

# Cultural Authenticity of Ethnic Traditional Sports in the Yuan River Basin

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore the authenticity of traditional ethnic sports in the Yuanshui River Basin and analyze their role in cultural inheritance and social development. Through field investigations and interviews on various ethnic traditional sports in the Yuanshui River Basin, relevant data and examples were collected to reveal the significance and value of these traditional sports in modern society. The research finds that traditional ethnic sports are not only an important component of ethnic culture but also an effective way to enhance ethnic identity and cohesion. By conducting a detailed analysis of traditional sports such as dragon boat racing, ethnic dances, and traditional martial arts, this paper discusses their importance in protecting and inheriting ethnic culture. Meanwhile, the study also points out the impact of modernization on these traditional sports, including the threats to their authenticity posed by commercialization and urbanization. To protect the traditional ethnic sports in the Yuanshui River Basin, it is recommended to strengthen policy support, promote community participation and cultural exchange, ensuring the sustainable development and inheritance of this cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** Yuanshui River Basin, Traditional ethnic sports, Authenticity, Cultural inheritance, Social development.

## 1. Historical Origins of Traditional Ethnic Sports in the Yuanshui River Basin

### 1.1 Historical Evolution and Cultural Inheritance

The historical evolution and cultural inheritance of traditional ethnic sports in the Yuanshui River Basin possess a profound regional cultural background, reflecting the historical development and cultural integration of multiple ethnic groups in the area. The Yuanshui River Basin is one of China's major water systems, with several ethnic groups living within its basin, including the Tujia, Miao, and Han peoples. Throughout history, these ethnic groups have developed unique traditional sports activities, which serve both as carriers of cultural inheritance and as essential components of social life.

As early as ancient times, the traditional ethnic sports activities in the Yuan River basin had already taken shape. Historical records show that the Tujia people's "spinning top" and the Miao people's "flower mountain climbing" have been popular for hundreds of years. These activities not only possess an entertaining nature but also contain rich ethnic culture. For instance, the Tujia spinning top activity is closely related to their harvest rituals, reflecting reverence for nature and a love for life.

With historical development, these traditional sports activities evolved continuously, integrating elements from different ethnic groups and forming unique local characteristics.

In terms of cultural inheritance, traditional sports activities in the Yuan River basin have been passed down through oral tradition and master-apprentice teaching. Elder athletes and coaches actively impart techniques and experiences to the younger generation in daily life, ensuring the continuation of traditional sports. Community organizations and festival events also serve as important platforms where competitions and performances enhance ethnic pride and cultural identity.

Amid modernization, traditional sports in the Yuan River basin face numerous challenges, such as cultural loss due to

urbanization and waning interest among youth in traditional activities. Therefore, exploring and researching the historical evolution and cultural inheritance of traditional sports not only helps preserve these valuable intangible cultural heritages but also provides crucial theoretical foundations and practical guidance for their future development.

### 1.2 Main Forms of Traditional Sports Activities

The main forms of ethnic traditional sports activities in the Yuan River basin are diverse, encompassing rich cultural connotations and unique regional characteristics. These activities are not only an integral part of the daily lives of the people in the region but also reflect ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

In the Yuan River basin, traditional sports activities mainly include dragon boat racing, spinning tops, wrestling, archery, and folk dances. Dragon boat racing is the most representative traditional sports activity in the Yuan River basin, typically held during the Dragon Boat Festival, with a long history and broad public participation. Each year's competition attracts large audiences, with participating teams coming not only from the locality but also including ethnic groups from other regions, demonstrating inter-regional cultural exchange.

Spinning tops, as a traditional folk game, are deeply loved by local children and teenagers. During competitions, participants combine skill and strength to spin the top both quickly and steadily. Spinning tops is not just a competitive activity; it is also an important way to cultivate teamwork spirit among children.

Wrestling holds an important position in the traditional sports of the Yuan River basin, as a form of physical combat competition often held during festivals and fairs. Particularly, wrestling among the Miao and Tujia ethnic groups incorporates unique cultural elements, becoming a significant platform for showcasing ethnic customs. This activity not only tests participants' strength and skills but also conveys the sporting spirit of respecting opponents and striving courageously.

Archery also has a long history in the Yuan River basin, once being an essential skill for ancient hunting and military training. Modern archery activities mainly focus on competition and performance, attracting many young people to participate. Through archery, participants not only exercise their bodies but also learn concentration and patience.

Folk dance is another important traditional sports activity in the Yuan River basin, with rich performance and participation aspects. Dance is usually closely related to festival celebrations and serves as an important way to express ethnic culture and emotions. Through dance, participants can showcase local characteristics and ethnic styles, enhancing community cohesion.

These traditional sports activities play a vital role in the life of the Yuan River basin, enriching the local cultural life and providing crucial support for ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Each activity form contains profound historical background and cultural value, reflecting the wisdom and creativity of the people in the Yuan River basin.

### **1.3 Analysis of Ethnic Characteristics and Regional Differences**

The Yuan River basin is one of the important cultural regions in China, encompassing a rich variety of ethnic traditional sports. These sports activities exhibit significant characteristics and regional differences among different ethnic groups. The traditional sports of each ethnic group not only reflect their unique cultural backgrounds and historical inheritance but are also closely related to their lifestyles, natural environments, and social structures.

Firstly, traditional sports activities of the Miao ethnic group, such as "stilt walking" and "bullfighting," demonstrate their unique cultural identity. These activities are usually combined with important occasions like festivals and weddings, enhancing ethnic cohesion. Stilt walking is not only a display of skill but also a way for the Miao people to show courage and wisdom during important festivals. Bullfighting, on the other hand, is a contest of strength and skill, conveying respect for nature and animals.

Traditional sports activities of the Tujia ethnic group, such as "top spinning" and "bamboo pole dance," reflect the importance they place on unity and cooperation in life. Top spinning is not only a competitive sport but also a symbol of family and community members participating together during festive times. The bamboo pole dance showcases the Tujia people's grasp of rhythm and coordination, typically performed during harvest celebrations, reflecting reverence for nature and love for life.

Among other ethnic groups in the Yuan River basin, such as the Dong and Yao peoples, traditional sports activities also have their own unique characteristics. The Dong's "Grand Song of the Dong" combines dance and sports, showcasing its unique musical culture, while the Yao's "Yao Dance" expresses worship of nature and yearning for a harmonious life through dance postures. These activities not only reflect the cultural identity of the ethnic groups but also form unique regional characteristics across different historical periods and

social backgrounds.

The formation of regional differences is closely related to the geographical environment. The mountainous areas, rivers, and climatic conditions of the Yuan River basin influence the lifestyles of various ethnic groups, thereby affecting the forms and content of traditional sports. Ethnic groups in mountainous areas tend to focus more on displays of strength and skill, while those near water areas may place greater emphasis on flexibility and coordination.

In addition, cultural exchange and integration have also impacted the characteristics of traditional sports. Historically, there has been frequent exchange and interaction among the ethnic groups in the Yuan River basin, promoting mutual learning and integration of traditional sports among different ethnic groups and forming a unique regional cultural phenomenon. The sports activities of different ethnic groups, while influencing each other, retain their distinct features while also demonstrating diversity and inclusiveness.

Therefore, the characteristics and regional differences of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin are both an accumulation of historical culture and a reflection of contemporary social change. These traditional sports activities play an important role in the lives of various ethnic groups, enriching the connotations and expressions of regional culture, and are worthy of in-depth study and appreciation.

## **2. Research on the Authenticity Status of Ethnic Traditional Sports in the Yuan River Basin**

### **2.1 Modern Transformation of Traditional Sports Activities**

The ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin have undergone significant changes in the process of modernization. This transformation is not only reflected in the forms and content of sports activities but also mirrors the profound transition of the socio-cultural environment. Traditional sports activities were once an essential part of local community life, with participants enhancing physical fitness and promoting spiritual and cultural exchanges through various forms of sports. With societal modernization, especially the acceleration of urbanization, the ways and content of participation in traditional sports activities have undergone profound changes.

First, the number of participants in traditional sports events is gradually decreasing, as many young people are too busy with studies and work to engage in these activities. Traditional group activities such as cockfighting and dragon boat races often require large numbers of participants, but the pace of modern life has caused these activities to gradually lose participants. Moreover, many traditional projects have been marginalized due to a lack of promotion methods adapted to modern society. In some areas, the frequency of holding traditional sports activities has significantly decreased, leading to challenges in cultural inheritance.

Moreover, modern concepts have influenced the value

systems and aesthetic orientations of traditional sports activities. In modern society, individualism and competitive spirit gradually replace the collectivism and harmony emphasized in traditional sports. This change affects how traditional sports events are organized and the motivations for participation; many traditional events, under the trend of becoming more competitive, gradually deviate from their original cultural significance.

Finally, with the advancement of globalization, the influence of foreign cultures has also impacted traditional sports activities in the Yuan River basin. Many international sports like basketball and soccer are gradually becoming popular among the youth, weakening the influence of traditional events. This phenomenon is not just about the replacement of sports but also reflects changes in cultural identity. Against this backdrop, how to maintain the characteristics of traditional sports while introducing modern elements to attract more participants becomes a crucial issue for the development of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin.

In summary, ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin have experienced a reduction in participation, changes in dissemination methods, shifts in values, and impacts from foreign cultures during the modernization process. These changes pose challenges to the authenticity of traditional sports and provide new directions for their preservation and development.

## 2.2 The Impact of Commercialization on Authenticity

Ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin are profoundly affected by commercialization in modern society, specifically manifested in cultural transformation, changes in participation methods, and the reshaping of values. While the commercialization process offers new development opportunities for traditional sports, it also poses challenges to their authenticity.

The commercialization of traditional sports activities is first reflected in event organization and promotion. Many traditional sports events are incorporated into commercial competitions, gaining financial support through sponsorships, media broadcasts, and other means.

Secondly, commercialization also influences how traditional sports activities are participated in. In the past, participants in traditional sports were mostly local residents who spontaneously organized activities in daily life to maintain cultural inheritance. However, after commercialization, the composition of participants has changed, with the addition of outside tourists and professional athletes causing a deviation in the original intent and nature of the activities. Commercial packaging shifts participants' motives from cultural inheritance to consumption experience; although the number of participants increases, actual understanding and recognition of traditional culture may weaken.

Moreover, commercialization has, to some extent, led to deviations in the development direction of traditional sports. To cater to market demands, some traditional sports events are adapted and innovated, with original rules and formats being adjusted. Such "adaptive" changes might attract more

audiences but pose potential threats to the authenticity of traditional sports. For instance, in the case of traditional folk dances, choreography might incorporate modern elements for visual effect, causing them to lose their original local characteristics and cultural depth.

At the same time, the impact of commercialization is also reflected in the perception and evaluation of traditional sports. In the process of commercialization, traditional sports are often regarded as "commodities" and their value is redefined. The evaluation criteria by participants, audiences, and society gradually shift towards economic benefits and market response, rather than cultural inheritance and social function. This shift marginalizes the social value of traditional sports and decreases cultural identity.

In response to the impact of commercialization on authenticity, effective strategies must be adopted to ensure that the ethnic traditional sports of the Yuan River basin maintain their cultural core during the modernization process. Strengthening the promotion and education of traditional sports culture and enhancing the public's understanding and respect for the essence of traditional sports are key to protecting authenticity. At the same time, encouraging participation from all sectors of society in the protection and inheritance of traditional sports will create synergy and foster a favorable environment where traditional sports can adapt to commercial development while retaining their cultural authenticity.

## 2.3 Protection and Challenges in Social Transformation

The ethnic traditional sports of the Yuan River basin face numerous protections and challenges during the social transformation process. With economic development and the acceleration of urbanization, the living environment and social functions of traditional sports activities have undergone significant changes. Traditional sports are not only an important part of national culture but also a manifestation of social interaction and community cohesion. In the face of modernization impacts, protecting the authenticity of traditional sports becomes particularly important.

On one hand, social transformation brings changes in lifestyle, reducing the participation of the younger generation in traditional sports activities. For example, in some rural areas, traditional dragon boat races and folk martial arts performances are gradually being replaced by modern sports events, with young people more inclined to participate in modern sports like soccer and basketball. This shift leads to the gradual aging of the participant base in traditional sports activities, posing a risk of generational gaps in transmission.

On the other hand, the commercial development of traditional sports also poses a challenge to their authenticity. With the growth of the cultural industry, many traditional sports activities are packaged as tourism projects to meet market demands. While this process increases the visibility and economic returns of traditional sports, it also causes these activities to lose their cultural essence and original social functions. For instance, in some places, traditional dragon boat races have become overly commercialized due to tourism promotion, with rules and formats altered to attract tourists,

ultimately deviating from their initial expression of ethnic culture.

Protecting the authenticity of traditional sports requires multi-faceted efforts. The government should strengthen policy support for ethnic traditional sports, encouraging communities and intangible cultural heritage inheritance through legislation and financial investment. At the same time, active participation from communities is crucial. Communities can organize promotional activities for traditional sports to attract young people and raise awareness and appreciation of traditional sports through education and publicity.

In summary, the ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin face both opportunities for preservation and challenges during social transformation. Only through comprehensive protective measures can the sustainable development of traditional sports be achieved amidst modernization, ensuring the inheritance of their cultural value and social functions.

### **3. Protection and Development Strategies for the Authenticity of Ethnic Traditional Sports in the Yuan River Basin**

#### **3.1 Government Policy Support and Community Participation**

The protection and development of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin require government policy support and active community participation. The government plays a crucial role in this process by formulating relevant policies to guide and promote the inheritance and development of traditional sports. Effective policies should include not only financial investment but also cover areas such as publicity, education, and training for traditional sports activities.

Community involvement is equally vital. As bearers of traditional culture, communities can better preserve and develop traditional sports by organizing events, festivals, and celebrations. Communities can establish relevant sports associations or clubs, regularly conduct training and exchange activities, and encourage residents to participate in learning and practicing traditional sports. For example, in some villages of the Yuan River basin, regularly held folk culture festivals not only showcase the charm of traditional sports but also enhance villagers' unity and cohesion.

Another form of community participation is recruiting and training volunteers to encourage residents to become promoters and interpreters of traditional sports. Active volunteer involvement can spread traditional sports culture more widely, attract interest from tourists and youth, and foster positive interaction.

Collaboration between the government and communities should also focus on information sharing and resource integration. Establishing effective communication mechanisms allows communities to stay informed about government policy updates while providing feedback on difficulties and suggestions encountered during implementation. This two-way interaction helps improve the relevance and effectiveness of policies, ensuring the

authenticity of traditional sports is sustained and developed in modern society.

#### **3.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Pathways**

The protection pathways for intangible cultural heritage are particularly important for the inheritance and development of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River basin. First, establishing a sound legal and regulatory system is the foundation for protecting intangible cultural heritage. Relevant policies should clearly define the scope of intangible cultural heritage, set protection standards and measures, to ensure the legality and sustainability of traditional sports activities.

Secondly, carrying out education and publicity activities is an important way to enhance social awareness. Through schools, communities, and cultural institutions, knowledge of intangible cultural heritage is popularized, strengthening the public's sense of identity and belonging to traditional sports. Organizing various lectures, exhibitions, and competitions attracts the younger generation to participate, allowing them to experience the charm of traditional sports firsthand, thereby stimulating their awareness of protection. Encourage community participation in the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The community is the carrier of culture, and the active participation of residents will play a crucial role in the protection of traditional sports. This can be achieved by forming folk art groups and regularly holding traditional sports activities, enhancing the cohesion and participation of community members. This bottom-up protection method not only helps the inheritance of traditional sports but also enhances the cultural confidence of the community.

In addition, utilizing modern technological means for digital recording and dissemination is also an effective protection path. Through video, audio, and virtual reality technologies, relevant materials of traditional sports are recorded and preserved, and online courses and interactive platforms are created so that more people can access and understand traditional sports. This digital protection method can break the limitations of time and space, allowing traditional culture to spread over a wider range. Establishing a diversified cooperation mechanism to promote collaboration among governments, academia, non-governmental organizations, and enterprises. The integration of resources from all parties can form a synergy to promote the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage. By jointly organizing cultural activities and co-developing related products, the influence and market competitiveness of traditional sports can be improved while ensuring their authenticity is maintained.

In summary, through the establishment of laws and regulations, strengthening of educational promotion, active participation of communities, application of technological means, and construction of diversified cooperation mechanisms, the authenticity of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River Basin will be effectively protected and inherited.

#### **3.3 Cultural Tourism and Authenticity Balancing Strategy**

In the Yuan River Basin, the development of cultural tourism provides new opportunities for the authenticity protection of ethnic traditional sports, but it also brings challenges. Therefore, establishing an effective balancing strategy is particularly important.

The rise of cultural tourism has allowed traditional sports activities in the Yuan River Basin to be showcased to a wider audience. For example, traditional sports such as Miao wrestling and Dong's song-treading hall have become important elements attracting tourists in tourism activities. These activities not only display the local ethnic culture but also bring economic benefits to the community, improving residents' living standards. However, commercial promotion may lead to the performative and commodified nature of traditional sports activities, affecting their original cultural connotations and authenticity.

To address this challenge, a series of balanced strategies must be adopted. First, formulate relevant policies to ensure the core values of ethnic traditional sports are fully respected and protected during the development of cultural tourism. The government can encourage community participation and organize traditional sports activities to ensure their authenticity and involvement in tourism. For instance, establish a "Traditional Sports Experience Day" allowing tourists to experience the charm of traditional culture while enhancing their understanding and respect for local culture.

Second, initiate the protection of intangible cultural heritage and establish a sound inheritance mechanism for traditional sports activities. By systematically organizing and recording traditional skills, a standardized inheritance system can be formed to ensure the vitality of traditional sports in modern society. This approach not only preserves the authenticity of traditional sports but also strengthens the younger generation's sense of identity with traditional culture through education and training.

Finally, enhance the quality of cultural tourism by emphasizing cultural depth rather than mere commercial interests. Through cultural explanations and interactive experiences, tourists can deeply understand the significance of traditional sports while enjoying cultural tourism. Combining local characteristics to create a cultural tourism brand can attract tourists and promote the sustainable development of traditional sports.

Integrating the above strategies can achieve a positive interaction between cultural tourism and the authenticity of ethnic traditional sports in the Yuan River Basin, ensuring the continuous vitality of traditional culture in modern society.

### Fund Project

1) Research on Strategies for Building an Information Database of Traditional Ethnic Sports Projects in Hunan; Key Project of Huaihua University, Project No.: HHVY2022-01;

2) Research on Excavation, Organization, and Digital Preservation of Ethnic Traditional Projects in the Yuan River Basin, Hunan Provincial Social Science Fund Project. Project

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