

# Teaching traditional Chinese martial arts to contemporary Chinese youth – a qualitative study with youth wushu coaches in China

## Authors' Contribution:

- A** Study Design
- B** Data Collection
- C** Statistical Analysis
- D** Manuscript Preparation
- E** Funds Collection

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## Abstract

### Background and Study Aim:

Wushu, the collective noun for Chinese martial arts, is one of the most prominent traditional sports in China and is generally recognised as the origin of most Asian martial arts (e.g. judo, karate, taekwondo). Wushu practice is characterised by a strenuous and often repetitive approach, and in recent years it has become less appealing to today's Chinese youth. In China there are two types of wushu organisations where youth is taught (i.e., clubs and schools). This study aimed to get more insight into how youth wushu coaches in China currently deal with the challenge of teaching their sport to youngsters and if possible differences occur between clubs and schools.

### Material and Methods:

Through a qualitative research methodology (in-depth interviews), 28 youth wushu coaches in China (12 from clubs, 16 from schools) were interviewed regarding their experiences in teaching children.

### Results:

While in both types of wushu organisations, coaches have changed their teaching approach, stereotype traditional contents still exist. Wushu schools continue to teach routines, whereas wushu clubs have begun to develop new courses that combine traditional culture, but do not have a systematic program with variation approaches. Noteworthy is that the teaching methods of both settings have not broken down the conventions which still show traces of professional training methods and follow the system in professional wushu competitions.

### Conclusion:

It is recommended that future studies investigate experiences and insights of wushu coaches in other countries, as well as to collect data among participating children in China and abroad to understand why and how they participate in wushu as they come from a different cultural background.

### Keywords:

Chinese martial arts • wushu • kungfu • jibengong • routine • self-defence • teaching method • youth • techniques

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**Wushu** – *noun* Chinese martial arts considered collectively [54].

**Jibengong** – *noun* is the general term for basic skill, which is a simple skill such as running, jumping or hand-eye coordination that is a basic requirement for involvement in many sports [54].

**Routine** – *noun* **1.** a regular pattern of activity **2.** a rehearsed set of movements or actions that make up a performance, such as a gymnast's sequence of exercises [54].

**Techniques** – *noun* a way of performing an action [54].

**Fitness** – *noun* the fact of being strong and healthy [54].

**Self-defence** – *noun* fighting techniques used for defending oneself against physical attack, especially unarmed combat techniques such as those used in many of the martial arts [54].

## INTRODUCTION

### Chinese martial arts

Originating from ancient hunting and war, traditional Chinese martial arts are known as 'kungfu' or 'wushu' [1]. While the former term has often been used in the entertainment industry (e.g., movies and TV) and is, therefore, more known to the general public, the latter name has primarily been used through official channels (e.g., the Chinese government, International Olympic Committee). Wushu can be regarded as a comprehensive system of ancient fighting techniques developed in China through centuries [2]. It is divided into different forms and schools. While its original military purpose has gradually diminished through the years with the introduction of firearms and modern warfare, several other functions have become more apparent over time, such as education, entertainment, moral cultivation, self-defence, health improvement and intellectual development [3, 4]. Wushu has long been considered to reflect the essential elements of Chinese culture, such as benevolence and etiquette and is linked to different traditional aspects of China (e.g., Chinese opera, traditional medicine and calligraphy) [5]. It has also been influenced by specific religious and philosophical concepts from Buddhism and Taoism. The entry of Western influences into China has also impacted wushu, which has, among others, resulted in a strong focus on regarding it as a competitive sport as well [6]. Since the 19th century, wushu was gradually transformed from a (sometimes secret) master-apprentice system to a form of general education, and finally into a modern competitive sport [3, 6, 7]. As one of China's most prominent traditional sports, wushu's fitness benefits have attracted an increasing number of participants over the years. According to recent numbers from the Chinese Wushu Administration Centre, there are approximately 70 million practitioners, with over 10,000 schools operating in the country [8]. Ninety-five per cent of these participants are below the age of 18 [9].

### Wushu teaching contexts

While many older Chinese people informally practice wushu (mostly in public parks and squares), formal wushu teaching in China – which is often targeted at youth – is organised in three different contexts: wushu schools, wushu clubs and physical education (PE) classes in regular schools. The first type, wushu schools, can mostly be found in rural areas [8]. Some are also located in major cities (such as Shanghai), primarily to accommodate

children from parents who came from the countryside in search for better job opportunities. Most wushu schools have a boarding school system, where students receive general education similar to regular schools but also participate in wushu training twice a day and six days a week. The purpose of these schools is to train students to become professional athletes. They also help them to obtain an athlete's level certificate through competitions, which makes them eligible for special college examinations.

In contrast, students that join a wushu club (the second type) do so from a leisure perspective. These youngsters practice once or twice a week after school or on weekends. It has been indicated that the primary purpose of wushu clubs is to cultivate students' interest, strengthen their physical fitness and promote wushu [8]. The third type, wushu in PE classes in regular schools, depend on the annual school teaching plans as they are not offered every semester. Contrary to the first two types, most of the teachers in this type are not professional wushu coaches, but regular PE teachers [10].

Although wushu is a well-known sport in China, it has been indicated that its traditional practice, as a very technical sport, is often monotonous and therefore not as attractive to children as other Asian martial arts [11]. The practice of these other martial arts, such as taekwondo and karate, are often organised less traditionally and have become more prevalent in China compared to wushu [12, 13]. According to Hu [14], taekwondo clubs in China have many students, while today, wushu classes are less popular. Besides, over the years, as PE classes have become more diverse, wushu classes have gradually been replaced at Chinese schools. Wang and Qiu [6] have argued that this situation has led to a decrease, not only in teaching wushu content and related theory, but also in passing on the traditional ethical culture of wushu, a core element of its practice.

### Modern wushu

In general, wushu practise can be divided into three types: modern wushu, traditional wushu (most often referred to as 'kungfu') and self-defence [15]. The first type can again be divided into routines ('taolu') and free fighting ('sanda' or 'sanshou'). For the remainder of this paper, we will only focus on taolu in modern wushu, as most of the Chinese youth only comes in contact with this type.

In general, in the teaching content of wushu schools and clubs, a lot of focus is put on the standards and difficulty of the movements [16]. Although there are a lot of cultural and ethical aspects related to wushu practice, in most cases, none of this is addressed during modern training, as the emphasis here is more on technical skill development [17-19]. According to Zhang and Meng [20], in teaching modern wushu, the common perception is that 'students like wushu, but do not like to learn it'. Feng and Zang [21] argued that modern wushu practice – regardless of whether it is taught in a wushu school or club – does often not meet the expectations of youth's image of fighting, which is depicted in kungfu movies and classic stories. In a survey by Qiu [3], mainstream modern wushu teaching was characterised by a focus on 'jibengong' and 'routines'. The former includes a series of individually performed exercises involving hands, arms, legs, body and jumping techniques, and is often regarded as the foundation of modern wushu practice. Jibengong is highly analytical, with isolated body techniques and movements, and is done repetitively at the beginning of each training session. The latter, namely routines, refer to the central part of wushu practice. They include a combination of different wushu skills, such as body positions, footwork, hand types and hand techniques. Most routines are performed individually and are barehanded or make use of traditional weapons (e.g., sword, stick, spear). It is also noteworthy that some have criticised this type of wushu practice as it stresses too much only performance without practical application in real fighting [22].

### Pedagogies of wushu

Haag [23] referred to sports pedagogy as the core of sports science in teaching and coaching. It is regarded by Armour [24] as the basis for effective sports teaching and counselling directed to youth. Armour considered three dimensions as mutually powerful frameworks that construct pedagogical practices. The first is 'background knowledge' referring to any knowledge to be taught, such as local club/school culture, sports culture and student background. Several authors have noted that in recent times, significant changes have occurred regarding conditions of wushu practice in China. These changes have also affected the knowledge being taught.

For example, it has been noted that the cultural aspects of wushu have been neglected in teaching and practice because of an increased

emphasis on technical, competition and athletic elements [25, 26]. Furthermore, Liu and Liu [17] argued that in the past, training in wushu schools was often highly regarded as families could gain honour through their children's wushu involvement and performance. This situation has now changed with people's improved living standards. Some authors have referred to the modernisation of Chinese society where the fighting aspects of wushu are regarded as too aggressive, and children are encouraged to focus more on general education at school [27]. Others have pointed to a gradual decrease in wushu's popularity because of a higher number of other sports that have been introduced [6].

The second dimension that Armour [24] referred to relates to 'coaching and coaches' which deals with sports expertise, management and organisational skills in using a variety of teaching tools. Mosston and Ashworth [28] positioned martial arts teaching as the 'command style' in their teaching style spectrum. In this style, a teacher (or coach) makes all the decisions and students are expected to follow them as accurately as possible. According to Theeboom and Zhu [4], this style is commonly found in wushu teaching as well, where great emphasis is put on precisely imitating the prescribed movements and techniques. Because of this focus on technical perfection, most wushu coaches also use a 'practice style', another style in Mosston and Ashworth's [28] spectrum. Here, the coach arranges all the themes and provides feedback after participants have finished their tasks. This teaching approach is characterised by means of an old saying in the Chinese martial arts that the mastery of a routine comes from a thousand times of practice [29]. Most wushu teachers also use a similar three-step method, namely 'warm-up-teaching technique-practice' which is common in many other sports as well [25]. It has been noted that much attention in wushu teaching is paid to 'jibengong', which is not only stressed in professional practice but also when coaching amateurs and youth [4, 6]. Jibengong is at the core of wushu teaching and is practiced in schools as well as in clubs. As there is a limited variation in it, several scholars have argued that its practice is often perceived by (younger) students as boring [10, 16, 30]. This is in contrast with training practices in other martial arts where there is often more variation in exercises, as well as opportunities to practice fighting application [1, 31]. Qiu and Yang [16] pointed out that

in China most beginners have expectations about what wushu is, which is based on what they see in 'kungfu action movies' or wushu novels where stories are told about heroic warriors and where spectacular fights are displayed or described. The authors argued that these expectations are never met when students come in contact with actual teaching practices.

Armour's [24] third dimension relates to 'learning and learners', which include the experience of working with children, their growth and development and understanding their process of learning and their motivations in participating in sports and physical activities. Scholars have reported on the negative effects of the lifestyle of contemporary Chinese youth. Among others, Xiong [32] referred to the fact that leisure activities from today's youth differ distinctly from that of earlier generations, as they now spend considerably more time at diverse (sedentary) activities at home (e.g., looking at films and TV or using internet). This sedentary behaviour has negatively impacted the health of Chinese youth. For example, in 2013, approximately 7% of the 1.2 million Chinese children (aged 7–18) were overweight, and about 12% were obese [33]. A report from the Chinese General Administration of Sport [34] showed that the number of overweight youth in China has increased in recent years. In addition, it has been indicated that China's one-child policy has influenced parents to become over-protective of their children, which also had a detrimental effect [35]. As mentioned by a number of authors, today's Chinese parents are known to spoil their children, reduce their outdoor activities, and do not let them participate in household chores to enable their children to live in a relaxed and safe environment [36]. Zhang [37] indicated that because of parents' overprotective tendencies, their children deal with severe psychological problems, such as high levels of selfishness, poor self-care abilities and a lack of willpower among other things. In recent years, this situation has not only triggered the Chinese government to start paying more attention to these negative effects, it has also made parents more aware of the need to improve their children's health and to stimulate them to be more sports active [14, 38, 39]. Abrahams [40] indicated that Chinese parents are now encouraging their children more to practise sport in an effort to stimulate an holistic development both internally (mental and psychological) and externally (physical). In recent years, alongside other sports, wushu is being more

actively promoted by the Chinese government as a school sport and physical education activity for pupils and students [10, 20, 39]. Several specific policy measures have been implemented, such as designating wushu as a particular sport in school and helping students gain extra points in their general examinations by learning wushu. But while these policies have resulted into an increasing number of young people being encouraged to start practising wushu, some challenges remain. For example, unlike in previous times, today's youth has many other leisure options to choose from [32]. Also, as Wen and Su [41] stated that in China most wushu instruction (also for young children) is based on professional training theory, some scholars have expressed concerns if such an approach will help to overcome the reported mental and physical health-related problems among contemporary youth. Among others, Qiu and Yang [16] indicated that, while professional wushu training can help students improve physically, it can be difficult for (beginning) wushu participants to deal mentally with its high-intensity practice.

In recent years a number of strategies have been suggested how wushu teaching methods can be more adapted to the needs of today's youth in China by making it more interesting for them [19, 20, 30, 43, 44]. Among other things, this included more emphasis on the traditional culture of wushu, sometimes by means of storytelling or by using animated samples through video or cartoon (such as referring to *Kungfu Panda* an animated movie from DreamWorks Animation). Another suggested strategy related to making children better understand the meaning of the techniques they learn [16, 43]. Often, wushu techniques are practised individually without informing students what their actual meaning is. By practising in pairs, children will get more insight into the potential applications of the techniques they learn and consequently become more interested in practicing them. To date, however, most of these suggested strategies have not been put into practice [45]. Also, in 2010 the Wushu Research Institute of the General Administration of Sport of China published an illustrated 'Wushu for Fun' textbook as part of a series on wushu. Its aim was to provide an overview of basic skills and fun exercises for beginners. A number of scholars, however, have been critical about this attempt. For example Cui and Liu [46] study among children that followed the Wushu for Fun programme, showed

that there was limited appreciation for these exercises. Jiang [47] also made several remarks regarding the teaching contents of the textbook and argued that more interaction with students was needed to increase their interest.

Armour [24] indicated that the use of a framework of sport pedagogy can help coaches in their training effectiveness. In China there are two types of wushu organisations where youth is taught (i.e., clubs and schools). This study aimed to get more insight into how youth wushu coaches in China currently deal with the challenge of teaching their sport to youngsters and if possible differences occur between clubs and schools.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Participants

A total of 28 Chinese wushu coaches were interviewed. These included 12 wushu school coaches (WSC) and 16 wushu club coaches (WCC). Their average age was respectively 32 and 28 years. All clubs and schools were located in Shanghai. The first author contacted the coaches, and all of them agreed to participate in the study. Their experiences were collected through a qualitative research method to understand their commonalities and differences in experiences in teaching youth (4-16 yrs.). A non-numerical analysis was used to identify respondents' feelings, thoughts and experiences [48].

### Procedures

The interview questions were based on a checklist used by Vertonghen and Theeboom [49] in her study of youth martial arts teachers. Prior to this data collection, seven pilot interviews were conducted with WSC and experts from the Shanghai University of Sport. The purpose was to verify the time needed and to check the logic of questioning. Piloting resulted in reclassifying the list of interview questions into the following three categories: (a) basic information about the coaching club/school (e.g., the purpose of the club or school), (b) coaching approach (e.g. 'How do you teach students...?') and (c) the club/school students (e.g., 'Have students dropped out of this club? If so, why?...'). The study's procedure consisted of four stages: (1) approval for the researcher's investigation plan from the Ethics Committee of the university; (2) informed consent from all coaches and scheduling interviews; (3) filling in a form regarding demographic

background (including gender and age), number of years teaching, reasons for studying wushu and major experience from practising wushu until now and conducting semi-structured interviews. All interviews, which were done by the first author (Chinese native speaker) who received training in interview techniques, were audio-recorded and lasted between 70 and 100 minutes. Afterwards, recordings were transcribed verbatim and data were processed by using NVIVO software.

To report the interview results, Armour's [24] three dimensions of pedagogy are used as a framework (i.e., background knowledge; coaching/coaches and learning/learners) to explain and compare WSC and WCC experiences.

## RESULTS

### Social background

All coaches indicated that Chinese society has changed, and material living standards have improved. Among other things, it was mentioned that while in the past proficiency in wushu could provide unique opportunities to become a professional, having wushu knowledge today is not the sole way for students to make a living. Young people nowadays have more alternatives to choose from, and therefore are less willing to endure demanding physical training. As a result, coaches had to reduce the number of training hours in wushu schools and wushu clubs. Some WSC ( $n = 7$ ) indicated that parents ask them to pay attention to the general education examination in school because children are expected to lead different lifestyles later on graduated.

*'Parents do not simply ask me how their children are in wushu class. They also ask me how their children perform in the regular class as we are not only a wushu coach but also the supervisor in the general course. Students have many choices. If they cannot rely on wushu skills, they can take over the family business, go to the factory or learn other techniques. When we were students, we only had a good way out when we practised wushu.'* (WSC)

The results also clearly show the difference in the aims of wushu training between wushu clubs and wushu schools. Parents bring their children to a wushu club to learn the sport as a leisure activity, the main goal here is simply to cultivate

their interests and make them healthy. This is contrary to wushu schools where children train on a professional level.

*'Many sports can be chosen. Therefore, we should change the inherent mode of teaching wushu. Do not treat students as athletes, which is the norm in wushu schools. Otherwise, students may choose other activities that are easier and more fun to learn than wushu.'* (WCC)

### Children's background

Most respondents ( $n = 20$ ) regard contemporary youth as being spoiled by their parents and grandparents, which they see as a result of China's one-child policy. According to them, this is the reason why today's children face several problems, such as having a low physical fitness level and being overweight. Coaches ( $n = 18$ ) also believed that nowadays children's ability to withstand physical and mental stress is far weaker than it was a decade ago.

*'In this society, people strive to improve their living standard. So imagine the scenario created by the one-child policy: almost six adults around a child, helping them to do anything difficult, providing whatever object they want and overprotecting them at home. However, when we were children, about 15 years ago, every family typically had several children. Our parents did not have time to take care of all of us. We helped our family do housework, apart from jumping around and playing with neighbours during our free time. Our standard of living then cannot be compared with that of today, but our physical quality was better than that of the children today.'* (WSC)

Coaches also described children as frail ( $n = 14$ ), lazy ( $n = 9$ ) and not motivated ( $n = 7$ ).

*'Children today are smart but lazy. They cannot stand heavy training. When we were students, we did not need coaches to supervise in practising wushu. Kids today do not have a high level of pursuit and desire to learn wushu. The physical and psychological qualities of children today are bad. Learning wushu is just one means of living now, because of the development of society, especially the one-child policy.'* (WCC)

### Coaches' background

Respondents had a similar technical background as they all had learned wushu at wushu schools ( $n = 27$ ). All WSC ( $n = 12$ ) and most WCC ( $n = 13$ )

are professional coaches. The first group has been teaching wushu for an average of 11 years, and the second for 3.8 years. The difference can be explained as, in general, wushu schools in China exist since long, while wushu clubs are a relatively new phenomenon. Also, clubs prefer to have new coaches who have recently graduated from university.

### Coaching objectives

Findings showed that all WSC have a similar goal, that is, to improve the skills of their students. According to these coaches, this will allow their students to have better prospects after they graduate from high school because of their skills, whether they enter a university, become a soldier or establish a wushu club.

*'The purpose of wushu schools is to teach regular classes the same way as in ordinary school. Wushu is considered a feature to encourage students to enrol in some wushu schools in China. From elementary school to high school, students are trained in culture, military, morality and quality. After graduation, they can go to college and become soldiers, artists, teachers or establish a wushu enterprise.'* (WSC)

However, most WCC have different goals ( $n = 8$ ). A wushu club is not only a sports organisation, but is also a commercial enterprise. The club first attracts children to study there for a long time, and then they consider teaching techniques.

*'Our club is a business which is the same as other clubs, but what sets our club apart is our style of teaching wushu. (...). Our teaching goal is to cultivate children's interest in wushu. Their improvement process is slow, but they can keep learning for a long time. The first thing to learn is that fitness is the primary goal in wushu clubs, unlike in wushu schools. Parents focus on the health of their children, rather than their skills.'* (WCC)

### Coaching content

All WSC have indicated to teach the same series of wushu content, consisting of the official standardised programme including basic exercises (jibengong – JBG), combinations (such as 'wubuquan' – WBQ, consisting of 5 different techniques and positions) and various routines. The coach decides what students learn depending on children's physical condition and technical level.

*'They all learn JBG and simple traditional routines. They do not learn difficult movements in elementary school because they are too young (under 11 years old). Their strength, speed and physical ability cannot sustain the difficult movements. They will learn the prescribed routines approved by the General Administration of Sports in China. They can participate in competitions through regular wushu training and by receiving honorary certificates, and coaches could receive a bonus from school if students got this honorary certificate.'* (WSC)

Contrary to the WSC, most WCC have indicated that they have made changes in the teaching content for beginners to make wushu easier and more enjoyable to learn ( $n = 12$ ). Notably, all the coaches follow the traditional rule, that is, first teach the basic barehanded routines before allowing children to practice with weapons.

*'The goal of teaching for beginners is to have fun. We have created a new combination of handcrafted and step styles that combine simple jibengong movements. As every wushu coach knows, when novices start learning jibengong and wubuquan, basic jibengong becomes boring for children and wubuquan is often too complicated. Therefore, we have re-created a new teaching content to attract students and promote their interest in learning. New fluid routines also combine jibengong. Hand style and position style are divided, and each action is named from Chinese traditional culture or literary quotation.'* (WCC)

Some wushu schools ( $n = 2$ ) and wushu clubs ( $n = 9$ ) use traditional culture as part of their teaching. In this course, teachers lead students in reading or reciting Chinese classical culture, with specific weekly courses for each class.

*'We always say that wushu is included in Chinese traditional culture. However, when we were students in wushu schools, we never learned about wushu culture. Now, we should remind students about traditional culture—not only by communicating, but also by regulating them. Children's behaviour can even influence their parents'. This technique is also a good way to attract parents to send their children to learn wushu.'* (WCC)

One WCC indicated that he not only teaches students to recite wushu culture, but also incorporates stories into new routines.

### Coaches' behaviours and coaching methods

When asked how their own coaches had trained them, interviewees answered that their coaches used corporal punishment and were very serious in training. They always used the same method to repeat an action until skills were mastered completely.

*'Our coach was tough. We had several trainings and communicated very little with him. Every time we repeated a movement, he would hit us when we made a mistake until it was perfect.'* (WCC)

Different responses were given when coaches were asked to describe their own coaching method. Most WSC ( $n = 12$ ) indicated to use a similar method as their own coaches but without corporal punishment. Noteworthy is that WCC said their methods differ from their coaches' in terms of punishment and repetition. They indicated that they show students apart first and then let them practice several times. However, this part is not repeated endlessly.

*'My method is inspired by my own coaches. I normally show the movement, explaining it one step at a time. My students follow me to practice, so I check and guide those who make mistakes. My coaches in the past were very serious and punished us many times. However, I do not physically punish my students and try to be more lenient towards them. I do not beat them, but they have to do more movements if they do not follow my order.'* (WSC)

*'My method for my students is mild. I show the movement first, but I divide the movement into simple parts. Then students practise by themselves twice or thrice. I will then choose a good student to demonstrate the movement to encourage others to learn or practice together without my command. We also choose some novelty movements which are not included in regular jibengong, like some tumbling movements.'* (WCC)

### Reasons for studying wushu

According to the respondents, children have different reasons to join a wushu school or wushu club. The primary reason why children enter a wushu school is that their parents have no time to take care of them because of their own work. They also see it as getting an extra chance in future exams. Some universities in China have an enrolment policy of a particular examination for students who have a high-level sports skills certification.

*'Most parents come from other provinces, do business or are working in Shanghai, and do not have time to take care of their children. So they choose this wushu school for their children to live here and go home every weekend. (...) Also depending on China's examination policy, some universities are targeted towards sports. Special students have special exams, so parents want their children to learn a skill in order to pass future exams.'* (WSC)

It is interesting to note that WSC did not mention children's motives here. This is different when compared to the responses from WCC. The latter ones indicated that youth that comes to a club loves wushu and that their parents have fitness and health-related reasons to send their children to learn wushu there.

*'Sometimes, we chat with students and parents. They have different reasons why they decide to learn wushu. Firstly, students want to learn it after they have watched movies and cartoons, and the second reason is the weak physical or mental condition of some students, as well as their overweight. Parents encourage their child to learn wushu.'* (WCC)

## DISCUSSION

To date, only a few international studies have explored teaching methods and children's experiences in wushu [49-51]. While our findings show similarities with this previous research, the present study provides further insights into wushu training contents and methods as it looked at two distinctly different wushu teaching contexts (wushu schools and wushu clubs). This situation primarily only exists in China as most other countries only have one type of wushu teaching context (i.e., wushu clubs).

The wushu club coaches that participated in this study indicated that China's one-child policy has impacted their teaching approach, in particular their teaching content. They argued that today's parents treat their children as 'little emperors' resulting in a changed (more ego-centric) attitude and a more passive behaviour. Coaches were obliged to make alterations in the content of their programmes in order to increase children's interest and motivation. Examples that were reported are replacing repetitive separate movements with new combined routines and

including traditional stories of wushu legends and heroes to stimulate children's phantasy. Interestingly, while these coaches have altered their teaching content for beginners, they have not adapted their programme for more advanced groups. Except for regular competitions, to date, there are no other types of events for club students to show what they have learnt and to test their ability. Consequently, if students want to continue to practice, they have to learn competition routines and coaches see no other options than to use professional teaching approaches. It is also noteworthy, that although club coaches indicated that youngsters are very interested to do weapons practice from the start, the respondents believe that students must first focus on unarmed basic exercises and routines. In that way, coaches preferred the learning sequence they had experienced from their own coaches. The fact that wushu club coaches continue to use professional training methods for more advanced students and that they do not introduce weapons practice for beginners despite its popularity, seem to indicate that these coaches have not yet been able to address all challenges they are facing when teaching contemporary youth.

Still, in contrast to wushu clubs, coaches in wushu schools are more in line with the conventional wushu teaching system. Their primary goal is to raise the wushu level of their students as high as possible. These coaches appeared to be less concerned about the challenge to keep students motivated because of the different context in which they work. Students are sent by their parents to a wushu school as it provides them more opportunities in later life (such as better opportunities to enter into further education or becoming a wushu coach and having their own wushu business). This also means that parents will encourage their children not to give up. But while wushu school coaches have therefore not changed their teaching content and keep a more professional approach, they also reported to have made some alterations in their method. For example, as they noticed declining levels in students' stamina compared to earlier generations, they have decreased training intensity. This is in line with others that have also referred to reduced endurance levels (both physical and mental) of contemporary Chinese children [35]. This situation is similar to wushu clubs, as well as the fact that coaches no longer use physical punishments to motivate their students, a method commonly used in the past. This shift also reflects a changed attitude

among adults in working with youngsters. Wushu club coaches reported that today's parents do not tolerate coaches' punishment of their children. They indicated that this resulted from the fact that parents are now more educated than before and argued that higher educational levels of parents result into more equal interactions with their children and make corporal punishment less acceptable [52]. Despite the fact that coaches believe that physical punishment is a useful way to improve students' technique, they have become more aware of parents' changed attitudes, especially those that live in urban areas. Coaches indicated that punishment still exists in wushu schools in rural areas, as these parents seem to be less opposed. Dong [53] reported that while in rural China parents economic is better than before, their educational level is not high in general.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study has shown that a number of changes occur in the way wushu is being taught to today's youth in China. This is especially the case for (urban) wushu clubs and is a result of

changes in children's' and parents' perspectives and their current living conditions. However, while a number of Chinese scholars have recommended specific strategies to further improve youth wushu teaching, our findings seem to suggest that this has not been put into practice. Consequently, it is suggested to explore how to design, implement and evaluate alternative teaching methods to be used in wushu clubs and schools. This can relate to investigating children's experiences and considering alternative approaches to youth competition organisation and requirements. Future research can also look at the extent to which parents' socio-economic status and educational level might have an impact on their attitude towards different pedagogical approaches to be used for their children. And finally, similar perspectives can be used to look at the situation and opportunities for youth wushu teaching in other countries.

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