

# DEVELOPING AN ONLINE PLATFORM FOR PROMOTING WUSHU AND QIGONG CLASSES IN THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF VELIKO TARNOVO

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**Abstract:** The following paper explores the opportunities for developing an online platform for promoting Wushu and Qigong classes in the Confucius Institute at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. It focuses on Facebook as the most suitable online platform to be used for sharing materials and discusses the main principles upon which the materials in hand were based. The study is useful due to the ever growing significance of online teaching materials and the need for developing new strategies for Wushu and Qigong promotion in times of great social changes.

**Keywords:** Wushu; Qigong; Confucius Institute; Online platform; Promotion

## **I. Introduction**

The last two years have been marked by great challenges which have significantly affected all aspects of human life. Due to the Covid-19 situation and the constantly changing social environment, there is an urge for overall adaptability which could happen partially through the use of technical innovations. Along with financial and healthcare systems, the educational system has been under enormous pressure, the reason being, the impossibility of conducting classes in person, opting instead for their online version. In a similar fashion, the Confucius Institute at the University of Veliko Tarnovo (CIUVT) has been put up to the task of keeping up with its regular courses and activities (HSK exams, contests, celebrations etc.) transitioning from its usual face-to-face form of teaching to the online one.

The following paper introduces the main principles upon which Wushu and Qigong online materials were based. In addition, it discusses the greatest challenges and benefits of the current situation related to their practice and pop-

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ularization. This is a preliminary study which could be of a further use when deciding on strategies for promoting Chinese language and culture through Wushu and Qigong.

## **II. Online Platform**

Social Media have become an integral part of our lives. They have facilitated if not replaced some traditional forms of interaction including trade, communication and education. Some could even argue that their original task of connecting people has shifted to a more commercial-oriented function. Nowadays, we can see that social media are used in sales, advertisement, entertainment, education etc. Statistics has shown that Facebook ranks first as the most influential social media worldwide and in Bulgaria.

The Confucius Institute at the University of Veliko Tarnovo was founded in October 2012. Its Facebook group was created shortly after on February 22, 2013 and currently has 1.1 thousand members. Given its popularity and accessibility, for the time being using Facebook as an online platform is the easiest and most convenient way to promote its courses and activities. In this context, popularizing its Facebook group itself could be highly beneficial.

## **III. Main Principles**

Following the global trend, Bulgaria announced emergency situation on March 13, 2020. Anti-crisis measures were taken including partial or full lockdowns of teaching institutions and shopping and entertaining centers. During the last year, the measures varied from short- to long-term national or local lockdowns depending on the specific situation. Consequently, the school year at UVT started as usual but shortly after, in November 2020, an online form of education was declared by the dean as a response to the national lockdown. In the light of these events, CIUVT had to come up with its own agenda of organizing and conducting its usual activities such as language courses, Wushu and Qigong classes, HSK exams, competitions and celebrations. A strategy was developed and language and Wushu and Qigong related materials were published on a weekly basis together with materials on different topics concerning China and its traditional and modern culture. The Wushu and Qigong materials encompassed three main topics: Wubuquan (五步拳); Five Animals Qigong (五禽戏); 18 Movements Chen Taijiquan (十八陈氏太极拳).

The following part introduces the main principles upon which those teaching materials were constructed.

## **1. Approachability vs. Attractiveness: Choosing the Content and Presenting the Content**

There is a general perception that martial arts being a complex type of movements are difficult if not impossible to learn. Starting with complicated movements or such that are more difficult to master could, firstly, validate this perception, and secondly, it could lead to possible fractures in an enthusiastic attempt to “try out new and cool movements”. Moreover, people’s attention span tends to be lower compared to previous years due to the immense amount of boundless information surrounding us. Thus, movements of low to medium degree of difficulty were chosen as a start. However, innovative and aesthetically pleasing visual display of a teaching material is always welcomed as it is more likely to grab and hold one’s attention. Therefore, a decision has been taken to combine the easily approachable movements as content and the attractive display of the content itself which resulted in the creation of both entertaining and educating video materials.

## **2. Interconnectivity**

On the one hand, Confucius Institutes are centers for language study and culture promotion. They combine various types of activities such as language and martial arts courses, celebrations, competitions, summer camps, exchange programs. On the other hand, the CIUVT Facebook group unites people of different background – Chinese language specialists, students and enthusiasts, members and representatives of different partnering institutions, volunteers and experts in different fields. Obviously, it is not a closed group but rather a social circle based on a friendly exchange of information. Therefore, a choice was made that the Wushu and Qigong learning materials need to be of use for both practitioners and language students. In other words, the materials themselves incorporate the knowledge of language and culture along with the demonstration of the techniques in hand. Furthermore, some of the martial arts and Qigong techniques have a deeper symbolic meaning in the traditional Chinese culture which suggested the creation of extra materials on the topics presented in the FB group afterwards.

## **3. Feedback**

The first type of feedback every post receives is in the form of likes, shares and comments. This provides the researcher with valuable information about the type of content people would be more likely to gravitate to. In this framework, some videos were shared by other language centers as a language teaching material or a culture-related one, while others were shared by the general audi-

ence based on personal preferences. The materials which received the most of the likes, however, are the Qigong related videos, the demonstrational materials of Wubuquan and Taijiqian and a short article introducing Taijiqian.

Another aspect of the feedback is related to different strategies the Confucius Institute team has applied in an attempt to catch people's interest and provoke their excitement. Needless to say, that team work is highly valued and in this relation, the Institute considers its visitors and FB group members as part of its team. However, keeping people's focus on point during times like this has proved to be particularly challenging. So, in order to get the people involved in its activities and keep their interest towards Chinese language and culture, different challenges and prize-winning games were organized. In relation to Wushu and Qigong, this was called "Guess the Animal" – different Qigong movements imitating animals were presented together with their health benefits, while in the end the audience had to guess which those animals were.

In short, the guidelines when preparing Wushu and Qigong materials encompass attractive display of movements with low to medium degree of difficulty in combination with specific hints in reference to the Chinese culture and language; different games and challenges were incorporated in addition to the materials as well.

#### **IV. Discussion**

First, it is worth-mentioning that the greatest challenge when preparing materials is most certainly related to the level of technical skills one must possess in order to design high-quality, innovative, creative and yet useful and informative tutorials. Although there are many excellent Wushu and Qigong online tutorials, it is the Wushu Smart Lab videos that have become a trendsetter providing detailed yet compact explanation of Wushu techniques.

Second, it has been argued that Wushu and Qigong materials are not always freely available to the general audience. There is definitely an increase in Wushu and Qigong online tutorials and lectures which surely could fill this gap, the Internatioanl Wushu Federation itself released online lecture on different topics such as training methods, martial arts history, techniques in martial arts movies. The amount and quality of the materials available online together with their potential effect on Wushu and Qigong development is yet to be researched.

Third, each material is to be prepared in accordance with a particular target group. Given the fact that the materials in hand were posted in CIUVT Facebook group, which unites people of different professional background and with interests in different fields of the Chinese culture, the materials were designed based on the above-mentioned principles so that they could be of use to any group member.

Lastly, each situation could be analyzed from different angles when evaluating its positive and negative sides. In this case, materials preparation was a great challenge which, however, has opened new horizons for further research and development in the field.

## V. Conclusion and Further Suggestions

In conclusion, the key points of Wushu and Qigong online materials include approachability of movements and attractiveness of their display, providing knowledge of Chinese language and culture and provoking people's interest through different games and challenges. This was the first attempt for the Confucius Institute of UVT to present online teaching materials related to Wushu and Qigong, which laid the foundation for their further use in this field. However, the need and ways online activities are to be developed in future depends mostly on the specifications of current situation.

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