

Reflections on Building a Dance Cultural Community with a Shared Future between ASEAN and China

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Abstract: Year 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the dialogue between ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and China. The past 30 years have witnessed great enhancement in the relationship between ASEAN and China. Today, the Belt and Road initiative from China offers an unprecedented opportunity to further advance the relationship. In particular, China has advocated to build a community with a shared future for mankind, which has resonated strongly with the international community. Dances can be an artistic pathway for achieving the objective of a community with a shared future for mankind. We here consider building a dance cultural community between ASEAN and China as a part of a community of a shared future for mankind. The primary objective of building such a community should be to form a sustainable framework that could foster exchanges of dance arts, promote dance culture diversity, and enhance the heritage and protection of traditional and/or folk dances. Because a dance cultural community is still in a nascent stage, comprehensive analyses and studies are very needed. This article aims to elaborate the importance of constructing a dance cultural community, presents analyses on the feasibility and constraints, and proposes cultural protection, exchanges, and communication.

1. Introduction

The concept of community was first brought up by Tönnies in 1887 in a fundamental book, entitled "Community and Society". It is the human collective with an ultimate common goal achieved by the relative aggregation of values, morals, identity, encounters, interests, and others. They are formed by common customs, beliefs, habits, and so on in a specific geographical space. A cultural community refers to an orderly group composed of social individuals with common ideals and cultural traits. Three major elements are involved, including common cultural memory, common cultural life, and common cultural spirit. Following the concept of community, a dance cultural community should be constructed in terms of a range of characteristics of dance, including collectives, alliances, values, beliefs, and so on, so that to achieve the common goal of the community with dance thinking and thinking about the essence of "The world is equally shared by all" and "Heaven and human are in harmony".

2. Building a Dance Culture Community between ASEAN and China

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was initiated in 1961 and formally established in Bangkok, Thailand on August 8, 1967. In the 1990s, ASEAN has 10 members, including Thailand, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. The ASEA Community, as declared on December 31, 2015, expands a total area of approximately 4.49 million square kilometers. and consists of a population of 654 million (as of 2018). The secretariat is in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.

Year 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue. The relationship between ASEAN and China will certainly get into a new period of development. China has initiated the Belt and Road cooperation and advocated the construction of a community of common destiny for all mankind, which opens doors to build corporation in any form for dance arts. Ralph Barker, President of UNESCO Dance Support for Social Integration, said that "if mankind is to make progress, it must rethink how to look at each other and how to dance as part of the dialogue to create the future " [1].

2.1. Benefiting regional peace, prosperity and stability

After the World War II, Asia has enjoyed a trend of stability. Including dances, its culture has undertaken a continuing development. Dances in the ASEAN countries have a prominent characteristic of both diversity and similarity. First, the ASEAN countries have more than 300 nationalities, with a population of about a half billion and with multi-ethnic characteristics. There are many nationalities that their origins have close connections to China, such as the Tyao (Lao long) family, which includes Thai, Lao, Lu nationalities and so on; Han-Tibetan (Lao Song) family, which includes Miao, Yao, Lisu, Vietnamese nationalities and so on; and Kar (Lao listen) family, which includes Kam, Fumei, Dalao nationalities. Some of folk dances from these families are similar and interlinked. The crossover and fusion are common too. Secondly, China and most countries of ASEAN are influenced by the Confucian culture and believe in Buddhism as their main religion. A wide range of dances is related to Buddhism, such as "wax dance" in China, "Kadakali" dance in Thailand, and " Hippocampal lazy dance" in Vietnam. Their dancing skills have well developed. Since the ASEAN is formed, there have been no major wars among the member States. In contraror, cultural exchanges and interactions have become more frequent, deeper and broader in the scope. The ASEAN Declaration on Coordination adopted by ASEAN at the first ASEAN Summit on 24 February 1976 took culture as a separate part and rrecognize that cultures and arts can lead people's spiritual orientation at the ideological level, instill the sense of peace, facilitate the resolution of ethnic conflicts, benefit a harmonious relationship in the Asian region to the outside world, and maintain the regional stability and development. While the dancing art is unique by using body language as a means of communication and thuscan cross the nationalities and national boundaries and resonate easily, it has particular advantages in the enhancement of communications in ASEAN.

2.2. Promotion of the Concept of the community with a shared future for mankind

In 2020, the ideas that dances are transnational and cross-cultural were extensively addressed. aChinese dance critic, Professor Yu Ping, pointed out that“connecting dance directly to the human's 'living body', we believe, is a key, a recipe, and a light to answer this question” [2]. No matter from the "functionalism" of the regional harmony or from the "constructivism" of the development of the international community, the idea of “community of common destiny for all mankind” has got more and more attention from ASEAN countries and China. Many dancing

artists, including Yang Liping and Huang Doudou from China, Susan Leigh Foster from the US, and Ralph Mckay Buck from New Zealand, all use distinct dance forms and skills to explore how to use their bodies to express the connection between themselves and the world, how to build a common home together, and how to play a role in the realization of a community with a common destiny for all mankind. Dances have its unique power to cultivate a sense of a common identity as human being, "I am in you, and you are in me" [3], shaping the vision of "building a society that is inclusive, harmonious, and able to strengthen people's care and sharing" [4].

3. Analysis on Constraints in Building a Dance Culture Community

From the history, we see that the exchanges and corporation of dances between ASEAN countries and China were not always going smoothly but disturbed or even disrupted by various diplomatic conflicts and political uncertainties.

3.1. Historical conflicts and political uncertainties

In the history, ASEAN countries' development has gone through several twists and turns, and the cooperative relationship between China and ASEAN has also been disturbed accordingly. Dance exchanges followed political fluctuations and ups and downs. As early as in the Yongle Year of China (1403- 1424) in Ming Dynasty, the navigator Zheng He took different performance groups to visit ASEAN countries. After the Peoples' Republic of China was founded in 1949, dancers represented by Dai Ailian and Dao Meilan had visited ASEAN countries frequently. In the 1980's when China undertook fundamental reformation and opening up to the world, the Chinese Dance Association invited dancers from eight ASEAN countries to visit China in 1980. Since then, dance exchanges and coopporation between China and the ASEAN countries have greatly been increasing. Both professional dance artists and local people have jointly laid the foundation for the spread of dance arts. However, during the SinoVietnamese war in the late 1970's and early 1980's and the Golden Triangle conflict, for example, dance exchanges almost completely stopped, and they could only gradually restart after the 1990s. After China's foreign minister, Qian Qichen, attended the opening ceremony of the 24th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 1991, the dance exchange and artistic visits become gradually stable and expand in scope. ASEAN and China formed a relatively strong relationship of mutual trust since 1997. In 2003, China formally signed the "Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia." Later, ASEAN passed the "ASEAN Social and Cultural Community Action Plan" at its 10th summit on November 29, 2004. However, in recent years, China-ASEAN relations have once again been affected by disputes over the South China Sea and some possible misunderstanding or disagreements, and some ups and downs again occurred in some regions, which causes some unfavorable impact in the construction of the "dance cultural community".

3.2. Competition driven by interests

ASEAN is located between two continents and two oceans. Its geographical location is very important politically and economically. The plateau landscape accounts for more than 70% of the total land area, with complex terrain. ASEAN thus hosts numerous ethnic groups, which is the same in the neighboring Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Hainan, Taiwan and other regions in China. The cross-border ethnic groups of ASEAN member countries have been reshaped or divided after many border wars. At present, there are more than 30 ethnic groups, which are rich in dance resources and color forms, and they are interlaced with each other, such as among the Dai people in China, the Thai people in Thailand, the Lao people in Laos, the Miao people and the Laosong

people in Laos, the Hmong people in Myanmar and other countries; the Yi people and the Luoluo people in Vietnam and Laos. Their ethnic boundaries essentially does not exist in either historical contact or separation. Their dance features are in common to a substantial degree, cultural customs are interlinked, and some languages can easily communicate. The specific multi-racial and multi-dance characteristics of ASEAN have always been a focus of global cultural studies. Unfortunately, the attribute of the cultural origination has sometime become the cause of disputes, which may be elevated to a political, diplomatic and social level.

3.3. Different governing systems, uneven economic and cultural development

First, the governing systems of Southeast Asian countries are different. ASEAN does not have a similar institution to govern the affairs of member states like the European Union. In addition, there could be limited direct interests from the cultural field, including dance, and some member states may be less motivated to cooperate in this field. Secondly, some long-term regional conflicts have made it difficult to eliminate the estrangement between sovereign states for a while, and the degree of value recognition of dance is also different. While dance is popular among the people and is valued by research scholars, the construction of a "dance cultural community" needs deeper thinking and understanding. Thirdly, affected by the uneven development of the economy, there are differences between countries and regions. Some countries may have invested in cultural infrastructures very limited, cultural indicators are set differently, and the implementation mechanism lacks a sound measurable standard. Under the influence of the globalization movement, the mainstream dance in the world is still dominated by western modern dances. Southeast Asian dances are impacted by western immigrants and culture, and it is difficult to gain a higher position in the world dance system. A Dance Cultural Community could play a positive role in promotion of dances from ASEAN countries in the world dance system.

4. Feasibility Analysis of the Construction of a ASEAN Dance Culture Community

From an international perspective, a dance cultural community should not stop at the level of political slogans and policy announcements. It requires us to seriously think about the real sense of cooperation. For this reason, we think that following issues requires in-depth thinking, research and demonstration: How great are the benefits of the cultural community to China and ASEAN? What are possible disadvantages? The main purpose of a dance culture community is to form a sustainable framework to foster exchanges of dance arts, promote dance culture diversity, and enhance interstage and protection of traditional dances, but it is inseparable from political and economic considerations. So, what are the existing limits of China-ASEAN cooperation? What are the best pathways to coordinate the relationship? What specific principles should follow? These all need to be carefully addressed by the joint efforts of economists, political scientists, and anthropologists. We believe that, from a realistic and comprehensive perspective, the use of cultural strategy, the intercomparison between dances to see the whole through the part, with simple and single as the guide and breakthrough, will inevitably create the necessary conditions for more cooperation in the future.

4.1. Effectiveness for dance to reach the consciousness of alliance and make people to have "empathy" mentality

The forms of dance are mostly collective activities, most of which are in the community, with organizers, and many people participating in the gathering. People communicate through dance together. This process allows participants to have an opportunity to meet more different people,

listen to others' views while expressing themselves. In the interpretation of culture from a community, it is most effective when people resonate spiritually through their cultural memories. Dance is more likely to be assimilated through simulation, or repetition, or fast or slow movement, and through aesthetic communication or similar concepts to achieve the state of "empathy". With its aesthetic power, dance enables people to form alliances in a subtle way, share the same values in culture, religion, etc., transcend the differences of social and political systems, obtain the safety enlightenment in the dance, form common interest needs, and look for space for common development.

4.2. Cultural commonalities in dance contributing to the promotion of ethnic identity

In the history, many ethnic groups in China and ASEAN share the same and similar experiences, which paves a way for the wide spread of dances among them. They thus have deep memories and a clear understanding of the essence of dances. For example, the Dai people, they all believe in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism, which are very close to each other in the spirituality and the related dances. Their costumes are all tube skirts, and their dance postures emphasize the shape of "three bends" movements. Most of the dance repeatedly uses a squatting posture, and the gestures are to express similar religious meanings. In the Miao people dance, the short skirt and hip move at the same rhythm. There are jumps and large movements, mostly reflecting the scenes of production, or playing fun games; and for the Yi people, different ethnic branches have the similar dances and have similar ceremonies of worshiping and acknowledging their ancestors. Another example is that they all worship mountain gods and earth gods, and have strict rituals and procedures to worship and even sacrifice chickens and sheep in a closely similar way. Whether it is a marine ASEAN or a land ASEAN, the member states have shared the same way of life and dance and have established deep connections among them. Their interaction and communication with each other result in interdependence and formation of the ethnic identity. Ethnic identity can better enhance understanding, cultivate affinity, and build mutual trust. Among the "five links" in the Belt and Road Initiative, the most difficult link to build is the "people-to-people bond". Ethnic identity pays more attention to communication. From the perspective of long-term planning, ASEAN is committed to building an inclusive and sustainable community to promote sustainable and resilient development.

4.3. Communication and cooperation are the driving force to realize the dance cultural community

The dance exchanges between China and ASEAN countries reached a peak in this century. Most countries, from private individuals to the government, have actively recognized that dance has played an essential role in the historical development of ASEAN. Through dance exchanges, dance can radiate to many aspects including cultural industry, intangible cultural heritage protection, public cultural service system, cultural technology development, cultural human resources, and so on, and will bring greater economic benefits too. Currently, there are active events, including China-ASEAN Expo, China-ASEAN Dance Development Forum, China-ASEAN Youth Dance Exchange Exhibition, so on. are taken place in China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and other cities. In the exhibitions, the visiting personnel performed and learned representative dances from different countries, such as the coconut dance in Cambodia, Nanyang dance in Malaysia, Java dance in Indonesia, court dance in Thailand, and Savannakhet singing and dancing in Xialiao, Laos, etc. The performers not only are always welcomed from audience on their distinctive dance styles but also had the opportunity to participate in seminars on ASEAN dance skills and interpretation. For example, the China-ASEAN Cultural Forum could always collect thoughts and ideas on topics such

as "Management and Practice of International Art Festivals" and "Inheritance and Development of China-ASEAN Traditional Art". With the recognition of the cultural impact, many countries have expressed the desire to continue cooperation, and some countries have also made plans for future cooperation. Southeast countries, with their characteristic of being able to "promote interdependence with complementarity and promote regional cooperation with interdependence" [6], can use dance as a bridge to establish a sense of dancing cultural community, and build a platform of mutual trust and mutual benefit. Being united and strengthening their cohesion, they will enhance ASEAN's international influence, and have the voice on global issues.

4.4. Stabilization of the education and talent training model by China

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint of the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007, formulated five assessment criteria for "relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact". The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 was reissued in March 2016, which refines the strategic objectives and specific initiatives of the Cultural Community and emphasizes the establishment of a sustainable community through effective mechanisms to meet the current and future needs of the people. This is consistent with the original intention and meaning of education. It has a standardized evaluation system and is a continuous development plan to train talents to meet the future needs. Currently ASEAN's talent training practice in Chinese universities is in the following aspects:

(i) Revise the syllabus. Many universities, including China-ASEAN Art Institute, Guangxi University for Nationalities, Chengdu University, Yunnan Nationalities University, Pu'er College, and Boren University in Thailand, have established ASEAN colleges and have included the "Southeast Asian Dance" course in their teaching plans. It is listed as an elective course for non-dance major students, and as a compulsory course for most dance major students. Most of the schools have set up Southeast Asian Cultural Research Center to enable to conduct extensive researches on ASEAN dances.

(ii) Increase the course practice. In addition to the regular mid-term and final exams, achievement performances and dance competitions are held from time to time, so students can get an opportunity to show what they learn. On the one hand, it tests the quality of teaching. On the other hand, it helps students strengthen their dance skills and get a deeper understanding of the knowledge. In addition, the on-campus and off-campus performance opportunities are also provided so that to effectively help students improve their profession.

(iii) Strengthen the interaction and collection. Strive to create opportunities for exchange visits of students from paired countries, such as studying tours. Students can learn about local cultures that they visit and feel the folk state of local dances, and apply their knowledge learned in the classroom to the real practice in local dances.

(iv) Promote corporation among universities. This includes: to sign cooperation agreements with higher education institutions in ASEAN countries to further strengthen the in-depth cooperation between paired schools, to conduct joint curriculum development, to share resources for complementing to each other's strengths, and to enhance the dance cultures through the teacher exchanges. In addition to university cooperation, Confucius Institutes also provide an additional way to receive talent trainings.

5. Conclusion

The past 30 years have witnessed great enhancement in the relationship between ASEAN and China. The Belt and Road initiative from China offers an unprecedented opportunity to further advance the relationship. In particular, China has advocated to build a community with a shared

future for mankind, which has resonated strongly with the international community. Dances can be an artistic pathway for achieving the objective of a community with a shared future for mankind. Since a dance cultural community is still a new concept and a new discipline in the field of dance, we conducted a range of analyses and discussions on some major issues on building a dance cultural community between ASEAN and China. It has been suggested that the construction of a dance culture community should become increasingly implementable as the Belt and Road corporation continues. It is also advocated that a dance cultural community between ASEAN and China as a part of a community of a shared future for mankind should provide a sustainable framework that could foster exchanges of dance arts, promote dance culture diversity, and enhance the heritage and protection of traditional dances.

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