

# **Exploration on the Living Inheritance Path of National Traditional Sports from the Perspective of New Liberal Arts**

## **-- Based on the Yao Dragon Dance in Jianghua County as an Example**

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### **Abstract**

Under the background of the construction of new liberal arts, the living inheritance and innovation of national traditional sports has become an important issue to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent traditional culture. This paper takes the Yao dragon dance in Jianghua Yao Autonomous County of Hunan Province as the research object, using the methods of field investigation, literature research and participatory observation, combined with the multidisciplinary perspectives of anthropology, communication and sociology, systematically discusses the inheritance status, value and dilemma of Yao dragon dance. The study found that the current Yao dragon dance is facing challenges such as separation of disciplines, disconnection of practice and lagging communication. Based on the concept of "integration, innovation and empowerment" of new liberal arts, this paper proposes to construct an interdisciplinary education system, promote the benign interaction of "inheritance-economy," and introduce innovative paths such as digital technology protection and dissemination, aiming to realize the transformation from "skill inheritance" to "cultural education," and provide theoretical support and practical reference for the living inheritance of traditional ethnic sports.

### **Keywords**

**National Traditional Sports; New Liberal Arts; Living Inheritance.**

### **1. Introduction**

Since the release of relevant documents on the construction of new liberal arts, its concept has been fully put into practice. As an important field of new liberal arts construction, traditional ethnic sports not only provide vivid localized cases for interdisciplinary integration, but also become a characteristic path to inherit Chinese culture and serve local development through its profound cultural heritage and various practical forms. [1]. In this context, further inheritance and innovation of traditional ethnic sports has become a new academic proposition. This paper takes the dragon dance of Yao ethnic in Jianghua County as the starting point, combined with anthropology, [2] communication, [3] sociology, [4] and other interdisciplinary new liberal arts construction concepts, to make a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of its inheritance dilemma and put forward an innovative path, so as to provide an important theoretical and practical basis for the living inheritance and development of traditional ethnic sports in China.

## 2. Research Object and Method

### 2.1. Research Object

The site of field investigation in this study is located in Jianghua Yao Autonomous County, Hunan Province, which is one of the most concentrated areas of Yao population in China. As a precious national traditional sports project, dragon dance of Yao ethnic carries profound historical and cultural heritage and collective memory of ethnic groups[5]. In Shengang Village, Dalupu Town, dragon dance and Yaojia boxing have a history of more than 500 years, which has become an important symbol of local Pingdi Yao cultural identity. This comprehensive cultural practice, which integrates sports, art and rituals, embodies the wisdom and aesthetic pursuit of the Yao people 's production and life [6], and is a rare ' living text ' for studying Yao culture.

### 2.2. Research Method

In order to ensure the depth and breadth of the research, this study will adopt diversified research methods : field research method, literature research method, and participation observation method. Through in-depth participatory observation and in-depth interviews with typical villages and schools in Jianghua County, we will obtain first-hand information on the practice of dragon dance inheritance and understand its real survival context. Secondly, the relevant personnel of the research group are also fortunate to be the main part of the local dragon dance activities during the internship process. Secondly, after the practice, the local archives, non-legacy declaration texts and academic works are systematically sorted out to establish historical and theoretical support for the analysis of the status quo. The inheritance path of Yao dragon dance is examined and explored in a multi-dimensional and holistic way.

**Table 1.** Types of dragon dance in Yao Autonomous County

| Name of dragon dance  | The main distribution area                                 | Main activity time                                               | Core Features                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Human dragon          | Jianghua Yao Autonomous County, Hunan                      | Spring Festival, Panlong Festival and other major festivals      | The dragon shape is directly composed of the human body, showing the spirit of unity and cooperation.                                                    |
| Yuanxiao Fried Dragon | Mashi Town, Jianghua Yao Autonomous County, Hunan Province | The fifteenth day of the first lunar month                       | Dragon dancers shuttle in the fire of firecrackers, and the scene is thrilling. It is a provincial intangible cultural heritage project.                 |
| Incense dragon        | Hunan Jianghua, Guangxi Jinxiu, etc.                       | Spring Festival, Lantern Festival or characteristic blessing day | The dragon body is full of lit incense fires, mostly performing at night, and the light and shadow are gorgeous, used to pray for the wind and rain.     |
| Grass Dragon Dance    | Ningyuan County, Hunan Province                            | Traditional festivals such as Mid-Autumn Festival                | Originated from the Yuan Dynasty, it reflects the rice farming culture and is mainly performed at night. It is a municipal intangible cultural heritage. |

## 3. The Fit Mechanism between the New Liberal Arts and the Living Inheritance of National Traditional Sports

### 3.1. The Shift from Instrumental Inheritance to Cultural Education

The traditional inheritance model often narrows it into a tool for maintaining rituals, competitive performances or tourism development. Although it retains the shell of skills, it

leads to the ' hollowing out ' of the cultural core. With its concept of " integration, innovation and empowerment, " the new liberal arts has broken this limitation [7] and promoted the inheritance practice to move towards " cultural education " with humanistic spirit and value shaping as the core. Specifically, through value remodeling, this turn interprets the national history and aesthetic password contained in dragon dance with the help of interdisciplinary methods, and upgrades the inheritance goal from physical fitness to cultural identity. Through content reconstruction, digital technology is used to create immersive cultural situations, and theme integration courses are developed to enable learners to change from learning ' technical modules ' to understanding ' cultural integrity ' ; through the innovation of methods, a four-in-one collaborative co-creation model of ' scholar-inheritor-community-student ' is constructed to encourage learners to make creative transformation on the basis of deep understanding of cultural origin. This shift aims to transcend the single goal of cultivating " skill inheritors, " transform dragon dance inheritance into a comprehensive education process of cultivating aesthetic perception, collaborative spirit, historical speculation and cultural self-confidence, and shape a " complete person " with the unity of knowledge, emotion, will and action and the feelings of home and country[8].

### **3.2. The Path Construction of Interdisciplinary Empowerment Living Inheritance**

The concept of cross-integration advocated by the new liberal arts provides a new methodology for solving the dilemmas faced by traditional ethnic sports in the contemporary era, such as the shrinking of the main body of inheritance, the change of cultural context and the single mode of inheritance[9]. Using sports biomechanics to analyze the scientific rationality of traditional techniques, using digital technology to establish ' digital archives ' for preservation and visual display, using new media communication rules to reshape its narrative and presentation, or developing its creative industry value from the perspective of cultural economics. This process is not a simple superposition of disciplines, but through the ' empowerment ' of multidisciplinary knowledge, from the aspects of value interpretation, technical support, dissemination and promotion, and format innovation, it acts on all aspects of inheritance practice. It promotes the traditional ethnic sports to shift from the " empirical inheritance " that mainly relies on oral teaching in the past to the " systematic inheritance " project with the participation of multiple subjects and the collection of various resources, and finally constructs a sustainable living inheritance ecosystem with internal and external linkage, dynamic and static combination, which is the vivid embodiment of the deep integration of the new liberal arts concept and the development needs of traditional ethnic sports and the synergistic effect.

### **3.3. Anchoring the Educational Goal of Serving the National Cultural Strategy and Social Development.**

Nowadays, China has entered a period of paying the most attention to Chinese excellent traditional culture for a hundred years [10]. The construction of new liberal arts aims to break through the barriers of traditional disciplines. Its fundamental task is to cultivate new talents with cultural consciousness, national feelings and global vision through interdisciplinary integration and innovation, so as to respond to the proposition of the times and serve the national strategy. This orientation is in line with the inherent requirements of the living inheritance of national traditional sports. Living inheritance is by no means a static preservation of museums. Its vitality lies in integrating into modern life and serving people 's all-round development and social progress. It needs to be systematically 'interpreted ' , creatively 'transformed 'and innovatively 'developed ' . What the new liberal arts provides is such an interdisciplinary ' methodology toolbox ' - a multidisciplinary perspective of sports science, anthropology, sociology, communication and digital technology [11], which can sublimate the national traditional sports from ' local skills ' to ' living educational resources '

and ' cultural capital ' carrying the Chinese cultural gene. The new liberal arts are endowed with ' reason ', and the national traditional sports are inherited with ' body '. The two jointly respond to the fundamental issue of ' who to train, how to train and for whom to train ', and jointly serve the grand goal of enhancing the national cultural soft power and promoting the all-round development of human beings.

#### **4. The Value and Contemporary Challenges of the Living Inheritance of National Traditional Sports - - Taking the Dragon Dance of Yao Ethnic in Jianghua County as an Example**

##### **4.1. The Discipline is Fragmented and Lacks Systematic Research.**

In the process of long-term practice, scholars have not paid much attention to or even neglected the research objects such as ethnic minority sports, folk sports, folk sports and health qigong, which leads to insufficient and unbalanced development of their disciplines, and the foundation of their disciplines is too narrow and unstable[12]. Secondly, most of the folklore and sports scholars are confined to their own discipline paradigm, and fail to effectively respond to the interdisciplinary integration concept advocated by the contemporary new liberal arts, which leads to the lack of systematic cognition of this cultural practice. Specifically, at the level of cultural interpretation, the existing research mostly stays on the surface description of ritual performance, failing to profoundly reveal its deep symbolic system and spiritual core as the internal identity carrier of specific ethnic groups such as the Yao ethnic. This fragmented research status not only causes the disconnection between theory and practice, but also makes the creative transformation and innovative development of dragon dance culture in contemporary society face the dual dilemma of insufficient theoretical support and weak practical guidance.

##### **4.2. Practice Out of Touch, Out of the Modern Living Environment**

In the context of the rapid changes in the current society, the inheritance practice of the Yao dragon dance in Jianghua County is facing the core dilemma of being seriously out of touch with the modern living environment. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects. ( 1 ) The fault and single way of inheritance. The original family and community oral teaching mode is difficult to sustain in the wave of urbanization. A large number of young people go out to work, and their sense of identity with local traditional culture is reduced, resulting in the lack of successors of exquisite dragon dance skills. ( 2 ) The cultural living space is greatly squeezed. The folk context such as festivals and sacrifices that dragon dance originally depends on is shrinking under the impact of modern entertainment methods and fast-paced urban life, making it transform from a cultural practice that integrates into life to a ' cultural specimen ' that is only displayed on certain occasions and loses daily emotional connection. ( 3 ) Insufficient support of education system. Dragon dance fails to systematically enter the physical education or aesthetic education curriculum of local schools. The younger generation lacks channels of cognition and experience, and cultural identity is difficult to cultivate. These problems together lead to the fact that although Yao dragon dance is ' protected ', it seems to be suspended outside modern life and fails to realize the ' living ' inheritance in the true sense.

##### **4.3. Propagation Lag, the Traditional Framework of Curing a Single**

The dragon dance of Yao ethnic in Jianghua is faced with the double dilemma of narrow channel and old narrative mode. On the one hand, its communication channels are highly dependent on offline festivals and fixed-point performances, failing to effectively use digital media to build a broad and continuous communication network. This lag leads to its influence basically limited to the local cultural circle, and it is difficult to reach a wider range of the public, especially the young group, which is rapidly marginalized in the era of information explosion. On the other

hand, there is an obvious solidification phenomenon in its communication content and narrative framework. The performance form has remained unchanged for many years, and the narrative discourse often stays in the labelled display of 'ancient' and 'mysterious', which is seriously out of touch with the aesthetic taste, values and emotional connection points of contemporary society. This single and static communication framework fails to deeply explore and translate the spiritual characteristics, philosophical thoughts and contemporary values of the Yao ethnic contained in the dragon dance activities, making its cultural expression flat and alienated. In the end, the lagging communication power and the solidified narrative framework are intertwined, which jointly aggravates the cognitive gap between the Yao dragon dance and the modern society. Although it is a cultural treasure, it is difficult to form an effective topic and resonance in the modern public opinion field, which further restricts the social basis of its living inheritance.

## **5. From the Perspective of New Liberal Arts, the Innovative Path of Living Inheritance of Dragon Dance of Yao Ethnic in Jianghua County**

### **5.1. Educational Innovation: Building a Diversified and Integrated Interdisciplinary Inheritance System**

Under the guidance of the new liberal arts concept, Jianghua County has integrated the Yao dragon dance system into the local education system through the "intangible cultural heritage into the campus" project, realizing the transformation from a single technology teaching to the overall cultural inheritance. The introduction of traditional sports such as dragon dance into the construction of campus culture has formed a characteristic pattern of "one school, one product." For example, in Tuojiang Town No.1 Primary School, the school not only adapted the national intangible cultural heritage 'Yao ethnic long drum dance' into a big break activity, but also opened characteristic courses and associations such as 'grass dance dragon'. This way of perfectly integrating traditional skills with modern sports enables students to subtly accept the influence of national culture while exercising. It is worth mentioning that the school has introduced the long-drum dance of the Yao ethnic into the campus for nearly 18 years, which reflects the long-term and systematic nature of education inheritance. Secondly, in the vocational education, the clothing specialty is creatively constructed, and the national 'intangible cultural heritage 'Yao brocade, 'Yao costume', 'Yao embroidery' and other courses are set up. This model provides talent support for the combination of traditional crafts and modern design, and also provides technical support for the production and innovation of dragon dance props. According to statistics, more than 20 kinds of Yao products designed by the school's clothing specialty are exported to more than 20 provinces and cities such as Guangdong and Beijing, driving more than 1000 people to engage in Yao brocade, generating more than 40 million yuan a year. This successful case provides valuable experience for the industrialization development of dragon dance culture.

### **5.2. Cultural Innovation: Building a Benign Closed Loop of 'Inheritance-economy' Inclusiveness**

Living inheritance emphasizes the inclusiveness of culture [13] and the times. [14] By breaking the traditional gender and age restrictions, dragon dance culture has become a force to promote community harmony and progress. 2024 'Longteng Yaodu · Electric Light' Dragon and Lion Lantern Festival, women's participation in dragon dance activities is a prominent feature of cultural innovation in Jianghua County. In traditional society, dragon dance is mostly dominated by men, and women have little opportunity to participate. However, with the change of social concept and the improvement of women's status, women in Jianghua County began to actively participate in the inheritance and innovation of dragon dance activities. These women

's dragon dance teams not only inherited the traditional skills, but also made bold innovations in performance forms, music accompaniment, clothing props, etc., forming a unique female dragon dance style. Through the continuous holding of these activities, not only the popularity of Jianghua Yao dragon dance has been improved, but also the development of local catering, accommodation, transportation and other related industries has been promoted, forming good economic benefits. In addition, Jianghua County also draws on the development model of the combination of ' learning, research, production and application ' of the School of Physical Education and Health Sciences of Yangtze Normal University. The ' bamboo polo ' project excavated and improved by the college once represented Chongqing to participate in the national traditional sports meeting of ethnic minorities and won the first prize. The relevant theoretical results provide a reference for promoting the integration of sports culture and rural tourism in ethnic areas. This mode of combining academic research, personnel training, product development and social services provides an example for the innovative development of Jianghua Yao dragon dance.

### **5.3. Scientific and Technological Innovation: Building Digital Technology to Empower Dragon Dance Culture Protection and Dissemination**

Facing the challenges and opportunities of the information age, Jianghua County can actively explore the application of digital technology in the protection and dissemination of Yao dragon dance. In 2023, Li Siqi and others put forward the scheme of digital collection and polymorphic protection in the " Research on Digital Collection and Polymorphic Protection of Jianghua Yao Dragon Fighting Project, " aiming at comprehensively preserving the details and essence of dragon dance skills through modern information technology[15]. This innovative approach represents an important shift in the traditional sports protection model - from static recording to dynamic preservation, from a single medium to multi-dimensional presentation. In the specific case, in 2019, the villagers in Shengang Village, Dalupu Town self-raised funds to shoot the micro-film ' Shengang Gulong ', mainly by the children of the village in Jianghua No.1 Middle School, Jianghua Vocational Secondary School, Dalupu Middle School and Xingjia Complete Primary School as actors. This film vividly shows the ancient dragon dance skills of Yaoshan for thousands of years, with the theme of showing young people 's inspirational, bloody youth, and persistence in the ancient dragon culture. The actors involved in the filming are the oldest 16 years old, the youngest 7 years old, with an average age of 13 years old, mostly left-behind children. Through the interactive communication of social media platforms, it can also attract more young audiences to pay attention to the Yao dragon dance and inject new vitality into the inheritance work. Digital collection not only focuses on the recording of dragon dance technical movements, but also covers all-round information such as production process, ritual procedures, music accompaniment, and oral narrative. At the same time, through virtual reality, augmented reality and other technologies, an immersive dragon dance experience environment can be created, so that the audience can transcend time and space constraints and feel the unique charm of the Yao dragon dance at close range.

## **6. Conclusion**

The construction of new liberal arts provides concept guidance and method support for the living inheritance of national traditional sports. Taking the dragon dance of Yao ethnic in Jianghua County as an example, this paper systematically analyzes the inheritance dilemma faced by it in contemporary society, and puts forward an innovative path from the three dimensions of education, culture and science and technology : through the construction of a diversified and integrated interdisciplinary inheritance system, the transformation from skill teaching to cultural education is realized. By promoting gender inclusion and industrial integration, a benign closed loop of inheritance and development is formed ; with the help of

digital technology, the dynamic preservation and wide dissemination of dragon dance culture are realized. These paths not only help the Yao dragon dance to rejuvenate in modern society, but also provide replicable experience for the living inheritance of other ethnic traditional sports. In the future, we should further deepen interdisciplinary cooperation, strengthen policy support and social participation, and promote traditional ethnic sports to play a greater role in serving national cultural strategies, promoting social harmony and all-round development of people.

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