

Research on the Origin and Development Status of "Colourful Sacred Arrow" Culture of Tibet in Jianzha, Qinghai

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ABSTRACT

In order to explore the origin of Tibetan 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' in Jianzha, Qinghai province and to promote the regional development of traditional ethnic sports culture, this paper studies the origin, cultural connotation and practical problems of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture through the literature research method, the interview method and the field investigation method. The study shows that the "colorful arrow" culture, as a traditional sports culture of regional nationalities, is developed from the "arrow" culture, and has historical and religious origins. Under the influence of the globalization and modernization of sports culture, the development status of "Colorful Sacred Arrow" culture is worrying. It is necessary to pay attention to the innovative development of "Colorful Sacred Arrow" culture, so as to make traditional sports culture and modern sports civilization more integrated so as to inherit and develop, and to find a sustainable development road supported by internal power and external environment for the development of "Colorful Sacred Arrow" culture.

Keywords: Jianzha, Tibet, Colourful Sacred Arrow, traditional ethnic sports culture, sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, archery was not only the most important military skill, but also the means of survival of the hunter. Besides, it was an essential method of education and the most widely known sports event with most participants.[1] At present, archery is one of the most widely carried out sports of the ethnic minorities.[2] The development of archery is in line with China's sports reform and development guidelines which point out that 'we should take further advantages of the ethnic minority areas, develop the ethnic sports resources, and commit ourselves to the excavation arrangement and promotion of traditional ethnic sports'.[3] With a very long history in China, Archery has been not only a physical activity, but also an indispensable part of the traditional ethnic sports culture, and has further developed into a traditional ethnic sporting event.

The Tibetan archery culture has a long history and as a traditional sporting event in the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, it is very popular among the Tibetan people.[4] Jianzha Tibetan Archery is characterized by a strong regional feature and contains a rich folk culture.[5] In addition, its 'Sacred Arrow' culture has gradually acculturated and sublimated into the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture, which have further inspired and

influenced the development of Chinese traditional ethnic archery. Jianzha County has been vigorously developing archery culture activities with the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' as the theme. In July 2007, Jianzha County was named as 'the Town of Chinese Ethnic Archery' by the Shooting & Archery Sports Management Center of the General Administration of Sport. Against the background of strengthening self-identity of traditional ethnic sports culture and building 'cultural self-confidence', it is necessary to grasp the opportunity and strengthen the excavation, inheritance and development of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture so as to promote its sustainable development.

II. THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF JIANZHA TIBETAN ARCHERY

The ancient ethnic archery culture in Qinghai area has a long history.[6] It is recorded in The Western Qiang Memoir, History of the Later Han Dynasty that 'the Hehuang area (in northern Qinghai) was in shortage of grain, but abundant in animals and the people there had to hunt to make a living'.[7] which shows that during the later Han period, the Qiang people of the Hehuang area already went archery and widely used it in hunting activities. It is also recorded in the Tubo Memoir, the Old Book of Tang Dynasty that 'the people of the Tubo Dynasty blew conch-made instrument and

beat drum while fighting a war, and they brought their bow and arrow wherever they go'.[8] Therefore, we know that bow and arrow were of great importance in life and military activities at that time, and their popularity was very high, which laid a foundation for the later inheritance and development.

Jianzha County is located in the southeastern part of Qinghai province and belongs to the Amdo Tibetan area. The area is situated at the bank of the Yellow River and the water there is abundant and the grass luxuriant. It is a small county with a total population of 53,800 in which the Tibetan population accounts for 67%. [9] The Jianzha area was subordinate to the Jiaoh County during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), to Kuozhou prefecture from the Northern Zhou Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, to Song jishi military region and Jin Jishi state in the Song Dynasty, to Guide state in the Yuan Dynasty, to Hezhou Wei prefecture in the Ming Dynasty and to Guide prefecture in the Qing Dynasty. Because Jianzha is an important farming area along the Yellow River, it was throughout the history located at the border area where wars were frequent. As a strategic place during military expansion, it had the soldier stationed all year round. After the fall of the Tubo dynasty, the war in the Jianzha area was reduced. The civil and military life then was relatively stable and the soldiers guarding the city and border gradually became the local people there. Because they were accustomed to martial arts and archery in production and everyday life, archery became very popular among them, and later developed into a folk sports competition and traditional sporting event with strong ethnic characteristics. Moreover, the original archery competition was also an important means of keeping people connected among villages, maintaining unity as well as dissolving disputes, which has the peace keeping implication similar to modern sports culture. Therefore, Jianzha, Hualong, Ledu and other parts of the Hehuang area are the birthplace of the Qinghai folk archery activities as well as the hometown and cradle of Qinghai folk arrow culture. [10]

In the past, archery culture was passed down through family education, army admonition, recreational athletics, hunting and so on. But now, the archery culture is primarily inherited by recreational athletics. In the Amdo area of Qinghai, Tibetans have a traditional festival named 'the Dutton Festival'. 'The Dutton Festival' is a comprehensive Tibetan sports and cultural activity participated by village unit. With folk archery and chantable story-telling as the main carrier, it is the integration of archery competition, folk songs and dances, chantable story-telling and so on. In Tibetan language, 'Dutton' means the feast of the Sacred Arrow, the archery festival or the archery celebrations. 'Du' means the arrow, 'ton' refers to banquets, festivals. Because of the fact that the Dutton Festival is mainly participated by men in the archery competition and

other athletics and recreational activities, it is also called 'the Carnival of men' During the Dutton Festival, the division of labor is quite clear among men and women. The women of the home team greet the visiting team by singing and dancing, while men are responsible for banquet, toast, tea and other matters. The Dutton Festival, carrying local people's yearning and appeal for peace and friendship, is now highly valued by the public, [11] which facilitates the inheritance and development of the traditional archery activities in Amdo area.

National traditional sports itself has the superiority as a means of fitness for all, in line with the principles of entertainment, leisure and promotion that are promoted by contemporary fitness. [12] As a kind of mass sports competition, the archery competition of Qinghai Tibetan area involves such physical activities as 'stomping and waving', 'loudly calling out' and 'circling dance celebration'. [13] Therefore, traditional archery competition is full of entertainment, participation and fitness, which can greatly attract the broad masses to participate in it. At present, the archery activities based on recreational athletics and leisure experience is widely carried out in Qinghai province. Since the beginning of the new century, the Qinghai provincial government has vigorously supported the development of archery, and the organizing and holding of 'the Colourful Sacred Arrow International Traditional Ethnic Archery Invitational Tournament (ITEAT)' represents the further excavation and promotion of Jianzha archery culture and the development of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture.

III. THE CULTURAL ORIGIN AND CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS OF THE 'COLOURFUL SACRED ARROW'

A. *The cultural origin and cultural connotations of the 'Sacred Arrow'*

The traditional Tibetan sports embody the national and regional characteristics of Tibetan culture. [14] The Tibetan "divine arrow" culture has a long history and has profound cultural connotation, which is fully embodied in bow and arrow making, sacrificial ceremony, religious belief, competition rules and other aspects.

The exquisite craftsmanship of the Jianzha traditional bow and arrow is integrated into the profound cultural connotations. The traditional Tibetan bow is made of ox horns, also known as the Ox Horn Bow. The surface of bow is wrapped by tendon and bark. The production process of the traditional horn bow is complex and takes several years. Therefore, the ox horn bow is cherished and valued by local people. The shaft of Jianzha traditional wooden arrow is made of pine and the fletching is made from the feather of

culture. The shaft is painted with a kind of natural color extracted from plant. The Jianzha wooden arrow must have four fletching, which means the conquest of the four sides. The fletching must be thin and narrow to reduce resistance and increase stability, which makes the arrow fly farther and the target more accurate. Bark is wrapped clockwise to the rear part of the fletching, which implies the gathering of wealth and food. The arrowhead must be sharp, which signifies the defeat of the opponents. Jianzha people merge their yearning and longing for a better life into the wooden arrows, which has formed the arrow worship.

The bow and arrow is the sharpest weapon in ancient times. Those who can master it skillfully can gain the benefit, the glory and the power, which made it the well-deserved 'hero of tribe, clan and nation'.^[15] In the Tubo Dynasty, the saying went that 'to die of fighting is glorious while to die of disease is shameful'^[16], which indicated the heroic and warlike people at that time, their great respects for those died of fighting, and certain influence on the later appearance of arrow worship. Moreover, Tibetans believe in Tibetan Buddhism. In the middle of the ninth century, when Glandar-ma, the btsan-po of Tubo, launched the Buddhist annihilation movement, Lalong Bejiduojie, the 23rd brilliant student of Padmasambhava shot dead Glandar-ma with bow and arrow to safeguard the Buddha dharma and then fled to the present Jianzha County and buried his bow and arrow there. Later, a Tibetan palace was erected at the burial site of the bow and arrow. With the revival of the Tibetan Buddhism, the bow and arrow culture had been worshiped by the Tibetan people. As an important tool of hunting and self-defense in ancient times, the bow and arrow gave great help to the survival and multiplication of the Tibetan ancestors. Thus, the Tibetan people respect the bow and arrow very much and regarded them as the sacred arrows and as the name implies, it has been endowed with divinity.

Throughout the Jianzha area, there have occurred a series of religious and secular activities around the 'arrow', including ritual activities, traditional folk archery activities and the taboos connected to the 'God Arrow' formed in daily, etc. In the Amdo area, the Tibetan people believe in the mountain God, and each village has its own divine mountain. People build 'La-rtse' on the divine mountain and regularly held sacrificial ritual to pray to the mountain. While praying, however, 'the Sacred Arrow' is also an indispensable instrument. 'La-rtse' means 'palace at the mountain top', referring to the divine palace at the top of the mountain. Because the main body of the 'La-rtse' is composed of 'arrows', some also translated it into 'arrow cluster', 'arrow pile', 'platform inserted with arrows' and so on. In Tibetan custom, 'arrows' are used mainly as a tribute to the god of mountain for his protection.^[17] From generation to generation, the Tibetan people in Jianzha

area have been using the 'Sacred Arrow' as a divine focus for the worship of the mountain god. Furthermore, the inviolable reverence for the 'arrow' has maintained the inheritance of the divinity of the 'arrow', and has facilitated the inheritance and promotion of the 'Sacred Arrow' culture highly praised by the Tibetan people.

B. The cultural connotations of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow'

In China, archery has a long history of development and a complete cultural system. The Jianzha 'Sacred Arrow' competition has its unique archery rules and sacrificial, invitational and worship rituals, which add more meanings and connotations to archery. The time-honored 'Sacred Arrow' culture has been gradually evolving over time. In the beginning, the 'Sacred Arrow' was painted in five colors or tied with strips of cloth of five different colors by Jianzha Tibetan archers, showing their prayers and blessings. Later, the name of the 'Sacred Arrow' with five colors gradually evolved into the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow'. People also use exaggerated methods to make the giant 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' tied with five-color pure wool and colourful hada and silk, and attach it to the 'La-rtse' to show their yearning and praying for a peaceful, harmonious and desirable life.

The 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' is painted in such five colors as blue, green, yellow, black and red, with each color implying the unique geographical landscape of Jianzha area. The five colors respectively symbolize five landscapes of the blue sky, green grassland, yellow plateau, black soil, and the red Danxia landform (a kind of rosy-cloud landform). Some scholars have endowed the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' with new cultural connotations: the red symbolizing passion and vigor, the yellow richness and nobility, the black power and justice, the blue wisdom and tolerance, and the green hope and peace. People regard the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' as the soul of Jianzha and have been passing it from generation to generation.^[18] The new connotations of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has added to it with the cultural and ideological content, showing the higher expectation and pursuit of the minority people in Western China. Nowadays, the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has gone beyond category of the original life tools and military weapons. It has become a cultural symbol recognized and inherited by people, melting history, religion, folk customs, sports, art and other elements into a whole. Through the cultural inheritance and development of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow', it reveals the Jianzha people's expectation for the harmony between human and nature, their cognition and worship to the beauty of nature, their gratitude and wishes for a stable, prosperous and colourful life.

The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era needs to rely on the

inexhaustible motive force of traditional culture. "Arrow" colorful god as part of the national traditional sports culture, rich in traditional cultural diversity, ideology, culture play its function value, also from different angles and different aspect reflects a certain period of Tibetan politics, economy, history, life, religion, customs and habits, psychological state and other aspects of content.[19] The "Colorful God arrow" culture is the representative and epitome of Jianzha people's sports life, and the crystallization of the modernization of traditional culture with national characteristics. While inheriting the traditional cultural connotation, the "colorful Arrow" also integrates more modern colors and becomes an important element of regional sports brand culture, regional sports industry culture and regional fitness culture. The "colorful Arrows" culture, which contains religious beliefs and emotional sustenance, bears the weight of history and culture and also shoulders the important mission of The Times — to inherit, carry forward and develop. However, with the acceleration of the globalization of sports culture, the inheritance and development of "colorful Arrow" culture has encountered unprecedented pressure and challenge.

C. *The current situation and challenges of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture*

Regional cultural development itself is restricted by regional identity, so it is relatively difficult to inherit and develop. Since Jianzha people have recognized the fact that regional traditional ethnic sports culture can have the opportunity of internationalization, the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture evolved from the 'Sacred Arrow' culture has gradually been recognized and developed. At the same time, the archery project base has been established in Qinghai Province working as the center of the 'radiation effect', and archery competitions have been carried out which greatly promoted the development of the ethnic sports.[20] The Colourful Sacred Arrow International Traditional Ethnic Archery Invitational Tournament (ITEAT) has been held for four consecutive years. It is an international traditional ethnic sports event derived from the Tibetan 'Dutton Festival'. The tournament (ITEAT) has become not only the most influential channel for the publicity and diffusion of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture, but also the major platform for the modern development of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture.

Taking the advantages of the Kanbula National Park, the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has been integrated into the National Regong Cultural Ecological Protection Experimental Zone so as to promote the building of the Yellow River Culture and Customs and to create 'a beautiful Qinghai and a charming Jianzha'. This is in line with Qinghai's the promotional strategy of fast, green, harmonious and coordinated development. At

present, the Colourful Sacred Arrow International Traditional Ethnic Archery Invitational Tournament (ITEAT) and the Dutton Festival is consisted of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' summit, the ritual ceremony, the opening ceremony, the Dutton Culture Festival, archery competition, closing ceremony, student archery competition, ethnic costume and Layi (love song) contest and so on. The tournament (ITEAT) uses the international traditional archery competition rules. There are totally five groups: the traditional bow 20-person group, the recurve bow 20-person group, the compound bow 20-person group, the traditional bow 5-person group and the recurve bow 5-person group.[21] Moreover, the tournament (ITEAT) has been included in three international traditional archery competitions in China, and the archery rules of the tournament has been raised to the rules of international traditional archery competitions. The scale of the tournament continues to expand, the level keeps improving and the notability and influence strengthens at home and abroad.

In the context of globalization, ethnic culture is often threatened by the cultural homogeneity and in order to maintain its authenticity, the intergenerational inheritance of culture becomes an inevitable choice.²² The modernization and internationalization of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has posed a challenge to the traditional ethnic sports culture. Originally, the 'Dutton Festival' in Jianzha was rich in content, but now many of them are being 'lost'.

Through investigation and interview, we found that the traditional craftsmanship of the ox horn bow is almost extinct in Jianzha despite of its cultural value and the fact that it has been included in the national intangible cultural heritage list. Only a few individual manufacturers are engaged in the production of traditional bows and arrows. Besides, the market development of traditional bow and arrow lags behind the composite bow and the recurve bow market due to its high price, vulnerable wooden material, excessive hardness and relatively short range. In the earlier archery competitions and the 'Dutton Festival', there were chantable story-telling related to bow and arrow, but now it is facing the danger of extinction because of the fact that the storytellers are too old to communicate and cannot record the lyrics passed down from generation to generation due to their illiteracy. Formerly, Jianzha was famous for its wooden arrows, and almost all the villagers were able to make wooden arrows. But now there are fewer and fewer people who can make arrows. The process of making arrows has been industrialized in the factory while the cultural heritage of traditional wooden arrow has gradually become lost. Currently, the cultural brand of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has been built up, but the industrialization process of archery remains falling far behind. At the present time, archery in Jianzha County are being vigorously carried out, but the proportion of

the younger participants remains to be small and intergenerational inheritance status is worrisome because of the impact of Western sports culture and the rich and varied social life. Although the NO.1 High School of Jianzha County has been approved as the pilot school of the 'Archery into School' campaign in Qinghai province, its influence is relatively limited. The theoretical research, popularization, the relative backwardness of education has constrained the development and inheritance of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' culture.

With the continuous social development and progress, the living environment and life style have changed correspondingly and the environment nurturing the Dutton culture has largely transformed. In addition, the education and inheritance of the 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' has been constrained by the rich material of modern life and the high modernization degree of spiritual life.

IV. CONCLUSION

The 'Colourful Sacred Arrow' is not only the essence of Jianzha Tibetan traditional sports culture, but also an essential part of the Chinese traditional ethnic sports culture. The traditional sports culture is formed during the specific period of history and inherited and developed under the particular historical circumstances. The interrelationship between human being and environment has indirectly and profoundly restricted the development of the traditional ethnic sports. In this age of globalization, the cultural diversity has its obvious characteristics. The richness of modern civilization has changed the survival conditions of the traditional sports and has highlighted much more vitality and adaptability of the modern sports over the traditional ethnic ones. At present, the western sports culture has been spreading in a deep and extensive manner and this phenomenon has been widely revealed in social sports, school sports as well as athletics sports.

Inheriting and carrying forward the traditional national sports culture is an important part of China's construction of "cultural confidence" system in the new era, which is of positive significance to maintaining the diversity of national culture, strengthening the foundation of national culture, and accelerating the impetus of national development. In the process of globalization of sports culture, the interpenetration and diffusion of western sports culture and national traditional sports culture become more widespread and deeper, which makes the development of national traditional sports culture face multiple challenges. The survival space of the traditional ethnic sports is becoming narrower because of the transformation of social environment, the diversity of sports culture and the spreading of western sports culture. In the face of all kinds of challenges, we should pay attention to

protect the "colorful arrow" culture, and realize innovative development, so that the traditional sports culture needs to be more integrated with the modern sports civilization in order to inherit and develop; It should conform to both tradition and modernity, have both connotation and development, so that the development of "Colorful Arrow" culture can find the way of sustainable development supported by internal power and external environment. To promote the implementation of the national fitness strategy in the western ethnic areas, provide experience for the development, mining, sorting and promotion of ethnic sports and cultural resources. Besides, we should take this opportunity to vigorously develop the ethnic sporting resources and commit ourselves to the excavation, arrangement and promotion of the ethnic sporting events so as to carry forward the traditional ethnic culture.

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