

# Inheritance and Development of Tujia Martial Art Culture Under Social Changes

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**Abstract**—Taking the social changes as the research background, this paper uses the literature method, field visits and other scientific research methods to study the inheritance and development of the Tujia martial arts culture under the social changes. After researches, it finds that under the social changes, there are “three crises” in the ecology of Tujia martial arts culture, that is, the continuous lack of survival soil, the fragility of intergenerational inheritance and the strong impact of modern sports. In the future, in inheriting and developing the Tujia martial arts culture, it should proceed from “two spaces”, namely cultural space and living space. The systematic study of the Tujia martial arts culture plays an enlightening role in inheriting and promoting the excellent Chinese traditional martial arts culture as well as promoting the development of regional martial arts culture.

**Keywords**—Social changes; Tujia; Martial arts culture; Inheritance and development

## I. INTRODUCTION

The natural and human environment on which a nation depends restrict its mode of production, which in turn determines its cultural pattern. As a typical mountain ethnic group, Tujia people have lived in the Wuling Mountains bordering Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing and Guizhou since the Qin and Han dynasties. For thousands of years, they have relied on the mountains and have continued the economic life of the mountainous region with half farming and half hunting. The harsh natural living environment and the historical and human background of frequent wars have promoted the continuation of its strong national martial arts spirit. Advocating martial arts and warriors has always been a vivid portrayal of its national character. However, with the development and progress of human civilization and the ever-increasing social changes, the production and lifestyle of Tujia villages have undergone tremendous changes.

Dialectically, social changes and development have greatly improved the living conditions and life quality of Tujia villagers. However, while changing the production and lifestyle of the Tujia people, this modernization in the field of social culture has also brought unprecedented challenges to the inheritance and development of its traditional culture. Tujia traditional martial arts culture, born out of military wars and primitive hunting activities, bears the brunt. Its living space is

getting narrower and narrower, and it is in an awkward situation where the martial arts become less and less known.

## II. ECOLOGICAL CRISIS OF TUJIA MARTIAL ARTS CULTURE UNDER SOCIAL CHANGES

### A. Continuous Lack of Survival Soil

“All things exist for a reason, and the survival soil is a profound economic, political, and cultural motivation.” The birth of traditional culture is not accidental. Any traditional culture has its own specific survival soil. If it loses the cultural soil on which it depends, it will lose its existing support, and its own development will lose its balance. Historically, the traditional martial arts culture of Tujia took war and hunting as the survival soil. In frequent battles and daily hunting activities, the Tujia martial arts as essential survival skills were produced, and they were continuously inherited and developed with their vigorous vitality. However, the development process of human civilization eventually moved from barbarism to a historical stage of peace. The history of shining spears and armoured horses is gone, and the military martial arts and various fighting skills that the Tujia people are good at have been lost their chance. It is no longer possible to use the battlefield to kill the enemy and make merits. At the same time, with the development of the agricultural economy and the commodity economy, the economic form of Tujia settlement areas has undergone fundamental changes, and Tujia people no longer need to live by hunting. With the introduction of a series of hunting bans formulated by local governments to protect the ecological environment, Tujia’s hunting culture, which has continued for thousands of years, has basically withdrawn from the stage of history and has become a cultural phenomenon in the memory of Tujia people. Nowadays, people can only glimpse it in traditional dances such as the hand-waving dance and the Maugusi dance. This shows that the continuous disappearance of the original cultural soil on which the Tujia traditional martial arts culture has survived has directly led to the shrinking of its living space. And it is also the direct cause of the continuous weakening of the Tujia martial arts culture.

### B. The Frailty of Intergenerational Inheritance

Inheritance is the maintenance and inheritance of traditional inertia, and is the fundamental guarantee for the inheritance of

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traditional culture from generation to generation. Without inheritance, traditional culture will be fragmented, and the inheritance process of traditional culture cannot be separated from the inheritor and the inherited. The two are indispensable. However, in process of inheritance and development of Tujia traditional martial arts culture today, there have been serious generational gaps and cultural faults. It is prominently shown that on the one hand, the majority of young people are not very enthusiastic about inheriting the Tujia martial arts culture; on the other hand, a group of old artists who are proficient in Tujia martial arts have difficulty in finding suitable inheritor, thus making the intergenerational inheritance of Tujia martial arts in an embarrassing situation. Although the fist routines of Tujia martial arts have more than 120 kinds, at present, except Yumen boxing, Tiemu boxing, chicken-shaped boxing, white tiger boxing, Tianmen Wuxing boxing, Wuhu Xiayi boxing, Bandeng boxing, Gongtianshu, Yandouganzi, Zuobasiheqiang and some fist routines, most of the fist routines have been lost or are on the verge of being lost. At the same time, the folk skills of Tujia rich in martial arts elements such as Raoguan, Wusang, Sanbangu, Roulianxiang (the four are all ethnic traditional ceremony skills) and other unique skills are gradually showing signs of succession, and the role of Tima (Sorcerer) is no longer attractive to young people. The main reason is that social changes have led to the transformation of people's values. With the continuous development of the economy, the lifestyle of Tujia cottages has undergone a tremendous change. The majority of Tujia people began to identify with and infatuated with the modern way of life, and then lost their passion and impulse for the traditional culture. Enticed by the material culture of modern society, most of the young and middle-aged Tujia people finally joined the army of "migrant workers" without hesitation and chose to go out to work to make money. It is this part of the population's departure from the hometown that eventually led to the Tujia martial arts's succession of unmanned and inherited phenomenon, which caused the Tujia martial arts cultural inheritance chain to break.

### C. The Strong Impact of Modern Sports

With the change of society and the improvement of people's life quality, modern lifestyles and life rhythms have also brought corresponding leisure and fitness methods. Surfing the Internet, online games and other modern entertainment methods for the Tujia people are no longer out of reach. At the same time, more and more foreign sports such as basketball, badminton, aerobics, skateboarding, roller skating, square dance, etc. have taken root in Tujia cottages, becoming the first choice for the Tujia people for fitness and leisure. In contrast, traditional martial arts programs that were once regarded as beloved by people of different classes and ages gradually lost their dominant position in culture and quietly faded out of sight. In their leisure time, Tujia people spend more time on watching TV, surfing the Internet, or playing Mahjong together. It is difficult to capture traces of traditional sports or martial arts fitness activities. In some of the Tujia ethnic schools visited by the author, the sports skills accepted by the students are mostly modern sports such as aerobics, athletics, dancing, ball games, etc., except for a few minority traditional sports such as high feet and board shoes prescribed

by the school. So the traditional martial arts of Tujia nationality is in a state of being gradually marginalized. In general, with the changes of the times and the transformation of people's values, under the strong impact of various modern sports, the survival space of the Tujia martial arts culture is getting narrower and narrower. Its inheritance and development are facing great challenges of internal and external environment.

## III. INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF TUJIA MARTIAL ARTS CULTURE

### A. Protect the Cultural Space of Tujia Martial Arts

"Cultural space" of martial arts refers to "a place where martial arts cultural activities or martial arts cultural elements are concentrated, or a period of time related to martial arts culture is determined to be held in a certain period." According to the definition of martial arts cultural space, the culture space of Tujia martial arts mainly includes various village temple fairs, traditional festivals, sacrificial ceremonies, and traditional sports games, etc. They are platforms for displaying the Tujia martial arts culture and become a space-time field where the Tujia martial arts culture can exist. "Temple Fair" generally refers to gatherings near the temple to perform various activities such as god worship, entertainment and shopping. Various village temple fairs provide a stage for various folklore activities. In the traditional Tujia temple fairs, various juggling, playing arhats, lion dances, traditional martial arts exhibitions, etc. are the most eye-catching activities. For example, lion dancers who throw hydrangea at temple fairs often perform Tujia martial arts such as "Simen Jiazi", "Sugong Beijing", "Menghu Tiaoqian", "Baihu Quan", etc., which provides unique cultural space for Tujia martial arts. There are many traditional festivals of Tujia ethnic group, such as Sheba Festival (hand-waving festival), Land Festival, Buffalo Festival, Dragon Robe Festival, Daughters Festival, etc.. Among them, in traditional festivals such as the Sheba Festival and the Dragon Robe Festival, there are often marvelous martial arts demonstrations, or traditional dance performances rich in martial arts. The traditional festivals have become one of the showing methods of the Tujia martial arts culture. The sacrificial rituals of Tujia people mainly include Wunuo rituals, funeral ceremonies, etc. Among them, martial art culture exists in the various Shidao, bamboo whips, knife ladders and ground knives performed by the witch Timor ritual scene, as well as the performance of Wusang, Dalin, Raoguan, etc. in the funeral ceremonies. Traditional sports games are regular sports events held by the government to promote the traditional sports culture of ethnic minorities, which is the main cultural space that can survive and display at present stage.

The cultural space of Tujia martial arts is the foundation of Tujia martial arts culture, which provides a platform for the survival and performance of Tujia martial arts. But it is undeniable that with the changes of society and the development of commercial economy, the cultural space of Tujia martial arts has gradually shrivelled, and the cultural connotation it reflects has gradually declined. Therefore, consciously protecting the cultural space of Tujia martial arts is the basis for the inheritance and development of Tujia martial arts.

## B. Expand the Living Space of Tujia Martial Arts

### 1) Inheritance space of school education of Tujia martial arts culture

The school is an important camp for inheriting national culture and an important field for carrying forward the national spirit. The majority of young students are in the formation period of the world outlook, outlook on life and values in school, where their identification and acceptance of something often tends to have a deep-rooted influence on their future learning and life. Therefore, the inheritance of traditional culture can only really expand the mass base through school education to exert the radiation function. Tujia martial arts are produced and developed in the unique historical and human environment of Tujia. The development of Tujia martial arts teaching in primary and secondary schools in the Tujia area, especially ethnic schools, can not only expand school-based curriculum resources, but also make up for the shortage of physical education equipment in poor mountain areas. More importantly, it will help enhance students' sense of national identity and enhance national cohesion. In this regard, relevant schools and regional education administrative departments should formulate syllabuses, teaching plans and contents as well as study teaching methods in light of local conditions. At the same time, they can also hire relevant Tujia boxers to teach students some simple and practical martial arts contents that are of interest to students at the school. For example, Ding Yaoting, the inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Tujia Yumen boxing, specially created Yumen boxing martial arts exercises and simplified Yumen boxing routine to promote in the local school pilot, which has received good results. Only if the Tujia martial arts really take root in school education, can its inheritance be put into practice.

### 2) Living space relying on government intangible cultural heritage

In order to promote the construction of advanced socialist culture and inherit and promote excellent traditional culture, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Up to now, China has basically established a national, provincial, municipal, and county-level intangible cultural heritage directory system, which has brought unprecedented opportunities for the protection and inheritance of various intangible cultural heritage. In this excellent situation, a group of traditional martial arts boxing species have been included in the national intangible cultural heritage list, such as "Shaolin martial arts", "Wudang martial arts", "Hui martial arts with heavy sword", "Cangzhou Hui martial arts", "Yang's, Chen's Tai Chi in Yongnian and Jiaozuo", "Xingtai Plum-blossom Boxing", etc., which have made the protection and development of traditional martial arts rise to a political level. The protection and inheritance of Tujia martial arts must also actively strive for the national intangible cultural heritage policy. To this end, the relevant departments must first do a

resource census, and focus on those Tujia martial arts that have strong cultural significance and meet the requirements for declaration. The relevant departments should give them priority to the agenda, and declare them step by step. At the same time, we should uphold the concept that inheritance is the best protection, and attach importance to the living inheritance and protection of the intangible cultural heritage of Tujia martial arts. At present, the declaration of the intangible cultural heritage of Tujia martial arts has achieved certain results. For example, the Tujia bench boxing with Chen Junfa as the representative heir and the Tujia Yumen boxing with Ding Yaoting as the representative heir have been successfully declared to the provincial intangible cultural heritage list, and the latter is currently actively decelerating the national intangible cultural heritage list.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Change is the normal state of human social development and an irresistible historical trend, but social change is often a double-edged sword to a certain extent. As far as Tujia people are concerned, the modernization of social and cultural fields has not only changed the production and life styles of the majority of Tujia villagers, but also brought unprecedented challenges to the inheritance and development of their traditional culture. The Tujia martial arts culture, which was born out of military war and primitive hunting activities, is the first to bear the brunt. Due to the lack of survival soil, the fragility of intergenerational inheritance and the strong impact of modern sports, its survival space has become more and more narrow, and it is in an awkward situation where the martial arts become less and less known.

In order for the Tujia martial arts culture to be effectively inherited and developed, it is necessary to protect its cultural space which is dying. At the same time, we must focus on expanding new living spaces and providing new opportunities and platforms for its inheritance and development. To this end, we must attach great importance to the inheritance space of school education in ethnic areas as well as the living space relying on government intangible cultural heritage, and take multiple measures to effectively promote the inheritance and development of the Tujia martial arts culture.

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