



A Study on the Promotion Model of Dragon and Lion Dance as a Traditional Ethnic Sport in Chengdu

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ABSTRACT

Dragon and lion dance is a fine traditional Chinese sport and an important intangible cultural heritage, aligning with national strategies for ICH protection, culture-tourism integration, rural revitalization, building a sporting powerhouse, and fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. Taking Chengdu as a case, this study uses literature review, case analysis, and logical analysis to examine the promotion status, achievements, and problems. Findings show that a multi-stakeholder framework involving government, associations, schools, and the market has taken shape, with phased progress in campus programs, cultural tourism performances, and community activities. Yet shortcomings remain: a shortage of professional instructors, non-uniform teaching standards, weak penetration in secondary schools and grassroots communities, low marketization, and an incomplete inheritance mechanism. Highlighting the nationally recognized ICH item—the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance—and closely following policies on ICH protection, culture-tourism integration, and traditional sports inheritance, this paper distills replicable local experience and proposes optimization paths: strengthening policy implementation, improving the instructor system, introducing ICH into school curricula, deepening culture-tourism integration, refining the inheritance mechanism, and supporting rural revitalization. The study offers theoretical reference and practical evidence for the high-quality development of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu, promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture.

1. Research Background

Traditional ethnic sports constitute a vital dimension of the living inheritance of fine traditional Chinese culture, playing a unique role in strengthening cultural identity and consolidating national sentiment. Dragon and lion dance integrates martial arts, dance, and festive rituals into a unified

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practice. Through a long historical evolution, it has accumulated a spiritual core of self-improvement, unity, and collaboration, and it retains broad grassroots participation and cultural influence to this day. In recent years, relevant institutional arrangements have continued to release favorable signals: the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China incorporated “enhancing the communication power and influence of Chinese civilization” into its strategic deployment, and the 14th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development issued by the General Administration of Sport of China emphasized the creative transformation of traditional ethnic sports. These macro-level policy orientations provide institutional space for the dragon and lion dance to evolve from a localized folk activity toward standardized and normalized promotion.

Chengdu is located in the hinterland of Southwest China, possessing both the cultural heritage of a renowned historical city and the public sports service capacity of a regional central city. The ancient town of Huanglongxi in Shuangliu District has incorporated the Fire Dragon Lantern Dance into its tourism performance system, forming a relatively stable performance schedule; Xindu District launched the inaugural “Dragon and Lion Championship” in 2023, signaling the initial emergence of a local competition platform; the Luo Liang Lion Dance Association in Wuhou District has expanded the project’s development space through exchange channels with Hong Kong and Macao; and universities represented by Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine have begun to introduce dragon and lion sports into physical education curricula and club activities. These signs indicate that the promotion of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu has moved beyond a fragmented stage and has begun to acquire a degree of organizational structure and social visibility.

2. Research Significance

In 2008, the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance was inscribed on the second batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List, marking the formal incorporation of this western Sichuan folk sports form into the national cultural protection system. In recent years, Chengdu has vigorously advanced the construction of a "World-Class City of Sporting Events," with the total scale of the city's sports industry exceeding 120 billion yuan in 2023, and traditional ethnic sports have drawn increasing attention as an integral component of the city's cultural identity. However, amid rapid urbanization, dragon and lion dance as a traditional folk sports practice faces practical challenges such as the aging of inheritors, insufficient youth participation, and weak market-oriented operational capacity. According to statistics from the Chengdu Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association, approximately 58 dragon and lion teams remain active throughout the year in the city, with a direct participation of merely over 1,200 individuals. Among them, participants aged 50 and above account for as high as 78%, while the 25–45 age group constitutes less than 6%, highlighting a pronounced inheritance gap. In view of this, the present study takes the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu as the research object. Through field investigations of sports administrative departments, dragon and lion dance associations, primary and secondary schools, cultural tourism scenic spots, and community-based teams, this study systematically analyzes the development status and promotion model of the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu. Taking the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance as a typical case, it conducts an in-depth analysis to reveal the functional mechanisms of branding, scenarization, and institutionalization in the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The study aims to provide empirical evidence for optimizing the promotion policies of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu and improving the inheritance system of traditional ethnic sports, and to offer a reference for the sustainable development of folk sports programs in comparable cities.

3.Literature Review

3.1 Foundational Research on the Development of Dragon and Lion Dance as a Traditional Ethnic Sport

As a core vehicle of traditional Chinese sports culture, dragon and lion dance has long been a focus of academic inquiry into its cultural origins, value connotations, and development theories. Lü Li systematically examined the evolutionary trajectory of Chinese dragon dance culture from the perspective of cultural history, identifying its multifaceted values encompassing athletic competition, cultural inheritance, and social cohesion. Mao Di et al. further argued that dragon dance plays an irreplaceable role in constructing national cultural identity, thereby providing a theoretical basis for the modern promotion of traditional sports. Regarding issues of modernization, Hu Xiaoming emphasized that traditional ethnic sports must adapt to the demands of the times through transformation, maintaining cultural authenticity while prioritizing accessibility and practical applicability. Collectively, the above studies establish the theoretical framework for the present research and offer a general academic foundation for an in-depth analysis of the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu.

3.2 Research on the Inheritance of Local Dragon and Lion Dance as Intangible Cultural Heritage Resources in Chengdu

Empirical studies on dragon and lion dance in Chengdu have predominantly focused on the exploration and current status analysis of local intangible cultural heritage (ICH) resources, exhibiting distinct regional specificity. Taking the nationally recognized ICH item “Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance” as the research object, Huang Xiaohua employed fieldwork to analyze its contemporary inheritance model, development bottlenecks, and cultural connotations, revealing the common challenges confronted by traditional dragon dance resources in modern society. Chen Min concentrated on the “Luodai Liu Family Dragon” Hakka dragon dance in Longquanyi District, Chengdu, investigating the current status and predicaments of its folk inheritance, thereby providing a concrete case for the living inheritance of Hakka dragon culture. Relevant working documents issued by the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Sports and the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture, Broadcast-TV, and Tourism have also summarized the conservation achievements and development directions of traditional sports ICH in Chengdu from the perspective of local practice. Collectively, these localized studies provide a direct basis for understanding the practical foundation of the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu.

3.3 Research on the Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Promotion of Dragon and Lion Dance Programs

In the domain of promotion mechanism research, multi-stakeholder collaboration constitutes a focal point in both domestic and international scholarship, primarily addressing the interaction models among government, industry associations, schools, and social forces. In the field of campus promotion, Zhang Jiajia investigated the current status of physical education curricula in primary and secondary schools in Chengdu, identifying deficiencies in teaching staff and curriculum design for campus dragon and lion sports, and proposed development pathways in alignment with the integration of sports and education. At the level of industry and societal collaboration, relevant studies have emphasized the vital role of industry associations in standard setting, resource integration, and standardized management. From a macro perspective, Wang Zhihui argued that the development of traditional ethnic sports should establish a governance framework characterized by government coordination, industry collaboration, and societal participation, with clearly defined

rights and responsibilities for all parties. The above studies provide theoretical references for analyzing the multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanism of the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu.

3.4 Research on the Culture-Tourism Integration and Market-Oriented Development of Dragon and Lion Dance Programs

With the deepening advancement of the culture-tourism integration strategy, the marketization and industrialization of dragon and lion dance programs have emerged as significant research directions. Yang Rui et al. explored the integration models of sports intangible cultural heritage and tourism development, proposing the realization of living ICH inheritance through resource transformation and industrial operation. The Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth, jointly issued by the General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education, provides a clear policy orientation for dragon and lion programs to connect with the market through campus popularization and social participation. These studies offer valuable references for the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu to achieve culture-tourism integration and to construct a pathway toward market-oriented sustainable development.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Research Object

This study takes the promotion model of the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu as the research object. The investigation scope encompasses sports administrative departments in Chengdu and its surrounding districts and counties, dragon and lion dance sports associations, primary and secondary schools offering dragon and lion dance courses, cultural tourism scenic spots, community-based dragon and lion performance teams, and groups of intangible cultural heritage inheritors. The analysis focuses on the inheritance, promotion, and operational practices of the nationally recognized ICH item—the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance—as a core case.

4.2 Research Methods

Literature Review Method: Relevant literature on traditional ethnic sports, dragon and lion dance, ICH inheritance, culture-tourism integration, and the integration of sports and education was retrieved through databases such as CNKI, Wanfang, and VIP. Concurrently, national and Chengdu-specific policy documents, work plans, and industry reports were collected via government official websites and industry platforms to provide theoretical and policy support for this study.

Case Analysis Method: Taking the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance as a typical case, this study systematically examines its historical origins, inheritance system, campus promotion, culture-tourism integration, and safeguard mechanisms, summarizes its strengths and distinctive features, and distills models and pathways that can be replicated and promoted citywide.

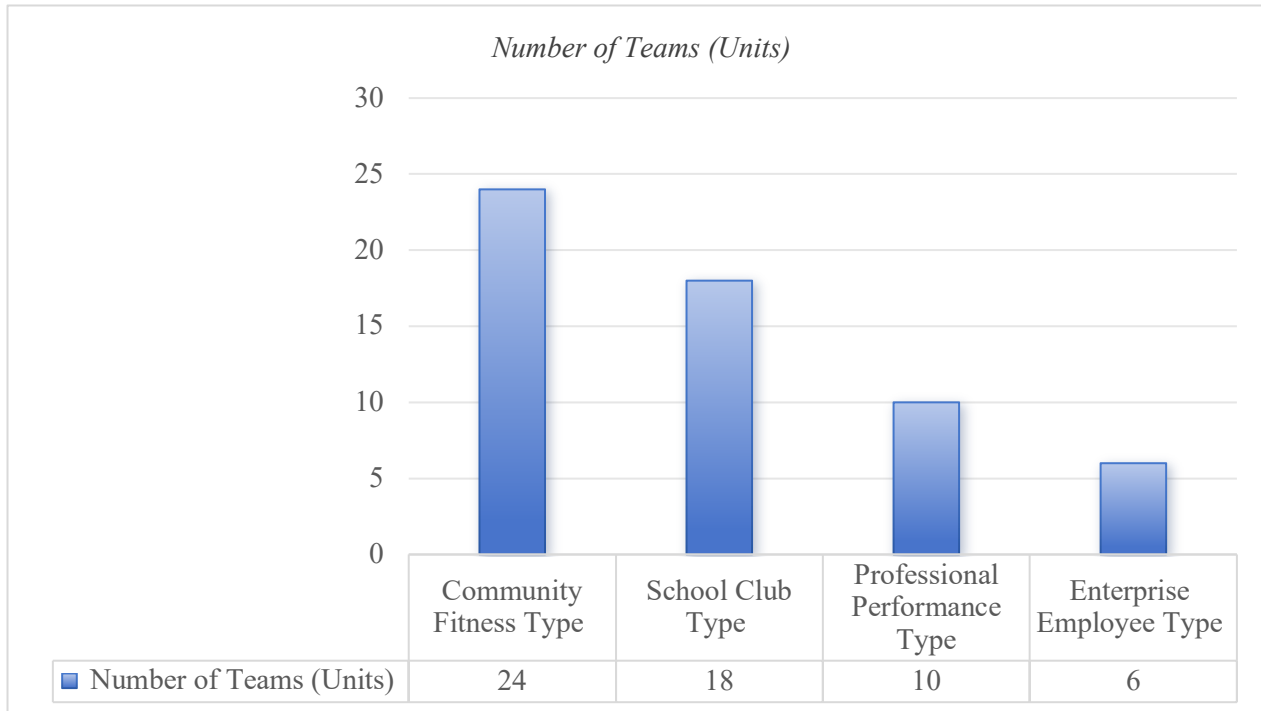
Logical Analysis Method: Employing methods of induction, deduction, synthesis, and inference, this study sorts and analyzes the current status, problems, and experiences of dragon and lion dance promotion in Chengdu. Integrating national policy orientations with local development realities, it logically derives scientific and feasible optimization strategies to ensure that the research conclusions are rigorous, reasonable, and practically valuable.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Current Status of Dragon and Lion Dance in Chengdu

The dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu enjoys a relatively broad grassroots foundation. According to statistics from the Chengdu Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association, approximately 58 dragon and lion teams remain active throughout the year in the city, with a direct participation of around 1,200 individuals. The distribution of team types is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Distribution of Dragon and Lion Dance Team Types in Chengdu



Source: Data source: Compiled from the membership roster of the Chengdu Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association and survey data (2024).

Figure 1 indicates that community fitness-oriented teams account for the highest proportion (41.4%), whereas professional commercial performance teams constitute merely 17.2%.

In terms of age structure, individuals aged 50 and above account for 78% of community teams, while school teams are predominantly composed of adolescents aged 12–22. The 25–45 age group constitutes less than 6%, exhibiting a pronounced “bimodal with a hollow middle” demographic discontinuity. Regarding activity formats, festival and celebration performances account for over 70% of the total annual activities, with an insufficient supply of routinized activities. From the perspective of technical inheritance, the master–apprentice system remains the dominant mode (approximately 60%), and no representative inheritor of intangible cultural heritage has yet been recognized for the Southern Lion Dance school. Zhang et al. noted that traditional sports ICH programs generally confront the predicament of broken inheritance chains and the disconnection between campus and community inheritance contexts; the dragon and lion dance likewise faces the intergenerational transmission challenge of “campus cultivation but community discontinuity.” Li and Yuan also confirmed that the professional inheritance capacity of most traditional sports programs is concentrated among middle-aged and elderly groups, and a closed-loop mechanism for retaining and transforming young inheritors has yet to be established. In summary, the current status of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu exhibits four characteristics: a predominance of community fitness-oriented teams, a polarized age structure, pronounced festival-oriented activity patterns, and insufficient professional inheritance capacity.

5.2 Analysis of the Promotion Model of Dragon and Lion Dance in Chengdu

Based on the investigation of multiple stakeholders involved in the dragon and lion dance program in Chengdu, this study categorizes the current promotion pathways into four models: policy-driven, event-led, culture-tourism integrated, and campus inheritance. These four models exhibit significant differences in terms of promotion entities, activity scale, coverage scope, and resource input. Their characteristics and core data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison between the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance and the Citywide Average Level

Promotion Model	Leading Subject	Annual Activity Frequency	Participation/Coverage Scale	Funding Source	Typical Representative
Policy-driven	Municipal/District Bureau of Culture, Tourism and Sports	3-5 times/year	500-5000 people per session	Mainly government appropriation	Chengdu Cultural Seasons Style · Folk Spring Festival Performance
Event-led	Dragon and Lion Sports Association, Bureau of Sports	2-3 times/year	41-61 teams, 532-704 people per event	Government appropriation + membership fee + sponsorship	Chuandun Cup' Youth Competition, Hope Star Sports Meeting
Cultural-Tourism Integrated	Scenic spot operators, commercial performance teams	1-4 times daily during peak season	About 180,000 person-times per year	Scenic spot procurement + commercial orders	Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Dance On-site Performance
Campus Inheritance	Primary and secondary schools	1-2 times per week	Covers about 2000 people, about 480 people in training	Education funds + special investment	Huanglongxi School, Nanfeng Primary School

Source: Compiled from event data of the Youth Sports Division of the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Sports, annual reports of the Chengdu Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association, operational data of the Huanglongxi Ancient Town scenic area, and curriculum records of surveyed schools (2024–2025).

As shown in Table 1, the four models exhibit marked differences in scale and sustainability. The event-led model achieves the largest single-session participation, with the 2023 “Chuandun Cup” attracting 61 teams and 704 participants. The culture-tourism integrated model, based on the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance, achieves high-frequency performances, averaging four shows per day during the Dragon Year Spring Festival. The campus inheritance model has limited coverage yet demonstrates the strongest continuity, with Huanglongxi School having trained over 1,600 foundational students. Nevertheless, Chengdu has yet to establish a cross-departmental coordination mechanism, and the four models have not formed a complete chain of “cultivation–showcase–competition–market.” The transition from “coexistence of multiple models” to “integrated synergy” constitutes the key to optimizing promotion effectiveness.

5.3 Comparative Analysis of the Inheritance Effectiveness of the Huanglongxi Fire

Dragon Lantern Dance

The Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance was inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2008 and is the only national-level ICH item in the dragon and lion category in Chengdu. A comparison between this case and the citywide average level is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison between the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance and the Citywide Average Level

Comparison Indicators	Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance	Citywide Average Level
Number of inheritors (people)	5	0.3 per team
Team size (people)	26	8-12
Annual average performances (times)	106	18
Students in training at schools (people)	86	40
3-year retention rate of trainees (%)	30.1	22.5

Source: Data from the Shuangliu District Cultural Center, Huanglongxi School, and the Chengdu Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association (2024).

Table 2 indicates that the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance significantly outperforms the citywide average across all indicators. Research by Zhang et al. suggests that ICH branding provides projects with social legitimacy and advantages in resource acquisition. The Huanglongxi case corroborates the empowering effect of branding; however, issues such as a student retention rate of merely 30% and the aging of inheritors persist. Chen and Wu note that the marketization of folk sports confronts the dilemma of ineffective conversion from cultural value to economic value. The Huanglongxi experience demonstrates that branding serves as an effective lever for promotion, yet it must be accompanied by an inheritor safeguard system and marketization capacity building in order to achieve sustainable development.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

6.1 Conclusions

Through investigation and analysis, the present study reveals that the promotion of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu has preliminarily established a framework characterized by government guidance, association coordination, and multi-stakeholder participation. However, the existing promotion model exhibits structural deficiencies and has yet to form a citywide synergistic development system. First, the rights and responsibilities of promotion entities remain ambiguous: the government's leading role is insufficient, the coordination capacity of industry associations is weak, market entities demonstrate low levels of participation, and schools function merely as isolated promotion venues without exerting a citywide linkage effect. Second, the distribution of promotion scenarios is imbalanced: resources are excessively concentrated in schools and core scenic areas, whereas promotion in communities, villages, and commercial markets remains perfunctory, with an absence of normalized and systematic promotion mechanisms. Third, the operational safeguards of the model are inadequate: the supply of professional talent, unified teaching standards, market-oriented operational systems, and long-term ICH inheritance mechanisms have all yet to be perfected, resulting in poor sustainability of promotion efforts. Fourth, local distinctive features have been insufficiently explored: the demonstrative effect and brand value of ICH resources such as the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance have not been

fully realized, and a replicable localized model has yet to take shape. On the whole, the current promotion model of dragon and lion dance in Chengdu remains at a fragmented and piecemeal stage, lacking systematic planning and citywide strategic layout, with various promotion entities and scenarios disconnected from one another, directly constraining the scale and sustainable development of the program.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn above, a six-in-one citywide synergistic promotion pathway should be established, characterized by "government leadership + association coordination + campus empowerment + cultural tourism empowerment + community implementation + market operation." Specifically, this entails: strengthening top-level government design and improving policy and funding safeguard systems; leveraging the coordinating role of industry associations to standardize professional norms and industry management; deeply exploring the ICH resources of the Huanglongxi Fire Dragon Lantern Dance and promoting the in-depth integration of dragon and lion culture with the cultural tourism industry to build a local distinctive cultural brand; positioning campuses as bases for cultivating reserve talent to achieve effective linkage between school and community promotion; taking communities and villages as core grassroots strongholds to broaden the program's citywide coverage; and cultivating social market entities, activating market-oriented operational momentum, and perfecting the living ICH inheritance mechanism. By comprehensively dismantling the barriers among promotion entities and scenarios and addressing the deficiencies of the existing promotion model, a multi-stakeholder, interconnected, systematic, and long-term promotion system for the dragon and lion dance program can be formed, thereby driving the program toward scaled, standardized, and sustainable development.

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