

The Identity of Yugur Dance from the Perspective of Corridor Science

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Abstract: The Yugur dance identity has been researched herein through the methodology of corridor science. The following aspects have mainly been discussed: the cognitive discrimination of “corridor science” and corridor dance culture, the Yugur dance in the cultural area of “Hexi Corridor”, the change in historical patterns of Yugur dance and its influence on Chinese and foreign cultures, the ontological cognition of Yugur dance culture, and the inheritance and development of Yugur dance in the new era. Finally, it has been affirmed herein the diversity of Yugur dance culture under the influence of Corridor culture. It lays not only an important methodological basis for cultural identity but also a more comprehensive theoretical basis for dance teaching system and composition in the future.

Keywords: Corridor science, Yugur dance, cultural form and identification research

Text

I. I. Research Background and Problem Statement

(I) Research Background

This paper comes from the regional research on local culture by local colleges and universities.

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Yugur people is a unique ethnic group in Hexi Corridor. They have experienced a long history of ethnic development and formed unique multi-cultural characteristics of dance in the Corridor. It is of contemporary and realistic significance to research Yugur culture at present.

(II) Problem Statement

The academic discussion has been conducted mainly from the following perspectives, such as the cognition of relationship between “corridor science” and dance, the history of Yugur dance and the Music and dance in the Western Regions from the perspective of corridor science, the cause and understanding of Yugur dance language, and the inheritance and reform of Yugur dance.

II. Research Objectives

The research objectives herein mainly cover the following five aspects: I. Inherit and develop Yugur dance culture; II. Yugur dance in cultural area of Hexi Corridor; III. The change in historical patterns of Yugur dance and its influence on Chinese and Foreign cultures; IV. Ontological cognition on Yugur dance culture; V. Inheritance and development of Yugur dance in the new era.

III. Methodology on Research

Populations and Sampling

The research mainly focuses on the Yugur dance culture from the following aspects: experts who engage in the performance, composition, inheritance and research on Yugur dance. Those people mainly include Quan Yingchun, a Yugur dancer and theorist who has been performing Yugur dances for over 20 years, An Juhua, a choreographer who has been engaged in Yugur dance composition for over 30 years, Ke Cuiling, the national intangible cultural inheritor of Yugur costume, An Yuling, provincial intangible culture inheritor Yugur folk songs, and quite a few professors who have been engaged in the research on Yugur dance culture.

(I) Research Tools

Questionnaire, interview form and observation form are mainly adopted, among which the observation form records contents as follows:

1. Questionnaire

According to the data collected by questionnaire, most of the respondents are female, with the male to female ratio of 1:3; they are mainly Yugur, Han and Tibetan, with the largest number of people between the age of 10-20 years old; the profession of respondents are mostly student and

actor, living in counties; the language they use is mainly Chinese, few of them speak Yugur or are Chinese-Yugur bilinguals; most of the respondents, except few professional dancers, know very little about Yugur dance; Yugur dance is originated from scenes of life and impacts of foreign cultures; the viewpoint that traditional ethnic style is the key point during Yugur dance evolution.

2. Interview form

Interviewed with related experts and scholars of Yugur dance performance, research, education and creation, including Quan Yingchun, a Yugur dancer and research scholar; Ba Yushan, a Yugur dancer and educator; Zhong Jinwen, a Yugur culture researcher and doctoral supervisor, in the following topics: starting time of engaging(creation or research) in Yugur dance, dance props, dance movement, the origin of the movement, type of dance, history of dance, development factor, status quo of dance, expectation, creation of dance, ethnic history, corridor dance culture, etc.

3. Observation form

Table I.

Observation Contents	Convention in lunar January	Observation Time	February 14 th , 2019 (The 10th day of lunar January)
Observation Objects	Monks in the ritual	Observer	Quan Xianfeng
Observation Theme	Yugur religion and festival dance		
Observation Records	The convention in lunar January is the most solemn temple gathering of Sunan Yugur Autonomous County. The monks were wearing masks and dancing in armor or embroidered robes for worship. Surrounding followers were kneeling down reverently. Accompanied by Suona, cowhide drums, gongs, cymbals and other musical instruments, the dancing worshipers were singing or dancing from time to time (Dharma dance is a religious dance).		

Table II.

Observation Contents	“Ebo worshipping” rite, a Yugur religious	Observation Time	July 21 st , 2020 (The first day of lunar June)
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	festival		
Observation Objects	Worshippers	Observer	Quan Xianfeng
Observation Theme	Yugur religious dance		
Observation Records	<p>“Ebo worshipping” rite is a Yugur religious festival in Sunan Yugur Autonomous County Gansu Province, which comes from the “Shamanism”. The rituals, behaviors, movements and language during the process are called Dharma dance, or religious dance. After the rite, worshippers would thank the Lama with the mutton from the lamb back and the rest portion would be distributed among sacrifice participants. Then, village leaders would organize the ethnic singing and dancing performance.</p>		

(II) Research Tool Validity Check

Professors Wang Wenren, Li Jianzong and Huang Dayuan (Wang Wenren, professor of Hexi University, researcher of ethnic musicology; Li Jianzong, professor of Qinghai Minzu University, doctor of ethnology, researcher of ethology and corridor science; Huang Dayuan, professor of Shaanxi Normal University, PhD, doctoral supervisor, researcher of ethology), who are relevant to the subject research, have been selected to evaluate those research tools according to the validity check of research tools, namely “questionnaire”, “interview form” and “observation form”. Their evaluation results show that those research tools are suitable for the research subject and therefore can help collect effective and feasible data.

(III) Data Collection

1. Literature Research

The following findings have been obtained through consultation of relevant literature and questionnaire survey processing:

“Corridor science” is an academic thought in view of other sciences concerning the regional culture development. Currently, the research on “corridor science” is based on the academic viewpoints of “Tibetan-Yi Corridor” proposed by Mr. Fei Xiaotong. According to this point of view,

a preliminary academic scale has been formed across various cultural research fields, which promotes the progress in “corridor science” in China(Fei Xiaotong, 2018.10).The adaption of “corridor science” in the research on Yugur dance in “Hexi Corridor” will bring forth new instructive significance and breakthroughs in academic thought. The research on Yugur dance is mainly to dissect the cultural essence of Yugur dance, to interpret the historic changes in Yugur dance and to inherit and develop the contemporary Yugur dance and language in “Hexi Corridor”, a cultural area of ethnic corridor(Li Jian, Du Junlin, 2021.12). Yugur dance demonstrates multiple common characteristics of dance culture during the development of Hexi Corridor, which is caused by historical reasons in the formation of Yugur people. The integration of Yugur dance with the marginal culture in “Hexi Corridor” forms the cultural commonality between Yugur people and other ethnic minorities on the fringe of the Corridor. This has become a sign of “cultural diversity” of Yugur dance, one feature of the times from the perspective of corridor science(Quan Xianfeng, 2018).

2. Data Analysis

Relevant papers, monographs and local Chronicles on Yugur dance and “corridor science” have been consulted. A clear cognition has been gained concerning the methodology of “corridor theory” and the current research achievements on performance, education, composition, inheritance and development of Yugur dance. With reference to history books on Yugur people, the music and dance culture concerning the development of Yugur people have been analyzed, summarized and speculated (assumed). The history of Yugur dance, especially its ancient history, has been reviewed and analyzed. A questionnaire survey has been conducted on people who engage in learning, performing and composing the Yugur dance in Sunan Yugur Autonomous County. Experts and scholars relevant to the performance, research, education and composition of Yugur dance have been interviewed. The festivals, folk customs and religious activities relevant to Yugur people have been observed.

IV. Conclusions

(I) Evolution Course and Intention of “Corridor Science”

“Corridor science” has gone through over half a century from an idea to a concept and then to a discipline. It creatively facilitates socialist multi-ethnic countries to think about the potential

dynamic consciousness in their ethnic cognition. It has witnessed the process of identity transition from an idea to a discipline. The concept of “Tibetan-Yi Corridor”, proposed by Fei Xiaotong, has accelerated the maturity of “corridor science” and the pace of ethnic identification in China. At the meantime, this concept also provides ideological guidance for cultural studies across ethnology and artistic in China.

1. Conceptual Transition and Cultural Cognition of Corridor Science

The development of corridor culture in China is closely relevant to the research on ethnic issues. For example, in ancient times, there were “Ancient Miao Territory Corridor”, “Ancient Tea Horse Road Corridor” and “Hexi Corridor”; in modern times, there is “Tibetan-Yi Corridor”, also known as “Tibetan-Qiang-Yi Corridor” or “Tibetan-Yi-Qiang Corridor”. Later on, with more understanding of the methodology on “corridor science”, scholars has then applied this theory to ethnic researches in “Northwest Corridor”, “Hengduan Mountain Corridor”, “Wuyi Mountain Corridor”, etc. In this way, the researches on corridor range from the macro study on ethnic group to the specific study on ethnic culture. Dance is one of them.

2. Relationship between Corridor Science and Corridor Dance

Corridor science is the methodology while corridor dance is the cultural entity in this research. The two forms a subordinate “hierarchical” relationship. The application of academic method for “corridor science” into the research on dance theory in the corridor not only extends the research scope of “corridor science” but also provides more abundant methodological instructions for the research on regional dance culture. The research subject and the methodology for “corridor dance” share the same accumulation field with anthropological fieldwork. The ontological objects of both researches share the “kinship” due to the “same ancestor”. Their similarities outweigh their differences. The research idea of “corridor dance” is to determine the research subject and collect the data on this subject via both literature review and fieldwork.

(II) Multi-boundary Cultural Space at the Corridor Edge

The corridor is located in a fixed region and surrounded by connected geographical and cultural spaces. For example, “Hexi Corridor” is separated from other geographical spaces by mountain, river and basin on its east, west, south and south. Within those barriers, the cultural area of the corridor is divided into three adjacent but culturally different spaces, namely the area in the

corridor, the area outside the corridor, and the area across the inside and outside of the corridor.

1. Range of Corridor Science Concerning Dance Studies

The term “corridor” literally describes a geographical range. In China, and even across the world, most of those “corridors” are characterized by ethnic pluralism and ethnic cultural diversity mainly due to the cultural interaction between the inside and the outside of the corridor. The interaction can be categorized into “cultural interaction at the same level, cultural interaction at different levels, interaction between ethnic group and ecological environment, interaction between cultural structures, and interaction between tradition and reality”(Huang Boquan, 2008).The multi-level and multi-dimensional ideological interaction has confirmed the common area, same origin and identical system for ethnic communication, exchange and integration within and outside the corridor culture. All of those ethnic groups belong to the Chinese culture. Therefore, this is an academic study based on multi-ethnic national identity.

2. Factors of Cultural Space Change within the Corridor

A corridor is geographically stable, whose geographical field is mainly formed by rivers, mountains and roads. Geological movement is part of the reasons for cultural changes inside a corridor. For example, river erosion, earthquakes due to orogenic movement and crustal movement, transportation, trade, and economic and cultural integration are all direct reasons for cultural changes in a corridor. In addition, wars among ethnic groups in a corridor may result in regime change and the deepening of ethnic crisis can lead to cultural change. Moreover, there are also invasions from external forces, including the invasion of political power and foreign culture. Nowadays, it is more about the “immigrant culture” invasion.

(III) Interpretation and Cultural Analysis on Corridor Dance

1. Corridor Dance — Embodiment of Diversified Cultures

The diversified cultures in the corridor are mainly summarized as “material culture”, “spiritual culture” and “institutional culture”. Those three categories are “general pluralism” in separation and “integration” in combination, which reflects the academic guidance of “integrative pluralism” in methodology for corridor culture research. The “general pluralism” above is pointed out because those three cultures can represent the idea of pluralism as a whole. They can also display a “pluralistic” ideology in separation. This idea of “integrative pluralism” reveals a cultural

connotation of “diversified small groups based on macro similarities”. The development and changes in corridor culture directly influence the cultural form of corridor dance, including dance movements and inheritance methods.

(IV) Categorization-based Understanding of Yugur Dance

As for the classification of Yugur awareness existence, I have thought for quite a long about which classification to base it on. I consulted some anthropology professors and they gave different answers. However, most of them support the research method based on fieldwork and the categorization upon functional characteristics of art. Then, I reflected on and referred to some academic literature on successful cases of studying and analyzing ethnic art or culture based upon anthropological research theories. Finally, I chose the categorization method offered by my mentor and roughly categorized Yugur dance into self-entertaining dance, religion dance, custom dance and labor life dance.

(V) Historical Changes in Yugur Dance and Its Interactive Influence on Chinese and Foreign Dance Art

1. Cultural Form of Ancient Yugur Dance

The Ancient northern minority Uighur is the ancestor of Yugur people today, who share the same origin with the Uyghur people. “There have been many viewpoints on the origin of Uighur people in the academic circle. However, there is a current consensus that the distant ancestor of Uighur people should be Ding Ling, who was active in Mobei and even the Western Regions in the Qin and Han dynasties. The people then evolved into Tiele and Gaoche. It was not until the Sui Dynasty that the names of Wuhu and Yuanhe began to be adopted. In the Tang Dynasty, the people began to be called the Uighur, namely Huihu.” (Yang Xuefu, 2013)The ancient ancestors of Yugur people “formed a self-conscious ethnic entity” against neighboring hostile states. During the formation of Yugur people, they have gone through “the process of aggregation, assimilation and integration” (Yuang Qing, Shang Xiaoli and Yuan Yiyu, 2018). Thus, they realized the dream of building a historical ethnic era from many to one. For the same reason, history has shaped the “multi-structure” characteristics of their ethnic culture “matrix” and the “diversity” of artistic research subject.

2. Analysis on Historical Form of Yugur Dance and Reflection on Fostering A Strong Sense of Community among the Chinese Nation

During China's advance with big strides in the new era, art is a sharp sword to foster a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation. Yugur people stands as a unique minority in the Hexi Corridor, whose dance art plays a crucial cohesive role in ethnic cultural diversity and ethnic unity pattern. We should conduct an academic research on corridor dance culture which is integrated with the complementary pattern of corridor core culture and corridor edge culture. This serves as a new thinking path to analyze and research the historical form of Yugur dance. It is also one of the national focuses to construct the multi-ethnic integration pattern of frontier corridor culture in the new era and to foster a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation.

(1) Corridor Culture and the Cause to Foster A Strong Sense of Community among the Chinese Nation

In the 1980s, Fei Xiaotong came up with the academic thought on “corridor”. It has then become a key thought and theory for constructing a diversified and integrated pattern of the Chinese nation and fostering a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation. At the meantime, corridor culture has also seen sea changes. “Corridor is no longer a geographical term but a complex social and cultural spatial network... It is no longer a static ‘corridor, road, road and network’ in the sense of physical space but a dynamic network connecting the social and cultural relations... Ethnic, civilizing, social, economic and political relations are intertwined along the corridor. They not only embody the power source of the Chinese nation community but also contain the cultural code to enhance the sense of community among the Chinese nation.” (Narebiligo, Shi Zhan, Huang Dayuan, Li Rudong & Li Jianzong, 2020)

(2) Yugur Dance in Hexi Corridor, where “Diversified Cultures” “Combine” to Foster A Multi-ethnic Community

Yugur dance culture has gradually emerged with the formation and development of Yugur people. It is a new cultural creation during the process of two-way communication and penetration between its ethnic culture and Chinese native culture, thus featured by its pluralism. This regional diversity and cultural integration serve as a key feature of the colorful and multi-layered aesthetic character in Yugur dance. The form and content of Yugu dance performance have formed a stable

system in the longitudinal time sequence...”(An Juhua & Zhong Zhifeng, 2015) “Against the backdrop of diversified cultures, different cultures are co-existing in an equal status. Those cultures communicate and interact with each other, and jointly build a rich cultural system.(Cao Sanmei, 2020)” Yugur people in Hexi Corridor stands as a unique ethnic group in this cultural circle. Its dance culture entity forms an indispensable part of the dance culture circle in Hexi Corridor. Under the influence from Uygur, Mongolian, Tibetan and Han’s cultures, Yugur dance has formed a cultural circle with Yugur at its core. Its interaction and connection with the fringe ethnic cultural circle in the same pattern has enhanced the cohesive force for harmonious development of multiple ethnic groups within the cultural circle of Hexi Corridor. The research on corridor zone provides a new paradigm for the traditional regional studies... The boundary zone often serves as a region where multiple cultures combines and multiple ethnic groups couple, in which multi-ethnic community has been constantly shaped. The multi-ethnic community in Hexi Corridor stands as an example for the Chinese nation community. The germinal mechanism in there is of great significance for us to better understand the formation of Chinese nation community.” (Li Jianzong, 2018)

(VI) Inheritance and Development of Yugur Dance in the New Era

1. Inheritance of Yugur Dance, A“Shared and Co-constructed” Intangible Cultural Heritage, in Colleges and Universities

In 2016, the faculty and students from the Conservatory of Music in Hexi College, the only undergraduate college in Hexi Corridor, jointly composed *the Yugur Elegance*, the first Yugur song and dance drama for teaching. The Folk Song and Dance Troupe of Sunan Yugur Autonomous County composed the *I am a Yugur Girl*, a song and dance drama, for the fifth National Ethnic Minority Art Festival. Those works have once again pushed Yugur song and dance culture to the peak in the new era. Apart from the two institutions, many other colleges and universities in Gansu Province, such as Lanzhou University, Northwest University for Nationalities, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou University of Arts and Sciences, Lanzhou City University, etc., have been inheriting and developing Yugur intangible cultural heritage via various literary and artistic composition and curriculum. They have grown into the main force for inheriting and carrying forward traditional Yugur culture in colleges and universities.

2. Interpretation of “Realistic” and “Fictional” Themes in Yugur Dance Composition

The reality and fiction of composing themes concerning Yugur dance have been discussed herein so as to fully refine and explore those creative themes of Yugur dance and apply them into artistic practice. “The so-called dance theme refers to daily phenomena directly described in dance works. It serves as a material that the choreographer selects from his or her social life, and then refines and processes it into a content in a dance work.” (Wei Wenting, 2013) The proper selection of composition themes on dance will guide the correct “inheritance” and “interpretation” of culture. Therefore, such selection serves as the first key step to compose an excellent dance work. As far as dance composition is concerned, “inheritance” and “interpretation” of culture means innovation. “Based on the new understanding of “composition” and “newness” and on the premise that it is actually impossible for artistic composition to be a thorough creation, we further comprehend that both creation and discovery belongs to composition... Composition brings about a new understanding of objective matters and incentivises new experience in old experiences. The ease and calmness accumulated in them are very touching.” (Wang Mei, 1999) It should be something to be meditated by choreographer on how to endow old dance themes with new life, which will facilitate a better “inheritance” and “interpretation” of culture.

V. Discussion

In the process of material collection and essay writing, it is found that the traditional Yugur dance is basically lost in the community memory of Yugur people, however, it can't be neglected that in the development history of Yugur, the traditional Yugur dance did exist, with distinct ethnic characteristic and regional cultural features. It was as same as the northwest minority dance, sharing the same enriched dance language and this statue had lasted very long time. Although in term of this subject, different scholars have different research perspectives and research results, it is necessary to find genuine description of Yugur dance from history, physical materials, music, costumes, archaeology and religion in order to understand and research Yugur dance better. By comparing with the other minorities which have fused with Yugur in the course of history and the mutual reflection therein, to prove the feature of diversity in Yugur dance culture has lasted from ancient time to present, so as to highlight the fact that Chinese national culture is diversified and all ethnic groups are sharing the same culture symbol.

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