



# The Importance of National Cultural Spirit in the Creation of Chinese Folk Dance

Hui Jing<sup>(✉)</sup>

Dance Practice and Performance, University of Roehampton, Roehampton Lane,  
London SW15 5PJ, UK

[jinghuiphdapply@outlook.com](mailto:jinghuiphdapply@outlook.com)

**Abstract.** National culture and spirit are considered the morale of the Chinese people of all nationalities, the behavioral standards of specific limitations, and the foundation of the Chinese traditional folk dance. It is widely acknowledged that the national culture spirit is crucial for the creation of Chinese national folk and also lays solid support for the folk dance creation. Under the current environment of diversified integration and development, it is bound to play a significant role in the future formation of Chinese folk dance.

**Keywords:** national culture spirit · Dance creation · Chinese folk dance

## 1 Introduction

China has a splendid civilization history of more than 5,000 years. In the development of human society, the material world of mankind is constantly innovating and developing, and the spiritual civilization is also continuing. Since the Neolithic Age, people have been conveying information and expressing their emotions through visual images and body movements [1]. Therefore, dance, also known as the cradle of art, has emerged as one of the earliest spiritual and material activities of human beings using the medium of the body. With the continuous evolution of human beings, their spiritual civilization also sublimates, with its contents represented through the body becoming more stylish and more thorough. In this case, folk dance starts to reveal universal truths that are universally accepted by people and have a profound influence on human spiritual world. Referring to the previous argument, has been closely related to the continuous progress and the current situation of society. In addition, the national cultural spirit developed from various geographical cultures is an indispensable part of the universal value, which further affects the occurrence and development of the Chinese national folk dance.

## 2 The Creation of Chinese Folk Dance and the Spiritual Interpretation of National Culture

### 2.1 Concept and Characteristics of Chinese Folk Dance

#### 2.1.1 Concept of Chinese Folk Dance

The Chinese national folk dance is a type of artistic dance creation. To be specific, artistic production refers to an innovative activity in which artists employ their aesthetic

inspirations, artistic experience, artistic skills, and creative techniques to transform the articulated contents into artistic visual and textual materials through artistic media. Dance creation can also be considered choreography, which produces artistic works by means of body movements. It is thus able to generate a dance language and externalize the connotation of the work into a concrete dance image.

The creation of Chinese folk dance not only absorbs the characteristics of contemporary dance, but also emphasizes the use of the unique dance language of different ethnic groups and regions for creative expression. Thus, the image of Chinese folk dance has been shaped. Chinese folk dance is at an ecological stage where professional dancers and choreographers collect, organize and process the original folk dances. Therefore, Chinese folk dance developing a creative stage art dance form [2].

### **2.1.2 Characteristics of Chinese Folk Dance**

The production of Chinese folk dance is rooted in tradition and also developed in innovation with the following three characteristics. First of all, Chinese folk dance is distinctively different from traditional folk dance because although Chinese folk dance is originated from the folk, it is absolutely not identical to the folk. Professional folk dancers of all nationalities perform it on stage, with choreographers being the primary participant in producing this specific dance, which, therefore, makes it a unique branch on both the physical level and artistic level.

Secondly, the Chinese national folk dance has become an indispensable part of the mainstream culture with diverse characteristics of popular art, which exhibits a strong connection with its innovative development [3]. The contemporary Chinese folk dance developed into an elegant art in terms of its contents and forms, presenting a national level. However, with profound personal characteristics of choreographers, this form strongly differs from the original Chinese folk dance which emerged from the local society under the influence of mass culture. To be exact, Chinese national dance is a dance created by professional dancers on the basis of original ecological dance. It focuses on the commonality of all nationalities and highlights the spiritual outlook of the Chinese nation. This is the first dance school in China, Beijing Dance Academy Chinese National dance department is the consensus reached.

Thirdly, the Chinese national folk dance has become increasingly diversified. According to Mu, with regards to the professional development of Chinese folk dance, it has been endowed with the cultural color of “leading politics”, “elite interest”, “mass entertainment”, and “folk spontaneous”. They respectively control the discourse in four different aesthetic landscapes, including the political discourse, elite discourse, market discourse, and folk discourse [4] (Fig. 1).

## **2.2 The Conceptual Definition of the National Culture Spirit**

National culture spirit refers to the collection of national culture, national consciousness, national belief, national religion, national values, and common pursuit of unique characteristics, which formed in the long course of history. In order to promote and navigate human thinking essence, it can not only encourage the prosperous development of a vitalized, creative, and cohesive nation but also provide the core and soul of a nation.



**Fig. 1.** Haiyang Yangko Dance (picture credit: original)

The formation of national cultural spirit belongs to a historical category, with the characteristics of stability, persistence, continuity, and ethnic identity. Its core significance is to educate people to behave and think in a socially acceptable manner [5]. For example, the national cultural spirit may be observed in traditional cultural events and folk activities such as weddings, funerals, and festival carnivals. It is not only a code of conduct but also a fundamental universal value, which has long been inextricably inseparable from the thinking mode developed by members of various ethnic groups. Moreover, the national cultural spirit of all ethnic groups has also given rise to numerous ethnic symbols, such as dance, music, clothing, architecture, and so on.

### **3 The Relationship Between Chinese Folk Dance Creation and National Culture Spirit**

Based on the abovementioned argument on the creation of Chinese folk dance and the interpretation of the Chinese national culture spirit, it is obvious that the Chinese folk dance takes the traditional folk dance as the creation motive and connotations, while the traditional folk dance can be further nourished with the spirit of national culture. Therefore, these three have the following relationship.

#### **3.1 National Cultural Spirit Breeds Traditional Folk Dance**

The traditional folk dance of each ethnic group serves as a container carrying various ethnic cultures and their spirits [6]. At the same time, it can be argued that the classic folk dance has been cultivated by the national culture spirit, which can be confirmed by the following two aspects:

### **3.1.1 The Concept of National Life Produces the Content of Traditional Folk Dance**

The unique cultural spirit of respective ethnic groups in China has shaped people's diverse attitudes towards dance and different interpretations of life through dance. According to Xu, "The most important thing of a national cultural spirit is a unique understanding of the meaning of life, which is related to the religious belief of a nation." Being significantly influenced by diffuse religious belief, the content, such as ancestor worship, marriage, grave moving, is becoming increasingly apparent in the national folk dance of diverse ethnic groups. This has also been developed and innovated with opinions of different traditional schools, including Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, and Buddhism, local views of life and death, as well as ethnic consciousness. In addition, the theme of life continuation has emerged from the blood-based national culture and has exhibited its presence in diverse ethnic dances. For instance, Hani people in Yunnan province perform the traditional dance "Yangana" as a means of reflecting nation's original worship of reproduction, expressing their appreciation for life, and promoting their vision of the continuity of life.

### **3.1.2 The Concept of National Order Creates the Stylized Process of Traditional Folk Dance**

The stylized process in the dance of all the ethnic groups in China represents not only the external manifestation of the order concept embedded in the national culture spirit but also a symbol of spiritual culture. Since the Zhou Dynasty, there has been an artistic expression form of eight ranges of people dancing in the court, which demonstrates the principle of hierarchy and order through the flow of performance, motions, and clothing. In all ethnic dances, the stylized process of dance can be identified with the features of the running map, role division, dressing code, and color matching, thus conveying the cultural spirit of the nation in the long run. For example, Yangko originated from Haiyang in Shandong province is characterized by the typical performance process of three phases of in and out. Yangko is so rigorous that it embodies the formation of the Han nationality under the influence of Confucian culture, demonstrates respect for the ancestors of heaven and earth, and reflects mutual respect among people.

## **3.2 Traditional Folk Dance is the Basis of the Creation of Chinese Folk Dance**

The Chinese folk dance is created based on the traditional folk dance of all ethnic groups in China. In the process, directors gain a thorough understanding of the folk culture by planning a nationwide field visit so as to get accustomed to its local customs, historical humanities, and artistic dance forms. Then, they can organize, extract, and process the necessary materials for creation so the most evident characteristic of Chinese folk dance is its identifiable prototype.

### **3.2.1 Drawing Creative Materials from the Traditional Ethnic Dance**

The majority of the movement elements, musical components, and narrative themes in Chinese ethnic folk dance are all collated, refined, and processed from traditional folk

dance. In the creation process, a traditional dance routine can be adapted to satisfy the requirements of contemporary audiences. At the same time, traditional folk dance music and costumes with distinctive ethnic features providing a solid foundation for the design of Chinese folk dance. Therefore, it is feasible to refer to traditional folk dance as a treasure trove of numerous creative resources, which exerts a favorable influence on the production and evolvement of Chinese folk dance.

### **3.2.2 Gaining Life Experience from the Traditional National Folk Dance**

By concentrating on the embodiment of national philosophy and national identity, traditional national folk dance is constantly expressing people's perception of life and revealing their emotional attitudes towards life. Therefore, the dance creators will not only absorb the classic movements and design of traditional national folk dance but also be aware of the life experience of the local people, which can be regarded as the necessary materials for producing Chinese national folk dance.

### **3.3 National Cultural Spirit is the Root of Chinese National Folk Dance**

Concerning the mutual relationships among national culture spirit, traditional folk dance, and Chinese folk dance, Chinese folk dance seems to bear an indirect relation with national culture spirit on the surface level; however, the latter one is directly influencing the former.

It is obvious that the cultural phenomena of all ethnic groups in China are emergent based on the national culture spirit; for instance, the music, clothing, dance, and architecture with distinctive national features are the symbolic representation of national culture spirit. During the preparation stage of dance creation, the artists can simultaneously extract the quintessence part of dance movements and comprehend the national cultural spirit so that they can interpret the natural and inornate spirit with the artistic body.

## **4 The Importance of National Cultural Spirit in the Creation of Chinese National Folk Dance**

### **4.1 National Cultural Spirit Determines the Cultural Essence of Dance Works**

A top-notch Chinese national folk dance should incorporate the movement, rhythm, and metre that can represent the major artwork contents and national characteristics. Those materials should be selected strictly based on the fundamental requirements of strong dance and artistic value, and more importantly, containing the national cultural spirit.

For example, in the classic work *I come from the Yellow River*, the action of the performer made full use of the stomping trembling steps, which is a representative pace of the folk highlighting the stylish characteristics of Shandong Drum Yangko. In the work, the boy can continually perform the movement which embodies the generous, enduring, resistant, and unyielding national spirit as well as reflects the national temperament of the Han people unity. In the creating process, the director grasped the national cultural

spirit and determined the essence of the national dance, demonstrating the courage and spirit of the Han males on both sides of the Yellow River [7]. Therefore, it can be revealed that the national cultural spirit should be the standard benchmark evaluating an artwork because it is the essence contained in work.

#### **4.2 National Cultural Spirit Provides the Basis for Creation and Innovation**

The creation of Chinese national folk dance needs to be developed and innovated continuously in the course of human progress; otherwise, it will be abandoned by the times. Although in the current development of social modernization, all ethnic groups are gradually homogenized with dwindling unique folk customs, the spirit of national culture can still be the most reliable foundation for innovative development.

For instance, the classic work *The Loess Yellow* is a folk waist dance derived from Shanxi Wanrong County. It has been sublimated, refined, extracted, and changed on the basis of the original shape of the local chest drum dance and with regards to the spiritual respect for God of people of the land of the loess plateau in order to broaden artistic expression. Different from traditional dance, the work has developed and innovated at the movement level and at the national cultural spirit level. Therefore, the work is not only sufficient in national cultural characteristics but also suitable for contemporary aesthetic appreciation, eventually becoming a classic work of the times.

#### **4.3 National Cultural Spirit is the Core of the Artistic Expression**

It is crucial to link various artistic activities through art communication by which artists convey to the audience their artistic concepts, values, and cultural connotations. First of all, dance has the function of spreading human emotions, expressing their inner feelings, and disseminating cultural spirits. Secondly, the traditional folk dance of all ethnic groups is passed down from generation to generation, which embodies a deep sense of national identity, national culture, and national spirit. Therefore, Chinese national folk dance should regard the national cultural spirit as the core connotation of its own artistic expression.

For instance, the most striking part of *The Loess Yellow* is the director's application of dynamic law and superposition of the number of performers in order to expand the connotation of the work from solely Han people to a national image. It also displays an integrated, indomitable, successive spirit.

## **5 Conclusion**

Therefore, Chinese folk dance is the result of the continual accumulation of the spiritual and cultural legacy of various nationalities in China over a lengthy course of history, which is largely independent, continuous, and inheritable. In contemporary development, it is historically inevitable to modernize the traditional ethnic folk dance so professional experts should not only propose a way to adapt to the current trend but also retain its authenticity. Although traditional folk dance may be diluted by the times, the spiritual essence of national culture will never be obliterated. This is indeed the foundation and

cornerstone of Chinese folk dance under the rapid advance of the times. According to Professor Xiong, culture is existence, but civilization is a process. Chinese folk dance has evolved to reflect the preferences of civilization, but the profound national cultural spirit is remaining unchanged.

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