

Experience and Reflections on the Inclusion of Chinese "Taijiquan" in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Chen Zhenyong ^{1*}, Fu Guangzhen ¹, Cui Ruihao ¹, Lei Meng ¹

¹ Affiliation 1; Chengdu Sports University, Chengdu, 610000, China

* Correspondence: 56554038@qq.com

Abstract:

Carrying Chinese thought and culture, Taijiquan not only reflects the distinctive characteristics of The Times, but also reflects its own cultural contribution to all mankind in the process of world intangible heritage declaration. Therefore, based on the method of literature and expert interview, this paper studies the process of Chinese Tai chi intangible cultural heritage declaration, analyzes the experience in this process, and carries out cultural reflection on this basis. The research shows that Taijiquan has the historical and cultural background of traditional Chinese characteristics, and has been strongly supported by national government departments and continuously promoted by elite figures in the process of world intangible cultural heritage declaration; Moreover, Taijiquan has been reinterpreted and reconstructed after its successful application to the world heritage.

Key words:

Taijiquan; Intangible cultural heritage of humanity; Experience and thinking

Introduction

"On December 17, 2020, Taijiquan was included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,"(Lin Xiaomei, Yu Qinyun & Wang Xiaoyan, 2022) which represents the further recognition of this body movement method that gathers Chinese wisdom. However, looking back on the history of China's Taijiquan intangible cultural heritage declaration, it has its unique experience and enlightenment from the national, social and individual levels. Moreover, Taijiquan has changed from a physical movement in China to a shared spiritual wealth of mankind all over the world. Based on this, this paper, starting from the cultural characteristics of Taijiquan itself, examines the work process of Taijiquan's application of world intangible cultural heritage, analyzes the key factors that promote the application of intangible cultural heritage, and then considers the significance and value of Taijiquan after it is listed as the intangible cultural heritage of mankind, in order to make certain reference value for the international development of Chinese Taijiquan.

Research focus

The main problem of this paper is the experience and enlightenment of Chinese Taijiquan in the process of world intangible cultural heritage declaration. In addition, the author will also focus on the significance of Tai Chi for all mankind after the successful application.

Methods

This study mainly focuses on the experience and enlightenment of Chinese Tai Chi intangible cultural heritage declaration, so the research method mainly adopts the literature research method. By collecting a large number of related research literature, the logical relationship between the literature research results and the previous research results on this problem is found out. On this basis, we also interviewed the experts in charge of the application of Tai Chi in China to learn about their attitudes and views on this issue. Through the above research methods, the research results of this study are gradually obtained.

Results

1.Unique Chinese traditional characteristics of the historical and cultural background

As a representative of traditional national culture, Taijiquan not only gestates the wisdom of martial arts ancestors for many years, but also combines with traditional culture, contains a strong national body connotation, and shoulders the spirit and mission of Chinese martial arts culture inheritance. Throughout the extensive and profound development of Chinese culture, Taoism is one of the most important and influential philosophical thoughts. Taoism emphasizes that all things in the world continue to develop and operate in accordance with certain natural laws. The Tai Chi culture is to learn from this thought, emphasizing to achieve the purpose of pursuing the essence of life by improving one's self-cultivation. Moreover, during the evolution of Taijiquan, the thought of yin-yang theory of Taoism has always influenced the development of Taijiquan, "(Kuang Wennan, 1994)and became the guiding principle of Taijiquan's theory of martial arts and tactics". It can be said that the thought of Yin and Yang changes is reflected everywhere in the development of Taijiquan. For example, in the application of boxing, Taijiquan takes the theory of Yin and Yang as the guiding ideology, and reflects the transformation of Yin and Yang in every move and every posture, which is what people often say: the combination of virtuality and reality, the combination of hardness and softness, and the integration of interior and exterior. Taijiquan is based on the principle of yin-yang mutual transformation, and the theory of yin-yang is integrated into the specific technical movements of Taijiquan, which reflects the high unity of goodness and beauty, inside and outside.

In addition, Taijiquan, as a traditional culture, has its own formation process. According to research, Tai Chi was founded in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties by Chen

Wangting (1600-1680 AD) in Chenjiagou, Wenxian, Henan Province. However, in the course of spreading Tai Chi, many schools were derived. For example, Yang Luchan and Wu Yuxiang founded Yang Tai Chi and Wu Tai Chi respectively on the basis of Chen style Tai Chi. Wu Jianquan of Manchu nationality formed Wu style Taijiquan on the basis of Yang style Taijiquan, combined with his own characteristics; Sun Lutang founded Sun style Taijiquan on the basis of Chen, Yang, Wu and other taijiquan, combined with martial arts techniques such as Xingyi boxing and Bagua palm. In the process of inheritance, these five schools of Tai Chi continue to absorb and learn from the advantages of other schools, and form their own unique styles and characteristics. Moreover, in order to facilitate popularization, the State Sports Commission organized experts in February 1956 to create and compile a simplified 24-style Taijiquan based on Yang's Taijiquan, whose movements are concise and easy to learn and master, and are welcomed by practitioners. Subsequently, the State Sports Commission organized experts to create and compile the forty-eight and forty-two forms (competition routines), which jointly promoted the wide spread and development of Taijiquan competitions across the country. It is worth mentioning that Taijiquan, as one of the representatives of traditional Chinese culture, has attracted fans from all over the world with its profound cultural heritage and unique fitness effects. The international competitions and exchange activities of Tai Chi provide a platform for tai chi lovers around the world to show and communicate. These activities not only improve the popularity and influence of Tai Chi, but also promote the international spread and development of Tai Chi.

To sum up, Taijiquan, which draws on the essence of yin-yang theory of Taoism, runs the philosophical thought of yin-yang conversion through the whole boxing process. Its development process from Chenjiagou to the formation of five schools to the whole country, as well as its wide spread in the world, shows profound cultural heritage and broad mass base, and highlights great development potential. It has become a cultural symbol representing the image of China, and the fitness value and international promotion of Taijiquan have also injected strong vitality into its development in China.

2.The national government and elite figures have promoted Taijiquan's intangible cultural heritage declaration

The guidance of Chinese government departments for Taijiquan intangible cultural heritage declaration

In May 2006, Taijiquan was declared a national intangible cultural heritage representative project by The State Council of China. This marks a unique Chinese traditional cultural connotation and condenses the essence of Chinese body movement form, since then boarded the national cultural stage. Moreover, since the unique cultural thoughts contained in Tai Chi can express Chinese style on the world stage to a certain extent, the Chinese government has devoted itself to pushing Tai Chi to the world stage and building Chinese Tai chi cultural symbols after Tai Chi became a national intangible heritage project in 2006. Based on this, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the

People's Republic of China designated Wenxian, Jiaozuo City, Henan Province, to represent Taijiquan to declare world-class intangible cultural heritage. In 2008, Jiaozuo City in Henan Province officially started Taijiquan to declare the representative list of the World intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity, and submitted it to UNESCO together with a total of 35 other projects in China. However, due to Tai Chi's first application for the world intangible Cultural Heritage List of humanity, the preparation of materials was not very sufficient, and China applied for a relatively large number of projects, so Tai Chi's first application for world-class intangible cultural heritage did not succeed. In 2009, China applied for Tai Chi's second world heritage status and submitted relevant information to UNESCO headquarters, but due to the competition of other projects and changes in the application rules, Tai Chi once again missed the world intangible cultural heritage. Since then, Taijiquan has experienced three applications in 2011, 2013 and 2014(Zhang M,2016)., although the results all failed due to various reasons. This has also accumulated experience for the Chinese government in reporting.

After Taijiquan failed to declare the world intangible cultural Heritage from 2008 to 2014, China made a profound summary and took a series of measures. Led by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China and the Wushu Management Center of the General Administration of Sport of the State, Taijiquan continues to enhance the exposure and influence of Taijiquan on various occasions. In 2015, Jiaozuo City organized 10,000 people to practice taijiquan; At the 2016 G20 Hangzhou Summit Gala, Taijiquan practitioners dressed in white performed the simple and elegant Taijiquan for the world under the night. In 2017, the world's 100 cities 10 million people Taijiquan Exhibition started from Chenjiagou, Wenxian, Jiaozuo, Henan Province, with more than 10 million people participating in more than 600 cities at home and abroad. In 2019, the "Belt and Road" Tai Chi walking activity was launched from Chenjiagou, Jiaozuo City, the birthplace of Tai Chi, and then Tai chi enthusiasts in 200 cities in China and 36 other cities in the world jointly performed tai Chi(Chang Chao-C,2023). In addition, the International Martial Arts Federation has hosted the biennial World Tai Chi Championship since 2014, which is the only single martial arts world championship established by the International Martial Arts Federation, providing a platform for exchanges and exchanges for tai chi elites and enthusiasts around the world. Since 2014, China has not been in a hurry to declare Taijiquan to UNESCO all the time. Instead, while actively preparing Taijiquan intangible cultural heritage application materials, China has continuously carried out intangible cultural heritage precipitation and Tai chi symbol dissemination, making careful preparations for the final declaration of Taijiquan.

In 2018, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China included Tai chi as the only project in China in the new round of application in 2019. The application involves seven representative projects of national intangible cultural heritage in Henan, Hebei, Beijing and Tianjin (Chen's Tai Chi and He's Tai Chi in Jiaozuo, Henan; Yang's Tai Chi and Wu's Tai Chi in Handan, Hebei; Wang Qihe's Tai Chi in Ren County, Hebei; Wu's Tai Chi in Beijing; Li's Tai Chi in Tianjin), Henan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism led the organization of Taijiquan

application related materials writing, video production and other work, and Henan as the lead application province. The city of Jiaozuo in Henan Province has become an important unit for the implementation of the declaration work, and has set up a leading group for the declaration work to write the declaration text and shoot the declaration video. The government-led Tai Chi intangible heritage work was finalized on March 26, 2019, and reported to UNESCO by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China. On December 17, 2020, UNESCO announced that Tai Chi was included in the representative list of the intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity, representing that Tai Chi has officially become a cultural heritage shared by all mankind. This is not only the Chinese government's solution and improvement of the intangible cultural heritage work, but also the Chinese government's step-by-step support for the declaration of the intangible cultural heritage of Taijiquan.

Elite figures for the promotion of Taijiquan intangible cultural heritage declaration

"The development of Tai Chi requires the full cooperation of the government, society and individuals."(Zhang X L,2016) From Tai Chi's first application for the World intangible cultural Heritage project in 2008 to its successful application in 2020, the Chinese government has played a crucial leading role. If the perspective shifts from grand narrative to micro description, there is no doubt that elite figures have played a driving role in the application process. Yan Shuangjun is an important figure in the declaration of intangible cultural heritage of Taijiquan, not only to carry out a lot of declaration work, but also played a role in promoting the declaration of intangible cultural heritage. In 2005, Yan Shuangjun, then deputy director of Wenxian Cultural Bureau, was in charge of the intangible cultural heritage work, when Taijiquan was in the stage of applying for the national intangible cultural heritage list. When Taijiquan successfully applied for the world-class intangible cultural heritage project in 2020, Yan Shuangjun served as the deputy leader of the leading group of Taijiquan application for human intangible cultural heritage in Wenxian County, Henan Province. To some extent, it can be said that Yan Shuangjun witnessed every detail of Tai Chi from Chenjiagou to the world. In addition, Yan Shuangjun has the dual identity of deputy director of Wenxian Cultural Bureau and deputy leader of the intangible cultural heritage declaration leading group, which not only implements the major decisions of the government, but also leads and promotes the orderly implementation of the declaration work.

In the preparation stage of the application of intangible cultural heritage, Yan Shuangjun devoted himself to the inheritance and dissemination of Taijiquan, the construction of schools and the application of intangible cultural heritage, showing the huge driving force carried by elite figures. In order to expand the influence of Tai chi internationally, Yan Shuangjun organized tai chi masters to participate in Tai Chi exchange activities in Italy, South Korea, as well as Xiamen, Xi 'an and other places in China, making outstanding contributions to the inheritance, promotion and dissemination of Tai Chi culture. In addition, since 2015, Yan Shuangjun has repeatedly taken the lead in

organizing tai chi exhibitions with more than 10,000 people, organized tai chi exhibitions with tens of thousands of people in hundreds of cities in 2017, and organized Tai chi walks along the Belt and Road in 2019. This not only promoted the vigorous development of local tai Chi in Wenxian, but also made the countries and regions participating in Tai Chi exhibition activities around the world feel the charm of Chinese tai Chi. In order to continue the long-term development of Taijiquan, Yan Shuangjun pays special attention to the running of Taijiquan schools at all levels, "Wenxian is building professional undergraduate schools and junior colleges of Taijiquan, training high-quality Taijiquan coaches and boxing talents, we are ready for this aspect." The establishment of Taijiquan schools at all levels can train high-quality Taijiquan talents for the world, and can make up for the shortage of talents caused by the expansion of the spread of Taijiquan to a certain extent. In the stage of intangible cultural heritage declaration, Yan Shuangjun personally participated in the first declaration in 2008, and successfully declared in 2020. The 12-year declaration process can be said to be practical for Yan Shuangjun personally. According to Yan Shuangjun's own memories, in 12 years, there were countless modifications to the application documents, videos, photos and other materials. In 2008, Yan Shuangjun was transferred to Jiaozuo City to participate in the application of Taijiquan on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and then went to Beijing to receive guidance from experts of the Ministry of Culture. In the six days in Beijing, I revised the Taijiquan theme film five times. To a large extent, these experiences represent the dedication and great efforts of elite figures for the application of Tai Chi.

When I am in the streets of Wenxian, Tai Chi statues, signs and other cultural symbols rich in Tai Chi ideas are everywhere. It is obvious that Wenxian, the small city where Tai Chi originated, has been deeply infiltrated by Tai Chi culture and ideas. Yan Shuangjun, who grew up in Wenxian, has his own unique feelings for Taijiquan. In recent years, as a member of the Chinese Writers Association, Yan Shuangjun has created "Intangible Cultural Heritage Series - Tai Chi", "Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpiece Series - Tai Chi", "Chinese Tai Chi", "Overview of Chinese Tai Chi", "Translation of Henan - Tai Chi", "Tai Chi Kung Fu" series of books, and "Beautiful Chen Jiagou", "Tai Chi Praise Song" and other songs. It has made great contributions to the dissemination of Taijiquan, as Yan Shuangjun said, "Taijiquan is the most beautiful gift from China to the world."

3.Taijiquan was selected as human intangible heritage for its contribution to human culture

Reinterpretation of the connotation of Taijiquan

Taijiquan, as the essence of traditional Chinese martial arts, its core concept is derived from Taiji philosophy, deeply inspired by the Yin and Yang theory in the Book of Changes, and integrates the meridians of traditional Chinese medicine, the ancient guiding health maintenance and breathing method, bringing together the essence of a variety of martial arts schools, forming a set of traditional health care practices with

Chinese characteristics. At present, Taijiquan, as a means of treatment, has been used more and more frequently in the international medical field, and has shown its unique value and remarkable curative effect in the treatment and management of chronic diseases. The practice of Taijiquan can not only promote physical health, but also improve spiritual cultivation, which is of great significance to promote the overall health of individuals. In the process of Taijiquan practice, breathe naturally, strive to be round and alive without body stiffness and disconnection, Taijiquan emphasizes the relaxation of the whole body, "relaxation has the effect of calming the mind, reconciling the qi and blood, dredging the meridians, enhancing the physique and rehabilitating the mind and body"(Qiu P X,2007), with the Tai chi movement guidance, the movement is soft and slow, and the breathing is deep, long, thin and even. In Tai Chi, the posture can be large or small according to the requirements of the practitioner's physique, and the exercise load can also be adjusted at any time according to the strength of the physical strength. The profound concept and practice of Taijiquan provides valuable reference value for the medical field, and plays a positive role in promoting the progress of human health and health.

As a treasure of Chinese traditional sports culture, Taijiquan has been included in the intangible cultural heritage list, which has a profound impact on the global martial arts and sports fields. First, this honor for Tai Chi elevates the martial art's place in global cultural diversity and strengthens its international recognition as an important cultural heritage. This recognition not only promotes the protection and inheritance of Taijiquan itself, but also provides an important reference for the international promotion and popularization of other forms of traditional martial arts. In addition, in the field of sports, Taijiquan's status as an intangible cultural heritage forms a sharp contrast with Western competitive sports, encouraging sports activities to pay more attention to physical and mental health and the deep cultural value. The philosophical thoughts and practical skills contained in Taijiquan provide a new vision and inspiration for modern physical education teaching and training, and promote the cross-integration of sports disciplines with culture, health and health.

The inclusion of Taijiquan has also promoted international cultural exchange and dialogue. "Many foreigners like to practice Tai Chi, in fact, has a great relationship with their love of Chinese culture, the process of their learning to practice Tai chi can be said to be the interpretation of traditional Chinese culture"(Sun Xilian, Yu Xiaohui, Meilin Qi, Chen Wei & Liu Yonghong,2008). As a cultural practice that transcends national boundaries, Tai Chi serves as a link between people from different cultural backgrounds and promotes cross-cultural understanding and respect. At the international level, Tai Chi practitioners have experienced the benefits of cultural diversity through a unified mode of practice, thus strengthening cross-cultural communication and collaboration. The cultivation of Taijiquan is not only a physical exercise, but also a spiritual and emotional cultivation. Through the practice of Taijiquan combining static and static, rigid and flexible, practitioners learn how to achieve harmony and balance of body and mind, which plays an important role in the personal cultivation system. Tai Chi has a positive effect on improving one's mental state and emotional stability, and helps to cultivate the character traits of calm, patience and perseverance.

"Tai Chi integrates traditional medicine, sports, culture and other attributes, and is one of the traditional sports and cultural symbols with great promotion value in China at present, and has a distinct and unique identity in the world."(Liu T Y, Li Z & Wu J W,2024) As the essence of Chinese traditional culture, Tai Chi is included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which not only highlights its unique position in the global cultural diversity, but also brings positive impact on improving global health, promoting the development of sports, and promoting the spread of multi-cultures.

Reconstruction of the meaning of Taijiquan

"Appreciating the way of heaven and earth and applying it to things and people is the most essential characteristic of Tai Chi thinking"(Tong Hui & Xie Chengwu,2010). Taijiquan combines the Yin and Yang cycles of traditional Chinese philosophy with the idea of the unity of heaven and man, which provides rich knowledge resources for deepening people's understanding of the universe, nature and the law of human body. According to the Chinese Dictionary, Tai Chi was defined by ancient philosophers as the original chaotic qi, whose movement led to the differentiation of Yin and Yang, which led to the change of the four seasons, and gave birth to the diversity of nature, so it was regarded as the root of the creation of all things in the universe. This philosophical concept can be summarized as "Tai Chi produces Yin and Yang, Yin and Yang produce four images, and four images produce eight diagrams." In this system, "Tai Chi" represents the fundamental principle or primitive state of the universe and nature; "Two instruments" refers to the opposites of heaven and earth or Yin and Yang. The "four elephants" symbolize the changes of spring, summer, autumn and winter. "Eight diagrams" refers to eight basic phenomena in nature, namely, heaven, earth, wind, thunder, water, fire, mountains, and ze, which are used to explain the changing laws of nature and personnel.

The guiding principles and movement forms of Taijiquan both focus on conforming to the laws of nature, emphasizing the expansion and change of the body through inner consciousness, and the continuity of the movement of the body in space, so as to realize the harmonious unity of the body and the surrounding environment. This movement not only cultivates people's perception of the pure beauty of nature, but also deepens people's love and reverence for nature, promotes the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and reflects the inseparable close connection between man and nature. The concept of "listening strength" in Tai Chi involves the mutual perception between bodies and the integration of individuals and the natural environment, which is a unique way of health that is unmatched by other forms of exercise. By directly feeling the movement of nature, Tai chi practitioners can draw the necessary physical and mental nutrients from nature, so as to obtain rich nourishment in the spiritual level. Therefore, Taijiquan is not only a way of physical exercise, but also a cultural practice containing profound philosophy, which emphasizes an inner peace and the harmony and unity of the external world.

"The thought of peaceful coexistence and security concept contained in Taijiquan is the

physical expression of the concept of human destiny community, and the international spread of Taijiquan has become the best carrier to promote the construction of human destiny community"(Wang Baili & Yang Guang, 2017). Since Taijiquan was recognized as the world intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, its modern cognition has been promoted from the national level to the international level, marking the unique status and development of Taijiquan culture in the contemporary era. This recognition not only reflects the ideal value orientation of Chinese society, but also promotes the understanding and recognition of Taijiquan culture in the world. Adhering to the purpose of people-oriented and serving the people, Taijiquan health culture conveys the Chinese health philosophy, which not only promotes the international sharing of a healthy lifestyle, but also makes the outside world deeply feel the profound charm of Chinese culture. The international popularity of Tai Chi provides a platform for global enthusiasts to communicate, while also shaping a positive cultural image of China on the international stage. Tai Chi's concept of harmonious integration of health culture and nature has attracted the attention and in-depth study of many international scholars, and its unique cultural charm has been fully displayed in promoting the global system of building a "community of human destiny". As a cultural symbol, Taijiquan transcends national borders, arouses the common emotional resonance of human beings, and makes people realize the Chinese people's pursuit of a better life and yearning for the spiritual world from the psychological level, thus deepening the understanding and recognition of Chinese cultural values and life philosophy.

Discussion and conclusions

Taijiquan, which embodies the Chinese spirit and thought, has a profound cultural heritage and a broad mass base, and has become an important symbol of Chinese culture in the world. After the macro-guidance of Chinese government departments and the social promotion of elite figures, it has been successfully included in the list of intangible Cultural Heritage of humanity by UNESCO. This not only represents that Taijiquan originated in China has officially entered the road of international development, but more importantly, it reinterprets the connotation and re-constructs the meaning of Taijiquan, giving Taijiquan new cultural significance and historical mission, and making important contributions to the spiritual resonance of "human destiny community".

References

- Lin Xiaomei, Yu Qinyun & Wang Xiaoyan.(2022). The Value Pursuit and Path thinking of International Dissemination of Taijiquan in the New Era -- A discussion on the main achievements and experiences of international dissemination of Taijiquan. *Sports science* (06), 31-41.
- Kuang Wennan.(1994). The origin and characteristics of Taoist doctors. *Chinese Culture Forum* (02),88-91.
- Zhang M. (2016). Research on the causes and countermeasures of Taijiquan's failure to declare the world intangible cultural Heritage. *Liaoning sports technology* (05), 94-97.

Chang Chao-C.(2023). Social adaptability of Taijiquan development since the founding of New China. Journal of Henan Polytechnic University (social sciences Edition)(03),83-89.

Zhang X L.(2016). Research on the development of Taijiquan and national fitness service industry. Sports Culture Guide (04),114-117.

Qiu P X. (2007). Selection of traditional health exercises. Beijing: People's Sports Publishing House,20.

Sun Xilian, Yu Xiaohui, Meilin Qi, Chen Wei & Liu Yonghong.(2008). The international spread of Taijiquan and the promotion of China's soft power. Journal of wuhan sports college (6), 72-75.

Liu T Y, Li Z & Wu J W. (2024). Evidence-based medical evidence and promotion path of Taijiquan to promote brain health. Journal of Shanghai sports university (4), 81-91.

Tong Hui & Xie Chengwu.(2010). Shaping the brand of Chinese traditional sports culture -- Taijiquan. Journal of Shenyang Institute of Physical Education (05),136-138.

Wang Baili & Yang Guang.(2017). Opportunities, Challenges and Reflections on the training of Taijiquan talents. Journal of Harbin Institute of Physical Education (02),52-56.