Others said that the doctrine at Team A and B no longer subscribed to an isolated training environment due to the fact that as long as they continued to maintain the required level of quality in their sports training, they were left to manage the rest of their time however they wanted. Athletes who ventured out from the team's training camp with "appropriate reasons," such as attending university classes, soon got accustomed to venturing outside the camp for other reasons. So long as they

did not leave or return to the team within the late hours of 9:30pm-7am for Team A or 11pm-4am for Team B, they experienced no administrative trouble. According to participants from Team A and B, due to a rapidly changing social environment, many children had already been exposed to many things back home before they were selected for the team. This made it no longer appropriate or even possible to implement the same strict and isolation-heavy governing and training methods of previous generations.

For Team C, outside communications were kept limited. Only senior athletes (athletes who have been on the team for many years) were allowed the use of cellphones. Even then, the senior athletes were required to power off their phones at 10pm - the coaches would call their phone numbers at night to ensure that they were actually off. One athlete said that she learned to switch her cellphone to Airplane Mode (no phone service) so that she could still use her phone to listen to music before bed. Once Team C moved to its present location, several of the senior-level study participants were permitted to buy and use computers, including dormitory internet access. Computers and cellphones were forbidden to the younger or less senior athletes and these were generally subject to confiscation on discovery. Younger athletes usually called their parents using public telephones, and they were also permitted to use personal cellphones to call their parents on Saturdays, but were required to give the phone back to their coach afterwards.

Violating these regulations could result in scolding or beatings administered by the coaches. Punishment could also take the form of monetary fines or withholding

of salary until they complied with the administrative regulations, and individual compliance was administratively monitored and recorded.

There were curfews for athletes in Team A and B as well, such as they were required to be in the dorm before 9:30pm or 10:30pm, at which time central lights were required to be turned off, dormitory doors were locked, and the internet access was disconnected. Team A provides coaches with internet access, but not the athletes. However, athletes who bought a network interface card, and paid their own services fees, were not impeded by the institution as regards internet access. Some of the senior athletes on Team A shared internet access with their coaches, subject to their coaches' control – for example, a coach might turn off his router around 10 pm. While junior athletes were nominally not permitted to buy computers, most survey participants nevertheless had a computer "on the side".

For Team A and B, although the coaches were said to be responsible for supervising compliance with these requirements, the athletes perceived coaches to usually be lenient about enforcement so long as the athletes did not make any trouble.

Generally, the coaches were less restrictive towards male and/or senior athletes than female and/or junior athletes. However, one to two months before competitions, all athletes would be submitted to strict team regulations that they might not be permitted to leave the training facility, the supposition being that going out might disrupt their focus on training.

Athletes tried to avoid being seen on the training camp grounds by the administrators or coaches with outside friends. They deemed it was less troublesome

to hang out with their outside friends off campus, away from the habitual suspicions and observation by team security and administration.

Athletes regularly went out for a walks, dinner, karaoke, or shopping for some daily needs. But unlike athletes from Teams A and C, Team B's athletes had access and permission to go ski or golf with their friends while training professionally, and they were also permitted to perform or teach wushu in their personal time for some extra money. In contrast, athletes in the other two teams needed to have permission from their coaches in order to do these things, even in their personal time.

Since athletes are almost always selected by the team at a very young age, they often did not have many friends from their hometown after a few years. Usually, after training for many years, survey participants would unsurprisingly make friends from among their teammates or athletes from other sports teams (for instance, tennis or wushu sanda, etc.) training at the same facility. Moreover, after attending a number of competitions, they would also become familiar with wushu athletes from other professional teams. They also met wushu practitioners from many other countries who would visit the sports school in order to train, however, the survey participants rarely kept in touch with them. Only some male athletes reported that they spent some time with friends who were not involved in one way or another with professional or competitive sports. However, it was recognized that maintaining these relationships around the curfew and confinement rules, as well as the overall policy against casual visitors, was difficult.

## Conflicts. (see Appendix G, Table 3)

### Training vs. social skills.

Professional wushu training typically involves enforced isolation, curfews, and a highly regimented schedule that includes training on weekends. This precludes or significantly limits the variety of opportunities for recreational or social activities in general. Three participants from two teams said that athletes rarely "stepped into the outside the world" while training professionally.

You have training sessions everyday, so you simply have no chances to socialize with others [outside the team]. Moreover, you completely do not understand or relate to other people's thoughts even when you do meet them. (A1, P. 11)

When talking about the conflicts between the development of athletic versus the

development of social skills, the constraints of limited time and energy were

consistently raised by the participants. However, since social activities generally

require less structured time, dedication, and energy than athletes' education, these

conflicts were not as obvious as previously mentioned conflicts with educational aims.

Four participants mentioned that because they were required to focus and spend

the vast majority of their time on professional sports training, they usually had no extra

time for other activities.

There is no opportunity [to meet and socialize with others]. I just want to ask them to give us more time to play (to go outside the team and have fun). I think although the national games are important, and actually any competition is important, so they (the coach and institution) don't even think to give us more time [for other activities]. (C2, P. 583)

Four participants also reported that they did not socialize with others either because the physical fatigue of training left them too exhausted to socialize, or because they worried that time spent on social activities instead of physical rest and recuperation would leave them without enough strength or energy to ensure the quality of their professional sports training, as it was extremely demanding and strenuous even for a fully rested, wholly healthy and conditioned athlete.

Uh...if there are many social activities, I might go out more often. However, if, for example, the training is quite tiring recently, I would cut down the social time to avoid getting too tired from it. Because I am a professional athlete, I must ensure the quality of my training, If my physical and mental condition allows me to do it, I might hang out with friends more often. (B5, PP. 467-468)

Four athletes emphasized that even without the self-imposed personal

responsibility or fatigue, the institutions themselves frowned upon social activities anyway, with the rationale again being that even small amounts of time spent socializing would degrade an athlete's condition or cause an athlete not to reach his or her full athletic potential. Imposed limitations were especially strict for athletes with higher athletic skills due to their higher professional competitive potential; therefore, athletes either skipped social activities they wanted to do for fear of punishment, or they did them "underground" and without the knowledge, approval, or permission of the institution, such as playing a leading role in a movie, filming for TV programs,

performing abroad, or even simply vising one's father at the hospital.

The team does not provide the same opportunity for every athlete. For example, the official team members are not allowed to perform abroad if there is a time conflict. [For the team], this is a conflict; for instance, if there is a performance in the U.S. in July, and you have competitions in September, you aren't allowed to travel for the performance. Therefore, it is not fair for athletes who have higher athletic skills since we also want to go outside for experiences. However, we had competitions. People who are not good enough to compete have these opportunities to go there to perform. We were like, why?! (B1, P. 326)

Consequently, two participants concluded that they had very limited knowledge

and experiences of the outside world, which negatively impacted their competence in

social situations.

For instance, friends were talking about their business, but nothing comes into my mind; I am not able to understand.... I do not have any basis for understanding what they are talking about, because I spent all my time on training. (C4, P. 676)

Not only did sports training and achievement diminish athletes' opportunities and

capacity to socialize with outsiders, they also created barriers for interpersonal

relationships within the teams themselves. Four athletes mentioned that the

inherently competitive nature of professional sports often led to teammates with higher

athletic skills becoming arrogant or standoffish with respect to their peers and

teammates.

It feels like that we were on the same level in the first place, but after the person achieved a certain level, I sometimes felt that she was apart from us. Suddenly, it was like we were no longer on the same level, and the distance between us was even further. She was consciously being apart from us as well. I felt a little sad that she [behaved like that only because she] competed in a competition that we were unable to attend. (A3, P. 75)

The last but the most frequently mentioned conflict was that athletes themselves

feared or believed that partaking in social activities might disrupt their career focus on

training and competition.

It would greatly affect your training. The reason is that while training, your mind might be occupied with what you did, who you met, what they said, and so on; with a distracted mind, you cannot hurl yourself into training. For example, there was a time when, after I came back from a competition, many people added me on QQ. Then, I chatted with them until quite late. I used to go to sleep when it was the time, yet chatting with them made me forget the time. Consequently, I did not get enough sleep, and I was constantly thinking about the funny things we talked about last night. After a short period of time, I felt that I did not make any progress in terms of training, because I was tired from lack of sleep. Afterwards, I deleted them from my QQ account, pushed myself not to talk to them, and focused my attention only on my training everyday. As a result, my athletic skills improved tremendously; compared to people who were chatting and playing, my athletic skills were enhanced to a great extent, including my thoughts and understanding of the movements. (A2, P. 52)

## Potential external causes of conflicts.

While many participants did not detail more concrete conflicts between their training and social skills development directly, the athletes' descriptions and attitudes towards the surrounding environment and their typical social activities strongly implied an institutional and structural environmental bias against socializing. For instance, the team regulations and the restrictions and protocols surrounding both internal and external communication made talking to people a bureaucratic or disciplined affair.

Most of the participants talked about their governing and training methods. Half of the participants indicated that the team regulations focused on the efficacy or primacy of training first and foremost, to the extent that they were referred to as "quasi-military" or "semi-isolated" methodology. These regulations included limitations or controls such as controlling people with curfews, or phone and internet access limitations. Even half of the athletes themselves tended to agree that these restrictions were for the good of improved training.

It is highly desirable to have isolated training before competitions. For me, even if the team did not want to implement isolated training, I would want to isolate myself anyway. I think people only have a certain amount of energy. You see, I know I should train harder, but without discipline in the environment, I would not be able to. Maybe by isolating myself, I would be able to devote all my attention and energy on training. That makes the quality of my training different. (B5, P. 495)

A similar line of reasoning seems to suffuse the official regulations, particularly

for female and young junior athletes in less economically prosperous areas. Ten participants, almost all the female athletes, said that they rarely communicated with

others except for their teammates, and they had very few friends outside of the training camp.

Hm.. This sports system limits your social activities; other than train, you just eat and sleep, eat and sleep, and eat and sleep; there is not much time for you to go out to socialize with others, I mean very few opportunities. I didn't know anyone nearby to this place! I only go outside the team to use the internet café [mostly for online games], and then I go back directly to the team afterwards. That's all. Our social circle is.... [limited]. (A7, P. 194)

Five participants indicated that society at large, whether other institutions, other

people, or social customs, appeared to be much more complicated to them than the

customs and relationships within the team environment. Navigating outside

relationships and expectations was a relatively unfamiliar task, and therefore

time-consuming and at times exhausting. Two of the participants directly stated that

their team's governing and training methods kept them focused on training and

prevented them from being distracted by the concerns and considerations of navigating

outside life.

Around 17 to 19 years old or above, athletes were slowly allowed to revisit outside society. (i.e. they were allowed to leave the premises once every two weeks) ... 14 or 15 year old athletes were almost never allowed to go out. They just had to study and train hard, and eat and sleep well enough to stay in good health. The administration wouldn't want them exposed to anything else, including even visitors or people from outside the institution, because any such exposure might introduce distracting thoughts about complicated things outside the team. Worse, outsiders might encourage them to ask unproductive questions, such as, "why do you want to do sports? Training is so hard and tiring. Come out to have fun with us instead." These would influence athletes' training negatively. (C4, PP. 666-667)

Consequently, according to about half of the participants, when asked directly,

athletes had almost nothing in common with people outside the training camp.

Certainly, people might have different life experiences growing up, and having

different backgrounds does not always affect athletes' social competence; however, these nine athletes indicated that being a professional athlete, as well as gaining little to no social experience from the day they joined their teams, negatively impacts their

social competence.

If they are people within the [wushu] circle, I think I could communicate with them with no problems; I can understand what they were saying. However, for anyone else, who are not in the [wushu] circle, I feel I might either not be able to understand what they say, or it takes me a longer time to understand, so I will be hesitant to even introduce myself to them . There is a "generation gap" (distance between them) when talking to other people, and it feels like our thoughts are different from others. (A3, P. 72)

Moreover, six participants believed that the ways they communicated with their

teammates would be "inappropriate" in the outside world.

I think you would be "killed" if you talked to an outsider the way we talk to each other, because the way teammates talks to each other is extremely direct. People outside the team are not so straightforward and seem much more tactful. For instance, when I would like to ask for something here, I just ask directly. Outsiders seem to start off by asking about some other things and slowly introduce the topic and then discuss it. (C6, P.P 740-741)

Therefore, the quasi-military governance and semi-isolated training methods,

arising from the prioritization of sports training over almost everything else, have

almost certainly affected athletes' social activities outside of the sports institutions

negatively by curtailing them both passively and actively.

Interpersonal issues between athletes inside the teams also limited opportunities for personal or social growth, and most of these stemmed from a set of combined factors including small community size, professionally competitive undertones in interpersonal relationships, and hierarchy or stratification based on seniority, skill, or administrative favoritism. The most obvious source of estrangement between teammates was the

hierarchical relationship between senior and junior athletes. One senior athlete said:

They are scared of you. You want to tell them something, but they try to run away; not to even mention to be close to you. (A1, P. 10)

One junior athlete said:

I would make friends with senior athletes, but when I do, I feel we are separated by a layer of film that I do not dare to break through the limit. First of all, I worry I would say something wrong; I am mentally afraid that it would cause something bad to happen. ... I just feel that they are seniors, so that I hesitate to do a lot of things. (A3, P. 74)

Young athletes also had only senior athletes and administrative staff for

immediate role models, so the development of personal maturity is often limited or hindered by a lack of variety in example. Young athletes who advanced in status due to athletic skill and achievement effectively had no mentors other than their coaches or the senior athletes, but the relationship younger athletes have with their coaches and senior athletes is primarily professional, not personal, as they spend little to no time with each other outside of training or administrative matters. This gives these younger athletes almost no social context within which to pursue or develop personal maturity.

The inherently competitive nature of professional sports also presented barriers to natural relationships or friendships. Eight athletes stated that in a team environment, it was better and more prudent not to share things that were too personal with teammates, because of a low level of trust or conflict of interest.

Six out of these eight participants described their feelings of distrust for their teammates.

After being fooled by my teammates, I no longer want to tell them too much because I feel I would be cheated again. For instance, they told other people what I said, and they only point fingers at others rather than themselves, or they peep into others' privacy. These people are annoying. ... You told them everything, and you thought they would not tell the coach, but they did tell the coach. You just could not believe it, and you thought he/she is not a person like that, and he/she was also not normally so familiar with the coach. It was not the first time. If it was the first time, I would forgive him/her since that might not be his/her fault, but after several times, you just do not want to be too close to someone in the team. (C2, PP. 602-603)

Five of these eight participants described the effect of conflict of interests on their

interpersonal relationships.

Teammates, I know my teammates very well, and because of this amount of understanding, I know we could only be teammates rather than friends. Only when there is no conflict of interest, can we actually be friends. That is, we can be friends when there is blame to share, but not we can't be friends when everyone wants the credit. Everyone competes for the benefits. I think this is the same in every professional wushu team. (B2, P. 345)

Competitiveness is, of course, inherent in sports and professional sports teams;

however, this sense of competition pervaded every aspect of their lives, because they were rarely if ever allowed to leave the team training environment, had restrictions on all outside contact, and lived, ate, and trained – did literally everything – with their teammates. Consequently, on a personal level, many athletes end up living extremely guarded lives.

Athletes often did not have anywhere to look for examples of interpersonal relationships that were not tinged or tainted by the interests of competition. For example, any team that was segmented into divisions or branches often had a coach for each division, and in this structure, the coaches often competed with each other as well, and the fallout of any maneuvering by the coaches often fell on the athletes themselves. Very often the relationships between coaches affected the relationships between athletes, according to seven participants.

It is like that [one coach would think that ]"you are the head coach and have higher position and power, but your teaching is not effective and yet no one will stand up to you. Because of it, I am not convinced. Therefore, I fight for the needs of my own athletes and will treat your athletes differently." This leads to unspoken dissension. You do not need anyone to tell you about it; it permeates the atmosphere. When the feeling is not right, athletes in different teams also reject each other. ... I won't do it because I don't like those who engage in factional activities, or interpersonal cliques. (B5, P. 484)

Many of the survey participants were selected and brought to the team at a very

early age, so in some ways, their coach is the closest thing they have to a parent in terms of their upbringing for much of their childhood and adolescence. On average this study's participants were selected for team training at 12 years old, with an average of 9.25 years of their lives spent with their wushu team. The coaches were not formally or officially responsible for the upbringing of their students in anything other than an athletic sense, but sometimes they were assigned responsibilities beyond athletic coaching. Even so, twelve of the study's participants indicated that they generally did not communicate much with their coaches outside of their training sessions.

One might hope or expect a coach to serve informally as a surrogate parent for his or her students, especially over years of training, but this kind of relationship was not natural under the circumstances imposed by the training environment. Six athletes indicated that communication with their coaches was poor because the coaches did not have a nurturing or admirable personality, i.e. were self-centered, closed-minded, or not reasonable, etc.

Actually, the coach is not reasonable sometimes. For example, the coach said if

something happened to our family, the coach would allow us to go visit them, but it turned out this was not really true. When the coaches' brother was sick, she just drove back to visit him. But when my grandmother passed away, I think what she did was very inappropriate. She only allowed me to go back home one day, and she said that I could not see my grandmother anyway, so I should not stay away for long. ... So I arrived home in the morning, but was required to return to the team at night on the same day. It was not enough time. Another time, when my father had an operation, my coach only allowed me to visit my father after the afternoon training. She drove me to the hospital, but only because it was convenient for her, since she also had a friend to visit at the hospital. I was with my father for not even two hours, and then she drove me back to the team again. I felt, I did not know what she was thinking, but my family members are the most important people in my heart, I wanted to be with my father for several days when I saw him suffering. However, she would not let us off for one day or even one training session. (C2, P. 576)

Six athletes indicated another cause of distance between coach and student -

simple institutional hierarchy. Athletes were just expected to follow and obey their coaches in all things, but this was born from rank and authority. While a parent may discipline his or her child, he or she also cares for the child. With most coaches, the other aspect of a normal parental relationship is absent.

After all, the coach is the coach; I just do whatever he asked me to. If he needs me to discuss something, I will do it; if he does not need me, I do not take the initiative to talk about something. (A8. P. 224)

Coaches were usually not available for consultation on anything not directly

related to competitive sports training. Athletes learned to obey their coaches simply because they held the power to make major decisions about what concerned the athletes most. The shared interests of coach and athlete revolved almost entirely around the drive to compete and to improve competition skills, so all interactions – whether praise, promises, intimidation, or taunts – were informed by that subtext and motivation, and this is well known to both sides.

Seven athletes observed that these athlete-coach relationships, based as they are on mutual career benefit, resulted in favored treatment for students with higher athletic skills and greater potential to win championships. These athletes also tended to end up being closer to their coaches on a personal level.

A few of the athletes with higher athletic skills can talk to the coaches casually. For example, the coach and \*\* (the current best athlete in the team) have a close relationship, and the coach would tell him everything. Anyway, maybe they no longer feel restrained. (B1, P. 309)

Additionally, seven athletes also saw their coaches as the main people in the

institution who champion the athletes' needs and benefits.

I think the coach-athlete relationship is delicate in that he is our coach and also the one who works for our benefit. He is like a leader, without whom all of our hard work for these years would be in vain. (B5, P. 471)

However, this feeling of dependency and the playing of favorites did leave

athletes with mixed feelings as to whether their coaches were really working to their

mutual career benefit, or whether the relationship was more exploitative than mutual.

Two athletes from Team C mentioned that:

She treated us well because we could bring her an advantage, and at most there is only a little affection within our relationship. Sometimes I saw her working too hard, or being hard on herself, but what she does to us is worse. ... I feel she is too hard on us for the most of the time. For example, she exploits us; when you are useful to her, she could use any method to keep you on the team, whether or not it was really best for your own good. (C3, P. 610)

In this study, results showed that athletes rarely communicated with their coaches

outside of athletics, and this was especially true for athletes with lower athletic skills.

With relationships being based on career or competition goals rather than personality

or friendship, athletes received different treatment according to perceived athletic skill

or potential rather than any individual need, and it became more difficult for coaches to

show genuine care outside of athletics.

Even worse, in terms of the administrators, athletes rarely talked to them, and five athletes in Team A commented that it was only about exploitation between the administrators and the athletes.

There is no communication between us at all. It feels like people are only thinking for themselves. It is a "being used" relationship. Only when we were able to help them, they would do something for us. (A4, P. 113)

## Potential internal causes of conflicts.

Determining the root institutional causes of athletes' overall poor level of social skills development often had to be performed by inference and observation. This is because the athletes themselves often had difficulty articulating the root causes of their problem due to a pervasive lack of familiarity or comfort with "typical" or "accepted" social customs.

For example, only two athletes directly stated that the conditions and environment of progressional training led to a limited knowledge and appreciation of the workings of outside society. Nine others did not directly assign any blame for their social isolation to sports institutions or the conduct of their training, but clearly indicated that a lack of experience and comfort with social convention severely limited their ability to relate to or connect with anyone not involved with wushu.

Even though I was active and tried to initiate a conversation, I would not know what to say. Actually, I really want to say something, yet I do not know what to talk about, and where to start it. ... You are all better than us because we are very simple-minded and ignorant. We do not understand some of the things people talk about except for wushu. Maybe I do not have enough social experiences and knowledge that I could not respond to other people's talking even when I want to. (C1, P. 528, 521)

Fourteen participants also expressed great difficulty in relating to people from

outside the wushu circle, mentioning that they either could not completely comprehend subjects of discussion that were not related to wushu, or were not very familiar with the appropriate words or idioms to converse on a non-wushu-related topic and therefore experienced difficulty in maintaining a conversation.

You want to tell other people a lot of things, yet you are completely unable to express yourself. You can think of them in your head but can not speak out. It is a very unpleasant feeling. (C5, P. 700)

Fully half of the survey participants believed themselves to have "introverted"

personalities. Whether such introverted tendencies were naturally part of the athletes'

personalities, reinforced by the initial team selection criteria, or whether it was a

learned behavior born from constant administrative supervisions, enforced schedules,

and curfew, can be difficult to discern given that many of the athletes have spent half

of their lives or more in the team training environment.

Six of the athletes self-described themselves as introverts, attributing this to their

natural personality.

I think my communications skills are not as good [compared to people outside the training camp], but it is only me. This is caused by my own personality. .... Yet my personality did not affect my ability to form relationships with others [once I had started to talk to other people]. After I manage to communicate with others, we could soon become friends with each other. (A5, P. 123)

Five others described feeling a general lack of incentive to engage in much

communication, attributing a lack of communication to a general lack of interest in

casual conversation.

I don't tend to take the initiative in communication. For example, sometimes we had visitors. You can see that \*\* team (another team) is here to train with us, but if these athletes don't need to talk to me, I guess I would not go out of my way to chat with them. Even if I knew them, I don't think I would have much reason to talk to them. It's like me and C5, we went to the same university for five years.

On his first visit to this team, the coach treated him to a meal. I sat next to him, but we didn't talk at dinner. Later, when he formally joined this team, we became good friends, and he asked me why I did not talk to him at all during his first visit. I told him that "I did not know you very well, so I didn't know what to talk about." At that time (C5 visited the team for the first time), we both knew each other, but I just avoided talking to him, feeling there was nothing to talk about. (C1, P. 520)

Eight participants said that they were unwilling to talk to others, especially

strangers.

(Will training professionally influence your social skills?) Yes, you just simply do not want to and are unwilling to socialize with others. (A1, P. 11)

For these wushu athletes training within the Chinese elite sport system, the

pressures and competition that defined their athletic career and training extended into

and, in fact, dominated athletes' lives in general. Whether by nature or nurture, the

constant competitive pressure encouraged and reinforced a guarded or introverted

mindset, which itself led to an isolationist personality.

#### Other miscellaneous factors.

#### Associations.

Though their exposure to and familiarity with casual customs in outside society might be lacking, it is not to say that the athletes did not mature. By necessity, they became adept at navigating their specific environment, which made them very self-reliant, focused, disciplined, and tenacious compared to the average person.

Because you left home when you were young, your thoughts would be more mature compared to ordinary people or people with similar ages. You should know this fairly well. That is, children [in the team] will grow up earlier than other children because they start a professional career many years sooner than most other people. Although the wushu circle is not big, it still is a small but complete society in and of itself. You will experience [things within that society] and learn from them, so you grow up quickly. ... No matter how difficult, you can bear the hardships when you encounter them in life because life in the team is really tough; for example, there is a lot of verbal satire or abuse so you quickly learn not to take many things too personally. ... In addition, children barely have any rebellious phase while growing up. ... Such a life experience tests and strengthens many of your concepts, or ideas. Generally, children at home are spoiled by their parents, but in the team, no one will treat you like that because you are just one of the athletes. (B1, PP. 292-293)

Even though these athletes might not be mature in many aspects of life, the environment made them realize that they were just one team member rather than an all-important individual. Constantly navigating a team environment with a competitive focus and many regulations teaches athletes at a young age about both cooperation and self-reliance, which can be difficult to reconcile for most outsiders. They also learn to protect themselves and appreciate the consequences, good or bad, of their actions more quickly because in an enclosed environment, the effects come both swiftly and severely.

Four participants from Team B said that their team, despite isolationist policies, actually provided many opportunities for them to meet people outside of wushu. In the case of Team B, this may have been in part due to prestige and outside political connections, as Team B frequently attracted visitors and guest students, and also afforded its members more opportunities for travel to national and international performances and demonstrates.

Many of the above descriptions mention restrictions, isolation, or lack of experience when relating to the outside world, but not all aspects of the athletes' social environment were negative. Within that environment, the athletes became adept at, or at least very adapted to, the behavioral or political necessities for that environment, some of which translate to particular advantages or at least particular areas of personal

growth.

Seven participants said that when relationships among teammates were

harmonious, they actually delight in their training. Under good circumstances,

athletes willingly help each other during training, even with the understanding that

they are teammates at some times and competitors at others. This was especially true

for athletes who practice Duilian, which are routines that require two or more athletes

to perform in coordination.

It is the Duilian, ... You can see that when they did not communicate with each other well, it is easy to get into wrangles. If they get into an argument, there is no way to continue the training. (A5, 131)

Seven more participants indicated that they were recognized for their relative

levels of athletic skill, and that higher skill often brought with it greater popularity and

social opportunity.

A lower level of athletic skill means fewer opportunities to communicate with others. Other people are less likely to seek you out for things (comment, advice, or general association) if your skill level is not very good. For instance, wushu practitioners from other countries will often go out of their way to meet you if they see you have better athletic skills. ... They would come to ask you, or they would like to learn from you; however, if you do not have good athletic skills, they do not trust your expertise, and when you teach them, there might be a little resistance. I know it happens quite frequently. (B3, P. 419)

Social stratification also tended to occur with regard to skill level. For example,

three participants stated that they generally socialized with people with athletic skills

of similar level.

For example, topnotch athletes will not come to you in a competition; they do not give you a damn. (So, you talk to people who have similar athletic skills?) Yes, because it is easy to approach people in the same stratum. (C5, P. 742)

Not surprisingly, better athletic skill also tended to bring with it a heightened

sense of confidence.

Wushu is our profession, and when you meet other people, they also know you train wushu professionally. Therefore, the better your athletic skills, the more you would be confident about yourself. You are competent and well-trained, so when you speak, you are generally confident. (B5, P. 491)

Additional factors relating to social skills.

According to five participants, a gender divide existed with respect to social

norms within the teams. Three female athletes indicated that their male teammates

possessed better social skills, and two male athletes described the female athletes as

being more socially restrained or awkward.

I think, very few girls would extend an invitation to a meal, but the boys always like to hang out with friends, and they even go to bars. Therefore, they are able to meet more people. (B2, P. 352)

All except one of the ten male survey participants had friends both inside and

outside the team. Most of them indicated that they often went outside the team to

meet friends or for purely social activities in their spare time.

Four of the female participants said that they just do not like activities typically

associated with socializing, for instance, drinking, talking about topics they could not

accept, or making more friends via their current friends. However, they also had no

other way to socialize with non-athletes outside the team.

When people ask you to hang out, you ought to go; you would get the chance to make more friends. However, I do not like to go to these occasions; ... I'm very uncomfortable with some of the subjects that they talk about. If I do, I feel like it would be against my nature. Also, when friends invited other friends for a meal, you could get to know their friends too. Nevertheless, I feel it is not good. That is, uh, I do not like to become friends with someone for no reason. I think I do not like these occasions, and people there were not appropriate for me as friends. (B1, PP. 302-303)

For example, like us, we do not have opportunities to meet people other than athletes because we do not know them. I cannot just carry a sign and stand in the street for meeting people who are not athletes! (B3, P. 417)

# Athletes' suggestions for social skills development in the professional wushu team.

Most athletes agreed that they were ill-adapted to most outside social environments, and blamed most of this on the isolation imposed upon them by the regulations and quasi-military policies of their sports systems or institutions. They felt that many such policies were historical leftovers, and not or no longer necessary, conducive, or ideal even for dedicated physical training.

Six participants suggested that athletes should be permitted or even encouraged outside of their teams to perform and train, and welcomed the idea of having more guests attend the school to observe or learn wushu from the athletes. Three athletes surveyed from Team A in particular believed that team-sponsored opportunities to teach wushu to guests or visitors would be valuable for them, both to practice and refine their communication and teaching skills as well as to learn social conventions and etiquette. Six of the surveyed athletes felt that the problems of social awkwardness and maladjustment were so serious that they even suggested formal classes in social conventions and etiquette be added to their academic curriculum, although they qualified this by saying it was more important for athletes nearer to adulthood (20 years of age or older) and not as necessary for younger athletes.

Many of the athletes also suggested that the administration of the institutions themselves was stunting their social development, and that the quasi-military structure where the athletes were always subordinate was not conducive to producing socially functional human beings. Some athletes suggested that the relationship between the coaches and athletes should be closer to friendship than superiority by rank, and that

team administrators should communicate with athletes more often. Suggestions already listed above for the purposes of improving training and education, such as re-combining teams broken down into too many distinct branches, or placing athletic teams within and under the administration of sports or academic universities instead of cloistered professional teams, were also suggested for the purpose of improving athletes' social acumen.

## **Conflicts Between Training and Vocational Skills Development**

## Environmental conditions and circumstances of professional wushu athletes' vocational skills development.

Athletes said that the team generally did not provide vocational assistance or preparation for most athletes' post-competition careers. However, some retirement benefits were known to motivate athletes to train and compete. For instance, Team A's athletes who competed in the national games at least three times or Team C's athletes who win in the world championships or the annual national championships, or placed in the top three in the National Games, could count on having a job with the institution upon retirement from competition.

Team administrations were in fact required to provide a job for any athlete who won a championship in the Olympic Games or the national games. However, no promise of employment was given for second place, no matter how close the competition; for example, in the national games, the first and second places in the wushu taolu competition might be separated by as little as a 0.01 difference in score. Nevertheless, the athlete taking second place would not be assigned a job as a coach or administrator, though he or she might receive a one-time, lump sum financial

compensation for his or her post-competition career on retirement.

The amount of money was influenced by the acceptance or rejection of any job at the sports institute earned by athletic achievement and calculated with reference to three factors: the average income level of urban residents, the number of years the athlete trained in the team, and their athletic achievements (General Administration of Sport of China, 2007). One athlete said that she probably would receive a lump sum of approximately 150,000 RMB, or approximately 25,000 US dollars, if she forewent the job offered by the team and struck off to find one on her own instead. However, she also noted that her 15 years of service probably would not be counted after receiving the money because the service might then be factored into the lump sum. If she took the job offer as assigned by the institution, she would receive a much smaller amount of money for the transition out of sport, and the 15 years of service might be continued. The total number of years spent training was usually counted, not just the number of years spent competing professionally. For example, although some athletes at the time of this writing were still not official team members, they would not have qualified for any retirement benefits; however, once becoming official team members, their numbers of years of service would be calculated from the day they started to train with their teams.

Because the retirement benefits were not well communicated, athletes did not have any hard guarantees or promises from the institution regarding this severance pay or its amounts. Some participants said that there was supposed to be money from the institution earmarked for their post-competition careers, yet they did not know if they

would actually receive it on retirement.

There were other retirement benefits for professional athletes. In the cases of two athletes with Team A who secured jobs outside of the professional team for their post-competition careers, there was a standing policy in many local sports institutions which holds that, after earning certain athletic achievements, athletes could return to the institution and receive a job in recognition of their achievements. Another athlete went on to represent both his team and the team of the Chinese Liberation Army; therefore, he would be able to enjoy retirement benefits as both a veteran and retired professional athlete.

One of the participants negotiated a post-retirement position within the institution as a requirement before joining this team. In addition, for Team C, although the athletes had been told by the team coach that on retirement, their salaries would end, the athletes observed that their coach nevertheless continued salary payments to retired athletes for one year after retirement. That continuance of team monetary assistance for up to one year after retirement from professional competition was, in fact, one of the institution's policies. The athletes themselves had little information or knowledge about their official retirement benefits, either for themselves or other sports.

While all participants revealed that the institution did not officially help or support them in finding a job post-retirement, they, especially athletes from Team C, had expectations that their coach would. According to the participants, their coach was able to help them because the coaches had guanxi (Chinese: 关系), or outside connections. On other occasions, the coaches had helped some athletes with

admission to universities, in obtaining positions as wushu coaches and PE teachers in local sports institutions that were affiliated with local primary and secondary schools, or even with the public security bureau. Any help provided by the coach, however, seemed to occur on a personal level, based on the athletes' individual relationships with the coach and was not required or enforced by the institution. Consequently, athletes who are obedient or willing to pursue professional team goals that are also in the interest of the coach's career were also more likely to benefit from the coach's connections.

Regarding athletes' plans (if any) for a post-competition career, almost all participants reported that their post-competition careers would be wushu-related, such as coaching at sport institutions or overseas, secondary schools or universities, or fitness centers/clubs before finding a stable job.

## Conflicts. (see Appendix G, Table 4)

## Training vs. vocational skills.

It is generally expected by most that significant time, effort, and focus are needed for the development of vocational skills outside of wushu. Interestingly, while it might be expected that the athletes would cite the time demands of their training as precluding vocational skills development, only two of the participants directly indicated that their schedules left no time for learning vocational skills. And only one athlete indicated that physical fatigue from training impeded the acquisition of career skills.

The relative lack of complaint regarding the development of other vocational

skills appears to be due to the relative low priority most of the athletes placed upon non-wushu-related vocational skills. Further questioning suggests that most athletes either assume that their post-retirement career will still be related to their athletic careers, or the pressures of their athletic career in the present take such priority that they overlook or discount career future concerns, preferring to concentrate on the more immediate issues of sports training and competition.

Nine athletes revealed concerns that even thinking about vocational training for their post-competition careers would be a distraction sufficient to prevent them from reaching their athletic potential.

[thinking about post-competition career] will influence the training. When you are a professional athlete and thinking about a future career, it will greatly affect the training. In other words, if an athlete wants to focus on training, he/she barely considers the post-competition career. When one athlete starts to think about it, he/she is certainly not satisfied with the current sports training and achievement as well as the consequent future development according to it. It is very difficult to [consider future career options while training professionally]. If my athletic skills are still improving, and I want to win the championship in the national games, I, then, do not have the energy to think about other things. (A5, P. 140)

Many athletes simply assumed or planned that their careers after retirement from

competition would still be related to athletics or wushu, both because it seemed to be a

natural career progression to stay within the same field, and because they believed that

outsiders would always end up thinking of them as athletes first and give little credit to

their other vocational skills, if any, or otherwise discount them.

For example, other professions, you tell them that you had been doing wushu, and you won championships; however, they might think in their head, "it is nothing to brag about it because I won something in my areas too." People will think like this. (A2, P. 50)

Another participant opined that even having post competition career goals that

did not naturally follow directly from competitive sports training would create conflicts of interest between such individuals and their team, and that such aspirations should not even be allowed.

Depend on people's personalities; they might want to be a coach, so they follow the system step by step [follow the scheduled training lifestyle]. However, some people might not want this type of life, so they might do something privately [to prepare]. They must not let anyone in the team know their intentions before they get the job and signed the contract; then, they quit this one. Things like that happened a lot, including athletes who quit for being actors in movies. It is quite normal. (B4, P. 438)

Most professional athletes possess excellent athletic skills after spending

enormous amounts of time and effort in their training; nevertheless, the constant

intensity and single-minded focus of professional competitive training over many years

can also, not surprisingly, lead to emotional and psychological burnout or fatigue as

well. Three athletes indicated that they had had enough of wushu after their careers

as professional athletes, and while a post-competition career as a wushu coach seems

within easy reach, they would gladly pursue other career options if available.

I do not want and do not like to teach wushu, ... In addition, I do not want to teach because I am tired of doing that; that is, anything related with wushu makes me feel very tired. (C2, P. 565)

## Potential external causes of conflicts.

Often, athletes assumed or relied upon the hope and promise that their careers as professional athletes would translate into some kind of career opportunity post-competition, usually through personal connections or institutional and administrative funneling or fast-tracking to specific post-retirement jobs. Whether through trust or reliance, athletes therefore spent little time and were afforded few opportunities to develop other skills or knowledge while actively training. This reliance on trust or assumptions about their team administrators or sports institutions creates a strong dependency on personal connections and politics to provide post-competition careers, a dependency which, in the end, may not end up being fulfilled in all cases.

Most of the athletes participating in this study were of the opinion that the institutions or the coaches were supposed to assist them in their post-competition careers, because the athletes sacrificed nearly all of their time and energy exclusively to the team for training and competition.

Actually, they certainly should help athletes find jobs; otherwise, it is too cruel for these athletes. I see many retired fencing and weight lifting champions leave their team without money, house, or education. The sports institution just ignored them; when athletes were active competing for the city/province, they held athletes as precious, yet when they left, people treated them like nothing. I think this is too callous although we live in a practical society. (C3, P. 643)

Nearly all of the athletes generally had some sense of the importance of personal

politics and understood that their coaches were one of their few contacts or representatives with their sports institutions or team administration; nineteen out of twenty stated this directly, as fact. They knew that it was desirable to maintain a good relationship with their coaches wherever possible, as their coaches were one of the few people situated to assist the athletes with their future careers. Their comments also suggested that most of the teams and institutions themselves have no formal plans, structure, or program for the disposition of athletes post-retirement whatsoever.

(Q: So, you said the coach assigned you this job, but is there any help provided by the team?) No, it's completely from the coach. I mean, so long as you are her athlete and listen to her [the coach would help you with your post-competition

career. But because it's personal, there can be recriminations, too]. Sometimes athletes might get mad with the coach and not listen to her after she did something inappropriate; these athletes would not get jobs [after retiring from the team]. But another athlete who retired recently, for example, was assigned a stable and official position. So it's easy to see that the coach helps her athletes as long as they obey her. Another time, there was another athlete who was unwilling to submit and was uncooperative with the coach. After a while, the athlete felt it was not appropriate to act rashly and apologized for it. ... The coach was soft-hearted; after talks, the coach helped this athlete find a job. I think that [all of this help regarding athletes' future career] is just personal favors on the part of the coach, though. In China, there are only a very few coaches who have arrangements for their athletes' post-competition career. (C5, P. 715)

Since help from the coaches seems to be on an individual, unofficial basis rather

than a structural or systemic basis, experiences across the teams will vary with the individual. In Team C, the coach apparently had the capability to obtain jobs for retiring athletes, whereas in Teams A and B, a coach's assistance in obtaining post-competition work was still valued, but considerably less critical or influential. Gender roles or a gender divide may also be a factor, again depending on the individual, and Team C illustrates one such scenario. Across the surveyed participants from Team C, the male athletes were very satisfied with the preparation and assistance they received from the coach for their post-competition careers, while all three female participants in Team C not only deemed that the assistance offered was conditional on unwanted pressures but also that the coach was either not able or not willing to provide assistance in obtaining the kind of job these athletes desired.

For me, I have never wanted the coach to assign me a job because I do not want to be in the coach's control anymore. To illustrate it, when the coach introduced me to a local sports institution to be a wushu coach, I would still feel like she would maintain authority over me even after I left this team. Then, I would not feel good or satisfied. I want my own, I want, for example, a work that is not related to the coach. ... If the coach introduced you to the local sports institution to work, and she might call you for whatever [she needs], you would still feel the

pressure and restriction. I do not like it. Even if I teach wushu somewhere in the future, I would not want the coach to help. I would try to contact people and do whatever is needed by myself. (C2, P. 598)

Even if the coach is able to help (us obtain the jobs we really want), she would not. (Q: Why?) Because you would no longer work for her, and she definitely would not be happy about it. (C1, P. 544)

There were also other people at the sports institutions or teams that the athletes

could build relationships with. Four participants said that it was essential to be

recognized by the administrators of the institutions, people with prestige in the field, or

the prospective managers, for obtaining the job they were interested in. For instance,

one athlete talked about getting help from the administrators.

The major part of my preparation is to put forward my career requests and concerns to the administrators to consider. In addition, I also try to go above and beyond in my duty and dedication to compete and perform for the team; ah, for example, last year, I was injured, and I competed with the assistance of injected painkillers. When it was already my second event, I was still in great pain, yet I kept up to the end. I showed the administrators and the coaches my efforts. After they saw all my efforts, they might think that this athlete at lease did something for \*\* province. Therefore, you make them recognize you and give you some opportunities [for post-competition career]. (A6, P. 167)

Regarding help from outside the institutions proper, twelve athletes also

mentioned help from their friends, most usually previously retired wushu athletes.

(Q: How could you get into this field?) I knew some friends, who are action directors, for example. They were retired wushu athletes from this team, and they later worked in the entertainment realm. (B2, P. 359)

In general terms, guanxi, or connections, whether athlete-coach,

athlete-administrator, or athlete-athlete relationships, are considered essential for

post-competition careers by more than three fourths of the participants, particularly in

the absence of any official or formal structure for vocational training.

I feel all these [avenues of work that I am interested in] require you to have the guanxi, a wide range of connections and a circle of friends. (A2, P. 49)

While the athletes recognized that guanxi is as important in their world as it is in outside society, they are very disadvantaged by their environment and circumstances. For most of the sport's history, wushu athletes have been largely or entirely isolated in order to concentrate their attention on their physical skills. Even for the teams with slightly more relaxed regulations than in the past, they have very limited opportunities to make connections or friends outside the team, and it is especially difficult for them to make connections or have friendships outside of athletics. Thus, not only are most of the athletes' outside connections limited to the retired teammates whom they knew before they retired, but because of intra-team competition, this type of resource is also low in both quantity and quality.

In addition, since athlete-coach and athlete-administrator's relationships are generally founded on mutual "business" benefit as opposed to friendship, affection, or trust, athletes might be led to believe that the way for them to build connections is to spend more time training, not socializing. Additionally, assisting the majority of athletes for their post-competition careers was deemed not an imperative for the institutions or coaches. Thirteen participants stated a belief that they could only depend on themselves or should take the responsibility for their own future careers. Furthermore, athletes' expectations for future careers assistance derived from professional training were difficult to fulfill in reality, sometimes leaving athletes who rely on their competition performance instead of their relationships to build connections without career assistance from any quarter after retirement.

The most frequently expressed complaint was that the administrators did not take

responsibility for and were unconcerned about athletes' post-competition careers.

Even for outstanding athletes, [the teams] do not arrange anything [for athletes' post-competition careers]. This should be the administrators' responsibility. ...actually, I feel that assigning jobs to these athletes should not be a big issue in the first place. After all, athletes devoted their lives to the team since they were young, and they do very well in competitions. Assigning jobs to these athletes should be a given, but the administrators always seem to have various excuses to turn them away. (C5, P. 694)

One athlete explained self-interest on the part of the administrators as one of the

potential reasons:

They're not even really thinking about [your welfare]. They are shortsighted, only care about immediate interests, only care about what [profit] they can grab, only care about the ultimate athletic achievement. If the team administrators can't get the team to win at taolu, they turn their attention to sanda (wushu sanda), it's all about trying to get a gold medal. The team's future does not matter to them because they might step down [by promotion or reassignment] after four years, and they won't have anything to do with the team afterwards. Administrators are all like that. He/she administers the team for four years, or only two years, or eight years. Within the eight years, if the team has attained [athletic] achievement, they can move on to something else; if not, they cannot be promoted. So, he/she only grasps the needs and goals of his/her own immediate interests, and it is impossible for him to build a solid foundation for the good of the team after two or more terms later<sup>11</sup>. (A5, PP. 141-142)

There are policies the SGAS set forth to mitigate negative factors impacting the

existing official or unofficial provisions for athletes' retirement, including the

aforementioned reservation of post-competition jobs, university recruitment and

admissions, and retirement stipend or severance pay. However, at least two athletes

mentioned that these benefits were both poorly communicated and poorly

administered.

[The team] does not inform me about [the post-competition career benefits and polices]. I mean it is not that they do not tell me, but they do not even know it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> According to the National Games, one term is four years.

themselves, because they do not even care. I found out about this policy<sup>12</sup> by myself; someone else told me that there is such a policy. I know about this policy now, but even so, I have no guarantee for my application after retirement (the policy is not communicated so maybe the administrators everywhere do not even know about it). In China, if you do not have guanxi, they still do not accept you anyway. They would say that "we could take you first, but we do not have an open position; when we have an open position, we will process it for you." The SGAS says "you (provincial and local sports institutions) must well arrange athletes' post-competition career." The local institutions tell you that "fine, we would accept you, but there is no open position." The problem is about the implementation. This is China not the U.S.; it is not as simple as saying that when you qualify for having something, you will receive it. It is easy for the SGAS to issue polices, but to implement all these polices effectively on provincial and local levels is too difficult. (A5, P. 139)

This athlete, who had been winning championships for years and was absolutely one of the very top wushu athletes in China, was still struggling to find a job, which further illustrates his point that the current efficacy of the post-retirement policies is questionable, and that as with many other things, guanxi still carries more weight than qualifications or achievements. Other athletes might assume that their future careers should be secured when they achieved his level of achievement, yet in reality, ten national champions still did not receive or encountered difficulty in receiving the intended benefits of their professional team's policies. Other athletes might not learn either about the policies or the challenges involved in availing themselves of them until they are nearly retired, and thereby find themselves thrown into an unfamiliar system with little preparation. Two more athletes said that only when athletes were about to leave the teams did they have any idea whether their institutions or coaches would in fact provide them with any kind of career assistance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> After the athletes retired from the team with certain athletic achievements and want to go back to the local institution, the local institution, where the athletes came from, must accept them and provide them a position within the institution.

The institution has the power to help you, but the problem is whether they help you or not. ... (will they help you, then?) I haven't gotten to that point yet, so how am I going to know if they would help me or not! (To which point, you'll be able to know it?) When I'm no longer useful to them, I will, then, know whether they would help me. ... when I'm about to retire from the team. (A9, P. 273)

Eight participants also shared their perspective on another issue they are likely to

face on retirement: the increasing number of retired athletes with growing market

saturation in their professional skill set.

There are only a few open positions but many athletes. They (the institutions) are not able to well arrange every athlete's future careers. In fact, it is very competitive for obtaining these positions. (B4, P. 462)

Another factor that appears to contribute to the increasing difficulty that

professional athletes are encountering after retirement is the diminishing political

prestige and importance of competitive sports in the public eye. While competitive

sports remain a great source of national pride, their perceived political and diplomatic

importance may be waning, leaving athletes and their skills less important to

prospective employers and political officials than in generations past.

The feeling is like that competitive sports are becoming less and less important, so people completely do not attach any importance to athletes. No one cares about you, and it does not matter to others after you retire. (C3, P. 644)

In the last few decades, Chinese society and standards of living have changed

rapidly, overtaking and outstripping the sports system's ability to maintain pace.

Professional athletes increasingly find themselves big fish in a small pond; once

outside the arena of competitive sports, they see themselves as having a disadvantage

in common society. As the outside world becomes increasingly sophisticated and

wealthy, and sports institutions remain excessively fixated on the relatively short-term

goals of competitive sports, athletes find themselves ill-prepared to venture outside a

system whose protective provincialism is becoming a liability instead of an advantage.

From the opinions and perspectives accumulated during this study, it becomes apparent that five issues--irresponsible administrators, poorly implemented vocational policies, late notice of vocational support, a relative oversupply of retired professional athletes, and regressing significance of competitive sports in the Chinese society, were revealed as obstacles to athletes' successful transitions from competition careers to post-retirement careers. Even as their limited social experiences and access made it difficult for them to fully predict or conceptualize the final implications or outcome of these difficulties.

## Potential internal causes of conflicts.

Many athletes started to realize that it was no longer possible for the sport system to place the majority of retiring athletes with jobs at various governmental organizations, so they have increasingly been relying on their own efforts to secure, or attempt to secure, post-retirement work. This of course meant that most athletes felt increased anxiety over their post-competition careers and had to divide their attention and energy between sports training and outside career preparation. It is also quite natural that such concerns become more and more pressing for senior athletes, closer to their retirement from competition, than younger athletes.

After all, you are old enough to have some of your own thoughts, and you are facing leaving the team. Right now, you ought to use the time to think and manage what comes later (the post-competition career). (B1, P. 301)

Even understanding that they may be on their own regarding future career planning, the athletes are disadvantaged in that their schedules are still dominated by training, and that their environment and overall lifestyle tends to be isolated, regimented and heavily restricted. Half of the participants revealed that they had no clue of what type of work they might have in the future, what skills they needed for future careers, and what they could do to prepare for them. These circumstances produced unnerving uncertainty and a natural aversion to facing the unpleasantness of feeling out of one's element, despite the increasing urgency of the problem on an individual and personal level.

I do not know what to do in the future, and I also do not have any plan yet. I'm still in the team, and will wait until I am about to leave the team. Then I will start to think about it. Right now, even if I was concerned about it, I would probably not be able to do anything about it anyway. (C2, P. 565)

Most of the participants expressed that a belief that their team administrators or

coaches should provide them with at least some support in finding work after retirement from their teams. However, since the policies regarding post-retirement arrangements are not clear or evident to the athletes, they have difficulty availing themselves of any of it. In the absence of notice or guidance, many do not know who to approach or how. Although there was one athlete from Team B who said he would talk to his coach if he needed the coach's assistances, two others from the same team were not assertive in terms of asking for assistance.

Q: What makes you think they will not assist you?

A: Because there is no such thing (helping athletes). First of all, they (the institution) does not think about us, only about competition; secondly, I have never asked for it. ... When you request it by yourself, people would feel you are annoying. (B3, P. 431, 433)

Because the Chinese sport system has not yet built an effective career assistance program for elite athletes, athletes who wait for their teams to step forward and inform them of the services or policies available to help them are left vulnerable and easily overlooked on their departure.

Athletes did understand that their careers as professional athletes had provided them with certain job skills that would be useful in other careers or work. They expected that they would receive some credit from any prospective employer for their national-caliber athletic and performance achievements. However, sixteen participants also discussed other skills, experience, and knowledge that could be relevant or required by other work.

Nine participants indicated that verbal and managerial skills such as teaching, communication, team coordination, computer skills, leadership, observation, etc., would be important for their post-competition careers.

If I am assigned a job to be an administrator [in the team]; I need to learn something new. Computers; I am able to use because I learned it at school (she physically attended university since the junior year). (A1, P. 20)

Of the surveyed participants, nine mentioned that they needed to have some work experience outside the team. In addition, ten athletes reported that they should have more work-related knowledge. About half of the participants expected to have post competition careers wherein their wushu-related knowledge would be essential or play a major or primary role. Not surprisingly, seven athletes that did have prior work experience or felt reasonably assured that they already had the skills needed for a post-competition career of some kind had more confidence and less anxiety, as they believed that with or without help from the institution, they would be able to make their way in the workforce.

I think I am capable to do all these jobs, whether it is office related or as a

choreographer-director. Because I have done these before, and if you want me to do these again, I am able to. ... I have done these before and I have the experiences. (B4, P. 458)

While seven of the athletes surveyed felt prepared in some way, ten athletes did

not feel prepared and felt considerable anxiety.

I am not able to teach a class; here I mean a regular PE class [rather than teaching semi-professional wushu athletes]. I need to learn how to teach a PE class. When I saw other teachers teaching PE, it seemed quite easy. ... it looked easy to handle, but it is very different and challenging when actually doing it. Maybe, I do not have enough teaching experiences. (C5, P. 713)

Athletes who were actively training in the more restrictive teams - those that

retained or maintained the more isolated, quasi-military restrictions and policies - all

had fewer opportunities to learn job skills than most other people in their geographical

region. Four athletes expected that most job skills would be learned on-the-job, as

opposed to at vocational school or job training classes.

When you are not in the position, you are not concerned about its related affairs. You will know and learn what you need when you are actually doing the work. (C6, P. 746)

Some athletes were concerned about their quality of education as an aspect of

their general quality of life; four athletes surveyed indicated that a fundamental education is a necessary quality. Some athletes, however, see educational degrees first and foremost as a job qualification or resume builder – the degree itself being a more valuable commodity for the opportunities presented, as opposed to its personal intellectual value; eight surveyed athletes were only concerned about whether they would be able to obtain a master's degree, or the teaching credential in order to teach in the school system.

(Q: Why is winning a championship so important for your post-competition career?) Because it makes me qualified to be recommended to go to the graduate

school. The master's degree is associated with my future career. (A8, P. 229)

As revealed in the education section, the time and resource conflicts between education and sports training are very sharp, with training for competition having near absolute priority. Even with an isolated childhood and young adulthood, spent almost wholly in the care and confinement of a sports institution, a minority of participants surveyed foresee trouble for themselves and their teammates in retirement, and even feel some resentment towards a system that all but discards them to their fate after leaving them so ill-prepared to face their futures.

It is ridiculous to have an Olympic champion doing street cleaning on retirement. Athletes contribute so much to the city/province, and then they clean the street after they leave the team. I think she ended up that way because she never received a real education. (Participant was making a general comment about professional athletes in retirement, but was previously discussing a specific case; a former weightlifting world champion who is now working at a public bath, giving back rubs) (C2, P. 598)

#### Other miscellaneous factors.

#### Associations.

Whether through unfamiliarity or inexperience, few of the participants were able to vocalize specific conflicts in time and resources between their sports training and their vocational development. Rather, quite a few still saw athletic achievements as being beneficial to their future careers, so long as those careers remained related to wushu in some way, where those achievements would be appreciated as being meaningful.

Why I want these athletic achievements, isn't it just for a better career in the future! (B1, P. 312)

All the participants, however, agreed that their level of athletic skills and accomplishment were largely of benefit only to wushu-related careers, and far less

associated with any credit or advantage for jobs in unrelated fields. Most of the athletes expected to pursue a career where recognition and credit for their accomplishments as athletes would be beneficial to them, instead of starting an unrelated career from scratch. Fourteen participants said that they would most likely teach wushu after retiring from their teams; another six indicated that they were, at the very least, considering wushu or sports-related jobs in their potential choices for future employment. This is significant, considering that many athletes have also voiced fatigue from their training and the demands of competitive sports, and yet nevertheless believe that their lives to date have prepared them for nothing else. Seventeen athletes directly expressed the belief that their athletic achievements and skills as competitive wushu athletes were advantageous to them only when searching for or actually doing wushu-related work.

With my athletic skills, [my parents] could help me find a job. I am also able to find one by myself. Even though I worry about it (post-competition career), I still think I can find one no matter what. In addition, I have won the title of the national elite athlete; after all, it is already the highest level, and not many people can say this. (B3, P. 433)

Six athletes indicated that professional athletes are in an "all of your eggs in one basket" situation after retirement. High performance and official recognition, including champion standing, would be the strongest qualifications they could take into a future career, because athletes' other skills are likely to be underdeveloped compared to many other citizens, particularly due to an otherwise relatively limited education.

Of course [athletic skills and achievements and future careers] are related. . If you do not have athletic achievements what would you have to show others? You

have poor education, and if you also do not have athletic achievement, no one will recognize you. (C5, P. 716)

Seven athletes also noted that even before entering the workforce at large, higher

athletic skills and achievements were worth more because of the unofficial help,

favoritism, or connections that they could bring the athlete from within the institution

before leaving, building connections for a future career.

Because of the limited jobs available and the limited ability and the attentions of the administrators, they are only willing to assist the most outstanding athletes for that [with their post-competition careers]. (B3, P. 430)

A few participants, however, saw their skills and experience, as specialized as

they might be as being, applicable to other work. Whether this is merely a matter of

perspective or represents a substantive career capability would be proven or disproven

by actual experience, but nevertheless, at least a few athletes see their focused career

training as having taught them skills that could be marshaled and applied to other

endeavors.

First of all, as a professional athlete, the primary thoughts of other people will be that you are able to bear hardships [or you are hard-working], there should have no other people who could be better than athletes at these. Secondly, the executive ability, athletes' executive ability is thought to be pretty good, i.e., you (authorities) want them (athletes) to do something, they will do it for you. Then, the ability to learn new things is not bad as well. Athletes have strong adaptability and can quickly learn new things. Also, the title as a professional athletes was valued in society, and the university I graduate from is one of these recognized as prestigious. For me, finding an average job is not difficult. (B4, P. 456)

One athlete, who had already been assigned a job as a coach of the second tier

wushu team on Team B by contract upon joining, mentioned that she could learn

teaching methods and knowledge from her coach along with her own professional

sports training.

I did not say that after the national games, I would retire from the team. ... I still

need the coach's help, such as some suggestions and advice [about coaching]. Therefore, after the competition, I still need to know more. Right now, I only have some superficial understanding [of wushu] with my enthusiasm, but I need more knowledge. (B1, P. 318)

Other factors affecting future careers.

Ten athletes talked about the availability of support from family members;

nevertheless, many indicated that they would not be relying principally on family

assistance. Three athletes specifically indicated that the family's financial situation

impacted athletes' post-competition careers. More generally, athletes meant that their

families, through connections or family business, would be able to help athletes find

jobs after retiring from competition, yet one athlete said that sometimes any

knowledge of family resources by outsiders would lead other people, such as the

coaches, to withdraw their own assistance.

The coach had helped many athletes find jobs or introduced them to somewhere (some organizations). But, for us, she might not do it. She must be thinking that my family background is not bad, so she would not do it for me. However, she will assist a lot of other people [in terms of post-competition career], and she did, such as to assign athletes to be coaches or police, etc. (C2, P. 597)

# Athletes' suggestions for future career development in the professional wushu team.

As noted above, many athletes have either felt completely unprepared for a post-competition career on retirement, or worry about both the lack of post-retirement career preparation and the (perceived) lack of any official institutional provisions for assisting athletes in their transition to the workforce at large. When surveyed, individual athletes had thoughts on how sports programs might better prepare athletes while they are still in their tenure as competing athletes.

Two athletes in Team B suggested an academic approach to this problem,

emphasizing that to develop additional vocational skills or to prepare for post-competition careers should be started much earlier, i.e., while they were still active athletes, before it is too late. One of these athletes suggested adding courses in English or basic computer skills, to the academic curriculum, to be studied when not physically training.

Eight other participants suggested a hands-on, "learn on the job" approach, wherein the institutions would assign athletes sports-related jobs that could be integrated easily into their standard training schedule. Suggested possibilities included assigning actively competing athletes to spend some of their training time as assistant coaches within their professional teams, as visiting coaches at the local sports institutions, or clerical work in their institution's administrative or logistics department. Three other study participants want their institutions to assist with introductions and referrals for procuring future work with such institutions, in a more official capacity than the traditional resort to guanxi, or connections.

A participant from Team B said that the team should give early information and communicate to its athletes regarding what type of jobs they might receive well before retirement. His reasoning was that if athletes knew what they were going to do for their post-competition careers, they could familiarize themselves with that department while training professionally instead of approaching them "cold". An athlete from Team A also pointed out that official programs for career placement of retiring professional athletes exist, they are just very poorly communicated. He suggested that simply proper communication of these policies would address many athletes' fears

and give them an opportunity to build towards those opportunities instead of wasting time and focus on undirected job searches.

In addition, three athletes suggested that the institutions should have dedicated instructional lectures regarding post-competition careers and preparation for professional athletes. Those lectures would answer many unanswered questions athletes might have, including what types of jobs could be made available or accessible by official means, what resources they have to educate themselves about those jobs, how to meet any prerequisites, how their experience as athletes would be applicable to future work, and how to prepare for these jobs step by step. Currently, many athletes obtain information regarding future careers from their coaches and previously retired teammates; however, such information may be inaccurate or circumstantial. For instance, several participants were erroneously convinced that they were physically "too short" for teaching wushu in an outside university based on their coach's opinion. I was thinking to teach wushu in university earlier, but I then thought about my

height; then, I was like, "forget about it," and I gave this up. (C2, P. 590)

# Attitudes for the implementation of athletes' suggestions.

Some athletes were not hopeful about the prospects of implementing any such suggestions, however, believing that they would be met with significant if not insurmountable resistance. Four athletes from Team A said that, in China, and in this sports system, it was too difficult or even impossible to make these changes whether they related to athletes' athletic, academic, social skill, and vocational skill development. Even supposing that the resources were available to the institution, these athletes guessed that the institution's administrators would not see it as being worth their own time, particularly if it did not provide the administrators with some personal benefit to themselves. For instance, team administrators might be convinced to invite a sports psychologist to help athletes foster optimal mindsets before competitions, but would probably not be convinced to hire teaching career coaches or psychologists to teach athletes how to socialize with others or prepare for career outside of athletics. They think that anything believed, accurately or not, to be a detriment or distraction to competitive performance, would be resisted or rejected outright by the administrators as a waste of time and resources.

#### Chapter 5

#### Summaries, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This study investigated the tensions within the Chinese elite sport system between its athletes' sport training and their overall personal, social, and vocational development. This chapter is divided into three sections; investigative summaries, recommendations, and conclusions. The summary section contains six subsections; the first subsection briefly recaps the history and evolution of the sports system as it presently exists, and the second subsection reprises the specific role of competitive wushu, part of the indigenous wushu *cultural* system, in this elite *sports* system. The other four subsections relate to the four dimensions of the athlete's personal and professional growth relevant to this study: athletics, academics, social skills, and vocational skills development. These four subsections present discussion and analysis of the data presented in chapter four after collation and tabulation, exploring their convergence or divergence with respect to the institutional objectives described in chapter two. Then, recommendations for avenues of future research and revision of the sports system are listed. Finally, the conclusion presents a summary review of study data reflecting the major themes articulated in chapter one.

#### **Investigative Summaries**

# The history and evolution of the State General Administration of Sport (SGAS).

This section presents a summary of the historical and political background of the Chinese government-run sport system as recorded in available literature. In 1952, the "two Chinas" political issue prompted the establishment of the State General

Administration of Sport (SGAS). Within the social, political, and economic contexts of pre-Cultural Revolution China, the Soviet Union's successes in international competitive sports were viewed as a template and inspiration for accelerating the development of China's sport system.

However, during the political climate of the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), competitive sports activities came to be regarded as bourgeois entertainment, so the SGAS fell under criticism. Consequently, elite sports in China were nearly eliminated in the first half of the Cultural Revolution. While most of the Chinese population continued to struggle in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the SGAS and the priority of elite competitive sports in China enjoyed a gradual but politically sanctioned revival following the "Ping Pong Diplomacy" event with the United States in 1971 and the subsequent re-opening of Sino-American diplomatic relations in 1979. The SGAS then enjoyed official and political support because of the value of competitive sports in international diplomacy, and during this phase of the SGAS' revival, China's participation within sport competitions reflected a spirit of "Friendship First, Competition Second".

Once China started to gradually "open its doors" to the outside world after 1979, it became more eager to project an image of competitiveness with western powers. As the SGAS renewed its membership with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1979, the mission of the Chinese competitive sports system started to emphasize nationalism and patriotism in addition to, and sometimes more than, diplomacy. Winning gold medals as status symbols and evidence of national strength

or superiority became the top priority.

Thereafter, from 1979 to the present day, the elite sport system has been known as the "Juguo Tizhi"; the "whole nation support system". The policy of Juguo Tizhi was to serve and advance state interests by attaining achievements and status in the most advanced, sophisticated, and influential areas of concern nationwide or worldwide. To this end, the "Olympic Strategy" was implemented in 1985, which made the acquisition and capture of Olympic gold medals the driving force behind the organization and design of all SGAS policies and systems.

In the beginning of this phase, the overall functions of the highly planned and centralized sport system enjoyed politically guaranteed priority and resources, but as China continues to evolve with an increasingly market-driven economy and enormous social change, the centralized sports system's ability to provide needed resources has fallen behind relative to the requirements of the rapidly changing society. When the centrally-directed economy was dominant, a career as a competitive athlete was a materially advantageous and prestigious opportunity for the young children to whom it was available. Now, much of that material advantage and prestige is either waning or gone, and professional athletes find themselves with specialized skills which do not necessarily prepare them for a career after the relatively short competition career of a professional competitive athlete ends. The single-minded focus on sport training, deemed necessary to prevail in national competition and the Olympic games, took complete precedence over development in any other area, educational, social, vocational, or otherwise. This extreme specialization left athletes less able to adapt to

life in society in large, as retirement from professional competition is unavoidable, with most athletes having to retire before turning thirty years of age.

## Wushu permeated with the western concept of sport.

When China was forced to open its doors to foreign commerce in the middle of the nineteenth century by the hands of western imperialism, western ideas, including the concept of competitive sports, were spread into the nation. The military value of wushu declined after Chinese exposure to industrialized technology, and consequently its cultural and traditional value lost much of its former prominence in Chinese society. As a physical pursuit, the surviving practice of wushu became intertwined with the western concept of competitive sports.

Wushu found itself reinvented as a competitive sport in the western sense during the 1920s. As China began participating in international competitions, the structure and conduct of wushu competitions and tournaments were also gradually reformatted along western sports paradigms. After the government-run sport system was established in 1952, wushu was included within it as a competitive sport, primarily for the purpose of promoting international and national sports events of economic or political significance. At the time of this writing, competitive wushu is both the only non-Olympic sport remaining in the National Games of China and the event most representative of traditional Chinese athletics. China has repeatedly petitioned for wushu to be introduced to the Olympic Games, but has thus far only succeeded at shortlisting wushu taolu for inclusion in the 2020 Summer Olympics along with seven other sports, and wushu was the only non-Olympic international sport event through

out Olympic history permitted to be hosted during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Because of the political importance of the National Games, professional wushu teams were included within the Juguo Tizhi, the national sport support system, in order to ensure that athletes were able to achieve their maximum athletic potential. The Juguo Tizhi's goal is not athletic advancement for its own sake, but rather for the advancement of patriotic, diplomatic, and political interests, and sports that have the potential to advance these goals on the national or international stage receive particular attention. Therefore, as with athletes of other competitive sports, most wushu athletes are selected from the local sport institutes and placed in professional training environments for the duration of their active competition careers.

Although the organization and administration of competitive wushu has been institutionally reworked in the western mold, it is still the subject of a degree of special or particularized consideration. The system still gives special regard to wushu for its cultural value and national pride, and wushu athletes have opportunities or support systems that are not available or less available to other professional athletes. For instance, plenty of universities in China have dedicated wushu departments, and athletes may attend these universities to broaden their wushu-related knowledge and skills. The nature of wushu also gives wushu athletes a natural opportunity to enter other professional fields, such as the entertainment industry, where wushu is an indispensable element. In addition, athletes can also teach wushu in China's school system or teach wushu abroad to propagate uniquely Chinese culture. All these

opportunities are seldom available for professional athletes from most other sports.

### Sport training.

The collected data indicate that athletes had to train anywhere from 20-40 hours per week, depending on which team they trained with. The interviews generally show that the more hours an athlete spends on training, the less satisfaction he or she feels toward the training regimen and the state or progress of his or her overall personal development. For example, while most athletes from Team B, who on average actively trained 20 hours per week, asserted that their training regimen was scientifically sound and necessary for competitive success, athletes from Team C, who on average trained over 30 hours per week, had almost universally negative perceptions of the effectiveness of their coaching and the scientific basis and efficiency of their training regimen.

Concerns about the efficiency or efficacy of their team training regimens aside, all surveyed athletes agreed that personal dedication is an indispensable quality in a competitive athlete. Athletes were convinced that whether they agreed with the particulars of their training, as professional competitive athletes the development of their athletic skills was their first priority, both for their present and future professional careers. They noted that the need for athletic excellence is obvious for competition, but even their future career success is dependent on recognition for what they achieve now in their competition careers. Various rewards, including material and political favors, connections, and future spiritual and vocational development, were assigned and received in light of athletes' competitive athletic achievements, because within the

Chinese elite sport system, the acquisition of gold medals and championship standing is both the ultimate goal and the most powerful measure of success. Therefore, while some athletes recognized the inherent value in vocational and academic training, they nevertheless also recognized that dedication to physical training remained paramount to success because the external perception of their value and skill focuses on their success as competitors, first and foremost.

### Education.

While academic study and scientifically-based training have the potential to be mutually complementary; the Chinese elite sports system views the two as being in conflict with regard to an athlete's time, energy, and training schedule. This study revealed three interconnected and mutually reinforcing systemic biases against fundamental academic education: people's indifferent attitudes toward athletes' education, a lack of quality in the available educational programs, and a belief that academic study detracts from the development of athletic skill instead of complementing it.

As a matter of fact, everyone involved in the system, including parents, coaches, administrative personnel, and the athletes themselves was fixated on sport training, with fundamental education being an afterthought. Eighteen out of 20 athletes deemed that education was not an urgent imperative for them, at least not compared to the immediate and constant demands of physical training. Even before being selected for professional team membership, amateur wushu students who demonstrate potential for their sport find the focus in their schooling already shifting, emphasizing the

athletic over the academic to the point of neglect.<sup>13</sup> It is likely that this dismissive attitude towards the importance or value of education stems directly from the pressure, expectations, and rewards of a lifestyle and career centered on athletic competition, where no such pressures, recognition, or advantage are associated with academics. Even the few athletes who felt otherwise said that effective study requires a student to both realize the importance of academics and study of his own free will.

Even on a material level, however, the education available to athletes training in a professional competitive environment is poor in quality and ineffectively managed. Teachers generally failed to exert sufficient discipline to maintain focus and productivity in classes, and tended neither to adopt nor be subject to any responsibility or incentives for their students' performance. These problems in quality are likely to have been precipitated by the institutional level of indifference towards the value of an athlete's academic education described above, as there is no indication that the financial or material resources needed to provide better quality instruction is lacking.

The above problems are exacerbated by the poor tailoring of team educational programs to the athletes' educational circumstances. The educational program for many teams offers only a few grade levels as starting points, and is ill-adapted to meeting a new student at his or her present academic level. Consequently, many students find themselves enrolled at a grade level that is either a number of years behind their level of preparation, resulting in years of redundant study, or far too advanced for their level of preparation, giving them little means of catching up or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Individual interviews of this study corroborate the findings of Dai (2004)

comprehending the content of their schooling.

Additionally, the mismatch in proficiency is compounded by failures in accommodation. The standard educational grade levels, materials, subjects, and pacing for students are all imported into the team schooling programs with only a little adjustment or accommodations made for the athletes' schedules or status as full-time, state-sponsored career athletes. Other studies, such as Xu and Xue (2011), have also concluded that the approach to education of athletes should be different from methods and structure applied in public schools; at the very least, the program should enroll athletes in a level commensurate with the actual current educational level.

The lack of attention to structure and efficacy in team schooling programs is perhaps not surprising, given the priorities of wining gold medals. Inclusion of educational programs within team training programs appears to have been little more than a formality, a token gesture towards the satisfaction of minimal education requirements. To all appearances, team administrators have dedicated little to no effort or research into tailoring school resources or schedules for efficiency or efficacy.

The state and quality of the athletes' schooling is the subject of more than just passive apathy or casual neglect, however; practically all conflicts or tension in priority between emphasizing a student's athletic performance and meeting that same student's academic needs are resolved in favor of more physical training. Furthermore, the isolation and a quasi-military lifestyle that are standard practice in professional teams also contribute to poor academic preparation. Athletes' exposure to the world outside of their training environments remains limited and frequently is

restricted only to athletes who were competing or abroad touring for demonstrations. At many training facilities, casual visitors, sometimes even friends and family, were all but forbidden. Thus, the environment inside schools did not change even as China at large experienced a rapid rise in its global economic standing and its standards of living and education. The value and utility of an academic education in present-day China is much higher, but the athletes train in an environment which sequesters them from these developments. Neither their family nor their friends are available to help them appreciate these realities or to apply the motivation or discipline needed to adhere to their studies. This is particularly so for the athletes who are removed from normal schools at very young age in order to maximize their athletic potential, as they start falling behind relative to social norms at a very early age, as observed by Gou The sports system does not share the priorities that family and friends do in (2010).an athlete's future well being; the sports institutions are government institutions advancing national priorities, and the officials within regard the athletes as the instrument by which to win gold medals for national pride and international prestige, as observed by Gou (2010). As noted by Dai (2004), the resources and support assigned to athletes is almost solely given over to sport training, and academic training was all but abandoned. Few, if any, people in the system concern themselves with the disposition of athletes post competition, regardless of how the rest of China has changed on social and economic levels, and they therefore, intentionally or otherwise, assign little to no priority to an athlete's educational well-being. Therefore, most athletes have little to no understanding of how much they need that education in order

to lead productive, successful lives after they retire from competition.

#### Social skills development.

Social skills have been defined as the ability to interact in appropriate and effective manners (Segrin, 1992, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1985, 1989). To function adequately in any given social environment, an athlete's behaviors need to meet social expectations, values, or norms, and he or she needs the capability to recognize and interpret the subtle signals that inform circumstance and responding accordingly. Segrin (2003) defines effective interaction as behavior which attains the intended goal(s) or maximizes the reinforcement in an interaction, but overall, the participants in this study revealed tendencies towards shyness or introversion, a lack of social initiative, or simply disinterest in talking with others. This study clearly indicates that professional wushu athletes' training-dominated lifestyle diminishes their opportunities and therefore their capacity to function in social environments other than the immediate circumstances of their sport training.

A review of the surveyed athletes' interviews paints a mixed picture of trepidation, confusion, and worry on the part of the athletes regarding their social preparedness. This is perhaps not surprising, as most team environments are moderately to severely isolated, cloistered, and heavily regimented compared to what most people would consider an "average" or "typical" life. Not only do most of them not receive a normal public education, they effectively grow up without their family and work full time at an age where most other children are still in elementary school. Nearly everything that they can appreciate about social norms and customs is garnered

through limited observation of outsiders, with very little personal experience. It must be kept in mind that the surveyed athletes' observations and understanding of their skills and preparedness with respect to social matters is filtered through this lens.

Some athletes, for example, believed on some level that professional athletes are actually more mature than most outsiders of similar age. Those who hold this opinion cite various reasons, including the strong personal discipline needed to endure the pain and rigors of daily training, a heightened or accelerated introduction to self-reliance from having been removed from family at a young age, and the heightened intuition and observational skills needed to navigate intensely political relationships in a closed environment.

These social skills, however, are of a particularized, possibly even overspecialized nature, exclusively adapted for daily, year-round social navigation in an atypical environment. As noted previously, the environment of Chinese sports teams, or at the very least, professional wushu teams, has been molded to serve governmental and national priorities of excelling at, and even dominating, national and international athletic competition for diplomatic and political purposes. This system is concerned with its own priorities, not the well-being or viability of the athletes once they no longer directly serve those priorities. Whether the reasoning is scientifically sound or not, the sports institutions decided very early in their history that allowing athletes to partake in social activities might disrupt their career focus on training, and so imposed regulations and practices that included isolating, quasi-military aspects such as curfews, heavily regimented schedules, and stifling limits on visitors and

outside communication. The institutions have made few if any changes to that policy ever since. (See Xiao & Li, 2004)

Social skills are learned from observation and experiences, and social isolation is known to impede social development, as observed by Liberman et al. (1989). Cao (2008) finds that athletes who live in an environment defined by isolation or curfews have thoughts and behaviors that are restrained and reserved out of habit and uncertainty. Riemer et al. (2000) have independently noted that even female student-athletes in the U.S. feel socially isolated as they devote enormous amounts of time to their sports. The data collected for this study note that the effects of isolation on social and emotional growth are especially strong when the athlete is female, young or junior, or hails from less economically prosperous regions.

Extended social isolation affects not only the emotional well-being of athletes, but their functional viability as individuals outside of the limited context of athletic competition as well. The resulting unfamiliarity with social customs, traditional moral standards, and the laws that govern outside society leave many professional Chinese athletes, not just wushu athletes, without essential tools for navigating life as an independent or self-sufficient adult, as found by Cheng (2010) and Li (2011).

The wushu athletes largely spend their adolescence and most of their young adulthood without their parents, family, or most of the usual sorts of role models one would have in a normal life, and their authority figures are more interested in their performance as athletes than anything else. This further inhibits both the feedback most children receive with regard to their social growth and impedes the development

of a working knowledge of outside society and social conventions; Li (2011) observes similarly. Athletes expressed that they felt a lack of common ground with outsiders and experience great difficulty relating to, communicating with, or connecting with anyone who was not also involved with wushu. The aforementioned lack of experience or familiarity with outside manners and custom is further compounded by the deficits in academic quality mentioned above, as surveyed athletes noted that they felt they even lacked the vocabulary and knowledge of vernacular, everyday idioms, and figures of speech to converse on any topic not related to wushu.

While isolation created difficulties for athletes' ability to function in outside society, the pervasive influence of competition created difficulties for the athletes in forming social relationships even within the one environment they actually lived in. Team athletes were in close contact with one another nearly every day of the year, for many years at a time, and adapted to dealing with each other as individuals. However, the similarity of their situations and the small size of their peer group, coupled with the pressures and conflicts of interest inherent in competitive sports, as well as a social hierarchy and stratification defined by seniority, skill, and administrative favoritism, limited the nature of even these intra-team relationships.

Within the semi-isolated team training environments, the population is too small to provide a representative sample of potential social interactions for healthy emotional and social maturation. Professional wushu teams generally have an average of 20-30 athletes. As with the "small group" phenomena noted in Chen (2010), this study finds that wushu athletes actively or subconsciously engage in stratification by

seniority and skill level even where the literal rules of the institution do not mandate it, generally spending even their spare time with athletes of similar standing. Consciously or unconsciously, athletes tended to group themselves by seniority as "junior" or "senior" athletes, and further informal subdivisions often occurred across "star" or "champion" status. This stratification became "typical" within the teams, with athletes in self-separated groups rarely interacting with athletes of another group.

Even within those strata, the inherently competitive nature of sport naturally creates tension that makes close friendships tricky to form. This is particularly so when the accolades or achievements each athlete makes in competition help define their career trajectory after retiring from the team. It has been observed that the athletes who do manage to be both contemporaries and friends often specialize in different events and do not always compete directly against each other. Orlick (1986, 2008) and Yukelson (2010) both find that ideally, athletes should be more open with each other and avoid playing internal politics including gossip, treachery, petty jealousy, cliquishness, or exclusion. However, this study finds that professional wushu athletes tend to be guarded in their interactions with their teammates on a personal level because of the intensity and pervasiveness of competitive conflicts of interests. Cliquishness and petty jealousy are common.

The athletes often generally did not have better examples to follow. Yukelson (2010) indicates that for effective communication between athletes and coaches, the coaches should strive to be good communicators; these coach "establish open lines of communication; [be] honest, fair, authentic, sincere, and consistent. ... Accept

individuals for who they are, and they genuinely care about them as people outside of athletics (p. 152) ." However, this study found that athlete-coach relationships were more based on career or competition goals rather than personality or friendship; authentic, sincere, or honest athlete-coach relationships both inside and outside athletics were rare, given the primacy of athletic achievements to the almost total exclusion of all other interests. Therefore, while athletes were often dependent on their coaches for communicating needs and issues to the sports team administration, the athletes' relationships with their coaches were not always those of openness and trust, due to the strict, quasi-military flavor of the training program. Younger, junior, or less accomplished athletes had fewer social privileges and little to no access to their coaches outside of the context of active training, as coaches would often not spend much time engaging with them until they achieved some level of prominence.

Furthermore, teams that were subdivided into branches would have multiple coaches, and the coaches were subject to the same competitive pressures as the athletes themselves, so coaches, depending on the team structure, often engaged in the same politicking that the athletes themselves did, just on a different level of hierarchy. Occasionally, athletes would even find themselves being used as pawns in rivalries between coaches.

#### Vocational skills development.

When directly asked whether their sport training complemented or conflicted with the development of their vocational skills, most athletes believed that their sport training helped their career development more than it harmed it. They anticipated

that so long as their careers remained related in some way to wushu, future employers would recognize the value in their experience and credit them accordingly.

The value of that team experience, however, lies as much or more on the development of guanxi as it does on the worth of the athlete's actual athletic skills. Athletes appreciate that the best competitors develop the most guanxi with their coaches and administrators. Given how crucial guanxi is to nearly everyone's career prospects in China, it is not surprising that many athletes end up neglecting the development of other vocational skills in favor of their competitive achievements. Particularly for an individual as career specialized as a professional athlete, guanxi, or connections, are considered essential and carry more weight than qualifications or achievements for post-competition careers, especially regarding jobs less directly related to wushu.

The athletes themselves would tend to focus on their athletic skills because they trust and rely on favors earned as athletes on the assumption that these factors are more important to their career development than unrelated vocational skills. Even if an athlete were to feel differently and to pursue vocational training, possibly because he or she is not making or not able to nurture the institutional connections and relationships needed to develop guanxi for a post-competition career, he or she would encounter systemic barriers that limit that option. As noted previously, the system's purpose and overriding goal is the acquisition of gold medals in national and international competition under Juguo Tizhi, and this creates environmental pressures on both the programs and the athletes to emphasize the immediate concerns of

competition over a future career, even to those who recognize the problem. As Petitpas et al. (1992) claimed, athletes' anxiety and fear of the declining of their competition skills might lead to investing even more energy into athletics rather than preparation for future careers, because the outcome of a lackluster competitive career is more immediate and the consequences are readily apparent. This gives many athletes the internal justification they need to shut out vocational concerns as a "distraction" from their training, even if they understand that this may haunt them later in their careers. Educational and vocational programs are given low priority, teachers and administrators are not held accountable for their students' progress, the choice and quality of course materials are limited or lacking, and athletes are not given timely notification of the services legally available to them after retirement from competition. This combination of pressure to concentrate on competition performance and a systemic de-emphasis of post-retirement vocational training makes many athletes averse to devoting time or energy to future career preparation. Consequently, most hardly imagine any other possible future identity for themselves other than that of a professional athlete. Other literature indicates that identity foreclosure is inversely related to career maturity and correlates with delayed career development and a lack of career initiative (Baillie & Danish 1992; Blustein & Phillips 1990; Murphy et al., 1996; Wooten 1994). Fully half of the surveyed athletes, when asked, said they had no idea what they would do after retiring from competition, or even how to prepare for it.

This environmentally enforced fixation on the development of guanxi through competitive achievements affects the development of athletes' social skills as well,

because guanxi in a system motivated by Juguo Tizhi is generally granted through achievements and competitive recognition, rather than friendship. This natural tendency towards career focus over social interaction, further reinforced by most teams' general tendencies towards curfews and isolation, leaves athletes with very limited opportunities and capability to make connections or friends outside of their team environments, which in turn affects their ability to network for jobs. Shurts and Shoffner (2004) posit that people "find their place" in the world by collecting a variety of data points based on learning experiences and exposure to outside society. The isolation which pervades most wushu team environments limits athletes' ability to gather outside data and leads to disorientation, insecurity, and broad ignorance about career options that do not directly involve wushu.

Despite this natural tendency to focus on options that provide benefit directly from athletic achievements and experience, wushu athletes recognize that concentrating one's efforts on such a tightly focused career path can be a liability. Zhao and Wang (2011), for instance, found through a series of interviews that both wushu athletes and coaches considered a lack of conventional pre-developed job skills an urgently pressing problem in finding employment after retirement from competition. This study corroborates Petitpas et al.'s (1992) findings that professional athletes were often lacking in work skills that did not relate directly to their chosen sport. The findings of this study further indicate that due to cultural expectations and gender roles, female athletes, especially from more cloistered and isolated teams, had even fewer opportunities to develop any skills or knowledge not directly related to wushu.

Wushu athletes of both genders appear to assume that they could be able to learn on the job quickly, as they do not expect to have time for or access to job preparation courses.

The outlook for professional wushu athletes was not always so bleak; the relative merits and advantages that professional athletes had in the Chinese system changed as the country's political and economic landscape changed over time. A couple decades ago, membership with a professional athletic team was one of the best opportunities available to young people in China, in part because of the prestige, security, and financial rewards relative to other career options. As the Chinese economy burgeoned in the late 20th to very early 21st centuries, athletes' post-competition prospects and educational quality have become pressing issues. The provisions made by Chinese professional sport systems and institutions, whether officially or unofficially, held athletes in high official esteem and provided for their needs in a manner similar to ranking public servants of the day. But now, the average cost and standard of living in China at large has outstripped athletes' post-competition earning capability. In order to keep the sport system sustainable, the State General Administration of Sports (SGAS) is now paying particular attention to ensure these professional athletes a stable future career.

However, market saturation may be something that is difficult for the sports system to correct on its own; market contraction due to the regressing significance of competitive sports in contemporary Chinese society makes even wushu-related post-competition careers more difficult to obtain and manage. It may no longer be

possible for the sports system to place the majority of retiring athletes in government jobs, so athletes have increasingly been relying on their own efforts to secure, or attempt to secure, post-retirement work.

A few surveyed athletes indicate the belief that a fundamental education is necessary for a good quality of life; most, however, more see an educational degree first and foremost as a job qualification or resume builder, a practical commodity valued primarily for the economic opportunities it presents. Even so, with training for competitions having near absolute priority, it is difficult for athletes to fully appreciate the benefits that education provides to their career options. Better knowledge of its relevance could alleviate athletes' concerns about retirement and contribute to athletes' successful transition from competition to their future careers.

As the outside world becomes increasingly sophisticated and wealthy, sports institutions remain excessively fixated on the relatively short-term goals of achieving sustained competitive excellence. Therefore, athletes find themselves ill-prepared for the rapidly changing and highly competitive society outside the familiar environment of their sports system. It is therefore imperative for the sport system to not only nurture professional athletes as competitors, but also to recognize that these state-sponsored athletes must also remain competitive and self-sufficient as productive members of society at large after entering the work force.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendations for future research.**

The following recommendations are offered for related research:

1. Longitudinal research methods may yield more complete and nuanced data.

2. General trends and principles may be revealed by conducting similar studies across different athletic disciplines and perspectives on the athletes within, including athletes from different sports, prospective or retired athletes, or by collecting data from athletes' parents or significant others.

3. Deeper investigative research into specific issues revealed in this study, for instance, inadequacies or ineffectiveness in educational programs offered to professional athletes, differences in the social environments between teams, the effect of gender differences on career preparedness and predispositions, and the strength and pervasiveness of intra-team stratification based on seniority, skills, or administrative favoritism, should also further the understanding of related topics.

4. The pursuit of systematic and theoretically driven research to answer questions of increasingly greater complexity is also recommended.

5. Interdisciplinary work is encouraged, as a more circumspect articulation of the knowledge and observations therefrom which may better explain the phenomena and issues confronting the current system.

### Recommendations for the Chinese elite sports system.

I. It is suggested that educational programs be specifically tailored for professional athletes in order to enable effective learning.

1. In such a program, the system should reconsider the relative allocation of time between training and fundamental education. In order to ensure sufficient time for adequate education, sport training should take greater advantage of scientifically

derived methods to allow for more efficient and more effective training with less time.

2. The curriculum, rate of advancement, measurement of progress, and the quality of study materials should be designed to account for the physical and temporal demands of intense sport training and competition rather than simply importing public school programs without regard to context. Considerable amounts of busywork could be eliminated, and the curriculum could focus on academic or scientific topics in the context of their sports in order to improve the rate of comprehension and applicability of the education to future employment.

3. Athletes' own sense of academic motivation would be improved by emphasizing the value of education to their post-competition careers. Most athletes appreciate that their competition careers generally do not last beyond their late twenties to early thirties and understand on some level that such preparation is vital to their futures. Enthusiasm towards education would also be improved by incorporating opportunities to visit environments outside their isolated or cloistered team training facilities.

4. The quality of the educational programs offered greatly depends on how and what academic resources are made available to teams. Most teams are state-run or state-sponsored institutions, so a closer alliance with the Ministry of Education would be ideal.

 Effective systems of supervision and performance evaluations for both the students as well as the teachers appointed to the program should be established.
 Currently, the system assigns little to no consequences for failure to administrators or

teachers. Apportionment of liability regarding athletes' education should be clear. Teachers should also be empowered with enough administrative standing to give them the authority needed to further their students' academic development.

II. Career preparation and vocational training, with clear reference and relation to existing post-retirement career policies, is proposed as part of a revised professional athletic curriculum.

1. Team educational programs should incorporate basic vocational skills training. An emphasis on broadening the athlete's set alternative post-competition career skills would be sensible approach to athletes' retirement issues, if the market itself simply does not demand as many retiring wushu athletes as the teams are creating.

2. Career services, including job search, counseling, and interview preparation programs presently in use at many universities, should be provided and communicated to athletes in a conspicuous and accessible manner throughout their careers<sup>14</sup>.

3. The isolated lifestyle imposed on the athletes by the sports system is outdated and injurious to the personal development of the athletes in a number of dimensions. It curtails or eliminates their ability to network or develop guanxi outside the team for the benefit of their future careers, stunts their social maturity, and reduces their exposure to career opportunities and working knowledge of the outside world.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Policies should aim to cover athletes from the time that they are, for all practical purposes, training full-time as professional athletes. Some athletes are not made official team members until after ten years of training or more, during which time they have no salary and allowance, and are not qualified for most of the retirement benefits officially available to team members in full standing. During this time, these athletes may be waiting for a vacancy on the team to open up, which itself may not happen until an existing team member, intent on departing, secures post-competition employment in a crowded workforce.

Furthermore, socioeconomic change combined with the saturation of the job market for retired professional wushu athletes have rendered both official policies and unofficial support for wushu athletes' post-retirement job placement increasingly ineffective. Therefore, participation in outside activities should be encouraged in revised training programs, and retired athletes could also be invited back to the team as career mentors and contacts for active team members.

4. Clarity on the reliability of post-competition career benefits. While some of the athletes and some of the administrators might be of the mind that spending any time or thought on post-retirement career provisions distracts from competitive energies, it could be just as fairly said that the uncertainty that comes with a lack of future assurances is also distracting. Clarity on the reliability of post-competition career benefits could strike the best middle ground between alleviating the distractions of both future uncertainty and reducing the loss of personal energy to wholly independent, unsupported career-mindedness on the parts of the athletes themselves.

5. Policies and procedures for establishing effective oversight of the preceding suggestions are critical, as adherence even to existing support policies is inadequate.

III. Healthy intra-team personal relationships should be encouraged.

1. Communications between coaches and athletes and between senior and junior athletes should be encouraged; as the present degree of stratification, compounded by systematic isolation, stifles personal development.

2. As most athletes begin training full-time while very young, they lack the benefit of traditional family relationships. Team culture should adapt to provide

athletes with positive foster family relationships and curtail or eliminate pervasive detrimental cultural tendencies, such as hazing, cliquishness, petty jealousies, and malicious gossip.

3. Enforced military-style isolation provides few training benefits at great personal cost; team policies should be more open and connected to outside society.

## Conclusions

The national Chinese sports system is renowned for producing Olympic and internationally competitive athletes of the highest caliber, through rigorous training programs known for their single-minded intensity of purpose. The state sponsors the teams and their training programs and justifies these measures as being necessary for maximizing athletes' potential, enforcing and imposing great personal sacrifice on the part of the athletes in the name of national pride and the goal of maximizing the number of gold medals captured on the international stage. The athletes too, however, bear the training at great cost to their future potential as self-sufficient members of Chinese society, as their social, academic, and vocational skills are subject to deep neglect that considers the investment in the athletes as functional citizens in their post-competition careers a distraction from, or even an impediment to, their success in competition.

The bias against providing wushu athletes with the life skills needed to successfully navigate a post-competition career is systemic and deeply ingrained in program history. The attitudes and values of the coaches, the athletes, and even the administration are conditioned, even indoctrinated, via the constant pressures of

competition and an institutional priority on national pride into reducing or dismissing the priority of education. These systemic biases are expressed on a number of levels, including the administrative failure to provide quality education, a general indifference to the value of academic study and the plight of professional athletes after retirement, plus a social stratification that negatively affects social maturation and athletes' ability to relate to the world at large. Career preparation tends to be regarded with a mixture of ignorance and denial on the part of the athletes, exacerbated by an administrative failure to impress upon athletes the need to prepare for a post-competition career or the availability of any official vocational resources to support their efforts to seek employment after retirement from competition.

Historically, wushu athletes enjoyed reasonable job security and means of support after retiring from competition. Formal and informal provisions for job placements suited to their experience and competition skills were provided by wushu team administrators or wushu coaches by way of guanxi and personal favors, and in the past, wushu athletes enjoyed a reasonably comfortable lifestyle and gainful employment after retirement from competition, but social and economic changes in China, combined with saturation of the job market for retired wushu athletes from previous generations, leaves present-day wushu athletes without the practical support that their predecessors enjoyed. The Chinese sports system is becoming unable to provide opportunities for athletes after they have dedicated their early years in service of their province and country, and athletes are increasingly becoming worse off or even unemployable relative to the average Chinese citizen after their tenure on their team is

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complete.

The system is therefore in need of review and reform. As China's economic situation continues to develop, fewer individuals will pursue state athletic careers if the neglect of athletes' potential as functional citizens after competition continues, as the viability of benefits of a normal life in outside society continue to outstrip the value of a competition career. If this trend continues, China may find itself unable to sustain its prestige and standing in the world of international competitive sports in general, nor continue to develop wushu as an art and competition sport. To remedy this, the Chinese sports system should undertake a review and reformation of its approach to wushu training, incorporating more sports science and improving the efficiency and efficacy of training sessions while also improving team academic programs. Improved academic programs and a scientific approach to sport training should complement one another and result in athletes of equal or better athletic capability in competition as well as cultivate marketable, applicable job skills in athletes for their post-competition careers. Furthermore, some of the isolationist policies imposed on the wushu athletes by the wushu teams should be relaxed, as the harm done to athletes' social and vocational potential imposes a great cost on the system's long-term potential for attracting athletic talent.

A successful reformation of the Chinese sports system's policies and philosophies with regard to the present and future viability of its wushu athletes and the sustainability of its competitive edge may lead to improved performance and standards of living, not just for wushu athletes, but for athletes in other disciplines as well.

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Many Chinese athletes in other sports also live and train under systems similarly motivated by Juguo Tizhi, and share similar institutional histories and practices. The Chinese sports system may be understandably hesitant to change its current approach wholesale, given its current successes in high profile international competition such as the Olympics, but at the time of this writing, wushu is not an Olympic sport. Therefore, the systems and approaches applied to wushu athletes may serve as a valuable test case for reform, as China is likely to maintain its high standing in international wushu competition by virtue of the experience and resources available to its athletes even during a period of institutional change. Should these changes result in the production of athletes who are of outstanding caliber in international competition and also viable as productive members of society after retirement from competition, these lessons may be applied with confidence and at little to no risk to the rest of the Chinese sports system as well.

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Note: Some English translations were translated in the journal itself and are indicated with [sic]. They were used even though they do not read as conventional English.

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### Appendix A **Consent Form (Athletes)** Agreement to Participate in Research



Appendix A

#### **Consent Form (Athletes)**

#### Agreement to Participate in Research

Department of Kinesiology One Washington Square San José, California 95192-0054 Voice: 408-924-3010 Fax: 408-924-3053

www.sisu.edu

Hi, ! This is a graduate student from the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Science and Arts, San Jose State College of Applied Sciences and Arts University. I am also a former professional wushu taolu athlete from Henan wushu team. Through a semi-structured interview approach, this research will address the possible dissonance between professional wushu taolu athletes' overall personal development and athletic skill development from the athletes' own perspectives. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Your participation might enable others to better understand the circumstances and challenges faced by professional wushu athletes and therefore, the most practical needs of professional athletes and the developmental concerns of professional sports programs.

> Please take a moment to read the informed consent form and sign on the bottom to indicate you agree to participate in the study.

Responsible Investigator: Yang Zhang (Student)

Title of Study: Professional Wushu Athletes: Potential Athletic/Personal Dissonance

1. You have been invited to participate in a research study investigating the potential dissonance between professional wushu athletes' athletic skills and overall personal development.

2. You will be asked to describe your life in a professional wushu team, and more specifically, you will be asked to talk about your opinions and attitudes toward your athletic skills development and overall personal development, which includes (a) the education you have received in the team, (b) social skills development under the semi-military and isolating sport training and governing system, and (c) development, if any, of vocational skills. To avoid missing any information during interviews, interviews will be audio taped, and all the recoded information will only be used for this research. The interview will not take more than two hours of your time, and the schedule and place of the interview will be arranged according to your suggested times and place.

3. There are no anticipated risks to the subjects.

Initial

### **Consent Form (Athletes) Continued**

4. Through telling others of your personal experiences, opinion, or attitude toward the Chinese professional wushu team, you might be able to understand yourself better and become more clear regarding the governance, policies, and support provided by the team in return for your service.

5. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. All of the information you provide for the study will be kept confidential and used exclusively for this research.

6. No material compensation is provided for participation.

7. Questions about this research may be addressed to Sunny, at zhangyang1017@gmail.com; Cellphone: 408 666-3678 (USA) or 15838550429 (China). Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Shirley Reekie, the Chair of the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Sciences and Arts, at: shirley.reekie@sjsu.edu. Questions about a research subject's rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2427.

8. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.

9. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right to not answer questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time at all, with any reason or no reason.

10. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

• By signing below you acknowledge that you understand the information presented and agree to participate in the study.

• The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

Participant's Signature

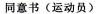
Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

### 附录 A

### 同意书 (运动员)



#### 参与研究协议

尊敬的运动员,您好!我是圣荷西州立大学应用科学与艺术学院运 动学硕士研究生。我也曾是河南省专业武术运动员。此研究试图通过 访谈法,从运动员个人的角度来了解专业武术套路运动员的全面发展 和运动技术提高之间的潜在不和谐。衷心感谢您的大力支持!你的参 College of Applied Sciences and Arts 与将会让更多的人更进一步了解专业武术套路运动员的现状和所面对 的挑战,当然,也将会体现专业运动员最实际的需求和专业运动队可 完善发展的空间。

Department of Kinesiology One Washington Square San José, California 95192-0054 Voice: 408-924-3010 Fax: 408-924-3053

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

www.sjsu.edu

请您花几分钟阅读此知情同意书。然后,在**最底部签名**表示您同意参 与这项研究。

研究生: 张旸 (学生)

研究题目:专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技术提高的潜 在不和谐

1. 诚挚地邀请您参加关于专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动 技术提高潜在不和谐的研究。

2. 本研究将会问及您的专业队生活。具体来讲,您将要讲述您对个人 的全面发展和运动技术提高潜在冲突的经历,态度,和意见。全面发 展在此研究主要包括学习教育,社交技能,和第二次就业技能的发展。 为了避免遗漏您的感受以及表达的想法,谈话内容将会进行录音。录 音资料仅供此研究使用同时也将会被严格保密。访谈不会多于2小时。 访谈时间和地点将根据您所提供的时间段和地点进行安排。

3. 研究过程和结果不会对您造成任何形式的伤害。

4. 通过对他人讲述您对专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技 术提高潜在冲突的经历,意见,以及态度,您可能会更好的了解您自 己,更好的了解运动队的管理,政策,和运动队所提供的辅助。这些 知识将会转而为您服务。

5. 尽管研究结果可能会被发表,研究结果会以匿名方式呈现以保护您 的隐私权。任何关于您和您所在队伍的信息将不会包括在研究结果内。 每位参加者的谈话资料将被严格保密。所得数据仅作为此论文研究所 用。

6. 参与此项研究没有任何物质奖励。

The California State University: The California State Grane Control of State Chancellor's Office Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico, Do East Bay, Fresno, Fullerton, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Maritime Academy, Monta dt, Long Be onterey Bay , Pomona, Sacramen San Francisco, San J

您名字的首字母

7. 如有任何关于此研究的问题,您可以联系张旸,电子邮箱: <u>zhangyang1017@gmail.com</u> 手机: (408) 666-3678 (USA). 15838550429 (中国)。 如要投诉,请报告到 Dr. Shirley Reekie, Chair of the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Sciences and Arts, San Jose State University, at <u>shireley.reekie@sjsu.edu</u> (中文: Shirley Reekie 教授,运动学系系主任,圣荷西州立大学,应用科学与艺术学院,电 子邮箱: <u>shireley.reekie@sjsu.edu</u>). 任何关于研究对象的权力,或研究 相关伤害可联系Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2427 (中文: Pamela Stacks 博士,研 究生院副主席,电话 (408) 924-2427)。

8. 不参与此研究不会对您造成任何损害。

9. 此研究是自愿参与,没有任何强制。您可以选择不参加此研究,或 不参与研究的某一环节。您有权利不回答您不想回答的问题。如果您 选择参与此研究,您可以中途任何时间以任何理由或无理由退出研究。

10. 当您签署这份同意书时, 您将会收到一份由研究者签名和有日期的 同意书副本留为记录之用。

● 您的签名表示您已经了解上述说明,并同意参加此研究。

● 研究者的签名表示同意以上签名者参与其研究,和证明研究 对象完全了解他在其研究中的权利。

感谢您的协助与参与!

同意者 签名

日期

研究生 签名

日期

## Appendix B Parental/Guardian Consent Form Agreement to Participate in Research

#### **Appendix B**

#### Parental/Guardian Consent Form Agreement to Participate in Research

Hi, \_\_\_\_\_! This is a graduate student from the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Science and Arts, San Jose State University. I am also a former professional wushu taolu athlete from Henan wushu team. Through a semi-structured interview approach, this research will address the possible dissonance between professional wushu taolu athletes' overall personal development and athletic skill development from the athletes' own perspectives. It will be greatly appreciated if you could allow your child or ward to participate in this study. His/her participation might enable others to better understand the circumstances and challenges faced by professional wushu athletes and therefore, the most practical needs of professional sport teams and the developmental concerns of professional sports programs.

Please take a moment to read the informed consent form and sign on the bottom to indicate you agree to allow your child or ward to participate in the study.

#### Responsible Investigator: Yang Zhang (Student)

**Title of Study:** Professional Wushu Athletes: Potential Athletic/Personal Dissonance

1. Your child or ward has been invited to participate in a research study investigating the potential dissonance between the professional wushu athletes' athletic skills and overall personal development.

2. Your child or ward will be asked to describe his/her life in a professional wushu team, and more specifically, he/she will be asked to talk about the opinions and attitudes toward his/her athletic skills development and overall personal development, which includes (a) the education he/she has received in the team, (b) social skills development under the semi-military and isolating sport training and governing system, and (c) development, if any, of vocational skills. To avoid missing any information during interviews, interviews will be audio taped, and all the recoded information will only be used for this research. The interview will not take more than two hours, and the schedule and place of the interview will be arranged according to your child or ward's suggested times and place.

3. There are no anticipated risks to the subjects.

Initial

### Parental/Guardian Consent Form(Continued)

toward the Chinese professional sport system, your child or ward might be able to understand himself/herself better and become more clear regarding the governance, policies, and support provided by the team in return for the child's own service.

5. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify your child or ward, your family, or you will be included. All of the information your child or ward provided will be kept confidential and used exclusively for this research.

6. No material compensation is provided for participation.

7. Questions about this research may be addressed to Yang Zhang, at zhangyang1017@gmail.com; Cellphone: 408 666-3678 (USA) or 15838550429 (China). Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Shirley Reekie, the Chair of the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Sciences and Arts, at: shirley.reekie@sjsu.edu. Questions about a research subject's rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2427.

8. No service of any kind, to which you and/or your child or ward is otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.

9. Your consent for your child or ward to participate is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to allow his/ her participation in the entire study or in any part of the study. Your child or ward has the right to not answer questions that he/she do not wish to answer. If you allow his or her participation, you are free to withdraw your child or ward from the study at any time. Your child also has the right to withdraw from the study at any time at all, with any reason or no reason.

10. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

• The signature of a parent or legal guardian on this document indicates:

- a) approval for the child or ward to participate in the study,
- b) that the child is freely willing to participate, and
- c) that the child is permitted to decline to participate, in all or part of the study, at any point.

Initial\_\_\_\_\_

# Parental/Guardian Consent Form(Continued)

agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject's parent or guardian has been fully informed of subject's rights.

Thank you for your support!

Name of Child or Ward

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Relationship to Child or Ward

Investigator's Signature

Date

### 附录 B

### 家长/监护人同意书

#### 家长/监护人同意书

#### 参与研究协议

尊敬的运动员家长或监护人,您好!我是圣荷西州立大学应用科学与 艺术学院运动学硕士研究生。我也曾是河南省专业武术运动员。此研 究试图通过访谈法,从运动员个人的角度来了解专业武术套路运动员 的全面发展和运动技术提高之间的潜在不和谐。衷心感谢您的大力支 持!您孩子的参与将会让更多的人更进一步了解专业武术套路运动员 的现状和所面对的挑战,当然,也将会体现专业运动员最实际的需求 和专业运动队可完善发展的空间。

请您花几分钟阅读此知情同意书。然后,在最底部签名表示您同意您 的孩子参与这项研究。

研究生: 张旸 (学生)

研究题目: 专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技术提高的潜 在不和谐

1. 诚挚地邀请您的孩子参加关于专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技术提高潜在不和谐的研究。

2. 本研究将会问及运动员的专业队生活。具体来讲,运动员将要讲述 他或她的个人的全面发展和运动技术提高潜在冲突的经历,态度,和 意见。全面发展在此研究主要包括学习教育,社交技能,和第二次就 业技能的发展。为了避免遗漏运动员的感受以及表达的想法,谈话内 容将会进行录音。录音资料仅供此研究使用同时也将会被严格保密。 访谈不会多于2小时。访谈时间和地点将根据运动员所提供的时间段和 地点进行安排。

3. 研究过程和结果不会对运动员造成任何形式的伤害。

4. 通过对他人讲述专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技术提高潜在冲突的经历,意见,以及态度,运动员可能会更好的了解自己,更好的了解运动队的管理,政策,和运动队所提供的辅助。这些知识将会转而为运动员个人服务。

5. 尽管研究结果可能会被发表,研究结果会以匿名方式呈现以保护您 孩子,家庭,和您的隐私权。任何关于个人隐私的信息将不会包括在 研究结果内。每位参加者的谈话资料将被严格保密。所得数据仅作为 此论文研究所用。

6. 参与此项研究没有任何物质奖励。

您名字的首字母\_\_\_\_\_

7. 如有任何关于此研究的问题,您可以联系张旸,电子邮箱: <u>zhangyang1017@gmail.com</u> 手机: (408) 666-3678 (USA). 15838550429 (中国)。 如要投诉,请报告到 Dr. Shirley Reekie, Chair of the Department of Kinesiology, College of Applied Sciences and Arts, San Jose State University, at <u>shireley.reekie@sjsu.edu</u> (中文: Shirley Reekie 教授,运动学系系主任,圣荷西州立大学,应用科学与艺术学院,电 子邮箱: <u>shireley.reekie@sjsu.edu</u>). 任何关于研究对象的权力,或研究 相关伤害可联系Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2427 (中文: Pamela Stacks 博士,研 究生院副主席,电话 (408) 924-2427)。

8. 不参与此研究也不会对您和运动员造成任何损失。

9. 此研究是自愿参与,没有任何强制。您可以选择不同意您的孩子参加此研究,或不参与此研究的某一环节。运动员也有权利不回答不想回答的问题。如果您同意他/她参与此研究,您也可以让您的孩子中途任何时间以任何理由或无理由退出研究。

10. 当您签署这份同意书时,您将会收到一份由研究者签名和有日期的 同意书副本留为记录之用。

- 签名表示家长或法律监护人
- a) 同意您的孩子参加此研究,
- b) 运动员是自愿参与此研究,和
- c) 在任何时候运动员可以拒绝参加整个或部分研究。

 研究者的签名表示同意以上签名者参与其研究,和证明研究 对象的家长或法律监护人完全了解研究对象在其研究中的权利。

感谢您的大力支持!

运动员 签名

家长或法律监护人 签名

日期

监护人和运动员的关系

研究生 签名

日期

## Appendix C

## **Demographic Information Sheet**

Please suggest a name for your **pseudonym** in this study.

Please suggest two to three <u>two hour</u> convenient time slots for the interview. **Only one interview** will be scheduled.

Time:\_\_\_\_\_

Please suggest a place that is most comfortable for you to be interviewed.

Place:\_\_\_\_\_

### **Demographic information:**

- 1. Gender: male\_\_\_\_\_ female\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Which team are you identify with? A \_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_ C \_\_\_\_
- 4. How long have you been training in professional wushu teams?\_\_\_\_\_
- 5. What is your highest athletic achievement level?
- 6. When and in what competition you won this title?
- 7. What grade in public school were you when you joined in your team?
- 8. Currently, what is your education level?\_\_\_\_\_

Please write down your E-mail address AND best way to approach you for a further member check. The verbatim transcript will be email to you to ensure the validity of the information. You can delete or add information into the transcript, and the research analysis will proceed according to your final edits.

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_\_

Best way to approach you:\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation!

## 附录 C

### 个人信息问卷

请为您自己取一个**匿名。\_\_\_\_\_** 

请建议三个对您来说最方便的2小时的时间段。只有一次访谈,但访谈时间将根据您所提供的最方便的时间段来进行安排。

时间:\_\_\_\_\_\_

请建议一个您认为最舒适的地点来进行此次访谈!

地点:\_\_\_\_\_

您的基本情况:

您的性别: 男 ( ) 女 ( )
 您的年龄: ( )
 您所在队伍: A( ) B( ) C( )
 您在专业武术队训练的时间? ( )
 您目前的运动等级? ( )
 您目前的运动等级? ( )
 你出现的人什么比赛获得此荣誉? ( )
 您进队前,在公立教育系统是几年级? ( )
 目前您的学历是? ( )

请留下您的电子邮箱地址和联系您的最佳途径。我们的访谈内容内容将以电子邮件方式发送 给您。您可以自此确定您所表达的意见的准确性,同时可删除或补充任何访谈内容。研究分 析将以您最后编辑的访谈版本为依据。

电子邮箱地址:\_\_\_\_\_\_

联系您的最佳途径:\_\_\_\_\_\_

再次衷心感谢您的支持与参与!

# Appendix D

# Semi-structured Interview Guide

Professional Wushu Athletes: Potential Athletic/Personal Dissonance

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. I'm interested in finding out what you think. All of the information you provide for the study will be kept confidential.

> Can you describe the schedule of a typical week in your team? What does joining in your wushu team mean to you?

# 1. Fundamental Education

- A. How would you describe your team's educational program?
- B. What are your attitudes toward basic education? What are the attitudes of other people in the team environment toward education?
- C. What are your opinions on your team's educational program?
- D. How would your education relate to the development of your athletic skills?
- E. Regarding active athletes' fundamental education, what suggestions do you have?

# 2. Social Skills

- A. How would you describe your team's training methods and governing protocols? What are your attitudes toward them?
- B. In one week, how much time do you spend outside of the training camp? Except for your teammates, who do you usually hangout with, and how do you communicate with them?
- C. What is your role on the team? How well have you gotten to know your teammates and coaches?
- D. What are your views and opinions on your personal social development while actively training with your team?
- E. How would you compare the development of your social skills relative to the development of your athletic skills? How does your professional training positively or negatively impact the development of your social skills?
- F. Do you have any suggestions regarding the improvement or the development of social skills within your training environment?

# 3. Vocational Skills

A. What kinds of careers are you most interested in after you retirement from your wushu team? What advantages do you have over others who plan on entering those fields? What do you perceive as the most important qualities for a post-competition career?

- B. What are your views, if any, on post-competition career preparation while actively competing?
- C. Does your team provide you with any assistance with career preparation? What are your attitudes and opinions toward the assistance?
- D. How does post-competition career preparation relate to the development of your athletic skills?
- E. Regarding preparation for active athletes' post-competition careers, what suggestions do you have?

Thank you for your time and participation in the study!

### 附录 D

#### 半结构式访谈提纲

专业武术运动员的个人全面发展和武术运动技术提高之间潜在冲突

请按照您的真实想法和意见认真阐述回答问题。回答没有对错之分,最重要是您的真实想法。 所有您所提供的信息将会被严格保密!

### 进专业队对您来说意味着什么? 请您描述一下您所在队伍的日常训练作息时间。

#### 1. 基础教育

- A. 请描述一下您所在运动队文化课学习的情况。
- B. 您对基础教育的态度是什么? 周围其他人对基础教育的态度怎么样?
- C. 您对运动队里基础教育情况的意见。
- D. 您认为运动队里的文化课学习跟专项运动技术的提高有什么关联?
- E. 关于在役运动员的基础教育, 您是否有其他建议?

#### 2. 社交技能

- A. 请问您会怎样描述队里的训练和管理的方法? 您对此训练及管理刚发的态度是什么?
- B. 一周内,您在运动队之外的时间有多久?除队友外,平常你所接触的人有哪些,以及通过什么样的方式进行交流?
- C. 您对自己在这个武术队关系圈的定位在哪? 您对您的队友和教练的了解有多少?
- D. 请谈谈您对在役期间社交技能发展的看法和意见?
- E. 您的社交技能跟您运动技术提高有什么关联? 专业训练有否对您社交能力提高产生任何正面及负面影响。
- F. 关于在役运动员社交技能的提高与发展, 您是否有其他建议。

### 3. 就业技能

- A. 您将来最想从事的工作是什么?结合自己对未来就业的梦想,谈谈自己有哪些优势。在 你看来,哪些素质对将来的二次就业至关重要?
- B. 对于退役再就业,您目前所持的态度是什么?
- C. 运动队是否提供任何就业相关辅助?对于所提供的就业技能培训或学习的安排,你有什么看法和意见吗?
- D. 您认为发展就业技能和提高专项运动技能之间有什么关联?
- E. 对与在役期间的第二次就业准备,您是否有任何建议?

#### 再次感谢您的参与,您宝贵的时间以及意见!

Athletes	Athletic	ងខ្លួ ភូពិភូ	Years	Current	Educational Status
	Skills Levels	)	in the Team	Educational Status	before the leam
AIF1	International Elite Athlete	24	15	Graduate School	4th Grade
A2F2	First Class	15	4	High School*	7th Grade
A3F3	First Class	15	5	High School*	7th Grade
A4F4	First Class	15	3	8th Grade	5th Grade
A5M1	National Elite Athlete	28	16	Graduate School*	8th Grade
AGM2	National Elite Athlete	23	11	Graduate School*	6th Grade
A7M3	First Class	23	11	College*	5th Grade
A8M4	National Elite Athlete	21	11	College*	4th Grade
A9M5	National Elite Athlete	20	10	High School*	3rd Grade
B1F5*	National Elite Athlete	23	11	B.A Degree*	5th Grade
B2F6*	National Elite Athlete	22	6	Sophomore at College	7th Grade
B3F7*	National Elite Athlete	21	10	College	7th Grade
B4M6	National Elite Athlete	24	14	B.A Degree	4th Grade
B5M7*	National Elite Athlete	22	6	College*	7th Grade
C1F8	National Elite Athlete	21	10	B.A Degree*	6th Grade
C2F9	National Elite Athlete	19	6	Junior at College*	4th Grade
C3F10	First Class	18	6	Junior at College*	4th Grade
C4M8	National Elite Athlete	23	10	B.A Degree*	6th Grade
C5∭9*	First Class	23	œ	B.A Degree*	9th Grade
CGM10	First Class	20	2	High School Graduated	12th Grade

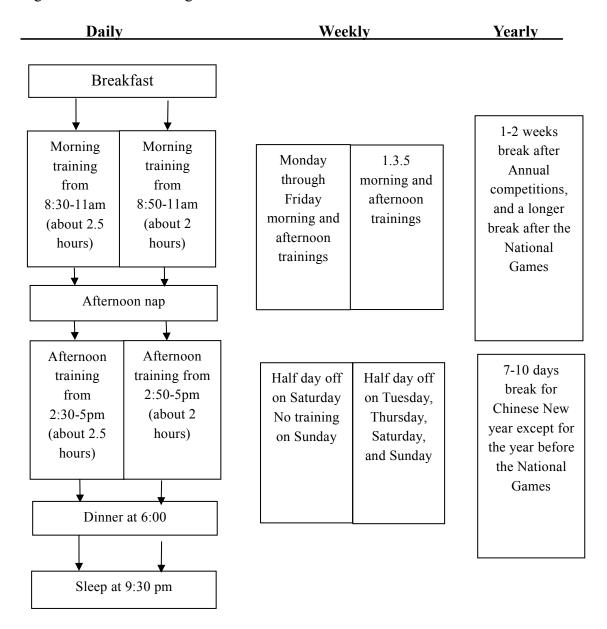
Appendix E Participant Profiles Note. The asterisks in the column of Athletes imply that these athletes had been training in other professional wushu teams before their current ones.

The asterisks in the column of Current Educational Status indicate that at the time of interview, these athletes were training in the team while attending schools in their names only.

# Appendix F

## **Training Schedules**

Figure 1. Team A Training Schedule<sup>15</sup>



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The columns on the left imply the training schedule of one branch team, and the columns on the right indicates the schedule of another branch team.

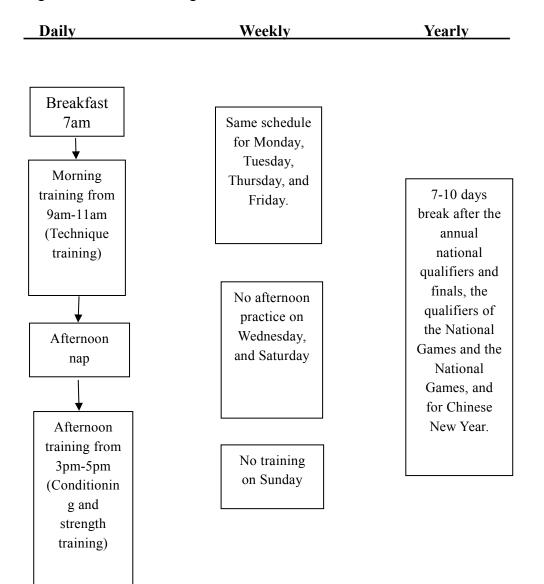


Figure 2. Team B Training Schedule

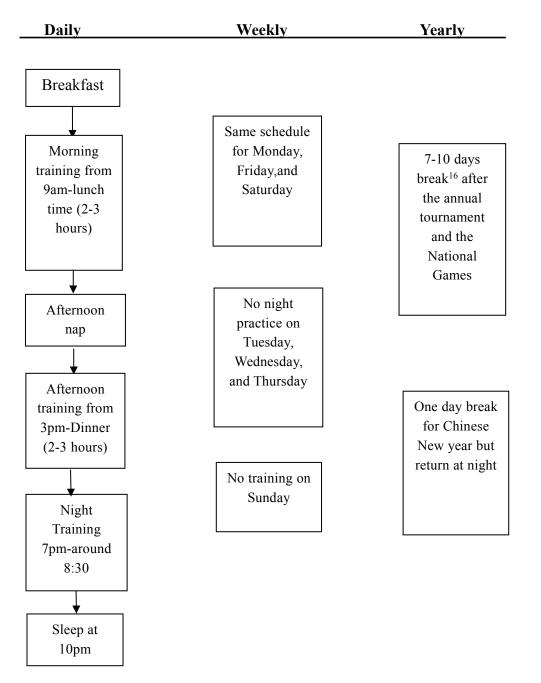


Figure 3. Team C Training Schedule

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Break in this team was when there was no training, and all athletes can leave the training camp.

# Appendix G

# **Analysis of Results**

Table 1.

# Athletes' Attitudes and Opinions Toward Professional Wushu Training

# ATHLETES' OPINIONS TOWARD THE TRAINING

REGIMENS	Number	Teams
Too intense	5	С
Physical Fatigue	5	С
Pressure	2+4	AC
Should be this amount/Acceptable amount of training	2+1+1	ABC
Boredom/Day after day and year after year	2+3	AC
Fear/Pain	3	С
Coaching effectiveness/ Scientific training	3+1	AB
Not effective and scientific/No quality	3+4	AC

ATHLETES' PHILOSOPHY ON TRAINING	Number	Teams
Training is on one's own initiative	5+3+4	ABC
Training is depend on themselves	2+3+1	ABC
Should train hard	5+1+3	ABC
Training is for athletes themselves (General)	3+2	AC
Training to satisfy the parents or to make them proud	1+3	AC
Suppose to train	5+3+4	ABC
All about training life pattern	2+1+2	ABC
Training is a job	3+2+3	ABC
Could not give up because the amount of time and efforts		
already invested	2+1+3	ABC
No choice and nowhere to go	1+3+4	ABC

MOTIVATIONS TO TRAIN	Number	Teams
Opportunity to improve athletic skills and compete	7+3+4	ABC
Training for benefits	8+5+5	ABC
Material (money reward, university fees, etc.)	3+5+3	ABC
Spiritual(honor, others' approval, self-esteem, etc.)	4+2+3	ABC
One way to get into a college	3+2+2	ABC
Shortcut/Better choice for life development	3+5+2	ABC

Table 2.

# Conflicts Between Training and Education

CONFLICTS: TRAINING VS. EDUCATION	Number	Teams
Tiredness	6+5+4	ABC
Time conflict	5+4+6	ABC
Conflict between the systematic training and studying	3+2+1	ABC
Athletes' attitudes toward both training and education	8+4+3	ABC
Parents' attitudes toward both training and education	5+2+1	ABC
Coaches' attitudes toward both training and education	3+2+2	ABC

POTENTIAL EXTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
To join in the team is equivalent to give up the education	3	А
To provide education in the institution is only a formality issue	1+1+1	ABC
Loose management	2+3	AB
Teacher could not manage the class	4+2+2	ABC
Teacher was there for giving lecture		
but not responsible for if athletes understand	3+1+1	ABC
Level taught is not match with		
Athletes' actual educational level	3+2	BC
Could not understand the classes	5+3+2	ABC
Inappropriate to be in the classroom	1+4	AC
Did not learn anything/things learned were not useful	6+4+1	ABC
Education was not related to the administrators',		
Coaches', teachers', and athletes' own interests	2+3+1	ABC
No one take the responsibility for athletes' education	1+2	AB
The team environment is not favorable for studying	2+4	AB
Could not remember what they learned	2+2+1	ABC
Encounter hardships outside the team/		
feeling education is important in the bigger society	5+3+6	ABC
Parents' attitudes	2+3+4	ABC
Coaches' attitudes	2+3+2	ABC

# Conflicts Between Training and Education (Continued)

POTENTIAL INTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
To study effectively, one must realize its importance/It should		
be from one's own free will	7+3+4	ABC
Participants deemed that education was not an imperative	8+5+5	ABC
Too young to have a concept to study	5+3+5	ABC
Personalitycould not calm down to study	2+1	AC
Could not concentrate and not interested in learning	5+3+1	ABC

# OTHER MISCELLANEOUS FACTORS

ASSOCIATIONS	Number	Teams
Positive association between sports or wushu related courses		
and daily trainings and competitions	2+2+1	ABC
Education in general lead to better understanding of the sport		
and consequently more effective trainings	5+4+3	ABC

ADDITIONAL FACTORS RELATING TO EDUCATION	Number	Teams
Life is already a learning process	3	В
Insufficient money to sign up for classes outside	1+1	BC

Table 3.

# Conflicts Between Training and Social Skills Development

CONFLICTS: TRAINING VS. SOCIAL SKILLS	Number	Teams
Training professionally limits other social activities	2+1	AB
Time conflict (scheduling incompatibility)	1+1+2	ABC
Physical Fatigue	2+2	AB
Limited opportunities pursue outside interests	1+2+1	ABC
Limited experience and knowledge of outside society	2	C
Higher athletic achievement led to social stratification and/or		
segregation by skill level	3+1	AB
Social activities thought to disrupt athletes' attention on		
training and competition	5+1+1	ABC

POTENTIAL EXTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
Team rules/governing methods prioritize training above all	3+3+4	ABC
Limited opportunities to meet people	5+2+3	ABC
No common background	4+2+3	ABC
The ways athletes communicated within the team and outside		
the team were different	4+2	AC
Ineffective communication between Senior and Junior athletes	4+1+4	ABC
Unwilling to share personal matters with teammates	1+3+4	ABC
Distrust	2+4	BC
Frienemy/conflicts of interest	1+3+1	ABC
Coach-coach relationships impact athlete-athlete relationships	4+3	AB
Rarely communicate with the coach	3+4+5	ABC
Coaches were unreasonable (self-centered, closed minded)	1+5	AC
Different stratum	3+1+2	ABC
Relationships with the coaches were mutually beneficial	1+2+2	ABC
Coaches' treatment of athletes/relationships with the coaches	2+2+3	ABC
Coachies bring athletes benefits	4+2+1	ABC
Coach takes advantage of athletes	2	С
Benefit-based relationships with administrators	5	A

Conflicts Between Training and Social Skills Development (Continued)

POTENTIAL INTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
Limited experiences and knowledge of the society	3+2+4	ABC
Ability to comprehend and express	6+2+6	ABC
Personality	5+1+4	ABC
Introversive personality	2+4	AC
No initiative	3+1+1	ABC
Unwilling to talk to others	4+1+3	ABC

# OTHER MISCELLANEOUS FACTORS

ASSOCIATIONS	Number	Teams
More mature than people of similar age outside the team camp		
or training facility	5+3	AB
The team provides better opportunities for athletes to meet		
others	4	В
The training atmosphere will be more pleasant if athletes		
maintain friendly relationships and having effective		
communications with one another	3+4	AC
Other people recognize you and are willing to talk to you	4+3	AB
Who they normally communicate with (i.e. athlete/teammate		
with certain athletic skills, daily training group)	2+1	BC
Social self-confidence	1+1	BC

ADDITIONAL FACTORS RELATING TO SOCIAL SKILLS	Number	Teams
Gender	4+1	BC
Disliked certain social activities for making friends(drink,		
discussing certain topics, introductions by friends)	2+2	BC
No ways or opportunities to meet and socialize with		
non-athletes	2	В
Financial situation	2+3	AB

Table 4.

# Conflicts Between Training and Vocational Skills Development

CONFLICTS: TRAINING VS. VOCATIONAL SKILLS	Number	Teams
Time conflict	1+1	AB
No energy for vocational training	1	А
Thinking about post-competition career impacts training focus	5+3+1	ABC
Athletic skills did not related to post-competition career if the		
jobs were not wushu related	1+2+1	ABC
Conflict of interests with the professional team	1	В
Fatigue	1+1+1	ABC

POTENTIAL EXTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
Official post-competition career assistance should be provided		
by the team and team administrators	6+2+6	ABC
Reliance on coaches' help	8+5+6	ABC
Unwanted pressures	3	С
Not the job they want	3	С
Cultivate positive relations with administrators and manager for		
future assistance	1+3	AB
Reliance on Friends' help	5+3+4	ABC
Reliance on Guanxi or connections	7+5+4	ABC
Self-reliance is critical, as the team, coaches, and other		
administrators are unable to provide reliable career assistance	6+4+3	ABC
Administrator did not take responsibility	7+1+4	ABC
Post-competition career related benefits are poorly		
implemented	2	А
No notice of official assistance until imminent retirement	2	А
Too many retired athletes; job market saturated with retired		
professional athletes	1+5+2	ABC
Regressing significance of competitive sports in outside society	1	С

POTENTIAL INTERNAL CAUSES OF CONFLICTS	Number	Teams
Age (mature enough to appreciate issue)	3+1	BC
Internal psychological avoidance/denial of issue	5+2+3	ABC
Not assertive	2	В

Additional non which anositic shills are an a		
Additional, non-wushu-specific, skills, experiences, and		
knowledge critical for vocational opportunities	6+5+5	ABC
Skills (teaching, communication, leadership, etc.)	3+4+2	ABC
Experiences	1+5+3	ABC
Knowledge	3+3+4	ABC
Non-athletic skills, experience, and knowledge gained in wushu		
competitive career are applicable to outside or future career	2+4+1	ABC
Lacking non-wushu-related skill, experience, or knowledge		
needed for post-competition career	3+1+6	ABC
Expectation: will learn on the job	1+3	AC
Perception that general education is needed for future		
employment	3+1	AC
Perception that Master's degree/teaching credential is needed		
for future employment	3+3+2	ABC
Perception that their low level of education educational level		
will affect future career opportunities	1+1+2	ABC

Conflicts Between Training and Vocational Skills Development (Continued)

# OTHER MISCELLANEOUS FACTORS

ASSOCIATIONS	Number Teams	
Training also leads to a better career in the future	8+2+2	ABC
Athletic skill will be associated with post-competition careers	9+5+6	ABC
Most likely to teach wushu in the future	6+3+5	ABC
Teach wushu is one of the future career options	2+2+1	ABC
Athletic skills and achievement are advantages in the job market	7+5+5	ABC
Skill in competition will be recognized by other people	4+1+1	ABC
The administrator and coaches' will help with career placement,		
especially for star athletes	3+3+1	ABC
Competition and training develop useful personal characteristics		
(i.e. ability to endure hardships)	1+1	AB
Training along with learning teaching methods from the coaches		
confers applicable job skills	1	В

# OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING FUTURE CAREERS

Family's support	5+3+2	ABC
Family's financial situation	2+1	BC

### **Appendix H**

#### Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board Approval



Yang Zhang

To:

le Stude From: Pamela Stacks, Ph.D. Associate Vice President im Graduate Studies and Research

**Division of Academic Affairs** Associate Vice President

Graduate Studies & Research www.sjsu.edu/gradstudies

One Washington Square San José, California 95192-0025 Voice: 408-924-2427 Fax: 408-924-2612

www.sjsu.edu

Date: April 10, 2013

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"Professional Wushu Athletes: Potential Althetic/Personal Dissonance"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the confidentiality of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Pamela Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subject's portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond April 10, 2014 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2427.

Protocol # S1302069

cc. Shirley Reekie 0054