



# An Analysis of Traditional Mongolian Sports Game Bokh

Wencai Miao

Integrated Support and technology Extension Center Chagannuoer town Balin Right Banner,  
Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia

1316789313@qq.com

**Abstract.** Sports are an indispensable part of human life, and over the course of human history, sports have gradually developed, bringing entertainment and cultural influence to human life. China is a unified multi-ethnic country. Since ancient times, various ethnic groups have closely interacted, communicated, and integrated, respecting each other and developing together, giving birth to the enduring and outstanding traditional Chinese culture, including both material and intangible cultural heritage. Bokh was listed as intangible cultural heritage in China in 2006. Bokh, a sport developed within the Mongolian ethnic group, embodies the diversity of ethnic culture by carrying aspects of ethnic culture, ethnic spirit, and customs. From its origins to the present, Bokh has its unique characteristics and educational value in terms of competition methods, attire, and rules. To date, Bokh has not developed into an internationally recognized competitive sport, so there is still a need for further improvement and enrichment. This paper, based on relevant literature, provides a brief analysis of the origins, characteristics, educational value, as well as the inheritance and future of Bokh.

**Keywords:** Bokh; education; intangible cultural heritage; inheritance.

## 1 Introduction

Traditional sports are an important component of a nation's culture. Traditional sports represent a unique cultural form of expression for a nation. They are not merely physical activities, but also symbols of a nation's spirit and cultural heritage. Traditional sports reflect a nation's values, way of life, traditional skills, and social customs. The significance of traditional sports for a nation is profound. They are not just forms of entertainment, but also important means of national identity and self-expression. Traditional sports can inherit and promote a nation's cultural heritage, deepen people's identification and pride in their own culture. Additionally, traditional sports serve as important bridges for communication and understanding, fostering mutual understanding and friendship among different ethnic groups. By preserving and inheriting traditional sports, we not only enrich the culture of the Chinese nation, but also enhance the diversity of human society as a whole.

## 2 Origin of Mongolian Bokh

The exact time when Bokh began to develop is not confirmed by historical records. However, it is certain that it evolved during the tribal period of human society. Ancient rock paintings found in the Mongolian plateau depict various Bokh wrestling activities, indicating the widespread presence of Bokh sports in ancient times.

Historical records in "Records of the Grand Historian" and "History of the Eastern Han Dynasty" document the gatherings of the Xiongnu people during the spring festival, May, and September, which included Nadamu-related activities. Additionally, "Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government" from the Qing Dynasty records wrestling matches held to entertain envoys from the Song Dynasty. According to "The Secret History of the Mongols," during a grand Nadamu event held by Genghis Khan on the banks of the Onon River, wrestlers from the Buriat tribe (a Mongolian tribe at the time) were invited to compete in wrestling, demonstrating the mass participation and inclusivity of Bokh, which allowed participation from other countries and ethnic groups. Bokh was not limited to men; "The Travels of Marco Polo" records cases of women participating in Bokh competitions.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Bokh continued to develop and was refined. Emperor Renzong Ayurbarwada of the Yuan Dynasty established the "Bokh Affairs Office" to oversee wrestling competitions.

According to historical records from the Qing Dynasty, in the sixth year of the Tiancong era (1632), Emperor Taizong awarded the title of "Arislen Tüsiyetu Bokh" to Mend (a person's name) during a military parade in the capital, and rewarded him with a sable fur robe. The title of "Zana Bokh" was conferred to Daoli Ma, and he was rewarded with a tiger fur robe. Temudege was awarded the title of "Baris Batel" and received a tiger fur robe as well.<sup>1</sup>

In 1935, multiple Bokh wrestlers participated in the 6th National Sports Games held in Shanghai. In September 1948, the first Nadamu Festival of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was held in Ganzhu'er Temple, Hulunbuir League, with special funds allocated by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In 1954, 1957, and 1962, three Nadamu Festivals were held in the capital city of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

In 1953, the National Traditional Minority Sports Games were held in Tianjin, including Bokh, where Bao Yu from Arukorqin Banner won the championship in the 100 kg category.

In 1998, the Asian Games were held in Shenyang, where wrestling teams from 11 countries and 17 regions, including the United States, France, Italy, and Mongolia, participated in the Bokh competition. This Bokh competition became the most extensive and highest-level world-class Bokh competition to date.

From ancient times to the present, Bokh has continued to evolve along the river of history, becoming an indispensable part of national culture. Throughout its development, Bokh has acquired unique cultural connotations and characteristics influenced by surrounding cultures. However, as Bokh has not yet been included in international competitive events, it indicates that there are still shortcomings in Bokh sports, and further research and development are needed to perfect it as a competitive sport.

### 3 Characteristics and Educational Value of Mongolian Bokh

Bokh, also known as Mongolian wrestling, is one of the traditional folk sports with unique cultural connotations and characteristics. The term "Bokh" comes from the Mongolian language, meaning "solid," and conveys the idea of being unbreakable, enduring, and everlasting. It is the foremost of the three main sports of the Mongolian people (wrestling, horse racing, and archery). Whether during the worship of the Oboo or the celebration of Nadamu, Bokh is an indispensable main event. It is not only a competitive sport but also an integral part of life. (Figure 1 shows Bokh players participating in the Nadam Fair, Select from "Mongolian Bo Ke" Inner Mongolia intangible cultural heritage public service platform. [https://ichnmg.cn/nmfyjc/detail.shtml?nrpjId=115&classType=FYJC\\_SECOND\\_CTTY#](https://ichnmg.cn/nmfyjc/detail.shtml?nrpjId=115&classType=FYJC_SECOND_CTTY#)).



Fig. 1. Shows Bokh players participating in the Nadam Fair<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 Characteristics of Bokh

Bokh competitions can take place indoors or outdoors and are divided into youth, young adult, and senior divisions. There are various forms of Bokh, such as Uju muqin style, Barin style, Shalabol style, Weirat style, Haraha style, Buriat style, and Hulunbeier style. There are also many different types of traditional attire (zhu dege). Some summarize Bokh as not only testing physical strength, power, and wisdom, but also incorporating various materials and content such as gold, silver, brass, leather, fur, silk, cotton, bamboo, wood, fabric, felt, patterns, calligraphy, music, jumping dance, morality, praise, and rewards.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 2 is an introduction to Bokh clothing, Select from Mongolian Beauty, the most complete fight robe in production and basic techniques (Mongolian culture) .[https://m.sohu.com/a/211479090\\_167788?trans\\_=010004\\_pcwzy.2017.12](https://m.sohu.com/a/211479090_167788?trans_=010004_pcwzy.2017.12).)

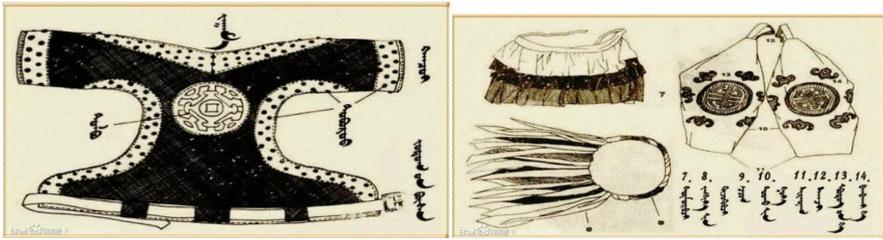


Fig. 2. Introduction to Bokh clothing<sup>4</sup>

Competitors wear a "zhudege" (sleeveless vest), bare arms and back, and tie a colorful silk "khilbug" around their waist, known as a colored skirt. They wear "bansheel" pants made of 20-40 feet of white fabric, adorned with ornate patterns, and traditional Mongolian or horse boots. Victorious competitors wear a colorful "jangga" around their neck, which symbolizes the number of victories in Bokh. (Figure 3 of Jangga, Select from Xilin Gol League News, elegant "Will Ga". [https:// www. sohu. com/ a/ 318778984\\_648639.2019.06.](https://www.sohu.com/a/318778984_648639.2019.06))



Fig. 3. Jangga<sup>5</sup>

The scale of Bokh competitions varies, with large-scale Nadam festivals hosting 512 to 1024 participants, mainly at national, regional, league, city, and banner levels. Medium-sized Nadam festivals typically consist of 256 to 512 participants, while small-scale ones have 32 to 128 participants. In 2004, a large-scale Nadam festival with 2048 participants was held in Xilingol League, setting a Guinness World Record.

The fight needs to be managed. Complete the tasks of organizing match affairs, supervising matches, arranging matches, rounds, rulings, etc. There are game stewards, game administrators, referees, judges, supervisors and other personnel who implement various systems to do a good job in the fight, so that the game is more orderly and disciplined, ensure the fairness and justice of the players, and improve the enjoyment of the game.

Bokh competitions have specific rules and formats for matchups. According to the rules, wrestlers are divided into two rows and seated on the east and west sides. The matchups start with the first wrestler on the upper west side facing the last wrestler on the east side, and continue until the championship and runner-up are determined. While this traditional method has some rationality, it also has drawbacks. Some competitions

now use single-elimination matchups and drawing lots. The method of matchups affects the entertainment value of the competition and the enjoyment of the wrestlers.

Bokh also has a unique characteristic. In the Mongolian language, "makhshi khu" means jumping. The jumping actions in Mongolian Bokh have been passed down from ancient times and have the custom of dance-like movements. Russian historian V. Yanchivikhi documented in the book "Badukhan" the Nadam festival held at the Yegule River: "The opponents wait for their turn and jump in place, alternating the lifting of their legs and stretching their arms like wings. They bend and stretch their knees to jump. Six pairs of wrestlers grab the ground or grass, jump into the arena like eagles spreading their wings, and start wrestling by grabbing each other's shoulders."<sup>6</sup> The jumping forms in Bokh are also divided by region, such as Haraha Bokh jump, Ujumuqin-style jump, Handahanlu-style jump (Hulunbeier), Barin jump style, Keshiketeng style, and various other jump forms.

A kind of song that Bokh players sing when competing at the Nadam Fair. The combination of music and fight not only stimulates the enjoyment of the game, but also brings the game to the climax. This song is called "ura" (the horn of the fight), and the people singing ura are called "ura singers", requiring a loud voice, the venue ura, eight to sixteen old people dressed in Mongolian costumes, standing in line on the east and west sides, and the contestants begin to sing ura when they enter.<sup>7</sup> The song has only one line, "Let the Bokh in," and the ulla tone is particularly majestic, an inspiring tone, and after singing the three ulla, the contestants jump into the arena like a flood of water, and the scene is very shocking. The crowd was also excited by the loud singing and the momentum of the boxers.(Figure 4 shows the music sheet music and lyrics played by the Bokh players as they entered taken from "Bahrain Naadam" Choji A Wuliji Inner Mongolia Culture Publishing House, June 2007,1.)

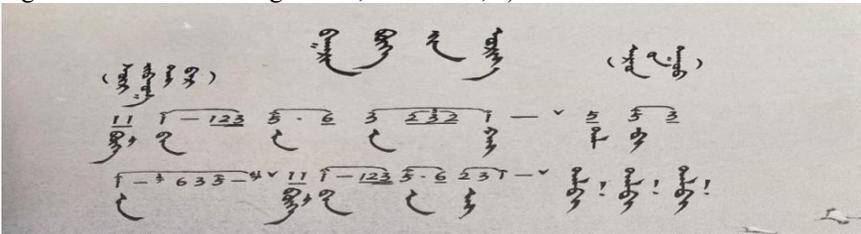


Fig. 4. Bokh players enter the background music<sup>8</sup>

There are many taboos related to Mongolian Bokh, such as: not throwing the "jangga" and "zhudege" around indiscriminately; not sitting on the "jangga" and "zhudege"; not grabbing the "jangga" during wrestling; not wrestling barefoot; not selling the "zhudege"; not kicking the opponent's shins during wrestling; not choking; not forcing joints; not reaching below the opponent's waist with hands; not biting the opponent; not cursing the opponent; not crossing over the head of the fallen opponent; not pressing the knee on the chest or abdomen of the fallen opponent... and so on.<sup>9</sup> These taboos are a representation of harmony, safety, and respect that have been formed during the transmission of Bokh.

### **3.2 The Educational Value of Bokh" in English.**

"Bokh, as a sport and athletic competition, has certain educational values influenced by the culture of the Mongolian people and surrounding ethnic groups. Bokh enhances muscle strength and bone density, requiring muscle contraction and extension, thus improving muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, and coordination, as well as enhancing body movement and posture control.

Bokh is not merely a strength-based sport, but also involves intellectual competition, with many classic matches requiring strategic thinking. It enhances brain function, as wrestlers need to think and make decisions during the matches, which strengthens cognitive and decision-making abilities, as well as improving mental agility and reaction speed. Furthermore, Bokh requires memorization of rules, tactics, and techniques, thus improving memory and information processing abilities.

In addition, the sport fosters creativity by challenging individuals to adapt to various situations and opponents' strategies, thereby stimulating creativity and problem-solving abilities. The focus and concentration required in Bokh also enhance attention and focus, improving individual thinking and efficiency. Furthermore, the sport cultivates a competitive spirit, encouraging active participation and the pursuit of victory, thereby instilling a sense of healthy competition and promoting personal development.

In summary, Bokh possesses rich educational value, contributing to physical and mental well-being, holistic development, and the cultivation of competitiveness, self-discipline, and perseverance, thus exerting a positive influence in the realm of education.

## **4 The Heritage and Future Development of Mongolian Wrestling**

Mongolian wrestling is not just a sport but also embodies the cultural essence of the ethnic group. In 2006, Mongolian wrestling was included in the first batch of China's intangible cultural heritage list. The inheritance and future development of Mongolian wrestling is a topic worthy of attention. As an important intangible cultural heritage, Mongolian wrestling not only has a rich historical and cultural significance but also embodies the ethnic way of life and values.

Promoting the traditional Chinese excellent culture and integrating the wrestling culture with education. Schools are the source of innovative knowledge and the primary output base for talents, and they are the creators of turning science and technology into productivity. They have localization advantages in the protection and practice of intangible cultural heritage and can play an important sustainable role. Strengthening the position of Mongolian wrestling in the education system is also an important way to promote its inheritance. By incorporating Mongolian wrestling into the school's physical education curriculum and integrating it with modern sports education, more young people can be exposed to and understand Mongolian wrestling, enhancing their identification and understanding of traditional culture. Vigorously cultivate a powerful force

for protecting and inheriting. It should be recognized that systematically and continuously cultivating talents in this area can not only meet the needs of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage but also build a backbone force for promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Innovative research drives high-quality academic development. Academic research needs to develop innovative thinking mode, innovation is the lifeline of academic research. To innovate, we must have modernity, we must cultivate the modern consciousness of academic paper writing, we must strive to grasp these new characteristics and new trends of contemporary scientific research, and we must explore new research ideas and methods. In the field of academic research, new research ideas and methods have been developed to promote the inheritance and development of Bokh. The academic research of modern scientific theory on Bokh is the core driving force to promote Bokh modernization.

The heritage and future of Bokh must strengthen international exchanges and promotion, which can promote the recognition and dissemination of traditional sports on a global scale. By organizing international competitions, holding exchange activities and participating in large-scale international sports events, the charm and uniqueness of traditional sports can be demonstrated and its international influence can be enhanced. Diversified development, traditional sports can be combined with other sports to form a diversified form of sports. For example, combining traditional martial arts with modern aerobics to create fitness programs with Chinese characteristics; Or combine traditional sports with modern technology to create new forms of competition and experience.

Comprehensive and diverse forms of promotion to create a good atmosphere for inheritance. In the era of the great development of the Internet in the 21st century, it is necessary to strengthen the promotion of intangible cultural heritage, first and foremost by fully connecting network media with the promotion of intangible cultural heritage. Because network promotion has a wide range and fast dissemination. New media such as WeChat public accounts, Weibo, and TikTok can be used to conduct video exhibitions, prize quizzes, and online essay competitions with the theme of "Understanding Mongolian Traditional Sports-Wrestling," and other activities to drive people's enthusiasm for active participation in the events. Encouraging more people to participate in the promotion and dissemination of Mongolian wrestling culture, increasing the visibility of Mongolian wrestling.

In conclusion, the inheritance and future development of Mongolian wrestling require our commitment to protecting and inheriting its unique cultural value, while also keeping pace with the times and continuously innovating. By strengthening inheritance work, promoting international exchanges of Mongolian wrestling, and diversifying development, a solid foundation can be laid for the sustainable development and dissemination of Mongolian wrestling.

## 5 Conclusion

Bokh is an important part of the traditional national culture with a long history, with unique charm and strong national characteristics. Bokh is not only the intangible cultural heritage of the nation, but also an important bridge of national culture export. Bokh as a traditional sport, so far in order to be included in international competitions, there are still many problems that need to be further developed and improved. Traditional culture should not only be protected but also innovated, so that it can be developed and improve the shortcomings of Bok. In order to inherit the excellent traditional Chinese sports culture, we will vigorously cultivate a vigorous and promising force for protection and inheritance. It should be recognized that the planned and continuous training of talents in this field can not only meet the needs of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, but also build a backbone force to carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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