

# *Tibetan Dance and Its Artistic Value Rediscovered*

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**Abstract:** Tibetan dance carries a rich history, culture and national feelings, and its history can be traced back to the Neolithic Age. At that time, the ancestors of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau had begun to express their lives and emotions in the form of dance. After thousands of years of development and evolution, Tibetan dance has formed a unique artistic style and a complete dance system, which not only reflects the profound historical and cultural heritage, but also shows the unique aesthetic pursuit and national spirit of the Tibetan people. This paper reviews the historical development of Tibetan dance, sorts out the characteristics and changes of Tibetan dance in different historical periods, analyzes the dance posture, rhythm and costumes of Tibetan dance, and discusses the value of Tibetan dance in contemporary times.

**Keywords:** Tibetan dance, Style, Contemporary values.

## 1. Introduction

Tibetan dance has a long history, dating back to the Neolithic period. According to archaeological discoveries, as early as 5,000 years ago, the ancestors of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau began to dance. In the long course of history, Tibetan dance has gradually formed a unique style and system[1]. It not only has a profound historical and cultural heritage, but also presents the unique aesthetic pursuit and national spirit of the Tibetan people. The purpose of this paper is to explore the historical development of Tibetan dance and its contemporary value.

## 2. Overview of Tibetan dance

In the long historical years, Tibetan dances have accumulated rich forms, mainly including Qiangmu, Zhuo (Guozhuang), Harmony (Xianzi), Reba, Duihuan, Gar and so on. These dances have their own characteristics in form, movement, rhythm and rhythm, reflecting the living customs, religious beliefs and aesthetic concepts of the Tibetan people[2, 3]. For example, Qiangmu is a Tibetan Buddhist monastic dance with strong religious overtones. Dancers dressed in ornate costumes and holding ritual instruments express religious stories and teachings through dance. Zhuo (Guozhuang) is a kind of Tibetan folk dance, mainly group dance, bold movements, bright rhythm, dancers hand in hand in a circle during the performance, while singing and dancing, showing the unity and joy between people[4]. Harmony (strings) is a dance form that combines singing and dancing, with strings as accompaniment instruments. The dancers hold strings in their hands and sing and dance while playing, reflecting the enthusiasm and tenderness of the Tibetan people..... The inheritance of Tibetan dance is mainly carried out through family inheritance, master-apprentice inheritance and school education,

among which family inheritance is one of the main ways[5]. With the development and changes of the times, Tibetan dance is also facing the problem of inheritance.

### 3. Tibetan Dance and Religion

There is no doubt that Tibetan dance, as an important part of Tibetan culture, is deeply influenced by religious culture. Tibetan dances are often used in religious ceremonies and serve as an important bridge between humans and gods. For example, in rituals, symbolic dances are often performed to worship the gods. Specifically, Tibetan dance incorporates a large number of religious elements, such as the symbols of gods, the interpretation of religious stories, prayers, etc., which make Tibetan dance have profound religious and cultural connotations. Among them, the classic "Shah Adha" dance is a dance form performed by the Tibetan people in the flail to celebrate the harvest and pray for protection, which symbolizes the joy and gratitude of the harvest, and also expresses the reverence and gratitude to the gods[6].

Not only that, but many of the movements in Tibetan dance also have religious significance. For example, the clockwise rotation in the dance symbolizes reverence and prayer to the deity, while certain gestures and movements represent offerings and invocation to the deity. These movements not only enrich the expressiveness of Tibetan dance, but also deepen the religious and cultural connotation of the dance. The music of Tibetan dance also incorporates a lot of religious elements. In dance performances, songs and musical instruments are often used to express respect and gratitude to the gods. This combination of music and dance makes Tibetan dance more reflective of its religious and cultural connotations, and there is a close connection between Tibetan dance and religion.

### 4. Characteristics of Tibetan dance

The characteristics of Tibetan dance are first and foremost reflected in its practicality, which is originally intended to dispel darkness, alleviate suffering, and reflect the yearning for a better life and the struggle against suffering. For example, the "circle" in Tibetan dance has been an indispensable element of the art of dance since ancient times, symbolizing wholeness, unity, and infinite circulation. Through the form of the "circle", the essence of dance, which is to express freedom, release emotions and achieve the unity of spirit and body, has consistently permeated the art of dance around the world. From dances in ancient ritual ceremonies to performances on the modern stage, dancers often perform in "circle" formations. This formation is not only visually aesthetically pleasing, but also embodies the essence of dance on a deeper level. In the "circle", the dancers connect with each other and support each other, working together to create a harmonious, unified whole. This connection and unity is the core value of dance art: in terms of synchronicity, the "circle" dance form shows the tacit understanding and collaboration between dancers. When all the dancers dance in a "circle" with the same rhythm, pace and movement, they not only form a unified whole physically, but also achieve a high degree of spiritual fit. This synchronicity not only makes the dance more ornamental and infectious, but also allows the dancers to feel each other's presence and power in the dance, so as to experience the freedom and emotional release brought by dance more deeply. Through the "circle" dance form, dancers are able to better express their emotions and inner world. In dance, you can forget the constraints and limitations in real life, devote yourself to dancing, and release your inner depression and uneasiness. At the same time, dance is also a way of communication and exchange, through which dancers have a dialogue with the audience and themselves, expressing their love for life, awe of nature and their vision for the future. The dance form of the "circle" realizes the unity of the dancer's spirit and body. In the process of dancing, the dancers not only exercised their bodies and improved their skills, but also sublimated and grew spiritually. Dance gives them a deeper understanding of their inner world and potential, which provides motivation and support for self-

transcendence and growth. In short, as an important element in dance art, "circle" not only has aesthetic value, but also embodies the essence and value of dance at a deep level. Through the "circle" dance form, dancers are able to express their freedom, release their emotions, and realize the unity of spirit and body, so as to feel the beauty and power of life.

Fertility worship and totem sacrifices are another characteristic of Tibetan dance. In Tibetan dances such as Xianwu Dance, Zhuo Dance, and Reba Dance, the dance form in which the leading dancer holds the yak tail as a prop contains rich cultural connotations and symbolic meanings. The yak tail is not only a simple prop in Tibetan dance, but also carries profound cultural significance. It symbolizes the yak, an animal that occupies an important place in Tibetan culture. The yak is known as the "boat of the plateau" and is an important partner in the production and life of the Tibetan people, so the yak tail in the dance is not only a reverence for the yak, but also represents awe and gratitude to nature. The dance form of holding a yak's tail in Tibetan dance is often closely related to fertility worship and totem sacrifices. In Tibetan culture, the yak is seen as a symbol of strength and fertility, so by holding the yak's tail in the dance, worship and prayer for life force and fertility can be expressed. At the same time, this dance form also reflects the Tibetan people's inheritance and admiration for totem culture. The hand-held yak tail form in Tibetan dance not only shows the unique charm and style of Tibetan dance, but also reflects its strong vitality and functional purpose. Through dance, Tibetans are able to express their love of life, their gratitude for nature, and their hopes for the future. Not only that, but this dance form also has the function of social interaction and cultural inheritance, which can strengthen the cohesion and sense of identity within the ethnic group. In Tibetan dances such as Reba, the dance movements holding the yak tail often have unique characteristics. By waving the yak's tail and imitating the yak's movements, the dancers show the primitiveness, roughness and enthusiasm of Tibetan dance. These movements not only reflect the dancers' superb dance skills, but also convey the unique charm and connotation of Tibetan culture. To sum up, the dance form of the leading dancer holding a yak tail in Tibetan dance has rich cultural connotations and symbolic meanings. It is not only a unique embodiment of Tibetan culture, but also shows the strong vitality and functional purpose of Tibetan dance. Through this dance form, you can gain a deeper understanding of the charm and connotation of Tibetan culture.

Further, Tibetan dance also has an entertainment function. It is said that when Salang became the leader of the tribe, music and dance were transformed from simple material production to entertaining expressions of spiritual emotion. The dance movements are more rich and diverse, and the difficulty of the technique gradually increases, forming a dance style with Tibetan characteristics. Tibetan dance art not only has a religious function, such as the role of dispelling darkness and alleviating the pain of reincarnation embodied in Gurudao music, but also has an entertainment function, providing spiritual sustenance and cultural enjoyment for the Tibetan people. This dual function makes Tibetan dance art have an irreplaceable position and role in Tibetan society. The evolution from religious ceremonies to entertainment not only enriched the expression of Tibetan dance art, but also laid a solid foundation for its later development. The Tibetan folk culture presents rare richness due to the vast territory and diverse ecological environment, and folk songs and dances also show unparalleled uniqueness and mystery due to their special geographical environment and history. Folk dances include the pastoral "Zhuo" (Guozhuang Dance), "Dui Harmony", "Fruit Harmony", and "Reba Bell Encouragement", which are danced around the bonfire during the harvest season, all of which reflect the Tibetan people's interest in life and spiritual pursuit.

## 5. The influence of Tibetan dance abroad

Tibetan dance was first introduced and recognized in the United States through cultural exchange activities, tourism promotion, and international art festivals. Through these channels, United States audiences have become exposed to Tibetan dance and become interested in its unique dance style and

deep cultural connotations. Over time, Tibetan dance groups or individuals began to perform more frequently in the United States, conducting artistic exchanges with local dance groups. For example, the performance of the Qinghai Tibetan Song and Dance Troupe at the Stanford University Concert Hall and the gold medal of the Tibetan dance "Ruomu Niu" in United States reflect the wide dissemination and acceptance of Tibetan dance in United States. In the course of these exchanges, Tibetan dance not only demonstrated its unique artistic charm, but also deeply interacted with the United States audience, promoting mutual understanding and respect between cultures.

In addition, Western scholars have examined Tibetan performing arts from different perspectives, exploring the rituals and symbols of sacred dance, studying the portrayal of gender roles in cultural performances, and studying the role of Tibetan dance in healing the world. As mentioned earlier, the historical origins of Tibetan dance can be traced back to primitive societies, integrating the mission of survival with the cycle of life, expressing reverence for nature and love for life.

In general, the research of Western scholars on Tibetan dance is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

First, it examines Tibetan dance from a Western perspective, revealing interpretations and evaluations of Tibetan dance, expanding the understanding of Western audiences and providing a cross-cultural experience. In general, the cultural background of Western observers influences their understanding of Tibetan culture, i.e., the importance of emphasizing the subjectivity of the observer. Historically, Tibetan activity has often been portrayed as fantastical imagery, reminiscent of medieval settings, as in the case of Yugis · As Jurgis Baltrusaitis points out, this view places Tibetan culture in a mystical and ancient context, leading people to see Tibet as a mysterious and wonderful place. Despite Marco · Polo may not have personally visited Tibet, but he also describes Tibetan customs and cultural practices, providing valuable insight into this, and highlighting the interweaving of Tibetan and Mongolian cultures, emphasizing the interconnectedness of cultures. Hipólito · Ippolito Desideri and Giuseppe · Western observers, such as Giuseppe Tucci, have described Tibetan customs and rituals in detail, but have failed to explain the deeper cultural or religious significance behind these practices. In addition, Desidri's depiction of Tibetan theatrical activity explains to some extent cultural or religious implications. And Jacques · Jacques Bacot compares the Tibetan theatrical tradition with European theatrical forms such as the "comedy of the arts" in Italy.

Second, United Kingdom scholars emphasize the role of Tibetan dance in healing and rituals, as Tibetan dance is an integral part of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and rituals, bringing inner peace and tranquility through emotional release and regulation of mental states. This therapeutic dance is not only widely used in Tibetan communities, but also serves as an important cultural heritage for spiritual comfort and healing in cross-cultural communication.

In addition, gender roles and cultural performances play an important role in the Tibetan Canada women's community, which not only helps to keep the culture alive, but also helps to showcase and transmit their cultural identity and values. These performances are not only a means of cultural inheritance, but also an expression of the status and identity of Tibetan women in Canada society Canada. Especially Tibetan Canada grown-up in Canada face the challenge of maintaining their cultural roots. As a result, Tibetan Canada women in Calgary choose to showcase and pass on their cultural heritage through dance performances to meet the challenges of cultural survival. Through stage performances, it showcases the diversity and richness of Tibetan culture to Canada society. Through traditional Tibetan costumes and dance performances, Tibetan women in Canada express their cultural identity and personal experiences in Canada society, reflecting their pride and resilience in their cultural identity. In places like Calgary, Tibetan cultural performances have undergone significant developments, including stage performances and public displays, reflecting the efforts of Tibetan Canada women to preserve and develop culture, as well as their belief in cultural survival, which is also partly a salvation and healing of their own souls.

At present, on the international stage, Tibetan women show their unique artistic charm and cultural characteristics through dance, and also present the gender roles and social status of Tibetan culture to foreign audiences. Gender Roles and Cultural Performances focus on gender expression and cultural significance in Tibetan dance. This perspective provokes reflection on the intersection of gender and culture, and demonstrates the cultural expression and significance of Tibetan dance in Western society.

In particular, it is worth mentioning that United States Tibetan dance researcher Lynn ·Lynn Lechner, who argues that "Tibetan dance is a pleasant entertainment in social situations, a theatrical vehicle for displaying legends (operas) and religious messages (religious dances)." Currently, the Black Hat Dance and the Skull Dance are still performed in Western countries, preserving the sacred religious rituals of the Tibetans while meeting the expectations of modern audiences. Totem worship, which mimics wild beasts, reflects the concept of "all things have spirits, and the soul never dies", inherited from primitive societies, while the performances aim to create an atmosphere of auspiciousness, enlightenment, and wisdom to express Tibetan culture and beliefs.

In short, the Black Hat Dance is a revered ritual in Tibetan culture that takes place every year on December 29 in the Tibetan calendar. This deep-rooted traditional ritual is believed to be beneficial to all inhabitants, and its origins can be traced back to Tibet in the 9th century. The black hat dance is called "shina" in the local dialect of Deqin County, and the Tibetan dictionary pronunciation is "shana". The dancers are dressed in wide-sleeved robes with black and yellow, blue, and red. Each dancer wears a red copper mirror with a blessing for the deity written in the center of the mirror. In addition, the dancers hold the "gale" (skull) in their left hand and the "peibu" (vajra) in their right hand. Nowadays, the black hat dance is the prelude to the King Kong dance of the Lama Temple, and the performance is solemn and sacred. The performers have peacock feathers on their heads and wear black-brimmed hats. During the dance, the performers perform precise movements according to specific scriptures and rituals, such as offering gin and scattering flowers, accompanied by the sound of trumpets and chanting of scriptures, creating a solemn atmosphere. The Skull Dance is a profound expression of Tibetan spirituality, symbolizing the transience of life and a profound reminder of death. The dance is often performed in secret within the monastery, with dancers dressed in white or red costumes decorated with skulls, evoking imagery of decay and the inevitability of change. In the Tibetan Khamma dance, the skull dance is often intertwined with other dance forms to create a vivid artistic scene. Another dance, the deer dance, also occupies a special place in Tibetan tradition, symbolizing spiritual growth and preservation. The dance originated in the Cigong Chu Monastery near the Chu Chu River, where a solitary monk wearing a deer mask exemplifies the qualities of a male patron deity. Through graceful movements and symbolic gestures, the dancers evoke spiritual development and divine guidance.

To sum up, from ritual to healing, it can be said that it covers the long development process of Tibetan dance. Tibetan dance originated from ritual rituals and is a medium of communication between gods and people, full of solemnity and mystery. Over time, it has evolved into part of celebrations and social gatherings, where wishes for prosperity and happiness are expressed during festivals and ceremonies. The Western view of Tibetan performing arts is one of observation, interpretation, and inevitable cultural misreading. Although modern scholars have tried to give a more objective description of Tibetan dance, in United States popular culture, the dance is once again given a sense of mystery, described as a form that helps "heal the world." This redistribution of the sacred and healing properties of dance may lead to a new understanding of the meaning of Tibetan dance, but it may also further exaggerate its mystique. As the number of Tibetans abroad increased, Tibetan dances began to be presented on a global scale, while also being modified and adapted to different cultural contexts.

## 6. Conclusion

As an important carrier of Tibetan culture, Tibetan dance inherits the traditional culture of the Tibetan people in the form of dance. Studying the contemporary value of Tibetan dance is helpful to promote the inheritance and development of Tibetan culture. Not only that, Tibetan dance, as a unique art form, is not only well-known in China but also has a far-reaching influence on the international stage due to its strong attraction and appeal. Through Tibetan dance, foreign audiences can more intuitively understand the lifestyle and spiritual pursuit of the Tibetan people, enhance their knowledge and understanding of Tibetan culture, absorb new elements and ideas through exchanges and collisions with different cultures, and enrich their own artistic expression and cultural connotation.

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