

# Cultural Industry Policy and Public Engagement in China's Rural Development: Evidence from the Guizhou Village Super League

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**Abstract:** This paper examines how cultural industry policy orientations interact with grassroots public engagement in shaping rural football culture in contemporary China, using the Guizhou Village Super League (Cun Chao) in Rongjiang County as a focal case. Rather than treating policy as a general background, the paper conceptualizes it as an enabling condition that legitimizes local cultural initiatives, expands access to resources and visibility, and creates institutional space for collective participation under the broader agenda of rural revitalization. The Village Super League illustrates a participatory cultural form characterized by community-based organization, non-commercial norms, and locally embedded cultural practices. By analyzing the policy-participation linkage reflected in this case, the paper argues that sustainable rural sports culture is more likely to emerge when policy support reinforces, rather than replaces, grassroots autonomy and everyday communal involvement. The study contributes to discussions on rural cultural governance and cultural industry development by clarifying the mechanisms through which public participation can be amplified within a supportive policy environment.

**Keywords:** Guizhou Village Super League; cultural industry policy; public participation; cultural industry development; grassroots football; rural revitalization

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## 1. Introduction

When Chinese football is discussed in public discourse, public evaluations are often polarized and dominated by criticism. The development of football culture in China over the past seven decades provides an important contextual background for understanding its contemporary forms and debates.

Existing studies often divide the development of football in China into several broad stages, ranging from early institutional exploration to professionalization since the mid-1990s. While this historical trajectory provides necessary background, the present study does not aim to reassess these stages in detail.

In recent years, the relationship between government policy orientations and public

participation has become increasingly significant in the development of football culture in China. Rather than emerging solely through professional leagues, football-related cultural practices have also taken shape at the grassroots level. A representative case is the Guizhou Village Super League, which originated in Rongjiang County, Guizhou Province. Emerging within a broader cultural industry policy framework that emphasizes rural revitalization and local cultural vitality, this case provides an opportunity to examine how policy support functions as an enabling condition for bottom-up public engagement in local sports culture (Zhang, Z. P., 2024).

This paper takes the Guizhou Village Super League as a case to explore how cultural industry policies interact with grassroots participation in rural contexts. By focusing on the policy-participation linkage rather than descriptive accounts of football development, the study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which public engagement in rural sports culture can be fostered under a supportive policy environment.

## **2. The Role of Policies in the Development of Football Culture in China**

Since 1950, China has incorporated sports into the national development strategy, and football has been actively promoted as one of the mass sports. In 1994, football in China entered the period of professionalization, and the policy strongly supported the establishment of professional leagues and promoted market-oriented reforms. The establishment of professional leagues expanded access to football as a cultural practice by creating regular opportunities for spectatorship and fan participation. With the rise of professional leagues, football has gradually become a popular culture, attracting a large number of fans, especially in some cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Dalian, Sichuan, Chongqing, Guizhou, Xi'an, etc., where football culture and fan culture are strong. In some cities with long-standing football traditions, informal fan spaces emerged alongside professional leagues. For example, stadium-based fan gathering

areas provided venues for interaction among supporters from diverse social backgrounds, contributing to the formation of localized fan cultures. Since 2000, football has become a part of China's national strategy. In 2015, the State Council released the Overall Plan for the Reform and Development of Football in China, emphasizing the popularization and professional development of football, encouraging the training of young people and the popularization of football in schools, signaling a shift toward broader social participation in football-related activities. With the expansion of policy support and the development of professional leagues, opportunities for public involvement in football-related cultural practices have increased, and fans have become more visibly embedded in football culture. Although China's football culture has brought positive social influence and people's enthusiasm to participate in its development, it has also brought some negative effects in the process of development.

While policy-supported professionalization expanded football participation, it also generated governance challenges related to fan behavior, commercialization, and institutional credibility. These issues highlight the limits of top-down development models and help explain growing interest in alternative, grassroots forms of football culture.

## **3. The Public's Initiative in the Development of Football Culture in China**

Public participation in football culture in China manifests not only through interactions with professional leagues and mediated fan communities, but also in grassroots self-organized sporting practices that are increasingly visible in rural contexts. Scholars have noted that rural sports events such as football and basketball leagues contribute to rural revitalization by enriching local cultural life, fostering community cohesion, and creating new pathways for social engagement under state-led policy frameworks (Chang, Q., 2025; Li, K., 2025; Li, K. 2025; General Administration of Sport of China, 2023). In recent years, amateur and

community-driven leagues have proliferated in both urban and rural settings, representing forms of bottom-up cultural participation that differ qualitatively from professional club fandom. This proliferation aligns with policy orientations that formally recognize the role of mass sports in rural social life and cultural development. For example, policies on promoting rural sports and diverse mass activities explicitly emphasize the creation of inclusive, participatory sports ecosystems that “encourage diversified cultural and sports activities with rural characteristics.” (General Administration of Sport of China, 2023)

### **3.1 The Grassroots Nature of the Guizhou Village Super League**

The Guizhou Village Super League is a grassroots football event spontaneously organized by rural residents in Rongjiang County, Qiandongnan Prefecture, Guizhou Province (An, H. Y., He, J. B., & Yang, C. N., 2024). In contrast to professional football leagues, it operates outside commercial league systems and is oriented toward community participation rather than market-driven competition. Both players and referees are predominantly local amateur participants drawn from diverse occupational backgrounds, reflecting a form of community-embedded sporting practice. As existing studies have noted, this organizational model emphasizes local autonomy, collective involvement, and non-commercial norms, which distinguishes the Village Super League from institutionalized professional football and situates it within broader discussions of grassroots sports and rural cultural development.

### **3.2 Public-Oriented Cultural Practices and Rural Revitalization Through the Guizhou Village Super League**

The Village Super League adopts locally embedded and largely non-commercial arrangements, including prize forms linked to local agricultural products and small-scale community-based contributions. Rather than relying on corporate sponsorships or ticket revenues, the event maintains

broad access through free entry and a funding model that emphasizes community support. These practices reflect a participatory logic in which the event functions less as a market product and more as a communal cultural activity, reinforcing collective involvement and local ownership (An, H. Y., He, J. B., & Yang, C. N., 2024; Tan, M., & Zhang, S, 2024).

Despite operating with non-commercial norms, the Village Super League has achieved high public visibility, partly through social media circulation and local-to-national communication networks. This visibility broadened the range of participants and observers beyond immediate village communities, illustrating how grassroots sports practices can scale up in attention without fully shifting into commercialized event logics. For the purposes of this paper, the key point is not the magnitude of popularity itself, but how participatory practices remain anchored in community organization while becoming more widely recognized.

During the competition, the villagers spontaneously organized cheerleaders, made uniforms and set up venues, creating a warm atmosphere for the competition (Zhu, Q. G., & Xiao, Y. L., 2024). Such forms of collective participation contribute to strengthening local social ties and help sustain engagement in football-related activities within rural communities. As the event gained wider recognition, governmental actors increasingly responded by acknowledging its cultural and rural-development value and by providing more supportive administrative conditions. This process suggests a feedback relationship in which grassroots participation generates policy attention, while policy recognition helps stabilize the conditions for continued community-led cultural practices.

## **4. The Relationship Between the Policy and the Public in the Development of the Football Culture of Village Super in Guizhou**

The development of the Guizhou Village Super League highlights the significant role of grassroots

participation in the formation of local sports culture. Compared with more centralized, top-down models of sports development, community-initiated events emphasize local autonomy and voluntary participation, which can facilitate broader public engagement (An, H. Y., He, J. B., & Yang, C. N., 2024).

The relationship between policy frameworks and public participation in grassroots sports can be understood as complementary. Policy support contributed to basic infrastructural conditions and institutional recognition, while sustained grassroots participation reinforced policy attention toward the event. From this perspective, the Guizhou Village Super League can be seen as the outcome of interaction between policy resources and grassroots initiative, illustrating how institutional support and public engagement jointly shape local cultural practices (Zhu, Q. G., & Xiao, Y. L., 2024). In the future, the government can strengthen the positive

interaction with the public by supporting the holding of mass sports events, increasing financial support, publicity and promotion, and further promote the development and prosperity of football culture in China.

## 5. Conclusion

The Guizhou Village Super League can be understood as a representative case of grassroots football culture development in contemporary China. The case highlights the significance of interaction between policy frameworks and public participation in shaping local football culture. From a broader perspective, the case suggests that establishing stable interaction mechanisms between policy initiatives and grassroots cultural practices may support the long-term sustainability of football culture development (Li, N., & Sun, S. H., 2024).

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