

Study on the Innovative Development Path of Enhancing Cultural Cohesion through Traditional Ethnic Sports in Shaanxi

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Abstract: This study examines the challenges and opportunities for enhancing cultural cohesion through Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports in the modern era, emphasizing the need for innovative development strategies. Combining literature review and field research, it explores the historical significance and state of these cultural practices, while identifying key issues related to their preservation amid political, economic, and social changes. The findings highlight the gradual decline of cultural essence, which hampers cultural confidence and cohesion. To address this, the study proposes the "Four Integrations" approach: aligning with youth interests, school education, nationwide fitness, and new media.

Keywords: Traditional Ethnic Sports; Cultural Cohesion; Sports Culture

1. Introduction

As globalization continues to deepen, the tension between cultural diversity and ethnic identity has become increasingly prominent. In this context, China, with its long history and numerous ethnic groups, faces the critical task of maintaining national unity and enhancing cultural cohesion as part of its development strategy.

Shaanxi, with its unique geographical location and rich ethnic cultural resources, plays an irreplaceable role in the preservation and development of traditional ethnic sports. The three major regions within Shaanxi—Southern Shaanxi, Northern Shaanxi, and the Guanzhong Basin—each embody distinct ethnic cultural characteristics. The traditional ethnic sports activities in these regions not only showcase athletic competition but also serve as a reflection of ethnic spirit and cultural identity.[1]

In contemporary society, with the rapid advancement of information technology and

changes in lifestyle, traditional ethnic sports face the dual challenges of inheritance and development. On one hand, the fast pace of modern life and the diversification of entertainment options have led to the marginalization of some traditional sports. On the other hand, the challenge lies in how to modernize these sports while preserving their ethnic characteristics, making them relevant to today's context, attracting the participation of younger generations, and ultimately fostering cultural identity and enhancing cultural confidence.

2. Theoretical Basis

The intrinsic connection between traditional sports culture and cultural cohesion is both multidimensional and profound. This connection is evident in the formation of cultural identity, the promotion of cross-cultural exchange, the preservation and development of ethnic cultural characteristics, and the education and guidance of values.[2] This relationship not only deepens the sense of identity and belonging among members of a community but also plays a crucial role in promoting social harmony and protecting and fostering cultural diversity. The inheritance and innovation of traditional sports culture can effectively enhance cultural cohesion, laying a solid foundation for the long-term prosperity and stability of the nation.

The role of traditional ethnic sports culture in enhancing the cohesion of Chinese culture is inevitable. It carries the historical memory and cultural spirit of the Chinese nation and plays a significant role in modern society by promoting national unity, strengthening cultural confidence, and fostering social harmony. As society progresses and develops, traditional ethnic sports culture will continue to contribute in its unique way to the prosperity and unity of the Chinese nation, becoming an essential cultural support for realizing the Chinese Dream of national

rejuvenation.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Historical Contributions of Shaanxi's Traditional Ethnic Sports in Enhancing Cultural Cohesion

3.1.1 Shaanxi's Traditional Ethnic Sports Cultural Resources

Shaanxi's unique geographical, political, and economic conditions have given rise to a diverse array of sports activities. The province's three major cultural and geographical regions—Guanzhong Basin, Northern Shaanxi, and Southern Shaanxi—each have their own traditional sports that reflect local characteristics[3]. These sports not only showcase the integration

between regions but also highlight their distinctiveness.

Each region boasts its own signature sports activities: for example, the "Shehuo" performances in Guanzhong Basin, the waist drums in Northern Shaanxi, and dragon boat racing in Southern Shaanxi. These activities not only enhance regional distinctiveness but also contribute uniquely to the diversity of ethnic traditional sports[4]. Together, these varied sports form a solid foundation for Shaanxi's ethnic traditional sports, providing robust support for the preservation and development of local sports culture. The regional distribution and distinctive programs of Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports culture resources are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Traditional Sports Cultural Activities in Shaanxi Province

Region	Sports Activities	Special Projects
Northern Shaanxi	Waist Drum (Ansai Waist Drum, Luochuan Waist Drum), Martial Arts, Dragon Dance, Lion Dance, Stone Lifting, Yangge Dance, Qingming Festival Activities, Mountain Climbing, Horseback Archery, Wrestling, Ice Skating, Nine-Turn Dance, Stilt Walking, Dry Boat Racing, Dragon Lantern Dance, Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs	Waist Drum, Northern Shaanxi Folk Songs
Guanzhong Basin	Martial Arts (Red Fist, Tai Chi), Ritual Archery, Cuju (Ancient Football), Cockfighting, Wrestling, Stone Lock Lifting, Go, Chess, Dragon Lantern Dance, Kite Flying, Stone Throwing	Guanzhong Basin Lantern, Brick Tile Game, Qingming Festival Activities, Mountain Climbing
Southern Shaanxi	Martial Arts, Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, Dragon Boat Racing, Swimming, Lever Resistance, Stone Inscription	Dragon Boat Racing, Swimming

3.1.2 Historical Contributions of Shaanxi's Traditional Ethnic Sports

Research has identified three primary ways in which Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports have historically contributed to strengthening the cohesion of Chinese culture. First, the development of competitive events: Traditional ethnic sports in Shaanxi have been promoted and transformed into competitive sports events. This evolution has not only raised the profile of these sports but also fostered broader appreciation and engagement, thereby contributing to cultural cohesion through organized competition and public participation. Second, the inclusion in the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list: Efforts have been made to include Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports in the ICH list. This recognition aims to preserve and protect these cultural practices as part of the region's intangible cultural heritage, ensuring their continued transmission and safeguarding their historical significance. Finally, the integration into local festivals and celebrations: Traditional ethnic sports are actively incorporated into Shaanxi's diverse festivals and celebrations. Through participation in

these vibrant events, these sports reinforce community bonds and cultural continuity, highlighting their role in local traditions and contributing to the region's overall cultural vibrancy. Promotion of Traditional Ethnic Sports to Competitive Events

Traditional ethnic sports events differ from other sports events in their focus on enhancing intercultural communication and integration among ethnic groups, thereby strengthening the cohesion of Chinese culture. Research shows that the first Shaanxi Provincial Traditional Ethnic Sports Games was held in 1994. As of 2024, eight editions of the Shaanxi Provincial Traditional Ethnic Sports Games have been conducted, each featuring numerous ethnic sports projects from Shaanxi.

In addition, the Shaanxi University Traditional Sports Exchange Conference was first held in 2021 and has successfully hosted two editions by 2024. During these exchange conferences, teams from various Shaanxi universities have showcased a wide range of traditional ethnic sports, including martial arts, archery, pot throwing, dragon dance, diabolo, shuttlecock kicking, wrestling, Tai Chi, waist drumming, and traditional martial arts equipment, among

others.

These events not only highlight the diversity and richness of Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports but also promote their development as competitive disciplines, further integrating them into the broader cultural and sporting landscape. More details are shown in following Table 2.

Table 2. Ethnic Traditional Sports Competitions in Shaanxi

Type	Year	Edition	Main Events
Shaanxi Provincial College Traditional Sports Exchange Conference	2021	1st	Martial Arts, Archery, Pot Throwing, Dragon Dance, Shuttlecock kicking, Ya jia Wrestling, Tai Chi
	2023	2nd	Waist Drum, Martial Arts, Archery, Shuttlecock kicking, Dragon Dance, Wrestling, Traditional Martial Arts Equipment, Ethnic Fitness Dance
Shaanxi Provincial Ethnic Traditional Sports Games	1994	1st	Specific events information unavailable
	2006	4th	Martial Arts, Wrestling, Rope Skipping, Crossbow, Cuju (Ancient Football)
	2010	5th	Martial Arts, Wrestling, Rope Skipping, Cuju, Wooden Shoe Racing, High Foot Racing, Ya jia Wrestling, Crossbow
	2015	6th	Martial Arts, Wrestling, Cuju, High Foot Racing, etc
	2018	7th	Martial Arts, Wrestling (Hui-style Wrestling), Rope Skipping, Cuju, etc
	2023	8th	Cuju, Martial Arts, Wrestling, Rope Skipping, and 6 other competition events with one performance even

3.1.2.1 Application of Traditional Ethnic Sports Culture for Intangible Cultural Heritage Status

Since the establishment of the national intangible cultural heritage list, provinces in Northwest China have also begun to establish their own regional lists and formulate corresponding protection regulations. In 2007, Shaanxi Province announced its first batch of provincial intangible cultural heritage items, totaling 145, including 8 traditional sports, entertainment, and acrobatics projects. Subsequently, Shaanxi released a second batch with 1 item, and the third and fourth batches each included 4 items, bringing the total to 465 items across four batches of provincial intangible cultural heritage.

Among these listed items, 17 are traditional ethnic and folk sports, accounting for 3.7% of the total[5,6]. This inclusion underscores the importance of preserving and protecting traditional ethnic sports as part of Shaanxi's rich cultural heritage. More details are shown in following Table 3.

Table 3. Shaanxi Province's Traditional Sports in the Provincial-level Intangible Cultural Heritage List

Batch	Number	Heritage Items
First Batch	8	Hong Fist Drum (Chengcheng County, Weinan City), Laoyangge of Luochuan (Luochuan County, Yan'an City), Dayangge of Yanchuan (Yanchuan County, Yan'an City), Laoyangge of Huangling (Huangling County, Yan'an City), Northern Shaanxi Yangge (Suide County, Yulin City), Jingbian Running Donkey (Jingbian County, Yulin City), Laoyangge of Hengshan (Hengshan County, Yulin City), and Hong Fist (Shaanxi Hong Fist Culture Research Association)
Second Batch	1	Huashan Fist (Huayin City)
Third Batch	4	Ganshuifang High-altitude Lion Dance (Huxian County), Li-style Tai Chi (Weicheng District, Xianyang City), Wu Dong's Bottomless Swing (Fuping County), Nanshe Swing (Heyang County)
Fourth Batch	4	Zhaobao Tai Chi (Huaxian County, Shaanxi), Fancy Jump Rope (Xi'an City), Lu-style White Ape Tongbei Fist (Xincheng District, Xi'an City), Shaomo Fist (Xi'an City)

3.1.2.2 Integration of Traditional Ethnic Sports Culture into Local Festival Activities

Integrating traditional ethnic sports culture into local festival celebrations serves not only as a means to commemorate traditions but also as a display of cultural diversity, with positive impacts on individuals, communities, and society at large. Festivals provide a platform to maintain and promote the uniqueness of ethnic sports culture, ensuring these traditions are preserved across generations.

During these festivities, the younger generation has the opportunity to engage with and observe their cultural heritage, fostering a deeper appreciation and sense of identity with their ethnic culture. This participation not only enhances their cultural awareness but also adds enjoyment and vitality to the festival celebrations, thus supporting the ongoing transmission of cultural heritage. More details are shown in following Table 4.

Table 4. Traditional Sports Activities During Festivals in Shaanxi

Major Festivals	Main Sports Activities
Spring Festival	Dragon Dance, Lion Dance, Waist Drum, Gong and Drum
Qingming Festival	Spring Outing, Hiking, Kite Flying, Swing, Shuttlecock Kicking, Tug of War
Dragon Boat Festival	Dragon Boat Racing, Archery, Fishing

3.2 Current Status of Enhancing Cultural Cohesion through Shaanxi's Traditional Ethnic Sports

Research indicates that the development of traditional ethnic sports culture in Shaanxi

currently faces several challenges. These issues include outdated and singular development forms, which fail to resonate emotionally and psychologically with younger generations, and difficulties in preserving, organizing, and transmitting these traditions[7].

If these challenges are not effectively addressed, the development of ethnic traditional sports culture will remain weak, and consequently, it will not be able to leverage its potential to enhance cultural cohesion. The ability of traditional sports to contribute to cultural cohesion depends on overcoming these obstacles and revitalizing the cultural practices to engage contemporary audiences more effectively.

3.3 Challenges Facing the Development of Traditional Ethnic Sports Culture in Shaanxi

The development of traditional ethnic sports culture in Shaanxi currently faces several significant challenges:

3.3.1 Impact of New Lifestyles

With the continuous evolution of lifestyles, some traditional sports activities are no longer meeting the needs of modern individuals and are gradually disappearing from public view. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced against the backdrop of the information revolution and globalization, which are profoundly transforming the socio-economic structure and cultural environment in Shaanxi. These changes affect not only technology but also local residents' ways of work, living habits, thought processes, and even value systems[8]. Such fundamental shifts pose substantial challenges to the preservation and transmission of traditional ethnic sports and cultural spaces.

3.3.2 Risks of Cultural Erosion

As society progresses from an agricultural to an industrial and information age, many young people migrate for work, bringing various influences of modern society back with them. Under the pressure of modern cultural norms, traditional culture is increasingly absorbed and assimilated, leading to the gradual disappearance of ethnic traditional sports from people's lives and memories.[9] A direct consequence of this cultural erosion is a loss of confidence in ethnic traditional sports culture among local people. In some cases, this can

even lead to feelings of inferiority and reluctance to learn and pass on cultural heritage. The Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage of sports faces the risk of ongoing erosion under the impact of dominant cultures.

3.3.3 Impact of Modern Sports Culture

In the field of sports, the ongoing globalization of the modern Olympic movement has made contemporary sports culture the dominant force in global sports. The strong development of modern sports culture, driven by globalization, has impacted and marginalized traditional ethnic sports culture. The vigorous development of modern competitive sports contrasts sharply with the challenges faced by Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports. As one respondent (28-year-old corporate employee, female) noted during an interview: "I prefer youthful and lively sports, like jogging and tennis, and often enjoy gym workouts." Another respondent (20-year-old university student, male) said: "Our school's physical education classes include some ethnic sports, like Tai Chi, but the main events in school sports meetings are running, hurdling, shot put, and high jump. I also enjoy watching road cycling competitions on sports TV programs." The Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage of sports faces the risk of being increasingly marginalized under the impact of modern sports culture.

3.3.4 Constraints Due to Breaks in Transmission

The transmission of intangible cultural heritage in sports primarily relies on oral teaching and family lineage. These legacies are cultural products developed over long periods of living and labor. However, with the acceleration of urbanization and the impact of contemporary popular culture, the power of traditional culture is gradually waning. The older generation of transmitters is passing away, while the new generation has not been adequately trained. Additionally, many sports intangible cultural heritages have not been documented in written form, which easily leads to breaks in the transmission chain. As one respondent (45-year-old Zhao Bao Tai Chi practitioner, female) mentioned: "I have been learning Tai Chi for 12 years. My master has only five disciples, including me, and all are middle-aged or older. I am the youngest. Young people today don't like Tai Chi and prefer more exciting sports." The lack of

cultural protection awareness, insufficient cultural identity, inadequate measures for protecting transmitters, and a shortage of professional protection personnel all directly affect the development and innovation of traditional ethnic sports. Shaanxi's intangible cultural heritage of sports faces the risk of transmission breaks.

3.4 Contemporary Paths for Enhancing Cultural Cohesion Through Shaanxi's Traditional Ethnic Sports

3.4.1 Aligning with Youth Preferences

As a crucial part of intangible cultural heritage, the transmission and development of traditional ethnic sports face numerous challenges, particularly concerning the engagement of the younger generation. Since youth are the future of cultural inheritance, their interests and preferences directly impact the vitality of traditional sports projects. Therefore, aligning Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports with the preferences of young people is a key strategy for ensuring their sustained development.

For instance, integrating traditional sports with modern popular elements, or using technologies such as e-sports and virtual reality, can enhance the appeal and interactivity of traditional sports. Additionally, increasing media promotion and educational guidance is essential to raise youth awareness of the value of ethnic traditional sports. By leveraging social media, campus activities, and public education platforms, we can communicate the cultural significance and health benefits of traditional sports, thereby stimulating youth interest and participation. Establishing incentive mechanisms for youth participation in traditional sports can also encourage their active involvement in the preservation and development of these cultural practices.

3.4.2 Integrating with School Sports

School sports are vital for fostering students' interest in physical activity, enhancing their physical fitness, and transmitting sports culture. Integrating traditional ethnic sports into school sports curricula can enrich the content of physical education while promoting students' understanding and appreciation of traditional culture[10]. There are three main pathways for this integration: First, local education departments and schools should collaborate to

develop curricula that incorporate ethnic traditional sports elements, providing students with opportunities to learn and experience these activities. Second, schools should offer practical opportunities for students to engage with traditional sports through physical education classes, extracurricular activities, and sports competitions. This hands-on approach helps students learn and master traditional sports skills. Finally, schools need to train and recruit teachers with knowledge and skills in traditional ethnic sports and provide the necessary teaching resources and facilities to support the instruction and practice of these sports.

3.4.3 Integration with National Fitness Programs

The national fitness movement is a key strategy for promoting health in China and improving the physical fitness and quality of life of its citizens. Integrating Shaanxi's traditional ethnic sports with national fitness programs can enrich the content of these programs while promoting the popularization and development of traditional sports. For example: Local governments and sports departments should include ethnic traditional sports in national fitness initiatives, supporting these activities through policy and resource allocation to encourage public participation. And combining traditional sports with modern fitness concepts can innovate practice methods, making them more relevant to contemporary health needs and lifestyles. For instance, promoting Tai Chi fitness and wellness concepts aligns traditional practices with modern health trends.

3.4.4 Integration with New Media

The rapid development of new media provides new platforms and methods for cultural dissemination and promotion. Integrating traditional ethnic sports with new media marketing can significantly enhance their visibility and influence, attracting more attention and participation. Strategies include: First, use local social media, video platforms, and mobile apps to release information and content related to traditional sports, increasing their online visibility. Second, develop a range of engaging and varied content, such as short videos, live streams, and interactive games, tailored to new media's characteristics and user preferences to capture user interest. Finally, partner with influential new media

personalities and online celebrities to promote traditional sports, leveraging their reach to expand the audience and enhance the impact of these cultural practices.

4. Conclusions

Shaanxi, a region rich in the long history of the Chinese nation, holds its traditional ethnic sports as a reflection of cultural diversity and a transmission of national spirit. However, these invaluable cultural heritages are facing unprecedented challenges due to the impact of new lifestyles, trends in cultural erosion, the influence of modern sports culture, and constraints in transmission. The traditional sports culture's capacity to enhance cultural cohesion is at risk, with the foundational cultural elements being undermined.

In this context, the study proposes a series of practical solutions. By innovating the forms and methods of participation in traditional sports, we can stimulate the enthusiasm of the younger generation, strengthening their sense of identity and belonging to their ethnic culture. Integrating traditional sports into school sports curricula serves as a crucial platform for cultivating the next generation, enriching students' sports experiences and instilling a sense of pride in their ethnic sports heritage.

Furthermore, through policy support and widespread education, we can increase public understanding and participation in traditional ethnic sports, thereby enhancing their vitality. Utilizing new media platforms for promotion and innovation in content formats, along with collaboration with opinion leaders and the establishment of communities and platforms, will effectively attract more attention and participation, facilitating the spread and development of ethnic traditional sports.

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