

Research on the Development of Sailing in China and Suggestions for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: This study focuses on the development of sailing among Chinese youth. By analyzing survey data, it explores the development trend of sailing in China and identifies the barriers to its growth. Additionally, the study conducts a sustainability analysis by comparing sailing with other similar international sports and their development trajectories. Based on these efforts, the study puts forward suggestions to address the challenges encountered in the sustainable development of sailing in China, aiming to accelerate the popularization of sailing, stabilize its development momentum, and consolidate its sustainable development trend.

Keywords: Sailing; Youth; Sustainable Development

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Introduction

At the 2012 London Olympic Games, Xu Lijia won China's first-ever Olympic gold medal in sailing. This groundbreaking achievement pushed the development of China's competitive sailing to a new height. Today, with the continuous improvement of national living standards, the constant optimization of consumption structure, and the growing urgency of the public's pursuit of a healthy lifestyle, sailing—a sport once confined to a small circle—is gradually stepping out of the "professional field" and entering the broader public view, becoming an emerging consumption trend in current life. The improvement of economic conditions has provided fundamental support for the public to participate in sailing, enabling the sport to gradually shed its "niche" label, integrate into the lives of ordinary people, and the number of participants has steadily grown. According to statistics, more than 60 waterfront cities in China have now carried out sailing-related activities, and the scale of the population participating in sailing all year round is about 60,000. This shows a positive trend of the sport extending from the "competitive arena" to "public life".

1 Research Background

1.1 Participant Demographics: Adolescents as the Absolute Core Group

Adolescents account for over 90% of China's sailing population, making them the core participant group. In 2022, approximately 20,000 new people in China received sailing training, among whom adolescents accounted for more than 80%. In terms of professional events, the scale of the National Youth Sailing League has continued to expand: in 2023, the league consisted of 5 stops, with a total of over 1,200 participant entries, and the maximum scale of a single stop reached 360 participants.

1.2 Current Development Status: Dual-Track Advancement of Professional and Mass Events

The scale of professional events (e.g., the National Youth Sailing League, which had 5 stops in 2023 with a total of over 1,200 participant entries and a maximum of 360 participants per stop) has expanded. Meanwhile, mass events such as the China Family Sailing Race are open to the general public, further broadening the participation channels for sailing.

1.3 Development Trend: Parallel Advancement of Professional Deepening and Mass Popularization

The professional event system represented by the National Youth Sailing League has been continuously improved, promoting the professional development of adolescent sailing. On the other hand, mass events like the China Family Sailing

Race have accelerated their penetration, helping sailing extend from the professional field to public life.

1.4 Policy Support: Multi-Dimensional Measures for Guarantee

Departments including the General Administration of Sport of China have issued a number of supporting policies, including the construction of national-level sailing bases, the promotion of the "Sailing into Schools" initiative (establishing characteristic schools and related courses), and assistance to local governments in building brand events to promote the integrated development of sailing and sports tourism.

2 Difficulties in the Development of Sailing

2.1 High Participation Threshold

Different from traditional sports, sailing is characterized by high requirements for venues, equipment, and athletes' physical fitness. Particularly in terms of venues, it has strict geographical demands, while meeting the equipment requirements requires certain financial support. Specifically, sailing first "requires waiting for a suitable venue"—a waterfront area with stable wind direction and safe waters. In northern cities, either lakes are frozen in winter or there is a lack of compliant docks; finding a place where one can sail with peace of mind is far more difficult than finding a basketball court. Meanwhile, a full set of proper equipment is also necessary: small items such as professional life jackets and non-slip shoes, and large expenses including boat maintenance and berth rental. The cost of a systematic sailing experience may be equivalent to the cost of basketball equipment for more than half a year.

2.2 Thick Cultural Barriers

According to the "Survey on Chinese Youth's Maritime Awareness" conducted by China Youth Daily in 2014, contemporary Chinese youth have insufficient knowledge of maritime history and events, and weak awareness of maritime security, territorial definition, and policy understanding. Additionally, the maritime awareness of the post-80s and post-90s generations is significantly weaker than that of the post-70s generation. At the same time, most regions in China have long been "land-oriented" in their living patterns, lacking the "water-related culture" of southern waterfront cities. The public mostly perceives "sailing at sea" as a professional competitive sport. This cultural cognitive barrier is even harder to break than explicit thresholds such as venue and cost constraints.

2.3 Weak Faculty Resources

Sailing carries high risks, and safety is the lifeline of this sport. Accidents such as crew falling overboard and ships hitting reefs can lead to irreversible consequences, even endangering lives. However, colleges and universities have failed to timely cultivate talents for the sailing industry, resulting in a shortage of professional supporting talents for sailing and inconsistent technical and safety standards.

Moreover, the development of sailing in China lags significantly behind that in some developed European and American countries. Even in Xiamen, which leads the country in sailing development, the sport has only a history of over a decade, leading to an obvious shortage of relevant practitioners. Faculty resources serve as a crucial safety line for this high-risk sport. Currently, sailing faculty in China mainly come from two channels: first, sailing training courses; second, retired sailing athletes. However, survey results show that domestic sailing coaches are mainly concentrated in coastal provinces, cities, and schools, and there is a shortage of sailing faculty in colleges and universities. In many colleges and universities, coaches of other sports also take on the role of sailing coaches concurrently.

2.4 Chaotic Industry Status

The sailing tourism industry has only a 10-year development history and is still in its initial stage, facing four prominent problems: First, the product structure is single, focusing only on sailing experience as the core. The project life cycle is short, and the industry's self-regulation capacity is weak. Second, there are gaps in industry supervision. Due to its late start, the improvement of the market management system cannot keep up with the pace of development, forming market barriers and making it difficult to build an effective competitive pattern. Third, the market order is chaotic: there is no

unified pricing standard, there are large gaps in service quality among enterprises, cut-throat competition is severe, scalpers are rampant in ticket scalping, and the travel experience is overstated. These factors lead to a discrepancy between tourists' actual experience and expectations, resulting in persistently high complaint rates. Fourth, safety and services are not guaranteed: the skills of sailing operators vary greatly, posing potential safety hazards; meanwhile, the industry has not established unified service standards, leading to inconsistent tourist experiences. These problems obviously restrict the sustainable development of the industry. Establishing a scientific management mechanism and promoting the healthy development of the industry have become urgent tasks to be advanced at present.

3 Measures and Suggestions for the Sustainable Development of Sailing

3.1 Promote Tourism Business Development: Implement a Commercial Development Path

Since sailing relies heavily on substantial equipment and venue support, economic constraints constitute a major barrier to its development. In recent years, the state has rolled out a series of supportive policies for the tourism industry, with local governments also attaching importance to and providing financial support for tourism development. Meanwhile, the rising national enthusiasm for fitness and physical exercise creates an opportune moment to drive the development of sailing. Sailing is characterized by strong participant engagement, dynamic athleticism, and novelty. Leveraging the aforementioned tourism and fitness trends to promote sailing would bring multiple benefits: if sailing secures a certain level of income through tourism, the financial burden of venue and equipment maintenance will be alleviated, significantly reducing the participation cost of sailing. Coupled with the cultural wave of national fitness, this will enable more people to participate in sailing, achieving dual gains in both the economic and cultural spheres.

3.2 Strengthen Cultural Construction: Inspire the Maritime Spirit

The development of sailing should not only showcase competitive standards and spread sailing culture but also prioritize its core educational function—cultivating students' perseverance in overcoming difficulties and spirit of unity and mutual assistance through practical sailing experiences. In 2016, five ministries and commissions including the State Oceanic Administration, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture jointly issued the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Maritime Awareness Publicity, Education, and Cultural Construction, which explicitly promotes the integration of maritime knowledge "into teaching materials and classrooms". Colleges and universities should respond to the call of "understanding the ocean, managing the ocean, and fulfilling historical responsibilities in building a maritime power". By developing sailing programs and promoting sailing culture, they can inspire students' love for the ocean. Guiding young people to contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through maritime culture carries profound significance. Furthermore, relevant authorities and colleges need to collaborate: establishing sailing teams and related organizations to strengthen the dissemination of sailing, maritime culture, and the maritime spirit; organizing diverse social practices and sailing experience activities to stimulate students' interest and help them quickly understand sailing; and using engaging and educational activities to convey the joy of sailing while advocating sailing spirit and culture.

3.3 Support Sports Development: Cultivate Sailing Talents

In this high-risk sport, coaches are undoubtedly the key to ensuring safety. A prominent contradiction exists: participants are interested in sailing but lack access to learning channels, while retired athletes possess professional experience but face employment difficulties. The core solution lies in the rational transformation of resources—this not only creates effective social jobs but also drives the dual development of sports and the economy.

At the local government level, efforts should be made to encourage and support the development of sailing: organizing relevant competitions and establishing reasonable incentive mechanisms to broaden the public's perspective on sailing, thereby attracting more people to participate. This will promote employment for retired athletes, cultivate more outstanding sailing talents, and enable these talents to work in fields such as teaching and training, and tourism services, laying a foundation for sustainable development. It also provides participants with more options: they can develop their interest into a career as professional athletes, or transition from competitive sports to related professional roles.

3.4 Establish Policies and Regulations, and Improve Management Mechanisms

Xiamen's sailing tourism industry started relatively late and only gradually entered public view in 2012. In recent years, the industry has experienced rapid development, but the construction of a matching legal and regulatory system has failed to advance in tandem, leading to the continuous exposure of management-related issues. As a marine-related sector, sailing tourism involves a wide range of management responsibilities across multiple departments. However, the current situation of multi-departmental management makes it difficult to clearly define the centralized management responsibilities for the industry. This not only hinders the effective advancement of relevant management work but also results in significant inadequacies in policy implementation among enterprises engaged in sailing tourism. Additionally, although sailing has expanded from a traditional competitive sport to a leisure and entertainment field, and private enterprises are allowed to enter the market for operation, this development transition has not yet been clearly regulated at the policy or legal level, lacking strong institutional support. It is evident that Xiamen's sailing tourism industry has obvious gaps in its supervision and management mechanisms, supporting policies, and legal regulations. The incomplete system directly leads to frequent irregularities in the industry, hindering its healthy and orderly development.

3.5 Promote University-Enterprise Cooperation: Stimulate Industrial Development

Colleges and universities have limited resources for developing sailing programs if they rely solely on their own capacities; funding from special university budgets is far from sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize social resources as much as possible, including collaborating with off-campus sailing clubs, enterprises, and other social organizations.

The university-enterprise cooperation model can achieve a win-win situation for both parties. When a university's sailing team wins honors, it enhances the university's reputation and increases the media exposure of sponsoring enterprises. A typical example is the cooperation between Xiamen City University and the Taiwan region -invested enterprise Xiamen Zhengxin Rubber Group. Since 2011, Xiamen Zhengxin Rubber Group has sponsored Xiamen City University's sailing team with a naming rights deal, providing RMB 600,000 annually. The funds are mainly used for boat purchases, transportation, training and competitions, and bonuses. Xiamen City University uses the sponsored funds to purchase sailboats and transportation vehicles, providing hardware support for the sailing team; another portion of the funds is allocated to training and competition subsidies as well as bonuses, offering software support for the team. The case of Xiamen City University's sailing team proves that university-enterprise cooperation is a successful model.

4 Conclusion

The development of sailing in China still has a long way to go, and it is necessary to join hands with social organizations to jointly explore the future of sailing. Against the backdrop of the "national fitness campaign" and the state's strong support for the tourism and sports industries, administrative authorities must not only consolidate relevant management mechanisms, laws, and regulations but also urge colleges and universities to inspire young people to explore knowledge of maritime culture. Specifically, stimulating interest through culture, creating job opportunities in talent cultivation, securing economic impetus via tourism, and rectifying industry irregularities through legal and management measures—these constitute the key to the sustainable development of sailing in China.

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