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Finding a meaningful story: A Narrative Study of Chinese Weightlifting

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Abstract
Weightlifting is the traditional strength of China, and the Chinese weightlifting team occupies a pivotal position in the international weightlifting arena by virtue of its brilliant achievements in major international events. However, the records of the origin and development of weightlifting are limited. Modern weightlifting emerged in Western Europe and the United States, and has been introduced to China since the 19th century. Even though many surviving magazine articles, oral and video interviews, and small-circulation films and documentaries present the history of the sport, weightlifting has not been documented as a coherent subject of sport history, and few narratives about the sport behind it exist. This paper draws on literature on sport, memory, and oral history to conduct interviews with those who lived through the sport of weightlifting in order to find signs of the processes by which interviewees derived meaning from their experiences. Oral history, as an influential act of social memory, will also provide great insight into the future development of the sport of weightlifting in China.

Keywords
Oral history of sports; Weightlifting; Olympic memory; Narrative research

The oral history of Chinese sports is relatively limited in terms of systematically documenting the origins and development of weightlifting as a sport. Weightlifting was recorded more than 2500 years ago, and the rise of modern weightlifting was mainly in Europe in the late eighteenth century, and it was not until the early nineteenth century that modern weightlifting actually appeared in the form of competition and was introduced to China. Weightlifting mainly includes three kinds of competitions: competitive weightlifting, bodybuilding and powerlifting. In 1896, at the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens, Greece, weightlifting was included as a competitive sport in the official competition. In the 1940s, women's weightlifting became popular in Europe and the United States, and it was not until the Sydney Olympics in 2000 that women's weightlifting was included as an official event. However, even though many extant magazine articles, oral and video interviews, and some small-circulation films and documentaries present the evolution of the sport, weightlifting is not documented as the subject of a coherent sport history. This apparent silence raises interesting questions about the value and meaning of weightlifting.

Drawing on the process of examining the foundations of the weightlifting program in China, this paper seeks to demonstrate the role that the oral history tradition-as a mechanism for generating, disseminating, and negotiating meaning-played in constructing a collective memory of the sport's past. In response to a brief

overview of the history of weightlifting and its apparent limitations, this paper identifies the earliest narrative histories of the sport in China. It examines the specific discursive processes of the past constituted through formal and informal acts of social memory, presented in the oral narratives of the interviewees (Jane E. Hunt, 2019).

1 History of weightlifting project: show the past of traditional sports weightlifting

The development of weightlifting in China has a very long history. From the primitive society, influenced by the habits of life, people in the daily hunting, self-defense activities, as well as the war between the tribes, the ancient trend of weightlifting has sprouted. Later, with the emergence of bronze and other types of weapons, people in the martial arts and fighting skills training, usually with the help of a certain weight of equipment to train, lifting weights, lifting off and other training methods emerged to outline the prototype of modern weightlifting. Subsequently, Chinese weightlifting has undergone a series of development and evolution. In 1935, the Chinese National Sports Federation, as the representative of China, officially joined the International Weightlifting Federation, and in 1936, three weightlifters were selected to participate in the weightlifting competition of the Summer Olympics in Berlin, thus starting the prelude of Chinese weightlifters to participate in the Olympic weightlifting competition.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the sport of weightlifting in China has been further developed. At the beginning of the founding of New China, weightlifting-related activities were widely carried out throughout the country, but the training system for weightlifting was not yet fully mature, so the overall level of competition in this period was low. 1955 onwards, weightlifting teams were established throughout the country and actively trained, and the national weightlifting team began to send athletes to the former Soviet Union for study and systematic training. During this period, the performance of China's weightlifting program was greatly improved. From 1956 to 1966, it was the eleventh year of the rapid development of Chinese weightlifting, catching up with the world advanced level in weightlifting, during this period, ten athletes broke the weightlifting world records in five levels and ten individual events thirty times. Among them, in 1958, in order to maintain the principle of one China, the Chinese National Sports Federation announced its withdrawal from the International Weightlifting Federation, followed by a period of relatively slow development of China's weightlifting program, and with the then advanced level of world weightlifting produced a very obvious gap. In September 1974, the Chinese Weightlifting Association resumed its legal status in the International Weightlifting Federation, and in 1979, the national team, consisting of a young generation of weightlifters such as Chen Weiqiang and Wu Guide, broke the world record in men's youth weightlifting twenty times, and Wu Guide also won a 52-weightlifting weightlifting title for the Chinese team. Wu also won a valuable gold medal for China's weightlifting team in the 52kg snatch event. In the following five years, the Chinese weightlifting team has been actively exploring and innovating through continuous learning, making the Chinese weightlifting team catch up with the world's advanced level of weightlifting again.

In 1984, China returned to the International Weightlifting Federation to participate in the Olympic weightlifting competition for the first time, and achieved four gold medals and two silver medals in the men's

weightlifting event, making a historic breakthrough in China's weightlifting program, and successfully ranked among the top four high-level ranks of the world's weightlifting sports. In the same year, the first women's weightlifting team was established in Shandong Province, China, marking the official launch of women's weightlifting in China. Over the next two years, the Chinese women's weightlifting team developed rapidly in terms of training and performance, reaching world-leading levels in all weightlifting categories except for the 75 kg and above category. To this day, the Chinese weightlifting team remains among the highest in the world.

The historical record of any sport is inseparable from the practical and theoretical research of the sport, and the same is true for the historical record of the development of competitive weightlifting. National weightlifting associations, continental weightlifting federations and international weightlifting federations have set up scientific research committees, these organizations and associations are mainly responsible for coordinating and organizing scientific research projects related to weightlifting. Among them, the International Weightlifting Federation organizes every four years a scientific research paper presentation on weightlifting, in which the latest, cutting-edge research on weightlifting from different countries and regions is presented. Also, the official quarterly magazine WORLD WEIGHTLIFTING is published in English, Russian and Spanish. In addition, former IWF President Gottfried Schodel and others have written books such as 100 Years of Olympic Games and 105 Years of World Championships in Weightlifting Medals and World Records, History of World Weightlifting, The Past - A History of the IWF, which provides a more systematic and comprehensive overview of the history of the world weightlifting. The history of the development of the world weightlifting has been comprehensively sorted out and summarized. At the same time, the national weightlifting associations, the continental weightlifting federations have also published related works, such as the History of Chinese weightlifting, History of Asian weightlifting and so on, from a macro perspective on the development of weightlifting in various countries and continents have been sorted out and studied, to a large extent to promote the development of the sport of weightlifting (McGrath, 2017).

2 Oral History and the Narrative of Olympic Weightlifting in China

Oral history, as a branch of the "new historiography," is developing at home and abroad, both in the methodological sense and in the historical sense. "It is of great value and importance in the study of social memory, both in the methodological sense and in the historiographical sense. Oral traditions of past narratives may not be historically recorded, but they can be discerned in the discourse of oral history quotes recorded for the weightlifting program. Narratives based on the earliest years of the weightlifting program suggest that magazine or mainstream media coverage contributed to the public's early awareness of weightlifting as a sport. While acknowledging oral histories as conscious acts that constitute social memory can rescue stories from the silence of history, oral histories are not immune to omissions (Douglas Booth & Holly Thorpe, 2019).

The oral histories of Chinese Olympic weightlifting participants provide specific historical evidence of the significant impact of the sport's memory framework. Weightlifting, a traditional Chinese sport of strength, has left very few oral histories. The purpose of the next paper is to interview Cong Zhang, an eyewitness to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and to link oral histories to the historical memory of Olympic weightlifting in China

through his narrative of the Beijing Olympics.

2.1 "Sport for poor children": finding characteristics in the oral history of weightlifting

Weightlifting is an important global sport, and with the continuous development of sports in recent years, the Chinese weightlifting team has achieved remarkable results in this sport, and has become the "Dream Team". However, the public attention to the sport of weightlifting and the stories behind the weightlifters is relatively small, and the media narrative content related to weightlifting is mainly focused on the coverage of the results of international events. Although, like athletes in other sports, weightlifters need to undergo hard training to create world-renowned results, the physical and technical requirements of the sport are much higher, especially in the Olympic Games and other peak arenas, where weightlifting is challenging the limits of the human body, and the resulting sequelae can be lifelong, according to interviewees' accounts Understand that:

In the process of weightlifting, the spine often needs to bear a lot of weight, in the long run, the overload of the weight-bearing process will make the spine damaged and the body out of balance, but also on the athlete's waist damage, and even tears, wear and tear and other problems. If the weightlifting process is not enough to bear the shoulder, it may cause damage to the shoulder muscles and affect normal activities. Between the hard training and physical injuries, few people are able to persevere, and those who can choose to make this sport a lifelong career are mostly children of poor families.

This phenomenon is also confirmed in the narrative of related reports. Weightlifting champion Qingquan Long was born in a poor family, his parents worked in a brick factory in Jing County, Xuancheng City, Anhui Province, with a monthly salary of just over 1,000 yuan, living a very frugal and hard life. And Qingquan Long in order to reduce the burden on the family, in addition to training hard every day, will also undertake the training venue cleaning work, the venue dropped mineral water bottles collected as scrap sold to subsidize pocket money. Although in such a poor environment, Qingquan Long still made a great success with his own efforts, and in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games men's 56kg weightlifting event, Chinese youngster Qingquan Long lived up to the expectations and stood on the Olympic podium. Lijun Chen, the world weightlifting champion, also had a similar upbringing. Lijun Chen was born in an ordinary rural family in Anhua, Hunan Province, with his parents working in agriculture, an uncle suffering from congenital heart disease and an old and sickly grandmother. Later, when he entered a sports school, Lijun Chen trained very hard and was determined to get good results and become a world champion. At the most difficult time of the family, Chen's mother asked Lijun Chen tentatively whether he could give up weightlifting, but Lijun Chen said very firmly, "I have been practicing for so long, and if I don't practice now, then the hardship I have suffered is not in vain." Later, Lijun Chen won the championship of World Youth Weightlifting Championship and World Weightlifting Championship, and broke the world record. As he won more and more championships, Lijun Chen relied on the prize money to finish paying off his family's debts. Weightlifting champion Chunhong Liu and others also came from poor peasant families, but they all relied on their own tenacity and struggle to achieve remarkable results in the sport of weightlifting. This characteristic is also reflected in the account of Cong Zhang, a weightlifting intern at the Beijing Olympics.

Unlike athletes in other sports, weightlifters seem to have a more difficult life, many athletes are from poorer rural families, in their bodies also carry more family responsibilities, but this also creates them more than the average person's will power to endure hardship. Perhaps in them, 'sword sharp from the sharpening, plum blossom fragrance from the bitter cold' is the most suitable description.

2.2 The scramble for geopolitics: a critical review of weightlifting talent selection

As revealed in the oral narratives of the interviewees, the age of the athletes is getting younger and younger in terms of the overall situation of our weightlifters. For weightlifting, it is necessary to first select talents suitable for the sport and then train them professionally in order to improve the weightlifting ability of the weightlifting talents and achieve the desired weightlifting results. How to weightlifting talents for a more scientific and reasonable selection, is every grassroots coaches need to pay attention to the problem. In front of the rising stars and strength veterans, the Chinese weightlifting team talent selection is also becoming more and more severe, the shortcomings of the selection mechanism is also increasingly apparent.

Yuan Tian is an accomplished athlete in the Chinese weightlifting world. On November 6, 2011, Yuan Tian won three titles in the women's 48kg class at the World Weightlifting Championships in Paris, France, with a snatch of 90kg, a clean and jerk of 117kg and a total of 207kg. The jerk of 117 kg also broke the world youth record for the event at the time. This laid the foundation for Tian's impact on the London 2012 Olympic Games, and was the "seeded player" that many Chinese sports people at the time expected to win the first gold medal of the Chinese delegation to the London Olympics, and was also favored by the world weightlifting community at the time. However, just as the London 2012 Olympic Games were approaching, Yuan Tian, the prospective London Olympic Games women's weightlifter, whose fingerprints had been taken, was temporarily announced to be replaced. This also caused a great controversy among the parties involved and related public opinion at that time. Afterwards, Tian's coach, Fang Xu, also repeatedly told the outside world through media channels that Yuan Tian had become a victim of Chinese sports' regional political competition due to the exchange of local interests and the competition for Olympic delegation spots.

Chinese weightlifting sports selection mechanism is relatively cruel, weightlifting talent selection from local sports colleges, to provincial and municipal sports colleges, and then to the national pair of level by level, the selection base is relatively large, different levels of weightlifting talent can participate in the competition levels are different, and the current selection mechanism revealed the drawbacks, but also easy to combat the motivation of weightlifting reserve training . Therefore improve the weightlifting talent selection mechanism is very necessary and urgent a thing.

In the face of the increasingly competitive environment of domestic weightlifting, there are athletes who have chosen to develop abroad, one of them being Li Yao, a female weightlifter who was sent to Kazakhstan in 2007 under the "Talent Exchange Program" of the State General Administration of Sports, and changed her name to Maia Maneza, while changing her nationality to that of Kazakhstan. After going to Kazakhstan, Yao's career took a "turn", the pressure and frustration at home made Li Yao naturalized by other countries, and after entering the Kazakhstan weightlifting team, Li Yao got the focus of the system. However, soon after winning the Olympic Games, she was found to be doping and her results were cancelled in all areas, and she was also dropped from the Kazakhstan weightlifting team and fell into a low point in her life. According

to the narrative of the interviewees and the narrative presentation of relevant information can be seen, weightlifting talent selection mechanism currently has a lot of room for improvement.

2.3 "Post-retirement grief": the brilliance and despondency of weightlifters

Compared to other athletes to get the honor, weightlifting athletes get the attention can be said to be minimal, the public now for the sport of weightlifting awareness is still more in the surface, perhaps only during the Olympic Games such international events will pay more attention to, if they do not get the Olympic gold medal, then probably many people will not notice these lifetime 'Athletes from special hardship families', in unnoticed corners, struggling silently to achieve their dreams. And now most of the weightlifters will choose to continue to coach the sport of weightlifting after retirement, but for many weightlifters, life after retirement is more accompanied by despondency.

Interviewee Cong Zhang talked about the situation of weightlifters after retirement, with "brilliant" and "despondent" two words to summarize. Nowadays, China has invested a lot of manpower, material and financial resources to train an Olympic champion, compared to the protection they get after retirement. People have been emphasizing the importance of winning gold medals and winning glory for the country, but ignoring the problems that will be brought to the athletes after the halo fades away. Olympic champions, as the best of the athletes, have become a topic of concern after retirement. Olympic champions not only bring the highest honor to the country, it brings meaning beyond the sport itself.

In today's environment, athletes who lack attention without heat find it difficult to receive endorsements or commercial performances, and the source of income usually comes from the prize money of the competition. But like Chen Lijun, despite having won so many championships and gold medals, their family was still known locally as a special hardship household until the Tokyo Olympics. And for those weightlifters who have not won Olympic titles, life after retirement is still a matter of concern.

In our country's sports industry, there are still many athletes who are fighting with their life health, but after retirement, not only lost the valiant on the field, but also need to endure the torture of illness. The former weightlifter Li Cai retired without any savings at home, and because he needed more strength during the competition, it led to obesity, and eventually suffered from respiratory sleep apnea syndrome due to excessive obesity causing infection in the lungs, and died of respiratory failure at the age of 33. The athletes who were surrounded by flowers and applause on the sports field in the past, after leaving the sports field, the past glory no longer exists, became an ordinary person who no one asked for, and even with a body of injuries and illnesses to live a dim and unlit day. So how to find a good balance between the athletes after the retirement of brilliance and despondency, become a question worth thinking about.

Through the interviewees' narratives, the oral history and weightlifting memories are linked, which is a high degree of fusion of individual sports experience history and collective memory, revealing the complex life experience of history and society, time and space interconnected in a special historical time and space. It seems to be the narration of individual life's sports experience, but what lies behind it is the operation mechanism of individuals, groups and society in a specific historical period, as well as the individual sports experience and fate of an era. The history told by those who witnessed the Olympic weightlifting events not

only provides a basis for recording the history of Olympic weightlifting in China, but also writes an important part of the oral history of sports for the whole country (Zhihui Wang, 2021).

3 Oral history and weightlifting narratives: the dual pursuit of personal and collective memory

Oral history is an important source of history for the sport of weightlifting. However, sports historians have largely overlooked the importance of this source and therefore fail to understand why and how people create meaning in the past. In this paper, we explore why and how through a careful analysis of the oral narrative testimonies provided by figures associated with the sport of weightlifting. As an ancient civilization in the world, China has passed down many legends and historical accounts of Herculean performances and wrestling from ancient times to the present. With the introduction of modern competitive weightlifting from Europe and the United States to China in the mid-nineteenth century, the development of the Chinese weightlifting program has had occasional ups and downs, but the overall development trend has been good, as can be seen from the above, the Chinese weightlifting team is a veritable "dream team" for the sport of weightlifting ", in the world of weightlifting project occupies a pivotal position.

This paper provides a case for acknowledging the role of oral history in the framework of memory for weightlifting programs. It is not possible to recover and analyze the oral narratives of the past that constitute the memory of weightlifting, but it is still possible to identify the traces of these traditions through oral history and to collect the meanings embedded in the memory, as well as its problems. According to Gary Osmond, "even small commemorations help to "save history", not so much by preserving events as by making them a personal and collective focus". The oral histories cited in this paper provide many clues about the small oral acts of remembering and forgetting on which weightlifting memory seems to depend. The testimonies provided by the interviewees demonstrate not only the role of oral history as an act of social memory, but also the value of an approach to oral history as performance in which the interviewees seek to connect their experiences to discourses of the past and present. All interviewees sought to speak as authorities on aspects of the history of weightlifting and used discourses formed in the past to give meaning to their experiences in order to ensure that they themselves and their experiences had a place in social memory. The narrative suggests that the oral history of weightlifting stems from complex, subtle, and spontaneous performances and affirms that the oral act of social memory has meaning for both the individual and the collective (Zhihui Wang,2021).

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