



Research on the Spiritual Connotation of Chinese Taijiquan Culture

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ABSTRACT

Taijiquan, as an essential part of China's intangible cultural heritage, is a unique form of exercise that integrates physical exercise, cultural connotation, and philosophical thoughts. Its foundation is deeply rooted in the principle of harmonious balance between Taoism and Confucianism, showing the profound historical deposits and cultural essence. Although Tai Chi has been widely recognized around the world, its modernization process and commercialization trends pose a potential threat to its cultural nature and identity. The study aims to explore the key role of Taijiquan in cultivating cultural identity and protecting intangible cultural heritage. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed articles published post-2012, using databases like JSTOR and Scopus. The final analysis includes 16 studies, focusing on Taijiquan's cultural, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions, evaluated through thematic analysis. Research shows that while retaining the essence of tradition, Taijiquan has shown a high degree of adaptability and inclusiveness, and its philosophical teachings and cultural value retain significance brightly in modern society. In addition, modern media technology, especially emerging technologies such as the meta-universe, provides new ways and possibilities for preserving and disseminating Taijiquan culture. Therefore, how to effectively inherit and protect Taijiquan culture under modernization has become an urgent problem that needs to be solved. This study provides a valuable reference and enlightenment for the inheritance and development of Taijiquan culture.

Keywords: Cultural Spirit; Tai Chi; Chinese Martial Arts; Martial Arts Form; Cultural Heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Tai Chi, commonly referred to as Tai Chi, is a way of physical exercise or martial arts and a concentrated embodiment of China's rich cultural heritage and profound philosophic thoughts. Its roots can be traced back to the prehistorical connection between mysticism and metaphysics in Taoism and Confucianism, and it profoundly contains the core concepts of harmonious coexistence, balance and coordination, and personal cultivation. Taijiquan, originating in the 16th century in Chenjiagou, China, was developed by Chen Wangting, blending martial arts with Taoist and Confucian philosophy. It evolved into various styles, including Chen, Yang, Wu, and Sun, with diverse training forms such as solo forms, paired forms, push hands, and weapons training. These variations contributed to its global recognition and adaptability. Throughout its development, Taijiquan has maintained its cultural essence, becoming a prominent representation of living cultural heritage and intangible cultural assets. F. Li (2014) noted that Taijiquan was included in UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. This recognition not only boosted the discipline's popularity but also stimulated practical exploration and academic interest, highlighting the urgent need to protect both its physical practice and cultural significance.

Taijiquan plays an essential role in enhancing social-cultural perception and strengthening social cohesion. Taijiquan is practiced widely in China and across the globe, demonstrating a high degree of flexibility and characterized by its independent practice. In addition, Tai Chi is also an effective supplement to the collective

cultural capital. The essence of its philosophy lies in achieving the harmonious unity between individual thought, body, and nature. This aligns with the modern sustainability and mental health issues advocated by Brown, Jennings, and Sparkes (2014), showing a coordinated and progressive relationship.

Research Problem

However, commercial adaptations have shifted the focus of Taijiquan towards competition and fitness, reducing its core philosophy to mere performance aspects, while its deeper cultural value is often overlooked. Therefore, it is natural to balance the relationship between the two through regulatory mechanisms. Tian, Wang, Law, and Zhang (2020) pointed out that although tai chi has been formally incorporated into the intangible cultural heritage protection category in the practice project as the core component of cultural assets, and as the key elements of associated community cultural identity to promote and spread, there is still a lack of systematic and comprehensive protection measures. To fill these gaps, this study will examine Tai Chi alongside other Chinese martial arts from historical, philosophical, and cultural perspectives, exploring their collective contributions to members' cultural identity and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. While the focus is on Tai Chi, understanding the broader martial arts context can offer insights into shared cultural themes (Tian et al., 2020).

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the historical and philosophical foundations of Taijiquan as a cultural heritage.
2. To explore the cultural values and spiritual elements needed in its physical practice.
3. To examine the role of Taijiquan in fostering cultural identity and its contribution to the protection of intangible cultural heritage.

Taijiquan's cultural and philosophical significance is of great value to studying intangible cultural heritage. As Wasela (2023) pointed out, relevant research can reveal the core role of Taijiquan practice in constructing cultural identity and systematically explaining its inheritance mechanism. By constructing the analytical framework of Taijiquan history and philosophy, this research deepens the understanding of its cultural value. It provides a new path to integrate traditional wisdom into strategic planning to protect modern cultural heritage. Given the commercialization risks proposed by S. K. Tan, Lim, Tan, and Kok (2020), the "protective development" strategy proposed in this study provides policymakers and cultural workers a way to balance commercial utilization with cultural authenticity, which has practical guiding significance for maintaining the continuity of Taijiquan cultural practice and promoting cross-cultural dialogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historical Philosophy Basis of Taijiquan

The analysis based on the historical and philosophical basis of Taijiquan provides profound insights for understanding this cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. As a technique derived from Tai Chi thought, the dualism of Yin and Yang and balance, Taijiquan has evolved from a strict confrontational action to an art form containing philosophical significance. Dai and Lu (2019) argue that the study of Taijiquan, including its practices and oral traditions, reveals that its inheritance is not a straightforward process. Instead, it is deeply embedded in the community's spatial practices. From a historical perspective, the formation and evolution of Taijiquan is influenced by socio-economic and natural factors, which are closely related to the practice field of Chenjiagou Village, its birthplace. Gaffney (2008) examined the development of Tai Chi from the perspective of social and political change, noting that external pressures, such as modernization and globalizing trends, led to dynamic changes in the practice. This adaptability underscores Tai Chi's resilience and its continued role as a cultural carrier.

The philosophy of Tai Chi exercise is also reflected in regulating stress and psychological effects. For example, some studies have continuously analyzed the relationship between Tai Chi and mental health promotion. Han, Hu, and Li (2022) noted that the above association enables Tai Chi to integrate with a broader cultural and philosophical context as an appropriate alternative practice. However, globalization has intensified the complexity of Tai Chi inheritance. X. Li (2015) points out that the identity of Tai Chi faces many problems due to the emergence of modern variants and the lack of professional guidance for practitioners. Although some adaptations make Tai Chi more accessible to weaker or older audiences, these adaptations often weaken the philosophical basis of its core and thus influence its value as a cultural heritage.

On the other hand, there has been extensive discussion about Taijiquan as a representative of UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage and its limitations in its protection and inheritance. P. Zhang, Jin, Gao, and Ma (2021)

pointed out that regional spatial factors significantly influence the practice and inheritance of Taijiquan and emphasized the key role of green space in this process. Similarly, H. L. Zhang, Zhang, and Guo (2018) explored the influence of Tai Chi on cognitive function, believing that it not only improves psychological flexibility and memory but also embodies its philosophy of "unity of body and mind". The above research conclusions provide empirical theoretical support for the research objectives and clarify the rationality of Taijiquan as a research object.

Cultural Values and Spiritual Elements of Taijiquan

Taijiquan integrates physical training, philosophical thinking, and social expression and contains rich cultural values, practice, and spiritual elements. Taijiquan, which originated from Taoism and Confucian philosophy, serves as a physical expression of the core concepts of Yin-Yang balance and self-development. Cai (2024) believes that the cultural lifeblood of Taijiquan lies in "harmonious nature", the best medicine to relieve the tension between contemporary people, society, and nature. Cao and Lyu (2024) noted that international practitioners' motives include pursuing fun, mastering skills, and gaining a sense of belonging. This means that the martial arts culture and spiritual level represented by Tai Chi can closely connect people in the form of global unity. However, the existing research mainly focuses on the comparison and analysis from the international perspective. It lacks the transnational perspective and the Chinese local perspective, which has also become a potential direction for future research. The audience is also one of the scholars' concerns. Some scholars interpret Taijiquan's and other Chinese martial arts' symbolic significance and cultural connotation using imagination, association, and emotional appreciation methods.

Some scholars pay attention to the concept of "heart flow" in the process of Taijiquan training and study the psychological effect of Taijiquan. Although the study embodies the power of "unity" and "mindfulness" in Taoist philosophy, it fails to combine this phenomenon with martial arts participants' cultural embedding and social contextualization. P. Zhang et al. (2021) affirmed the benefits of Tai Chi in muscle strength, skin touch, proprioception, and postural control in older adults at different stages. Yannan Chen et al. (2023) focused on the effects of Tai Chi on patients with diabetes and mild cognitive dysfunction, which can improve the cognitive function of specific types of patients. Song and Lu (2022) focus on martial arts, including Tai Chi, to maintain good health, especially in managing digestive system problems. Although the study affirms the many benefits of martial arts at the practical and physiological levels, its methodology oversimplifies the importance of the spiritual and cultural aspects, which are integral to understanding the full impact of the practice. This deficiency is widespread in the current research, and the fundamental reason is that martial arts are often studied as rehabilitation activities while ignoring their spiritual significance.

The Role of Taijiquan in Cultural Identity and Heritage Protection

Under the framework of cultural identity and intangible cultural heritage protection, Taijiquan and martial arts show a wide range of application dimensions, and their value realization is not only rooted in the traditional practice paradigm but also integrates the innovative development path. Mendoza, De La Hoz Franco, and Gómez (2023) explored the possibility of using emerging technologies to protect and share cultural heritage, suggesting that cultural practices such as 3D printing or virtual reality technologies can help to preserve and promote Tai Chi, thus continuing its essence on a global scale. Salvesen and Keitsch (2021) advocate for the transformation and modernization of traditional customs in the mainstream social environment to strengthen cultural identity. Such measures not only retain the functionality and practicality of Taijiquan but also consider the inheritance of its philosophy and cultural connotation, which aligns with the demands of modern protection of Taijiquan.

Of course, non-material culture can promote cultural tourism to enhance its tradition and identity, but cultural dilution and commercialization development also challenge practical activities such as Taijiquan. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken to dilute the leading role of tourism in cultural heritage and prevent cultural content from bowing to economic interests. Moreover, Hurova et al. (2024) took Ukraine as an example, deeply discussed the role of cultural heritage in promoting social cohesion and economic development, and put forward strategies to protect cultural identity in modernization. This is important for boosting the development of Tai Chi into a more comprehensive cultural and educational framework.

Ruhanen and Whitford (2019) critically examine the interactive relationship between indigenous tourism and cultural heritage, and their research reveals the ontological value of the self-management mechanism of cultural heritage. Through the empirical analysis of the inheritance group of Taijiquan, this study demonstrated the necessity of the survival of the core meaning of traditional martial arts. To ensure the authenticity of culture, it is necessary to systematically explore the symbiotic path of traditional culture and contemporary tourism forms. This theoretical construction provides an important paradigm for subsequent studies. For example, Chng and Narayanan (2017) verified the positive driving effect of cultural emotional connection on community protection behavior through a structural equation model based on the theoretical framework of social identity theory. Xu

(2023) further expands this research context and puts forward institutionalized suggestions from the perspective of culture and education. By integrating the intangible cultural heritage elements, such as the philosophical system and technical spectrum of Taijiquan into the national education curriculum system, the cultural identity of teenagers can be significantly improved. This provides a quantifiable implementation path for the intergenerational inheritance of cultural heritage.

Literature Gap

Although the study of Taijiquan has formed a multidimensional basic interpretation of historical philosophy and cultural spirit, there is still a significant gap. First of all, the existing literature shows obvious physiological bias. For example, Cruz-Díaz et al. (2020) focus on the efficacy of Taijiquan but generally ignore the spiritual symbol value of Wuqi as a carrier of cultural memory. This "disenchantment" research orientation leads to a lack of in-depth interpretation of the subjective cultural experience of martial arts practitioners. Secondly, there are methodological defects in the field of cross-cultural research. For example, Nedeljkovic, Bürgler, Streitberger, and Ausfeld (2011) discussed the psychological mechanism of Taijiquan. Due to the lack of a cultural anthropology perspective, it failed to reveal the cultural coding process of core concepts such as "qi" and "Yin and Yang" in constructing cognitive schema, resulting in cognitive adaptation disorders for cross-cultural subjects.

At the level of the modernization process, the critical research of Yun Chen (2021) and Wu (2017) touch on the risk of the truth of the global business wave. However, there is still a lack of quantitative model construction for the key mechanisms, such as the erosion of the traditional mentoring and apprentice inheritance system and the weakening of the core of martial arts philosophy by the standardized competition system. At the same time, Salvesen and Keitsch (2021) highlighted the role of participatory approaches in cultural conservation, but the role of local community involvement in preserving the intangible cultural heritage of Tai Chi remains understudied. In terms of education dimension, although the quasi-experimental study of Xu (2023) confirmed the significant improvement effect of curriculum communication on teenagers' cultural identity, it has not yet established an organic connection between martial arts education and the traditional academy system and genealogy culture inheritance system of Chinese civilization. These research gaps highlight the need for systematic research on multiple intertwined perspectives of culture, spirit and education.

METHODOLOGY

Methods and Design

This study uses a qualitative design based on a systematic literature review (SLR) to address the research gap in Taijiquan's cultural, spiritual, and intangible heritage dimensions. SLR was chosen for its ability to synthesize existing peer-reviewed studies, providing a transparent process for evaluating diverse research. This methodology overcomes the lack of comprehensive studies by integrating research from various fields, ensuring robust, data-driven findings. The rigorous selection process ensures that only high-quality, relevant articles contribute to understanding Taijiquan's cultural and philosophical significance.

Data Collection Method

Search Tool

The data collection process included a topic-based keyword search to identify the relevant literature. Keywords came from research objectives, such as "cultural value of Taijiquan," "Taijiquan and spiritual elements," and "Tai Chi heritage protection," to ensure that the literature search was consistent with the areas of research focus.

Database Source

The databases used in the literature search for this study included JSTOR, Web of Science (WOS), Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Scopus. These databases were selected to obtain many full-text peer-reviewed papers in the fields of cultural research, Tai Chi and intangible cultural heritage.

Boolean Operators

This study used Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to optimize the results. For example, "Taijiquan AND cultural heritage" can accurately retrieve the correlation study of Tai Chi and cultural heritage protection, while "Chinese martial arts OR Taijiquan NOT physical exercise" effectively eliminates irrelevant literature that only focuses on fitness function.

Screening Criteria

This study used a systematic approach to select literature based on the specific inclusion and exclusion

criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Publications | Peer-reviewed journals, post-2012 conference papers | Unpublished work, pre-2012 conference papers |
| Research Type | Qualitative research, systematic evaluation | Experimental studies that do not meet the target |
| Language | English | Non-Chinese and English studies |
| Research Emphasis | Tai Chi, cultural identity, martial arts | Focus only on physical health and do not have a cultural focus |

Paper Screened through the PRISMA Framework

This study used the PRISMA framework to screen and select relevant articles from the thousands of available literature. First, 138 articles meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected. These articles were screened for relevance by reviewing abstracts and full text (if any). From the preliminary analysis, 66 articles were selected for further analysis, 16 of which were selected by the final screening (Figure 1). The purposeful sampling method ensures that only studies relevant to the research objectives are considered.

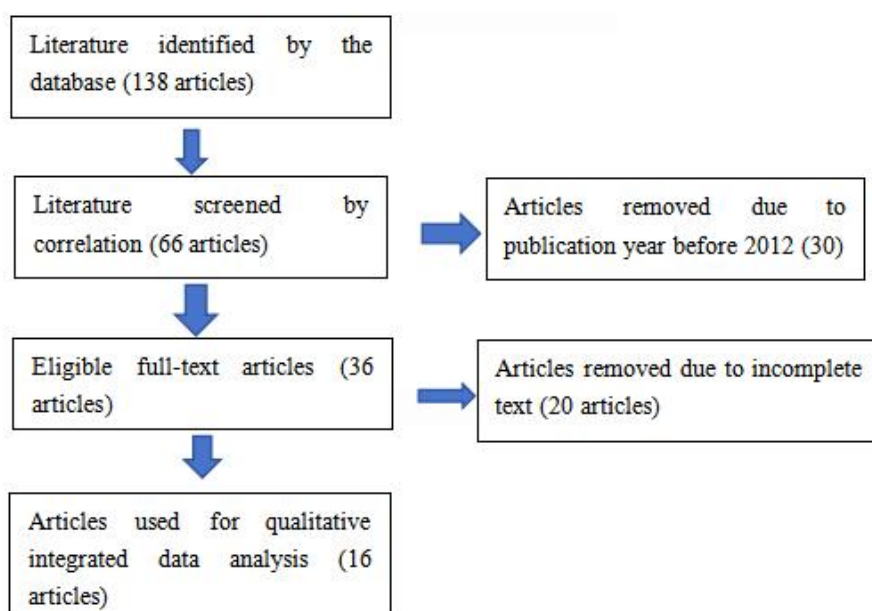


Figure 1. PRISMA Framework

Data Analysis Methods

This study used a thematic analysis method to analyze the selected literature. The relevant steps are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Analysis Method

| Step | Description |
|-----------------------|--|
| Familiarization | The researcher will read and thoroughly review the selected articles to gain a complete understanding. |
| Code | Identify and categorize key cultural identity, spiritual elements, and heritage preservation themes. |
| Theme development | Organizing the coding into broader themes ensured consistency with the study objectives. |
| Review and perfection | Ensure that the topics covered all aspects of the research question. |

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly followed the ethical norms. All included articles were peer-reviewed, indexed journal articles to ensure openness of the study. Plagiarism was not involved in the study; all sources were used as required, and the copyright of the authors was respected. Moreover, this study strictly followed the data protection principles, ensuring that the study results were presented without any distortion at presentation, and

the presentation of the data output maintained the original accuracy.

RESULTS

The following sections systematically present the data collected for this study in tabular form and illustrate the relevant significance of each study objective. Table 3 describes the themes extracted during data analysis using the NVivo software, which was used for the data collected in the institute (Appendix 1).

Table 3. Theme Extraction

| Theme | Description |
|--|---|
| The historical basis of Tai Chi | Exploring the origin and development of Taijiquan, highlighting its development in Chenjiagou village and its expression as a Chinese cultural heritage. |
| The philosophy of the foundation | Discuss the influences of Taoism and Confucian philosophy, such as the balance of Yin and Yang, harmony, and self-cultivation, which are deeply rooted in Taijiquan's practice. |
| Cultural practices and values in Tai Chi | Through the cultural value and practice of Tai Chi, regional similarities and differences, non-genetic inheritance, and modern adaptation. |
| Spiritual elements of Taijiquan | Explore the integration of mindfulness, meditation and spiritual growth, emphasizing martial arts' interconnection between body and mind. |
| The formation of a cultural identity | Analyze how Tai Chi develops cultural identity, especially among the Chinese community and global practitioners, highlighting its symbolic significance. |
| Heritage protection and adaptation | Focus on protecting Taijiquan as an intangible cultural heritage under the challenge of modernization and globalization and explore the relevant protection strategies. |

Theme 1: The Historical Basis of Tai Chi

The historical basis of Taijiquan is explored through various studies, highlighting its cultural adaptability and significance.

Table 4. Historical Basis of Taijiquan

| Author | Objective | Method | Finding | Conclusion |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Lu (2019) | Explore the social-cultural background of the elderly in Halifax, Canada and Jinan, China. | Ethnography, including interviews and participation in observation. | Canadian Taijiquan values health; Chinese Taijiquan values cultural inheritance, bridging ancient tradition and contemporary reality. | Taijiquan has developed in different cultural backgrounds while maintaining its historical and cultural nature, demonstrating its adaptability as a living cultural heritage. |
| Cheng and Wang (2013) | Discuss the orientation and architectural significance of Chenjiagou Village in protecting Taijiquan cultural heritage. | Field investigation and literature analysis | Chenjiagou is the core element of Tai Chi's historical development and cultural identity, reflecting the role of geography and tradition. | The protection of Chenjiagou must consider the unique cultural and historical significance of the village. |
| Y. Zhang (2024) | Discuss the historical inheritance, contemporary development problems and solutions of Taijiquan. | Historical analysis method and literature research method | The school was formed at the end of the 19th century; the development of Chinese culture, new China and the weakening of the skill. | Based on the technical culture, building a scientific system and activating the youth market can promote the third great development. |

An analysis of Taijiquan is done with regard to the usage of the source material investigations, all of which underline the culture and weight of the tool in history. In comparing the style taught to the elderly in Canada and China, Lu states that the mode of Taijiquan practiced in Canada is mainly related to health. In contrast, the China Mode encapsulates the hereditary aspect of Taijiquan mixed with reality. However, Cheng and Wang (2013) raise awareness that Chenjiagou Village plays a crucial role in the culture and geography of Taijiquan, and this information concerns the issue of preserving it. In Y. Zhang (2024), the author discusses the modern issue of Taijiquan and corresponding approaches, such as the establishment of a scientific system and attracting the young generation to develop Taijiquan. Altogether, these two studies evidence Taijiquan's vibrant cultural tradition and

the significance of protection and development (Table 4).

Theme 2: The Philosophy of the Foundation

Theme 2 highlights the philosophical basis of Taijiquan, which is explored through various studies.

Table 5. Philosophical Foundation

| Author | Objective | Method | Finding | Conclusion |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Z. D. Wang, Y. L. Wang, Zhang, and Wang (2024) | To explore the influence of Confucianism and Taoism on self- and holistic thinking. | Intervention study of classroom teaching and reflection | Confucianism advocates the reliance on self and holistic thinking, while Taoism advocates independent self and holistic thinking. These philosophies influence cognitive development. | Taoism and Confucianism have significant effects on the cognitive framework, underscoring their fundamental role in activities such as Tai Chi, which externalises these principles. |
| Lin, Swanson, and Rogge (2021) | Develop and validate measurement tools for the interconnected ideologies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. | Cross-cultural multilingual survey, 2091 respondents participated | Determine the core dimensions and integration of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, exploring their role in shaping life satisfaction and vitality. Developed a tool to assess its impact. | These ideologies provide a complete philosophical basis, consistent with the unity of balance, harmony, and mindfulness in Tai Chi activities. |
| Chang and Yang (2022) | Explore the philosophical interpretation of the physical practice of Taijiquan on the Confucian view of nature and man. | Theoretical analysis from the perspective of body philosophy | Taijiquan strengthens the harmony between nature and man through body patterns and behavior and regulates the relationship between blood, gas, heart and heaven. | Taijiquan provides a disembodied cognitive path for Confucian philosophy and promotes the innovation of cultural research paradigm. |

The studies by Z. D. Wang et al. (2024), Lin, Swanson, and Rogge (2021), and Chang and Yang (2022) all highlight the profound philosophical foundations of Taijiquan, particularly its connections to Confucianism and Taoism. Wang et al. (2024) explore how these philosophies influence cognitive development, emphasizing self-construction and holistic thinking, which are central to Taijiquan practice. Lin et al. (2021) validate the interconnectedness of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, showing their role in promoting balance, harmony, and mindfulness, key aspects of Taijiquan. Chang and Yang (2022) highlight how Taijiquan embodies Confucian principles of harmony between nature and humanity, innovating cultural research (Table 5).

Theme 3: Cultural Practices and Values in Tai Chi

Theme 3 highlights the cultural practices and values of Taijiquan, which are explored through various perspectives.

Table 6. Cultural Practices and Values in Tai Chi

| Author | Objective | Method | Finding | Conclusion |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Guo, Qiu, and Liu (2014) | Combining the historical evolution, health efficacy and cultural communication value of Taijiquan. | Literature review, and empirical analysis | Simplify global promotion, both physical and mental rehabilitation and chronic disease prevention and treatment, and help cross-cultural dialogue. | Tai Chi is a model of cross-cultural health practice that integrates traditional wisdom with modern science. |
| Cai (2024) | Critique the existing research paradigm and refine Taijiquan's cultural theme and contemporary value. | Combine literature analysis and practical practice and understanding | The theme is reactionary weak use, harmonious nature, and integration of art and Taoism to guide international relations, alleviate contradictions and innovate martial arts research. | Taijiquan culture helps the peaceful rise, social harmony and national rejuvenation and provides the dual construction of theory and practice. |

Guo et al. (2014) highlight Taijiquan's global promotion, emphasizing its dual role in physical and mental rehabilitation, chronic disease prevention, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue, positioning Taijiquan as a bridge

between traditional wisdom and modern science. Cai (2024) critiques existing research paradigms and refines Taijiquan's cultural themes, focusing on the integration of art and Taoism to guide international relations and alleviate social conflicts. Taijiquan is portrayed as a tool for social harmony, national rejuvenation, and a model for balancing theoretical and practical applications in martial arts research (Table 6).

Theme 4: Spiritual Elements of Taijiquan

Theme 4 highlights that the spiritual elements of Taijiquan are explored through various studies.

Table 7. Spiritual Elements in Tai Chi

| Author | Objective | Method | Finding | Conclusion |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Yu et al. (2018) | To reveal the neural mechanism of Tai Chi through neuroimaging technology. | A systematic review of neuroimaging studies to analyze the effects of Tai Chi on brain function and structure. | Tai Chi practice enhances brain morphology, functional connectivity and cognitive function, which is beneficial to physical and mental health. | Neuroimaging studies support the role of Tai Chi as a body-body holistic practice, revealing its effects on neural structures responsible for cognitive and emotional well-being. |
| L. Z. Chen et al. (2021) | To assess the effects of an 8-week Tai Chi course on mindfulness and interoceptive perception in healthy adults. | Randomized controlled trial evaluating mindfulness and endoceptive perception before and after the intervention. | Tai Chi significantly improved the mindfulness dimension (e.g., awareness and non-judgment), and its effect persisted within 24 weeks after the intervention. | Tai Chi enhances mindfulness and interoceptive perception, demonstrating its potential as a sustainable intervention that helps to promote psychological and emotional well-being. |
| Shen (2019) | It reveals the connection between craftsman spirit and the spread of modern Taijiquan. | Analyze school cases, cultural interpretation and literature induction. | The spirit of craftsmanship drives the innovation and cultural integration of Taijiquan | The craftsman spirit is the core driving force and cultural foundation of Taijiquan transmission. |

Yu et al. (2018) provide evidence that Tai Chi exercises had a positive impact on brain function, morphological changes, and cognitive functions, which supports the view that Tai Chi has holistic health benefits. In the present research, body awareness and perceived stress are assessed after a Tai Chi program lasting 8 weeks; the follow-up assessment of 24 weeks discusses the implications of the results for the longevity of psychological well-being. L. Z. Chen et al. (2021). Shen (2019) pointed out that the "craftsman spirit" is one of the reasons for the cultural innovation of Taijiquan. These works also support Tai Chi's spiritual, cognitive, and cultural function in the current world (Table 7).

Theme 5: The Formation of a Cultural Identity

Theme 5 highlights the role of cultural practices in identity formation and mental health.

Table 8. Cultural Identity Formation

| Author | Objective | Method | Findings | Conclusion |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Z. Zhang and Zhu (2020) | To evaluate the role of Tai Chi in the rehabilitation of amphetamine drug addicts and its impact on mental health. | Control experimental study comparing the Tai Chi intervention group with the control group. | Taijiquan promotes mental health, reduces anxiety, benefits social harmony, and helps individuals to re-establish self-identity. | Taijiquan not only improves physical health, but also strengthens cultural and personal identity, and plays an important role as a rehabilitation tool. |
| Kennedy et al. (2023) | Exploring the social network and cultural confidence is conducive to enhancing the sense of belonging of local teenagers and promoting their mental health. | Qualitative interviews and social network analysis were conducted with local adolescents. | Participation in cultural activities enhances cultural confidence, reduces substance abuse, and improves mental health, emphasizing the value of cultural practice activities. | Cultural confidence and participation in traditional activities are important factors that promote belonging and improve the well-being of local communities. |

Z. Zhang and Zhu (2020) show that Taijiquan has the benefit of being useful in the rehabilitation of amphetamine addicts since it can enhance mental health, reduce anxiety, and offer an avenue for reconstructing their self-identity. In the paper by Kennedy et al. (2023), they continue to argue that cultural participation increases cultural cleanliness, cuts down substance use, and improves mental health and self-acceptance of cultural identity among adolescents in local areas. Both of the works emphasize the importance of cultural practices in the development of everybody's and the community's identity (Table 8).

Theme 6: Heritage Protection and Adaptation

Theme 6 highlights that the protection and adaptation of cultural heritage are explored in various studies.

Table 9. Heritage Protection and Adaptation

| Author | Objective | Method | Find | Conclusion |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Yang, Qiu, and Fu (2021) | To explore the cognition and attitude of residents in the Qingmuchuan area on protecting traditional cultural heritage. | Mixed research method: questionnaire and interview | Local residents attach more attention to economic and practical values, while professionals emphasize entertainment and cultural significance. | Successful heritage protection requires participatory planning that considers the economic demands, cultural concerns, and leisure needs of local stakeholders. |
| Ming, Chen, and Qiu (2025) | To evaluate strategies for the digital protection of intangible cultural heritage using advanced technologies (such as metaverse technology). | Systematic topic review of digital protection research from 2018 to 2024. | Four key strategies were identified: metadata protection, cultural heritage, digital infrastructure, and the involvement of metacosmic technology. | Digital means opening up innovative paths to protect intangible cultural heritage and maintain the authenticity of culture while realizing global sharing. |
| Wu (2017) | Analyze the problem of non-genetic inheritance and propose a solution. | Literature and logical analysis are combined with policy research. | Lack of vitality, integrity, authenticity, and cultural inheritance. | Promoting the campus and improving the inheritance mechanism and legal guarantee is suggested. |

Yang et al. (2021) demonstrated that local people pay more attention to economic and utilitarian values, but professionals mentioned fun and cultural values; therefore, they should consider people's concerns in order to protect heritage effectively. Ming et al. (2025) have pointed out the key programs to be protected in the digital era, namely metadata, cultural heritage, as well as the concept of metaverse that will enable an international sharing of the intangible cultural heritage. According to Wu (2017), there is a need to revitalize the cultural inheritance constant; he suggests reforms in education programs, legal assurances, and the inheritance system (Table 9).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the Findings

Goal 1: The Historical and Philosophical Basis of Taijiquan

History and philosophy have a double and plastic effect on Taijiquan. The research by Lu (2019) or Cheng and Wang (2013) shows that there is a continuous relationship between the historical practice and contemporary practice of Taijiquan. Serves as a health promotion tool in Halifax, Canada, and becomes a carrier of cultural inheritance in Jinan, China. This dual feature not only reflects the adaptive nature of the "living cultural heritage" of Taijiquan but also further reflects the practical philosophical nature of the "unity of body and use". In addition, as demonstrated by Z. D. Wang et al. (2024) and Lin et al. (2021), the cognitive framework and spiritual dimension of Taijiquan are deeply infiltrated by the Confucian thought of "the mean of the mean" and the Taoist concept of "unity of man and nature", and their practice system is based on the values of balance, harmony and mindfulness. It continues to suffer the contemporary reconstruction of these philosophical traditions.

Goal 2: Cultural Value and Spiritual Dimension

The empirical study further clarifies Chinese martial arts and Taijiquan's cultural value system and spiritual dimension. Shen (2019) believes that the pursuit of ingenuity (such as fine research, innovation, and equal emphasis on virtue) contained in the practice of Taijiquan skills constitutes the internal power for the inheritance

of Taijiquan. Yu et al. (2018), Yun Chen (2021), and other scholars further pointed out that the spiritual characteristics of tai chi make it a holistic physical and mental practice paradigm. Through mindfulness awareness (mindfulness) and interoceptive (interoception) synergy, not only can the brain neural plasticity (neuroplasticity) be optimized, but also emotional regulation (emotional regulation) and cognitive enhancement (cognitive enhancement) levels show a significant effect.

Goal 3: Heritage Protection and Adjustment Mechanism

Taijiquan plays a key role in the process of strengthening the cultural identity and protecting the intangible cultural heritage. Through empirical research, Z. Zhang and Zhu (2020) proved that Taijiquan continuously shows the contemporary value of individual identity shaping and cultural identity construction by promoting mental health reconstruction and the integration of social relations. Kennedy et al. (2023) further revealed that cultivating cultural pride and strengthening the sense of community belonging have significant effects on the practice of cultural revival of the indigenous community. Yang et al. (2021) confirmed through the interdisciplinary research: heritage protection to form dynamic balance, and the universe technology provides innovative digital path (such as virtual field, immersive culture map), can realize the high fidelity of martial arts culture, and through the smart contract (smart contract) and other technical means to maintain culture authenticity. Wu (2017) promotes tai Chi through campus promotion, improves the protection mechanism of inheritors and strengthens cultural inheritance, and advocates the establishment of legal guarantees and industrialization development modes to promote the coordinated development of social benefits and economic benefits under the framework of the rule of law.

Comparison with the Previous Studies

Multi-dimensional Interpretation of Taijiquan Culture

The vitality of Taijiquan as a living cultural heritage is driven by its dynamic inheritance mechanisms. Lu (2019) discusses how Taijiquan harmonizes health promotion and cultural protection through a combination of traditional practices and modern approaches. This coordinated development reflects the adaptability of Taijiquan as it evolves while maintaining its core cultural philosophy. Gaffney (2008) examined Chenjiagou and found that Taijiquan preserves its vitality through external communication strategies, helping it adapt across time and space. Yang et al. (2021) emphasize that Taijiquan's survival is not only reliant on material factors like architectural spaces but also on cultural reproduction mechanisms that activate collective memory, forming the foundational inheritance code of living heritage.

The Physical Practice of Confucian and Taoist Philosophy

Taijiquan transforms Confucianism and Taoism thought into an embodied practice system. Wang et al. (2024) revealed the Confucian "outward collective of self" and Taoist "inward self of self" schema, which were embodied through the ethical interaction of "pushing hand" and the inner view of "standing pile". The textual research shows that the moral ethics of Taijiquan contains Confucian values such as cultivating one's morality, justice and benevolence, and its action system reflects the Taoist cosmic view of "practicing nature". The cross-cultural research by Lin et al. (2021) shows that Taijiquan transforms abstract philosophy into tangible life experiences through physical practice, creating a unique cognitive framework. This approach allows Taijiquan to embody and transmit traditional wisdom in a practical and accessible form.

The Construction Mechanism of Cultural Identity

Tai Chi constructs a cultural identity through physical and mental interaction. The intervention experiment of L. Z. Chen et al. (2021) confirmed that 8 weeks of training can significantly improve the level of mindfulness through the internalization of cultural cognition into physical memory. The neuroimaging study by Yu et al. (2018) showed that Tai Chi enhances self-awareness by regulating the default mode network, and this neuroplasticity provides a biological basis for cultural identity. Z. Zhang and Zhu (2020) found that Tai Chi reshaped the connection between individuals and culture through embodied practice, and its psychological effects included the dual dimensions of anxiety relief and social integration. These evidence chains show that Tai Chi, as a cultural medium, realizes the construction of cultural identity through the physical and mental integration mechanism.

Inheritance and Innovation in the Digital Age

Digital technology opens up a new situation for the inheritance of Taijiquan. The community participation mechanism revealed by Yang et al. (2021) has been developed into a cultural consultation platform for virtual space in the digital research of Rachman (2024). The metadata management system proposed by Yue et al. (2025) transforms the tacit knowledge of Taijiquan into digital assets that can be disseminated, which is essentially the modern transformation of cultural genes. Research shows that technological innovation should be integrated with local knowledge, ensuring that cultural integrity is preserved through digital transformation. This can be achieved

by creating a platform for negotiating values, which reflects the core principles of Taijiquan: maintaining authenticity while embracing modern adaptations.

Theoretical Contribution

This study systematically explains the multidimensional protection mechanism of Taijiquan as an intangible cultural heritage. It is found that Taijiquan constructs a living inheritance carrier through the physical practice of Confucianism, Taoism, and philosophy (Z. D. Wang et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021). Based on neuroplasticity evidence (Yu et al., 2018), it reveals the activation effect of embodied cognition on cultural identity. At the same time, empirical verification of the dual role of digital technologies, such as metadata application and metadata management (Ming et al., 2025), not only expands global accessibility but also prevents and controls commercialization and alienation.

The "participatory adjustment" model is constructed based on this: it not only requires the community consultation mechanism to maintain the authenticity but also needs the collaborative path of digital technology (smart contract tamper-proof, virtual cultural map) (Yang et al., 2021). It emphasizes the dual track system of the core philosophy and the technical tool specification to realize the dynamic balance of "integrity and innovation" (Rachman, 2024). This model provides the trinity theoretical framework of "traditional practice-modern technology-community participation" for intangible cultural heritage protection and deepens the methodological system of living heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the cultural, philosophical, and spiritual significance of Taijiquan as a living intangible cultural heritage. It reveals how Taijiquan integrates Confucian and Taoist philosophies, contributing to both cultural identity and mental well-being. By analyzing its practices through a systematic literature review, the research underscores Taijiquan's adaptability in modern society and highlights the importance of preserving its cultural essence amidst globalization and commercialization. The study also emphasizes the role of emerging technologies, such as digital preservation tools, in safeguarding Taijiquan's authenticity. Lastly, it introduces a participatory adjustment model for heritage protection, emphasizing the balance between tradition and innovation for future sustainability.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, the use of secondary data through a systematic literature review (SLR) means that there is a lack of firsthand data, such as in-depth interviews with practitioners, which may limit the practical relevance of the findings. Second, the focus is solely on Taijiquan, without considering other forms of martial arts, which limits the breadth of the analysis. Third, while the study addresses the inheritance of Taijiquan in various regions of China, it does not fully explore the complex interactions between Taijiquan and local cultural heritage, which could provide deeper insights. Finally, the digital strategies discussed in the study are theoretical and have not been tested through empirical methods such as motion capture or virtual simulations.

FUTURE WORK

This study opens up a new academic growth point for Tai Chi heritage research. In the future research, we should focus on the construction of 3 D expansion paths: firstly, integrate the ethnographic oral history and the brain mechanism data, reveal the embodied cognitive law of the living inheritance; secondly, break through the single research framework of Tai Chi, reveal the multidimensional expression spectrum of Chinese traditional martial arts culture philosophy through cross-boxing comparative study; secondly, conduct empirical research of digital technology application, and verify the practical effectiveness of universe technology in motion capture, cultural communication and other scenarios.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

Conflict of interest: No declaration required. **Financing:** No reporting required. **Peer review:** Double anonymous peer review.

Appendix 1

Table 10. Theme Code and Description

| Theme Code | Description |
|--------------------|---|
| HIST_BASIS | Historical Basis of Taijiquan: This theme explores the origin and development of Taijiquan, particularly its cultural significance in Chenjiagou village. |
| PHILOS_FOUND | Philosophical Foundations: Focuses on the influence of Taoism and Confucianism, including concepts like Yin-Yang balance, harmony, and self-cultivation. |
| CULT_VALS_PRACTICE | Cultural Practices and Values: Analyzes the cultural values embedded in Taijiquan, highlighting regional differences, non-genetic inheritance, and modern adaptations. |
| SPIRIT_ELE | Spiritual Elements: Explores mindfulness, meditation, and the mind-body connection in Taijiquan practice, emphasizing its spiritual impact on practitioners. |
| CULT_IDENTITY | Cultural Identity Formation: Examines how Taijiquan fosters cultural identity, particularly in Chinese communities and among global practitioners. |
| HERITAGE_PROTECT | Heritage Protection and Adaptation: Discusses the challenges and strategies for protecting Taijiquan as an intangible cultural heritage amidst globalization and commercialization. |