

# Embodied power and identity: bodily discipline and sociocultural transformation in the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association

Haidong CHEN , & Lianzhen MA\* 

*School of Physical Education and Sports Science, South China Normal University, Panyu, Guangzhou (China)*

Received: 12/03/2025; Accepted: 01/08/2025; Published: 03/08/2025



## ORIGINAL PAPER

### Abstract

This study aimed to deeply examine how the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, within the specific historical and regional context of Republican Era China, shaped members' bodily concepts, behavior patterns, and values through its unique system of bodily discipline. It examines the intricate relationships between this process and individual identity, group identification, and national identity. This paper applies Foucault's theory of bodily discipline to address the lack of previous research on the bodily disciplinary practices of specific regional Chin Woo branches and their sociocultural implications. Based on a meticulous review and analysis of primary archival materials, including the works *Jing Wu Ben Ji* and *Jing Wu Yue Chuan*, this study systematically analyzes the diverse bodily disciplinary practices of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, encompassing the modernization of Chinese martial arts training, the organization of diverse cultural activities, and the establishment of strict institutional norms. The research reveals that the bodily discipline of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association was not merely a simple physical skills training, but a complex social process that integrated the call of the times, the leadership and promotion of social elites, organizational operational guarantees, and cultural inheritance and innovation. This disciplinary system effectively internalized specific bodily standards, behavioral norms, and values into members' daily practices, not only enhancing members' self-confidence and sense of group belonging but, more importantly, closely linking individual bodily experiences with national cultural identity and national identity, making the body a symbol carrying the hope of national rejuvenation. The study concludes that the bodily discipline of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association is a vivid embodiment of Modern China's sports modernization transformation, bodily cultural changes, and the intertwining of power, identity construction, and social mobilization. It profoundly reveals the historical process in which the body was discovered, disciplined, and endowed with symbolic meaning under specific historical conditions.

**Keywords:** Martial arts; Chinese martial arts; combat sports; sport history; bodily discipline; identity; leadership; Republican Era China.

### La encarnación del poder y la identidad: disciplina corporal y transformación sociocultural en la Asociación Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong

#### Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar en profundidad cómo la Asociación Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong, en el contexto histórico y regional específico de la China de la Era Republicana, moldeó los conceptos corporales, los patrones de comportamiento y los valores de sus miembros a través de su sistema único de disciplina corporal. Se examinan las complejas relaciones entre este proceso y la identidad individual, la identificación grupal y la identidad nacional. Este artículo aplica la teoría de Foucault sobre la disciplina

### A encarnação do poder e da identidade: disciplina corporal e transformação sociocultural na Associação Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong

#### Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo examinar em profundidade como a Associação Atlética Guangdong Chin Woo, dentro do contexto histórico e regional específico da Era Republicana da China, moldou os conceitos corporais, padrões de comportamento e valores dos seus membros através do seu sistema único de disciplina corporal. Ele examina as relações complexas entre esse processo e a identidade individual, a identificação de grupo e a identidade nacional. Este artigo

\* Corresponding author: Ma Lianzhen ([malianzhen@qq.com](mailto:malianzhen@qq.com))

**Contributions:** Haidong Chen (BEM), Lianzhen Ma (AFN). Codes according to CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy): (A) Conceptualization. (B) Data curation. (C) Formal Analysis. (D) Funding acquisition. (E) Investigation. (F) Methodology. (G) Project administration. (H) Resources. (I) Software. (J) Supervision. (K) Validation. (L) Visualization. (M) Writing – original draft. (N) Writing – review & editing.

**Funding:** This work was supported by the Research Topic on the Guangzhou Philosophical and Social Sciences Development "14th Five-Year Plan" 2023 Annual Grand Ceremony grant (Project ID: 2023GZDD06).

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



corporal para abordar la falta de investigaciones previas sobre las prácticas disciplinarias corporales de las ramas regionales específicas de la Chin Woo y sus implicaciones socioculturales. Basándose en una revisión y análisis meticulosos de fuentes primarias de archivo, incluyendo las obras *Jing Wu Ben Ji* y *Jing Wu Yue Chuan*, este estudio analiza sistemáticamente las diversas prácticas de disciplina corporal de la Asociación Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong, que abarcan la modernización del entrenamiento en artes marciales chinas, la organización de diversas actividades culturales y el establecimiento de normas institucionales estrictas. La investigación revela que la disciplina corporal de la Asociación Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong no era simplemente un entrenamiento de habilidades físicas, sino un complejo proceso social que integraba el llamado de los tiempos, el liderazgo y la promoción de las élites sociales, las garantías operativas de la organización y la herencia y la innovación culturales. Este sistema disciplinario internalizó eficazmente normas corporales específicas, normas de comportamiento y valores en las prácticas diarias de sus miembros, lo que no solo mejoró su autoconfianza y el sentido de pertenencia al grupo, sino que, lo que es más importante, vinculó estrechamente las experiencias corporales individuales con la identidad cultural nacional y la identidad nacional, convirtiendo el cuerpo en un símbolo que encarnaba la esperanza del renacimiento nacional. El estudio concluye que la disciplina corporal de la Asociación Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong es una encarnación viva de la transformación de la modernización deportiva de la China moderna, los cambios culturales corporales y del entrelazamiento del poder, de la construcción de la identidad y de la movilización social. Revela profundamente el proceso histórico en el que el cuerpo fue descubierto, disciplinado y dotado de significado simbólico en condiciones históricas específicas.

**Palabras clave:** Artes marciales; artes marciales chinas; deportes de combate; historia del deporte; disciplina corporal; identidad; liderazgo; Era Republicana China.

aplica a teoria da disciplina corporal de Foucault para abordar a falta de pesquisas anteriores sobre as práticas disciplinares corporais de filiais regionais específicas da Chin Woo e suas implicações socioculturais. Com base numa revisão e análise metódica de materiais de arquivo primários, incluindo as obras *Jing Wu Ben Ji* e *Jing Wu Yue Chuan*, este estudo analisa sistematicamente as diversas práticas disciplinares corporais da Associação Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong, abrangendo a modernização do treino de artes marciais chinesas, a organização de diversas atividades culturais e o estabelecimento de normas institucionais rigorosas. A investigação revela que a disciplina corporal da Associação Atlética Chin Woo de Guangdong não era apenas um simples treino de habilidades físicas, mas um processo social complexo que integrava o apelo dos tempos, a liderança e promoção das elites sociais, garantias operacionais organizacionais e herança e inovação culturais. Este sistema disciplinar internalizou eficazmente padrões corporais específicos, normas comportamentais e valores nas práticas diárias dos membros, não só aumentando a autoconfiança e o sentimento de pertença ao grupo, mas, mais importante ainda, ligando estreitamente as experiências corporais individuais à identidade cultural nacional e à identidade nacional, tornando o corpo um símbolo que carrega a esperança do rejuvenescimento nacional. O estudo conclui que a disciplina corporal da Associação Atlética Guangdong Chin Woo é uma encarnação viva da transformação da modernização desportiva da China moderna, das mudanças culturais corporais e do entrelaçamento de poder, da construção da identidade e da mobilização social. Revela profundamente o processo histórico em que o corpo foi descoberto, disciplinado e dotado de significado simbólico sob condições históricas específicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Artes marciais; artes marciais chinesas; desportos de combate; história do desporto; disciplina corporal; identidade; liderança; Era Republicana da China.

## 1. Introduction

In the tumultuous river of sociocultural transformation in Republican Era China (1912-1949), the body was a bearer of historical change and a crucial field for the operation of power, the construction of identity, and the shaping of social recognition. In the early 20th century, facing severe internal and external challenges, the calls for “Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race” intertwined with the yearning for national rejuvenation. This convergence gave rise to social movements, with sports and Chinese martial arts as their vehicles, aimed at reshaping the national physique and invigorating the martial spirit (Liang, 1998; Pan, 2019). Within this historical backdrop, the Chin Woo Athletic Association, which originated in Shanghai and quickly spread throughout the country, became one of the most influential sports organizations in Republican-era China (Chen, 1919). The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, as its essential branch in the South China region, offers a unique lens through which to examine how social forces shaped the body, how individuals participated in identity construction through bodily practice, and how sports organizations played a role in the interaction between regional culture and national identity.

The core question of this study is to explore how the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, within its specific historical and regional environment, shaped its members’ bodily concepts and practices through a unique system of physical discipline. It also examines how this bodily disciplinary practice subsequently influenced individual and collective identity, and how it was linked to broader sociocultural transformation and the national construction agenda. While previous research has discussed the overall history and impact of the Chin Woo Athletic Association,



in-depth case studies focusing on specific regional branches, such as the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, especially from the perspective of bodily discipline theory, remain insufficient (Zhang & Guo, 2014; Yi, 1997). Furthermore, the micro-mechanisms by which social elites exerted influence in this process, as well as the specific effects and cultural implications of bodily discipline, require further elucidation.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the diverse bodily discipline practices of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association through a case study, encompassing the modernization of Chinese martial arts training, the organization of rich cultural activities, and the establishment of strict institutional norms. Foucault's theory of bodily discipline will be applied to examine how this system, influenced by contemporary demands and elite leadership, effectively shaped physical skills, behavior patterns, and values of its members, ultimately constructing a new citizen's identity and a collective identity characterized by the distinct features of the era. This study particularly emphasizes that bodily discipline within the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association was not a unidirectional power imposition but a dynamic interaction process between individual reflexive practice and social norms. It also highlights its profound connection with the grand narrative of national construction within the local sociocultural context.

This research, through a meticulous review and analysis of primary archival materials such as the works *Jing Wu Ben Ji* and *Jing Wu Yue Chuan*—which encompass internal regulations, training rules, and official association documents, accessed variously through digital means, published collections, and in-person visits to institutions like the Guangzhou Municipal Archives—expects to reveal the specific operation of power mechanisms of bodily discipline within the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association and its far-reaching impact at the individual, group, and cultural identity levels. The study argues that the bodily discipline of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association was not just a technical aspect of body shaping, but a complex practice of the operation of power, cultural transmission, and social mobilization. It profoundly reflects the historical process in Republican Era China, where the body, as an essential resource, was discovered, disciplined, and endowed with symbolic meaning in response to internal and external challenges and the pursuit of national rejuvenation. This paper's discussion not only aims to enrich the regional perspective of Chin Woo Athletic Association research but also strives to offer new insights into understanding the complex interactions between sports, bodily culture, and social change in Republican Era China, and to provide historical lessons for the cultural inheritance and innovation of sports culture.

## 2. Literature review

This literature review will cover the history and development of the Chin Woo Athletic Association, the application of bodily discipline theory in sports research, identity construction and national construction, and the limitations of existing research, to clarify the theoretical basis and academic value of this study.

### 2.1. History and development of the Chin Woo Athletic Association

The Chin Woo Athletic Association was founded in Shanghai in 1910 by Huo Yuanjia, becoming China's first modern martial arts academy (Kennedy & Guo, 2010). Its establishment occurred against a backdrop of increasing national crisis in Republican Era China due to foreign aggression. Huo Yuanjia's challenges against foreign strongmen significantly ignited Chinese public nationalism, fostering the birth of this martial arts institution (New Zealand Chin Woo, 2024). Aiming to promote traditional Chinese martial arts, the Chin Woo Athletic Association is now one of the world's largest martial arts organizations, boasting numerous branches across five continents (Kuo & Kuo, 2023). Initially named the Chin Woo Gymnastics School, the name "Chin Woo" (精武) was chosen to signify "refined" and "superior" martial arts spirit, while also cleverly avoiding associations with the Boxer Rebellion's symbolism of rebellion and militarism. Following Huo Yuanjia's death, martial artists such as Chen Zizheng, Luo Guangyu, Zhao Lianhe, and Wu Jianquan continued his legacy, expanding the Chin Woo Athletic Association and formalizing and systematizing martial arts instruction. This marked the beginning of modern Chinese martial arts education (Monk Wise Martial Arts Academy LLC, 2024). The Chin Woo Athletic Association served as a venue for martial arts training and a platform for promoting national pride and cultural heritage. Its slogan, "Strengthen



the Nation and Preserve the Race,” received high praise from Sun Yat-sen and inspired patriotism among martial artists across China (New Zealand Chin Woo, 2024).

It is important to note that the Chin Woo Athletic Association’s development model has not been static, with local branches exhibiting unique characteristics in their evolution. Scholars have investigated the operational mechanisms of the Chin Woo Athletic Association’s “dual-track” physical training system and how the organization positioned, expanded, and sustained its influence through media (Yi & Zhang, 1998; Zhang & Li, 2010). They found that the Chin Woo Athletic Association’s practices included establishing Chinese Martial Arts and Western sports departments and dispatching Members to various competitions (Kuo & Kuo, 2024). This “Integration of Chinese and Western sports” strategy reflects the Chin Woo Athletic Association’s flexible adaptability in a turbulent society and its brand positioning to cultivate healthy New Citizens. The success of the Chin Woo Athletic Association can also be attributed to its assimilation of Western sports cultural elements. Research indicates that the Chin Woo Athletic Association was, to some extent, an ideological response to the Western Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) movement, incorporating many Western pedagogical principles and methods (Bowman, 2020). This adoption of Western elements also promoted the Modernization and institutionalization of martial arts curricula, allowing many traditional martial arts to flourish anew in modern society. Furthermore, the Chin Woo Athletic Association has exerted widespread international impact, particularly in Southeast Asia, where its branches have thrived, significantly contributing to the Dissemination of martial arts culture (Lau, 2022).

Substantial research on the Chin Woo Athletic Association exists; however, a notable gap remains concerning the Guangdong branch. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how Guangzhou’s distinct geographical and cultural context during the Republican Era influenced the development of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. A central focus is also to identify the association’s unique characteristics regarding its practices of bodily discipline and the construction of social identity.

## *2.2. The application of bodily discipline theory in sports research*

Bodily discipline theory, as a perspective for understanding the relationship between the body and power, has been widely applied in Republican Era China sports research in recent years (Cheng, 2007; Zhao, 2010). It offers new insights for exploring the sociocultural connotations of sports activities. This theory originates from Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power, positing that the body is not naturally given but rather a product shaped and disciplined by various social mechanisms (such as education, institutions, and customs). In Republican Era China, sports embodied bodily discipline, not only in the training of technical movements but also in the deeper regulation of individual bodies by social norms, ethics, and power structures. Examining bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports provides deeper insights into its cultural characteristics and social functions.

## *2.3. Bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports: intersections and Chinese characteristics*

Bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports shares commonalities with Western disciplinary theories but also possesses Chinese characteristics. For example, the implementation of sports and hygiene regulations in new-style schools during the late Qing Dynasty exemplifies the nationalized feature of bodily discipline, which involves the institutionalized inclusion of individual bodies into state management (He, 2009). Fang’s research reveals how the late Qing Dynasty schools transformed students’ bodies from “private bodies” into “national bodies” through the implementation of sports and hygiene regulations. This transformation reflects the state’s power dynamics over and shaping of individual bodies. Such a concept of the “national body” reflects the urgent need to enhance national physique in modern China’s pursuit of “Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race,” as well as the important role of sports in national rejuvenation. The systematic development of physical education during the Republican Era in China further standardized the practice of bodily discipline. The curriculum design and teaching methods for physical education teacher training reflected the disciplinary requirements for students’ bodies (Chen, 2023). Chen Yu’s research highlights that physical education teacher training during the Republican Era in China emphasized the integration of academic and practical subjects, with a focus on diversifying practical



training activities. This was not only to enhance the professional capabilities of physical education teachers but also to disseminate the concept of bodily discipline to a broader range of students through standardized teaching practices. In promoting mass sports, physical educators advocated for schools as the primary entities, combined with social forces, gradually forming a sports education system with public participation (Wu, 2023). The implementation of bodily discipline also accompanied this process. Wu Mian's research on the "mass sports" views of four modern physical educators indicates that physical educators during the Republican Era China sought to cultivate healthy national bodies and enhance national cohesion through the popularization of sports, thereby achieving the goal of "Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race." These studies suggest that Republican Era China sports, while introducing Western sports systems, also adopted the model of bodily discipline, aiming to shape national bodies conforming to social norms.

#### *2.4. Integration of Chinese tradition and modernization*

Bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports reflected a unique synthesis of diverse influences. However, bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports did not simply copy Western models; instead, it was integrated with inherent Chinese cultural traditions. On one hand, traditional Chinese sports emphasize moral education and ethical enlightenment, often linking physical training with moral cultivation. Jiang Zhilan's research highlights that the sports discipline in Republican Era China, inheriting the essence of traditional sports ethics and integrating the Olympic spirit, formed a sports culture with distinctly Chinese characteristics (Jiang, 2007). This perspective highlights the profound influence of traditional Chinese sports culture on the development of sports in Republican Era China. On the other hand, traditional Chinese sports emphasize the unity of body and mind, pursuing both internal and external cultivation. For example, Chinese Martial Arts is not only a combat skill but also a way to cultivate oneself, emphasizing the nurturing of "Martial Spirit." Yin Xiaoguang, when comparing the nature of traditional Chinese sports with Western sports, also emphasized the holistic and moral educational aspects of traditional Chinese sports (Yin, 2001). These studies indicate that in the Republican Era China, sports' bodily discipline did not purely pursue physical strength but focused on cultivating students' moral sentiments and spiritual realm through sports activities. Zhao Hong's research highlights that Mao Zedong's sports philosophy contributed to the modernization of physical education by critiquing the traditional emphasis on valuing morality over physical strength (Zhao, 1999). This perspective reflects the innovation and transcendence of Republican Era China sports about traditional sports concepts, while also emphasizing the role of bodily discipline in the modernization and transformation of physical education. Thus, bodily discipline in Republican Era China sports involves shaping individual bodies and elevating individual spirits, embodying the unique wisdom of Chinese culture.

#### *2.5. Identity construction and national construction*

Identity construction is often closely linked to national construction during periods of societal transformation. During the Republican Era in China, facing invasion by Western powers and the cultural impact of Western influence, a surge of nationalism emerged in Chinese society. Sports were regarded as a crucial means of "Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race" and boosting national self-confidence, and were also entrusted with the mission of shaping "New Citizens" and achieving national rejuvenation. Anderson proposed the theory of "imagined communities," arguing that a nation is an imagined community constructed through shared historical memories, cultural symbols, and values (Goswami, M, 2020). On the other hand, Smith emphasized the cultural factors in national identity, believing that national identity is a collective identity built upon common culture, language, and religion (Smith et al., 1999).

Sports organizations played a crucial role in national development. The Chin Woo Athletic Association promoted Chinese martial arts and actively participated in social activities, cultivating members' patriotism and a collective sense of honor. Eacersall (2015) points out that the Chin Woo Athletic Association emphasized the importance of traditional Chinese martial arts, playing a positive role in national physical fitness, cultural pride, and national defense.

Morris (2000) argues that overseas Chinese support for Chin Woo's sports endeavors was based on national pride, rather than territorial nationalism. Research on the Chin Woo Athletic Associations in Southeast Asian Chinese communities has found that these organizations played a



significant role in shaping the national identity of overseas Chinese (Kuo & Kuo, 2023). Acevedo and Cheung (2012) analyzed how the Chin Woo Athletic Association promoted Chinese martial arts and sports culture among overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, facilitating the establishment of a larger Chinese cultural community and strengthening cultural connections. These studies indicate that the Chin Woo Athletic Association was not merely a sports organization, but also a cultural and social force, acting as a bridge in Chinese communities both domestically and abroad, connecting cultural heritage with national identity.

### 3. Research limitations and this study's innovation

Existing research provides a crucial theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding the Chin Woo Athletic Association's history, culture, and social impact. However, some limitations persist. On the one hand, current studies have not delved deeply enough into the local branches of the Chin Woo Athletic Association, notably lacking a systematic analysis of the Guangdong branch. On the other hand, using original archival materials needs strengthening; the excavation of first-hand historical data can more authentically recreate historical scenes. Furthermore, research on the mechanisms of how bodily discipline interacts with sociocultural transformation remains insufficient. Existing studies still need to deepen their exploration of bodily discipline's role in shaping individual and social identity.

This study addresses these shortcomings through a case study of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, delving into the role of bodily discipline during sociocultural transformation. This paper will primarily employ Foucault's theory of bodily discipline as its analytical framework. It will analyze how the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, through Chinese martial arts training, cultural activities, and social practices, disciplined members' bodies, shaped their social identity, and played a role in local society and national construction. Concurrently, this research will emphasize the use of original archival materials, striving to restore the historical appearance of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association, thereby offering new perspectives for both Chin Woo Athletic Association research and studies on sociocultural transformation.

### 4. Bodily discipline, reflexivity, and the cultural body: a theoretical reflection

As the primary medium through which individuals engage with society, the body is perpetually embedded in networks of social regulation and discipline (Townley, 2019). Since the emergence of sociology, scholars have sought to understand how social norms shape individuals into acceptable and functional members of society. Bodily discipline has thus become a critical theoretical lens for analyzing the relationship between the individual and society.

French philosopher Michel Foucault emphasized that power is not merely top-down repression, but is diffused throughout every aspect of social life. Power functions through various disciplinary techniques that regulate and mold the body to conform to the operational needs of authority and social norms (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977). Foucault argued that the body is not merely a biological entity but a site of power inscription—an object that is “marked, trained, and transformed” (Foucault et al., 1977).

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (2019) provided a comprehensive analysis of the technologies of discipline in modern society. He demonstrated how timetables, spatial partitioning, hierarchical systems, and surveillance regimes systematically normalize individual behavior. Institutions such as schools, armies, hospitals, and prisons serve as arenas of disciplinary power, shaping bodily gestures, conduct, and even ways of thinking through formal regulations, training routines, and punitive measures. Through these mechanisms, the body is rendered both “docile” and “useful.”

However, scholars have increasingly recognized that bodily discipline is not a unidirectional control process (Gu & Liu, 2020; Pan, 2019). Individuals are not passive recipients of discipline but rather engage in reflexive interpretation, negotiation, and reappropriation processes. While discipline seeks to standardize and regulate, individuals often strive to retain autonomy and distinctiveness. Thus, tension emerges between the normative imperatives of social order and the subject's pursuit of self-expression and agency.



This dynamic tension is visible in everyday life. For example, school regulations that mandate uniforms, enforce strict classroom discipline, and promote standardized examinations reflect the state's effort to normalize student behavior. However, individuals simultaneously engage in creative acts of self-presentation and behavioral divergence. Bodily discipline, long recognized as a mechanism of social control, is increasingly understood as a terrain of interaction, where reflexivity plays a key mediating role.

Reflexive practice, defined as the individual's capacity for critical self-awareness and adaptation, endows the subject with agency within the constraints of disciplinary structures. Markula-Denison and Pringle (2007) articulate the concept of the "correctness of bodily technique," emphasizing that in the process of learning and performing skills, individuals continually evaluate their capacities and modify practices based on embodied experience (Markula-Denison, P. et al., 2007). Through this process, bodily practice becomes not merely a site of conformity but a space of creative self-construction.

In modern Chinese society, bodily discipline was closely intertwined with nationalist ideology. Training and disciplining the body were seen as a means of individual self-improvement and a contribution to national strength, thereby achieving personal and collective value. The slogan "civilize the mind, but first strengthen the body" became a popular axiom of the era. Chinese Martial Arts, in this context, were imbued with cultural identity construction and symbolic significance (Guo & Xu, 2005; Liang, 1998). While much research on Chinese Martial Arts has focused on technical skill acquisition, it is equally vital to explore the underlying disciplinary logic and how bodily training shaped individual and collective identity—an approach grounded in sociological inquiry.

In conclusion, the relationship between bodily discipline and reflexive practice is not a simple dichotomy of domination versus resistance. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic and interactive process. Bodily discipline provides individuals with structured frameworks for socialization, while reflexive practice enables them to critically navigate, modify, and even subvert these norms. Bodily discipline manifests in training systems, technical standards, and bodily aesthetics, while reflexive practice endows the subject with interpretive flexibility. Together, they co-produce what may be termed the "cultural body"—a body that mediates the mutual shaping of individual agency, social norms, and cultural values.

## **5. Historical context of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association and its bodily discipline practices**

### *5.1. Era's mission and disciplinary goals*

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association was not merely a Chinese martial arts training center, but a quintessential microcosm of bodily discipline practices during a tumultuous period of social upheaval in Republican-era China. The times profoundly shaped its establishment, development, and operational model. In the early 20th century, China faced severe internal turmoil and external threats. A pervasive sense of national crisis spurred the call to "Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race," with the central themes of the era being the improvement of the national physique and the reshaping of the national spirit.

Against this historical backdrop, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association emerged in Guangzhou in the spring of 1919, its very existence a response to societal demands. It was jointly promoted by Li Fulin, Commander of the Guangzhou National Revolutionary Army's Fu Army, and Chin Woo Athletic Association leader Chen Gongzhe, among others (Lu et al., 1919; Zhang, 1919; Anonymous, 1919). As an important branch expanding south from the central Chin Woo Athletic Association, its location in Guangzhou, the heart of South China's politics and economy, not only leveraged the region's open cultural atmosphere but also reflected its strategic foresight. Guangdong, as a frontier for external exchange in Republican Era China, had its unique geographical and cultural environment that endowed the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association with distinct regional characteristics, closely linking its bodily discipline practices with the prevailing social ideologies of the time.

The association's core philosophy, adhering to the "Greater Chin Wooism" of the Shanghai headquarters, upheld the "Martial Spirit." It advocated for strengthening the national physique



through physical training. It promoted an educational policy that emphasized the development of moral, intellectual, and physical aspects to shape a well-rounded personality. This reveals the ultimate goal of its bodily discipline: to cultivate “New Citizens” who met the era’s demands and served the great national cause of salvation and survival (Chen, 1919).

### 5.2. *Organizational structure and institutional safeguards*

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association established a relatively comprehensive organizational structure and operational system with modern characteristics to achieve its objectives in bodily discipline. Its organization was not a loose, traditional martial arts school model but exhibited the standardization and systematization typical of modern associations. To ensure orderly operation and regulate member behavior, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association formulated detailed Articles of Association, which stipulated the organization’s purpose, member qualifications, management hierarchy, and financial system. This reflected its institutional discipline of members’ physical conduct and organizational discipline (Seventy-two Trades News, 1919).

For example, Article 4 requires that all aspiring members must be introduced by a current member, ensuring a controlled admission process that indirectly regulates members’ commitment and behavior. Article 5 further mandates applicants to submit a letter of guarantee, which for students must come from their school principal and for those in commerce or military from their supervisors, thereby enforcing social accountability and behavioral standards before acceptance.

Once admitted, Article 6 specifies a probationary period of two months, during which the head instructor and association officers must certify that the new member has adhered to the association’s regulations before the membership insignia is formally awarded. This probation serves as an institutional mechanism to monitor and ensure compliance with the physical and behavioral discipline expected.

Article 7 explicitly governs members’ conduct related to bodily discipline, requiring that the membership insignia be treated with respect and forbidding its display in improper venues. Members are prohibited from engaging in public disturbances, leveraging their membership for personal gain, or committing immoral acts. Violations result in expulsion and public revocation of membership, highlighting the importance placed on moral and bodily discipline.

In terms of organizational structure, Articles 10 through 14 detail the roles and election of directors, executives, and instructors who oversee the enforcement of these disciplinary codes and the management of training activities, thus institutionalizing behavioral norms and the physical training regimen.

Financial discipline is also regulated, with Articles 15 through 17 establishing clear funding sources via donations and membership fees, and setting fee schedules based on membership type. These provisions ensure the association’s sustainability and indirectly promote members’ continued engagement in bodily discipline practices by linking membership status to financial contribution.

These concrete provisions within the Articles of Association illustrate how the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association directly governed its members’ bodily behavior and organizational discipline, providing a structured framework that reinforced the physical and moral standards critical to its mission.

Its member composition also demonstrated broad social mobilization capabilities. Primarily composed of young students, it also attracted individuals from various social strata, including merchants, soldiers, and intellectuals (Anonymous, 1919). Its influence extended to educational institutions such as Lingnan University and the Guangdong Women’s Physical Education School (Lu et al., 1919; Anonymous, 1919; Anonymous, 1924). This diverse member base served as a vehicle for the widespread dissemination of its bodily discipline philosophy and provided social support for its development.

The association established a leading organization with internal branches, subdividing into various specialized departments, including the Combat Department, Music Department, and Health Department, each with specific responsibilities. This manifested in modern organizational management and gave a guarantee for diversifying its content of bodily discipline. However, this





organizational structure also made it inevitably subject to the profound influence of the social and political environment of the time. Initial support from military and political dignitaries, as well as business elites, facilitated its early development. However, with the rise of political instability, the association was also drawn into political disputes. At one point, its organization became an arena for political power struggles (Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Research Committee on Cultural and Historical Materials, 1964). This indirectly reflected the survival status of modern Chinese social organizations within a complex political ecosystem and the potential deviation from their organizational goals.

### 5.3. Diverse practices and cultural integration

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline practices extended beyond teaching Chinese martial arts skills. Instead, they constructed a comprehensive system encompassing Chinese martial arts training, diverse cultural activities, and Institutional Norms to shape members' bodies and spirits on multiple levels.

Their core Chinese Martial Arts training showcased a distinct feature of Sino-Western Integration in sports. It not only inherited the essence of traditional Chinese martial arts, such as Tantui and Chaquan, but also actively introduced concepts and methods from Western modern sports, including the competitive ideals of gymnastics and boxing. To enhance the scientific nature and effectiveness of their training, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association drew upon Western sports training models, planning and quantitatively managing training venues and times. For example, they established different levels of diplomas linked to years of training and formulated detailed "National Calisthenics Grand Assessment Rubrics" (Seventy-two Trades News, 1919; Anonymous, 1926). For example, figure 1 shows standardized criteria for evaluating two martial arts forms, Tan Tui and Gongli Quan, including movement commands, scoring rules, point deductions for errors, and documentation of common mistakes to ensure consistent technical assessments. These initiatives marked a significant innovation over traditional oral instruction methods, putting standardized bodily discipline into practice.

**Figure 1:** Guangdong Chin Woo National Calisthenics Grand Assessment Rubric (Anonymous, 1926)

廣東精武國操大考評判表	
項目	分數
一路	一二三四五
二路	一二三四五
三路	一二三四五
四路	一二三四五
五路	一二三四五
六路	一二三四五
七路	一二三四五
八路	一二三四五
九路	一二三四五
十路	一二三四五
十一路	一二三四五
十二路	一二三四五
十三路	一二三四五
十四路	一二三四五
十五路	一二三四五
十六路	一二三四五
十七路	一二三四五
十八路	一二三四五
十九路	一二三四五
二十路	一二三四五
二十一	一二三四五
二十二	一二三四五
二十三	一二三四五
二十四	一二三四五
二十五	一二三四五
二十六	一二三四五
二十七	一二三四五
二十八	一二三四五
二十九	一二三四五
三十	一二三四五
三十一	一二三四五
三十二	一二三四五
三十三	一二三四五
三十四	一二三四五
三十五	一二三四五
三十六	一二三四五
三十七	一二三四五
三十八	一二三四五
三十九	一二三四五
四十	一二三四五
四十一	一二三四五
四十二	一二三四五
四十三	一二三四五
四十四	一二三四五
四十五	一二三四五
四十六	一二三四五
四十七	一二三四五
四十八	一二三四五
四十九	一二三四五
五十	一二三四五
五十一	一二三四五
五十二	一二三四五
五十三	一二三四五
五十四	一二三四五
五十五	一二三四五
五十六	一二三四五
五十七	一二三四五
五十八	一二三四五
五十九	一二三四五
六十	一二三四五
六十一	一二三四五
六十二	一二三四五
六十三	一二三四五
六十四	一二三四五
六十五	一二三四五
六十六	一二三四五
六十七	一二三四五
六十八	一二三四五
六十九	一二三四五
七十	一二三四五
七十一	一二三四五
七十二	一二三四五
七十三	一二三四五
七十四	一二三四五
七十五	一二三四五
七十六	一二三四五
七十七	一二三四五
七十八	一二三四五
七十九	一二三四五
八十	一二三四五
八十一	一二三四五
八十二	一二三四五
八十三	一二三四五
八十四	一二三四五
八十五	一二三四五
八十六	一二三四五
八十七	一二三四五
八十八	一二三四五
八十九	一二三四五
九十	一二三四五
九十一	一二三四五
九十二	一二三四五
九十三	一二三四五
九十四	一二三四五
九十五	一二三四五
九十六	一二三四五
九十七	一二三四五
九十八	一二三四五
九十九	一二三四五
一百	一二三四五

Beyond core Chinese Martial Arts training, the association actively engaged in various cultural and sports activities, including recreational games, photography, music, dance, and water sports (Anonymous, 1923). These activities enriched members' cultural and recreational lives, expanding bodily expression and aesthetic experiences from different dimensions, thereby representing a holistic shaping of the body. Furthermore, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association actively responded to social trends, promoting women's sports and advocating militaristic nationalism. Their efforts to integrate local and Western sports philosophies demonstrated the adaptability of their bodily discipline practices to the times and their diverse evolving social functions.

However, the fall of Guangzhou in 1938 forcibly interrupted this flourishing bodily discipline practice, leaving a profound impact on the history of sports in Republican Era China for approximately nineteen years.

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association understood that Chinese Martial Arts were not just a skill for “Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race”, but also an important vehicle for cultural inheritance. Therefore, beyond Chinese Martial Arts training, they actively organized various cultural activities to cultivate members’ character, enhance cultural identity, and ignite national identity, achieving an organic integration of bodily discipline and cultural shaping (Xiaoao, 1923).

These cultural activities encompassed diverse forms, such as music, drama, calligraphy, debate, and photography. They enriched members’ leisure lives and provided a platform for them to showcase their talents and exchange ideas (as shown in Figures 2 and 3). The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association also creatively integrated Guangdong music with Chinese Martial Arts, demonstrating a unique cultural characteristic and innovative spirit, further enhancing members’ sense of cultural belonging and pride. Through these rich and varied cultural activities, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association aimed to merge the martial spirit with cultural literacy, cultivating “scholarly and militarily accomplished” social citizens (Shen, 1923).

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association established a comprehensive set of Institutional Norms to standardize member behavior and regulate their thoughts. These emphasized that member conduct and ideological awareness must align with the Chin Woo Athletic Association’s values and behavioral guidelines. These Institutional Norms permeated every aspect of members’ daily lives, shaping their collective consciousness and identity construction.

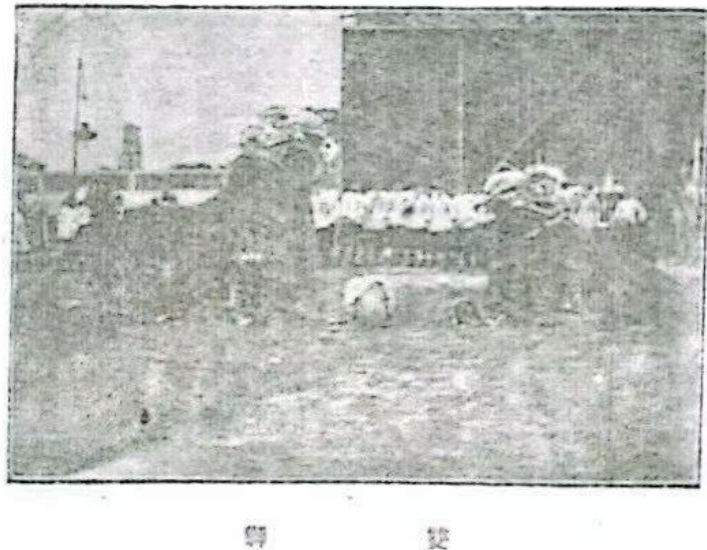
The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association formulated detailed Articles of Association, which stipulated member codes of conduct, organizational discipline, and reward/punishment systems. Through institutionalized means, these Articles of Association regulated member behavior and reinforced their sense of organizational belonging. Additionally, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association implemented a hierarchical system within the organization and conducted various ceremonial Cultural Activities, such as group drills, wearing association badges, and displaying flags. These ceremonial activities strengthened members’ collective identity and sense of honor (Lu & Chen, 1919).

Particularly noteworthy is the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association’s strong emphasis on cultivating Martial Spirit, stressing “valuing martial arts and upholding virtue.” Its association motto included values such as “self-discipline,” “equality,” and “fraternity” (Chen, 1919), guiding members to internalize these moral norms as their behavioral guidelines, thereby enhancing

**Figure 2.** Dances of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association (source: Luo, 1925, p. 105)



**Figure 3.** Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association performing the Double Lion Dance (source: Luo, 1925, p. 16)



personal cultivation and achieving harmonious personal and social development. The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association subtly disciplined members' bodies and minds through stringent institutional norms and value guidance, shaping their behavior patterns and value orientations.

#### *5.4. Elite leadership and the socialization of bodily discipline: dissemination and practice of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association's body-shaping philosophy*

The bodily discipline practices of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association extended beyond the technical training of its members. The profound influence it achieved was inextricably linked to the active participation and strong promotion by key social elites, specifically figures such as Chen Gongzhe, Lu Weichang, Chen Tiesheng, and Yao Chanbo. Among them, Chen Gongzhe and Chen Tiesheng played especially significant roles in the early founding and development of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. These elites not only provided the association with vital material resources but, more importantly, leveraged their social status, ideological convictions, and agency to elevate the bodily discipline advocated by the association from a practice confined to a specific group to a broad cultural phenomenon with wide social impact. Through their leadership and efforts, the bodily discipline system of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association became intimately connected with the reshaping of the national spirit and the construction of national identity. Therefore, examining how these elites integrated their philosophies into the association's framework of bodily discipline and disseminated them through its platform to broader society is essential for understanding the evolution of body concepts and social patterns of physical discipline in Republican Era China.

Taking Chen Gongzhe, a central figure of the Chin Woo Athletic Association, as an example, his influence on the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association's body-shaping process was foundational and multifaceted. As an Elite Individual with multiple identities—industrialist, Chinese martial arts master, and cultural figure—Chen Gongzhe first ensured the material foundation of the Chin Woo Athletic Association with his economic strength, a prerequisite for the sustained practice of bodily discipline. He integrated his profound understanding of Chinese and Western cultures into the philosophy of bodily discipline at the Chin Woo Athletic Association. His advocacy for introducing scientific training methods from Western modern sports into traditional Chinese martial arts was not merely a technical innovation, but a modern reshaping of the body concept itself, emphasizing the body's plasticity, scientific nature, and efficiency (Chen, 1919). This philosophy directly influenced the Chin Woo Athletic Association's training curriculum and teaching methods, liberating the association's bodily discipline from the potential mystification and arbitrariness of traditional Chinese martial arts, moving towards systematization and standardization.

Furthermore, Chen Gongzhe combined this modernized body concept with the grand narrative of national rejuvenation. His core ideas, such as the "three-fold emphasis on moral, intellectual, and physical education," "Martial Spirit," and "spirit of sacrifice" (Chen, 1953), essentially tightly bound physical strength with moral perfection, intellectual improvement, and the nation's destiny. This approach, imbuing bodily discipline with a lofty sense of mission, greatly enhanced the Chin Woo Athletic Association's social appeal. Through media such as photography and writing, Chen Gongzhe tirelessly disseminated these ideas, allowing the specific bodily standards and behavioral norms (e.g., discipline, perseverance, unity, and cooperation) advocated by the Chin Woo Athletic Association to transcend the martial arts community and reach the general public. Therefore, Chen Gongzhe's practice demonstrates how Elites, through ideological construction and Cultural Transmission, promoted a specific bodily discipline system from within an organization to the societal level, imbuing it with profound patriotic sentiment, thereby guiding society's perception of the ideal body and national character.

Lu Weichang's participation enriched the social practice pathways of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline philosophy, particularly in the dimension of "governing the world through practical application" (Lu Weichang, 1923). As a business Elite and active social activist, Lu Weichang not only provided crucial economic and organizational support for the early establishment of the Chin Woo Athletic Association but, more importantly, he brought the pragmatic spirit of business operations and a sense of social responsibility into the promotion of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline. His advocacy for introducing Chinese Martial Arts into the school

education system was an important strategy for socializing bodily discipline (Lu, 1924). Schools, as important institutions of social enlightenment, play a fundamental and universal role in shaping the bodies of adolescents. Lu Weichang promoted the compilation of Chinese martial arts textbooks, dedicating himself to the standardization and popularization of Chinese martial arts. This essentially encoded and replicated the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline methodology for application in broader educational settings. This approach lowered the threshold for bodily discipline, making it more accessible for the public to accept and learn. His embodied philosophy of "martial arts saving the nation" emphasized the practical value of bodily discipline, enhancing national quality and serving social development (Lu, 1928). This pragmatic orientation enabled the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline to be more easily integrated with the practical needs of various social strata, thereby broadening its channels of social dissemination and lending greater realistic significance and social benefit to the Chin Woo Athletic Association's body-shaping philosophy.

Chen Tiesheng, as a representative of the cultural Elite, made a unique contribution to the deep dissemination of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline philosophy and the construction of cultural identity through his profound cultural literacy and powerful dissemination capabilities. His awareness of "Culture Saving the Nation" led him to recognize that bodily discipline was not merely about physical improvement, but also the carrier of cultural identity and national spirit. He actively participated in the compilation of core documents like the *Chin Woo Benji* (Records of Chin Woo), which was not only a systematic organization of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's Chinese Martial Arts system and history but also the textualization and authentication of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline philosophy and core values (such as "valuing martial arts and upholding virtue"). The Chin Woo Athletic Association's body-shaping goals, training methods, and behavioral norms were presented through these texts, imbuing them with historical weight and cultural legitimacy (Chen, 1919). Chen Tiesheng utilized his identity as a journalist to publish many articles in media such as the *Chin Woo Magazine*, vigorously promoting the Chin Woo spirit. This utilized modern media for social mobilization and guidance on public opinion regarding the philosophy of bodily discipline (Chen, 1919). He integrated Chinese Martial Arts culture with the Chin Woo spirit, enhancing the Chin Woo Athletic Association's discourse power in the sociocultural sphere, allowing the body aesthetics, behavioral norms, and moral standards advocated by the Chin Woo Athletic Association to more broadly influence the public's cognition and values, thereby subtly shaping public body concepts and behavior patterns.

Similarly, the strong support from business magnate Yao Chanbo demonstrated the critical role of economic Elites in promoting the socialization process of bodily discipline, especially in organizational expansion and resource integration (Shao, 1919). His acquisition of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's new premises and his promotion of the association's expansion throughout the nation and overseas provided material guarantees and an organizational foundation for the regional dissemination and enhanced international influence of the association's bodily discipline philosophy. More importantly, Yao Chanbo's attention to and investment in fields such as women's sports, music, and photography reflected his broad understanding of the connotations of bodily discipline, expanding body-shaping to broader social groups (e.g., women) and more diverse fields (e.g., the cultivation of artistic literacy) (Yao, 1919). This enriched the practical content of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline, making it more inclusive and attractive, and enabling it to reach and influence a broader range of social members from diverse backgrounds.

In conclusion, Elites such as Chen Gongzhe, Lu Weichang, Chen Tiesheng, and Yao Chanbo collectively constructed the driving force for the socialization of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline philosophy through their ideological leadership, organizational construction, Cultural Transmission, and resource integration. They were advocates and practitioners of the Chin Woo Athletic Association's bodily discipline, interpreters, and disseminators who closely linked it with the era's demands, the nation's fate, and national identity. The deep participation of the Elites allowed the specific bodily standards, behavioral norms, and spiritual qualities advocated by the Chin Woo Athletic Association to gradually evolve from a practice within a sports organization into a widely influential body culture and value orientation. This influence was not a unidirectional imposition; the Chin Woo Athletic Association's advocated concepts of "Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race" and "valuing martial arts and upholding virtue" also



aligned with the contemporary Social Elites' perception of their social responsibility and their pursuit of an ideal national image. Through the Chin Woo Athletic Association platform, the Elites' ideas were disseminated, their social influence was consolidated, and simultaneously, they promoted the transformation of body concepts and the modernization of bodily discipline patterns in Republican Era China, whose profound impact can still be faintly seen today. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the role of the Elites in the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association's body-shaping process can reveal how bodily discipline achieved socialized dissemination under their leadership and mutually shaped broader sociocultural changes.

### *5.5. Specific effects of bodily discipline: individual, group, and cultural identity*

The bodily discipline practices of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association profoundly shaped members not only physically but also psychologically, demonstrating significant reflexive effects at individual, group, and cultural identity levels. This discipline extended beyond physiological transformation, profoundly influencing self-perception, interpersonal relations, and social belonging, ultimately contributing to the construction of a modern Chinese identity and strengthening national spirit.

At the individual level, Chin Woo's bodily discipline markedly enhanced members' self-mastery, confidence, and perseverance. Systematic Chinese martial arts training equipped members with skills and a robust physique, while cultivating unwavering mental fortitude. For instance, Chen Yan, a prominent Guangdong member with extensive experience in Western sports, contrasted the asymmetrical muscular development from activities like soccer and tennis with the balanced muscular gains from rigorous Tan Tui practice, noting a significant personal weight increase of over ten pounds (Chen, 1924). His empirical, embodied experience, supported by scientific reasoning and medical validation through collaboration with health professionals, reinforced his conviction in the efficacy of traditional martial arts training.

Similarly, Chen Tiesheng's candid narratives chronicle a journey from physical frailty and hardship—marked by the moniker “stiff-legged chairman,”—to renewed strength and service capacity through martial arts. His reflections on familial losses due to neglect of physical fitness imparted a grave seriousness to the practice, positioning bodily discipline as essential to social and familial responsibility (Chen, 1923). His methodical teaching approach, attentive to the struggles of novices, fostered a learning environment rich in empathy and precision.

Beyond martial techniques, Guangdong Chin Woo offered a diverse range of sports and cultural activities, including tennis, roller skating, tug-of-war, and aerial exercises, that enriched members' bodily experiences and challenged their perceived physical limits. This variety facilitated a positive self-image and increased self-esteem. Moreover, the association's advocacy of an “equal martial spirit” actively contested entrenched gender stereotypes, encouraging women's participation and fostering a culture of female self-respect, confidence, and autonomy (Huang, 1919).

At the group level, bodily discipline engendered strong social bonds and collective identity. The association transcended a mere training venue to become a vibrant social community where collective training, ceremonial events, and civic engagement forged shared values and goals. Chen Tiesheng's transparent admission of physical difficulties cultivated a culture of mutual support, while his meticulous instruction promoted an interactive pedagogy. Regular rehearsals and public demonstrations reinforced a sense of collective honor and belonging (Luo, 1925, p. 20-35).

Active involvement in public welfare and disaster relief translated individual discipline into collective social action, enhancing solidarity (Li, 2008; Shanghai Chin Woo Athletic Association, 2021). Institutional norms—spanning training etiquette to daily conduct—combined with varied cultural events, nurtured deep friendships and a familial ethos within the association (Guangzhou Dongshan District CPPCC Learning and Historical Materials Committee, 1992). This synthesis of regulation and social interaction cultivated a cohesive group ethos.

Culturally, Chin Woo's bodily discipline operated as a profound act of identity construction and national reaffirmation. Martial arts served as a conduit for traditional values—loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, courage, and perseverance—and as a tangible link connecting



individuals with their cultural heritage (Anonymous, 1923). The “Chin Woo Spirit,” forged amidst Republican China’s turmoil, embodied patriotism and national rejuvenation. Through cultivating “martial ethics”, members intertwined personal destiny with that of the nation, transforming martial arts into a vessel of national sentiment (Chen, 1919, p. 5-15). Members were envisioned as “New Citizens” who were both “scholarly and militarily accomplished” and “physically and mentally strong,” thus integrating individual bodily discipline seamlessly with the grand national salvation narrative.

In summary, the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association’s bodily discipline was a holistic practice intertwining physical training, psychological empowerment, social cohesion, and cultural identity formation. It fostered resilient individuals, cohesive communities, and an impassioned national spirit grounded in both tradition and modernity.

## 6. Conclusion

Using the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association as a case study, this research offers a comprehensive examination of the practice of bodily discipline and its multifaceted role in shaping individual, group, and cultural identities within the specific historical context of Republican-era China. The findings reveal that bodily discipline in the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association extended far beyond physical skill training; it constituted a complex social process that integrated the era’s national mission, organizational dynamics, elite leadership, and cultural heritage. This process shaped members’ bodies and behaviors while profoundly influencing their self-awareness, group belonging, and national identity.

The Association’s practices exemplify the body as a site of power operation. Through systematic Chinese martial arts training, diverse cultural activities, and strict institutional norms, the Chin Woo Athletic Association internalized specific bodily standards, codes of conduct, and values into its members’ daily lives. This not only illustrates Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power shaping “docile and useful” bodies but also reflects the politicized meaning attributed to the body during the Republican era’s imperative to “Strengthen the Nation and Preserve the Race.” Consequently, bodily discipline transcended physical education, becoming a crucial tool for social mobilization and cultural formation aimed at cultivating the “New Citizen.”

This “New Citizen” embodied qualities that sharply contrasted with the preexisting citizenry, who often lacked the physical vigor, moral discipline, and national consciousness required for China’s modernization and rejuvenation. The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association instilled in its members scholarly and martial competence, physical and mental resilience, and a strong sense of patriotic responsibility—traits largely absent or underdeveloped in earlier populations. These qualities redefined citizenship as an active, disciplined, and socially engaged identity, aligned with the nation’s collective aspirations.

Elite leaders such as Chen Gongzhe, Lu Weichang, Chen Tiesheng, and Yao Chanbo played indispensable roles in promoting and institutionalizing this philosophy of bodily discipline. Leveraging their social status, economic resources, and ideological influence, they not only secured organizational foundations but also actively disseminated Chin Woo’s values through Sino-Western integration in sports, education promotion, core document compilation, and media engagement. Their leadership broadened the social legitimacy and impact of the bodily discipline practices, embedding them firmly within the national revival narrative.

At the individual level, systematic bodily discipline enhanced members’ confidence and perseverance, and challenged traditional gender roles by fostering women’s physical empowerment and subjectivity. At the group level, collective training, ceremonial cultural events, and civic participation fostered social cohesion, collective honor, and a sense of belonging. More profoundly, the cultural inheritance of Chinese Martial Arts, imbued with patriotism through the “Chin Woo Spirit,” linked personal bodily experience to national and cultural identity, transforming members’ bodies into living symbols of national hope.

The Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association’s bodily discipline thus represents a multi-dimensional socio-cultural phenomenon—both a microcosm of Republican China’s sports modernization and a vivid embodiment of the dynamic interplay among body, power, culture, and



social change. It exemplifies how, under specific historical conditions, sports organizations actively contributed to the construction of individual, group, and national identities through bodily practices.

While this study offers an initial exploration, limitations in historical materials call for future research to conduct deeper micro-level investigations into the mechanisms of bodily discipline, individual member experiences, and comparative analyses across regional Chin Woo branches, aiming for a more comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon and its contemporary relevance.

## References

- Acevedo, W., & Cheung, M. (2012). Analysis of the Chinese martial periodicals edited during the Republican Era. *Revista de Artes Marciales Asiáticas*, 6(1), 35-60. <https://doi.org/10.18002/rama.v6i1.84>
- Anonymous. (1919a). Group photo of officials of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Anonymous. (1919b). Photo taken at the residence of Mr. Li Fulin, proponent of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Anonymous. (1919c). Two photos of the Guangdong Women's Physical Education School welcoming party. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Anonymous. (1923a). Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association reopens its aquatic recreation ground. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine], (28).
- Anonymous. (1923b). Record of the Guangdong Chin Woo lecture meeting. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine].
- Anonymous. (1924). Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association welcomes business delegations from various ports. *Jingwu* [Chin Woo Magazine], (42).
- Anonymous. (1926). Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association National Calisthenics Examination and Judging Form. *Foshan Jingwu Yuekan* [Foshan Chin Woo Monthly], (10).
- Bowman, P. (2020). In authentic relations: Traditional Asian martial arts, East and West. In F. Hong & L. Zhouxiang (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of sport in Asia* (pp. 11-19). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061202-3>
- Chen, G. Z. (1919). The true spirit of Chin Woo. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Chen, G. Z. (1953). *Jingwu wushi nian* [Fifty years of Chin Woo]. Central Chin Woo.
- Chen, S. C. (1919a). A brief record of the Chin Woo Women's Model Group. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Chen, S. C. (1919b). Record of the Cherish Time Group. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Chen, T. S. (1919a). Great Chin Woo-ism. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Chen, T. S. (1919b). To the chief editor of New Youth Magazine. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Chen, T. S. (1919c). Mr. Chen Tiesheng, Editor-in-Chief. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Chen, T. S. (1923). Wuku Tan Tui [Tan Tui from the martial arts library]. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine], (19).
- Chen, Y. (1924). The benefits of Tan Tui that I have witnessed and experienced. *Jingwu* [Chin Woo Magazine], (40).
- Chen, Y. (2023). The Training of Physical Education Teachers in Modern China (1904–1927) [Master's thesis, Chengdu Sport University]. Master's thesis. <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.26987/d.cnki.gcdtc.2023.000201>
- Cheng, Y. L. (2007). Cong wanqing dao wusi: Nüxing shenti de xiandai xiangxiang, jiangou yu xushi [From the late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth Movement: Modern imagination, construction and narration of the female body] [Doctoral dissertation, Shandong Normal University]. CNKI. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CDFD9908&filename=2007143179.nh>

- Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Guangdong Provincial Committee, Historical Accounts Research Committee. (1964). *Guangdong wenshi ziliao: Di shiwu ji* [Guangdong historical accounts: Volume 15] (pp. 43-44). Guangdong People's Publishing House.
- Eacersall, D. (2015, September 24-25). The old and the new: Chinese boxing and the integration of traditional and modern Chinese identities [Paper presentation]. *Imperial Identities: Intersections and Transformations Workshop*, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Foucault, M. (1977). Intellectuals and power (D. F. Bouchard, Trans.). In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 205-217). Cornell University Press. (Original work published 1972)
- Goswami, M. (2020). Benedict Anderson, imagined communities (1983). *Public Culture*, 32(2), 441-448. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-8090180>
- Gu, Y. H., & Liu, X. (2020). Cong guixun dao guanhui: Jindai yilai woguo xuexiao tiyu sixiang zhong shenti guan de yanjin [From discipline to care: The evolution of the body concept in Chinese school physical education thought since modern times]. *Beijing Tiyu Daxue Xuebao* [Journal of Beijing Sport University], 43(6), 140-148. <https://doi.org/10.19582/j.cnki.11-3785/g8.2020.06.015>
- Guangzhou Shi Dongshan Qu Zhengxie Xuexi Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui [Learning and Historical Materials Committee of the CPPCC Dongshan District, Guangzhou City]. (1992). *Dongshan wenshi ziliao: Di er ji* [Dongshan historical and cultural materials: Vol. 2] (pp. 77-83).
- Guo, G., & Xu, X. (2005). *Selected essays on martial arts culture and national fitness development*. China Sport Science Press.
- He, F. (2009). Qingmo xuetang zhong de shenti guixun [Body discipline in late Qing Dynasty schools] [Doctoral dissertation, East China Normal University]. CNKI. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=40ORb77KhuLzoasZ8G4VuwOLC-K4CuFXKSvtFWwlORXXvwq2gWIYGZKBzop41lWaDQDxbgxcx\\_0hgfi0nyyFJTAp3ggE13ynsRzp9Y0OurvahE8N84tYJlchTyC0eSY1P3VjML9k2DcKEvJmMQ-byX3oNtX9EWG\\_bb3WxoyinmvhtUKAqolmkYXcnPRL6a](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=40ORb77KhuLzoasZ8G4VuwOLC-K4CuFXKSvtFWwlORXXvwq2gWIYGZKBzop41lWaDQDxbgxcx_0hgfi0nyyFJTAp3ggE13ynsRzp9Y0OurvahE8N84tYJlchTyC0eSY1P3VjML9k2DcKEvJmMQ-byX3oNtX9EWG_bb3WxoyinmvhtUKAqolmkYXcnPRL6a)
- Huang, W. X. (1919). The Relationship Between Women and Combat Skills. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Jiang, Z. L. (2007). Gudai tiyu lunli sixiang de jicheng he chuangxin yanjiu [A study on the inheritance and innovation of ancient sports ethical thought] [Master's thesis, Southwest University]. CNKI. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=40ORb77KhuL5ne4A98YRz12lXZbWwhkFUyDO5ERMoiu6kupwS\\_lJqHIGpBfhQQuMiNDlFTPLHZk2zXJ4gqAkaoVYPZQauk-1l-4ijGqE7K0dYBhns3aj0LzAe1NiWMgluwYF8pwX2u9vultQbFPT5qzGkmVPu\\_VP3CDtwSa36M3wL-0MgeP2rWSP\\_d3KPcm](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=40ORb77KhuL5ne4A98YRz12lXZbWwhkFUyDO5ERMoiu6kupwS_lJqHIGpBfhQQuMiNDlFTPLHZk2zXJ4gqAkaoVYPZQauk-1l-4ijGqE7K0dYBhns3aj0LzAe1NiWMgluwYF8pwX2u9vultQbFPT5qzGkmVPu_VP3CDtwSa36M3wL-0MgeP2rWSP_d3KPcm)
- Kennedy, B., & Guo, E. (2010). *Jingwu: The school that transformed Kung Fu*. Blue Snake Books.
- Kuo, H., & Kuo, C. (2023). Bloodline Organization of Disseminating Chin Woo Athletic to Nanyang: From Cultural Matrix China to SEA. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 40(6-7), 514-532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2023.2216653>
- Kuo, H., & Kuo, C. (2024). Image of 'Sino-Western Essence' in the Press: On the 'Dual-Track' Physical Training System of Chin Woo Athletic Federation. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 41(15), 1693-1714. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2024.2393365>
- Lau, K. Y. (2022). Chinese martial arts. In D. Pomfret (Ed.), *Hong Kong history: Themes in global perspective* (pp. 241-260). Hong Kong University Press.
- Li, Q. N. (2008). *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cunao xuanbian di 7 ji Wenhua jiaoyu* [Selected manuscripts of Guangzhou historical and cultural materials, Vol. 7: Culture and education] (pp. 444-470). China Wenshi Chubanshe.
- Liang, Q. C. (1998). *Liang Qichao shuhua* [Liang Qichao's talks on books]. Zhejiang People's Publishing House.
- Lu, W. C. (1923). My hundred opinions on pugilism. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine], (20).
- Lu, W. C. (1924). Lu Weichang's speech at the Jiangxi Education Association. *Jingwu* [Chin Woo Magazine], (42).
- Lu, W. C. (1928). Speech on national calisthenics. *Jingwu Huabao* [Chin Woo Pictorial], (22).





- Lu, W. C., & Chen, T. S. (1919). An accurate record of the establishment of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Markula-Denison, P., & Pringle, R. (2007). *Foucault, sport and exercise: Power, knowledge and transforming the self*. Routledge.
- Monk Wise Martial Arts Academy LLC. (2024). Chin Woo Physical Association — Professional instruction in Kung Fu, Tai Chi, meditation, and Qi Gong. Retrieved April 14, 2024, from <https://www.monkwise.com/-jing-wu-chin-woo-physical-association>
- New Zealand Chin Woo. (2024). What is Chin Woo? Retrieved April 14, 2024, from <https://chinwoo.org.nz/what-is-chinwoo/>
- Pan, L. X. (2019). Quanli, shenti yu xingbie: Zhongguo jindai nüxing xuexiao tiyu shijian [Power, body and gender: The practice of school physical education for modern Chinese women]. *Shanghai Tiyu Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Shanghai University of Sport], 43(2), 63-68. <https://doi.org/10.16099/j.sus.2019.02.009>
- Qishi'er Hang Shangbao [Seventy-two Guilds Commerce News]. (1919). Articles of association of the Guangdong Chin Woo Athletic Association. In *Jingwu Benji* [The original record of Chin Woo].
- Shao, T. Y. (1919). Postscript to Mr. Yao's portrait. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Shanghai Chin Woo Athletic Association. (2021). *Jingwu zhi* [Chin Woo annals]. Shanghai Wenhui Chubanshe.
- Shen, J. X. (1923). Grand record of the Guangdong Chin Woo Music and Dance Festival. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine], (18).
- Smith, D., Elias, N., & Foucault, M. (1999). "The civilizing process" and "The history of sexuality": Comparing Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. *Theory and Society*, 28(1), 79-100. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006938626238>
- Townley, B. (1993). Foucault, Power/Knowledge, and Its Relevance for Human Resource Management. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(3), 518-545. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1993.9309035149>
- Wu, M. (2023). A Study on the Concept of "Mass Sports" by Four Modern Chinese Sports Figures (Master's thesis, Zhejiang Normal University). Master's thesis. <https://doi.org/10.27464/d.cnki.gzsfu.2023.000346>
- Xiaobao. (1923). Review of the four weeks of Guangdong Chin Woo and the plan for future progress. *Zhongyang Zazhi* [Central Magazine], (20).
- Yao, C. B. (1919a). Record of the Youth Club. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Yao, C. B. (1919b). Achievements in photography studies. In *Jingwu Benji 1919 Nian Tekan* [Chin Woo annals 1919 special issue].
- Yi, J. (1997). A Comparative Study of Chin Woo-ism and Olympism: Sports Cultures in the East and West from the Late 19th Century to the Pre-World War II Era. *Journal of Chengdu Sport University*, (04), 2-6, 17
- Yi, J. D., & Zhang, L. (1998). Zhongguo wushu bainian licheng huigu: Mianxiang 21 shiji de Zhongguo wushu [Review of a century of Chinese martial arts: Chinese martial arts facing the 21st century]. *Tiyu Wenshi* [Journal of Sports Literature and History], (3), 22-24, 47.
- Yin, X. G. (2001). Zhongguo chuantong tiyu xingzhi yu xifang tiyu xingzhi de bijiao yanjiu [A comparative study on the nature of traditional Chinese sports and Western sports] [Master's thesis, Beijing Sport University]. CNKI. [https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=5ykjdPmCibKaqPmQH2RXhr27qcTWLdka-hCG6CTqexjD8urHn5dtT3pyiTgqGHhlcRAM3sSoVETusnHJDgOSA1P01YjoYeJZ2XLNxxqyKB\\_Ei\\_qiPjEFCskaaJ0WdJh3UZ-L9oHBNo2gZj1CuUr3oJ-eAz\\_wxBF9pL2YMAWb69280T-gGOILMnbjCLiHr6rZy](https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=5ykjdPmCibKaqPmQH2RXhr27qcTWLdka-hCG6CTqexjD8urHn5dtT3pyiTgqGHhlcRAM3sSoVETusnHJDgOSA1P01YjoYeJZ2XLNxxqyKB_Ei_qiPjEFCskaaJ0WdJh3UZ-L9oHBNo2gZj1CuUr3oJ-eAz_wxBF9pL2YMAWb69280T-gGOILMnbjCLiHr6rZy)
- Zhang, W. D. (1919). A brief account of the Hankou Chin Woo Athletic Association. In *Jingwu Benji Special Issue* [The original record of Chin Woo special issue].
- Zhang, Y. H., & Guo, Z. Y. (2014). Gonggong fuwu shiyu xia de minguo wushu shetuan zuzhi yanjiu: Yi Jingwu Tiyu Hui wei li [Research on martial arts associations during the Republic of China from the perspective of public service: A case study of the Chin Woo Athletic Association].

- Nanjing Tiyu Xueyuan Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* [Journal of Nanjing Institute of Physical Education (Social Science)], 28(1), 35-39. <https://doi.org/10.15877/j.cnki.nsic.2014.01.009>
- Zhang, Y. H., & Li, J. Y. (2010). Shiming Yu Yangwu: Jingwu Tiyu Hui yu wushu jindaihua yanjiu [Mission and promotion of martial arts: A study on the Chin Woo Athletic Association and the modernization of martial arts]. *Shandong Tiyu Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Shandong Institute of Physical Education and Sports], 26(12), 41-46. <https://doi.org/10.14104/j.cnki.1006-2076.2010.12.007>
- Zhao, F. D. (2010). Shenti guixun: Zhongguo xiandaixing jincheng zhong de guojia quanli yu shenti [Body discipline: State power and the body in China's process of modernization] [Doctoral dissertation, Nankai University]. CNKI. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CDFD0911&filename=1011045336.nh>
- Zhao, H. (1999). On Mao Zedong's thoughts on physical culture. *Mao Zedong Thought Research*, (3), 19-20.

~

### Authors' biographical data

**Haidong Chen** (China) is a doctoral candidate in Ethnic Traditional Sports at South China Normal University, where he also earned his master's degree. His research interests include sports history and culture and the preservation and development of intangible martial arts heritage. He leads one project under Guangzhou's 14th Five-Year Plan and has participated in four National Social Science Fund and provincial/ministerial-level projects. E-mail: [2968241505@qq.com](mailto:2968241505@qq.com)

**Lianzhen Ma** (China), PhD, is professor at South China Normal University (SCNU) with a PhD, is an expert in Chinese martial arts and sports history. Born into a martial arts family, he excels in various traditional disciplines. Ma has contributed substantially to researching martial arts literature, promoting *duanbing* practice, and internationalizing Chinese martial arts through conferences and projects, including partnerships with the Shaolin Temple. E-mail: [malianzhen@qq.com](mailto:malianzhen@qq.com)

