

Research on the Practical Path of Integrating the Traditional Health Preservation Wisdom of Wuqinxi into the Modern Health Promotion System

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Abstract: *Wuqinxi, a component of the traditional Chinese medicine regimen, should not be merely regarded as a mere continuation of fitness exercises. It embodies wisdom such as “unity of heaven and man, nurturing both body and spirit, and preventing disease”. Given the current stage of Healthy China’s development, where fitness for all is gradually becoming a part of life across all social strata, Wuqinxi has greater room for development and practical significance. However, existing research has primarily focused on its direct therapeutic effects on the body, and there is still insufficient consideration on how Wuqinxi can be integrated with modern health promotion and how practical promotion should be carried out. To fill this gap, this paper utilizes literature review, interviews, case studies, and questionnaires to comprehensively summarize the traditional regimen of Wuqinxi, analyze its natural connection with contemporary health concepts, and examine the difficulties encountered in practical promotion. Starting from theoretical updates, population segmentation, usage scenarios, technical assistance, and institutional arrangements, this paper attempts to identify the possibilities for Wuqinxi to align with modern health needs. The goal is to breathe new life into the health regimen tradition of Wuqinxi, providing ideas and inspiration for both national health and the development of traditional sports.*

Keywords: Wuqinxi, Traditional Chinese Medicine health preservation exercises, Traditional health preservation wisdom, Health promotion, Integration path.

1. Introduction

The “Healthy China 2030” Plan Outline places the distinctive advantages of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in a prominent position, encouraging the integration of traditional health preservation culture into public health services and advocating a health concept centered on prevention [1]. Tracing back to the origins of the exercises, the Wuqinxi (Five Animals Exercises) are attributed to Hua Tuo of the Eastern Han Dynasty and are an important representative of ancient Chinese health preservation practices. The entire set of exercises draws inspiration from the postures and movements of five animals: tiger, deer, bear, ape, and bird, integrating physical guidance, breathing and inhalation, and mental regulation. It embodies the cultural core of TCM, which corresponds to the five elements and five organs, regulates meridians and qi, and prevents diseases before they occur. As a national-level intangible cultural heritage, Wuqinxi combines cultural value and fitness rehabilitation value, is not limited by venues or equipment, and is suitable for fitness activities for multiple groups of people.

In contemporary society, public health issues such as sub-optimal health conditions, various chronic diseases, and excessive psychological stress on the general populace are increasingly prominent, having become major factors affecting people’s physical and mental well-being. The modern concept of health transcends a singular focus on physical health, no longer limiting itself to the regulation of bodily functions. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of mental health and social adaptability, advocating for prevention as a priority and laying a solid foundation for health through optimizing lifestyles. The philosophy of

nurturing both the body and mind advocated by the Five Animals Exercises aligns closely with the core aspirations of modern comprehensive health promotion, possessing high adaptability value. However, from the perspective of actual promotion, there are still many constraints on the popularization and development of Wuqinxi [2]. At present, public practice is mostly limited to imitating standardized movement routines, generally neglecting the profound core of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) health preservation culture behind it. At the same time, the practicing population tends to be aging, with a single audience circle, and traditional practice modes are difficult to adapt to the living pace and scenarios of contemporary people, lacking adaptability. These numerous issues greatly restrict the popularization and long-term development of Wuqinxi. Therefore, the core focus of current research and promotion lies in deeply exploring the core connotation of the traditional health preservation culture of Wuqinxi, realizing the deep integration of traditional health preservation wisdom and modern health concepts, and promoting the transformation of Wuqinxi from a single traditional fitness routine practice to a scientific health preservation method that empowers the physical and mental health of the entire population and adapts to modern health needs.

2. The Inner Logic between Traditional Health Preservation Wisdom of Wuqinxi and Modern Health Promotion Concepts

2.1 The Traditional Health Culture Connotation of Wuqinxi

The formation of the Five Animals Exercises is rooted in

traditional Chinese medicine theory and incorporates the simple philosophical ideas of ancient China. In summary, its essence of health preservation can be summarized into three points. Based on the holistic view of life that “heaven and man are one,” the movements of the Five Animals Exercises are not random imitations. They follow the principles of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements - Tiger Exercise nourishes the liver, Deer Exercise strengthens the kidneys, Bear Exercise strengthens the spleen and stomach, Ape Exercise regulates the heart, and Bird Exercise clears the lungs - using bionic movements to regulate the body’s qi and blood, maintaining a dynamic balance between humans and nature. Beyond the view of life, the Five Animals Exercises also embody the practical logic of “nurturing both the body and the spirit.”. The Five Animals Exercises emphasize the integration of posture, breathing, and mindfulness [3]. The movements stretch the joints and muscles, the breathing harmonizes the qi flow, and the mindfulness focuses on nurturing the soul, achieving a unity of body and mind. This is also what distinguishes it from ordinary exercises. “Preventive treatment of diseases” is an important health-preserving approach in traditional Chinese medicine, advocating “preventing diseases before they occur and preventing changes once they occur.” This philosophy does not advocate intervention after the disease has occurred, but emphasizes the use of techniques such as guided exercises to regulate the body, improve bodily functions, and enhance the body’s ability to resist pathogens, which collectively embodies the preventive thinking of traditional Chinese medicine.

2.2 Core Essence of Modern Health Promotion Concept

Modern health promotion is no longer limited to the treatment of diseases. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. With prevention as its core, modern health promotion advocates for the improvement of public health literacy through lifestyle intervention, health education, and environmental improvement, aiming to reduce the occurrence of chronic diseases and sub-health issues [4]. It focuses on the coordination of both physical and mental aspects, and provides corresponding health services for different groups and individuals across their entire life stages.

2.3 The Inherent Compatibility Between the Two

The value cores of the two are highly interconnected. Firstly, the goals are aligned: the “preventive treatment of diseases” in Wuqinxi (a traditional Chinese exercise) and the “prevention first” approach in modern health promotion are highly consistent, both prioritizing active prevention as the primary path to achieving health. Secondly, the content is aligned: Wuqinxi nurtures both the body and the mind, taking into account both physical activity and psychological regulation, matching the modern dual health standards of physiological and psychological well-being. Lastly, the practice methods are aligned: Wuqinxi is low-cost and low-threshold, suitable for regular daily practice, and matches the lifestyle-based health intervention model advocated by modern health promotion. However, there are differences in the discourse systems of the two. Traditional exercises rely on Chinese medical philosophy for interpretation, while modern health

promotion relies on modern medicine and exercise science. A bridge needs to be built to complete the modern translation of traditional wisdom.

3. The Current Status and Practical Dilemmas of the Integration of Er-Wu-Qin-Xi (A Traditional Chinese Exercise) and Modern Health Promotion Concepts

3.1 Current Research Status at Home and Abroad

At the current stage in China, academic research on the Five Animals Exercise can be broadly categorized into two main streams. One strand of research delves into the cultural essence of traditional Chinese medicine embedded in the Five Animals Exercise, systematically tracing its origins, development trajectory, and traditional theoretical underpinnings, thereby reinforcing its cultural roots in traditional health preservation. The other strand relies on clinical experiments to conduct empirical analysis, using data to demonstrate that the Five Animals Exercise can effectively enhance the physical balance ability of the elderly population, while also positively intervening in the physiological state and psychological emotions of patients with chronic diseases. A comprehensive review of existing research reveals notable limitations in the current academic perspective, with most studies solely focusing on verifying the singular fitness and health preservation benefits of the Five Animals Exercise [5]. Existing research lacks sufficient exploration into the intrinsic mechanisms of integrating the traditional health preservation culture of the Five Animals Exercise with modern health concepts, as well as practical and normalized promotion models that can be implemented. Additionally, there is a lack of personalized and differentiated practical schemes tailored for different groups, such as adolescents and office workers, making it difficult to meet the health promotion needs of the entire population.

Most foreign studies regard Wuqinxi as an alternative exercise therapy, focusing on empirical tests of physiological indicators to demonstrate its improvement effects on muscle strength and cardiovascular function. However, due to cultural barriers, these studies seldom delve into the underlying philosophical principles of traditional Chinese medicine and the cultural connotation of nurturing both the body and spirit inherent in Wuqinxi. They merely remain at the practical fitness level, failing to achieve a comprehensive study that integrates the exercise value of the technique with its traditional cultural connotation.

3.2 Realistic Dilemmas of Integrated Development

Firstly, culture is divorced from practice, with emphasis on formality and neglect of connotation. Currently, most promotional activities for the Five Animals Exercise only teach the routine of movements, ignoring the cultural interpretation behind it, such as the five elements, internal organs, and the nourishment of both body and spirit. Practitioners only imitate the moves without understanding the logic of health preservation. Traditional health preservation wisdom is simplified into a set of fitness exercises, losing its cultural core.

Secondly, the adaptability to different groups is poor, with a single target audience. Currently, the main audience for Wuqinxi (a traditional Chinese exercise) is the elderly, and there are few adapted versions for teenagers and young professionals. Teenagers face high academic pressure and lack a simplified version suitable for fragmented campus scenarios; young professionals work at a fast pace, and the threshold for practicing the complete routine is high, making it difficult to integrate into daily life.

Thirdly, the communication mode is outdated and the modernization transformation is not in place. Traditional offline teaching remains the mainstream, and digital communication content mostly consists of video recordings of actions, lacking popular science interpretation combined with modern health knowledge. It also lacks modern communication carriers such as VR and online interactive courses, making it less attractive to young people.

Fourthly, the talent and standard system is not sound. Most of the promotion personnel for Wuqinxi only master the movement techniques, lacking relevant knowledge such as modern health management and sports science, and are unable to combine traditional exercises with modern health needs. The lack of standardized teaching programs for different groups limits its large-scale promotion in communities, campuses, elderly care institutions, and other places.

4. Construction of the Integration Path between Traditional Health Preservation Wisdom of the Five Animals Exercise and Modern Health Promotion Concepts

From the dual perspectives of cultural inheritance and health empowerment, we adhere to preserving the core of traditional culture, and carry out creative transformation to meet modern health needs. We construct an integration path from five aspects: theoretical translation, differentiated plans for different groups, implementation in multiple scenarios, digital empowerment, and safeguard mechanisms.

4.1 Theoretical Translation: Building a Bridge for Dialogue Between Traditional Health Wisdom and Modern Health Science

To achieve a modern interpretation of traditional health preservation discourse, it is necessary to conduct theoretical tracing based on ancient books. We should sort out the relevant ideas of Wuqinxi (a set of exercises originating from the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine) recorded in classics such as the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine and the Record of Nurturing Life and Extending Life, retain the core cultural essence of the unity of heaven and man, the nurturing of both body and spirit, and the prevention of disease, adhere to its cultural origins, and prevent the excessive deconstruction of traditional concepts into a one-sided and simplistic view. Meanwhile, based on the existing research findings in sports physiology, rehabilitation medicine, and psychology, we scientifically elucidate the fitness effects of the Five-Animal Exercises [6]. We translate traditional Chinese medicine expressions such as "dredging meridians and harmonizing the five organs" into modern

health terms like muscle stretching, emotional regulation, and stress relief, facilitating communication and dialogue between traditional and modern theoretical systems and breaking down cognitive barriers arising from different knowledge backgrounds.

4.2 Tailor Differentiated and Adaptive Integration Solutions for Different Groups of People

Abandon the singular promotion model of "one approach for all", and develop tailored solutions for different groups based on their health pain points.

Adolescent group: Focusing on issues such as body posture correction, physical fitness improvement, and psychological stress relief, we have developed a simplified version of the Wuqinxi (Five Animals Exercise) for campus use, and shortened the practice time to make it more suitable for use during long breaks or physical education classes. We will integrate these cultural knowledge into the classroom, achieving a combination of physical exercise and learning traditional culture.

Young and middle-aged professionals: They often sit down to work, and during this time, their bodies feel very fatigued and under significant stress. Therefore, we have developed some five-minute mini-activities, placing some relaxing movements on their workstations [7]. This allows simple techniques to be incorporated into office work, enabling them to unwind their bodies.

The elderly population and those with chronic diseases: We will retain the main body of the original qigong exercises, but we will develop a gentler practice method tailored to the specific diseases of the elderly, so that they won't feel too exhausted. Additionally, we will collaborate with rehabilitation doctors and inheritors of the Five Animals Exercises to introduce these practices to the elderly. This will provide an auxiliary treatment method for those with chronic diseases, allowing them to use it for exercise.

4.3 Expand Diverse Application Scenarios and Open up Channels for Practical Implementation

Finally, we aim to introduce the Five Animals Exercises to various settings: within communities, we can collaborate with health centers to conduct public welfare teaching sessions, educating residents on health knowledge; in schools, we can utilize physical education classes or club activities to promote this initiative. In elderly care facilities, we encourage residents to practice these exercises and integrate them into their daily routines.

4.4 Digitalization Empowers Innovative Communication and Expands the Influence of Modern Communication

In line with the trend of digital communication, it has become particularly important to enrich the communication platforms for Wuqinxi. On the one hand, developing online courses and short video tutorials to make this ancient fitness practice more accessible to everyone is crucial. This involves not just recording action videos, but also explaining the underlying health culture and modern health values. In addition,

exploring the application of VR technology can create an immersive practice experience, which will add a lot of fun. 3.17% (148) conducted popular science propaganda of Wuqinxi through new media platforms, breaking the previous impression that it is a sport for the elderly, allowing more people to accept it and broadening its audience range.

4.5 Improve Talent Cultivation and Standard Construction, and Establish a Solid Long-term Guarantee Mechanism

A team of composite talents is a crucial foundation for practical implementation. It is necessary to promote joint training among Wuqinxi practitioners, physical education teachers, and health management practitioners, so that they can not only fully understand the traditional cultural connotations behind the exercises but also become familiar with relevant theoretical knowledge of modern health promotion. On this basis, it is also necessary to establish teaching standards that are suitable for different groups of people. For multiple usage scenarios such as campus students, community residents, and elderly care institutions, we should introduce practical and standardized teaching guidelines. It is worth noting that an expert consultation mechanism should be established to involve practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, sports science researchers, and health management workers in the demonstration of the plan. This will ensure that the core of traditional culture is not lost during the integration process, while also meeting the requirements of modern healthy development.

5. Conclusion

Wuqinxi (Five Animals Exercise) is a core gem of China's traditional health preservation culture. Its health preservation philosophy, which advocates "unity of heaven and man, nurturing both body and spirit, and preventing disease before it occurs," aligns with modern health promotion principles that prioritize prevention and the integrated treatment of mind and body. It possesses remarkable potential for modern application. Currently, the modern inheritance of Wuqinxi faces practical issues such as the dilution of its cultural essence, weak audience adaptability, and outdated dissemination models. The deep integration of the two is not a simple superposition of traditional exercises and modern fitness functions. Instead, it requires adhering to the principle of maintaining integrity while innovating, transforming traditional health preservation theories into contemporary health discourse that is suitable for the modern age. Targeted promotion plans should be developed for adolescents, young and middle-aged professionals, and the elderly, covering campus, community, and elderly care settings. Relying on digital technology to innovate dissemination methods, improve relevant talent training and standardization systems, and assist in the innovative transformation and modern development of Wuqinxi.

Integrating the Five Animals Exercises into the contemporary national fitness system can enrich public health services. This measure not only enhances the overall health literacy of the public and facilitates the implementation of the Healthy China strategy, but also inherits and revitalizes traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) health preservation culture, allowing the

millennia-old wisdom of health preservation to serve the health needs of the contemporary public. At the same time, more empirical pilot projects need to be carried out to test the practical application effects of the integrated promotion model. Based on the feedback from these pilots, we should continuously optimize and iterate the promotion strategy to achieve long-term improvement of the practical model.

Fund Project

Shaanxi Provincial Sports Bureau (No.20261864), Research on the Integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine Health Preservation Techniques and Modern Health Concepts: A Study on the Integration Path of Traditional Health Preservation Wisdom and Modern Health Promotion Concepts in Wuqinxi. Project leader and unit: Zhu Tian, Xianyang Polytechnic Institute.

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