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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SUSTAINING THE RURAL EDUCATION REVITALIZATION OF MEISHAN MARTIAL ARTS: A GROUNDED THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Meishan martial arts is a traditional sports culture with distinct national and regional characteristics, and it is an important part of Meishan culture. This grounded theoretical research attempts to systematically alleviate the inheritance crisis of Meishan martial arts and meet the national demand for rural culture construction under the background of rural revitalization strategy. Eight key insiders were specially selected and asked to share their experiences in the inheritance of martial arts in Meishan and the development of rural education. In-depth interviews were conducted to ensure that a rich narrative will emerge. Member checks and expert audits of interview transcripts and interpretations were also conducted to ensure the credibility of the data. Three themes were ultimately drawn: the inheritance of Meishan martial arts mainly involves the technical system, the theoretical system and the inheritance system. The three are interrelated and mutually based, and none is indispensable. Consistent with academic literature, the difficulties Meishan martial arts has encountered in the modern context can be attributed to the themes identified. This study provides a reference experience for the inheritance and development of traditional sports culture in rural society. It constructs the rural education inheritance system of Meishan martial arts and carries on the demonstration through educational action research.

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INTRODUCTION

Meishan culture is a hidden culture in people's lives. It is difficult to capture its existence clearly, but it exerts a subtle influence on the life and death of all people in this cultural circle. An integral part of it is Meishan martial arts, which is not only an excellent traditional national sport, but also a unique regional cultural phenomenon that has been in existence for thousands of years. Meishan martial arts, however, is facing a serious inheritance crisis, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects: excessive commercial development, modern competitive transformation, major loss of inheritance subjects and lack of inheritors, emergence of modern sports forms, and reduction of development space. These problems must be faced; otherwise, Meishan martial arts will die a natural death.

Background of the Study: In 2017, the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and The State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, which set out specific requirements on how to implement the project of inheriting and developing excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. Among other things, it underscored that the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture is a systematic project. As an important part of Meishan culture, Meishan martial arts is a traditional sports culture with distinct national and regional characteristics summarized and refined in the

long-term social and historical practice of Meishan Town (Yang Zhihua & Peng Jianmin, 2022). It still has a profound influence on the way of thinking and living customs of people in Meishan. It has been practiced for thousands of years, mainly relying on oral and physical instruction in rural education. However, with continuous modernization, traditional social foundations are starting to erode, and Meishan martial Arts is now facing "national demand for in-depth exploration of excellent traditional Chinese culture" and "unprecedented and severe inheritance crisis (Kang Renjie, 2022)." Promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of Meishan martial arts amid such backdrop is, therefore, an important and urgent problem. Under the dual background of The Times, the inheritance and development value of Meishan martial arts is mainly reflected in two aspects: regional location of Meishan and cultural characteristics of Meishan martial arts as determined by this regional location. In terms of national needs, Meishan martial arts takes root in the rural society, has the function of educating villagers and rural governance, and meets the needs of rural cultural construction. In terms of the urgency of inheritance, the rural "empty-nest" caused by the long-term urban-rural dual structure (Ma Liangcan & Kang Yulan, 2022) greatly restricts the inheritance and development of Meishan martial arts. This study mainly discusses how to inherit Meishan martial arts through family inheritance, village community education, and school education, so as to explore effective ways for rural education to serve rural revitalization and provide a systematic and detailed blueprint for rural culture revitalization of Meishan region—and preserve Meishan martial arts as a result.

Statement of the Problem: This research aimed to comprehensively analyze the historical characteristics and modern significance of rural education in Meishan martial arts and to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment of the development of it. Specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions: What is the historical development process of Meishan martial arts? What is the current status and main issues concerning the development of Meishan martial arts? What is the logical framework for integrating Meishan martial arts into rural education? How can the integration of Meishan martial arts into rural education be realized?

Significance of the Study: This paper explored the rural education path of Meishan martial arts, and the results can benefit the following:

Practitioners of Meishan martial arts: They stand to gain in-depth knowledge of the origin, history, and development of Meishan martial arts so they can better carry it on and advance it.

Students: They can learn more about an integral aspect of Meishan culture, and this knowledge can, in turn, cultivate a sense of local culture and cultural pride through conscious education and teaching, opening up the possibility that they, too, can be caretakers of Meishan martial arts.

Educational Leaders: School administrators will understand young people's attitudes towards local culture and their willingness to accept it, and may even develop policies to stimulate and promote students' sense of identity with local culture.

School and the community: Knowledge gleaned from this study can help schools and communities systematically inherit the school education of Meishan martial arts, and effectively solve problems such as insufficient teachers and nonstandard teachers of Meishan martial arts in rural education.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study: This study was limited to the inheritance mechanism construction and realization path exploration of Meishan martial arts under Chinese rural education. Specifically, the limitations of this study are mainly reflected in three aspects: The need to use historical methods to further sort out the educational influence of Meishan martial arts on the regional society; the difficulty in extensively involving all aspects of rural education; and the context of specific social environment and rural revitalization strategy.

Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored on various theories, one of which is Liang Shuming's theory of rural Construction where the previous way of transforming China's countryside with Western order and culture is described as being full of problems that failed to build a modern countryside and caused extremely serious cultural imbalance—resulting in the deep collapse of Chinese society. Shuming proposed that the only way to build modern countryside is to follow the inherent spirit of the Chinese nation that has lasted for thousands of years, starting from national consciousness and then taking Chinese traditional culture as the cornerstone and using Western technology to solve rural problems, thus finding a road of integrated development between China and the West. Another theory is Fei Xiaotong's rural reconstruction thought. Xiaotong, one of the founders of sociology and anthropology in China, posited that rural reconstruction needs to develop rural industry while revitalizing agriculture and exploring a way to enrich people through culture on the basis of cultural consciousness. These, in turn, allows for the building of a local life community that can meet the needs of modern people. Additionally, urban-rural integration theory was also used. Traced back to Adam Smith, this theory posits that the country supplies the city with means of living and raw materials used in manufacturing, and that the city sends some finished products back to the rural residents as a return. The benefits of both are common and mutual. The relationship between urban and rural areas should follow the natural course and maintain a certain proportion. German economist Johann Duynen proposed in the Relationship between Agriculture and National Economy in Isolated Countries that cities and villages could be integrated through idealized industrial layout based on the exchange of industry and agriculture.

METHODOLOGY

The foregoing describes the study design, setting and location, sample and sampling design, data collection procedures and ethical considerations used in this study.

Research locale: Hunan has a strong foundation for mass martial arts. As early as the Spring and Autumn period, Hunan belonged to the territory of the State of Chu, and the spirit of martial arts of the Chu people was very strong. It was recorded in *Huainan Zi · Soldier Training*: "All the lords in the state of Chu, the soldiers were brave, the nobles fought to wear swords, and the army and the people advocated martial arts." The research site is closely centered around the core area of Meishan region of Hunan, including Xinhua, Anhua, Dongan, Lengshuijiang, Lianyuan, Longhui, Louxing and other counties and cities, and the field investigation is specially carried out in local areas by taking advantage of major local festivals, competitions, exhibitions and other activities. People in the above areas have a long history of practicing Meishan martial arts, among which Xinhua County is one of the main birthplaces of Meishan martial Arts.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sampling principle of grounded theory is theory saturation principle (Morse & Richards, 2002). According to grounded theory, interview and analysis are mutually reinforcing and inseparable in in-depth interview research. After each interview, immediate data sorting and analysis should be carried out, theoretical hypotheses should be constructed on the basis of interview analysis, and then the sample interviews should be conducted according to these theoretical hypotheses to further verify and improve the theoretical hypotheses. To ensure that meaningful and credible data were actually and effectively collected, three different types of theoretical sampling introduced by Strauss and Cobin in the Summary of Qualitative Research were implemented.

Open sampling: Means that, according to the research questions, the research objects that have the most say in the inheritance, development, promotion, and communication of Meishan martial Arts are selected for interview, so as to cover all aspects of the research phenomenon and find the relevant concepts and categories needed to construct the theory. The categories to be considered are as follows:

- Years of practice
- Achievement size
- C. Social reputation
- Social part-time job
- Awards

Relational and differential sampling: Means that, on the basis of immediate sorting and analysis of Meishan martial Arts, experts on rural education issues are selected in a more targeted way to carefully sort out the theoretical concepts and categories emerging from the interview materials, so as to clarify the relationship between the inheritance of Meishan martial arts and the development of rural education.

Discriminative sampling: Means that with the increase of interview data, researchers establish theoretical hypothesis of rural education inheritance mechanism of Meishan martial arts on the basis of continuous induction and analysis of interview data and then select survey objects that are conducive to further revision and improvement of the theory for interview.

Data Gathering Procedure: To facilitate the smooth implementation of theoretical methods and ensure long-term contact with the research subjects, multiple in-depth discussions were conducted with key informants such as Meishan martial Arts inheritors, folk martial arts masters, village-level organizers, and practitioners in the birthplaces of Meishan martial arts, including Xinhua and Lengshuijiang. These were done during winter and summer breaks and other holidays. Close contact was maintained with scholars from universities such as Hunan University and Hunan Normal University, and in-depth interviews were conducted at appropriate opportunities to collect

relevant data. Following the theoretical saturation principle in qualitative research, the researcher aimed to continue sampling until information redundancy or saturation was reached, meaning no new information or themes emerged from the data. To ascertain whether this point had been achieved, preliminary interpretation was conducted alongside data collection. After the completion of the study, the recorded conversations were deleted and discarded.

Statistical Analysis: Nvivo12.0 software was used to encode and analyze the collected data step by step until the theory was saturated—and until themes emerged from the data. Level 1 coding—that is, open coding—involved inputting the relevant materials of Meishan martial arts and rural education in the region according to their own state. An important principle to observe at this stage is to believe in both everything and nothing (Strauss, 1987:29). Secondary coding—that is, spindle coding—involves principal axis decoding, which refers to the process of connecting the categories derived from open decoding using the canonical model of causal conditions-phenomenon- context- mediating conditions-action/ interaction strategy-results (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Its main task is to further discover various connections among categories through clustering on the basis of open coding category mining, so as to establish organic associations among independent categories in data (Xiangming, 2000). Tertiary coding, or selective coding, refers to the process of selecting the core category, systematically associating it with other categories, verifying its relation, and supplementing the incomplete conceptualization category. The main tasks of this process include identifying the core category that can dominate all other categories, using all the data and the categories and relationships developed from the core category to explain the whole phenomenon briefly, coming up with canonical model to link the core category with other categories and verifying these connection relations, and developing the category to have more subtle and complete characteristics (Zhigang & Xingwang, 2006). Data analysis in selective decoding is not much different from that in spindle code, but it deals with a more abstract level of analysis.

RESULTS

The foregoing introduces selected personal situations of the participants in the in-depth interview, the themes in the interview, the explanation of the themes, and the construction of the inheritance mechanism of Meishan martial arts rural education.

Profiles of Key Informants: All eight of the key information providers in the study were either senior practitioners of Meishan martial Arts (*inheritors*) or experts in rural education research and government department heads. Their experience is the basic foundation to explain Meishan martial arts rural education inheritance approach. Yan Xizheng is a male national representative inheritor born in May 1947 in Xinhua, Hunan Province. He is a 19th generation inheritor of Meishan martial arts who was announced as the representative inheritor of Meishan martial arts. He is one of the "100 Masters of Martial Arts" in contemporary China. Chen Yiqiu is a male provincial representative inheritor born in December 1950 in Menggong Town, Xinhua County, Hunan Province. He is a national first-class martial arts referee, first-class martial arts instructor, and President of Loudi Meishan Martial Arts Culture Research Institute. Tan Xin is a male municipal inheritor born in February 1967 in Xihe Village, Xihe Town, Xinhua County. In 2014, Loudi City confirmed Xin as a municipal inheritor. He is also the standing committee member of the sixth Wushu Association of Hunan Province and the executive chairman of the third and Fourth Meishan Traditional Wushu Association of Xinhua County. Peng Jianmin is a native of Xinhua County, Hunan Province born in August 1966. He is a member of the Communist Party of China and is a master, professor, master supervisor. Currently, he is the director of Graduate School of Hunan University.

Duan Jianzhi, female and born in November 1966, is a professor, master, and master supervisor. She is a Hunan Province 121 Talent Project second-level candidate, a first class aerobics Judge of the

People's Republic of China, and former deputy director of the Physical Education Department of Huaihua University. She is affiliated with Hunan University of Humanities and Science. Zhao Long, male born in January 1982, is an intermediate, master degree candidate. He is the Head of the Mass Sports Section of Loudi Sports Bureau, mainly responsible for mass sports activities, mass sports events organization, national fitness activities organization, and sports intangible cultural heritage management in Loudi City. Chen Qin, male born in December 1979, is a master, senior teacher, and principal of Xinhua No. 1 Middle School. He has been engaged in martial arts teaching and training in Meishan for a long time.

Theme 1: Meishan martial Arts

The first theme is the influence factor of the model: Meishan martial Arts. It includes technology system, theory system and inheritance system. Meishan martial arts, as a practical means of life production, was born for survival at the beginning. In other words, it is a simple summary of the experience of survival means and does not have the characteristics of active fighting. However, through the accumulation of long-term life and production practice, this skill can be integrated with the function of religious sacrifice and entertaining gods and people, and then developed into a fighting skill. The inheritance of Meishan martial arts, in turn, not only cultivated the healthy and strong physique of the Meishan people from generation to generation, but also nurtured the spiritually of patriotic and home-loving people, leaving a great legacy in the history of the development of the Chinese nation. In the history of Meishan martial arts, the most common way of inheritance is the inheritance of masters and apprentices, which fully reflects the importance of "portal" in the process of historical inheritance of Meishan martial arts. Such "portal" view is often closely related to "authentic" thought, which comes from the inheritance of portal and is widely recognized by the public and the industry. Therefore, the simplest way to maintain authenticity is to maintain the portal, under which authenticity can continue to be maintained.

Theme 2: Rural Education

Rural education includes rural family education, village community moral education, and rural school education (Yangchu, 1998), and it underscores the important mission of blocking the transmission of poverty between generations. With the comprehensive promotion of the rural revitalization strategy, the important position of rural education is further highlighted. Minister of Education HuaiJinpeng pointed out that it is necessary to "promote the revitalization of rural education and the revitalization of rural education in a coordinated way, integrate rural education into rural construction actions, and serve the construction of rural culture, rural culture and rural governance system." Rural education is not only an important part of rural construction and governance, but also bears the historical responsibility of inheriting and developing culture. Education, therefore needs to play a crucial role in preserving Meishan martial arts as the continuous development of the economy and the gradual popularization of television and mobile phones have diversified people's choices. Hong Kong and Taiwan films, for instance, along with Western culture have gradually influenced every village in central Hunan, ultimately cooling down the martial arts craze and forcing martial arts schools to close down one after another.

A large number of young people began to leave the village and go to the outside world, leaving the elderly and children behind. In this case, the traditional martial arts of the whole people no longer flourishes, given the lack of inheritance subjects—particularly of Meishan martial arts. As Professor Jianzhi explained: "The problem Meishan martial arts faces in the inheritance of village culture is not simply the inheritance and development of traditional culture, but the integrity of the inheritance system and the construction of economic foundation. The most critical thing is the design and guidance of superstructure for the inheritance of village traditional culture..."

In the heyday of Meishan martial arts, primary and secondary schools in Xinhua County practiced it in both physical education and recess exercises. Schools, therefore were the main bases for the inheritance and dissemination of Meishan martial arts.

Today, however, Meishan martial arts—and martial arts in general—is gradually being withdrawn from PE classes in primary and secondary schools. Although some schools still offer Meishan martial arts courses they are too few to achieve scale effect. In addition, “portal” is a typical expression of Chinese martial arts schools, and it embodies different technical characteristics. It even constructs a secret that is not transmitted for identifying the characteristics of the family. In the absence of adequate protection of intellectual property rights, the family, as a social unit, embodies the crime and punishment of portal in the inheritance history of Meishan martial arts. In the family inheritance, Meishan martial Arts also serves as the evaluation index of the younger generation's moral thoughts and promotes the construction of good family style. It is worth noting that Xing, a sixth-generation inheritor of the Chen family, is not from the Chen family in Xinhua, but from Lianyuan. He had no relatives in the Chen family but was recognized by Yiqiu because of his personal hobbies and talents and accepted as a separate generation successor. At present, Xing continues to practice Meishan martial arts with Yiqiu and Qin, and has mastered the main techniques of it.

Theme 3: Rural Cultural Inheritance

Cultural inheritance is an important task to safeguard cultural diversity, protect cultural heritage, and promote cultural spirit. In China, tsurvival wisdom and moral thoughts contained in the traditional sports culture are still of great value to the construction of rural society today—just as Meishan martial arts was originally a survival culture. Related to cultural inheritance is cultural policy, which refers to policies formulated by governments or other organizations to support, promote, and protect cultural undertakings and activities. It includes measures to support cultural industries, cultural education, cultural heritage, cultural creative industries, and cultural diversity. Cultural policy aims to encourage and protect cultural and creative industries, including literature, film, music, theatre, fine arts, crafts, and even sports. It can also be used to increase cultural participation and diversity and encourage participation and enjoyment of cultural activities. Governments can support and promote cultural activities by formulating policies and measures, such as providing cultural education and training, providing cultural events and festivals, and promoting cultural exchanges and transnational cultural cooperation.

Professor Peng Jianmin from Hunan University has been engaged in cultural policy research for a long time, and has unique views on inheritance, development and protection policies of local traditional culture—especially as regards Meishan martial arts. According to him: “The inheritance and development of Meishan martial arts is largely due to the smooth implementation of these national policies. Since it was included in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2014, the annual investment in funds has ensured the development of some large-scale activities, such as the annual Meishan Martial Arts Invitational Tournament in Hunan Province, which reflects the cultural policy to express power through the investment in funds. Therefore, the study of policy is closely related to power, but cultural policy itself is not equal to the expression of power, and the operation process of cultural policy is not completely carried out in accordance with the process of realization and expression of power. But no matter how good the policy is, it must be implemented to reflect its social value—and rural cultural construction activities are examples of the concrete implementation of cultural policies. Rural cultural construction covers many aspects, such as rural cultural industry, cultural heritage protection, cultural inheritance and innovation, and cultural exchange and so on. Meishan martial arts, as a traditional sport originating from the practice of life and production, is part of the culture of Meishan people; therefore, relevant cultural elements are widely reflected in national characteristics, living customs, religious beliefs, and codes of conduct. To carry out cultural construction activities in accordance with cultural policies is to strengthen this “ineffable” influence through actionable strategies.

The formulation of cultural policy is to standardize the construction and development of traditional culture, and ultimately to enhance cultural identity and achieve the purpose of cultural confidence. In the Western context, the proposal of “cultural confidence” is seen as a

response to the challenges and threats brought by globalization and the influence of Western culture, and as an important part of China's efforts to safeguard its position and enhance its soft power on the global stage. In fact, it encourages Chinese people to accept their own cultural identity and be proud of their own cultural heritage, while also recognizing the value of other cultures. However, cultural confidence is a more basic, deeper and more lasting force in the development of a country and a nation, which is the basic principle followed by the top-level design of all cultural construction.

Jianminsaid of cultural confidence:“At present, the international situation is complicated. Globalization and anti-globalization are losing each other. The adjustment brought by Western culture and values is more and more serious, and the influence on local culture is more and more profound. For example, Xinhua County and other small cities are full of the shadow of Western culture, and the influence of Western sports culture has even penetrated into the villages. More people play basketball, watch football, and practice Meishan martial arts. This is not normal and shows that our culture has eroded. Many people think that Western things are modern and fashionable, and they think that our traditional things are too old. Even old people begin to dance in square dances and don't practice Meishan martial arts any more. In a few decades, traditional martial arts like Meishan Martial Arts will die out...” In the 1920s and 1930s, Liang Shuming carried out an in-depth survey in rural areas and proposed that rural construction should have “return consciousness” and “education consciousness.”Return consciousness is to return to farmers, agriculture, and countryside, while the education consciousness is to carry out social education and establish rural agricultural schools (Shuming, 2006). It has important implications for the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy in the new era and plays a positive role in promoting the comprehensive rural revitalization. In 2018, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council issued the Opinions on The Implementation of Rural Revitalization Strategy, which put forward the important view that “Rural revitalization, cultural revitalization is the key” (CPC Central Committee and The State Council, 2018). Therefore, in the process of rural revitalization, it is necessary to strengthen the research and explanation on the inheritance and development of Meishan martial arts rural education, and promote the rural “cultural revitalization.” Concretely combined with the rural education of Meishan martial arts must be an operation mechanism that should be reflected in three aspects: rural school education, rural village education, and rural family education.

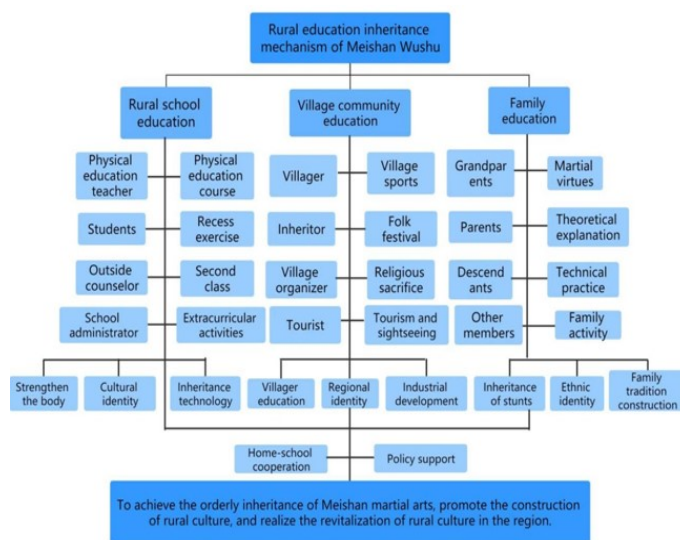


Fig.1. Rural education inheritance system of Meishan martial arts

The inheritance system of Meishan martial arts (Figure 1) is mainly composed of the transmitter, means, media, and inheritor.

Usually, the bearer (transmitter) spreads the information of national traditional sports culture to the inheritor through certain paths and means, and makes the bearer gradually become a new bearer, forming

an organic cycle. (Zhiyong, 2007). Therefore, the perfection of the mechanism mainly depends on whether the different parts of the system can form a unified and complete organic cycle. The history of the inheritance of national culture shows that family members inherit excellent national culture with their unique blood relationship, and give national culture strong vitality (Zhibin & Xiaoyan, 2015). In the family inheritance mechanism of Meishan martial arts, the elders of the family are generally the inheritors, while the younger members of the family are the inheritors. The main ways are religious ceremonies, festival activities, family education (daily education), one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, many-to-many, and many-to-many, and the cultural information of Meishan martial Arts is transmitted to the family members by oral transmission.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to explore the rural education inheritance mechanism and realization path of Meishan martial arts. Meishan martial arts is a traditional martial arts with distinct regional and national characteristics, along with a "bloody" spirit that deeply influences local conventions and customs. It is ingrained in the Meishan culture and has become a part of local life. For this study, four senior practitioners (inheritors) of Meishan martial arts and four education experts were interviewed in detail to share their personal experiences and views on the inheritance of Meishan martial arts and the development of rural education. The inheritors emphasized the dilemma faced by the inheritance of Meishan martial arts from the perspective of technology and theory. As the main inheritors of Meishan's martial arts, they see themselves as powerless in the face of adversity. They have done a lot of work to inherit Meishan martial arts, but they are now seeing its gradual decline in the face of challenges from Western culture and the transformation of rural society.

Education experts, on the other hand, see two distinct results from the institutionalization of rural education. On the one hand, the institutionalization has unified the education form of rural schools, which is conducive to the standardization of rural education. On the other hand, it weakens the function of rural schools to inherit local culture, which is not conducive to rural students' identification of local culture, and thus affects the inheritance of excellent traditional culture. With the impact of foreign culture, the foundation on which Meishan martial arts sits has undergone tremendous changes, and its inheritance and development have encountered unprecedented challenges. But while the inheritance and development of Meishan martial arts are faced with various difficulties, there is hope nonetheless given the comprehensive promotion of the rural revitalization strategy and the construction of villages and schools. The respondents are also confident of support from national cultural policy. These developments are a boon to Meishan martial arts, which can, as an excellent traditional sports culture, improve people's physical health and cultivate their affinity local culture. Given the findings, this paper puts forward the rural education and inheritance mechanism of Meishan martial arts, which mainly includes three aspects: the education and inheritance mechanism of rural schools, the inheritance mechanism of rural villages, and the inheritance mechanism of rural families. Consequently, establishing an inheritance system for Meishan martial arts in rural education is to discuss the effectiveness and sustainability of rural cultural construction from the perspective of mechanism, which will then play a crucial role in the inheritance and development of other types of traditional sports culture—particularly Meishan martial arts.

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