

## Shaping the New Body: Promoting Radio Physical Exercises in the Early PRC

### 1. Introduction

Radio physical exercises (*Guangbo ticao*) refer to a series of calisthenics undertaken to radio music by groups at a fixed time regularly. The golden age of radio exercises in the People's Republic of China was from the 1950s to the 1970s. Even until today, radio exercises have been widely practiced as mass sports with strong "Chinese Characteristics" and attracted people from a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Body studies always attaches great importance to physical, emotional and metaphorical bodies, and bodies per se are the fields where individuals interact with social constructions and political controls. In this perspective, radio exercises may provide an example to illustrate how the new regime of China have attempted to shape the "new man", "new sport" and "new body".

Why did the PRC promote radio exercises in the early period? What was the significance of radio exercises then? Actually, doing radio exercises was a part of daily politics, echoing disciplines and so called "good" or "correct" sports views. Timewise, gymnastics or physical educations (*ti cao*) had been introduced into China for more than forty years before 1949, how did the PRC's radio exercises inherit or change the body-nation relation in terms of "saving the nation"?<sup>1</sup> In space, radio exercises were also widely taken by socialist countries from the Soviet model after the World War II, in what degree did the PRC's radio exercises localize themselves?<sup>2</sup>

This paper concentrates on the early proliferation process of radio exercises from the 1949 to the end of the Great Leap Forward in China. It argues that the official aim of promoting radio exercises was to shape the daily order and new men for socialist construction, and official narratives on bodies were unitary. The first part of the paper deals with the promotion process, including the introduction from the Soviet Union, the early proliferation during the First Five-Year Plan, and the turbulence in the Great Leap Forward, from which we would see the nature of "good" sports, the organization of mobilization, and

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Zhidong 张之洞, *Zouding xuetaang zhangcheng* 奏定学堂章程(1904) (Taipei: Wenhai Press, 1972), 6. This document officially arranged gymnastics into the cultivation of new students.

<sup>2</sup> James Riordan, *Sport Under Communism: the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, the G.D.R., China, Cuba* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1978), 3-11.

the nationwide appropriation of radio exercises as models or tasks by local cadres. Then based on various official materials and the common's memory, the official and folk narratives and images shed light on consistent or inconsistent images of bodies through radio exercises. Lastly, a brief comparison leads us back to examine the body-nation thesis.

## 2. Literature review

Previous studies on China's modern sports or exercises usually traces Michel Foucault's theory on internal enforced "disciplines" from sociological view or the symbolic meaning of "rituals" from anthropologists. Gymnastics and radio exercises are usually displayed as daily rituals under the body-nation relation, where bodies are symbolized as a tool or a metaphor for the nation or modernization. For instance, Huang Jinlin's study on bodies indicates the strong interests from intellectuals in transforming the body for the country in the Military Citizen and the New Life Movement in the Republican period.<sup>3</sup> Through regular daily exercises, bodies were trained for cultivating the common to soldiers. In the meantime, China's Communist Party (CCP) also developed a set of daily disciplines to fight against the Kuomintang (KMT).<sup>4</sup>

Chang-tai Hung studies a special collective dance Yangge. Yangge had been a fixed propaganda program in CCP's political celebrations as "the dance for revolution" in the 1940s, but it later faded into less significance for its rural character after 1951.<sup>5</sup> Yangge was not a good choice for workers then. However, what new rituals took place Yangge remained unanswered. Since radio exercises were likely to be dominant as new rituals later on, their special symbolic meanings need further interpretations.

In the 1980s, Susan Brownell observed and studied China's sports culture. The reduced role of mass calisthenics witnessed a shift from communism to consumerism. Although radio exercises were falling in the 1980s, they were frequently employed in the National Sports Game to show the spirit of collectivism.<sup>6</sup>

Generally speaking, above studies give us a glance at the relation between minds and bodies, while how bodies further become a metaphor of the nation need more explanations on realistic organizations and impressionistic intentions. The interactions among the common and different levels of government also counts. Daniel Leese gives an inspiring case of "Chairman Mao Quotation Gymnastics" in the Cultural Revolution, suggesting that this local

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<sup>3</sup> Huang Jinlin 黄金麟, *Lishi, shenti, guojia: jindai zhongguo shenti de xingcheng (1895-1937)* 历史、身体、国家：近代中国的身体形成(1895-1937) (Beijing: Xinxing Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Huang Jinlin 黄金麟, *Zhengti yu shenti: Suweiai de geming yu shenti (1928-1937)* 政体与身体：苏维埃的革命与身体(1928-1937) (Taipei: Lianjing Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Chang-tai, Hung, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 75-91.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 99-147, 316.

cadres' innovation went out of control and worried the central government.<sup>7</sup> This inspiring case shows competitions in the propaganda process instead of Durkheimian tales. Therefore, radio exercises should be studied from both the top-down and the bottle-up approaches.

### 3. Making “new sports”

On 25 November 1951, an article entitled “come to do radio physical exercises” was published on the first page of the *People's Daily* with Zhu De's scripts: “work for improving people's health”.<sup>8</sup> In the article, the All-China Sports Federation Preparatory Committee (ACSFPC) and other eight official organizations appealed together for doing exercises.<sup>9</sup> This was the first set of radio exercises in the PRC, and it was also the first official leading mass sports program throughout the country. Where was the first radio exercises from? Why did the government decide to publish it? To understand the particularity of radio exercises, it is necessary to figure out the “new sports” for “new China” after 1949. On the contrary, what does the “old sports” for “old China” mean?

The sports policy of CCP was vague in the Yan'an period. At that time, team sports and games were widely adopted as propaganda tools, such as Yangge, Huagun playing (*Da huagun*) and Denmark exercises.<sup>10</sup> He Long's “Fighting Basketball Team” was also famous in the Eighth Route Army for political mobilization.<sup>11</sup> However, sport was seldom highly perceived as a distinct field from arts or a formal occupation. Mao Zedong's famous talk on literature and art in the Yan'an forum didn't refer to sports directly, but he gave a slogan as “doing exercises to fight against Japan” (*Duanlian tipo, hao dao Riben*) on the Xinhua Daily in 1942.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the mass line was connected to sports. Since several sports schools were cancelled, “CCP would take place sports by labor”, “Yangge and other collective activities would take place P.E. courses” and other rumors were spreading in the early days after liberation.<sup>13</sup>

On 22 October 1949, the Capital Sports Game was held in Beijing to celebrate the foundation of the PRC, and it also set the basic mood of “new sports” to “uncover the new

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Lease, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (in Chinese) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2017), 175-179.

<sup>8</sup> “Dajia lai zuo guangbocao”大家来做广播操, *Peoples' Daily* 人民日报, 25 November 1951, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. It was noted that the All-China Sports Federation (ACSF) was formally built in the July of 1952. Before that, the ACSFPC was in charge of national sports affairs.

<sup>10</sup> “Yan'an shiqi tiyu jishi”延安体育纪实, in *Shanxi tiyu wenshi* 陕西体育文史, no. 2(1983): pages unknown. Quoted in Chen Zhenhua 陈镇华, Lu Enchun 卢恩淳, Li Shiming 李世铭, *Zhongguo ticao yundong shi* 中国体操运动史(Wuhan: Wuhan Press, 1990), 216. This book was published under the order of the Ministry of Sports in 1980s, giving much emphasis on expert gymnastics while less referring to radio exercises.

<sup>11</sup> Deng Liqun 邓力群, Ma Hong 马洪, Wu Heng 武衡, *He Long Zhuan* 贺龙传(Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Press, 2003), 470-478.

<sup>12</sup> Mao Zedong: “Duanlian tipo, hao da Riben” 锻炼体魄, 好打日本, *Xinhua Daily* 新华日报, 9 September 1942, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Chen Zhenhua, Lu Enchun, Li Shiming, *Zhongguo ticao yundong shi*, 245.

page of China's sports history.”<sup>14</sup>The “good” sports were defined as “popular, collective and revolutionary”, like collective exercises and bayonet fighting. While the “elite sports”, “medals mania” and “sports stars” were condemned as the remnants of “capitalist sports”. Though collective exercises were applied in celebrations, they hadn't become daily activities. Later in the First Conference of the ACSF on 26 October 1949, Feng Wenbin advocated the “New Democratic Sports” to take over “old sports” and to learn from the Soviet Union, but Feng also criticized the over-politicization of sports.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, there was much blank to be filled under the title of “collective sports”. The point came after the sign of “Sino-Soviet Friendship Union Cooperation Treaty” in 14 February 1950, and the “Lean to One Side” policy made the Soviet Union the dominant example in sports for the PRC. Soviet sports experts were sent to Beijing for “physical assistances” in July 1950. Anatoly Vladimirovich Tarasov, a state-honored gymnast in ice hockey, gave a speech in Soviet sports, especially about the “Ready for Labor and Defense” (RLD) program. On the relationship between politics and sports, he also said: “The aims of sports were production and defense...there was not ‘sports for sports’ but only sports for politics”.<sup>16</sup> Comparing Feng Wenbin's talks with Tarasov, the distinction was that China's initial sports view were not so political but natural. In the next month, China dispatched a sport team to the Soviet Union to learn the advanced sports experience for three months as well.<sup>17</sup>

In the Soviet Union, the “Ready for Labor and Defense” program aimed at cultivating the “socialist way of life” for the common and finding potential stars for international competitions.<sup>18</sup> It classified different leveling tests for the youth and also provided sets of radio exercises for all.<sup>19</sup> For radio exercises, RLD exercises and “production gymnastics” were pushed in the end of the First Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union in 1928. They were undoubtedly “good” sports advocated by the Proletkultists school in the 1920s, as they distinguished from competitive sports of bourgeois society.<sup>20</sup> Hence, a transitivity occurred from popularization to professionalism in sports for the nation. The daily radio exercises, the RLD system and international competitions constituted a covering-all system for Soviet sports.

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<sup>14</sup> “Jiekai Zhongguo tiyushi xinye, shoudu tiyu da hui jin kaimu” 揭开中国体育史新页，首都体育大会今开幕, *Peoples' Daily*, 22 October 1949, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Feng Wenbin 冯文彬, “Xinminzhu zhuyi de tiyu” 新民主主义的体育, *New Sports* 新体育, (1950) no. 1: 6-9.

<sup>16</sup> “Dalasuofu tongzhi zai shoudu tiyu zuotanhui shang tan sulian de tiyu” 达拉索夫同志在首都体育座谈会上谈苏联的体育, *New Sports*, (1950) no.2: 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Zeng Henghui 曾桓辉, “Xinzhongguo chengli hou tuixing laoweizhi de lishi yanjiu” 新中国成立后推行“劳卫制”的历史研究, *Tiyu wenhua daokan* 体育文化导刊, (2005) no.2: 74-76.

<sup>18</sup> Riordan, *Sport Under Communism*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Yu Lishuang 于丽爽, “Guangbo ticao: bange shiji de quanmin jianshen jiyi” 广播体操，半个世纪的全民健身记忆, in *Lishi de beiying* 历史的背影, edited by the *Beijing Daily*, (Beijing: PLA Arts Press, 2009), 230-249.

<sup>20</sup> Riordan, *Sport Under Communism*, 20.

China's visiting team was so impressed by the Soviet sports system, especially the RLD exercises. Compared to other armed sports, radio exercises were simple, easy master and without specific restrictions in sites. What's more, the ideology behind radio exercises accorded with the "collective sports". When the visiting team came back, Yang Lie, a leader from the ACSFPC, promoted to design a new set of exercises in China. Then Liu Yizhen, who had received education in Japanese gymnastics, employed what she had learnt to design the first radio exercises. Consequently, the original model for the first set of radio exercises was a combination of Soviet RLD exercises and Japanese *rajio taiso*, and the gestures of this set didn't reflect much strong ideologic symbols.

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 1952, the *People's Daily* called on lasting promotion of radio exercises for the construction of the RLD system.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, famous physical educators, such as Wu Yunrui, Yuan Dunli and Fang Wanbang were accused of claiming the pure physical gymnastics above classes and politics during the during the "Three-Anti" Movement.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the outburst of the Korean war in June 1950 might also facilitate official decision to popularize radio exercises. Returning to the first page of the *People's Daily* on 25 November 1951, the central article in the upper area was to call on "increasing production and practising strict economy for the campaign to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea".<sup>23</sup> The military character of the RLD fitness system was beneficial to build up reserves in the future.

To be noted that, the high status of ACSFPC was bounded up with the entry right in the Olympic Games, which further symbolizing the international status of the PRC versus the Republic of China (Taiwan). After the winding story in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, the PRC built up the National Sport Committee (NSC) under the Government Administration Council to remove the title of "the sick man of Asia".<sup>24</sup> From then on, the NSC and the belt organization ACSF worked together in mass sports as well as competitive games. Constructing "new sports" was pushed as a higher task for "new China".

In a word, the introduction of radio exercises in China combined Soviet model, CCP's changing views on sports and complex diplomatic circumstances. Radio exercises, as a typical case of "new sports", distinguished the "old sports" in ideology, and became an extension of official periodicalization theory in historical narratives. Except this "new" change, the body-nation relation continued or even reinforced in the political nature of sports from Soviet impacts.

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<sup>21</sup> "Wei guomin tiyu yundong de puji he jingchanghua er fendou" 为国民体育运动的普及和经常化而奋斗, *People's Daily*, 26 June 1952, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Fu Yannong 傅砚农 ed., *Zhongguo tiyu tongshi (1949-1976)* 中国体育通史(1949-1979) (Beijing: People's Sports Press, 2008), 454.

<sup>23</sup> "Jixu tuijin zengchan jieyu" 继续推进增产节约, *Peoples' Daily*, 25 November 1951, 1

<sup>24</sup> Deng Liqun, Ma Hong and Wu Heng, *He Long Zhuan*, 470-478.

#### 4. From “New Democratic Sports” to “Socialist Sports”

When the design of the first set of radio exercises was finished, the promotion work was on the way. Many expert teams were sent to schools, institutions and factories, “radio exercises promotion committee”, “teaching rooms/station” as well as “radio exercises performance meeting” was widely formed in cities like Wuhan and Tianjin in 1951.<sup>25</sup> However, the first national and programmatic sports document from the Central Committee was released late until 8 January 1954. This document clearly pointed the significance of developing mass sports as a “fundamental political task” “under the General Line” for socialist construction.<sup>26</sup> In particular, radio exercises were highly praised as a mass good sport to improve people’s health.

According to the order from the Central Government Administration Council on 1 March 1954, government departments were required to do exercise twice a day and ten minutes for each.<sup>27</sup> After one month, the RLD system was formally initiated.<sup>28</sup> The urgent of promoting radio exercises connected closely with the RLD system and “socialist construction”, thus they were also called “labor and defense” exercises.

The new strong interests could also be discerned by comparing the *New Sports* and *China’s Women* in the First Five-Year Plan. The former was the official magazine of the ACSF, and the latter belonged to the All-China Women's Federation. It was not until 1954 did *China’s Women* began to talk on gymnastics. Artistic gymnastics were reported under the name of the RLD system.<sup>29</sup> Morning exercises and production exercises were considered as the “minimum requirement” for everyone. When introducing morning exercises, their connections to the RLD were emphasized again and again to “shape the strong, brave, determined and optimistic men for socialist construction.”<sup>30</sup>

Even *New Sports*, reported the case of radio exercises more frequently. It was reported that a state-owned factory improved health conditions of workers after promoting exercises, which further saved much labor force in 1954.<sup>31</sup> In Huhehaote, competitions in radio

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<sup>25</sup> “Wenhua lingxun”文化零讯, *Peoples’ Daily*, 31 December 1951, 3.

<sup>26</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan zhongyang tiwei dangzu guanyu jiaqiang renmin tiyu yundong gongzuo de baogao de zhishi” 中共中央批转中央委党组关于加强人民体育运动工作的报告的指示, in *Tiyu yundong wenjian xuanbian(1949-1981)* 体育运动文件选编 (1949-1981), edited by National Sports Committee Policy Study Group, (Beijing: People’s Sports Press), 3-8.

<sup>27</sup> “Guanyu zhengfu jiguan zhong kaizhan gongjiancao he qitayundong de tongzhi” 关于政府机关中开展工间操和其他运动的通知, *Tiyu yundong wenjian xuanbian(1949-1981)*, 272.

<sup>28</sup> “Zhunbei laodong yu weiguo tiyu zhidu zanxing tiaoli” 准备劳动与卫国”体育制度暂行条例, *Tiyu yundong wenjian xuanbian(1949-1981)*, 218.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang Qingzeng 张庆曾, “Jianmei de ticao” 健美的体操, *New China’s Women* 新中国妇女, (1954) no.11: front cover.

<sup>30</sup> Zhang Jian 张坚, “Tiyu yu jiankang” 体育与健康, *New China’s Women*, (1954) no.11: 28.

<sup>31</sup> “Guoying Dongguan tangchang kaizhanle laodongqianhou shengchancao ji gongjiancao” 国营东莞糖厂开展了劳动前后生产操及工间操, *New Sports*, (1954) no.4: 22-23.

exercises were also held among middle schools in the Nadam Fair, a special festival for the Mongol group in 1954.<sup>32</sup> That was to say, radio exercises were systematically promoted to shape new men in the period, but what about concrete ways in promotion?

Firstly, paper media took an important role. From 1954 to 1957, at least three national sets of radio exercises were released, and each set contained three versions for adults, teenagers and children.<sup>33</sup> All sets were designed by the Study Group of Radio Exercises under the ACSF. Besides declaring the advantages of radio exercises in promoting health, *the People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily* and other local newspapers provided instructions in concrete practices with diagrams. The People's Sports Press published many picture posters and visual diagrams, the symbolic meaning within these pictures would be discussed in the sixth part of this article.

Secondly, voluntary sports clubs of workers were ordered to widely form according to the programmatic sports document in 1954. Take the example of China's Coal Mine Sports Association founded in 1955, it was namely subjected to the NSC.<sup>34</sup> In fact, trade unions usually took in charge of sports affairs and kept close interaction with the Women's Federation and the Young Communist League. At times, China's Locomotive Sports Association, the first and the most typical sports club founded in 1952, directly dispatched cadres to help other factories to form sports clubs.<sup>35</sup> The blurring lines of responsibility made every section to share opportunities in workers' sports. Compared to other voluntary sports in clubs, radio exercises were special. On one hand, radio exercises quickly faded into a daily discipline after teaching activities. On the other hand, radio exercises seldom related to other activities with strong characteristics of amusement. Instead, they were usually portrayed as "scientific experience for improve production efficiency" in production competitions.<sup>36</sup> Again, the blurring lines between labor and sports invoked the function of radio exercises in controlling workers in production.

Thirdly, a fixed time was set for radio exercises by daily broadcast. In 1951, the China National Radio (CNR) was also ordered to respectively broadcast sports music three times in the morning at 6:40, 7:20 and 7:40.<sup>37</sup> Later, radio exercises were fixed at 10:00 a.m. and at 3:30 p.m.<sup>38</sup> Taking the stagnation of the development of time machine industry in China

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<sup>32</sup> Wu Gaoming 吴高明, "Nadamu Dahui" 那达慕大会, *New Sports*, (1954) no.4: 33.

<sup>33</sup> "Guojia tiwei gongbu disitao shaonian ertong guangbo ticao" 国家体委公布第四套少年、儿童广播体操, *Guangming Daily*, 14 October 1963, 1.

<sup>34</sup> "Zhongguo meikuang tiyu xiehui zhangcheng" 中国煤矿体育协会章程, in *Tiyu yundong wenjian xuanbian(1949-1981)*, 187-191.

<sup>35</sup> "Zai Beijing qu huochetou tiyuxiehui bangzhuxia, changxindian tielu gongchang guangbo ticao you henda kaizhan" 在北京区火车头体育协会帮助下, 长辛店铁路工厂广播体操运动有很大开展, *Guangming Daily*, 28 January 1954, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "Dajia lai zuo guangbocao" 大家来做广播操, *Peoples' Daily*, 25 November 1951, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Liang Jinghe 梁景和 ed., *Zhongguo iandangdai shehui wenhua fangtanlu* 中国现当代社会文化访谈录 (Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue, 2014), 123, 130, 138.

before 1958 into consideration, broadcast easily controlled time and enforced a time arrangement for workers to do exercises.<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, setting a star or hero was also a choice. This strategy was popular in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Aleksai Grigorievich Stakhanov, a model worker of socialist emulation, led the Stakhanovite Movement to persuade production efficiency.<sup>40</sup> CCP also found its own Stakhanovs, Zhao Zhankui in the Yan'an period, Wang Chonglun and Sun Wei Fang in the First Five-Year Plan. The close combination of radio exercises as part of scientific management in socialist construction was similar in the PRC and the Soviet Union. However, Soviet Union did have sports stars, while the PRC didn't. One reason was that expert athletes who had won international sports awards for China were very few at that time. The other was the strong integration of labor and sports. For instance, Sun Weifang, who had gained several medals in workers sports games, was reported by the *Guangming Daily* reported as "a sports expert, as well as a model worker".<sup>41</sup> Sun Weifang was praised for making great use of production facilities to do daily sports and promoting radio exercises in mines. The end of this article again came back to use of daily sports to accelerate production emulations, thus the identity of model worker went first before sports.

In the First Five-Year Plan, radio exercises were spreading quickly from schools and government departments to factories, and they became the daily belt to enforce rules and cultivate compliant workers and citizens. The nature of "socialist sports" positioned sports at the margin, while the center was labor production.

## 5. Stepping toward and after "the Great Leap Forward of Sports"

"Socialist sports" centered not only in labor production but also politics. During the First Five-Year Plan, *New Sports* also debated on several events to highlight the "good sports" Still, the production of these files was more likely to follow the trend of different political movement. For instance, the critique on martial arts was raised but abandoned quickly, and the raising of the critique on martial arts became a new striking point.<sup>42</sup> Another case in the Anti-Rightist Movement blamed an intellectual for hating radio exercises and destroying the RLD system.<sup>43</sup> All of these indicated the mimetics of political terminology in the field of sports.

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<sup>39</sup> Yang Bo 杨波 ed., *Zhongguo qingongye nianjian(1949-1984)* 中国轻工业年鉴(1949-1984) (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu, 1985), 133.

<sup>40</sup> Miin-ling Yu, *Shaping the New Man: CCP Propaganda and Soviet Experiences* (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinca, 2013), 264.

<sup>41</sup> Wang Yongde 王泳德, "Shi yundong nengshou, yeshi laodong mofan" 是运动能手也是劳动模范, *Guangming Daily*, 5 July 1956, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Chen Zhenhua, Lu Enchun and Li Shiming, *Zhongguo ticao yundong shi*, 150.

<sup>43</sup> "Lv Wen Shandong tiyujie fandui dang de lingdao" 吕文煽动体育界反对党的领导, *Wenhui Newspaper* 文汇报, 29 August 1957. 25 April 2018 retrieved from <http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Subject.aspx>.



Subsequently, the Great Leap Forward witnessed a turbulence in radio exercises, because different organizations attempted to practice the national policy under their own understanding. Peasants were more involved in radio exercises at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward.

The first strike to sports appeared in the educational system. The Great Leap Forward in agriculture was plotted at the end of 1957, and the Ministry of Education initiated the Great Leap Forward of Education to keep the track of the slogan. Besides developing more schools, productive works were set in the formal course list, and time spent on which varied from 1 to 5 months per year.<sup>44</sup> In minds, productive works were said to build “red and expert” successors. In practice, productive works helped to solve the financial problem for the increasing number of schools. Thus P.E. courses were cancelled under the slogans of “substituting sports by labor and military training”, and newly-admitted peasants in socialist education were called up to “develop people’s militias”. Surprisingly, the function of radio exercises was reinforced in some areas, because radio exercises were more inclined to disciplines in organized activities. According to the diary of a writer in 1958, doing exercises was a fixed program in the village to encourage the morale and outputs.<sup>45</sup> Guo Yuhua interviewed peasants in the Ji Village, Shaanxi Province in 1998, and some of them still recalled that the strict radio exercises and the pace of work were highly supervised by militias in the Great Leap Forward.<sup>46</sup>

Not to be outdone, the NSC and ACSF launched the Great Leap Forward of Sports. One indicator for sports was the 100% permits of ranks in “four reds (*si hong*)” or “double reds (*shuang hong*)” under the RLD system for the youth. A witnesses recalled that many students cheated openly with teachers’ connivances.<sup>47</sup> Another important target was doing the newly published third set of radio exercises, as the official claimed, “if everyone does exercises, everyone would live to 100 years old; working for the motherland for ten or more years would create much more treasures.”<sup>48</sup> Holding radio exercises was much cheaper and easier than organizing sports games and sports associations to fulfill the upper orders. Under these circumstances, more local cadres created “advanced” experiences by creatively imitating the model of radio exercises in 1958. For instance, setting time periods was a common way in

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<sup>44</sup> Julia Kwong, “The Educational Experiment of the Great Leap Forward, 1958-1959”, *Comparative Education Review* 23, (1979) no.3: 446.

<sup>45</sup> Zhu Weibo 祝伟波, *Weiguan lishi: 1957-1965 微观历史 : 1957-1965* (Beijing: The International Commercial Press, 2013), 147.

<sup>46</sup> Guo Yuhua 郭于华, *The Nature of the Peasant: How Can “Suffering” Become History* (in Chinese) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013), 146.

<sup>47</sup> Xin Jialing 辛建领, “Guanyu tiyu dayuejing de Huiyi yu sikao” 关于体育大跃进的回忆与思考, in *Zhonggong dangshi koushu huiyilu* 中共党史口述回忆录, edited by Liu Peng 刘朋, (Beijing: Zhongguo guji, 2010), 1500-1501.

<sup>48</sup> Song dayuejin, in *Tiyu xuanchuan cailiao xuanji 1* 体育运动宣传材料选集 1, edited by the People’s Sports Press, (Beijing: People’s Sports Press, 1958), 27

campaign, and “Sport Leap Forward Month” were displayed to promote radio exercises in Beijing.<sup>49</sup> Covering more people was another strategy, thus family members were also mobilized to support the leisure time for workers. Shanghai popularized radio exercises through neighborhood committees.<sup>50</sup> Two villages in Liaoning Provinces “happily promoted the RLD system”, and “people from seven to seventeen years old did radio exercises seriously.”<sup>51</sup>

Above materials vividly presented how events were made to fulfill the task by local creations, but the diffuse of famines turned down the “satellites” of production and sports cruelly. It was said 10 million people were starved to death in Sichuan Province from 1957 to 1960.<sup>52</sup> How could it be possible to insist doing exercises in starvation for the common? In a special case in Zhejiang Province, doing radio exercises became a common way to punish those peasants who concealed production.<sup>53</sup> Anyway, the falling of reports on radio exercises after 1959 might sign a falling of this sport when the economic situations got worse.

In 1962, the work of sports gradually turned to the normal way again with the change of the great atmosphere. Xie Jin, a famous director, was officially commissioned to produce a comedy called *Da Li, Xiao Li and Lao Li* to popularize mass sports, in which radio exercises were described and embedded into the main plot with great emphasis.<sup>54</sup> Then this film was released together with the publication of the fourth set of radio exercises in 1963. When a journal of the *Times* came to Beijing then, he was surprised that Chinese did radio exercises on the street or roof regularly with “very strong interests in sports”.<sup>55</sup> He also found that it was regular radio exercises that took place prostitute businesses and other vibrant nightlife. That was to say, radio exercises had been internalized into the daily life order at that time.

## 6. Bodies and radio exercises in images and narratives

What was the situation of bodies when actors were performing radio exercises in the early years of the PRC? The official and folk narratives and images suggest various interpretations of bodies taken radio exercises.

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<sup>49</sup> “Shoudu tiyu yuejinyue kaishi” 首都体育跃进月开始, *Guangming Daily*, 6 July 1958, 1.

<sup>50</sup> “Shanghai lining jumin canjia tiyu huodong” 上海里弄居民踊跃参加体育活动, *Guangming Daily*, 8 April 1958, 2.

<sup>51</sup> “Nongcun jinxing tiyu duanlian de qizhi” 农村进行体育锻炼的旗帜, *Guangming Daily*, 10 September April 1958, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Yang Jisheng 杨继绳, “Dayuejin zhong de liangshi wenti” 大跃进中的粮食问题, *Twenty-First Century* 110, (2008) no. 12: 44.

<sup>53</sup> Lou Xiafu 楼侠父, “Zhejiangsheng Shaoxingxian fanmanchan jiaoyu” 浙江省绍兴县在进行反瞒产教育, *Xinhua News Agency* 新华社, 11 October 1957. 25 April 2018 retrieved from <http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Subject.aspx>.

<sup>54</sup> Xie Jin 谢晋(Director), *Da Li, Xiao Li and Lao Li* 大李, 老李和小李 (Shanghai: Shanghai Film Studio, 1962). 25 April 2018 retrieved from <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av20308092?from=search&seid=5654790695471764754>.

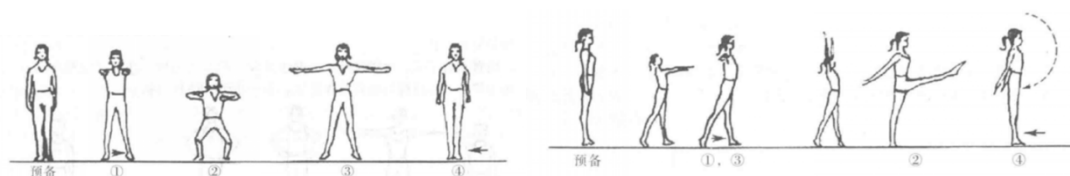
<sup>55</sup> Shi Yonggang 师永刚 ed., *Zhongguo shidai 1900-2000* 中国时代 1900-2000 (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 2016), 267. This book edited historical articles from the *Times* in America.

## *Gestures: nationalizing radio exercises*

Organized gestures often hint at official ideology. In the PRC, radio exercises were gradually nationalized with local characters. The third set of radio exercises began to add several native gestures from martial arts. For instance, crouching gestures include firm stances (*zha mabu*) and making a fist (*wo quan*) in the second cycle, and vibrating arms (*zhen bi*) at the back in the third cycle (see in *Figure 1*). Such design is a combination of traditional arts with exercises, which may attract more people. Interestingly, one officer attributed the rapid design of the third set to the unaccustomedness and difficulty of the second set.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, the second set was designed by Soviet experts in 1954.

The color of political education is more vivid in the third and fourth set of radio exercises for children in 1957 and 1963. In the third set, labor gestures like pumping and sawing are introduced to show the figure of strong workers (see in *Figure 2*). Also, shaking drum and riding horse gestures are from native sports. By contrast, the fourth set adds agriculture elements like sowing and forging (see in *Figure 3*). In other words, the former cultivates workers and the latter hints peasant. Both sets present inseparable connection between sports and labor. This connection was also developed by Chairman Mao in the Great Leap Forward: “waling, swimming, climbing and radio exercises all belonged to labor.”<sup>57</sup>

**Figure 1. The Third Set of Radio Exercises (Partial, squatting and kicking)**

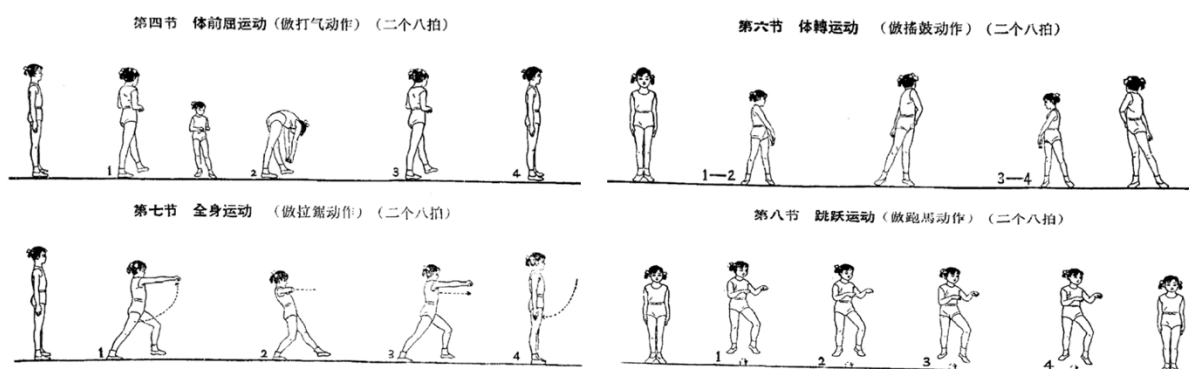


Source: “Diagrams of the Third Set of Radio Exercises”, in *Fundamental Gymnastics 基本体操*, edited by Wang Bohua 王伯华, (Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2004), 129-132.

<sup>56</sup> Yu Lishuang 于丽爽, “Guangbo ticao: bange shiji de quanmin jianshen jiyi”, 242.

<sup>57</sup> Mao Zedong, “Referring to Meicheng’s *Qifa*” 关于枚乘《七发》, 16 August 1959. This article was published in the Lushan Conference in 1959. Mao highlighted Meicheng’s article for he emphasized the strong connection between disease and enjoyment. The saying “walking, swimming, climbing and radio exercises all belonged to labor” was widely used as a slogan to promote mass sports. 25 April 2018 retrieved from <http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/Subject.aspx>.

Figure 2. The Third Set of Radio Exercises for Children (Partial)



Source: “Diagrams of the Third Set of Radio Exercises for Children”, in *The Handbook of Radio Exercises for Children* 儿童广播体操手册, edited by the People’s Sports Press, (Beijing: People’s Sports Press, 1964), 35-43.

Figure 3. The Fourth Set of Radio Exercises for Children (Partial)



Source: “Diagrams of the Third Set of Radio Exercises for Children”, in *the Handbook of Radio Exercises for Children* 儿童广播体操手册, edited by the People’s Sports Press, (Beijing: People’s Sports Press, 1964), 44-52.

Nationalization of radio exercises in gestures reflected strong official intentions. One was about the relationship between minds and bodies. The exercises on bodies were expected to shape the thoughts of actors, let alone the re-education of intellectuals through labor. Hence, new men with correct political moralities were made. The other aspect of nationalization appeared against other countries, meant making radio exercises localized and distinguished from the Soviet model.

*Narratives: imaging the body*

The advantages of radio exercises were discussed again and again in public in the 1950s, while the formats of praising reports were very similar. The beginning day of doing exercises, workers’ better health conditions, more outputs in productions and further determination to push radio exercises made up of four basic sections of those reports published in official paper media. The connection from better health conditions to more outputs is straightforward, but what does “healthy bodies” mean?

Firstly, it is reasonable to define “better health conditions” as getting less illness. For example, the Qixin Cement Plant in Tangshan claimed its sickness rate decreased by 17% after doing exercises.<sup>58</sup> The second trait is gaining weight. A sugar mill in Dongguan reported an average growth of 2 kilograms after three-months exercises.<sup>59</sup> What’s more, the worker who got the most increase around 10 kilograms in weight was selected to highly praised. Conversely, this kind of narratives reflects a tight supply of food and starvation. The third factor for “healthy bodies” is scientific management in leisure time. Especially for units (danwei), “doing radio exercises persistently was necessary to keeping holding the red banner in competitions”.<sup>60</sup> In a nutshell, individual bodies should be strong and self-disciplined by official definition, and radio exercises could help to lead a regular life.

Political posters also facilitated the public imaginations of strong bodies, and many of them were printed by the People’s Sports Press. Most notably, women were put into the central of attached posters (*see in Figure 6 and Figure 7*). Doing sports in public had been considered improper for women, while mass sports gave women more exposure to the outside. Women in sports were almost painted as strong as men and without much femininity or sexual attraction. This feature is also similar in the Soviet Union, and some scholars criticize it as “female masculinity” or “iron girls”.<sup>61</sup>

**Figure 6. Come to Do Radio Exercise(1958)**



Source: Chen Leisheng 陈雷生, *Come to Do Radio Exercises*, printed by the People’s Sport Press in 1958. Quoted in *Inspiring China: New China Sports Posters 1952-2012 激励中国：新中国体育宣传画图典 1952-2012*, edited by Guo Lei 郭磊, (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2012), 56.

<sup>58</sup> He Long 贺龙, “Under the Sunshine of the General Line, Work for Developing Mass Sports (updated version)” 在总路线的照耀下，为开展全中心给的体育运动而奋斗, *Guangming’s Daily*, 25 March 1954, 2.

<sup>59</sup> “Guoying Dongguan tangchang kaizhanle laodongqianhou shengchancao ji gongjiancao” 国营东莞糖厂开展了劳动前后生产操及工间操, *New Sports*, (1954) no.4: 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> Cao Di 曹弟, Liu Changzhong 刘长忠, “People Who Insisted in Doing Exercises” 坚持锻炼的人们, *People’s Daily*, 28 January 1958, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh University Press, 2014), 154-174. Jie Aihua 揭爱花, *State, Organizations and Women 国家、组织与妇女* (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 2012), 146-147.

Figure 7. *Develop Mass Sports Widely* (1960)



Source: Shen Fuming 沈复明, *Develop Mass Sports Widely* (1960), printed by the People's Sport Press in 1960. Quoted in *Inspiring China: New China Sports Posters 1952-2012 激励中国：新中国体育宣传画图典 1952-2012*, edited by Guo Lei 郭磊, (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2012), 54.

Lastly, bodies taken radio exercises were imagined in a broader international view at least before the Sino-Soviet split. Radio exercises were a fixed program for visiting teams from other socialist countries. The editor-in-chief in the *Guangming Daily* Ba Bo, wrote a reflective journal on *the Morning of Our Motherland*, a film sent by Bulgaria officially in 1953.<sup>62</sup> On radio exercises, he said: “Doing radio exercises in healthy music in the morning, we and our neighborhood Bulgaria performed the same rhythm. Even if we were not in the same yard, we shared the same breath, and our spirits were from the same sun.”<sup>63</sup> This tone sounds similar to Benedict Anderson’s imagined community, but the community here is the international socialist line. In this case, print capitalism or rites of passage fades into the secondary position, and the core bond is the synchronized performance of radio exercises. Therefore, physical bodies of individuals are imagined from visible to invisible as anonymous bricks in the body of the nation and further socialist lines.

### *Resistance and memory*

How did the common feel when they were doing exercises? There were many methods to escape from radio exercises. For instance, the *New Sports* posted a series of caricature to criticize those who hadn’t attached great importance to radio exercises in 1954 (see in Figure 8). Some workers made use of any chance to escape from the daily ritual of exercises, such as having a meeting, going too late and performing the gesture casually.

<sup>62</sup> Ba Bo 巴波, “The Morning of Our Motherland”, *Guangming Daily*, 5 December 1952, 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 8. *Workers Who Don't Think Highly of Gong-jian-cao* (Partial)



Source: Li Binsheng 李滨声, *Workers Who Don't Think Highly of Gong-jian-cao*, *New Sports*, (1954) no.8: 32.

The common did not receive the official intention entirely. According to a documentary film on radio exercises, main actors in the film *Da Li, Xiao Li and Lao Li* were actual workers from the factory.<sup>64</sup> Many elder witnesses confirmed the function of radio exercise to improve health. In another short novel by Wang Anyi, the time for doing radio exercises was pleasant, and students enjoyed amusement for temporary leave of class.<sup>65</sup> As mentioned before, doing exercises meant a painful memory for some peasants in the 1950s.

In addition, although individuals could escape from radio exercises occasionally, the broadcast never stopped. In another word, time arranges on radio exercises was fixed in objective time. Notably, the strong target in the youth made radio exercises a symbol of school life in the above documentary. In the 1980s, Susan Brownell interviewed retired people dancing disco on the square, many of whom expressed the affinity between discos and radio exercises; they also felt “turning back to the youth” with their partners.<sup>66</sup> The fixed time of radio exercises in subjective time and life stages may partly explain the strong “Chinese Characters” of radio exercises in retrospective descriptions by the elder.

<sup>64</sup> *Come to Do Radio Exercises*. The movie data of this documentary failed to open, and the detailed information could not be found. Actual sound was typed in the links below. 25 April 2018 retrieved from [http://www.360doc.com/content/14/1123/06/10693281\\_427312469.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/14/1123/06/10693281_427312469.shtml) and [http://www.360doc.com/content/14/1123/06/10693281\\_427312530.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/14/1123/06/10693281_427312530.shtml).

<sup>65</sup> Wang Anyi 王安忆, *Da yi dianying mingzi 打一电影名字* (Shanghai: Shanghai Arts Press, 2011), 14-15.

<sup>66</sup> Brownell, *Training the Body for China*, 277-280.

## 7. Conclusions

Based on the Ready for Labor and Defense system from the Soviet Union, radio exercises have been promoted for more than 60 years in China. The introduction and early proliferation process of radio exercises have shown the state's effort to nationalize sports and to shape the new body for socialist construction. The new individual body should be strong and lead a regular life with correct political thoughts. The new mass sports actually played a role of substituting labor and production. In the field of ideology, sports should serve for people instead of "pure" and professional sports for individuals. Radio exercises were the typical sports to show official defined goodness, and that was why they could go over many political movements in the early period of the PRC.

From the bottom-up view, radio exercises could be defined widely by different actors and organizations. States in the plural form didn't function in the same manner, such as the paradox among different government ministries and the creative mimetic in the templates of radio exercises. The common also attributed mass sports with emotional and some non-political nature. Serious and pleasant practices, symbolic disparities in ideology and local competitions worked together to shape people's daily life, through which radio exercises have become so impressed by Chinese.

Timewise, the term "*ti cao*" (physical education) imported in the late Qing means physical education without specific items. Physical education initially referred to military exercises at schools. While nowadays, "*ti cao*" is more inclined to radio exercise and expert artistic gymnastics in Chinese perception. Adding with broadcast music and a fixed time, radio exercises gave citizens a sense of synchrony.

Additionally, radio exercises and the RLD system functioned together to fulfill the blank of mass sports in the 1950s, when competitive sports were still stumbling in international games. Radio exercises didn't make any sports star but a number of leading-exercises persons. Compared with the Soviet Union, the overlap of leading-exercises persons and model workers was a conspicuous feature in the PRC.

Last but not least, the case of radio exercises responds with the body-nation thesis with more daily experiences and various voices. One weakness of this paper is the insufficient example beyond disciplines, like commercialization and other vivid applications. This suggests more potentials of interpreting radio exercises in further studies.



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