

Article

Cultural Influence of Values Embodied in Sports Films on Rural Revitalization and Social Development

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Abstract: The core essence of the rural revitalization strategy lies in the coordinated advancement of material and spiritual civilization. As the soul of rural revitalization, cultural revitalization undertakes the pivotal mission of reshaping local rural ethos, consolidating grassroots consensus, and driving integrated urban-rural development. Carried by competitive narratives, sports films embody diverse value connotations, including perseverance, hard work, collective collaboration, cultural inheritance, equality, and self-improvement. Leveraging the intuitive communication advantages of moving images that reach mass audiences across urban and rural areas, they serve as vital literary and artistic vehicles for disseminating mainstream culture, transforming rural cultural landscapes, and advancing sound social progress. Taking domestic sports films with rural, ethnic, and youth themes as research samples, this paper systematically sorts out the core value system embedded in sports films. It analyzes the internal logic through which they empower rural revitalization from four distinct dimensions: spiritual cultivation, rural civilization, cultural industries, and grassroots governance. Furthermore, it interprets their practical cultural impacts with case studies of films such as *Young Black Eagles*, *Never Say Never*, *Starlight Kids*, and *Qiang Huapao (Fighting for the Firecracker)*. Meanwhile, it identifies existing communication shortcomings in the capacity of sports films to boost rural development and proposes practical pathways, including optimized creation, grassroots-oriented communication, and industrial integration. Ultimately, this research aims to exert the value-leading function of sports films, providing theoretical references for the construction of livable, harmonious villages and the overall upgrading of social culture.

Keywords: sports films; values; cultural revitalization; rural revitalization; social development

1. Introduction

In the comprehensive advancement of rural revitalization, cultural revitalization addresses practical challenges such as the lack of spiritual enrichment in rural areas, the erosion of traditional cultural practices, and the limited internal motivation for development. To address these issues, various national authorities have introduced initiatives aimed at promoting sports as a means to support rural revitalization and enhancing cultural engagement through literature and art. These initiatives explicitly encourage the creation of literary and artistic works centered on rural sports, the dissemination of rural sports culture through mediums such as films and events, and the cultivation of positive rural customs [1]. Unlike conventional entertainment films, sports films uniquely combine the essence of sportsmanship with narratives rooted in rural life, local traditions, and the growth of younger generations. These films go beyond simple depictions of competition, focusing instead on contemporary themes such as individuals transforming their lives through perseverance, rural communities achieving progress through collective efforts, and cultural confidence being strengthened through the preservation of heritage.

Academic research on sports films has traditionally concentrated on aspects such as film aesthetics, competitive storytelling, and the portrayal of national identity, with

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limited exploration of their connection to rural cultural revitalization and grassroots social development. However, in recent years, a growing number of rural-themed sports films have emerged, highlighting the experiences of young people in mountainous regions, culturally diverse communities, and children in rural areas who are left behind by migrating family members [1]. These films convey values such as resilience, teamwork, and determination, which subtly influence the mindset of rural residents, rejuvenate local sports traditions, stimulate the development of cultural tourism, and contribute to improved rural governance. Within the broader context of rural revitalization and societal modernization, examining the mechanisms through which sports films transmit cultural values and assessing their multifaceted cultural impacts can provide new perspectives for media-driven rural cultural development and contribute to the theoretical framework of sports culture as a driver of grassroots progress.

2. The Core Value System Embodied in Sports Films

Over the course of several decades, domestic sports films have evolved to embody value systems that reflect both distinctive national characteristics and the dynamic traits of contemporary society [2, 3]. Notably, sports films with rural themes have developed a comprehensive four-tier value framework that resonates with the unique social structures of rural communities while aligning with the broader objectives of rural revitalization initiatives.

2.1. Individual Level: The Life Value of Self-Improvement and Triumph through Struggle

Stories of grassroots rural sports serve as a significant creative direction for domestic sports films, often focusing on young individuals from mountainous regions and underprivileged communities. These narratives emphasize the core value that personal fulfillment is achieved through dedication and effort. One example is the film *Never Say Never*, which portrays the real-life experiences of teenagers in mountainous Sichuan who engage in combat sports as a means of livelihood [4]. The film illustrates how rigorous daily training enables these youths to overcome challenges associated with poverty, presenting a resilient life force akin to wild grass and challenging the notion that one's background irrevocably determines their future. Similarly, *Starlight Kids* follows rural primary school students excelling in rope-skipping and advancing to national competitions through persistent effort. Their pursuit of dreams inspires local villagers to embrace the value of hard work, motivating migrant parents to return home, support their children, and contribute to community development. These films aim to counteract passive attitudes prevalent in certain rural areas, fostering values of proactive self-improvement and perseverance. By presenting relatable role models, they encourage rural youth to aspire toward personal growth and collective progress.

2.2. Collective Level: The Community Value of Mutual Support and Collective Progress

Rural society is deeply rooted in the interconnected relationships of clans, villages, and neighbors, and sports films often emphasize the importance of shared values through team-based competitions. In these narratives, sports teams are portrayed not as isolated groups of individuals but as representatives of entire communities, with collective efforts underpinning their success. For instance, in one film, teenage basketball players from Daliangshan are supported by their village, where residents contribute funds for travel expenses and gather to watch live broadcasts, showcasing a unified spirit of encouragement [3, 5]. The sentiment expressed through the line "When you come back, we can all live in new houses" reflects the intertwining of individual aspirations with broader rural development goals, symbolizing a shared vision for progress. Similarly, an ethnic sports film centered on a traditional Zhuang competitive activity illustrates how such events foster unity and cooperation among diverse groups. By focusing on teamwork and mutual support, these narratives reinforce a sense of rural identity, promote harmony among neighbors, and strengthen the foundation for sustainable community development. These portrayals highlight the enduring significance of collaboration and shared purpose in rural revitalization.

2.3. Cultural Level: The Cultural Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Local Confidence

Many sports films incorporate traditional rural sports and competitions as central narrative elements, facilitating the visual preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage associated with these activities. For instance, the animated film *I Am What I Am* focuses on the lion dance, a traditional cultural practice in Guangdong, portraying the journey of rural youth as they learn and revive this art form within their communities [6]. By bringing such traditional sports to broader audiences, these films foster a deeper appreciation for rural cultural heritage among both urban and rural viewers. Additionally, depictions of activities such as horse racing, wrestling, and firecracker fighting, which are rooted in specific cultural traditions, challenge the conventional flow of cultural influence from urban to rural areas. These portrayals highlight the unique aesthetic and spiritual significance of rural traditions, contributing to the restoration of cultural confidence and countering outdated perceptions of rural culture as lacking in value or sophistication.

2.4. Social Level: The Public Value of Equality, Inclusiveness and Universal Access

Sports inherently embody principles of equality, transcending barriers such as economic status, cultural background, gender, or geographic location. This universal characteristic is often reflected in sports films, which emphasize the social value of inclusiveness and equal opportunity. These narratives highlight how individuals from diverse backgrounds, including children in remote areas, individuals from underrepresented communities, and persons with disabilities, are equally entitled to pursue their aspirations in sports. Furthermore, such films address broader societal challenges, such as disparities in resource distribution between urban and rural areas, biases related to gender roles, and unequal opportunities across regions. By promoting concepts of fairness and inclusivity, these values inspire rural communities to adopt practices that prioritize universal access to fitness and cultural resources. This, in turn, fosters the equal provision of public cultural services in rural areas and contributes to the harmonious development of urban and rural social frameworks.

3. Multi-Dimensional Cultural Impacts of Values in Sports Films Empowering Rural Revitalization

Sports films, as a form of mass communication, play a significant role in disseminating values that contribute to rural revitalization [7]. These cultural impacts manifest across multiple dimensions, including the enhancement of spiritual civilization, the improvement of rural governance structures, the development of cultural industries, and the promotion of urban-rural integration. By influencing societal norms and fostering community cohesion, sports films serve as a catalyst for sustainable development in rural areas, encouraging both economic growth and social harmony.

3.1. Spiritual Empowerment: Filling Rural Spiritual Vacancies and Cultivating Endogenous Development Impetus

Certain rural areas are currently experiencing challenges such as the migration of young and middle-aged laborers, limited access to cultural activities, and a diminished emphasis on industriousness. Inspirational narratives found in sports films can serve as an accessible and cost-effective means of addressing these issues by providing spiritual enrichment [8]. Platforms such as rural cinemas, cultural auditoriums, and short-video applications frequently showcase sports films that depict grassroots individuals transforming their lives through personal effort. These portrayals help counteract the negative effects of unproductive habits and behaviors, fostering a culture of diligence and self-improvement. By presenting relatable role models, these films encourage rural youth to remain in their communities, pursue entrepreneurial ventures, and actively participate in rural development, thereby stimulating internal growth and revitalization within these areas.

Following the release of sports films centered on themes relevant to rural communities, many villages witnessed a surge in youth-led initiatives, such as the formation of basketball and rope-skipping teams. Parents have also shown increased enthusiasm in supporting their children's involvement in sports, contributing to a noticeable improvement in the overall morale and outlook of rural residents [9]. The values of perseverance and hard work, as vividly portrayed in these films, resonate deeply with audiences, aligning with broader cultural objectives aimed at fostering aspiration and spiritual renewal in rural areas. This approach not only enhances the cultural fabric of these communities but also strengthens the foundation for rural spiritual development, promoting a more vibrant and cohesive society.

3.2. Rural Custom Empowerment: Reshaping Local Ethics and Improving Grassroots Governance Efficiency

Challenges in rural governance often involve interpersonal tensions, fragmented social structures, and limited communal awareness. The principles of solidarity, inclusiveness, and mutual support depicted in sports films offer cultural frameworks for addressing outdated practices. Stories showcasing entire communities rallying behind a sports team or engaging in intergroup competitions encourage individuals to move beyond personal interests and adopt a cooperative mindset. In practical applications, village committees in various regions have initiated collective film screenings of sports-themed movies, accompanied by discussions on modern rural customs inspired by the narratives. These initiatives have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and resolving issues related to land use and social divisions, thereby promoting harmony within communities.

The cultural themes embedded in sports films subtly influence traditional rural practices, nurturing a community-oriented ethos characterized by neighborly cooperation, industriousness, and widespread participation. Additionally, these films have catalyzed the emergence of rural sports events such as "Village BA," "Village Super League," and traditional folk competitions. These gatherings serve as vital platforms for interpersonal interaction, strengthening social bonds and reducing barriers to communication within rural governance frameworks. By leveraging the unifying power of sports, these events contribute to the development of a governance model that emphasizes shared values and collective responsibility, fostering a more cohesive and efficient rural management system.

3.3. Industrial Empowerment: Activating Local Sports Cultural Resources and Spawning New Integrated Cultural-Tourism-Sports Business Forms

The influence of sports-themed films can be transformed into a driving force for the development of rural cultural industries. Locations featured in these films, along with traditional sports depicted, become unique cultural tourism assets, fostering mutual growth in rural economies and cultural heritage. For instance, after the release of a popular basketball-themed film, there was a notable increase in basketball-related tourism activities in certain rural areas. This included basketball study tours and immersive rural basketball experiences. In response, local authorities developed basketball-themed accommodations, cultural and creative products based on local agriculture, and youth sports training programs, creating a comprehensive industrial chain that integrates film, sports, and rural tourism. Similarly, ethnic sports traditions, such as those showcased in traditional competitions, have been leveraged to develop cultural experience programs in ethnic minority villages. These initiatives attract visitors to engage with local traditions while simultaneously providing new income opportunities for villagers, thereby enhancing the economic vitality of these communities.

Building on the popularity generated by films, local governments actively identify and promote indigenous folk sports resources, establish rural sports facilities, and develop sports-themed villages. These efforts are complemented by the creation of ancillary business opportunities, such as the sale of agricultural products, folk art performances, and the organization of outdoor competitions. This approach transforms cultural assets into tangible economic benefits. The resulting prosperity in cultural

industries contributes to the enhancement of rural cultural infrastructure, with investments directed toward upgrading libraries, sports plazas, and cultural centers. This creates a positive feedback loop where cultural communication and industrial development mutually reinforce each other, fostering sustainable growth in rural areas.

3.4. Integration Empowerment: Breaking Urban-Rural Cultural Barriers and Promoting Balanced Overall Social Development

The enduring division between urban and rural cultural structures has created significant barriers in perception and hindered the effective circulation of resources between cities and villages. By showcasing sports films on a national scale, urban audiences gain exposure to the authentic realities of rural life, including the resilience demonstrated in challenging agricultural environments, the distinctive folk sports practiced by ethnic minorities, and the untainted aspirations of rural youth. These portrayals help dismantle entrenched stereotypes held by urban populations regarding rural communities. Concurrently, the dissemination of these films to rural areas through modern media platforms introduces villagers to contemporary sports concepts and a broader spectrum of social ideas, fostering a shift away from insular perspectives prevalent in rural settings. This reciprocal cultural exchange not only bridges the urban-rural divide but also cultivates mutual understanding and appreciation, laying the groundwork for more integrated societal development.

The facilitation of two-way cultural exchanges between urban and rural areas contributes significantly to the equitable distribution of public resources. Urban sports organizations and film production teams engage in field research within rural communities, offering public sports training and fostering local development. Simultaneously, urban tourists participate in sports-related cultural tourism in rural regions, promoting the exchange of talent, financial investment, and cultural assets. These interactions embody values of equality and shared growth, as conveyed through sports films, encouraging society to prioritize rural cultural development. This focus drives the simultaneous enhancement of spiritual and cultural standards in both urban and rural areas, fostering a harmonious and balanced societal progression. By integrating diverse cultural elements and promoting shared experiences, these initiatives support the creation of a unified social fabric that values inclusivity and collective advancement.

4. Existing Dilemmas in Sports Films' Values Communication Empowering Rural Development

4.1. Insufficient Supply of Rural-Themed Sports Films and Homogenized Value Narratives

Contemporary sports films predominantly focus on professional athletes and major international events, leaving rural communities and their unique realities underrepresented. Films set in rural areas often rely on repetitive narrative structures, typically revolving around disadvantaged youth achieving success through sports as a means to transform their lives. This approach overlooks deeper issues such as the development of rural industries, the enhancement of local governance, and the preservation of traditional cultural practices. Consequently, the portrayal of values in these films tends to remain surface-level, limiting their ability to foster meaningful engagement or emotional connection with rural audiences. A broader exploration of diverse rural experiences and challenges could enrich the narrative depth and enhance the cultural resonance of sports films within these communities.

4.2. Incomplete Coverage of Rural Film Communication Channels and Disconnections in Value Transmission

Urban cinemas and short-video platforms currently dominate as the primary channels for disseminating sports films. However, rural and remote areas, particularly those in mountainous regions and villages with diverse cultural backgrounds, face significant challenges due to inadequate infrastructure. Issues such as outdated digital equipment, infrequent screenings at cultural venues, and limited access to high-quality

sports films disproportionately affect middle-aged and elderly residents, as well as seniors who remain in these areas. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of short-video platforms disrupts the continuity of storytelling, as audiences often consume only isolated, exciting clips. This practice undermines the deeper messages embedded in these films, such as themes of rural development and cultural preservation, thereby diminishing their overall impact on value transmission and audience engagement [3, 10].

4.3. Low Integration of Film and Television IPs with Local Rural Resources and Absence of Long-Term Transformation Mechanisms

Many films tend to generate only temporary cultural tourism activity during their initial release period, without adequate planning for sustained operations [11]. Locations used for film production often fail to fully harness the cultural and recreational values associated with sports themes depicted in the films. Furthermore, the development of complementary industries, such as cultural events, educational tours, and creative cultural products, remains underdeveloped. Local governments and rural stakeholders have not established effective platforms to integrate film-related activities with sports and cultural tourism, which limits the ability to transform the temporary popularity of films into long-term growth for rural cultural industries. As a result, the cultural impact of sports-themed films often diminishes quickly, leaving rural areas without lasting benefits.

4.4. Inadequate Field Research by Creators and Detached Expression of Rural Values from Reality

A significant challenge faced by some film and television creators is their limited firsthand experience with rural life, which often results in superficial portrayals of rural characters and cultural activities, such as folk sports [5, 12]. This lack of depth in representation leads to a disconnect between the values depicted in these works and the actual realities of rural communities. Consequently, such portrayals fail to establish a meaningful connection with grassroots audiences, diminishing the potential of these films to effectively guide or influence societal values. By not accurately reflecting the complexities and nuances of rural life, these productions risk alienating their intended audience and undermining their cultural and educational impact.

5. Optimized Paths to Strengthen Sports Films' Values Empowerment of Rural Revitalization and Social Development

5.1. Support Creation of Rural-Themed Sports Films and Enrich Multi-Layered Value Narrative Systems

To enhance the role of sports films in rural revitalization and social development, it is essential to implement supportive policies aligned with cultural enrichment initiatives [13]. Establishing dedicated funds for the creation of rural-themed sports films can provide the necessary financial backing for long-term projects. Encouraging creators to engage in extensive field research within rural communities can help ensure authenticity and depth in storytelling. These films should explore a variety of themes, such as rural governance, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, youth returning to rural areas for entrepreneurship, and the integration of urban and rural lifestyles. Moving beyond the conventional "triumph through adversity" narrative, these works can address realistic challenges like industrial revitalization, the transformation of rural customs, and fostering social cohesion. Additionally, leveraging traditional local sports can inspire unique intellectual properties in rural sports cinema. This approach can encompass diverse formats, including documentaries, short dramas, and animated films, catering to a wide range of audiences across different age groups and regions.

5.2. Improve Grassroots-Oriented Rural Communication Networks to Bridge the "Last Mile" of Value Transmission

Enhancing the rural public cultural film and television service system is essential for fostering community engagement and value sharing. Regularly organizing free screenings of sports films at cultural auditoriums and New Era Civilization Practice

Stations, in conjunction with rural sports events and film discussion sessions, can create opportunities for villagers to exchange perspectives and deepen their understanding of the films' themes. County-level integrated media centers can play a pivotal role by producing concise, interpretive short videos specifically tailored to rural audiences, ensuring that the core messages and values of the films are effectively conveyed [14]. For elderly groups, traditional communication channels such as rural radio broadcasts and offline large-screen projections can be utilized to ensure comprehensive urban-rural communication coverage, thereby addressing potential gaps in value communication and fostering inclusivity across diverse demographic groups.

5.3. Build a Long-Term Integrated Industrial Model of "Film and Television IP + Local Rural Sports"

During the production of films, collaboration with local governments and rural cooperatives should be prioritized to simultaneously plan for the development of cultural tourism. This approach can transform rural areas featured in films into destinations centered around sports and cultural themes. Regularly organized folk events inspired by traditional sports depicted in the films can serve as a foundation for these efforts. Additionally, industrial chains can be developed to include educational tours, immersive experiences of local customs, and the creation of sports-related cultural and creative products. Establishing dedicated film memorial halls and rural sports museums can further preserve the cultural and historical elements portrayed in the films. This strategy ensures that short-term popularity is converted into enduring cultural and economic assets for rural areas, fostering sustainable dissemination of the positive values associated with sports-themed films through industrial development and cultural enrichment [15, 16].

5.4. Coordinate Multiple Stakeholders to Establish a Long-Term Cultural Empowerment Mechanism

Collaborative platforms should be established to unite various stakeholders, including the film and television industry, sports authorities, agricultural and rural departments, and grassroots organizations in rural areas. Film and television institutions can focus on creating and disseminating content that resonates with rural audiences, while sports authorities can prioritize upgrading sports venues and fostering local athletic talent. Grassroots organizations in rural areas can play a pivotal role by hosting film screenings and organizing community events that promote cultural engagement. Additionally, cultural tourism authorities can coordinate efforts to integrate industrial development with cultural initiatives. Feedback mechanisms should be implemented to gather insights from rural audiences after film screenings, enabling the optimization of content creation and communication strategies. This approach ensures that the values conveyed through sports films align with the practical needs of rural communities, contributing to the development of livable and harmonious villages.

5.5. Promote National Sports Cultural Development through Sports Film Dissemination to Advance Comprehensive Social Progress

Rural sports films can serve as effective tools for promoting national sports culture by organizing screenings in schools, communities, and workplaces. These films can convey values such as perseverance, inclusiveness, and unity, fostering a shared cultural understanding across diverse societal groups [10]. By leveraging the appeal of sports films, efforts can be made to popularize the concept of national fitness, address disparities in urban and rural sports resources, and work toward equitable access to public cultural and sports services. Additionally, sports imagery can act as a medium to bridge urban-rural cultural divides, facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding. This approach contributes to the coordinated enhancement of spiritual and cultural development across society.

6. Conclusion

The fundamental pillar of rural revitalization lies in cultural revitalization. As a literary and artistic medium with broad public appeal and strong emotional resonance, sports films embody diverse values, including perseverance, social cooperation, cultural inheritance, equality, and inclusiveness. These values constitute an important cultural force for activating rural vitality, reshaping civilized local customs, stimulating the development of cultural and sports-related industries, and narrowing urban-rural disparities. Represented by films such as *Young Black Eagles*, *Never Say Never*, *I Am What I Am*, and *Qiang Huapao (Fighting for the Firecracker)*, rural sports films demonstrate that moving-image narratives can transform abstract values into perceptible and actionable life philosophies. In this way, they provide sustained cultural momentum for rural revitalization across spiritual cultivation, community governance, industrial development, and urban-rural integration. More importantly, such films not only enrich cultural expression in rural areas but also enhance public identification with positive social norms, strengthen emotional bonds within communities, and create new pathways for the dissemination of healthy lifestyles and constructive value orientations. Through their aesthetic appeal, narrative accessibility, and educational potential, rural sports films further contribute to balanced, inclusive, and high-quality social development.

Looking to the future, greater support should be provided for the creation and dissemination of rural sports films, while grassroots-oriented communication channels in rural areas should be further improved. At the same time, the integrated development of film and television intellectual properties with rural sports industries should be deepened so as to fully release the value-guiding function of sports films. By presenting vivid stories of contemporary rural life through sports cinema, it becomes possible to nourish the inner world of rural residents with the spirit of perseverance, fairness, and mutual support, while also consolidating the cultural foundation of rural revitalization through sustained soft-power development. In addition, these efforts can promote wider participation in public cultural life, improve the visibility of rural cultural resources, and encourage the formation of distinctive local cultural brands. Ultimately, the continued development of rural sports films can support more coordinated progress in urban and rural spiritual and cultural life, foster stronger cultural confidence at the community level, and open a broader cultural horizon for comprehensive and sustainable social development.

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