

Further Exploration of the Commercialization of Wudang Martial Arts and its Policy Environment

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INTRODUCTION

The paper “A study on the recreation of Chinese traditional martial arts in national policy: Focusing on the tourism case of Wudang mountain martial arts primarily examines how the Wudang region established its regional branding through martial arts tourism after 2010 [1]. Building on this study, this commentary further analyzes the broader policy environment influencing this transformation. It explores the cultural, economic, and ideological factors driving the commercialization of Wudang martial arts and provides a critical reflection on the research methods employed in the original paper.

DESCRIPTION

Policy environment: Integration of culture and tourism

Since the reform and opening-up, China’s cultural and tourism industries have gradually integrated, forming the policy framework of cultural-tourism integration. The 2009 Guidelines on Promoting the Integration of Culture and Tourism Development emphasized leveraging local branding and cultural identity to drive economic growth [2]. However, the revival of Wudang martial arts faced unique challenges.

As martial arts rooted in Taoism, Wudang martial arts had to reconcile with the national ideological framing of religion as “superstition.” To address this, the Wudang region repositioned its martial arts as “Taoist Martial Arts”, downplaying religious elements while highlighting cultural and fitness values. This strategy aligns with national cultural tourism policies and the “Healthy China” initiative, positioning martial arts as a tool for both health promotion and national pride [3].

Commercialization and invented traditions

This paper introduces Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented traditions” to explore how Wudang martial arts were reconstructed to align with modern economic and cultural demands [4]. In legends, Wudang has been depicted as South

Wudang, a cultural symbol that not only reflects the geographical distinction between Shaolin and Wudang and the religious contrast between Buddhism and Taoism but also highlights their prominence as central pillars in the martial arts world. Local governments skillfully leveraged this legend to brand Wudang martial arts, integrating historical fragments with contemporary needs to successfully create a new regional identity. Events such as the Wudang International Martial Arts Performance Festival exemplify this process, demonstrating how the commodification of cultural heritage can contribute to the development of tourism.

However, this commercialization raises several concerns:

- **Authenticity and standardization:** Simplifying martial arts forms to appeal to tourists risks eroding their traditional essence.
- **Economic dependency:** Wudang’s heavy reliance on tourism exposes its economy to external disruptions, such as pandemics or policy shifts [5].

Critical reflection on research methods

The original paper utilizes literature review and field research to analyze the case of Wudang martial arts commercialization. However, certain methodological limitations merit attention:

Overreliance on government-provided data: The study heavily relies on policy documents and economic reports provided by local governments, which may be biased or overstate achievements, thus affecting objectivity.

Lack of horizontal comparison: The research primarily focuses on Wudang’s policies and outcomes, with limited comparison to similar cases in other regions, such as Shaolin martial arts commercialization. This oversight weakens the evaluation of the generalizability of martial arts commercialization models.

Taoism perspective undervalued: While emphasizing the Taoist roots of Wudang martial arts, the study insufficiently explores how Taoist elements contribute to or are marginalized in the commercialization process, leaving cultural analysis underexplored.

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Future studies should prioritize cross-validation of data from diverse sources, including local interviews, independent academic studies, and third-party data. Additionally, comparative analysis with other regional cases can help assess the unique and generalizable aspects of Wudang martial arts commercialization.

Balancing cultural preservation and economic growth

The commercialization of Wudang martial arts exemplifies a significant trend in China's cultural policy: leveraging cultural heritage to drive economic growth while supporting national political narratives. Wudang martial arts are positioned as both "sports" and "cultural symbols." While this dual role fosters tourism, sustainable development requires:

- **Long-term policy support:** Ensuring investment in cultural preservation alongside commercialization.
- **Community involvement:** Engaging local practitioners to maintain authenticity and prevent cultural erosion.

CONCLUSION

The case of Wudang martial arts demonstrates how cultural heritage can be strategically redefined under national policies.

While the branding of "Taoist Martial Arts" has successfully elevated Wudang's global image, further evaluation is needed to assess its long-term cultural and economic impacts. Future policies should focus on balancing commercialization with the preservation of intangible cultural heritage to ensure sustainability.

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