

AN ANALYSIS OF WUSHU'S DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract: The study analyses the development of Wushu in CEE from a sports perspective. Its purpose is to identify the leading forces and the most popular styles in Wushu among Central and Eastern European countries. The analysis is based on the medal distribution and participation rate of major World and European championships held between the years of 2012-2017. The findings show that Romania and Poland dominate on the Wushu carpet, while Wushu in the West Balkan countries is still to be developed. Sanda and Changquan are the best liked events in Sports Wushu, whereas Tai Ji Quan is the most enjoyed event in traditional wushu competitions. The study is of importance due to the ever growing significance of the 16+1 Format and its various aspects and development strategies.

Key words: Wushu, Chinese martial arts, Central and Eastern Europe, 16+1 Format.

1. Introduction

The world has seldom witnessed such major changes and such a rapid growth politically, economically as well as culturally. It is a time when the process of globalization sets the standards for international cooperation higher and higher. In the light of these events, China has come up with a rather interesting plan known as “One Belt, One Road”. A part of this plan is the so called “16+1” Format, an initiative offering China and the Central and East European countries (CEE) a mutual support in the fields of communication, infrastructure, commerce etc. (www.china-ceec.org).

Sports has proven to be one of the most enjoyable yet effective tools within the process of international cooperation. Wushu, being a part of the Traditional Chinese culture and enjoying the love of millions of people around the world, appears to be the perfect tool for promoting collaboration between China and the CEE countries in the field of sports. However, a profound study of Wushu's development in CEE has never been made. Thus, the present paper aims at filling the void in the research of Wushu for the sake of its popularization as well as to lay the groundwork for a potential future cooperation within the “16+1” Format.

About Wushu

Wushu is a relatively new term the use of which still brings a great deal of confusion to many people. It refers to the various styles and forms of martial arts developed in China over the centuries and is a subject to different interpretations – historical, philosophical and commercial to name a few. The practice of Wushu is formally divided into Taolu (套路) – a choreographed barehanded or weapon-based fight and Sanda (散打) – a full contact fight where punches, kicks and throws are allowed (Wushu Magazine, 2014). After years of standardization of forms and rules Wushu has evolved into a sports discipline as well. Sports Wushu Taolu for example is considered to be a product of the interactions between

Traditional Chinese and Western cultures. Forms of some of the traditional styles such as Chang Quan, Tai Ji Quan and Nan Quan have been effectively developed into an elite sports disciplines where professional Wushu Taolu athletes demonstrate their mastery in breath-taking jumps and spins along with the more traditional content of the routines. Eventually, this has led to the belief shared by many that Wushu has taken a step back from its roots. Yet, traditional Wushu has never ceased to fascinate the world and thousands of practitioners at any age join various competitions in traditional Wushu styles such as Tai Ji Quan, Shaolin Quan, Yongchun, Xingyiquan.

2. Goals and Methods

The present study uses the perspective of sports in order to analyze Wushu's development in CEE countries. It answers two main questions: 1) which among the CEE countries are the leading forces in Wushu; 2) which Wushu styles are the most popular ones in CEE. The analysis is based on the results of the last three rounds of four major Wushu championships held between the years of 2012 – 2017 (see table 1); the results from the 2nd European Kung Fu Championships were not available. The competition data were gathered from the official internet sites of the International Wushu Federation (www.iwuf.org) and the Estonian Sports and Traditional Wushu Federation (wushu.kungfu.ee/). A statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 16.0.

World Wushu Championships – WWC		World Kung Fu Championships – WKFC	
12 th WWC – Malaysia	2013	5 th WKFC – China	2012
13 th WWC – Indonesia	2015	6 th WKFC – China	2014
14 th WWC – Russia	2017	7 th WKFC – China	2017
European Wushu Championships – EWC		European Kung Fu Championships – EKFC	
14 th EWC – Estonia	2012		
15 th EWC – Romania	2014	3 rd EKFC – Bulgaria	2015
16 th EWC – Russia	2016	4 th EKFC – Georgia	2017

Table 1. World and European Wushu and Kung Fu Championships 2012-2017

3. Findings

The medal distribution is based on the full amount of golden, silver and bronze medals won by CEE athletes in various disciplines during the last three rounds of the championships mentioned above (see table 2). The results clearly indicate that Romania and Poland rank first accounting respectively for 20.98% and 32.64% of the medals in total. Romania, however, holds the first place having won 32.85% of the golden medals. In comparison, Serbia accounts for only 0.84% of the silver and 1.01% of the bronze medals, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia and Macedonia are placed on the bottom of the table having received no medals.

	gold	silver	bronze	total
ROU	23	27	31	81
POL	14	39	73	126
LAT	8	8	19	35
BUL	7	10	11	28
LTU	5	5	4	14
CRO	4	1	2	7
CZE	3	21	23	47
EST	2	4	7	13
HUN	2	1	14	7
SVK		2	11	13
SRB		1	2	3

ALB				0
BIH				0
MNO				0
SLO				0
MKD				0
total	70	119	197	386

Table 2. Medal distribution among CEE athletes in World and European Championships 2012-2017

The participation rate of the CEE countries varies across competitions (see Table 3). World Wushu Championships have the lowest participation rate, i.e. only 6 athletes from 2 countries joined the 14th World Wushu Championships held in Russia 2017. In comparison, 41 competitors from 10 countries took part in the 16th European Wushu Championships held also in Russia a year earlier. As to the World and European Kung Fu Championships, they both enjoy a relatively high participation rate. The latter could lead to the presumption that traditional Wushu is more popular than its sports version.

championship	No. countries	No. athletes	total	championship	No. countries	No. athletes	total
12 th WWC	3	13		5 th WKFC	6	73	
13 th WWC	4	9		6 th WKFC	4	33	
14 th WWC	2	6		7 th WKFC	7	50	
14 th EWC	6	41					
15 th EWC	8	70		3 rd EKFC	9	151	
16 th EWC	10	41		4 th EKFC	8	78	

Table 3. Participation rate of CEE Wushu Athletes in Major International Championships 2012-2017

It is noteworthy that Romania is the only country that participated in all eleven of the championships. It is followed by the Czech Republic which joined ten and Poland and Latvia which joined nine championships. In contrast, Macedonia took part in one competition only, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovenia did not participate in any of those eleven championships. In this context, the International Wushu Federation (IWUF) and the European Wushu Federation (EWUF) are the international

institutions governing Wushu's development and being responsible for its spread throughout the world and in Europe, respectively. As outlined in their constitutions, only countries member of IWUF and EWUF are allowed to join any activity organized by the federations. All of the CEE countries are IWUF members, however, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia were approved 2017. This could be a possible reason for their lack of involvement in any of the world championships. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia are not EWUF members, which in a similar fashion could have influenced their absence during the European championships. It is critical to point out that Romania and Poland are among the first European countries which became IWUF and EWUF members. Romanian and Polish athletes have been joining Wushu championships ever since the First World Wushu Championships held in Beijing 1991. Furthermore, both of them hosted numerous international competitions: 2nd World Taijiquan Championships (2016), Poland; 15th European Wushu Championships (2014), Romania; 12th European Wushu Championships (2008), Poland; 1st European "Cailifo and Hongjia Cup" Championships (2015), Poland. This goes to show that these two countries have been actively involved in the popularization and development of Wushu. Other countries which have shown a significant progress in this direction are Bulgaria (1st European Yongchunquan Championships, 2015; 3rd European Kung Fu Championships, 2015; 6th World Junior Wushu Championships, 2016; 3rd World Taijiquan Championships, 2018) and Estonia (14th European Wushu Championships, 2012).

According to the further analysis of the data Sanda is the most popular competitive discipline during the World Wushu Championships, more athletes competed in Sanda than in any of the Taolu events. However, the Taolu events together attracted more participants in the European Wushu Championships, the Changquan events in particular (see table 4). In contrast, Tai Ji Quan is the least popular discipline in Sports Wushu Championships. This might be due to the fact that Tai Ji Quan is strongly associated with its health benefits and is being promoted as a way to balance one's energy and improve one's health. Thus, Tai Ji Quan popularity as an elite sports discipline is insignificant compared to the other events. However, Tai Ji Quan belongs to one of the most popular traditional Wushu styles. Nanquan and Tai Ji Quan are the best liked events of the World Kung Fu Championships, while the majority of the athletes in the European Kung Fu Championships competed in Shaolinquan, Tai Ji Quan and Sanshou, a light contact fighting (see Table 5).

	No. athletes			
	Taolu events			
championship	CQ	TJQ	NQ	SD
12 th WWC	2		1	10
13 th WWC	3			6
14 th WWC	1		2	3
total	5	0	3	19
14 th EWC	71	3	5	25
15 th EWC	22		12	29
16 th EWC	8	5	12	21
total	101	8	29	75

Table 4. Participation rate of CEE athletes in World and European Wushu Championships 2012-2017

championship	TJQ	SLQ	NQ	X,B,B	XXQ	CQ,HQ	TB,WD,FZ	other	sanshou
5 th WKFC	23	8	22		6			9	
6 th WKFC	9	4	9	1	1	1	1	5	
7 th WKFC	11	5	11	4	4	8		5	
total									
3 rd EKFC	37	31	18	3		5	10	12	36
4 th EKFC	15	18	12	7	6	3		6	22
total									

Table 5. Participation rate of CEE athletes in World and European Kungfu Championships 2012-2017

4. Conclusion and Further Suggestions

In conclusion, according to the medal distribution of eleven major World and European Wushu competitions held between the years of 2012-2017 Romania and Poland are the leading forces in Wushu in CEE, while Wushu in the West Balkan countries is still to be developed. Regarding the popularity of the styles, the study shows that the number of Sanda and Changquan athletes is prevailing in Sports Wuhu championships, where as Tai Ji Quan appears to attract the majority of the participants in traditional Wushu competitions.

This study is based on championship results only and does not include a thorough investigation of Wushu's history of development in CEE, the sports

policy of those countries or any sports activity related to Wushu on local or national level. Therefore, a more profound research on the latter is required in order to gain a better understanding about Wushu's current situation of development in CEE.

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