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## **A Study on Factors Influencing the Inheritance Dilemma of Traditional Minority Sports Culture**

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### **Abstract**

The inheritance dilemma of traditional minority sports culture in the New Era of Chinese Socialism was investigated using a field survey and literature review, and its influencing factors were explored. The results demonstrated that the inheritance of traditional minority sports culture is affected by various factors, such as a diversified ecological environment, socioecological trend, and a lack of cultural consciousness: (1) economization of natural ecological environment and homogenization of cultural inheritance space in the minority regions; (2) diversification of cultural, ecological environment, marginalization of traditional minority sports culture; (3) absence of successors to traditional culture; (4) imbalance in cultural inheritance methods. The traditional minority sports culture faces a severe identity crisis and a lack of cultural consciousness.

**Keywords:** minority; traditional sports culture; inheritance dilemma; influencing factors

## **Introduction**

The traditional minority sports culture reflects the historical, spiritual, and material civilization of an ethnic minority and embodies distinct era, ethnic, and artistic traits. <sup>[1]</sup> It also depicts the life, customs, wisdom, and pursuits of each Chinese ethnic minority and vividly recalls their long-lasting, alive, and civilized history <sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, the inheritance and development of traditional minority sports culture are critical for both a nation and its ethnic minorities. <sup>[3]</sup> By using traditional minority sports as a vehicle, traditional minority sports culture serves as a general representation of the educational knowledge, athletic connections, and practical skills of ethnic minorities. <sup>[4]</sup> In January 2018, the General Administration of Sport of China and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission issued the "Guiding Opinions on Further Strengthening the Work of Traditional Minority Sports." The document stated that "Traditional minority sports are an important part of China's sports industry, are a valuable cultural heritage of China, and are beloved by the masses of all ethnic groups. In addition to contributing to the inheritance and development of outstanding traditional culture, they significantly promote interactions among various ethnicities, enhance physical well-being, and enrich the spiritual and cultural lives of all ethnic groups." <sup>[5]</sup> In a report issued in October 2022, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stated, "To build a modern socialist country in all respects, we must develop a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and be more confident in our culture. Efforts should be made to uphold socialism, rally public support, foster a new generation with sound values and ethics, develop Chinese culture, and build a positive image of China to build a socialist cultural power." How to inherit and develop traditional minority sports that embody the essence of the Chinese spirit and wisdom, erect a beacon of recognition for Chinese traditional minority sports culture, elevate its influence, as well as safeguard its root by taking advantage of the national strategy of vigorously developing excellent traditional Chinese culture has become a topic of great interest.

The formation and development of each minority culture possess distinct characteristics, and traditional minority sports culture emerges due to the daily life of ethnic minorities in specific regional environments,

conditions, and cultural contexts. Traditional sports in minority regions play a crucial role in developing the sports industry and inheriting traditional minority culture in China as a valuable cultural heritage [6]. For instance, the "Whipping Spring Ox" of the Bulang and Hani ethnic groups shows the ancient agricultural economy culture; bow shooting, horse racing, and wrestling reflect the nomadic culture of the Mongols [7]. These traditional minority sports initially evolved from hunting and daily activities [8]. Traditional minority sports are intertwined with the cultural evolution of clans and ethnic groups, and traditional sports programs mirror various ethnic and cultural characteristics. However, in the contemporary era, changes in the production and lifestyles of ethnic minorities have resulted in a narrowing space for distinctive traditional minority sports, thus posing challenges to the inheritance of traditional minority sports culture. Previous studies on "traditional minority sports culture + inheritance" focused on changes in inheritance contexts [9], developmental perspectives [10], inheritance mechanisms [11], and innovative minority sports education [12], but there is limited research on the inheritance and development challenges of traditional minority sports culture in the modern context. This study examines the factors that inhibit the inheritance of traditional minority sports culture and its dilemma. Moreover, a development path in the new era was established so that traditional minority sports culture could play a novel role in the era of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## **1 Influences of Diversified Ecological Environment**

### **1.1 Economization of Natural Ecological Environment and Homogenization of Cultural Inheritance Space**

The origins of the traditional minority sports culture can be traced to the creative manifestations of native regions in sports and recreation [13]. These sports activities have been practiced over extended periods and possess distinct historical traditions and local ethnic characteristics [14]. They embody the unique historical and cultural accumulation of their respective ethnic groups and exhibit clear ecological and cultural influences. The natural ecological environment deeply influences the formation and development of minority sports culture [15].

Most traditional minority sports originated from labor, wars, funerals, sacrifices, and religions, and their development was directly influenced by their native natural environment, unique historical and cultural environments, as well as the geological location of the minority region. For instance, the Mongols, who are nomads living on grasslands, have practiced various horse sports, such as horse racing, equestrianism, and horse lasso; the Oroqens, who reside in forests and mountains, have practiced unique hunting-related sports, such as Xiaba (archery), shooting, Talimue (stick-drawing). In recent years, rapid infrastructure construction in minority regions has been observed, resulting in an expansive economic expansion pattern. Thus, the ecological environment is overburdened, and the natural ecological environment has been drastically changing, posing a grave threat to the sustainable development of minority sports cultures.

The traditional minority sports culture holds a unique position in the daily life of nomads and plays a significant role in improving the growth of youth, entertaining audiences, and maintaining public health [16]. The Mongols are nomads living on grasslands in the northern part of China and live a nomadic life; the oxen and

horses and the vast grasslands provide ample resources and space for developing traditional Mongolian sports. To enhance their ability to confront beasts, the Mongols frequently practiced Mongolian wrestling and archery; most Mongol children learned to ride and raise horses from a young age and practice horse riding and horse racing. Nevertheless, urbanization leads to the reduced area of grassland available; exploitation of mineral resources leads to damage to grassland vegetation; rapidly increasing population and livestock leads to damaged ecological balance as the grassland does not have enough time to recover its vegetation. Hence, traditional Mongolian sports lost the grassland ecological environment upon which their survival and development depend, and the native unrestricted and open playing field hinders the development of horse racing, Mongolian wrestling, and other sports.

The origin and evolution of traditional minority sports are largely rooted in rural communities. However, urbanization and modern urban development processes have often perceived traditional villages as obstacles to urbanization and economic targets for demolition and transformation. The urbanization rate in China has increased from 17.9% in 1978 to 58.5% in 2017 <sup>[17]</sup>. Urbanization has razed temples, ancient buildings with distinct ethnic or cultural characteristics, and old courtyards in ethnic villages to build modern economic facilities, destroying the sustainable development soil and the natural living space of traditional minority sports culture. The emphasis on economic benefits and standard urban construction has resulted in the homogenization of urban spaces, ultimately obscuring the regional diversity of traditional minority sports culture. Consequently, some traditional sports culture remains only in the memories of certain generations.

## **1.2 Diversification of Cultural Ecological Environment and Marginalization of Traditional Minority Sports Culture**

The cultural ecology of ethnic minorities consists of political systems, economic development, social organizations, value systems, and cultural practices. Various ethnic minorities have developed distinctive native cultural environments due to their unique histories and living conditions. The inheritance and development of traditional minority sports are closely related to the development of minority culture <sup>[18]</sup>. The minority of cultural ecological environment, social and cultural atmosphere, economic activities, and religious history influence the development of traditional sports <sup>[19]</sup>. Ethnic minorities and minority regions are experiencing new characteristics of development as China's economy enters a new normal; the ethnic or cultural ecological environment is constantly changing, and the cultural ecology is diverse, posing challenges to the cultural foundation space that supports the survival and development of traditional minority sports culture. The era of artificial intelligence has brought about rapid advancement and numerous life changes, posing a threat to the inheritance and development of the intangible cultural heritage of minority sports <sup>[20]</sup>. Traditional sports are deeply embedded in the daily lives of ethnic minorities, and their survival and development require a cultural ecological environment. However, with the advancement of new industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization, the production and lifestyles of people have changed, causing traditional minority sports programs to lose their previous "living" cultural space.

The relationship between traditional minority sports culture and traditional labor practices has changed due to the transformation from an agricultural and hunting society to an information and industrial society <sup>[21]</sup>. For instance, the Nanai, who primarily resides in Heilongjiang Province, China, have been practicing “Spear Fishing” for hundreds of years, using long wooden spears with two or three pointed ends to catch fish swimming in the water. In their leisure time, the Nanai engage in competitions and activities, such as "Wurigong" cultural and sports gatherings and other traditional sports games, to improve their fishing abilities and pass on their knowledge to future generations. “Spear Fishing” is a traditional minority sports activity that evolved from the long-term fishing process of the Nanai, and it has a strong combative function. In recent years, the Nanai transitioned from a traditional agricultural economy to modern agriculture, the mode of production of fishing changed, the fishing tools evolved, and the Nanai started to use fishing boats and nets. Thus, the traditional “Spear Fishing” activity gradually loses its advantageous position in fishing. With the loss of the native cultural environment of “Spear Fishing,” the cultural function of "Spear Fishing " has degraded, its occurrence has decreased, and its societal role has shifted, resulting in its eventual extinction.

The “ecological environment” is the “core issue” in inheriting traditional minority sports culture. Some traditional minority sports cultures have lost value and cultural function due to changes in their cultural ecological environment. As Western sports culture and urban culture aggressively infiltrate rural areas, the agricultural civilization that depends on traditional economic development modes has suffered, the traditional sports culture and cultural ecology have been disrupted, and the traditional minority sports culture has become homogenized and marginalized. To endure and thrive in a society dominated by Western sports culture, traditional minority sports cultures have "proactively" adapted to Western sports culture standards. This Procrustean way has resulted in the loss of the integrity and ethnic uniqueness of traditional minority sports culture, leading to the gradual disappearance of authentic traditional minority sports culture, e.g., the “Axi Tiaoyue” activity of the Yi ethnic group in Keyi Village, Mile County, Yunnan Province. As a ritual for bestowing blessings and paying homage to ancestors, the Axi people of the Yi ethnic group performed the "Axi Tiaoyue" activity in their religious ceremonies during traditional festivals. But now, the activity has detached itself from its religious and sacrificial cultural roots. Instead, it has been adapted to serve economic purposes. By incorporating elements of Western sports culture and altering dance movements, the activity has transformed into a form of entertainment for tourism, losing its original cultural significance and becoming more performative. These nuanced modifications are an inevitable consequence of reconstructing the cultural ecological environment.

## **2 Influences of Socioecological Trend**

### **2.1 Absence of Successors in Traditional Culture**

In protecting and inheriting traditional minority sports, the most crucial and invaluable element is “people.” People are the foundation and soul, the “core subject” and “important carrier” of cultural inheritance. The participants of traditional minority sports are primarily members of the respective ethnic groups, often dominated

by farmers. Nevertheless, the elderly individuals who understand the cultural roots are gradually aging, whereas successors to traditional minority sports culture have been absent due to population migration. As a result, traditional sports culture is facing a severe challenge.

Minority regions generally lag in economic and social development and have low industrial development. With the acceleration of new urbanization in these minority regions, traditional agricultural production modes are no longer suitable for modern society, leading to changes in the production modes and lifestyles of the regional masses. Many young locals abandon their communities in search of employment; as a result, the demographic structure of villages has been altered, villages have begun to shrink, and ethnic villages are experiencing "hollowing out." As the organizing groups of traditional minority sports activities become dispersed, the main force in the participation and inheritance of the traditional minority sports activities dissolves. Many minority villages cannot engage in folklore and folk activities because the number of people participating in traditional sports activities in minority villages is insufficient, and the performances and competitions at traditional ethnic festivals are lifeless. Consequently, the frequency of the activities is diminishing. This disparity in culturally participating subjects exacerbates the cultural defect, posing significant challenges to inheriting traditional minority sports culture in China.

Due to the absence of successors and the difficulty of intergenerational transmission, traditional minority sports are in danger of extinction as a result of the loss of inheritance subjects. For instance, the "Axi Tiaoyue" successors of the Yi ethnic group are typical "Bimo" who indulge in religious ritual affairs as their profession. As organizers and inheritors of religious activities such as "Axi Tiaoyue," "Bimo" possess extensive knowledge of Yi culture, history, and technology and significantly contribute to the inheritance and growth of "Axi Tiaoyue." "Bimo" possess hereditary succession and master-apprentice inheritance and requires two to eight years of study [22]. However, as society evolves, young Bimo practitioners lack sufficient economic income and life security to engage in inheritance activities. Hence, youngsters prefer working as migrant workers instead of being successors, as being a successor entails low income. This scarcity of inheritors ultimately results in a lack of successors for traditional minority sports culture.

## **2.2 Imbalance in Cultural Inheritance Methods**

The inheritance methods of folk culture include ethnic inheritance, social inheritance, collective inheritance, and divine inheritance, whereas the main inheritance methods of the traditional minority sports culture are collective inheritance and social inheritance.

Social inheritance is a form of culture that depends on the living community composed of individuals in the cultural model field to inherit and spread, such as the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and other festivals. Ethnic and folk festivals with distinctive ethnic characteristics are one of the main inheritance channels for the social inheritance of traditional minority sports culture, and they provide a favorable spatial environment for the development of traditional minority sports. The traditional minority sports culture can be inherited during the competition and performance process of ethnic and folk festivals; however, the cultural inheritance requires many participant groups and an ambiance of spontaneous ethnic culture inheritance. For example, the "San Yue

San” festival of the Li ethnic group in Hainan is a significant manifestation of their culture, marked as their most important folk festival. The “San Yue San” festival is held on the third day of the third month of the lunar calendar every year. Both young and old Li people would participate in this activity to express their worship of nature, mourn ancestors, yearn for love, and pray for happiness and a bumper grain harvest in the next year. The Li people would slaughter pigs and set up banquets during this folk festival, beat gongs and drums and perform ritual dances in their settlements, and engage in a series of cultural activities such as wrestling, swinging, shooting, tug-of-war, and other traditional minority sports competitions, as well as ethnic song and dance performance. However, as fewer and fewer Li youths participate in this festival, the "San Yue San" festival, which has distinctive ethnic characteristics, has progressively lost its vitality. Since the people's awareness of the inheritance of the ethnic culture has not reached the level of conscious inheritance, the social inheritance of the culture has lost its vitality. The “San Yue San” festival has transformed into a tourist attraction to foster economic growth as economic development progresses. The development of sports tourism is an essential way to foster minority cultures, and its growth will inevitably impact the minority cultural ecology. [23] After a long period of inheritance, it has become the shell of a custom or ritual, and its spiritual values and cultural connotations have gradually been blurred and forgotten.

Collective inheritance is a form of cultural inheritance by a group of individuals residing in a particular cultural region, such as dragon boat racing, lion dance, and other activities. [24] During the collective inheritance of traditional minority sports, the local government has issued few regulations and guiding documents on cultural inheritance to conduct a few minority sports competitions, resulting in insufficient efforts in the promotion of minority culture. Minority institutions have limited sports-related curricula, and some lack a minority culture atmosphere. Some commercial organizations alienate the traditional minority sports culture in cultural transmission due to their commercial interests. Nowadays, many traditional minority sports culture relies on tourism development for their transmission and growth. However, in this process, the ecological fragility of these traditional minority sports is often ignored in favor of adapting to Western sports culture and improving economic benefits. [25] Some minority projects are restructured and infused with trendy elements to appeal to tourists, drastically altering the substance of minority sports culture. This leads to the loss of its core cultural essence, evident detachment from its inherent attributes, and a loss of authenticity, resulting in some authentic traditional minority sports cultures losing their ethnic distinctiveness and deviating from developmental principles. The purpose of cultural protection is “inheritance,” and the prerequisite of inheritance is “protection,” which needs to be effectively integrated to ensure the sustainability of traditional minority sports culture.

### **3 Identity Crisis and Absence of Cultural Consciousness in Traditional Minority Sports Culture**

Cultural consciousness is a term introduced by Hsiao-tung Fei, and it indicates his expectation of Chinese individuals who lack knowledge of their own culture. It implies that the inhabitants of a certain environment have "self-knowledge" of their culture, comprehending its origin, formation process, characteristics, and

development trend <sup>[26]</sup>. Inheriting and developing the traditional minority sports culture not only implies a high degree of recognition and high confidence for the traditional minority sports culture but also reflects a high degree of self-awareness regarding the inheritance and development of the traditional minority sports culture built on cultural self-confidence <sup>[27]</sup>. Due to certain historical events, many ethnic minorities have incorrect cultural cognition of their minority culture, leading to their lack of self-confidence and an identity crisis. These ethnic minorities lack knowledge of the historical context and cultural value of traditional sports, such as “Doctrine of Mean and Harmony,” “Great Harmony,” and “The Unity of Body and Spirit,” which are the essence of traditional minority sports culture. However, minority populations do not recognize these valued concepts, which are scarce and essential. Because of the decline of the awareness function of traditional culture, people have a weakening sense of identification with the traditional minority sports culture, which further diminishes the function of traditional minority sports culture and makes festival ceremonies more fragmented. According to researchers, “the sense of ceremony in traditional folk activities is now largely unknown, and the cultural space of festivals lacks the fill-up of ceremonies” <sup>[28]</sup>. Specifically, the cultural connotations of folk festivals have been replaced by simple eating, drinking, and pleasure-seeking. For instance, “Qingming Festival” has become a relaxing “Spring Outing Festival,” and “Dragon Boat Festival” has become the “Zongzi Festival.” As a result, the traditional sports programs attached to these festivals lack a cultural space, diminishing the sense of identification with traditional minority sports culture.

General Secretary Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized "cultural confidence" at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, regarding it as a fundamental, profound, and enduring factor in the development of a nation and its ethnic minorities. With the economic and social development, the native soil of culture has changed, and the younger generation, growing up in different environments with diverse educational experiences and social exposures, possesses varying cognition toward their ethnic culture. A lack of confidence in their own culture has led to a misinterpretation of their culture. In development and inheritance, inappropriate modifications have distorted minority programs and cultural deviations. Interviews with Tujia youngsters revealed that their understanding of the origins, cultural background, and historical development of their traditional sports culture is vague, and clear comprehension is lacking. They are reluctant to become inheritors of traditional sports culture, are gradually distancing themselves from these cultural traditions, and rarely participate actively in traditional minority sports programs. Their enthusiasm for participating in these programs is low. Also, they have a vague understanding of the connotations and are unaware of their ethnic culture. As a result, they have little interest and enthusiasm in participating in the traditional minority sports programs, resulting in a low degree and frequency of participation. The traditional Tujia minority sports culture faces an identity crisis, resulting in a lack of ethnic pride and responsibility among young people. For instance, they prefer Western sports programs such as yoga, taekwondo, and basketball for fitness activities rather than traditional sports programs such as hand waving dance, bamboo rattle ball, and stilt walking.

As Western and urban cultures invade rural areas, traditional minority sports culture is being homogenized and marginalized, and people's psychological preferences have changed dramatically, resulting in a severe crisis of identity for China's traditional minority sports culture. With the emergence of novel Western sports culture and urban culture closely aligned with the times, many youngsters view traditional cultural values as



incompatible with contemporary society and consider Western civilization brought about by the globalization tide to be fashionable while perceiving their ethnic culture as outdated. This has caused a lack of psychological identification with traditional minority sports culture and an identity crisis of ethnic culture. The distinctive traditional minority sports culture is being increasingly squeezed and dissolved, and the sense of identification is gradually being diluted and undermined. The youth are unaware of the splendor of their own culture, which is one of the cultural marvels of China. Furthermore, they have not yet realized that, as members of their ethnic group, it is their responsibility and obligation to propagate and promote their ethnic culture, ensuring that descendants can still comprehend it, thereby preserving the diversity of Chinese culture.

## **4 Conclusion**

The inheritance of traditional minority sports culture is a dynamic and evolving process closely tied to the ecological environment, socioecological trends, and cultural awareness. As the natural ecological environment of ethnic minorities changes, the traditional minority sports culture has lost its native environment and soil, the cultural inheritance space has been homogenized, and the ecological unity of cultural inheritance has been disrupted. As a result, some native traditional minority sports cultures are merely preserved in the memories of a single generation, with the diversified development of the cultural and ecological environment. Traditional minority sports culture gradually loses its former “living” cultural foundation space, the cultural function is degraded, and the culture is marginalized. The transformation of traditional minority sports culture according to Western sports culture standards has led to the loss of its ethnic uniqueness and integrity. To inherit and develop traditional minority sports culture, active participation, and proactive learning are required. Minority regions exhibited changes in economic development patterns, and villages with minority characteristics showed signs of "hollowing out" due to the socioecological trend. Furthermore, the dispersed distribution of organizing members and successors of traditional minority sports culture leads to insufficient cultural inheritors and imbalanced internal inheritance, and the successor is considered a profession with limited financial prospects. All these contribute to the widespread phenomenon of “no successors or successors with shallow knowledge” in the inheritance of traditional minority sports culture. The lack of cultural awareness among ethnic minorities results in the gradual disintegration and extinction of minority sports traditions. Traditional minority sports culture will become a "cultural relic" if the current trend continues. Currently, the inheritance and survival of minority sports cultures face challenges and complexities.

To address these challenges in the inheritance of traditional minority sports, we must thoroughly understand the policies and regulations issued by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government to protect and

inherit traditional minority sports culture. We should earnestly implement the “Opinions on the implementation of the Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture Inheritance and Development Project” released by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council of China in January 2017 and the “Guiding Opinions on Further Strengthening the Work of Traditional Minority Sports” issued by the General Administration of Sport of China and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission in January 2018. We need to adapt to the requirements of the new era, accelerate the rescue, exploration, and protection of traditional minority sports culture, promote the prosperous development of traditional minority sports, advance the development of minority health, and promote the construction of a sports power. We should put significant efforts into developing traditional minority sports culture, integrating the inheritance of traditional minority sports culture with new rural reconstruction and poverty alleviation efforts, excavating distinguishing sports resources, driving local economic development, and aligning with the cultural policy of the “Rural Revitalization Strategy.” We should “integrate the cultural landscapes of ethnic culture, sports culture, and tourism services to achieve unified and symbiotic societal development” [29]. Efforts should be made to encourage the creation of distinctive sports projects, facilitate integrated industrial growth, actively promote the establishment of communities with distinctive traditional minority sports, and build tourist-themed towns. We should actively promote the international dissemination of traditional minority sports culture by utilizing the opportunity given by the Belt and Road Initiative to increase the influence of China's traditional minority sports culture.

Traditional minority sports culture has played a crucial role in economic and social development and stability. In order to accomplish the "creative transformation and innovative development" of traditional minority sports culture, limiting factors must be eliminated. In addition to preserving the essence of traditional minority sports culture, efforts should be made to continuously supplement, expand, and refine the traditional minority sports culture, ensuring that its fundamental cultural genes align with modern culture, aesthetics, and interests, thus making it conducive to promoting the spirit of both the Chinese people and the times. Increased efforts should be made to promote and educate traditional minority sports culture by utilizing new media to expand its influence and recognition and by integrating exceptional traditional minority sports culture into education to ensure that it „Lives On and Passed Down.”

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