

RESEARCH ON THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FACED BY COMMUNITIES IN PROMOTING THE SPORTS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract: *Sports intangible cultural heritage, including ethnic traditional sports and games, represents the achievements of people's long-term efforts, possessing rich historical significance and artistic value. Protecting and promoting these ancient sports at the grassroots community level can help preserve traditional culture and raise public awareness of sports, thereby achieving sustainable and healthy development. However, challenges such as a shortage of skilled inheritors, inadequate sports facilities, and insufficient funding hinder their promotion. This study examines these issues and proposes actionable solutions, including creating model communities, renovating sports venues, securing funds through multiple channels, and introducing traditional sports in schools.*

Key words: *Community, sports, intangible cultural heritage*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional ethnic sports are cultural creations forged through long-term labor practices over the course of history, embodying the wisdom in daily living of various regions and ethnic groups. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since then, numerous traditional sports worldwide have been inscribed on the Intangible Cultural Heritage lists, and countries have actively responded by incorporating their outstanding traditional sports into national-level safeguarding systems.

Today, amid sustained economic development and growing awareness of physical fitness, exercise has become an indispensable part of modern lifestyles. Hundreds of sports options are available for daily activities, and new forms of athletic games continue to emerge. However, the widespread use of the internet has allowed video games to consume significant amounts of people's time, causing a decline in participation in physical sports. This poses a serious challenge to the survival of traditional ethnic sports and games.

As the fundamental unit of the social organism, a community serves as a microcosm of the broader society and shoulders the responsibility of being a "testing ground" for social development. Community centers and associations created and managed by communities themselves can play a vital role in supporting the transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and raising public awareness of its importance to the community (Valentina, 2020). Conducting social pilot programs within specific communities can provide invaluable reference for other communities, thereby influencing the planning and development of society as a whole. Thus, this paper proposes that vigorous efforts should be made to promote the transmission and development of sports-related intangible cultural heritage within grassroots communities. This aims not only to preserve traditional history and culture but also to enhance residents' willingness to participate in sports activities by doing so.

METHODS

This study is based on a literature search conducted via Google Scholar. Building upon extensive reading and referencing of relevant professional literature, it integrates theoretical analysis, content analysis, as well as logical induction and deductive reasoning to examine the current challenges facing sports intangible cultural heritage within community development, and then proposes specific coping strategies.

THE DILEMMA OF INHERITING SPORTS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Lack of talent in inheriting sports intangible cultural heritage

Culture is created, sustained, and refined by humanity. Consequently, bearers are the core element in the protection of sports intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Currently, the declining number of outstanding bearers has become a serious and undeniable reality. Many ICH projects face the issue of aging bearers and participants, or even a break in transmission (Zhang, 2023). In the process of rapid urbanization, the large-scale migration of rural residents to cities has intensified population loss in rural areas. Compounded by historical and natural constraints, economic development remains challenging in some remote regions. These factors collectively make it difficult for a significant amount of sports ICH rooted in rural communities to find sufficient and suitable successors, ultimately leading to a break in transmission.

Secondly, sports intangible cultural heritage has developed over millennia and is now rich in meaning. However, due to the way they are passed down, many practitioners master the skills and performance techniques but lack deep theoretical understanding, failing to grasp the cultural depth behind them (Jiang et al., 2024).

Additionally, the influence of modern emerging sports continues to deepen, and their reach far exceeds that of relatively slower-paced traditional sports. This has led to a widespread lack of public interest in traditional sports (Ma et al., 2024). As a component of mass sports, community sports are characterized by their voluntary nature. The choice of sports activities by residents depends on their personal interests. These various factors make the promotion and popularization of traditional sports at the grassroots community level a daunting challenge, directly hindering the cultivation of a new generation of practitioners for traditional sports.

Insufficient community sports facilities

Ample community sports facilities are the fundamental material support for residents' participation in physical exercise, and their supply level primarily depends on the local economic development. However, the problem of insufficient public sports facilities remains widespread in most cities today, and the situation is even more severe in vast rural areas. With the continuous boom in urban development and construction, land is becoming increasingly scarce, making it difficult to guarantee the public sports facilities that urban residents are entitled to. The residents' strong demand for exercise stands in sharp contrast to the sports equipment that is scattered, limited in number, and insufficient in supply.

Furthermore, the intangible cultural heritage of sports is extensive and profound, featuring diverse activities with distinct regional characteristics. Activities such as equestrian skills and water sports, for instance, struggle to find space for practice in land-scarce cities once removed from their native environments. Therefore, the lack of objective material conditions poses great challenges to the widespread preservation of intangible cultural heritage in sports.

Insufficient funds for sports development

Currently, the development of community sports relies primarily on government fiscal allocations, with private capital playing a minimal role. Due to varying levels of economic development across regions, government investment in sports also differs significantly. Remote regions receive particularly inadequate funding.

Simultaneously, the protection of sports intangible cultural heritage faces numerous challenges. These include a lack of specialized protection agencies, unclear ownership, and modernization and commercialization tendencies in the transmission process. This has led to increasingly constrained survival space. (Gao, 2023)

Sustained efforts in cultivating the transmission of sports intangible cultural heritage require substantial financial investment. However, the vast majority of talent cultivation initiatives are currently undertaken spontaneously by civil society organizations. Limited by their own scale, these organizations can provide only severely limited support. The shortage of both policy support and funding constitutes the primary bottleneck constraining the cultivation of talent for sports intangible cultural heritage.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SPORTS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE COMMUNITY

Create sports intangible cultural heritage demonstration communities

Sports intangible cultural heritage activities embody profound artistic value and serve as both recreation and education. Through participation, people are subtly and profoundly influenced. To effectively protect and pass on these precious legacies, and to promote the harmonious development of community sports through traditional sports programs, it is essential to establish a multi-party collaborative governance system. The core objective is to enhance residents' participation and satisfaction.

Establish a "government-led, community-collaborated, resident-participated" community sports model

Government-led planning and guarantee

Government-led planning and safeguarding should involve studying and formulating systems such as community development plans for sports-related intangible cultural heritage, evaluation standards, and sports facility management measures, to coordinate the allocation of sports resources. Additionally, a community supervision and evaluation mechanism centered on resident satisfaction should be established, authorizing third parties to oversee the use of special funds, facility construction and maintenance, residents' fitness status, and activity implementation.

Community collaboration stimulates vitality

Community organizations should contribute to community building by expanding the team of sports professionals, promoting sports programs, offering fitness guidance, encouraging resident participation in exercise, and organizing sports competitions. In serving the community, these organizations must promptly identify residents' difficulties and requests. Through communication and coordination with government departments, experts, and scholars, they can provide practical suggestions for developing improvement plans.

Focusing on residents, enhancing participation experience and sense of identity

Creating a sports atmosphere and guiding concepts

Community residents are both the starting point and the ultimate goal of community development. The fundamental criterion for measuring its effectiveness lies in residents' recognition and satisfaction. Governments, communities, sports clubs, and other stakeholders should actively guide residents to adopt sound perspectives on health and sports, fostering a vibrant sports culture within communities. Only when residents personally experience the value of traditional sports – such as the enjoyment and health benefits they offer – will they develop a genuine appreciation for them. By regularly organizing popular competitions that resonate with the public, traditional sports can be seamlessly integrated into residents' daily lives. Neighbors should be encouraged to support one another in physical activities, promoting collective well-being. Additionally, collaborations with non-governmental research teams can be established to conduct lectures, educating the public about the rich cultural heritage behind traditional sports.

Expand ways for residents to participate in community construction

Encourage residents to not only participate in sports activities, but also engage in the governance process of community sports. By leveraging both online and offline interactions, we can solicit broad input and guide residents to focus on community sports affairs, actively offering suggestions. This allows them to gain a sense of involvement and fulfillment through their contributions, ultimately integrating more residents into the development of community sports.

Innovate, promote and optimize sports events

Practitioners of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in sports are pivotal to the construction of ICH communities. Efforts should be community-based and practitioner-centered to broaden participation, enhance appeal, and encourage local residents to engage in traditional sports. Innovation can be introduced to certain traditional sports while preserving their essence—for instance, simplifying overly complex forms and appropriately lowering intensity levels—better to align activities with the needs of

the general public. Governments, communities, and residents must provide essential support through measures such as venue provision and fostering an interactive environment. This requires collaborative support and coordination from multiple stakeholders. This will ultimately motivate more residents to participate in physical exercise, promote neighborhood interaction, allow everyone to share the benefits of sports, and build a healthy, happy, and supportive sports community.

Adapt to local conditions and build, renovate, and utilize sports venues

The current distribution of public sports facilities in urban communities is uneven. Older communities, constrained by limited public space, typically suffer from a shortage of sports facilities. They often only have a small number of outdated fitness equipment installed by the government during earlier initiatives. Meanwhile, some newly developed, upscale communities are equipped with relatively comprehensive sports venues.

Therefore, the government should, considering the need to preserve local sports-related intangible cultural heritage, reasonably plan dedicated areas and invest in constructing corresponding venues and necessary equipment. Simultaneously, where conditions permit, efforts should be made to adapt to local conditions, fully utilize existing sports facilities, showcase the distinctive features of traditional sports, and organize various engaging activities.

Additionally, during holidays, we could explore the "government-society collaboration" model for organizing sports events. We may actively host diverse community sports competitions targeting small units such as families, residential buildings, and neighborhoods, thereby mobilizing residents' enthusiasm for participation and fostering a vibrant community sports atmosphere. At the same time, we could organize sports performances, exhibitions, lectures, and exchanges of management experience.

These activities, on one hand, can broaden residents' perspectives on sports, while on the other, they provide insights and references for improving community sports initiatives in the future. By participating in these rich and varied community sports and cultural activities, residents can not only strengthen their bodies, cultivate their character, and delight their minds but also enhance their sense of teamwork and experience the cohesive spiritual strength of the community. The participation process naturally brings neighbors closer, establishing harmonious and close connections between people and the community, thereby strengthening residents' sense of community identity and belonging.

Use multiple channels to raise funds

In the provision of community sports services, relying solely on the participation of governments and enterprises is far from sufficient. It is essential to introduce multiple stakeholders to bridge the supply gap. Governments can collaborate with organizations such as enterprises, sports foundations, clubs, and associations to jointly raise funds and resources. These entities can then be entrusted with the production of community sports services, thus enabling support for traditional sports activities, programs, and institutions in areas such as venue construction, event organization, and expert training (Xue et al., 2023).

For traditional sports, it is essential to establish support and collaboration mechanisms with civil research organizations and universities, while encouraging diversified forms of social funding to protect sports-related intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, efforts should be made to pool collective wisdom in developing innovative adaptations of these cultural assets by integrating local cultural characteristics. This includes creating cultural and tourism products and leveraging emerging information technologies to enhance online promotion and visibility.

The interdependent and complementary cooperation between the government and sports social organizations not only helps the government reduce provision costs and enhance community sports service quality, but also enables sports social organizations to obtain policy incentives and various forms of support, thereby expanding their social influence.

Carry out traditional sports activities on campus

To ensure effective transmission of a skill or project, the student community serves as an ideal teaching audience. For sports that do not demand extensive equipment or dedicated practice venues,

inheritors may collaborate with primary and secondary school administrators based on their capacity. They can serve as extracurricular instructors after school hours in the form of clubs or interest-based activities to teach traditional sports. Currently, some schools in China have launched the "Taichi on Campus" program. Practice has demonstrated that, with proper guidance, Taichi can not only be successfully integrated into school curricula—contributing to cultural heritage preservation—but also enhance educational outcomes (Tian et al., 2025)

Additionally, higher education institutions may hire excellent inheritors with teaching qualifications to offer specialized or elective courses on traditional sports, building a distinctive curriculum system. Government education and sports departments should provide encouragement and support to schools that actively establish such specialized courses and allocate funding for sports facilities and equipment as appropriate. At the same time, students' education requires the supportive attitude of parents. Good home-school relationships contribute to the mutual reinforcement of family education and school education (Huo 2023). Education can only be effective when parents understand and support their children's participation in traditional sports, recognizing the importance of sports for youth development.

CONCLUSION

The preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage is a long-term endeavor. A central challenge lies in how to garner broader attention for ancient traditions within contemporary society. Building upon an analysis of the current difficulties in transmission, this paper proposes several actionable countermeasures. It emphasizes that the concerted efforts of the government, communities, and residents are indispensable—each playing a vital role.

Furthermore, beyond grassroots community organizations, assistance from educational institutions is crucial. Leveraging schools' platforms and facilities can provide students with opportunities to engage with these traditional practices. Parents should also collaborate with the government and schools, supporting their children's participation in sports activities. Ultimately, this integrated approach aims to foster a holistic environment—encompassing schools, communities, and families—where individuals are immersed in traditional culture.

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