

# Opinions on the Choreography Creation of Yunnan Traditional Folk Dance

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## ABSTRACT

**There are 26 ethnic minorities in Yunnan. The ethnic dances in each region have their own unique styles, and the ways they follow are in accordance with people's living customs, religious beliefs and ideals. In Yunnan, the differences and blending of traditional dances among different ethnic groups are prominent. This paper analyzes the origin and characteristics of Yunnan traditional dance, discusses the innovative creation of Yunnan traditional folk dance, and puts forward the choreography and creation concept of Yunnan traditional folk dance from three aspects of simplified action extraction, defamiliarized choreography and creation, and emotional expression.**

*Keywords: Yunnan, folk dance, creativity, choreography and creation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Yunnan folk dance has a long historical tradition and is widely circulated among the people. It is dance of a mass character. Dance originates from life. Traditional folk dance brings the fragrance of the earth and the atmosphere of the mountains. It reflects the character of the nation and the customs of production and life in style. If Yunnan folk dance loses its unique style, it will lose its value and charm. Yunnan traditional dance is one of the earliest artistic expressions created by the early Yunnan ancestors. It was born in the primitive society of hunting life, sacrificial activities, religious beliefs, relationship between men and women, or a simpler animal-like performance. The original dance has been precipitated over the years. It has been passed down from generation to generation and has the meaning of inheritance. In other words, it is more like an emotional symbol commemorating and remembering ancestors flowing from the blood, and it has gradually become an important part of traditional culture. As a multi-ethnic province, Yunnan has 25 ethnic minorities among the 26 ethnic groups. In Yunnan, there are three-dimensionally distributed eco-residential areas intertwined with the "mixed and concentrated" of various ethnic groups. It is precisely because of the interweaving of life background that the differences and blending of traditional folk dances are prominent. First, due to differences in region, humanities, and customs, folk dances show obvious differences. Second, due to the long-term intertwining of various ethnic groups, the interaction and integration of dance is relatively prominent.

## II. INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SACRIFICES ON TRADITIONAL DANCE IN YUNNAN

Religious beliefs including ancestor worship, nature worship, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Christianity and various sacrifices are widely popular among ethnic groups in Yunnan. In traditional dance in Yunnan, religious sacrificial dance occupies an important position. The traditional sacrificial dance is mainly a sacrifice to nature, but it gradually changed from sacrifice to folk customs, becoming an expression of people's good wishes. Yunnan's currently well-preserved "agricultural dance", for example, the Bai people sacrifice "the Lord" every year, hold a grand "rounding the three spirits" activities, praying for a good weather. The Yi and Hani people still have to "sacrifice the dragon" every year, praying to gods to protect peace. Some sacrificial dances have changed in function. For example, the Wa people's "wooden drum dance" was originally an old habit of religious sacrifices "hunter's head and sacrifice to the soul of the valley", but this custom was completely abandoned in 1958. The Wa's "wooden drum dance" became the entertaining dance. After continuous processing and upgrading, it has developed into a performing dance.

Yunnan traditional folk dance is produced and circulated among the folks. Due to restrictions, it is impromptu performances, with self-entertainment as the main function, but the style is relatively stable. Dance of different nationalities will have obvious differences in performance styles due to the influence of the environment, but folk dance originates from life and

takes daily production and life as abstract expressions. Therefore, traditional folk dance tends to be simple and lifelike, which is more like a portrayal of life. Such traditional dance tends to be native-style dance, which is the expression of unpretentious emotions, and there are no established story themes. The dance style is more pure and the emotion expressed is simple. In the author's opinion, the so-called Yunnan traditional folk dance belongs to people's established dance style formed by the influence of cultural tradition on dance. Traditional dance and traditional culture are inseparable. In other words, Yunnan's traditional folk dance is closely related to life, or it is the reflection of folk life forms in art

### III. YUNNAN FOLK DANCE ON STAGE

People often say that "dance comes from life." The common life forms are refined and refined after being "artistic", but Yunnan traditional folk dance that is on the stage is also constrained by national culture and national heritage. It is just a dance choreographer's art sublimation of the traditional dance from the sense of form on stage, break of the rhythm, adjustment of the schedule, or usage of the music. Folk dance on the stage is no longer a simple "sentence" or "group" but is presented as a complete work, so it is no longer a simple expression of emotion. Because it needs to spread and needs new development, it is organized and arranged. Such a complete work needs to respect the public's aesthetic, which inevitably requires the director to re-create the dance movements, gestures, and even costume props from the original ecology to achieve the enjoyment of "beauty", or to "surprisingly" arrange from the audience "uncommon" level from the choice of the theme, the change of the content, and plot development. Therefore, the works moved to the stage overcome the arbitrariness of the original ecological folk dance, and began to pay attention to the organic combination of formation changes, as well as the modification and beautification of movement strength and quality. That is, the use of "choreography techniques" that you can often hear. Dance choreographers perform a certain analysis and "dramatization" of element movements on the basis of collecting and arranging the original ecological vocabulary of action, but the processing of the movement must be kept national stylistic features, otherwise the works created will have "qualitative changes". When people talk about the work only from the perspective of action, they will find that many Yunnan folk dance works will be different from the original dance in the ethnic areas after they are put on the stage, because the choreography and creation and the communication of the actors will definitely give the work a new content.

Yunnan traditional dance must perform performance processing on the stage, and such

processing often generates many problems. For example, traditional dance satisfies the author's thoughts and understanding; excessive choreography and a lot of modification of action expression destroy the style of the nation, prompting the work to deviate from the "root" and "soul" of traditional dance in Yunnan. Finally, the presentation of the work caused people to question "is this the traditional dance we have seen in Yunnan?" As for the example of "Yunnan Image", it is a relatively successful work that has been moved to the stage as a traditional dance in Yunnan and still retains nationality while having a reasonable stage art arrangement. "Yunnan Image" is a good combination of the original "unchanged" and "changed". It challenges the normative thinking of Chinese dance creation and performance. From the point of view of dance art, it can no longer be classified as a native native ecology in the true sense, because it was firstly choreographed and artistically arranged in the design of the entire chapter and the development of the content. However, this sort of arrangement did not cause the entire program to lose its cultural and spiritual content. In terms of the form of performance, it still belongs to the traditional national dance, but it is more "artistic" and more in line with the audience's demand for "beauty". As a dance learner in Yunnan, the author was fortunate to have the opportunity to watch "Yunnan Image" and personally communicated with teacher Yang Liping. Teacher Yang believes that the traditional folk dance in Yunnan is "growing out of the land", and more popular is that it, as the "wheat" and "rice" in the fields, is generally rooted in the soil of Yunnan and absorb its nutrients to grow. "The action can be original. Even if it is a native action, the speed and scheduling can also change, but it is not a kind of original life force." This is Mr. Yang's "degree" in the arrangement of "Yunnan Image". It is precisely because the whole work has maintained the traditional folk dance's heavy communication of life and national culture that makes such a work successful. Because it is not just a sublimation of scheduling, space and dance beauty, but also moved onto the stage, the whole work is still emphasizing the vitality of the traditional national culture, that is to say, it is not just a dazzling visual change or a "haicaiqiang" live shouting that makes goose bumps and there is no subsequent tension. The whole work is to instill in the audience based on the folk life of Yunnan. "This is the life of Yunnan minority people, this is the traditional dance of Yunnan". And in such traditional dances, people can get a glimpse of the "root" and "soul" of Yunnan's traditional culture. Whether it is the perception of life, the awe of nature, the gods, the joy of the harvest, and the expression of the affection for men and women, it is precisely the so-called Yunnan traditional culture. However, most of the choreographers neglect the traditional folk dance which are more like "others" while arranging and compiling traditional folk dances

in Yunnan. The choreographer's arrangement of the work is undoubtedly the personal knowledge given to the author in the dance work. At the same time, he also hopes to use the dance as a means of expression to convey more thinking and inspiration to the audience. It's just that if the individual choreography is too heavy, it will cause a "qualitative change" in traditional folk dance.

The success story of "Yunnan Image" as a traditional national folk dance is not very common. When people look at major competitions or performances in China, they will find a problem — while the choreographer composes the works, in order to make the works that can positively reflect the cultural connotation of traditional dance, they often just make it like the "hard copy" or use the traditional dance movement, flow, group dance. This move undoubtedly preserves the style of traditional folk dance, but it undoubtedly makes the work lack new sublimation from the perspective of choreography and creation. For the two lotus prizes of "Venturing to Northeast China" and "On Songhua River", they are both anti-war red works. But the two authors want to connect the traditional dances of the Northeast with the works to show that this is a folk theme work, there is no new "personality" in the design of the plot and the use of traditional dance, which makes people to wonder whether the performance of the two works are too similar that they can still be a performance if they change the music. This has caused us to question where the traditional folk dance has its own personality, but the work created by the director emphasizes more commonality than its personality, and even says that the entire work has not risen to a new height. Is the work "choreography" greater than "creation"? Have they paid too much attention to the arrangement of traditional folk dance techniques and ignored the innovative thinking consciousness?

#### **IV. VIEWS ON CHOREOGRAPHY AND CREATION OF TRADITIONAL FOLK DANCE IN YUNNAN**

##### *A. Simplified action extraction*

The simplified action extraction refers to the abstract extraction of a subtle action element that is very representative of the people in traditional folk dance. At the same time, the composition of the work is based on the development of such a movement, so that the abstract movement can express concrete things or the expression of traditional emotions. This kind of extraction is the layer-by-layer stripping and the analysis of the silk, which makes the image and ethnic-style movements have new changes and have new connotations.

Dancing movements are an important part of choreography, and it can also be said that movements are the basis for the choreography and creation of works. Traditional folk dances have a wealth of action elements, and the use of these elements can give people a visual and intuitive identification of the types of ethnic groups, such as the Dai people's "Three Turns" and "Draw Kick Step", Yi peoples' "Cai Qiao" and "Wai Wai Strings", and Wa people's "hair swing" and "hand shape". This series of action elements are the basic content that a director needs to master when creating a work. So why do they propose simplistic action extraction? And can such an approach effectively and reasonably compose traditional folk dance? First of all, the movement elements of traditional folk dance in Yunnan are extremely simple. Such movements have "simplicity" in themselves. Most choreographers are prone to excessively use a lot of cumbersome traditional forms of traditional folk dance when composing traditional Yunnan dance, which makes the complex movement changes easy for the audience to have a "dazzled" feeling in sight. This approach can largely preserve the style characteristics of traditional dance in Yunnan, but should people reflect on the use of a large number of action materials that are easy to obscure the new changes and sublimation produced by the choreographer after analyzing the actions? This approach lacks the use of novel movements compared to previous common works. When people are beginners in choreography, teachers often instill in them "based on a small point to amplify the entire content". In fact, it is the extraction and refining of simplistic action words. For example, the classic Dai's work "The Spirit of the Sparrow" is very different from the Dai dance that people often see in the world. Throughout the work, even as the Dai people's iconic "Three Turns" movement has changed from traditional static and horizontal to a large amount of use of the head and chest, waist and hips, span and legs to present "S" - shaped curves. For the older Dai people, "peacock dance" and "Dai" have a lingering strangeness in this work. According to Yang Liping's own explanation, the "Dai Dance", which is not authentic to the others, is that she does not just want to imitate the form of peacock. Her use of "sparrow-shaped hand" is to combine "human and sparrow" spiritually. The use of the simple Dai-style "sparrow-shaped hand" after the movement is arranged and analyzed through rhythm and layered rhythm to change the existing spiritual peacock. She attaches great importance to the liquidity of the hand, the movement of the arm waves, the unique five-finger shape, and has been able to describe the inner world of a spiritual peacock, or that a Dai girl or dancer is pursuing her ideal world. Such a simple and even the extraction and use of a subtle hand shape in the basic elements of the Dai people avoids complicated movements which would destroy the ideological understanding of the dancers. It is also the preservation

of the traditional dance style of the Dai people and novel creation. This undoubtedly made "The Spirit of the Sparrow" a classic work of the Dai dance.

"The Ghee's Fragrance" is very representative of action extraction. The whole work deserves attention not only for the innovative change of the Tibetan girl's straight waist plate, but also for the simple development of the Tibetan girl's action of pounding ghee in the work. But what it wants to convey to people can already be realized from this simple action, whether it is the diligence and kindness of the Tibetan girl or the Tibetan people's strong feelings for ghee, the audience can receive this message. It no longer needs the wide-opening sleeve-throwing movements and dramatic drama performances. Such a pounding action is the best interpretation of "The Ghee's Fragrance".

The extraction of simple movements requires the choreographer to see the value of subtle words in the action elements of many traditional Yunnan folk dance, develop and sublimate the words, and pick out some details that are easily overlooked for artistic. This kind of processing is more complicated than the "choreography and creation". It can make a big difference from common works and can test the director's ability at the same time, it can also largely express its technical attainments and abstraction of thinking consciousness.

#### *B. Defamiliarized choreography and creation*

Defamiliarized choreography and creation is based on the premise of extraction and analysis of traditional dance movements. The fragmented analysis and extraction of patterned dance movements have resulted in the disintegration of dancers' body cognition and ideological understanding of dance movements in the general sense of teaching combinations and "disciplined" movement elements, which will also make the dancers use the creativity of a body language that is living in the moment to reconstruct and create the memory of these traditional folk dances with the defamiliarized choreography and creation. In this way, the defamiliarized choreography and creation plays a key role in the reorganization.

"Defamiliarize familiar things, so that the main body between the audience and the performer is intermittent, and always allow the audience to keep thinking in the distance and novelty" — "Defamiliarization", this literary term originated in Europe. Commonly used defamiliarization is mainly achieved by means of space definition, orientation scheduling, motion abstraction, gravity change, and rhythm breaking. This kind of choreography and creation and techniques often cause audiences to be puzzled, "Is this a traditional folk dance?" It has a strong style movement of traditional dance but it is different from the performance of traditional folk

dance. This defamiliarized choreography and creation technique has subverted people's previous understanding of traditional inspection-free dance in human body or mind. This kind of choreography and creation is more like an ancient dance art with a new form of performance. While retaining national emotions and spirits, it has made an innovative adaptation of traditional dance performances.

The author was fortunate enough to see the performance report by the Xinjiang Uighur Dance Class under the guidance of Professor Wang Mei of the Beijing Dance Academy for "Modern Choreography and Creation of Traditional Uighur Dance". The first feeling at the time was "Is this the Uighur dance I have studied or seen?" The program directed by professor Wang Mei challenged the thinking mode that the author was familiar with Uighur dance. The two Uighur actresses always used the Uighur "wrist-wrap" in one space. The two kept keeping their arms wrapped. The four performers in the back stage of the stage use the Uyghur dance elements to change the horizontal space, the movement of the square dimension, and the corresponding performance of time. This series of gravitational changes, extensions, limits, changes, and sudden pauses and repetitions of various "defamiliarization" arrangements have implied a very strong national style. The actors on campus was even holding a water basin on the stage and pedaling the typical Uyghur pace, showing the repetition of typical Uyghur wrist words and the ingenious handling of the points or positions that appeared. The author gradually realized that this is Uighur dance, but it is no longer a familiar Uighur dance. Professor Wang Mei can grasp the angle of movement changes and the opportunity to integrate Uyghur typical dances into it, which promoted the defamiliarized choreography and creation folk dances, which undoubtedly made people's eyes shine. However, the problem of "defamiliarization" choreography and creation methods is easy to bring about is that the personal choreography and creation of the director is too heavy and the modern choreography and creation techniques are too strong, which makes people question such choreography and creation methods, and doubt that this form of work can no longer be classified as a traditional folk dance. So how to make the defamiliarized choreography and creation return to folk dance? This requires the director to accurately grasp the emotional expression of the work.

#### *C. Emotional expression*

Compared with other types of action art, such as martial arts, gymnastics, and acrobatics, dance has its own independence, which is emotional. This is where dance differs most from other action arts. The emotional expression of dance is to present the internal emotions to the outside through a certain form. It is undeniable that the movements play a leading role in

the dance works. The works with a strong sense of form and dazzling movement scheduling can also be pleasing. However, such works are too "superficial", lacking the thinking and follow-up tension that the audience produces when watching the works. Because the place where a work really touches people is precisely the transmission of emotions, traditional folk dance has the deepest connection with human life sentiment and aesthetic emotion. Many researchers have shown that traditional dance expresses emotions with the essence of rhythm. The most noteworthy convenience of the innovative choreography and creation technique in the simplistic movement extraction and the defamiliarized choreography and creation is the emotional expression of Yunnan traditional folk dance. In a work, the arrangement of actions and stage forms is often just a new change to the external form. and emotion as the soul of the work should be valued by the director. Because the emotional expression of national dance is directly related to the "root" and "soul" of national culture, it is related to whether a work has national spirit and connotation. In the innovative choreography and creation of traditional folk dances in Yunnan, the use of simplistic action extraction and defamiliarized choreography and creation often produces works that are "unacceptable" in the eyes of the public or that too much emphasis on personality culture leads to deviations from traditional folk dance. While emotionally expressing the emotional exploration and feelings based on the Yunnan national spirit, such an approach is inclined to find "human spiritual commonality" in the works, that is to say, emotion is a commonality, and it needs to be coordinated with the personality culture in the choreography and creation to achieve the emotions expressed in the choreography and creation works are not rejected but still have a strong national spirit. When it comes to the work of "Wolf Totem", it is similar to "The Spirit of the Sparrow". This work is categorized as a "beast-simulated performance" in traditional folk dance. "Wolf" as a creature admired by the Mongolian people can be said to be a totem of the Mongolian people. Based on this cultural perspective, the choreographer of the work endows the wolf with spiritual realization, and retains the life form of "wolf" in the playful and social life. It also cleverly integrates the pace of traditional dance under the feet of the Mongolian people, the stretch of the shoulders, and the "hard wrist" elements of the wrist to depict the life of wolves on the Mongolian steppe. It is worth mentioning that the director's selection of themes is based on the traditional Mongolian culture and gives new content. The wolf living as a rare animal in today's society will inevitably cause the poachers to covet. And the director has made the wolf human to a great extent in the work, making the wolf have blood and tears to show their life and helplessness. The director, while conveying the Mongolian people's awe and admiration for the wolf,

also integrated the work into a new understanding to the analysis of human nature and the cry for ecology, which made the emotion conveyed by such a work accepted by the audience. Even though it has a big gap with the traditional Mongolian dance in action design and performance arrangement, it still has a strong national flavor in terms of its foothold and the emotions it conveys. The communication of national emotions enables the works to return to the folk and the simple national culture.

## V. CONCLUSION

The technical arrangement of traditional dance works of many ethnic groups has not been mature, and the consciousness of innovative thinking has not been mature either, which has caused the personality of the works to be covered. What people see is still traditional folk dance. However, such folk dance is too "common". "Choreography" is the use of techniques to organize, and it is an organic treatment of existing national traditional dance; "creation" is the need to incorporate new content into existing folk dance. Therefore, "innovative choreography and creation techniques" play a vital role in the development of traditional folk dance in Yunnan. The above are simple views on the innovative choreography and creation of traditional folk dances in Yunnan from the perspective of "the author".

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