

The Development of Dai Dance in China Against the Background of the New Era Taking "Song of the River" as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Chinese Dai dance is an important component of Chinese folk dances, and it contains profound cultural connotations in its unique artistic expression. This article takes the original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" as an example to deeply explore the artistic characteristics of Chinese Dai dance and the cultural connotations behind it. By analyzing the image, aesthetic form, narrative techniques, and the use of costumes and props of Chinese Dai dance in the context of the new era, this study aims to reveal the unique aspects of the long-term development of Chinese Dai dance in the new era.

Keywords: Chinese Dai dance, Chinese Dai nationality, Innovation, Development, Traditional national culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese Dai dance is one of the treasures of traditional Chinese dance, mainly spread in the southwest region of China. It is known for its unique artistic features and rich ethnic cultural connotations. The popularity of Chinese Dai dance is very high. As an important cultural heritage, it can continue to flourish in the context of the new era not only because Chinese Dai dance truly reproduces the love and longing of the Chinese Dai people for life, but also because it is the crystallization of their intelligence and creativity. Whether in terms of artistic form or cultural connotation, it can innovate and keep up with the times, and always implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's proposal to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and adhere to promoting the cultural spirit, cultural vision, and cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. This article takes the original Chinese Dai female solo dance "Song of the River" as an example to explain the innovation and development of Chinese Dai dance in the context of the new era.

2. THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF CHINESE DAI DANCE

2.1 The Origin of Chinese Dai dance

For thousands of years, Yunnan's unique natural resources have left precious and rich dance wealth and heritage for humanity. The Chinese Dai nationality mainly resides in China Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, Dehong China Dai Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and Simao Region. Its dance originated from the specific environment in which the ancestors of the Dai ethnic group in China lived and multiplied. Due to the long-standing preference of the Chinese Dai people to live in tropical regions with a wide variety of bird and animal species, people at that time were not attracted to the gorgeous fur and graceful physique, but rather to obtain food. Until later, when people were able to capture more prey and wild fruits to solve the problem of hunger, they couldn't help dancing, and the movements they danced were naturally the same animal images and common postures. Therefore, early bird and beast dances emerged, such as red deer dance, peacock dance, monkey

dance, and fish dance. In addition to imitating movements, this type of dance also needs the animal fur as props. The dance genres currently known to the whole nation and even going global are peacock dance and elephant-foot drum dance.

When the ancestors of the Chinese Dai nationality entered clans, tribes, and ethnic groups with blood ties, they began to change their way of life from hunting to settled farming. At this time, dance began to combine with beauty to a certain extent. For example, the ancestors used the simplest leaves and animal skins to cover the body, developing into wearing earrings, collars, etc. During this period, in addition to primitive religions such as totem worship and animism, dance was also added with a mysterious color and gradually became the main content of religious rituals. The peacock has also become a symbol of the clan totem, possessing an inviolable sacred status. Peacock dance is no longer a purely realistic representation, it adds many abstract conceptual movements, becoming a symbol of auspiciousness and happiness. The red deer dance embodies the meaning of prosperity. Chinese Dai dance, as the main form of cultural inheritance, has been passed down from generation to generation, forming its unique ethnic cultural style and artistic characteristics.

In summary, Chinese Dai dance is an important means and main way for the Chinese Dai people to inherit and carry forward traditional ethnic culture, and impart production knowledge and skills. Chinese Dai dance is a dance art form with distinct ethnic characteristics, profound artistic connotations, multiple social functions, rich types, and innovative inheritance characteristics. This article takes Chinese Dai dance as the starting point and analyzes the development and innovation of Chinese Dai dance in the new era, using the original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" as an example.

2.2 The History and Culture of Chinese Dai Dance

2.2.1 The History of Chinese Dai Dance

The Chinese Dai nationality has a long history and a splendid culture, dating back to the first century BC. Chinese historical records have relevant records about it. More than 4000 years ago, the ancestors of Chinese Dai nationality were descendants of Baiyue. Due to historical reasons, they were widely distributed and mainly

concentrated in the southwest of China, with a population of about 1.1 million. The early Dai, Tai, Lao, Dan, and Ahongtai were considered the same ethnic group in Chinese history. "Yueshang" was the earliest ancestor of Dai, Tai, Lao, Shan, and Ahongtai who appeared in the Chinese version of the "Grand Biography of the Book of Documents"; After the Western Han Dynasty, the ancestors of the Chinese Dai nationality were known as "Dan". "Dan" and "Shang" were actually just homophones and different spellings at that time, with "Yuedan" being "Yueshang"; During the Three Kingdoms and Two Jin dynasties, the Dai ethnic group in China was known as the "Jiuliao"; During the Tang and Song dynasties, due to people's preference for decorating their front teeth and tattoos with gold and silver foil, the Chinese Dai nationality was referred to as "Jinchi", "Yinchi", "Mangman", "Baiyi", "Xiujiao", etc. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the Chinese Dai nationality was referred to as the "Jinchi Baiyi" or "Jinchi" or "Baiyi(百夷)", but they referred to themselves as the "Dai", meaning people who loved freedom and peace; After the Qing Dynasty, they were called "Baiyi(摆夷)". After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the system of ethnic oppression was abolished. According to the wishes of the Chinese Dai people, the ethnic group was officially referred to as the Chinese Dai nationality. Chinese Dai culture has undergone many changes in the long river of history. With the advancement of the times, while maintaining tradition, Chinese Dai culture is also seeking integration and development with modern society.

2.2.2 The Culture of Chinese Dai Dance

Traditional ethnic culture refers to the things that have been inherited from generation to generation in ethnic culture, and is the accumulation of ethnic history and culture. Any social system change in history cannot be separated from changes in the field of ideology and culture. Dance, known as the mother of human art, is one of the important contents of traditional national culture. This kind of change has a comprehensive impact on it, involving multiple levels such as content, form, economy, and policies. Chinese Dai dance is derived from the production and labor of the Dai people in China, and after long-term development, it has become a very popular dance. Peacock dance is also a popular dance among the Dai people in China. The peacock is a symbol of auspiciousness and happiness in the hearts of the Dai people in China. Therefore, the popularity rate

of Dai dance in China is very high, even ranking among the top few in the popularity rate of folk dances among various ethnic groups in the country. After a long period of development, the Chinese Dai dance has gradually formed a unique dance style, which not only has mass entertainment dance, but also various forms of performance dance. During festivals, the Chinese Dai nationality gather together to watch folk artists perform Chinese Dai dance based on folk stories, myths, legends, and Buddhist scriptures.

At present, Chinese Dai dance is facing a great era where opportunities and challenges coexist. How to develop ethnic dance culture in a conservative and innovative manner in the context of the new era is a noble and arduous task entrusted to us by the times. As an important component of national culture, Chinese Dai dance also needs to keep up with the times in order to adapt to the development of the times.

3. THE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE DAI DANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW ERA

In the new historical period, it is necessary to establish artistic innovation based on traditional culture, combined with modern forms of dance expression. The innovation of artistic creation does not mean replacing the old with the new, but means to closely link with the profound cultural heritage of the nation, respect the traditional style and rhythm of ethnic dance, create dance works that the audience enjoys, lead the audience to appreciate contemporary dance works rich in traditional cultural factors, and deepen emotional appeals and aesthetic experiences of excellent traditional culture.

The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" is a simple work. Its simple beauty originates from folk customs, thrives in the hearts of the people, thrives in the wishes of the people, and blends in the emotions of the people. The work depicts the image of a mother and son accompanied by water, with the river being long and flowing, to interpret the beauty of maternal love, where a woman is inherently weak and a mother is strong, the poetic beauty of combining elegance and boldness, and the beauty of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The posture and form of props created by dance also reveal the purity and intuitiveness of "being sentimental and unadorned". The dance can fully demonstrate the director's thoughts and

experiences on ethnicity, community, and dance functions, while showcasing the contemporary charm of the Dai ethnic life atmosphere. This work won the first prize in the "14th Yunnan Province Youth Actor Competition" and the third prize in the "2nd Yunnan Province Original Dance Exhibition" in 2022; In 2023, it received funding from the "Yunnan Art Fund for Small Drama (Festival) and Work Creation Project". In the original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River", the dancers have demonstrated the following innovations and developments in Chinese Dai dance in the context of the new era:

3.1 The Image of "Mother" Created by Chinese Dai Dance Work for the First Time

The ancestors of the Chinese Dai people believed that humans and animals are a community of life, and humans cannot do without animals. Animals also need human protection. Therefore, the Chinese Dai people attach great importance to protecting animals and strive to achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and animals. It is precisely with such a historical background that peacocks occupy a place in the cultural history of the Chinese Dai nationality, and gradually become symbols of the spirit of the Chinese Dai nationality, representing auspiciousness and prosperity. The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" that the author wants to analyze here has made bold innovations in character portrayal. For the first time, it breaks through the inherent image of peacocks in Chinese Dai dance, but condenses the "Chinese Dai women" on the banks of the Ruili River into a kind, resolute, and brave "mother" image, highlighting the warm scene of a "Chinese Dai mother" raising children on the beautiful Ruili River, as well as a picture of the simple and hardworking life of Chinese Dai women on the banks of the Ruili River. The "Song of the River" is based on the natural and cultural background of the Ruili River and Dai people in Dehong, China. It strives for a brand new aesthetic image and grasps the national aesthetic characteristics in the character images of the work to achieve the sublimation from concrete to imagery.

3.2 *The Aesthetic Form of Taking "Shape" as Beauty and the Unity of Heaven and Humanity*

Many people believe that the artistic charm of Chinese Dai dance far surpasses the unique natural beauty of the Dai region in China. Because Chinese Dai dance has experienced the sublimation of creative beauty from the appreciation of natural beauty, it has reached a new level of conceptual beauty (i.e. artistic beauty). The aesthetic refinement in the original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" comes from the "heavy color" in art works, which has reshaped the posture of the characters depicted in it, and designed a series of modeling movements such as "raising the palm, bending the waist, swinging the tail, and jumping into the water" from the Chinese Dai "Gaba dance" to shape the image of the mother, striving for a new aesthetic image. It showcases the beauty of the natural environment reflected by the shimmering rafts on the river water in the morning light, the beauty of the Dai ethnic mother's movements in the turbulent river water in China as the main form, and the overall artistic beauty brought by the second artistic creation of actors during dance performances. However, this kind of beauty - it is a unique beauty that is limited by objective conditions. The performer presents the dance on a small raft, abandoning the visual impact brought by the technique of opening and closing. At the same time, the dance performer uses delicate and soft emotions to move the hearts of every audience, finding a unique form of beauty. It conveys the aesthetic concepts of traditional Dai dance in China in four forms of beauty, unleashing the charm of a community of life between humans and nature.

3.3 *The Narrative Technique of "Emotion" Moving and Harmonious Coexistence*

The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" has a unique style in the construction of dance scenes. But in terms of emotional expression, it is more based on the emotional release in the dance plot setting, which triggers the audience's resonance with the emotions of the entire nation. The element of "maternal love" is expressed in many ethnic dances, but the expression of maternal love through "river" is not uncommon. "Mother River" is a common spiritual totem of Chinese people, so even audiences from other regions will feel the same emotional appeal in

this dance. "Human" is an important connection point between "river" and "emotion", and "river" is an important carrier of "human" and "emotion". The sublimation of "emotion" based on the first two is the core output of this work. Through concrete expression, it praises the fundamental connotation between "maternal love" and "inheritance".

3.4 *Diversified Clothing and Props Usage*

3.4.1 *Clothing Design*

The traditional Chinese Dai ethnic clothing is elegant and fresh, with young women wearing tight fitting short jackets, light colored collarless tight sleeved shirts with a front or front, and colorful striped floral tube skirts. The young women use elegant fragrant flowers as hairpins, inserting combs on the temples, or wrapping headscarves while the elderly often wear dark colored home woven clothes and skirts. The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" also has certain innovations in the use of clothing, which not only does not deviate from the daily wear of the Chinese Dai people, but also reflects the unique image characteristics of the dance. On the one hand, in the design of clothing, the actress' shirts and hems are designed to look like oars, vividly depicting the image of oars in the river flow. On the other hand, the use of the slit in the skirt and the dancing characteristics portrays the resolute and brave image of Chinese Dai women rowing in the turbulent water flow.

3.4.2 *Prop Application*

The props are cleverly used in the original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River". On the one hand, it is the use of "bamboo poles", which vividly display the rhythm of the river and the state of rowing through the changes of the bamboo poles in the hands of the actors. In addition, the static image of the bamboo pole itself constantly reveals the gentle and tranquil nature of the river. On the other hand, there is a visualized "children's puppet", in which actors perform a series of communication actions with this prop "children's puppet", thereby expressing the gentle, firm, and deep love of Chinese Dai mothers for their children.

In this work, each form of prop and clothing has its symbolic significance and cultural connotation, and its impact on constructing imagery is also

enormous, providing the audience with visual and spiritual aesthetic enjoyment.

4. THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF DAI DANCE IN CHINA AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE NEW ERA

4.1 Tracing the Source and Inheriting Ethnic Art

The creation of "Song of the River" is based on rigorous cultural examination, The author collects and organizes traditional Chinese Dai dance images, and classifies and analyzes the media suitable for the creation of the work with the combination of the cultural requirements of the new era and the spiritual civilization instructions of the 20th National Congress and the use of the stage creation logic. Through the excavation and reconstruction of traditional Chinese Dai women's dance, the author also attempts to break the inherent expression of Chinese Dai women's dance images and re-create Yunnan's Dai dance style, dance image, and dance expression. It is necessary to integrate modern elements while inheriting, constantly seek the inner spiritual core and cultural heritage, and highlight the development space and potential of traditional dance culture, to provide new creative perspectives for current ethnic dance creation.

4.2 Emotional Mapping of Specific Social Groups

The portrayal of small characters from a non-fictional perspective awakens the audience's emotional attention to the social group behind the characters they see through questioning reality, that is, to the people in real life. The performance nature of dance art helps us reach the ultimate reality, that is, the presence of human life. "Song of the River" presents the emotions of "mother" and "nation", "river water", and "children" through a dramatic storyline, and also presents the real living situation of the Dai people in China from multiple perspectives, including their thoughts, mentality, emotions, as well as their resilience, bravery, diligence, and kindness in the face of survival problems. By injecting this objective and real emotion into this down-to-earth character, it is hoped to achieve the transcendence of individual emotions. Through the audience's empathy and concern for the emotional activities of "mother" in performance practice, it is possible to understand

the emotional value of specific social groups coexisting behind the character.

4.3 Promoting the Era Theme of "Harmonious Coexistence Between Humans and Nature"

The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" uses the river as a cognitive theme, expressing two sets of inheritance subjects from "river to Dai children" and from "mother to child", achieving a leap from "small person" to "big image". Through the unique visual relationship between "mother" and "river", with a focus on Chinese Dai dance style, dance body language has been created to express and convey the theme of "harmonious coexistence between humans and nature", demonstrating that a good ecological environment is the home and foundation for human survival.

4.4 The Dual-civilization Value of Cultural Protection and Artistic Innovation

The original Chinese Dai women's solo dance "Song of the River" deconstructs and recombines the traditional Dai folk dance "Gaba Dance", extracting the representative original "fish dance" dynamics of the Chinese Dai ethnic group, and arranging it to the extreme in the work. The actress' arms, shoulders, waist, rhythm, and steps are used to depict the multiple states of the river and shape character images. By examining the cultural representation and artistic characteristics of the "Gaba Dance" of the Chinese Dai nationality, it is necessary to carry out innovative arrangements of traditional folk dances of the Chinese Dai nationality to add new dimensions to the research on the "Gaba Dance" of the Chinese Dai nationality, and achieve breakthroughs in the research and practice of the "Gaba Dance" of the Chinese Dai nationality; It can also provide certain enlightening significance for inheritors, learners, and users in research, and help promote the protection, inheritance, and innovation of ethnic dance in the new era, truly fulfilling the natural mission of contemporary dance research.

In summary, an excellent ethnic dance will open up a broader space for the survival and development of a nation's traditional culture and art. Moderate, steady, and scientific grasp of the protection, inheritance, and innovation of Chinese Dai dance is not only a trend in cultural and historical development, but also the will and need

of our nation, and it is also an inevitable trend of the times.

5. CONCLUSION

The occurrence of folk dances varies greatly, and naturally its development is also diversified. It not only needs to have its own characteristics and ethnic characteristics, but also has characters, personalities, and humanity. This is its most charming place, and it is also a dance state with cultural depth that people recognize. The primary task in inheriting, developing, and innovating ethnic dance is to deeply understand and master the culture of ethnic dance. In the 21st century, creation should be promoted with a higher awareness of "exquisite works" to produce more, better, and updated works of Chinese Dai dance that will be passed down. It is a must to calmly examine the future of Chinese Dai dance creation from the perspective of our own historical development process. Only in this way can people discover that there is still great potential for Chinese Dai dance.

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