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# Issues and Reflections on Improving the Rule of Law in Physical Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Frontier Minority Areas*

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Based on an analysis of the issues in physical education in primary and secondary schools in frontier minority areas, this paper proposes that improving the rule of law in this context requires perfecting the institutional system for school physical education, exploring the integration of traditional ethnic sports resources into the curriculum, and providing targeted state support for the rule of law in physical education in these regions.

*Keywords:* frontier minority areas, rule of law in physical education, traditional sports

## Major Issues in the Rule of Law for Physical Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Frontier Minority Areas

Health is a fundamental goal of social development and the foundation and prerequisite for individuals to contribute to society and enjoy life. Physical exercise offers numerous benefits, including disease prevention, improved physique, delayed aging, weight control, increased energy, maintenance of mental agility, enhanced mood, and the cultivation of willpower and interpersonal skills. There is a need to comprehensively deepen quality-oriented education, accelerate efforts to address shortcomings in physical education, aesthetic education, and labor education, and promote the healthy physical and mental development of students. In 2018, President Xi Jinping emphasized at the National Education Conference: “We must establish the educational philosophy of prioritizing health, ensure the full provision of physical education classes, and help students enjoy fun, enhance their physique, improve their character, and temper their will through physical exercise”.

The main problem with the rule of law in physical education in primary and secondary schools in frontier minority areas is its insufficient and uneven fulfillment of the nature and requirements of physical education. Compared with economically developed regions and cities, the primary and secondary physical education in frontier minority areas faces the following major issues:

(I) Inconsistent legal basis: Physical education in primary and secondary schools is significantly influenced by local regulations and policies, leading to varying normative requirements for physical activities across

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different regions or schools. For example, in some areas, students require parental approval to participate in calisthenics or gymnastics during breaks, while in others, there may be more stringent requirements regarding the legality and health aspects of physical activities.

(II) Weak school physical education: The weakness of school physical education is manifested in multiple aspects, such as the imbalance in development between urban and rural schools, a shortage of qualified physical education teachers in remote rural areas, inadequate guaranteed time for physical education classes and extracurricular activities, insufficient recognition of the importance of school physical education by multiple stakeholders, lack of support from social forces, and unreasonable evaluation mechanisms for school physical education. A survey shows that over one-third of schools nationwide do not adhere to the national regulation of "2 classes per week for Grades 1-2 in primary school, 3 classes per week for Grades 3-6 in primary school and junior high school, and 1 class per week for high school".

(III) Insufficient resources: Frontier minority areas face shortages in both physical education professionals and teaching facilities. The construction level of primary and secondary school sports facilities is uneven. Supporting facilities for sports are outdated, and the lack of basic sports infrastructure in rural areas constrains the development of rural sports. Surveys have found that rural schools commonly suffer from a shortage of equipment and resources. There is a severe lack of personnel related to physical education in rural schools, and the current state of rural sports venues and facilities cannot meet the demands of school physical education teaching activities.

(IV) Unreasonable curriculum design, with monotonous or lacking diversity and innovative content: The physical education curriculum system in rural schools is not well-developed. Current physical education in primary and secondary schools focuses more on competitive sports, lacking emphasis on the comprehensive development of students. For instance, activities may be limited to ball games in the school gymnasium, neglecting students' physical fitness training, psychological adjustment, and mental health development. Many schools' curriculum arrangements lack interest and interactivity, resulting in low student interest in physical activities.

(V) Lack of necessary supervision and management: Rural school leadership often does not prioritize physical education. To avoid safety risks in physical education classes, schools often simplify the curriculum. Long influenced by the fixation on exam scores, rural schools show even less initiative in organizing physical activities. Teachers and parents provide insufficient supervision over physical education in primary and secondary schools, particularly regarding the on-site guidance and safety education for standardized physical activities, leading to frequent violations. For example, the linkage between "Home-School-Community" is hindered. Due to farmers working away from home, rural populations are mostly composed of elderly individuals and left-behind children. Schools find it difficult to maintain timely contact with students' parents, and parents are unable to accompany and participate in their children's growth and education.

## Reflections on Improving the Rule of Law in Physical Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Frontier Minority Areas

In response to the problems in physical education in frontier minority areas, improving the rule of law can be approached by perfecting the institutional system for school physical education, strengthening supervision and management, utilizing traditional ethnic sports resources, and learning from foreign institutional experiences. The goal is to gradually construct a legal system aligned with the essence of physical education, ensuring its legality and scientific nature.

(I) Perfect the institutional system for primary and secondary school physical education: Continuously improving and innovating the socialist physical education system with Chinese characteristics is an important guarantee for creating a new path for Chinese modernization in sports and the core driving force for promoting the high-quality development of the national sports industry. Over a century of development, school sports under the leadership of the Communist Party of China have always been governed by laws and regulations. Through a series of institutional constructions and organizational management reforms, the state has steered the management of school sports onto a path of legalization and standardization, establishing a relatively complete operational mechanism and guarantee system for school sports management. China has already established a relatively complete legal system for physical education in primary and secondary schools, and this system is continuously being optimized.

It is necessary to legislate on important educational systems related to the rule of law in school physical education or improve existing laws, regulations, and normative documents from the government, educational authorities, and schools. Considering the particularities of physical education, a unified legal and regulatory system for physical education should be established to clarify the legal and normative requirements for all parties involved. For example, institutional construction for developing the core competencies of physical education teachers. Cultivating the core physical education competencies of primary and secondary school students requires continuously improving top-level design, strengthening institutional guarantees, stimulating motivation for sports participation, and enhancing the efficiency of physical education teaching. It also requires strategic planning and systematic integration of school resources, community resources, and social resources for physical education teaching to build a synergistic ecosystem for physical education. To better cultivate these competencies, a development system for the core competencies of physical education teachers should be constructed from micro, meso, and macro dimensions; continuously optimize and improve the physical education system, gradually perfecting the facilities, curriculum, and management mechanisms for primary and secondary school physical education.

(II) Integrate traditional ethnic sports resources into physical education in frontier minority area schools: In 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Integrating Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture Into Primary and Secondary School Curriculum and Teaching Materials, identifying Physical Education and Health as an important subject for implementing education in excellent traditional Chinese culture. Minority regions, as significant ethnic areas in China, possess rich traditional culture and unique traditional sports resources. Common traditional ethnic sports projects in these areas include rope skipping, rubber band skipping, tug-of-war, spinning tops (top whipping), bamboo pole dancing, and crossbow shooting. Traditional sports resources in minority areas blend with ethnic culture, emphasize fun and practicality, stress teamwork, and value sports ethics education.

Given the realities of school physical education in China, it should highlight local characteristics. Integrating ethnic sports resources into primary and secondary physical education can enhance students' physical fitness and cultural literacy, pass on ethnic culture, and promote students' all-round development. In exploring the new path of Chinese modernization in sports, Chinese Communists have deeply explored, inherited, and promoted the essence of excellent traditional sports culture, comprehensively advancing the healthy development of the socialist sports cause with Chinese characteristics. In promoting the integration of sports and culture, incorporating elements of minority traditional culture into school physical education curricula can strengthen students' cultural identity and sports literacy. In economically underdeveloped frontier minority areas, the state can effectively support the construction of the rule of law in physical education through measures such as government transfers and targeted support for physical education. The Compulsory Education Physical Education

and Health Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) requires leveraging the moral education function of martial arts courses in primary and secondary schools to realize the educational concept of fostering virtue through education. The profound culture accumulated by Chinese martial arts is deeply embedded in the development of Chinese sports. This unique endowment of sports resources not only constitutes an advantage for Chinese modernization in sports but also continuously provides a source of emphasized spiritual motivation. Integrating ethnic sports resources requires incorporating projects like top whipping and bamboo pole dancing into the school-based curriculum system. For example, border schools in Tengchong City, Yunnan, through a sports immersion action plan, selected teachers and students from universities to conduct teaching assistance, promoted the introduction of characteristic projects like the Lisu ethnic group's "Da Tiao" (dancing) into classrooms, and applied for research projects to promote curriculum development.

(III) Learn from foreign sports legal systems and practical experience: In terms of international cultural exchanges, successful experiences in primary and secondary physical education from other countries should be studied, drawing lessons from their experiences in formulating and implementing physical education laws and regulations, curriculum design, etc. For instance, the U.S. Common Core State Standards (2010) clearly defines the core competency cultivation indicator system, provides detailed specifications for evaluation standards and curriculum teaching objectives for relevant subjects, establishes sharing platforms, promotes exemplary teaching cases, and guides school teaching practices. One implication of the UK's Sporting Future strategy for China's sports governance is to establish partnerships and advance a model of sports development featuring multi-stakeholder collaborative governance. Using sports as a "nexus", an inter-ministerial joint conference system involving departments such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and National Health Commission can be established to clarify the powers and responsibilities among departments and govern public sports affairs through multi-departmental collaborative governance.

## Targeted State Support for the Rule of Law in Physical Education in Frontier Minority Area Schools

For relatively economically underdeveloped frontier minority areas, the state can provide the following support for the rule of law in their physical education:

(I) Government investment: The state can invest in sports infrastructure through taxation and government transfers, increasing funding for physical education curricula and teacher training in minority area schools. For physical education in frontier minority areas, it is particularly necessary to promote the development of relatively Backward physical education by optimizing the allocation of regional educational resources. Emphasis should be placed on balanced regional development and improving basic public services. Currently, the issue of unbalanced and inadequate regional development in China remains unresolved, constraining the coordinated progress of regional sports and hindering high-quality economic and social development. Therefore, it is essential to improve the fiscal transfer payment mechanism. Given the persistent issues of low sports participation, scarce fitness facilities, and underdeveloped sports resources in less developed areas, further increase the tilt of transfer payments, fully leverage the incentivizing role of fiscal tools, and achieve the goal of equalizing basic public services. For necessary sports facilities and resources, the state can increase such facilities in economically through tax incentives or special appropriations.

(II) Expansion of physical education resources: Due to limited opportunities for exchange and professional development for physical education teachers in rural schools, their professional levels often fail to improve

significantly. They struggle to break away from traditional teaching materials and methods, leading to a gradual loss of student interest in physical education classes. The Compulsory Education Physical Education and Health Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) points out the need to implement interdisciplinary teaching. As the main implementers of the Physical Education and Health curriculum, physical education teachers must enhance their relevant disciplinary core competencies. Therefore, the state should explore areas such as physical education curricula, teacher training, and support for sports activities to improve the guarantee of physical education resources for primary and secondary schools. This includes strengthening the construction of the physical education teaching workforce and enhancing the construction of school sports facilities. For example, establishing a counterpart assistance mechanism between universities and schools, where university teachers and students provide teaching assistance, student internships, teacher training, and joint teaching research to enhance teacher capabilities and address resource shortages. Government departments at all levels should continuously increase funding for school sports, with a focus on Skew funding to central, western, and remote areas.

(III) Supply of social sports resources: Regarding the supply of social sports resources, the Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth, jointly issued by the General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education, stipulates that schools can purchase physical education teaching and coaching services from social sports organizations through the government. This can effectively construct a complementary mechanism between school sports and social sports resources.

(IV) Mental health and psychological support: In terms of mental health and psychological support, The Local government provide psychological counseling and guidance for adolescents to help them alleviate stress and fear associated with sports. Research based on the 2014-2015 China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) data shows that physical exercise has a significant positive effect on the non-cognitive abilities of adolescents. It can enhance non-cognitive abilities by fostering closer peer interaction and strengthening parent-child relationships. Therefore, both schools and families should reasonably allocate time for study and physical exercise for adolescents to fully increase their participation in physical activity. Physical exercise, as a positive intervention, can directly reduce depressive symptoms among students who have relocated.

(V) Improve the institutional guarantee mechanism for physical education system reform: Regarding the reform of the physical education system, it is crucial to the institutional guarantee mechanism. Due to the long-standing influence of “exam-oriented education”, school physical education has been marginalized, leading to increasing rates of childhood obesity and myopia, declining physical fitness, increasing spinal curvature, and an overall concerning state of physical health among primary and secondary students. The guarantee mechanism for cultivating the core physical education competencies of primary and secondary students is key to its implementation. Physical education reform must ensure that physical education teaching receives institutional safeguards.

(VI) Improve the supervision mechanism: In establishing a scientific and effective supervision mechanism, teachers should be encouraged to actively understand and guide students’ participation in physical activities. Through parent classes or home-school meetings, specific requirements for physical education should be clarified. First, the school should take the lead. As the primary entity in nurturing students, schools should enrich learning resources for rural physical education teachers and create a favorable physical education teaching environment. Introducing Interest sports games, scenario-based teaching, and competitive forms featuring rural characteristic sports projects can stimulate students’ interest in sports. Second, parents have a responsibility in education. The

Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education clarifies parents' awareness of their role as the first teachers and their primary responsibility for family education of adolescents. Even when parents work away from home, they should fulfill their responsibilities despite physical absence, maintaining frequent heart-to-heart interaction with their children through online means or phone calls, and supervising their children's mental and physical health.

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