

The Difference between Competitive Tai Chi Chuan and Traditional Tai Chi Chuan and Training Countermeasures

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Abstract: Tai Chi Chuan is an ancient form of Chinese martial arts with a history spanning several centuries. Originally, it served as a traditional practice focused on self-cultivation, health enhancement, and physical fortification, with its essence rooted in the principle of "soft overcoming hard," emphasizing the harmonious integration of mind, breath, and physical movement. As time has progressed, Tai Chi Chuan has evolved into two main schools: Traditional Tai Chi and Competitive Tai Chi. Traditional Tai Chi retains the art's primordial essence, emphasizing the cultivation of "internal power" through slow, fluid movements and breath regulation to achieve a state of mind-body unity. In contrast, Competitive Tai Chi, influenced by modern sports, places greater emphasis on visual appeal and standardized techniques, focusing on speed, strength, and precision of movements. Studying the differences between Competitive and Traditional Tai Chi not only enhances understanding of the art's developmental trajectory and cultural significance but also aids practitioners in selecting the most suitable training approach according to their individual needs.

1. Introduction

Traditional Tai Chi emphasizes the principle of yielding to motion through stillness and overcoming rigidity with softness, intricately weaving together philosophical thought, martial artistry, and the path of health preservation, thus becoming a distinctive emblem of Chinese culture. Building upon this foundation, competitive Tai Chi emerged in the mid-20th century. This modern iteration of Tai Chi redefined the movements and technical requirements to cater to the demands of sporting events, making it more suitable for display on the competitive stage. Competitive Tai Chi features expansive movements and pronounced rhythms, striving to showcase the athlete's agility and explosiveness during contests. Consequently, there are marked differences in technical actions, performance styles, training objectives, and methodologies between competitive and traditional Tai Chi. Investigating these distinctions can foster a deeper understanding of the evolution and developmental trajectory of Tai Chi across different historical periods, while also promoting its application and dissemination in contemporary society. For practitioners, such research not only provides guidance for more effective training but also assists in discovering practice methods that

align better with their individual characteristics and goals, ultimately achieving optimal cultivation outcomes.

2. The Main Differences between Competitive Tai Chi Chuan and Traditional Tai Chi Chuan

2.1. Differences in Technical Movements and Drill Styles

From a technical perspective, competitive Tai Chi emphasizes the standardization of movements and the performance effect. Given that competitive Tai Chi is conducted in a contest environment with stringent evaluation criteria, practitioners must demonstrate maximal bodily control, precision of movements, and a sense of power within a limited timeframe. This demand results in movements that are often more exaggerated and expansive, focusing on the balance between elegance and tension. The transitions between movements are smooth and fluent, with a strong sense of rhythm, striving to create a visually impressive effect. In contrast, traditional Tai Chi places greater emphasis on the internal flow of Qi and the coordination of movements. Practitioners of traditional Tai Chi often pursue synchronization of movement and breath, stressing the cultivation of internal power and the seamless flow of intention. The movements do not seek extreme amplitude but rather focus on experiencing the flow of energy within the body through a gentle and slow rhythm. Traditional Tai Chi resembles a form of cultivation, emphasizing the unity of mind and body, and the integration of internal and external aspects. Through prolonged practice, practitioners develop a profound understanding of the body and nature, achieving harmony and enhancement of both body and mind.

In terms of performance style, competitive Tai Chi typically exhibits a pronounced external expressiveness. To stand out in competitions, practitioners' movements often prioritize visual impact, demonstrating a perfect blend of strength and speed. Competitive Tai Chi practitioners must undergo repeated training to enhance muscular explosiveness and bodily coordination, achieving a harmonious blend of "hard and soft" effects. This style highlights physical power and control, with movements that are swift and forceful, while still maintaining the smooth and continuous nature of Tai Chi. Conversely, the style of traditional Tai Chi is more reserved and profound, emphasizing the principles of "using softness to overcome hardness" and "using stillness to control movement." Movements are gentle and slow, focusing on maintaining a state of balance and tranquility, with the internal Qi guiding each action to create a natural, flowing state. Practitioners of traditional Tai Chi emphasize maintaining relaxation and calm in each movement, achieving a deep level of relaxation and serenity. The entire practice process resembles a form of meditation, focusing on mental peace and physical relaxation [1].

2.2. Differences in Training Objectives and Methods

In competitive Taiji, the objective is to perform complex techniques with precision within a set time and space, requiring athletes to undergo extensive specialized training to enhance physical attributes such as strength, speed, and flexibility. This training approach mirrors that of general competitive sports, focusing on breakthroughs in physical fitness and technique. For instance, practitioners of competitive Taiji often engage in prolonged strength training, including weightlifting and plyometric exercises, and may also incorporate modern sports science tools like heart rate monitors and strength tests to ensure that each movement meets the highest performance standards. Conversely, traditional Taiji's training objectives revolve around internal cultivation and harmonious movement. The essence lies in adjusting one's breathing through slow and steady motions, nurturing an inner sense of "stillness in movement and movement in stillness." Traditional Taiji emphasizes the guidance of intent, advocating for the use of the mind to direct the energy and

the energy to move the body. Thus, training focuses more on the subtle execution of movements, developing internal awareness, and coordinating breath with action. This method resembles a holistic practice of mind-body unity, emphasizing self-awareness and mental tranquility.

In terms of training methods, competitive Taiji typically demands strict adherence to routines, where each movement must be executed within specific timeframes and spatial parameters, achieving particular standards of force and speed. This necessitates high-frequency repetition of movements in a short period to optimize muscle memory and expedite bodily responses. It can be likened to a battle without weapons, with each session pushing the physical limits. Traditional Taiji, on the other hand, emphasizes the principle of "relaxation," requiring movements to be slow, even, and unhurried, aiming to cultivate bodily relaxation and focused intent. The completion of movements relies not on explosive muscle power but on overall coordination and the application of internal strength to achieve a state of agile grace, balancing hardness and softness. Training in traditional Taiji demands patience and perseverance to achieve a well-rounded refinement of both inner and outer aspects. Thus, the differences in training objectives and methods between competitive and traditional Taiji reflect their divergent cultural heritage and developmental paths.

2.3. Differences in Competition Rules

Competitive Tai Chi Chuan emphasizes the rigorousness and uniformity of competition rules, highlighting standardized movements and a consistent scoring system. Athletes must strictly adhere to established routines during performances, with each movement's specifications and force being precisely defined to allow judges to assess with objectivity and fairness. The goal of competitive Tai Chi Chuan is to showcase individual skill and bodily control through competition, thus placing high demands on the precision, strength, and expressiveness of the movements. This standardized approach presents a severe challenge to athletes' physical stamina, technique, and psychological resilience, requiring them to maintain composure and accuracy under high pressure to achieve optimal scores. In contrast, traditional Tai Chi Chuan places greater emphasis on inner cultivation and personal experience. While the regularity of movements is important in daily practice, the focus is on achieving a state of "softness overcoming hardness" and the integration of mind and body. Traditional Tai Chi Chuan is less concerned with external form and more with the harmony of internal energy and the coherence of intent, emphasizing the individual's physical and mental sensations during practice. Its aim is to cultivate oneself, harmonize body and mind, and thus achieve fitness, self-defense, and inner tranquility. Consequently, traditional Tai Chi Chuan practice is often conducted in a serene and composed manner, with movements striving for continuous flow and hidden strength, prioritizing the development of internal power and breath harmony over external performance [2].

3. Training Countermeasures of Competitive Tai Chi Chuan

3.1. Training Program and Cycle of Competitive Tai Chi Chuan

The training cycle for competitive Tai Chi Chuan is typically divided into the foundational phase, the specialized phase, and the adjustment phase. The primary objective of the foundational phase is to solidify fundamental skills, enhancing core strength, flexibility, balance, and other essential qualities. Training during this stage should focus on the standardization of movements and the development of muscle memory, achieved through repeated practice to ensure uniformity and precision. Additionally, this phase should emphasize psychological conditioning, improving concentration and stress resistance, thereby laying a robust groundwork for subsequent specialized training. The specialized phase represents the core of competitive Tai Chi Chuan training, centering

on specific competition techniques and movements. During this stage, personalized training plans should be crafted according to each athlete's needs, further enhancing the strength, speed, and agility of movements. Intense repetitive practice is employed to boost the athlete's physical and technical capabilities. Moreover, the specialized phase should include targeted simulation exercises to enhance the athlete's in-game response and adaptability, ensuring they can handle unexpected situations during competitions with ease. The adjustment phase aims to restore the athlete's physical condition, refine their mindset, and maintain competitive readiness. The intensity of training during this stage is relatively lower, yet it is crucial to maintain an appropriate level of physical activity to prevent a decline in bodily functions due to excessive relaxation. This phase should also incorporate psychological adjustment training to help athletes maintain optimal mental state before major competitions.

3.2. Physical training and skill improvement of competitive Tai Chi Chuan

Competitive tai chi focuses on the rules of the game and the criteria for judging, demanding competitors to reach higher standards in terms of physical condition and technical skill. Unlike traditional tai chi, which emphasizes internal energy cultivation and spiritual cultivation, the physical training for competitive tai chi is more systematic and scientific, requiring competitors to possess a high level of muscular endurance, explosive power, and flexibility. Fundamental aerobic exercises and strength training, such as running, swimming, and weightlifting, are indispensable components. In addition, specialized training for the core muscles is required to enhance the strength of the abdominal, back, and lower body muscles, not only to maintain the standard and stability of movements but also to effectively execute high-difficulty competitive maneuvers, such as aerial jumps, twists, and abrupt stops. The enhancement of technique is also a critical aspect of competitive tai chi training. In addition to retaining the basic spirit of traditional movements, competitive tai chi incorporates a plethora of more challenging combinations. Each movement must be meticulously crafted, aiming for both aesthetic appeal and conformity to the rules when performed. The path to precision and fluency involves practicing movements in a step-by-step manner. Furthermore, competitive tai chi emphasizes variations in the force, speed, and rhythm of movements, requiring precise control through repetitive specialized training. Through the repeated practice of movement combinations and routines, competitors can gradually hone the transitions between movements, enhancing overall coherence and coordination [3].

3.3. Psychological Adjustment and Competition Preparation of Competitive Tai Chi Chuan

Achieving optimal performance under high-pressure conditions requires exceptional psychological adjustment from athletes. At the heart of psychological adjustment lies emotion management. Athletes must master the art of controlling negative emotions such as tension and anxiety, maintaining inner tranquility and focus. Taiji emphasizes "calmness to govern movement," a principle that equally applies to mental composure. During training, methods such as meditation and breathing regulation can effectively alleviate stress and enhance psychological resilience. Positive self-talk and mental imagery are also powerful tools for improving psychological adjustment; this internal self-motivation aids athletes in maintaining a positive mindset, bolstering self-confidence, and facing challenges with composure. In preparing for competition, Taiji athletes need to focus on adjusting their state and managing rhythm. Pre-competition physical recovery and adjustment are crucial; appropriate training intensity and adequate rest are vital for achieving peak performance. Strategic planning should be based on the opponent's characteristics and the competition environment, demanding not only technical and tactical proficiency but also the ability to adapt swiftly. On the day of the competition, mental preparation is a critical factor influencing

the final outcome. Psychological adjustments before entering the arena, such as relaxation exercises and positive visualization, help athletes quickly attain the desired state. Once the competition begins, athletes should concentrate on the precision and expressiveness of their movements, avoiding external distractions. Maintaining internal focus and calm, achieving a high degree of alignment between action and mentality, is key to excelling in competitive Taiji.

4. Countermeasures for Traditional Tai Chi Chuan Training

4.1. Basic Training of Traditional Tai Chi Chuan

The fundamental training of traditional Tai Chi Chuan forms the cornerstone of its martial prowess and inner cultivation, distinguishing it significantly from competitive Tai Chi. The essential practices of traditional Tai Chi Chuan primarily encompass standing postures, relaxation of the waist, and breath control. Standing postures, as the bedrock of Tai Chi, demand that practitioners experience the equilibrium and flow of power through prolonged stillness. This stillness-seeking-movement training not only fortifies muscles and bones but also cultivates inner concentration and emotional stability. Through standing postures, practitioners gradually achieve the integration of body and mind, attaining a state of holistic unity. The training of waist relaxation emphasizes the looseness and flexibility of the waist. This fundamental practice aims to establish the waist as the central axis in subsequent Tai Chi movements, allowing power to be transmitted from the waist to the limbs, thereby achieving overall coordination and unity. Relaxation of the waist is not merely about loosening but about activating inner strength through relaxation, ensuring a smoother and more natural flow of power. The flexibility of the waist is crucial in Tai Chi, influencing both the fluidity of movements and the direction and force of internal energy. Breath control, or the cultivation of Qi, is a core element of internal martial arts within Tai Chi. Through deep and steady breathing, practitioners sink Qi to the lower dantian, ensuring smooth circulation of Qi and blood, and harmonizing the internal and external aspects of the body. This process not only enhances the function of internal organs but also strengthens the practitioner's endurance and stamina. In Tai Chi, Qi is the source of power, and breath control enables the body to achieve a harmonious balance of strength and softness in its movements. In fundamental training, attention must also be paid to cultivating the right mindset. Traditional Tai Chi Chuan seeks "inner sanctity and external sovereignty," requiring practitioners to maintain a tranquil heart and eliminate restlessness and distractions during practice. Through prolonged fundamental training, not only is physical fitness enhanced, but spiritual elevation is also achieved, representing the essence of traditional Tai Chi cultivation [4].

4.2. Traditional Tai Chi Chuan Health and Rehabilitation Training

In the realm of wellness, traditional Tai Chi focuses on the comprehensive relaxation and harmonious coordination of the entire body, achieved through the regulation of breath and the extension of limbs, thereby allowing the practitioner's mind and body to experience a holistic state of relaxation and rejuvenation. Distinct from the high-intensity, fast-paced modern competitive Tai Chi variant, the traditional form of Tai Chi features more fluid motions, making it more accessible to a wider audience, particularly the middle-aged and those of frailer health. It facilitates improved circulation, enhanced cardio-respiratory function, and bolsters the immune system, aiding in the prevention and alleviation of chronic ailments. Within the context of rehabilitation training, traditional Tai Chi places an even greater emphasis on its ability to modulate internal organ functions and improve psychological well-being. Through consistent practice, many chronic conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, and arthritis, can demonstrate significant symptomatic

improvements. This is because the movements of Tai Chi are designed in accordance with the natural laws of human motion, allowing for a comprehensive adjustment of the muscular, skeletal, and articulatory systems. Through the practice of Tai Chi, an individual's mental state can reach a state of tranquility that facilitates the body's self-repair mechanisms. Within the realm of rehabilitation training, traditional Tai Chi is revered as an effective form of low-intensity, whole-body exercise. The uniqueness of this practice lies in its emphasis on "guiding Qi with intention, and moving the body with Qi." This approach enhances the practitioner's capacity for self-regulation, thereby enabling a greater mastery of one's health status during the rehabilitation process. Additionally, the training in Tai Chi underscores the fluidity and rhythm of motion, which assists practitioners in establishing superior postural control and dynamic balance, a crucial component in the recovery of motor function [5].

5. Conclusion

Competitive Tai Chi and Traditional Tai Chi, despite their marked differences in training objectives, methodologies, and styles, are not irreconcilable. Traditional Tai Chi emphasizes the unity of body and mind, integrating internal and external practices, and is deeply rooted in cultural heritage and health benefits. In contrast, Competitive Tai Chi, set against the backdrop of modern sports, has injected new vitality and form into Tai Chi, promoting its global dissemination through standardized and regulated training systems. For practitioners, whether inclined towards competitive events or pursuing health and wellness, a balance can be found between the two. By combining traditional internal cultivation with contemporary physical training, one can not only enhance physical fitness but also elevate skill levels. The essence of Tai Chi lies in "adapting to changes with invariance." Regardless of the chosen style, practitioners who persist and delve deeply will ultimately achieve their own. The fusion and complementarity of both forms not only enrich the expression of Tai Chi but also ensure that this ancient art shines with renewed brilliance in the modern era.

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