

Chinese Evenki Dance Inheritance, Spread Methods

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Abstract

The Evenki people have a rich historical and cultural heritage, and their dances showcase unique artistic characteristics and vivid regional folk cultural features. Due to their unique cultural attributes, these dances hold high value for protection and inheritance. This paper conducts an in-depth study focused on the issue of the transmission of Evenki dance, analyzing the forms and connotations of Evenki dance in detail. It further elucidates the current status of Evenki dance inheritance and, in conjunction with the identified issues and influencing factors, discusses strategies for its transmission. The paper proposes effective measures to promote the inheritance of Evenki dance.

Keywords

Dance Forms; Connotations; Celebration; Internet; Training

1. The Heritage and Traditions of Evenki Dance

The Evenki people, inhabiting the Hulunbuir region of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, maintain a rich and diverse tradition of folk dance. Evenki folk dance constitutes a fundamental element of their ethnic culture, shaped by their natural environment, historical social structures, and traditional way of life.

Within the scope of this article, the folk dances of the Evenki people have been documented and analyzed. This includes:

Tiger Dance

The "Tiger Dance" originated among the Soloon Evenki people inhabiting the Hui River area of the Evenki Banner in Hulunbuir. Although tigers no longer exist in their present homeland, where they now practice animal husbandry, historical records indicate the Evenki people lived as hunters in the Khingan region before migrating to Hulunbuir in 1732. In that region, they hunted tigers, and the commemoration of the tiger's strength and power became deeply embedded in the "Tiger Dance."

During festive celebrations, weddings, or following successful hunts and abundant harvests, communities gather to perform the Tiger Dance. Each performance features five female dancers—four representing tigers and one portraying another animal. The four tigers position themselves at the four corners of the dance area, while the other animal dancer occupies the center. The tigers dance with knees half-bent, hands resting on their knees as they leap. Pairs of tigers leap across each other's paths, then shift sideways, advancing as if to capture the other animal. That animal evades them, leaping back and forth in a dynamic display. The dance concludes when one of the tigers captures the headwear or scarf of the other animal, symbolizing a successful hunt.(Luan yanqin 2025)

The Tiger Dance is performed without instrumental accompaniment. With each leap, the dancers emit deep, guttural "hum hum" vocalizations, which are responsively echoed by other performers. While vividly portraying the spirit and form of wild felines, the dance incorporates dynamic movements such as pouncing on prey and viciously tearing at it with their teeth, making the performance exceptionally vivid and engaging. As an artistic expression that captures the exultation and prowess of Evenki hunters, the Tiger Dance preserves distinct characteristics of ancient dance forms.

The Wild Boar Dance(Aitan Dance)

"The Wild Boar Dance" is a paired dance performed by two men, depicting the confrontation between two wild boars. The dancers wear leather trousers, traditionally used during hunting or festive occasions, and apply white flour to their faces.

The dance commences with the two men shouting "Je kheel!" as a signal to initiate the competitive performance. They lunge toward each other with one fist clenched. Subsequently, they place both hands on their knees, bending them and spreading their legs apart, while grunting "Ham ham!" to enact the scene of confrontation. Gradually, they advance closer, pressing their backs together and circling each other, portraying a tense standoff. When stepping back, they twist their right arms in opposition, lift their right legs, and engage in a challenging stance before leaping to switch positions on one leg. If one dancer loses balance and falls, it signifies defeat, and the dance concludes

Swan Dance(Otchi Dance)

The local Evenki herders have traditionally revered swans as "birds of happiness and blessing." When flocks of swans migrate through their territory, they perform ritual offerings by sprinkling milk as tribute.(Serenbat 20112)

During celebrations such as the White Moon Festival (Tsagaan Sar) and weddings, the Evenki people wear white robes or fasten white sashes, adorning their heads with red scarves as they perform their traditional "Otchi" dance. The dance authentically imitates the movements of swans—taking off, flying, preening, and calling.

The dancers extend both arms to represent swans spreading their wings, while choreographed formations depict swans flying in flocks or gliding in unison. In one

segment, two dancers face each other, mimicking swans in confrontation, and vocalize sounds like "kho kho ee kho" as part of the performance. At times, the dancers spin in a circular motion, bending one arm like a wing while stretching the other, with palms turning and flipping rhythmically. Accompanied by chants of "ivsh ivsh," these movements symbolize freedom, joy, and happiness.

This dance not only reflects the Evenki people's profound admiration for swans but also embodies their cultural spirit of resilience, harmony with nature, and celebration of life.

Akhanbai Dance

The Akhanbai Dance represents a widely celebrated folk dance among the Evenki people, also known as "Nurgel," derived from the word meaning "flickering flames." Its origins extend to ancient times when hunter-gatherers would gather around campfires for warmth and celebration, dancing to express joy and community spirit. During festivals such as the White Moon Festival (Tsagaan Sar) and weddings, young women attired in traditional dress perform the Akhanbai Dance before assembled guests. The dance is optimally performed with an even number of participants, who form two rows facing each other in the center of the performance area.

The dance features a series of synchronized movements:

- Maintaining rhythmic steps with one foot while sustaining eye contact with the partner across the row;
- Establishing hand contact with the opposite dancer, bending at the waist, and positioning outstretched hands on each other's shoulders;
- Performing gestures that simulate washing the face, looking into a mirror, smoothing sleeves, or combing hair;
- Transitioning positions through palm clapping or interlocking arms.

These movements are executed harmoniously, with dancers regularly exchanging positions while maintaining a fluid, interactive dynamic. The Akhanbai Dance represents the Evenki people's cultural heritage, embodying themes of community connection, celebration, and life's dynamic energy (Chinese Dance Records Editorial Board 2006).

The Ritual Campfire Circle Dance (Yikan Dance)

This traditional dance originates from the Olguya Evenki people. The Evenki maintain deep reverence for the fire deity. During weddings and celebratory occasions, they establish a ritual campfire where participants—regardless of gender or age—join hands and dance in a clockwise circle around the flames.

The Ritual Campfire Circle Dance accommodates between ten participants and several dozen. A lead singer directs the performance while others follow in coordinated singing and movement. The dance commences with slow, melodic chanting that progressively increases in tempo, accompanied by intensifying dance movements. The dance traditionally continues until the ritual fire extinguishes. (Guo Yuxia 2019)

2. Approaches to Preserving and Promoting the Tradition of Evenki Dance

The transmission of Evenki dance primarily occurs through oral tradition, instructional practices, and academic documentation. As intangible cultural heritage, folk artists typically pass these traditions through generations. Instructional inheritance occurs within formal educational settings, enabling younger generations to study Evenki dance academically. Theoretical works and scholarly publications provide systematic research and analysis, offering theoretical foundation for preserving this dance tradition.

However, socioeconomic development, evolving production methods, changing living environments, and declining traditional festivals have created challenges for transmitting Evenki dance. Moreover, contemporary lifestyles and external cultural influences have progressively reduced young people's engagement with Evenki dance.

To address these challenges, Evenki dances, including the "Akhanbai Dance," "Wild Boar Dance," Ritual Campfire Circle Dance, have been incorporated into the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Protective measures have been established through management mechanisms, funding, and inheritance strategies.

To ensure comprehensive preservation of ethnic culture, scientific and contemporary methods must be implemented when transforming folk dance into ethnic cultural heritage. Key approaches include:

2.1. Inheriting and Promoting Traditional Festival Customs

Festival customs embody the collective spirit, culture, and psychology of an ethnic group, reflecting its fundamental essence and sensibilities. These customs have evolved into intangible cultural treasures deeply rooted in ethnic consciousness. Once established, festival traditions demonstrate remarkable stability over extended periods.

Dance functions as an integral component of celebrations, often forming the foundation of festivals, with specific dance forms emerging within many ethnic minority festivities. The traditional Evenki "Sebin Festival," celebrated annually, exemplifies this as a major event where Evenki dances such as the Ritual Campfire Dance and Akhanbai Dance serve essential functions. During these festivals, Evenki dances operate as both artistic expressions and vehicles for communication and learning.

Festivals provide optimal opportunities for elder artists to transmit traditional dance culture and for younger generations to acquire dance arts while disseminating ethnic spirit to the public. Comprehensive preservation of Evenki festival customs requires organizing public ethnic dance performances and competitions during celebrations, fostering participation in traditional dances, ethnic music performances, and ethnic attire. These events facilitate broad promotion of Evenki dance,

enhancing public awareness and understanding of traditional arts while achieving preservation objectives.

2.2. Utilizing the Internet

The contemporary era has introduced significant technological advancement, with the "Internet" integrating into all aspects of life and transforming daily activities and production methods. Evenki dance preservation and development necessitates "Internet" support. Technological progress has incorporated internet and multimedia technologies into recreational activities, expanding information dissemination channels. Digital and online television now occupy central positions in contemporary life. Recent years have witnessed increased traditional cultural content in online programming, attracting substantial viewer interest.

Moving forward, relevant departments and promotional personnel should develop numerous online and television programs focused on innovative choreography and presentation of Evenki dance. This approach can engage diverse artists in Evenki dance preservation efforts. Additionally, establishing official online accounts enables Evenki dance distribution across various media platforms, such as the "Tik-Tok""Youtube"app. These platforms maintain extensive user bases and high traffic volumes, with their innovative content receiving broad audience acceptance. Thus, multimedia and emerging internet technologies present significant potential for advancing Evenki dance development.

2.3. Inheritance and Dissemination through Educational Training

The preservation of Evenki folk dance extends beyond maintaining it in a static state, focusing on ensuring its continuous transmission to future generations. To facilitate sustainable and effective development of this heritage, incorporating folk dance into the educational system is paramount. Education functions as a vital mechanism for transmitting and disseminating human culture, particularly serving as a conduit for preserving intangible cultural heritage such as Evenki folk dance. Consequently, emphasis must be placed on establishing a pyramidal dance education framework, wherein art colleges deliver professional dance education while primary and secondary schools provide dance instruction, working in concert to construct this comprehensive system.

Hulunbuir University has integrated Evenki dance into its curriculum through the program "Elementary Training in the Dances of the Evenki, Daur, and Oroqen Ethnic Groups of Hulunbuir," as part of initiatives to safeguard and transmit Evenki dance. The training curriculum commences with fundamental footwork and hand positions of Evenki dance, advancing progressively to folk dance exercises. Moreover, the university's "Stage Dance Course for Hulunbuir" program incorporates contemporary Evenki dance creations. Guided by principles emphasizing ethnic culture promotion, character showcase, dance dignity preservation, distinctive feature empha-

sis, and artistic conception expression, Hulunbuir University conducts systematic explorations into Evenki dance pedagogy. Following students' mastery of basic dance rhythms, they engage in field research and studio practice to accumulate materials, systematically developing a scientific and comprehensive training resource system for Evenki dance.

Researchers indicate that the introduction and transmission of Evenki dance in primary and secondary schools can be effectively accomplished by incorporating basic Evenki dance movements into physical exercise and break-time activities. For instance, adapting Evenki dance into fitness exercises offers an alternative to conventional calisthenics typically practiced during school breaks. In comparison to traditional broadcast calisthenics, dance exercises emphasize both aesthetic and cultural elements while enhancing physical fitness and aesthetic education. Additionally, public dance education enables children to internalize Evenki folk dance from an early age, integrating it into their developmental process. This approach facilitates the preservation and absorption of traditional culture by the general population.

3. Conclusion

Evenki dance represents a folk art form of historical significance, encompassing distinctive stylistic features, artistic value, aesthetic appeal, and ideological content. Through their profound and ancient heritage, the Evenki people have preserved their traditional culture through physical expression. The contemporary era presents both opportunities and challenges for the development and transmission of Evenki dance culture. This research examines methods for safeguarding and promoting China's Evenki dance.

Systematic Documentation and Research: Through comprehensive collection and organization of data regarding dance movements, repertoire, costumes, and props, coupled with structured research and documentation, the preservation of the dance's original dignity and form becomes feasible. Furthermore, showcasing Evenki dance through competitions, exhibitions, and various platforms can expand its audience while enhancing public awareness and understanding.

Promotion through Dance Education: Strengthening dance education represents a crucial approach to disseminating Evenki dance. The integration of Evenki dance techniques and conceptual foundations into higher education and primary and secondary school curricula ensures its continued transmission. Implementation of Evenki dance in schools can positively influence student development while cultivating their interest in the art form.

Utilization of Modern Technology: Modern scientific and technological tools, including internet platforms and social media, can facilitate the distribution and dissemination of Evenki dance training videos and performance recordings to broader audiences.

Multilateral Collaboration and Efforts: The preservation and transmission of Evenki

dance necessitate collaborative efforts across multiple sectors. Enhanced cooperation among government bodies, educational institutions, communities, and performance ensembles is crucial for developing comprehensive preservation policies. Intensifying professional dance training and support will enhance educational resources and opportunities, strengthening the preservation of Evenki dance. Moreover, increased efforts to promote public awareness will improve general understanding of the art form. Through coordinated multilateral collaboration and the strategic use of modern technology for disseminating training and performance materials, the conditions for effectively preserving and developing Evenki dance can be secured.

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