

A Study on the Mechanism and Optimization Paths for Promoting the Formation of a Strong Sense of Community among the Chinese Nation through Folk Sports Tourism—A Comparative Case Analysis Based on the Xijiang River Basin in Guangxi Province

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Abstract: *Folk sports tourism serves as an important vehicle for strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation. Taking the three counties of Mashan, Luzhai, and Gongcheng along the Xijiang River in Guangxi as examples, this study employs methods such as literature review, case analysis, and field surveys. Drawing on theories of interactive ritual chains, social embeddedness, and symbolic interaction, it constructs a four-dimensional analytical framework—“subject collaboration—means empowerment—object interaction—effect progression”—to deeply explore the mechanisms by which folk sports tourism fosters and strengthens the sense of community among the Chinese nation, as well as to identify optimal pathways for its enhancement. The study finds that folk sports tourism cultivates emotional energy through collective joy and sparks cultural identity via symbolic interaction, thereby forming the core mechanism for solidifying the sense of community among the Chinese nation. Addressing common challenges such as cultural homogenization, superficial symbolism, and talent gaps, this paper proposes optimization strategies including differentiated development, living heritage preservation, digital empowerment, and improved infrastructure. These strategies aim to provide both theoretical insights and practical references for ethnic regions seeking to strengthen the sense of community among the Chinese nation through the integration of culture and tourism.*

Keywords: Folk sports tourism; The formation mechanism of the Chinese national community consciousness; Optimization paths;

1. INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation is the core principle of ethnic work in the new era [1]. As an important vehicle that integrates ethnic cultural heritage, regional economic development, and cross-ethnic interactions, folk sports tourism plays a unique role in promoting exchanges, interactions, and integration among various ethnic groups. The region along the Xijiang River in Guangxi, leveraging its diverse ethnic cultural resources and distinctive geographical location, not only serves as a crucial stronghold for safeguarding China’s ethnic cultural heritage but also sees its folk sports tourism industry become a vital link for fostering ethnic solidarity and consolidating the sense of community among the Chinese nation. However, constrained by factors such as insufficient funding, inadequate integration of resources, and a lack of specialized planning, the potential of folk sports tourism in this region to strengthen the sense of community among the Chinese nation has yet to be fully realized. With the issuance of the “Guiding Opinions on Using Sports to Strengthen the Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation,” as well as the successive release of the “14th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development” and the “14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development,” supporting ethnic regions in developing distinctive sports tourism products and promoting exchanges and integration among various ethnic groups have become key policy priorities. Consequently, research on the intrinsic link between folk sports tourism and the cultivation of a sense of community for the Chinese nation has attracted increasing attention from the academic community [2].

Existing domestic literature largely focuses on surveys of Guangxi’s folk sports resources and explorations of integrated cultural and tourism development paths. Some scholars have analyzed the intrinsic connection between folk sports culture and community consciousness, arguing that the linkage between the two is an outward

manifestation of overlapping cultural consensus. However, most of these studies remain at the level of theoretical analysis. Although overseas research has earlier focused on the role of folk sports in ethnic identity formation and mechanisms of cross-cultural exchange, confirming that folk sports, as cultural symbols, serve as a core medium for ethnic identity, thereby providing an interdisciplinary perspective for studying the cultural value of sports tourism, such research still lacks targeted discussions specifically addressing the unique Chinese context of strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation.

Although existing research has laid a theoretical foundation for this study, the research on the mechanisms by which folk sports tourism fosters the formation of community consciousness remains relatively weak. It lacks multi-case comparative analyses that take into account the unique characteristics of the Xijiang River basin region in Guangxi, and most studies tend to focus on single-dimensional explorations. Moreover, the proposed optimization strategies often lack practical applicability at the regional level. To address these shortcomings, this study draws upon the practical experience of folk sports tourism development along the Xijiang River in Guangxi, as well as the region's distinctive features. Taking Nanning Mashan County, Liuzhou Luzhai County, and Guilin Gongcheng Yao Autonomous County—three typical counties along the Xijiang River—as research objects, this study comprehensively employs literature review and case-comparative analysis methods. Through field surveys and in-depth interviews, it gathers primary data to systematically sort out the theoretical logic and impact mechanisms underlying how folk sports tourism strengthens the sense of community among the Chinese nation. The study also conducts comparative analyses of different county-level development models and their practical outcomes, identifying current developmental obstacles and their underlying causes.

Based on the multi-ethnic residential characteristics along the Xijiang River, this paper constructs a specialized analytical framework to uncover the intrinsic mechanisms by which folk sports tourism promotes the cultivation of community awareness. It also proposes differentiated optimization strategies and policy recommendations that are tailored to the region's unique characteristics. The policy recommendations aim to enrich the micro-level research perspective on strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation, provide practical references for the high-quality development of folk sports tourism in ethnic regions of western China, and offer new ideas for these regions to consolidate their achievements in poverty alleviation and seamlessly transition to rural revitalization.

2. RELEVANT THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Relevant Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1 The Theory of Interactive Ritual Chains

The theory of the interaction ritual chain was proposed by American sociologist Randall Collins. At its core, it is a chain-like interactive process composed of four key elements: group gatherings, shared focal points of attention, collective emotional experiences, and the accumulation of emotional energy—ultimately leading to group solidarity and identity formation. Collins argues that society is not an abstract systemic unit but rather a collection of people who feel united through ritual participation and ritualistic symbols (Wang Peng, Lin Juren, 2006)[3]. In the context of folk sports tourism, ethnic festivals and traditional competitions create highly infectious physical and psychological spaces. Here, tourists and local residents break down barriers of social identity, engage in joint physical activities, and collectively focus on the central events of these competitions, thereby generating intense emotional resonance. This brief collective jubilation then transforms into sustained emotional energy. As this emotional energy continues to accumulate, it gives rise to a powerful collective symbol—the notion of "the Chinese nation as one family"—thus elevating individual interactions into group-level identity and providing an emotional bond that strengthens the sense of community among the Chinese nation.

2.1.2 Social Embeddedness Theory

The theory originates from Karl Polanyi's core idea that "economic behavior is embedded in social structures" (Uzzi, B., 1997)[4], and was later expanded by Granovetter into an analytical framework encompassing four dimensions: relationships, structure, cognition, and culture. This theory emphasizes that individual and group behaviors are not isolated, atomistic actions; rather, they are profoundly constrained and shaped by social networks, cultural norms, and institutional contexts (Huang Zhongwei & Wang Yulu, 2007)[5]. In this study, folk sports

tourism naturally possesses all-round embedded characteristics: at the spatial and structural levels, physical venues such as ethnic villages and sports arenas serve as shared spaces where various ethnic groups coexist and enjoy themselves together, breaking down geographical and psychological barriers; at the cultural and cognitive levels, the diverse cultural symbols embodied in folk sports events intermingle through interaction, enabling tourists and local residents to build cross-ethnic social networks via collaborative competitions and fostering shared values. Through this multidimensional embedding, traditional sports facilitate the transformation of ethnically interwoven communities—from physical aggregation toward emotional integration—providing a solid structural foundation for strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation.

2.1.3 Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interactionism was founded by George Herbert Mead. Its central idea is that social reality is constructed through people's definitions and interpretations of symbols in their interactions. Microsocial processes—including socialization and interpersonal interaction is the central focus of this school of thought (Hu Rong, 1989)[6]. According to this theory, humans do not react directly to objective objects; rather, they act based on the symbolic meanings that these objects carry. In folk sports tourism, folk artifacts such as dragon boats, embroidered balls, and long drums—as well as behavioral norms like village-opening ceremonies and competition rules—constitute a specific cultural symbol system. As tourists interpret, share, and co-create these symbols, they not only bridge cultural gaps but also subtly reshape participants' concrete perceptions of the grand concept of "the Chinese nation." In this way, the sense of community is reinforced through shared symbols and resonant meanings.

2.2 Analytical Framework for the Mechanism and Implementation Path of How Folk Sports Tourism Promotes the Formation of a Strong Sense of Community Among the Chinese Nation

This study is based on fieldwork conducted in the three counties of Mashan, Luzhai, and Gongcheng in Guangxi. It integrates literature analysis with empirical research to construct a four-dimensional analytical framework—"subject collaboration—means empowerment—object interaction—cumulative effects"—and deeply explores the internal mechanisms through which folk sports tourism strengthens the sense of community among the Chinese nation.

The government coordinates policy resources, market entities invigorate industrial momentum, and the third sector along with grassroots communities provide supplementary mobilization efforts. With diverse actors working in synergy, a solid organizational foundation is laid for fostering a sense of community. Relying on policy guidance and digital technologies, folk sports resources are transformed into embodied tourism products and immersive experiences, thus opening up a pathway for the conversion of cultural resources into resources of identity and providing crucial support for building cultural identity. Folk sports tourism breaks down barriers to interethnic interaction. Residents strengthen their cultural pride through participation, while tourists deepen cross-cultural understanding through immersive experiences. As different ethnic groups engage in shared practices, cultural divides gradually dissolve, creating a highly integrated space for cultural exchange and turning interethnic interactions into bonds of emotional connection.

This process moves from the emotional belonging of an individual's physical presence, to the narrative construction of medium-scale egalitarian interactions, and then to—

The macro-level, conscious preservation of the cultural foundations of the Chinese national community progresses in a stepwise manner, achieving an elevation of values. Folk sports tourism, by embodying cultural heritage, driving social integration, and reshaping value identification, has become a vivid practical platform for solidifying the sense of community among the Chinese nation, providing both theoretical and practical guidance for the integration of culture and tourism in ethnic regions and for fostering a shared sense of community.

3. CASE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1 Mashan County, Nanning City: Leading with the rock-wall economy, empowered by the "Three Cultural Treasures," and enhancing efficiency through comprehensive regional collaboration.

Mashan County is leveraging its rock-climbing economy as a core catalyst, building on internationally and nationally recognized climbing events to create distinctive features. The sports tourism brand has achieved remarkable results in developing rock climbing—from having none to becoming excellent—and has doubled the

number of tourist visits. Build a sports tourism consumption chain centered on rock climbing, transforming natural rock wall resources into drivers of county-level economic growth. Extremely. [7] Based on the “Cultural Three Treasures” —the Zhuang ethnic group’s drum dance, pole dance, and three-part folk songs—Mashan County promotes the dynamic preservation of intangible cultural heritage by developing cultural and creative products such as drum ornaments, Zhuang embroidery, and Black Mountain Goat-themed IP characters, thereby establishing a distinctive system of tourism-related goods and significantly enhancing residents’ cultural pride and willingness to carry on these traditions.

Mashan County is also advancing integrated, whole-area tourism development, achieving synergistic effects through sports-driven stimulation, cultural value enhancement, and spatial integration, thus accelerating the flow of resources between urban and rural areas and alleviating imbalances in regional development. Currently, development faces bottlenecks such as a shortage of professionally qualified operators, homogenization of folk sports experience products, insufficient extension of the industrial chain, and an imperfect mechanism for distributing benefits among villagers. However, by jointly participating in rock-climbing events, jointly showcasing the “Three Treasures of Culture,” and achieving shared benefits across the entire region, we can establish a normalized space for multi-ethnic interaction, exchange, and integration. This will foster greater mutual understanding among residents, tourists, and various ethnic groups through physical engagement and cultural sharing, thereby promoting the embodied cultivation of a sense of community among the Chinese nation.

3.2 Luzhai County, Liuzhou City: Promoting Tourism Through Competitions + Revitalizing Intangible Cultural Heritage through Living Practices + Community Co-Construction

Rongzhai County leverages its karst landscapes and ethnic cultural resources to cultivate distinctive folk sports events such as mountain cross-country races and rural basketball tournaments, using the economic power of these events to boost tourism consumption. Over the past five years, the county has hosted more than 40 major sporting events. In 2025, the China Mountain Cross-Country Open attracted 78,000 visitors. Following “Village BA’s” victory, farm households in the core area saw their tourism income triple, creating a stable influx of visitors and driving effective conversion of tourist spending. With intangible cultural heritage (ICH) at the heart of industrial empowerment, the county has established 11 ICH inheritance workshops, developed ICH-based study-and-travel products, and promoted a shift in ICH resource management—from static preservation toward productive conservation and experiential development, thereby activating the intrinsic motivation for the living transmission of ICH. By strengthening community co-construction and support, the county encourages residents to deeply engage in the cultural and tourism industry chain through employment and self-employment, enhancing their sense of ownership and identification with local culture. Using sports events as a platform for integration, we will organize competitions through cross-village team formations and mixed-group arrangements involving multiple ethnic groups, incorporating cultural performances from various ethnic communities. This approach will foster interaction, exchange, and integration among different ethnic groups, achieving synergistic development across four key dimensions: economic growth, cultural preservation, community governance, and ethnic unity. 2.3 Gongcheng Yao Autonomous County, Guilin City: Revitalizing ancient villages as a foundation, empowering with ecological enhancement, and integrating sports with health and wellness.

Based on its rich collection of Ming and Qing dynasty architectural complexes and traditional Yao ethnic settlements, Gongcheng County has introduced regulations for the protection of traditional villages. With an investment of 120 million yuan, the county has completed the renovation and restoration of 18 traditional villages, transforming idle historic residences into cultural venues, guesthouses, and spaces for intangible cultural heritage experiences. This initiative has effectively curbed the deterioration and hollowing-out of these ancient villages, enabling the conversion of their historical and cultural value into economic benefits. Leveraging its outstanding ecological resources, the county has developed sports and wellness industries, building over 100 kilometers of forest trails, cycling greenways, and a regional-level health-and-wellness base. By precisely matching ecological resources with growing consumer demand for health and wellness, the county has fostered a development model in which ecological conservation and industrial development mutually reinforce and coexist. The county has also deeply integrated folk sports with wellness concepts, developing products such as Yao ethnic health practices, rural marathons, and mountain hiking tours. Additionally, it organizes events like the Beautiful Countryside Run, which not only extend tourists’ stays but also significantly boost overall tourism revenue. Cultural and tourism development has boosted employment for over 20,000 people across the county, significantly increasing per capita income for villagers in key villages. This has driven synergistic progress in residents’ sense of well-being,

community development, ecological conservation, and cultural heritage preservation, thereby establishing a unique advantage in the integrated development of ecology, culture, and health & wellness.

4. OPTIMIZATION PATHS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING THE STRENGTHENING OF THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG THE CHINESE NATION THROUGH FOLK SPORTS TOURISM

4.1 Optimizing Paths for Promoting the Strengthening of the Chinese National Community Consciousness through Folk Sports Tourism

Based on a comparative analysis of three typical cases along the Xijiang River in Guangxi—Nanning Mashan, Liuzhou Luzhai, and Guilin Gongcheng—we identify three major challenges currently facing folk sports tourism: cultural homogenization, superficial symbolic representation, and a generational gap in talent. To address these challenges, we propose the following four optimization strategies aimed at deepening cultural identity and strengthening emotional resonance:

4.1.1 Implement differentiated development to highlight the uniqueness of ethnic cultures.

By delving deeply into the cultural essence of regional folk sports, we can trace their cultural genes, historical trajectories, and spiritual connotations. We must move beyond merely replicating superficial symbols and break through the dilemma of homogenized development. In Mashan County, leveraging its karst topography, the local authorities have integrated rock-climbing tourism with traditional Zhuang ethnic activities such as the Zhuang drum dance and board-shoe racing, creating a unique mountain sports and tourism experience. By establishing a project system characterized by "one place, one signature product; one village, one specialty," we can avoid homogeneous competition among regions, enabling tourists to appreciate the diversity and integrity of Chinese culture through multifaceted cultural experiences and fostering a sense of unity and shared identity amid differences.

4.1.2 Continue the cultural symbol system and establish a dynamic inheritance mechanism.

Establish a multi-level inheritance system integrating inheritors, communities, schools, and tourism sites. Encourage national- and provincial-level intangible cultural heritage (ICH) inheritors to visit scenic areas and campuses, offer inheritance courses, and integrate ICH into local education systems, thereby addressing the challenge of talent gaps. Transform static symbolic displays into dynamic, immersive experiences by incorporating folk activities such as flower-powder-snatching festivals into traditional ancient towns and scenic areas, and narrating the spirit of unity and striving that lies behind these cultural traditions. Through live-action performances and festive rituals, make cultural symbols tangible, experiential, and comprehensible, thus solidifying the cultural foundation of community identity. 3.1.3 Promote digital empowerment and explore new pathways for cultural dissemination. Leverage digital technologies to break through spatial and temporal limitations, innovate the forms of expression for folk sports culture, and attract young people to participate. Build a digital platform for folk sports tourism that integrates intangible cultural heritage resources, event information, and travel itineraries, and develop immersive VR/AR experience scenarios. Utilize short videos and live streaming platforms to promote folk sports events and create online buzz. Explore cross-border integration between esports and traditional ethnic sports, launch digital collectibles and social topics, and encourage young people to become cultural disseminators, thereby fostering a shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation in the digital space.

Modern medical interventions such as nutritional support and antidepressants can rapidly stabilize physical and emotional symptoms, while cognitive behavioral therapy and family interventions help correct cognitive biases and reduce relapse risks. The integrated approach combining traditional Chinese and Western medicine, acupuncture with herbal therapy, and holistic treatment of mind and body comprehensively improves eating habits, mood, sleep, nutrition, and menstrual patterns, significantly enhancing therapeutic efficacy and patient compliance. This constitutes an ideal treatment regimen for adolescent anorexia nervosa complicated by depression. Our clinical experience emphasizes a three-step therapeutic strategy: first calming the mind, then stimulating appetite, and finally strengthening the spleen. Stable mental state promotes self-regulated eating behaviors, while robust spleen-stomach function facilitates gradual physical recovery. Acupuncture targeting the Governor Vessel to regulate mental functions directly addresses the root cause, complemented by traditional Chinese medicine and family support, achieving both symptomatic relief and long-term stability—a clinically viable model worthy of

widespread adoption.

4.1.3 Improve infrastructure to enhance the tourism experience and services

Optimize the layout of the transportation network to address the "last-mile" connectivity issues between scenic areas and villages, upgrade accommodation, dining, sanitation, and other hospitality facilities, and create a convenient and comfortable tourism environment. Promote the development of smart tourism to achieve intelligent and precise service delivery. Guiding County leverages the revitalization of ancient villages and an eco-healthcare model to develop an AR-powered smart tour guide system, offering personalized route planning and guided commentary services. Strengthen training for tourism professionals, encouraging them to become storytellers of ethnic unity and disseminators of community-building ideals, thereby enhancing tourists' sense of belonging and satisfaction through high-quality service.

4.2 Policy Recommendations for Promoting the Strengthening of the Sense of Community among the Chinese Nation through Folk Sports Tourism

4.2.1 Enhance residents' cultural participation and foster tourists' cultural identity.

First, enhance residents' participation in cultural activities and stimulate the intrinsic motivation for cultural heritage preservation. Establish a three-tiered collaborative mechanism involving communities, families, and individuals, integrate folk sports into residents' daily lives, set up transmission centers as platforms for cultural inheritance, organize regular practical activities, and affirm residents' central role in cultural innovation. Implement a cultural points system for residents, build self-organized platforms for community members, and foster a positive cycle of spontaneous inheritance, professional enhancement, and public display of achievements, thereby strengthening the grassroots cultural foundation of the Chinese national community consciousness.

Second, enhance tourists' cultural identity and foster the autonomous vitality of ethnic development. Leveraging digital technologies, develop an AR-based smart tour guide system to evoke profound cultural resonance. Establish a feedback mechanism for tourists to dynamically optimize the content and formats of cultural communication. Create shared experience spaces where hosts and guests can interact, inviting tourists to actively participate in folk activities, thereby bridging cultural gaps and transforming cultural identity into a tangible driving force for strengthening community cohesion.

4.2.2 Innovate a differentiated development model and build a context of equal and interactive engagement.

First, we must innovate and adopt a differentiated development model to forge a shared sense of community through economic synergy. By systematically examining the unique rules and cultural significance of folk sports, deeply exploring regionally distinctive resources, and creating exclusive cultural and tourism projects, we can avoid homogeneous competition. Relying on cross-regional policy coordination will amplify brand effects, drive coordinated economic development across multi-ethnic regions, and establish a virtuous cycle of industrial growth—thus making differentiated development an effective practical approach for strengthening the sense of community.

Second, we will build an environment of equal and interactive engagement to foster synergy and promote ethnic integration. By leveraging folk sports tourism as a platform for equal dialogue, we will ensure equality in terms of participation rights, cultural exchange, and cooperative development. We will encourage tourists and local residents to participate equally in activities and engage in deep cultural exchanges, guiding practitioners from different ethnic groups to collaborate effectively, thereby pooling their strengths for common development and solidifying the foundation of ethnic relations characterized by equality, solidarity, mutual assistance, and harmony.

4.2.3 Solidify the cultural foundation of the community and strengthen the concept of "four shared elements."

We will strengthen the "Four Shared" concept and build emotional bonds of shared destiny. By means of immersive interactive experiences and cross-regional cultural and tourism collaborations, we will integrate the core meanings of shared joys and sorrows, shared honor and disgrace, shared life and death, and shared fate into every stage of tourism, thereby fostering deep emotional connections. We will guide participants to embrace the narrative of a diverse yet unified Chinese culture and move beyond superficial cultural performances. Focusing on

distilling the common spiritual genes of all ethnic groups, we will transcend ethnic cultural differences and establish a framework for community identity based on emotional resonance.

5. CONCLUSION

First, we will conduct a systematic study centered on the theme of promoting the forging of a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation through folk sports tourism. We will focus on addressing the academic shortcomings in existing research—namely, insufficient explanations of underlying mechanisms and a lack of comparative regional case studies. To this end, we will select three typical county-level regions along the Xijiang River in Guangxi for empirical analysis, thereby constructing a theoretical framework, uncovering the underlying principles of their effects, and proposing optimization strategies.

Second, building on this foundation, and drawing upon the three theoretical frameworks of interactive ritual chains, social embeddedness, and symbolic interaction, this study profoundly reveals the three-tiered, progressive mechanism through which folk sports tourism—by establishing cross-cultural interaction spaces—forges a strong sense of community: first, by sparking shared emotions to solidify the psychological foundation of group solidarity; second, by promoting multidimensional embedding across space, culture, relationships, and cognition, thereby facilitating a leap from geographical cohabitation to emotional integration within ethnic communities; and third, by fostering the shared creation and co-construction of cultural symbols, thus elevating individual ethnic identities toward a broader, unified Chinese national identity. Horizontally, the study distills three replicable development paradigms: Mashan County leverages its rock-wall economy as an engine to drive coordinated development across the entire region; Luzhai County uses sports events as a catalyst to invigorate the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage; and Gongcheng County builds on its ecological advantages to develop sports-based health and wellness tourism. These cases fully validate the practical effectiveness of folk sports tourism in empowering ethnic unity and progress.

Finally, four targeted optimization pathways are proposed to address the common bottlenecks in industrial development: implementing differentiated development to highlight cultural uniqueness; establishing dynamic inheritance mechanisms to sustain the cultural roots; leveraging digital empowerment to expand channels of cultural dissemination; and improving infrastructure to enhance service quality. These pathways will enrich the micro-level empirical research on strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation and provide theoretical references and operational guidance for ethnic regions as they coordinate cultural preservation, industrial revitalization, and ethnic unity efforts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to this study.

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