

Development Strategy of Chinese Dragon-lion Sport under the Perspective of World Intangible Heritage—Comparative Study with Taekwondo’s Heritage Application

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Abstract

This study explores the characteristics, current development, and comparisons of Dragon-lion Sport and Taekwondo from the perspective of world intangible cultural heritage, and then proposes their future development strategies. It utilizes methods such as literature review and logical analysis and has accessed nearly 10 years of relevant literature through CNKI for collation and induction. By analyzing and comparing the popularity, economy, and cultural characteristics of Dragon-lion Sport and Taekwondo, and investigating their development status in China and internationally, the future development strategies for these two sports have been proposed. Under the perspective of world intangible heritage, the future development of Chinese Dragon-lion Sport should be promoted through emerging media domestically and abroad, enhancing the recognition of dragon and lion culture. The government and relevant departments should increase funding and cooperate with ASEAN regions to jointly promote the international organization and collaboration of Dragon-lion Sport, considering joint applications with ASEAN countries for world intangible cultural heritage registration. The future development of Taekwondo should focus on the pursuit of traditional martial arts history and cultural values, highlighting Taekwondo’s ability to enhance South Korean social cohesion, promote national unity and social stability, and facilitate the joint registration of world intangible cultural heritage between South Korea and North Korea.

1. Introduction

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Dragon-lion Sport, also known as “Dragon and Lion Dance”, is a traditional cultural activity of the Chinese nation that originated in ancient China. It serves as a carrier and manifestation of Chinese culture, an essential part of traditional Chinese sports, and a spontaneous, entertaining, and casual folk traditional sports activity. It is also an excellent folk art. Dragon-lion Sport can be divided into Northern Lion and Southern Lion. The Northern Lion is more popular in the north of the Yangtze River, with its birthplace in Hebei province, represented by the Xushui Lion Dance. The Southern Lion, also known as “Dancing Lion,” features a more vigorous appearance, emphasizes martial arts, dance, music, and other elements, and is prevalent in South China, Southeast Asia, and overseas communities. Dragon-lion Sport has spread worldwide, and wherever there is a gathering of Chinese communities, you can find various forms of this traditional sport, creating a joyful and harmonious atmosphere and becoming a beloved traditional sports event. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam in the ASEAN region cherish the Dragon-lion Sport, and their lion dance culture is closely related to China’s traditional culture, making it one of the representative projects of our country’s traditional sports going international.

Dragon-lion Sport, as one of China’s national intangible cultural heritage, showcases the strong cultural foundation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, under the perspective of world intangible cultural heritage, how to find the development space of Dragon-lion Sport in the combination of tradition and modernity, nation and world, sports and industry, is an issue that cannot be ignored in studying the prospects of Chinese traditional sports (Jiang Dai, 2019). Against this background, Taekwondo, as a traditional Korean martial art, is also making continuous efforts to be included in UNESCO’s list of intangible cultural heritage. Taekwondo is a traditional Korean martial art, known for its fluid, dance-like movements, gentle contact techniques, and unique jumping kicks. This discipline represents a rich and diverse cultural tradition and the comprehensive embodiment of physical and mental skills in Korea, sharing similarities with China’s Dragon-lion Sport.

Based on this, this study attempts to explore the characteristics, current development, and comparisons of Dragon-lion Sport and Taekwondo from the perspective of world intangible cultural heritage, and then proposes their future development strategies.

2. Research Method

Based on the needs of the study, this paper conducts a search through CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) using keywords such as “Dragon-lion Sport,” “Intangible heritage,” and “Taekwondo,” and excludes irrelevant results. It reviews nearly 10 years of relevant literature for collation and induction, which serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. Then, the logical analysis method is applied to the related literature and data for logical comparison, analysis, and summarization. The logical relationships between the materials are analyzed, the characteristics and development status of Dragon-lion Sport are dissected, and qualitative judgments are given, providing a real and reliable basis for proposing future development strategies for Dragon-lion Sport and Taekwondo.

3. Research Results

3.1 Comparison of Characteristics between Dragon-lion Sport and Taekwondo

3.1.1 Popularity of Dragon-lion Sport

Dragon-lion Sport, as a folk art and sports activity, is not limited by venue, season, number of participants, or gender. It possesses distinctive local cultural characteristics and is easily accepted and learned by people. Throughout history and up to the present day, Dragon-lion Sport can be observed during festivals and joyous occasions. Its development has given rise to various performances and competitions not only within China but also worldwide, attracting people from all over the world to watch or participate. The level of large-scale events both in China and globally continues to improve, and the number of practitioners from different countries has been increasing, leading to the emergence of various Dragon-lion associations. Concurrently, Dragon-lion Sport has found its way into schools and some universities have established Dragon-lion Sport representative teams. This widespread appreciation indicates that the popularity of Dragon-lion Sport contributes to its enduring heritage.

3.1.2 Popularity of Taekwondo

With Taekwondo becoming an official Olympic sport at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the world's enthusiasm for learning Taekwondo has further increased, leading to its rapid development in China (Cheng Huayan, 2018). As of now, the population of Taekwondo practitioners in China has reached 50 million, and it continues to grow in popularity. Not only professional athletes, but public participation of Taekwondo in China also enjoys a prosperous scene. The development of public Taekwondo has various models, primarily starting from education and training, as well as popularizing Taekwondo culture and enhancing national physical fitness. Research on public Taekwondo competitions shows that current events in China are mostly amateur and public competitions, guiding the direction of the Taekwondo market (Song Ziye, Li Shihong, Yang Lizhi, 2022). Taekwondo has high learning and aesthetic value, requiring the study of various techniques and flexible application, thus achieving control over the body. At the same time, Taekwondo's stage performances and competition forms offer the public high-quality, highly entertaining cultural entertainment (Li Yang, 2019).

3.1.3 Competitiveness of Dragon-lion Sport

Dragon-lion Sport is a comprehensive sport that combines martial arts, music, and dance. It requires seamless cooperation among performers, displaying a vigorous and festive atmosphere that represents the forms of the dragon and lion. For the performers, it provides excellent physical and mental exercise, while delivering a visual feast and bringing joy to both participants and audience members. Furthermore, in Dragon-lion Sport competitions, athletes need to possess good physical fitness, strong arm strength, and lower limb power. They must complete a series of challenging techniques and performances in coordination with their teammates, including difficult jumps, rolls, and dance moves. Judges evaluate performances based on difficulty, coordination, and

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overall presentation, determining the winning teams. Recent Dragon-lion Sport competitions have seen athletes continuously raising their skills, attempting various challenging moves, thus enhancing the competitive level of this sport.

3.1.4 Competitiveness of Taekwondo

Taekwondo is a martial art originating from the Korean Peninsula, characterized by kicks, strikes, and defense as its primary techniques, being a comprehensive sport that combines offense, defense, skill, speed, strength, and endurance. Taekwondo athletes need to demonstrate their skills and strength to win the competition. Taekwondo is not only a sport but also a manifestation of spirit and culture. Athletes must possess qualities like perseverance, courage, self-discipline, and strength, which not only come into play during competitions but are also reflected in daily life. They must also adhere to the rules, respect opponents, all of which embody the sportsmanship. Taekwondo can promote physical health, boost confidence and self-protection ability, and have a positive impact on the growth and development of young people.

3.1.5 Cultural Essence of Dragon-lion Sport

Sports itself is a form of bodily culture. Dragon-lion Sport, as a product of ancient Chinese agricultural civilization, serves as a cultural carrier, a spiritual symbol, and a manifestation of national spirit. It embodies aesthetic culture, reflected in its costumes, props, and music. The costumes are dominated by colors such as red, gold, and green, creating a festive and lively atmosphere. The props used in the performances are grand and magnificent, creating a visually impressive spectacle. The accompanying music is rhythmic and powerful, evoking strong emotions and providing aesthetic enjoyment for both the visual and auditory senses, often resonating with the audience. Dragon-lion Sport also embodies the “harmony” culture of China.

3.1.6 Cultural Essence of Taekwondo

Originating from the ancient Korean Peninsula, Taekwondo has its own history of development and transformation, continuously infused with new cultural meanings, and can be seen as one of the carriers reflecting the trajectory of national historical development. Modern Taekwondo started in South Korea, and its internationalization process has also been a way for Koreans to promote their sports cultural ideas to the world. Representing the spirit of Eastern martial arts, Taekwondo is a way to spread Eastern ecological culture around the world. This international sports form reflects national and regional characteristics, having particular value globally in today’s globalization. Taekwondo has quickly developed under market mechanisms, and attention to the use of Taekwondo culture is an important direction for future project development. Only in this way can Taekwondo play a more active role in physical exercise, personality improvement, and cultural heritage.

3.2 Development Status of Dragon-lion Sport

3.2.1 Development Status of Dragon-lion Sport in China

With the gradual strengthening of standardized construction and management of

Dragon-lion Sport in China, especially with the support and attention from the government, sports departments, and various sectors of society, Dragon-lion Sport competitions have been held continuously, driving the popularization of this traditional sport in China. This has revitalized the sport, making it more widely accepted and loved by various departments and the public. The popularity of Dragon-lion Sport has been increasing, and its development trend is becoming more profound, reaching a broader audience. The Chinese Dragon-lion Sport Association has actively encouraged local governments to engage in Dragon-lion Sport activities by naming and designating certain places as “Chinese Dragon-lion Sport Hometowns.” This initiative has effectively increased the number of participants in Dragon-lion Sport activities in towns and villages. The promotion and popularization of Dragon-lion Sport are closely related to its historical origins, profound ethnic characteristics, and unique artistic charm, which have contributed to its continued growth. Additionally, traditional Dragon-lion Sport has extended to school campuses, and a considerable number of higher education institutions and some primary and secondary schools have incorporated Dragon-lion Sport into their physical education curriculum. Millions of primary and secondary school students and hundreds of thousands of university students have been exposed to and participated in dragon and lion activities, making Dragon-lion Sport a distinctive physical education course at all levels of schools and an important component of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and traditional education.

3.2.2 Development Status of Dragon-lion Sport Internationally

Countries and regions where Dragon-lion Sport is popular include China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and others. Dragon-lion Sport originated in China and gradually spread overseas through the migration of Chinese communities, making it an international cultural movement. Particularly in ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, with a significant Chinese population, Dragon-lion Sport has flourished. Local associations and societies formed by Chinese immigrants have preserved and developed the art of Dragon-lion Sport, involving local communities in these activities. Malaysia, in particular, has shown great enthusiasm and reverence for Dragon-lion Sport, rivaling that of China. China, on the other hand, places high value on exchanges and collaboration in Dragon-lion Sport with Southeast Asian countries. Various competitions held in China frequently invite teams from ASEAN countries to participate. ASEAN countries with a strong foundation in Dragon-lion Sport also organize domestic and international Dragon-lion Sport competitions. The International Dragon-lion Sport Federation rotates the representation of the highest-level World Dragon-lion Sport Championships between China and ASEAN countries, and regularly conducts training and exchange activities for international Dragon-lion Sport performers and referees. On this basis, ASEAN countries have also established their respective ASEAN Dragon-lion Sport Associations, organizing and hosting relevant events regularly. These activities provide excellent opportunities for the exchange and cooperation of Dragon-lion Sport in the ASEAN region, promoting the dissemination

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of Dragon-lion Sport skills and enhancing friendly relations between China and ASEAN countries, as well as other cities in the region.

3.3 Development Status of Taekwondo

3.3.1 Development Status of Taekwondo in China

Taekwondo is a traditional Korean sport that originated in the Korean Peninsula. In the late 1980s, Taekwondo entered China with the cultural and sports exchange between China and South Korea. However, Taekwondo's development in China began in the 1990s, with the establishment of the China Taekwondo Preparatory Group in Beijing in 1992 with international assistance. After three years of relentless effort, the Chinese Taekwondo Association was officially founded in 1995, marking an essential milestone for Taekwondo's development in China. Now, besides the national team, each province has its own Taekwondo representative team, and many cities have competitive sports schools specializing in training Taekwondo athletes (Zeng Bingxi & Xue Xinxuan, 2016). Many Taekwondo practitioners train mainly in dojos and training institutions. Though their skill level is far below that of professional athletes, they have their own direction and development concepts under the unified management of the Chinese Taekwondo Association. With the combined efforts of the central and local associations, Taekwondo in China has reached its current level of development (Ma Guangyue & Xu Hang, 2020).

3.3.3 International Development Status of Taekwondo

Diverse international exchanges and strong domestic promotion have made Taekwondo a popular sports movement worldwide, with increasing global cooperation and cultural fusion providing a world stage for Taekwondo's development. Taekwondo has rapidly found a place in the world's sports projects with its simple and easy-to-learn moves, clear competition standards, and graded system (Shi Feiyang, 2020). It was accepted as an Olympic sport on September 4, 1994, at the 103rd Olympic Conference in Paris, officially included in the 2000 Olympic Games, and awarded eight gold medals. Taekwondo has become an official competition event in various competitions worldwide, practiced by nearly 100 million people in 188 countries and regions (Xu Xiaoying, 2019). To better protect and inherit Taekwondo, South Korea started preparations in 2021 to apply for UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage.

3.4 Future Development Strategies for Dragon-lion Sport

3.4.1 Diversification of Media Promotion

In China, the international dissemination of Dragon-lion Sport can be achieved through activities such as delivering speeches on dragon and lion culture to international students, organizing international student teams to participate in the Chinese University Dragon-lion Sport Championship, and holding commercial performances in ASEAN countries. Whether through speeches, lectures, exchange activities, or commercial performances, both the communicators and the audience should make effective use of various media to promote dragon and lion culture worldwide. Moreover, the promotion of Dragon-lion Sport should keep up with the

trends of the times, creating short videos, documentaries, films, and television dramas related to it, and using emerging media such as mobile internet to spread dragon and lion culture globally, thereby increasing its popularity.

3.4.2 Strengthening Investment in Dragon-lion Sport

The government and relevant departments should increase financial investment in Dragon-lion Sport. Based on the current development status of Dragon-lion Sport in respective regions, active efforts should be made to raise funds, provide support to social organizations and enterprises, and increase financial investment in Dragon-lion Sport to address any funding shortages. Additionally, by creating a dragon and lion cultural brand, the influence of Dragon-lion Sport can be enhanced. For instance, combining costumes, accessories, and drum music associated with Dragon-lion Sport, design and develop related cultural and creative products to contribute to the international development of Dragon-lion Sport.

3.4.3 Collaboratively Building the Brand of World Dragon and Lion Cultural Heritage with ASEAN Countries

Dragon-lion Sport not only has a significant impact in China but also holds historical and widespread cultural influence in ASEAN countries. Especially in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, Dragon-lion Sport has witnessed considerable development and popularity. Many ethnic groups within ASEAN share a common heritage, which provides a foundation for cultural identity. However, differences and contradictions exist, and each country has its own interpretations, understandings, and ways of preserving various ethnic cultures. Dragon-lion Sport in ASEAN countries has already established considerable mass people foundation, providing favorable conditions for ethnic cultural identity. Therefore, collaborative efforts between ASEAN countries to promote the international organization and cooperation in Dragon-lion Sport hold significant meaning. This collaboration could include strengthening cooperation among regional associations and management units, governments, and civil organizations, forming alliances for event activities, jointly protecting world dragon and lion cultural heritage, and creating unified regional dragon and lion cultural brands. Such efforts would enhance the efficiency of promoting Dragon-lion Sport in ASEAN countries and worldwide, promoting the international development of Dragon-lion Sport.

3.5 Future Development Strategies of Taekwondo

3.5.1 Emphasizing Taekwondo's Cultural Value

Taekwondo, as both a traditional martial art and a modern competitive sport, has gained global recognition and popularity. It became an official Olympic sport at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, drawing considerable attention worldwide. While Taekwondo's development as a sport has been rapid and widely spread globally, it lacks the extensive historical and cultural values that Chinese dragon-lion sport possesses. Dragon-lion sport holds significant cultural value in terms of attire, music, dance movements, and more. Therefore, the future development of Taekwondo should focus

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more on embracing its traditional martial art history and cultural value, rather than solely pursuing its growth as a sports discipline. It should aim to promote the spirit and cultural beliefs of the Korean people and highlight Taekwondo's ability to enhance social cohesion, foster national unity, and stabilize society's cultural values.

3.5.2 Joint UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Registration for South Korea and North Korea

Taekwondo originated as a martial art on the Korean Peninsula in 1950. Despite existing in separate entities as the World Taekwondo (WT) and International Taekwondo Federation (ITF) due to political reasons, both South Korea and North Korea have contributed to spreading Taekwondo worldwide. Establishing Taekwondo as a globalized sport and martial art and making it an Olympic sport is a joint achievement of South Korea and North Korea. This accomplishment not only solidifies Taekwondo's status as a global sports discipline but also establishes it as a human culture on a global scale.

Therefore, in order to successfully inscribe Taekwondo on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, it is suggested that South Korea and North Korea jointly apply for registration. UNESCO typically accepts applications from individual countries every two years, but in the case of joint applications from two countries, they may exceptionally consider applications on an annual basis, providing more opportunities for Taekwondo's successful inscription.

Despite the complexities of political relations between South Korea and North Korea, actions have already been taken within their Taekwondo communities to support the joint UNESCO registration. In 2018, WT and ITF signed a joint agreement in Pyongyang, and North Korea is actively preparing for the UNESCO registration. Through sports exchanges between the two countries, regardless of political relations, a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere can be created, reflecting the 'peaceful' significance of Taekwondo's cultural value, which is desired by the global sports community and likely to gain recognition worldwide.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzed and compared the characteristics of popularity, economic aspects, and cultural significance of dragon-lion sport and Taekwondo, considering their current development status in China and internationally. Based on this analysis, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1) In the context of intangible cultural heritage, the future development of Chinese dragon-lion sport should focus on promoting its culture through new media platforms both domestically and internationally. The government and relevant authorities should increase financial support and collaborate with ASEAN countries to jointly promote the establishment of international organizations and cooperation for dragon-lion sport. There should also be consideration for joint applications with ASEAN countries for the inscription of dragon-lion sport as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

2) The future development of Taekwondo should emphasize the pursuit of its

traditional martial art history and cultural value, highlighting its ability to strengthen social cohesion, foster national unity, and stabilize society's cultural values for the Korean people. Additionally, efforts should be made to facilitate the joint registration of Taekwondo as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage by both South Korea and North Korea.

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