

## 2025 International Conference on Fiscal Management, Holistic Social Studies (FMHSS 2025)

Article

# Research on Class Exclusivity and Entry Barriers of Golf from the Perspective of Bourdieu's Field Theory

Ke Zhu<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weiming School Shenzhen Nanshan, Shenzhen, China

\* Correspondence: Ke Zhu, Weiming School Shenzhen Nanshan, Shenzhen, China

**Abstract:** Golf has historically been regarded as a highly stratified sport reserved for the elite, where participants' socio-economic backgrounds fundamentally shape their experiences, access, and social interactions. Drawing extensively on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, this paper critically analyzes the mechanisms of class exclusivity and the pervasive access barriers inherent in the sport of golf. It discusses how such sporting activities function as powerful carriers of social status, habitus, and cultural capital. Through comprehensive empirical research focusing on golf courses, associated social activities, and related sporting industries, this study finds that golf not only reflects the direct accumulation of economic capital but also profoundly underscores the critical importance of cultural and social capital within elite networks. The exorbitant membership fees, restrictive invitation-only membership systems, and unwritten elite social rules of golf have collectively established a robust exclusive mechanism that effectively segregates different social classes. This systemic mechanism severely limits the participation of low-income and marginalized groups while simultaneously reinforcing the exclusivity and cohesion of the privileged classes. Consequently, there are significant disparities in both the cognitive understanding of the sport and the willingness to participate across different social strata, a phenomenon that further exacerbates broader inequalities within contemporary sports culture. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from this research are of great academic and practical significance, offering strategic insights necessary to dismantle these barriers, promote the broader popularization of the sport, and foster genuine social inclusion within the golfing community.

**Keywords:** pierre bourdieu; field theory; golf; class exclusivity; entry barriers; social inclusion

Received: 22 April 2026

Revised: 14 June 2026

Accepted: 25 June 2026

Published: 01 July 2026



**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Golf is widely regarded as a sport associated with high social status, with participants often linked to affluent economic backgrounds and extensive social networks. In China, the rapid economic growth and the emergence of a robust middle class have elevated the role of golf in society, where it is increasingly used as a medium for status display and social interaction. However, the sport's inherent barriers to entry and exclusionary mechanisms frequently restrict participation to a select elite group. This exclusivity has drawn significant attention due to its implications for social equity and cultural inclusivity [1]. Theoretical frameworks, such as those analyzing the interplay of cultural, social, and economic capital, provide valuable insights into the positioning of golf within the social hierarchy and its associated class distinctions and interaction patterns. Within this context, the present study examines the exclusivity and access barriers inherent in golf, its defining characteristics, and the broader issues of social inequality it reflects. The research also aims to offer policy recommendations to encourage

the popularization and development of sports culture. As societal attitudes evolve and public interest in physical activity grows, exploring the class dynamics of golf and their impact on social structures holds both practical and academic significance. This study seeks to promote diversity and inclusivity within the sport, contributing to the establishment of a more equitable sports environment across various dimensions.

### *1.2. Research Significance*

Examining the class exclusion and access barriers associated with golf holds significant importance [2, 3]. Theoretically, this research employs a framework based on field theory to analyze the relationship between sports activities and social structures. This approach enables a more comprehensive exploration of the interactions among cultural, economic, and social capital within the context of golf. Furthermore, it provides a valuable reference for sociological studies of sports and expands the application of related theoretical perspectives. From a practical standpoint, this study enhances understanding of fairness in sports participation. Investigating the participation thresholds in golf highlights the critical importance of social diversity and inclusiveness. As the pursuit of healthy lifestyles and social engagement becomes increasingly prevalent, the exclusivity of golf as a high-end sport presents challenges for broader participation, warranting careful consideration and discussion. At the policy level, the findings offer essential insights for promoting the popularization of golf and fostering social integration. For example, adopting more inclusive policies and reducing entry barriers could enable individuals from varied socioeconomic backgrounds to benefit from athletic participation. Ultimately, this research contributes to the theoretical knowledge base in the sociology of sports and plays a pivotal role in advancing social equity and promoting the comprehensive development of sports culture.

## **2. An Analysis of Class-Based Exclusivity in Golf: From the Perspective of Bourdieu's Field Theory**

### *2.1. Theoretical Basis and Realistic Representation*

The concept of social class exclusivity in golf can be analyzed through the lens of field theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals and the forms of capital they possess. Within this framework, the accumulation and interaction of various forms of capital create distinct social structures, contributing to the exclusivity observed in golf [4]. Participants in this sport often have significant economic resources, allowing them to afford the high costs associated with membership fees and venue usage. Furthermore, differences in cultural knowledge, such as familiarity with golf etiquette, rules, and related practices, are typically acquired through specialized training or specific social environments, further reinforcing exclusivity.

In practice, golf courses often function as social spaces that symbolize elite status. Social activities related to golf frequently revolve around high-level social circles, where shared cultural and economic backgrounds contribute to the exclusion of individuals from other social classes. Public perceptions and media portrayals further emphasize the association of golf with luxury and an affluent lifestyle, which discourages participation among lower-income groups and deepens social stratification [5, 6]. Ultimately, the exclusivity of golf is shaped not only by individual capital accumulation but also by broader social, cultural, and cognitive factors that influence access to participation and the formation of social networks.

### *2.2. Analysis of Barriers to Entry*

#### **2.2.1. Barriers to Economic Capital: High Consumption Costs and Membership Fees**

High economic capital barriers significantly hinder access to golf, primarily due to the high costs associated with participation. These costs include purchasing high-quality equipment, paying substantial membership fees, and covering venue usage fees, which are generally much higher than those for other traditional sports. Golf clubs often require new members to pay a considerable initiation fee along with annual membership fees,

creating a financial obstacle for most low- or middle-income families. Additionally, the expenses associated with golf lessons and training are substantial, as participants must invest significant time and money to develop the technical skills and competitive abilities necessary for social and competitive settings. Other expenditures, such as transportation, dining, and regular equipment maintenance, further exacerbate the financial burden. These high costs make golf less accessible as a mainstream sport, discouraging many young individuals who might otherwise be interested. As a result, the golf community tends to consist of individuals from similar economic backgrounds, predominantly those with greater financial resources. This dynamic reinforces social class boundaries, positioning golf as an elite sport and limiting participation opportunities for individuals from lower socioeconomic strata. Consequently, economic capital barriers play a deeply entrenched role in restricting the popularization and broader development of the sport [7].

#### 2.2.2. Barriers to Social Capital: Closed Social Networks and Relationship-Based Entry Barriers

Barriers to social capital in golf are evident in the form of closed social networks and relationship-based entry restrictions, which significantly reduce opportunities for individuals from diverse social classes to engage in the sport. Golf courses serve not only as venues for competition but also as important spaces for social interaction, where individuals often acquire resources and opportunities through communication and relationship-building. However, the social networks established in these settings are frequently exclusive, making it challenging for individuals of lower social status to gain access. Furthermore, entry to many golf courses and their associated facilities is often governed by membership systems that prioritize well-connected acquaintances or new members with existing social ties. This structure restricts the ability of new participants to become involved. Consequently, individuals lacking relevant social networks encounter substantial social barriers, which hinder their ability to participate equally and may lead to social discomfort during their attempts to integrate [8]. This dynamic creates a divide between people of varying economic levels and social backgrounds. Additionally, the inherently social nature of golf requires participants to perform well in specific social contexts, which can lead to feelings of inferiority among those who are less sociable, as they may struggle to engage in activities that place a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships.

#### 2.2.3. Barriers to Cultural Capital: Unique Habitus and Tastes

Golf involves specific etiquette and cultural norms, encompassing not only dress codes but also the conduct during gameplay and interactions with other participants. These aspects require a certain level of cultural capital. The division of cultural capital in this context is reflected in the recognition of golf's unique appeal. Participation in golf signifies more than financial capability; it also connects to cultural backgrounds. For individuals lacking the requisite cultural foundation, understanding the symbolic identity and deeper significance of the sport may prove challenging, potentially leading to exclusion and marginalization within the golfing community [9]. Such barriers to cultural capital effectively preserve the elite and exclusive nature of golf, reinforce social class distinctions, and restrict the sport's broader popularization and societal acceptance.

### **3. The Formation Mechanism of Social Class Exclusivity in Golf from the Perspective of Bourdieu's Field Theory**

#### *3.1. Analysis of Internal Generative Logic*

##### **3.1.1. Capital Conversion: The Transformation from Economic Capital to Social and Cultural Capital**

The primary requirements for participating in golf include membership fees, equipment purchases, and expenses related to golf courses [3, 10]. Only by accumulating sufficient financial resources can individuals secure a basic position in the golfing

community and afford to participate. Upon entering the social arena of golf, individuals with financial means gradually transform their material resources into social and cultural assets. These individuals often find it easier to establish connections with high-income groups, thereby building robust social networks through shared consumption patterns and social interactions.

At the same time, this transformation process also enhances cultural capital, as the unique rules and etiquette of golf necessitate a certain level of cultural literacy. Individuals with significant financial resources can acquire golf-related knowledge and skills through training and participation in social activities. Consequently, the accumulation of cultural capital enables them to integrate seamlessly into these activities, exhibit appropriate behavior in social contexts, and reinforce their social status. This conversion of financial resources into social and cultural capital fosters greater confidence in social identity, creating a continuous cycle that accentuates class distinctions within sports activities.

### 3.1.2. Symbolic Violence: Make Class Advantage Seem Natural and Legitimate

In the context of social dynamics, certain mechanisms are employed to normalize and legitimize class advantages, fostering an unconscious acceptance of disparities. Within the realm of golf, participants often perceive the sport as refined and prestigious, associating it with wealth, achievement, and elevated social standing. This perception is reinforced through cultural narratives that emphasize the exclusivity and sophistication of golf. Individuals with greater economic resources tend to solidify their advantageous positions by showcasing advanced skills and adherence to established etiquette, which further elevates their status within the sport. This dynamic can lead other participants to experience a reduced sense of self-worth, cultivating admiration and aspiration toward the sport. Such mechanisms obscure the exclusionary practices inherent in golf while simultaneously promoting broader societal acceptance of inequality [11, 12].

## 3.2. Analysis of External Mechanism

### 3.2.1. Field Autonomy in Golf: Space Exclusivity and Internal Rule Governance

Space exclusivity is evident in the way golf courses often limit access to individuals from lower-income groups and outsiders through membership requirements and high entry fees. Only those with sufficient economic resources can gain access to these spaces by purchasing expensive memberships. This exclusivity distinguishes golf from the general public, reinforces its identity as an elite sport, and establishes it as a status symbol for participants [13, 14]. Another significant factor contributing to this exclusivity is the governance of internal rules within golf courses. Golf is characterized by strict etiquette and behavioral norms, including dress codes, playing etiquette, and rules for social interactions. Participants are required to adhere to these norms to be recognized as legitimate golfers. These rules implicitly demand cultural capital, and individuals lacking the necessary knowledge may feel uncomfortable and choose to leave. Consequently, the combination of space exclusivity and internal rule governance transforms golf courses into not only competitive venues but also social spaces where elites congregate, thereby perpetuating and solidifying social hierarchies.

### 3.2.2. Social Reproduction: Identity and Intergenerational Transmission of the Elite

Golf, as a highly socialized activity, reinforces its exclusivity within social classes through its role in shaping identity and facilitating the intergenerational transmission of elite status. Participation in golf serves not only as a personal recreational pursuit but also as a marker of cultural and social identity. Within the context of intergenerational transmission, the sport often becomes a medium for perpetuating family values and traditions. Wealthy families frequently treat golf as a legacy, fostering a passion for the sport and encouraging participation through family-oriented activities, mentorship, and training for younger generations [8]. This mechanism of identity formation and intergenerational continuity among the elite contributes to the preservation of golf's exclusivity, reinforcing the cohesion of elite communities by maintaining distinct cultural practices and consumption patterns.

### 3.3. Analysis of Interactive Model

#### 3.3.1. Constructing a Four-Dimensional Reinforcement Model of "Capital-Symbol-Field-Reproduction"

The study of "social class exclusivity in golf" and barriers to entry benefits from the construction of a four-dimensional reinforcement model encompassing "capital-symbol-field-reproduction." This model facilitates an understanding of the interactive relationships among various forms of capital and their role in social reproduction. Economic capital serves as the foundational element, providing the material conditions necessary for participation in golf and enabling individuals to secure advantages within social fields. Symbolic capital is integral to the model, as it conveys class superiority through the value systems, etiquette norms, and social identity frameworks associated with golf. The field represents the core of the model, encapsulating golf as a distinct social space where specific social networks and cultural capital shape interaction patterns, ultimately leading to the exclusion of non-elite groups. Furthermore, the reproduction component highlights the intergenerational transmission of capital and symbols. Elite families perpetuate their association with golf and its etiquette practices through cultural education and social activities, thereby reinforcing the existing social class structure.

#### 3.3.2. The Coupling and Transmission Path between the Elements

In constructing the analysis model for social class exclusivity in golf and barriers to entry, a systematic analysis is conducted of the coupling and transmission paths among various mechanism elements, with a focus on the complex interactions among economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. The acquisition of economic capital directly influences an individual's ability to participate, which subsequently supports the accumulation of social capital. Individuals with economic resources can broaden their social networks through golf, creating connections with other participants and forming a robust social support system within the field. The role of cultural capital is reflected in the understanding and application of golf etiquette and skills; through practice and learning, participants can enhance their personal cultural awareness, fostering self-confidence and a sense of belonging in social interactions within the field. Symbolic capital, through the promotion of the image and values associated with golf, connects the sport with social status, success, and sophistication, thereby reinforcing cultural identity.

## 4. Breakthrough Paths

### 4.1. Eliminating Economic Capital Barriers

#### 4.1.1. Promoting the Civilianization and Market-Oriented Transformation of Golf

Promoting the transformation of golf into a popular and market-oriented sport is essential for overcoming barriers related to economic capital. Golf has long been perceived as an elite sport, and its high participation costs, together with its exclusive environment, discourage many people from engaging with it. In the process of broader popularization, low-cost or even free access can be provided through the establishment of public golf courses and the implementation of community-based activity programs, enabling lower-income groups to encounter and participate in the sport. To support market-oriented transformation, it is advisable to attract a wider range of participants by developing diversified business models. Through this transformation, golf should also emphasize the establishment of a sponsorship system, making use of brand sponsorships and industry collaboration to enhance its visibility and expand its social reach through investment promotion and related activities.

#### 4.1.2. Exploring Diversified Participation Modes

Exploring diverse participation models is a key approach to overcoming economic barriers to golf. By implementing varied participation pathways, individuals from different social backgrounds can gain equitable access to and engage in this sport. One recommended strategy is to introduce short-term trial courses and Open Day events,

which allow the public to experience the enjoyment of golf at a reduced cost, thereby lowering psychological and financial barriers to entry. Additionally, golf institutions are encouraged to collaborate with communities to establish youth training programs and family-oriented activities. By leveraging connections among schools, communities, and families, young people and their families can engage in golf through group activities, fostering stronger relationships [15]. Furthermore, the creation of interdisciplinary activities and the promotion of comprehensive sports events through partnerships with other sports disciplines are suggested. Utilizing the internet and new media platforms to design integrated online and offline promotional activities for golf is also an effective strategy. Through interactions on social networks and digital platforms, these initiatives can attract potential participants and help cultivate a sports culture within the community.

#### *4.2. Reconstructing the Social Capital Network*

##### *4.2.1. Breaking the Closure of the Golf Course*

Promoting an open operational model for golf courses and related activities is essential. Initiatives such as open days or affordable experience programs can enable the general public to engage with golf at reduced risk and cost. Furthermore, implementing a diversified membership system and encouraging golf clubs to develop tailored preferential plans for various social groups, including students, families, and individuals with lower incomes, is recommended. These approaches can enhance the participation structure of golf and facilitate interaction and communication across diverse social strata.

##### *4.2.2. Promoting Cross-Class Social Interactions and Exchanges*

Encouraging cross-class social interactions and exchanges serves as an effective approach to reducing social class exclusivity in golf. By facilitating engagement among participants from diverse social backgrounds, the inclusiveness and social function of sports can be significantly enhanced. To achieve this, organizing various activities, such as family days and community open days, is recommended to promote participation across different social strata. These events create opportunities for individuals from all walks of life to experience golf and establish an interactive platform for fostering mutual recognition and interest in the sport. Additionally, implementing cross-class golf training programs can be a valuable measure. Pairing participants from higher economic backgrounds with those from lower-income groups enables collaboration through shared learning and training experiences. In such settings, wealthier participants can contribute their knowledge and skills, while economically disadvantaged individuals gain access to learning opportunities and skill development. This interaction not only strengthens social relationships but also plays a crucial role in breaking down class barriers within the sport.

#### *4.3. The Way to Reshape Cognition*

##### *4.3.1. Breaking Down Stereotypes*

Breaking down the elite image and the stereotypes associated with golf is essential for promoting social inclusion. Over time, golf has been perceived by the public as an activity exclusive to the privileged, fostering a deeply ingrained elite cultural atmosphere. Such cultural cognitive barriers not only limit opportunities for low-income groups to engage in golf but also contribute to a generally low level of public acceptance of the sport. To address this, reshaping golf's social image through educational and promotional initiatives is recommended. Investment in education is particularly important, with golf programs integrated into school and community physical education curricula to familiarize participants with the sport's basic rules and values, such as health, friendship, and teamwork. Additionally, measures like campus promotional events, family competitions, and community golf experience days can provide opportunities for individuals from diverse social backgrounds to participate. These activities can help dispel prejudices against the sport through direct engagement, ultimately fostering greater inclusivity within society [16, 17].

##### *4.3.2. Promoting an Inclusive Sports Culture*

Advocating a diversified and inclusive sports culture holds significant importance in addressing the social-class exclusivity often associated with golf. Sports culture encompasses not only skills and competition but also the development of social values and interpersonal relationships. In promoting and practicing golf, it is essential to emphasize values such as equality, respect, and sharing, ensuring that participants from diverse backgrounds and abilities are treated equitably [18]. Reshaping this culture requires collaborative efforts from golf institutions, coaches, and participants to foster positive social interactions and reduce class divisions. When organizing activities, prioritizing diversity and inclusiveness is crucial. This involves designing events and programs that accommodate individuals of varying ages, genders, and skill levels. Furthermore, proactive measures should be taken to encourage participation from all members of the community.

## 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of field theory, this paper examines the exclusivity of golf, its barriers to entry, and the resulting inequalities in social structure. As a traditional elite sport, participation in golf is strongly shaped by economic, social, and cultural capital. The accumulation of these forms of capital creates opportunities to enter the golf community and influences status and identity within it. Accordingly, reducing barriers to participation and promoting social inclusion are particularly important. The strategies proposed in this paper can help mitigate class-based exclusivity in golf and support more equitable and balanced social development. In the future, the culture and values associated with golf may be more fully understood and reshaped, enabling the sport to play a more constructive role in social structure by fostering interaction across social strata and encouraging diversity and inclusion.

## References

1. Twine, F. W., and Gardener, B., Eds., *Geographies of privilege*. Routledge, 2013.
2. Breitbarth, T., Kaiser-Jovy, S., and Dickson, G., Eds., *Golf business and management: a global introduction*. Routledge, 2017.
3. H. Reis and A. Correia, "Gender asymmetries in golf participation," *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 67–91, 2013.
4. H. J. Carson, "The US golf academy system and the twenty first century talent tourists! Future lines of research to understand this new golfing talent pathway," 2017.
5. W. Vamplew, "Sharing space: Inclusion, exclusion, and accommodation at the British golf club before 1914," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 359–375, 2010.
6. L. P. McGinnis, J. W. Gentry, and T. Gao, "Antecedents to consumer perceptions of sacredness in extended service experiences: the case of golf," *Journal of Service Research*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 476–488, 2012.
7. C. Huth and M. Kurscheidt, "Membership versus green fee pricing for golf courses: the impact of market and golf club determinants," *European Sport Management Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 331–352, 2019.
8. S. Shmanske, "Market preemption and entry deterrence: Evidence from the golf course industry," *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 55–68, 2004.
9. J. J. Ferrare and M. W. Apple, "Field theory and educational practice: Bourdieu and the pedagogic qualities of local field positions in educational contexts," *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 43–59, 2015.
10. P. DiMaggio, "On Pierre Bourdieu," 1979.
11. N. Couldry, "Media meta-capital: Extending the range of Bourdieu's field theory," *Theory and Society*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 653–677, 2003.
12. M. Hilgers and E. Mangez, "Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields," in *Bourdieu's theory of social fields*, Routledge, pp. 1–36, 2014.
13. L. Wacquant, "Following Pierre Bourdieu into the field," *Ethnography*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 387–414, 2004.
14. P. Bourdieu, "Some properties of fields," in *Media Studies: A Reader*, 3rd ed., S. Thornham, C. Bassett, and P. Marris, Eds., pp. 94–99, 1993.
15. E. Mangez, *Bourdieu's theory of social fields. Concepts and applications*, 2015.
16. M. Grenfell, "Applying Bourdieu's field theory: The case of social capital and education," *Education, Knowledge & Economy*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 17–34, 2009.
17. P. Thomson, "Field," in *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, pp. 65–80, 2014.
18. A. Cohen, "Pierre Bourdieu and," in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, vol. 200, 2018.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.