

The image of the divine bird in the dance of Dai ethnic group: the historical origin and artistic characteristics of the Kinnara Dance

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the cultural connotation of Kinnara dance under the background of Dai culture. Through the in-depth analysis of the historical origin, dance characteristics, religious functions, inheritance and development in contemporary society, this paper reveals its unique position and influence in the Dai cultural circle. By combining the methods of literature and field investigation, the paper systematically sorted out the origin, evolution and the close relationship between Kinnara dance and Dai ethnic group. Kinnara is not only a form of artistic expression, but also an important part of the Dai belief system. Therefore, this paper discusses how Kinnara can maintain its cultural continuity and vitality through innovation and adaptation in the process of modernization. It is of great significance to promote the protection and development of ethnic group culture.

1. Introduction

As one of the major ethnic groups in Yunnan Province, the Dai ethnic group has a long and unique history and culture. The Dai people are internationally famous for their rich ethnic culture, unique religious beliefs, colorful festival activities and architectural style similar to Southeast Asian customs. The Dai population is about 1.2 million, mainly distributed in the southwest of Yunnan Province, such as Xishuangbanna, Dehong, Pu'er, Gengma and other areas.

The social structure and cultural traditions of the Dai people are deeply influenced by their religious beliefs, and Buddhism occupies a central position in Dai culture. The Dai people believe in southern Buddhism, and their religious ceremonies, festival activities and daily living habits are closely related to Buddhism. So far, the Dai people have retained some ancient folk beliefs and rituals, such as the worship of natural gods and ancestors. Another notable feature of Dai culture is its rich and colorful festival activities. The Dai people have many festivals as well as the ethnic groups in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and other countries that believe in southern Buddhism[4]. For example, Thailand's festival is called "Songkran Festival" while China's Dai people call it the Water-splashing Festival. The Water-splashing Festival is not only a kind of entertainment, but also the New Year of the Dai people, with the symbolic significance of washing away dirt, bringing good luck and praying for good luck in the New Year. The common feature of

the Dai people in Southeast Asian countries is their worship and love for water. They love water, pray for water, and have special feelings for water[4]. During the Songkran Festival, people pour water on each other as a blessing, while singing and dancing performances, floats and parades are celebrated. Not only the "Water-splashing Festival" to be celebrated in a big way, carnival, children's initiation ceremony is also very grand, there are "opening the door festival", "closing the door festival", "Bandai" and other festivals in which young people will form a circle on the grass around the stockade, waving their arms in the percussion of the elephant-foot drum band, twisting the waist and knee joints, imitating the dance of divine birds[2].

2. The origin of the Dai Kinnara dance

The word kinnara, derived from Buddhist scripture and Roman for Kinnara, is a small half-human, half-horse deity in Indian and Buddhist mythology who was also a singer and musician of the gods. Kinnari is also a half-man, half-horse figure, and a typical pair of lovers with Kinnara. Southeast Asia also has a pair, the same name, but India is a centaur, Southeast Asia, the Dai region is half human and half bird, the upper body is a human, the lower body is a bird. With the passing of time, Kinnara is widely spread in various regions and nationalities, Gengma Buddhism, Kinnara is a pair of divine birds in the Dai legend, the male is Kinnara, the female is Kinnara, the Buddhist culture is called Jin Gala, is the Buddha's two major protection, they love each other, representing loyalty and good love[3].

As an important part of Dai culture, the origin of Kinnara dance can be traced back to the animal-like dance of the ancient Dai society in BC. In primitive society, the Dai people lived among mountains and rivers that were closely connected with the natural environment, and they maintained close contact with the natural world through farming, hunting and other daily activities[9]. Gradually, some movements and gestures in these activities were detected and excavated, showing the artistry and beauty of the human body, and gradually evolved into a unique dance form, which is the prototype of Dai dance. During this period, Dai dance has an original ecological atmosphere. The dance form of this period is very primitive and direct, retaining the Dai people's worship and reverence for the natural world. The dancers express their feelings and awe of nature by imitating the behavior of animals, the growth of plants, the flow of water and the changes of the sky. The dance posture is full of the power of life and the beauty of nature, making people feel the harmonious symbiosis with nature. This form of dance is not only a performance, but also a way for the Dai people to communicate and connect with the nature[3].

The origin of Kinnara related to Buddhism naturally also has a certain mythological color, in Southeast Asian legends, Kinnari is the wife of Kinnara, and her image is an animal that is both like a bird and like a human. They are a creature of the legendary Himavanda Forest. Collectively known as Kinnara. In the classical books, the appearance of the Kinnara is: the upper body is a human, the lower body is a swan, and in Southeast Asia, there is no swan, but a mixture of human head and bird body mixed with a variety of bird images.

In short, as a bright pearl in Dai culture, the origin of the dance is closely related to Dai sacrificial activities. In ancient times, the Dai people would dance during sacrifices to express their respect and praise to Buddha and gods. After a long period of development and evolution, this dance has gradually evolved into a cultural activity with strong sociality and entertainment. The long-term migration in the history of the Dai also provided an important historical background for the formation and development of the Kinnara dance. In the process of migration, the Dai people came into contact with different ethnic cultures and integrated these cultural elements into their own cultural traditions.

3. The performance form of Kinnara dance

The unique geographical location of Gengma County has an important impact on the local economic and social development. As one of the areas inhabited by Dai people, Gengma County has formed a unique Dai cultural characteristics and social structure. Abundant natural resources and superior geographical conditions provide the material basis for the protection and inheritance of Dai culture. At the same time, the unique natural landscape and strong ethnic culture here attract many domestic and foreign tourists, and inject new impetus into the development of the local economy.

Mengding Town, Gengma County. Originating from the legend of Zhaowuding, it is the location of Mengding Tuosi Shu in the past dynasties. Its political, economic and cultural transportation is very developed, and it is the second important town in Gengma County. Mengding, Dai language means "can play the string of the place", is the southwest border of the motherland "golden port". As the main inhabited area of the Dai people in Gengma, Mengding culture is influenced by religious culture, folk belief, geographical environment, historical factors and other ecological factors[10]. The diversified forms of Mengding culture directly affect all aspects of local Dai people's art, especially Mengding folk dance. The geographical location of Mengding town is not only of great significance to its own economic and social development, but also plays a unique role in regional cooperation and border exchanges[8]. As a border area between Yunnan Province and Myanmar, Mengding town has become an important gateway between China and Myanmar, facilitating economic and trade exchanges and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. At the same time, the geographical location also provides opportunities for local governments to carry out cooperative projects and develop border economies. The form of Kinnara dance performance in Mengding town, Gengma County is roughly as follows:

The first is the performance time: the Dai traditional open-door festival, catch up, welcome guests, wedding ceremony, water-splashing Festival and so on.

The second is the performance occasion: Mengkeng Village, Mengding Town, Gengma County, for example, including not limited to the square in the main temple, Red Deer Square, stage, Gaduo Manor, Lover Lake Square and so on.

The third is the inheritance method and performance personnel: inheritance methods include master and apprentice inheritance, family inheritance, Gengma song and dance troupe. The performers include folk inheritors, song and dance troupe actors, and other visitors and learners.

The production of Kinnara costumes and props can be roughly divided into the following categories:

3.1. The production of Kinnara hats

In modern times, hats were made of cardboard. The hat is made into a pagoda and then sewn together by hand to ensure that it does not come loose. Using the branches of paulownia fruit, the inner white substance is adhered to the brim of the hat, adding a unique texture and artistic sense to the hat. Then, the selection of high-quality white cotton paper, the inner layer of the hat carefully mounted, so that the hat is not only more beautiful in appearance, but also more comfortable when wearing. Finally, through clever paper-cutting techniques and colorful cloth, as well as other exquisite ornaments, the hat is carefully decorated, making the whole hat full of creativity and personality, showing a unique artistic charm.

3.2. The making of Kinnara masks

First, an elaborate model of the face is made out of clay and left to dry in the sun. Next, the

prepared konjac powder is boiled into a rice paste for subsequent use[1]. Then, seven to eight layers of traditional Dai white tissue paper are put on the mask model, which is left to dry, and the eye holes and nostrils are hollowed-out. Finally, the mask is painted and the details of the five features are painted to make it more vivid and realistic. Let dry again, and you have a beautiful mask.

3.3. The making of Kinnara clothes

When making bamboo strips: In the selection of bamboo texture, it is not appropriate to choose too old bamboo. Generally speaking, bamboo in April or March of the Dai calendar is a more ideal choice, because bamboo at this time is more flexible and easy to bend. After cutting down a bamboo tree, it is divided into three sections, the first section is 1 meter long, the second section is 80 centimeters long, and the third section is 60 centimeters long. Next, the bamboo tube will be cut open, and cut into 6 bamboo strips. Punch holes at the other end of each strip, and then thread through the eyes of each strip to connect them together. After that, the other end of each bamboo strip is tied to a belt with a good root distance. The bamboo strips after this treatment have good flexibility and plasticity, and can be used to weave a variety of bamboo products, such as baskets, baskets, MATS, etc. At the same time, after such processing, bamboo strips are also more durable and not easy to break.

In the selection of cloth: it is necessary to cut the fabric according to the size of the three strips. First of all, the purchased fabric is cut according to the required size to ensure that the size matches the specifications of the strips. Then, the bamboo strips are evenly placed on the ground to unfold, so that it is smooth and in the correct position. Next, place the cut cloth above the strips and measure the position of each strip. Along the two sides of the bamboo strip, draw two lines with the scribing tool, these lines will be used as a guide to sewing cloth strips. Make sure the position of the lines is accurate so that the cloth can cover the strips correctly. Then, using the drawn lines as a guide, cut the fabric to the desired size for each strip. The middle part of each strip should have a small hole for threading the strips so that the strips can pass through and be fixed to the fabric.

Finally, place the cut strips on top of the drawn lines and align them. Use a needle and thread or a sewing machine to sew both sides of the strip together, ensuring that the stitches are secure. In this way, the cloth can be fixed on the bamboo strip to form a complete woven structure. Through the above steps, it can be ensured that the cloth matches the size of the strips, and the strips can be correctly covered and fixed on the strips, laying a good foundation for the subsequent assembly work.

Assembling racks is a meticulous and orderly process. First of all, it is necessary to lay the belt that has been fixed on the ground to ensure that the position of the belt is correct, so that the subsequent steps can proceed smoothly. The belt is the basis of the entire rack, so pay special attention to the accuracy of its placement. Next, each root of the bamboo strip one by one through the sewn cloth strip hole. This step requires patience and careful operation to ensure that each strip is able to pass smoothly through the strip hole to avoid getting stuck or bending. After passing through the hole, the strips should be evenly distributed on the belt to form a complete support structure. Then, the cloth ends of each bamboo strip are tied and fixed with a line. This step requires the use of a strong and durable line to ensure that the connection between the strips and the cloth is firm and not easy to loose or fall off. When tying the wire, pay attention to moderate strength, not only to ensure the fixed effect, but also to prevent the wire from being too tight resulting in deformation or damage to the cloth head. Through the above steps, the assembly of the rack can be completed. Throughout the process, patience and care are needed to ensure that each step is done accurately. The assembled rack should have a stable structure and good supporting performance to provide a reliable guarantee for subsequent use.

Decoration: By sewing beads and sequins on the clothes, you can add a gorgeous and luster to the wings of Kinnara props. These beads and sequins have been carefully designed and selected to present the best visual effects and make the costume even more eye-catching. Beads are available in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes that can be matched according to personal preferences and design needs. Sequins, with their unique reflective effect, add a touch of sparkle to the clothing. These sequins can be selected in different colors and shapes, such as round, square, heart, etc., and can even be used in special metallic or rainbow colors to add a richer layer. When sewing beads and sequins, it is necessary to use the appropriate needle and thread and technique to ensure that they are firmly attached to the garment.

The ritual and performance process of Kinnara dance can be roughly divided into the following:

Transfer of props: In the traditional Kinnara dance ceremony, props are not only auxiliary objects for performance, they carry profound cultural significance and symbols of blessing. When the prop producer completes the beautiful prop, there is a special and solemn delivery ceremony to show respect for the art and heritage.

Welcome Ceremony: The entrance ceremony is a very important and sacred part of the Kinnara dance ceremony, symbolizing the acceptance and blessing of the stockade. Led by the venerable elders of the stockade and the Buddhas of the temple, they will lead the well-dressed, spirited elephant-foot drum corps and other villagers to participate in this welcoming ceremony.

Pre-performance worship: Worship is the core religious ritual in the Kinnara dance ritual, which shows respect for the spiritual world, ancestors and Buddha. The performers perform three symbolic kowtows at different stages of the performance, the first of which is to pay homage to Buddha. The second kowtow is an expression of worship to the walled God. The third kowtow is held in memory of the late successor of the Kinnara. These three worship ceremonies are not only spiritual tributes to different objects, but also emotional ties that resonate between performers and audiences, strengthening the cohesion and cultural identity among community members. Through such public ceremonies, the Dai people demonstrate their adherence to their traditions and beliefs, as well as their desire for a better future.

4. Summary

As a symbol of Dai culture, the Kinnara dance carries the values and ideas of Dai culture, and sustains the feelings and attitudes of Mengding Dai people[5]. However, in the modern social background of global cultural integration, it is a key issue to explore the unique cultural value of Kinnara dance and pass down its simplicity and original characteristics from generation to generation. In the process of the transition from Dai traditional society to modern society, the original inheritance mode of Kinnara dance has been impacted. With the development of science and technology and the acceleration of information circulation, the global culture is increasingly integrated, which makes it inevitable that the dance will contact and integrate with foreign cultures. Although this cultural integration has brought new creativity and development possibilities for Kinnara dance, it may also lead to its original cultural connotation and characteristics being diluted[6].

Therefore, in order to protect the unique cultural heritage of Kinnara, a variety of measures are needed to address these challenges. First of all, we should strengthen the education and popularization of traditional arts, so that more people can understand and respect the cultural value of Kinnara dance. Secondly, relevant protection mechanisms, such as intangible cultural heritage reserves or special funds, can be established to support intangible cultural heritage inheritors to maintain the purity of traditional skills, while encouraging innovation, so that Kinnara dance can continue to flourish in modern society. Finally, international cultural exchanges should be

strengthened to promote the dance to the world, enhance its international visibility and influence, and promote global awareness and respect for cultural diversity.

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