

Research on Traditional Martial Arts Education in the Context of Strengthening the Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation

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Abstract: The Chinese nation is composed of numerous distinct ethnic groups that coexist in mutual tolerance and close interdependence, collectively forming a diverse, profound, and extensive Chinese cultural system. Through the course of history, the cultures of these various ethnic groups have drawn inspiration from one another and blended together, giving rise to the unique and outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation. As an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, traditional ethnic sports play an extremely crucial role in the process of forging a strong sense of the Chinese national community. By analyzing four dimensions—material culture, institutional culture, behavioral culture, and spiritual culture—this paper profoundly elucidates the deep alignment and inseparable logical connection between traditional Chinese martial arts and the sense of the Chinese national community. Guided by the consciousness of the Chinese national community, traditional martial arts education also exerts a positive influence, primarily manifested in strengthening cultural identity, unifying the national spirit, and fostering emotional bonds. It is evident, therefore, that further advancing traditional martial arts education can help to continuously strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese national community.

Keywords: Traditional ethnic sports; Traditional martial arts education; Four levels of culture

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1. Introduction

The Chinese nation is a multi-ethnic state comprising 56 distinct ethnic groups. These groups recognize each other, intermingle, and depend upon one another. Throughout history, they have grown stronger together, jointly building a beautiful homeland characterized by political stability, economic prosperity, cultural diversity, and harmonious living. Ethnic traditional sports embody rich cultural significance, serving as vital treasures of ethnic heritage. Rooted in these sports lies the soul of traditional culture. Vigorous development of ethnic traditional sports forms the foundation for forging a strong sense of the Chinese national community. The awareness that Chinese martial arts and Chinese culture are intertwined and mutually

supportive helps to strengthen cultural identity ^[1].

Characterized by ethnic distinctiveness, tradition, health benefits, and recreational value, ethnic traditional sports also embody spiritual elements such as patriotism, unity and perseverance, self-improvement, and hard work. Only through the comprehensive and effective promotion of ethnic traditional sports can traditional culture be sustained. The continuity of cultural development strengthens cultural identity, thereby more effectively forging the consciousness of the Chinese nation as a community. As an integral part of Chinese culture, martial arts culture is not only a cultural treasure of the Chinese nation, but also a symbol of its cultural and social identity ^[2]. Traditional martial arts hold a significant place within ethnic traditional sports, boasting a long history of development. Their material cultural forms can be traced back to primitive society. This study explores the connection between traditional martial arts and the consciousness of the Chinese nation as a community through its four cultural manifestations.

2. The connection between traditional martial arts and the sense of community among the Chinese nation from the perspective of four cultural levels

The sense of a Chinese national community is directly centered on all citizens themselves and takes them as its foundation ^[3]. Traditional Chinese martial arts and ethnic traditional culture are interdependent and inextricably linked. Ethnic traditional sports form the bedrock of ethnic traditional culture. The development of traditional Chinese martial arts continuously nourishes and enriches ethnic traditional culture. Ethnic traditional culture divorced from ethnic traditional sports is like a tree without roots or water without a source. Ethnic traditional culture endows traditional Chinese martial arts with profound cultural depth, transforming it from a mere collection of movements into a practice imbued with rich national cultural significance. In his book *A Modern Interpretation of the Chinese Intellectual Tradition*, Chinese scholar Yu Ying-shih categorizes culture into four levels: material, institutional, customary, and ideological and value-based ^[4]. Traditional Chinese martial arts manifests its profound connection to the Chinese national community consciousness across four dimensions: material culture, institutional culture, behavioral culture, and psychological culture.

2.1. Material cultural forms in traditional martial arts

From the perspective of the four levels of culture, the material cultural layer not only reflects a society's level of productive forces but also reveals the relationship between humans and nature ^[5]. The evolution of various apparatus in traditional ethnic sports reflects the material culture of an era. Martial arts originated from productive activities in primitive society ^[6]. For instance, the origins of Chinese martial arts apparatus can be traced back to primitive society. To survive and obtain resources in an extremely harsh natural environment, primitive humans utilized quartz, sandstone, and bones to craft relatively sharp stone tools and bone implements. These tools were primarily used in life-and-death struggles against wild beasts. Though outwardly simple objects, these tools embody profound cultural heritage and rich spiritual significance, manifesting the Chinese nation's indomitable spirit, relentless self-improvement, and courageous perseverance.

With societal advancement and economic growth, people's material needs became abundantly fulfilled. No longer compelled to battle beasts for survival, humanity began pursuing spiritual enrichment. The swords

and blades seen in modern martial arts performances serve primarily as props for demonstration, having replaced their wartime combat functions. Today, people live in a peaceful, stable, and prosperous society where interpersonal relationships are harmonious, neighborly bonds are friendly, and ethnic groups coexist in mutual support. With more time and energy to savor life, this reflects the Chinese spirit of peace-loving unity. Simultaneously, this has greatly promoted martial arts, deepening global understanding of Chinese culture. These changes in external weapons and equipment stand as tangible evidence of the strengthening of the Chinese national community consciousness.

2.2. Institutional cultural forms in traditional martial arts

From an institutional cultural perspective, throughout the long course of history, China's socio-political structure has undergone continuous iteration and renewal alongside societal development. These rapid changes have served to better adapt to national progress, with traditional martial arts serving as a prime historical testament.

The rules governing traditional martial arts disciplines have evolved alongside shifts in social structures, influenced by multiple factors. During the pre-Qin period of frequent warfare, martial arts primarily served military combat to achieve unification, with warriors bravely fighting enemies on the battlefield to defend their homeland. By the Tang Dynasty, with its vast territory, booming economy, and relative stability, the nation required numerous warriors to defend its borders. Martial arts during this era gave rise to the "Martial Examination System," primarily designed to select and cultivate martial talents for national military development, safeguarding peace and unity. The Song Dynasty witnessed economic prosperity and cultural flourishing. During this era, literature was valued over martial arts, with scholars holding higher status than warriors. Building upon the foundations laid in the Tang Dynasty, "martial studies" emerged. By the Southern Song Dynasty, various martial arts societies had formed, focusing more on martial arts performances for public fitness and entertainment. Today, martial arts have developed into a mature system, with distinct styles and schools emerging from each ethnic group. For instance, the Dai ethnic group's "Dai Quan" (Dai Fist) integrates distinctive Dai cultural elements, featuring its own prescribed routines and movements. Whether in fist techniques or weaponry, it differs from traditional Chinese martial arts. Although martial arts performances vary across ethnic groups, each possesses its own rules and regulations. These regulations reflect the cultural beliefs of different ethnicities, enabling harmonious coexistence through adherence to these institutional norms.

The evolution of these systems is intrinsically linked to the development of their respective eras, manifesting diverse functions and roles while reflecting the institutional culture of their time. Such systems establish norms and standards governing relationships between individuals, between individuals and collectives, and between collectives themselves. Only through these rules can society truly operate according to established principles, enabling members to coexist harmoniously and orderly. This, in turn, fosters unified and stable national development, playing a crucial role in promoting ethnic unity and progress. Today, the recognition of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics by people of all ethnic groups stands as an institutional testament to the consolidation of the Chinese national community consciousness ^[7].

2.3. Behavioral cultural forms in traditional martial arts

From the perspective of behavioral culture, China is a nation composed of 56 ethnic groups. Mutual tolerance

among these diverse ethnicities has fostered distinct regional cultures with unique characteristics. Traditional ethnic culture serves as a vital spiritual bond for the development of traditional ethnic sports. These traditional sports are unique to each ethnic group, possessing their own distinctive cultural elements and performance styles. For instance, the Dai people of Dehong practice “Daiquan,” which is deeply intertwined with local cultural life. Living near the border with Myanmar, the Dai originally trained in Daiquan to serve as instructors for local chieftains and protect their families. During periods of frequent warfare, young men collectively learned “Dai Kung”—which encompasses fist techniques, knife techniques, staff techniques, and spear techniques—to better protect themselves and their families. When conflict arose, the Dai people united to resist invaders, safeguard their kin, and maintain the village’s security. Over time, Dai Kung has continuously evolved through transmission and development, spreading widely. Today, Han Chinese also learn Dai Kung, reflecting cultural integration among different ethnic groups. United together, they have formed a unique local ethnic traditional sport. Nowadays, Dai boxing is performed during traditional Dai festivals like the Dai New Year, Water Splashing Festival, and Outing Festival. It has become an established cultural activity, inseparable from people’s daily cultural lives.

Ethnic traditional sports are rich and diverse in form, originating from people’s productive and daily practices while also serving those very needs. They are the collective creation of all ethnic groups, shaped through mutual exchange and learning that weaves ethnic cultures into traditional sports. This has formed distinctive behavioral cultures, with these traditional sports performances serving as tangible evidence of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

2.4. Mentality and cultural forms in traditional martial arts

From the perspective of mentality and culture, human societal development has shaped distinct spiritual cultures, value systems, and modes of thinking. Ethnic traditional sports embody rich cultural traditions. Take the ethnic traditional sport “Dai Kung Fu” as an example: with its long historical roots traceable to the Tusi period, it has evolved over time into a distinct Dai Kung. In Dai villages, people are occupied with farming during the busy season. In their leisure time, they gather to learn Dai Kung together. Before formal training begins, they first perform ancestral rites, seeking the ancestors’ blessings for smooth learning and peaceful lives. After mastering the art, practitioners vow not to engage in fights outside the village, seeking continued peace. These rites embody the compassionate and tolerant spiritual culture and values of the local people. When danger arises, the entire village maintains strong cohesion and unity, working together to resist external threats. This demonstrates a spirit of ethnic solidarity and perseverance. While Dai boxing was once exclusive to the Dai people, today practitioners from diverse ethnic backgrounds can learn it. This openness and generosity of spirit from the Dai community stand as a cultural testament to fostering a shared sense of community within the Chinese nation.

3. The role of traditional martial arts education in fostering a sense of community for the Chinese nation

3.1. Strengthening cultural identity to solidify the foundations of community ideology

Sports is not only a vital endeavor for national strength but also one that is closely tied to the people’s immediate interests; it plays an irreplaceable role in forging a strong sense of the Chinese national community and promoting interaction, exchange, and integration among all ethnic groups ^[8]. China is a

nation comprising 56 ethnic groups. Through historical evolution and development, each ethnic group has cultivated its distinctive cultural characteristics. The convergence of these diverse cultures has fostered the great development and prosperity of Chinese civilization. Traditional martial arts stand as one of the most representative forms of ethnic traditional sports. They transcend mere physical exercise, embodying the cultural essence of cultivating virtue through martial arts, establishing moral character through martial arts, and refining one's character through martial arts. The profound and extensive traditional culture of the Chinese nation is expressed through ethnic sports activities. By learning traditional martial arts, students enhance their understanding of diverse ethnic cultures, strengthen their national identity, and cultivate cultural confidence.

“Dai Kung Fu” has been passed down to its fourth generation, boasting a century-long history. Over time, it has developed into a stable cultural form. Offering culturally distinctive Dai Kung classes in schools attracts students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This not only sparks learning enthusiasm and motivation but also allows students to explore Dai history, culture, spiritual beliefs, lifestyles, and customs through everything from performance attire to martial movements. Simultaneously, it fosters the preservation and promotion of Dai Kung culture. Through hands-on participation in traditional ethnic sports activities, students can experience the inclusiveness, diversity, and unique charm of Chinese culture. This practice helps preserve traditional Chinese culture, strengthen cultural identity, and thereby enhance ethnic confidence and a sense of belonging. Such cultural confidence plays a positive role in reinforcing the “Four Confidences,” promoting the “Five Identities,” and solidifying the consciousness of the Chinese nation as a community.

3.2. Uniting the national spirit and shaping the core values of the community

Currently, the various ethnic groups in China have largely adopted a pattern of “living in large, mixed communities with smaller, more concentrated settlements”^[9]. Traditional ethnic sports embody rich ethnic cultural traditions. The techniques, essence, and etiquette of traditional martial arts are deeply intertwined with China's outstanding traditional culture. The philosophy of “combining hardness and softness, unifying heaven and humanity” in Tai Chi originates from Daoist thought, while the “fist salute” in martial arts embodies the Confucian Five Constant Virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity. These are inextricably linked to China's traditional culture. Rooted in ethnic traditions, diverse ethnic sports activities embody distinct cultural spirits. Learning these activities involves not only mastering techniques but also understanding their cultural underpinnings. Engaging in uniquely engaging ethnic sports activities enhances students' sense of ethnic identity and fosters cultural recognition, thereby strengthening ethnic cohesion and shaping a shared core of values. The development of ethnic traditional sports requires the collective efforts of all ethnic groups to ensure their preservation.

Within schools, minority students deepen their understanding of their own ethnic culture and strengthen their ethnic identity by participating in their traditional sports and cultural activities. Simultaneously, Han students, through engaging in minority traditional sports and cultural activities, enhance communication with minority groups, cultivate respect and tolerance for diverse ethnic cultures, and contribute to strengthening cohesion among different ethnicities. Conducting these diverse forms of ethnic traditional sports and cultural activities on campus ignites students' pride and sense of belonging to their own ethnic group, enhances their recognition of different ethnic cultures, and further strengthens unity and stability among ethnic groups. It guides students toward establishing correct values and outlooks on life, striving to foster a campus culture

atmosphere of unity, friendship, and harmony, thereby further solidifying the consciousness of the Chinese national community.

3.3. Fostering emotional bonds and building bridges for community interaction

Traditional martial arts education is not merely about learning skills; it also involves studying the etiquette of the martial lineage and inheriting martial virtue. This allows practitioners to establish shared norms and values while learning techniques, creating a spiritual bond between them that facilitates emotional connections.

Martial arts practice emphasizes collective learning, requiring fellow disciples to train together, correct each other, guide one another, and progress collectively. Though practitioners come from diverse regions and ethnicities, with varying lifestyles, habits, and cultural customs, they share a common goal: mastering martial arts. Take the paired sword routine, for instance, this discipline demands high coordination between partners, emphasizing synchronized footwork and movements. Only through seamless collaboration can the performance be executed effectively. During our actual practice sessions, partners constantly correct and assist each other to advance together. Through this process, strangers become familiar, emotional bonds strengthen, and they evolve into friendly partners, building bridges of friendship.

The journey of martial arts training involves many hardships, presenting challenges for every learner. From foundational drills to routine performances, practitioners encounter numerous obstacles and plateaus. Throughout this journey, they support and encourage one another, guided by instructors who lead the group in overcoming difficulties. This collective effort fosters unity, allowing individuals to feel the strength of the team. Nurtured by this shared power, both the individual and the group continuously grow. When mastery is achieved, a profound sense of collective pride and accomplishment emerges. This experience continually strengthens the bonds between us, making the bridge of communication between different ethnic groups more solid.

4. Conclusion

The development of traditional martial arts serves as the foundation for the continuity of Chinese traditional culture, while the evolution of Chinese traditional culture has endowed traditional martial arts with profound cultural significance. As an integral part of Chinese traditional culture, traditional martial arts embody the spirit of the Chinese nation. It is imperative to seize the developmental opportunity presented by traditional sports^[10]. Viewed through the four-tiered framework of culture, traditional Chinese culture consistently centers on a people-oriented philosophy, placing the people at its core and earnestly safeguarding their fundamental interests. We must continuously explore traditional Chinese culture, fully leverage its cohesive and centripetal forces, and use cultural confidence to strengthen cultural identity. This will unite all ethnic groups in jointly preserving the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, further solidifying the consciousness of the Chinese national community, and achieving the great development and prosperity of all ethnic groups.

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