

Analysis on the Inheritance Path of Integrating the Local Ethnic Dance Culture into the Dance Education in Higher Vocational Colleges-Taking the Qiang "Sarang" Dance in Northwest Sichuan as an Example

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Abstract: As a vital component of the Qiang ethnic cultural ecosystem, the Sarang Dance of Northwest Sichuan holds exceptional artistic value and profound historical significance. In the context of integrating intangible cultural heritage preservation with vocational education, higher vocational colleges bear the dual mission of preserving local ethnic culture and cultivating versatile skilled professionals. This study focuses on Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County and Mao County in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Through field research and case analysis, it explores the historical origins, artistic characteristics, and integration pathways of the Sarang Dance within vocational education systems. The research reveals that while vocational education has achieved progress in textbook development and classroom implementation, the Sarang Dance in Beichuan and Mao County faces divergent inheritance challenges amid deepening Sinicization and modernization. To address this, the study proposes strategies including establishing digital resource libraries, fostering school-enterprise collaboration, and innovating curriculum models, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for preserving and innovating the Qiang Sarang Dance in vocational education.

Keywords: Qiang Ethnic Group; Sarang; Northwest Sichuan; Higher Vocational Education; Beichuan; Maoxian; Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance

1. Introduction

The northwestern plateau of Sichuan, home to the Qiang ethnic group, has nurtured a unique and resilient culture known as the "Cloud-dwelling Ethnic Group." Among its traditions,

the Sarang dance—a highly participatory form of collective performance—serves not only as an essential expression during Qiang celebrations, weddings, and funerals, but also as a vital medium for preserving ethnic memory and maintaining cultural identity. In recent years, with the government's intensified efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage, integrating this regionally distinctive folk art into modern vocational education has become a focal point for both academic and educational circles.

Beichuan and Maoxian, as the core regions of Qiang ethnic culture, are geographically situated at the intersection of the Han-Tibetan Corridor. Historically, Beichuan has exhibited profound "Sinicization" due to its geographical position, while Maoxian has relatively preserved the more primitive production and lifestyle of the Qiang people. This regional cultural difference is prominently reflected in the performance forms, rhythmic patterns, and inheritance models of the Sarang dance. As the educational level most closely integrating industrial skills with local institutions, the alignment between vocational education curriculum design and local cultural heritage directly impacts the market conversion efficiency of ethnic intangible cultural resources and cultural sustainability.

2. Cultural Connotation and Historical Evolution of Qiang Sarang Dance in Northwest Sichuan

2.1 Ethnic Memory and Historical Construction

From the perspective of historical anthropology, the origin and evolution of the Qiang people are inextricably linked to the interactions within the Han-Tibetan relationship. In the narrative of this historical relationship, Beichuan and Maoxian

are regarded as the core areas of the "Yu's Traces." The "Yu Xue Gou" in Beichuan and the "Yu's Traces" in Maoxian are frequently documented in the old county records of the Qing Dynasty. These geographical markers serve not only as administrative divisions but also as symbols for ethnic groups seeking political status and cultural recognition[1].

In this historical context, the Sarang dance transcends mere physical movement, its choreography embodying ancient migration memories and survival wisdom. Through circular formations, it strengthens ethnic cohesion. In deeply sinicized regions like Beichuan, while some dance elements reflect Han cultural influences, the core rhythms and signature movements like "knee tremors" and "foot stomps" still vividly preserve the resilience of ancient Qiang culture.

2.2 Regional Characteristics of Sarang Dance: A Comparison between Beichuan and Maoxian

To study Sarang dance, it is essential to analyze its regional characteristics in depth. The Beichuan Sarang features relatively gentle movements, with lyrics blending Chinese and Qiang language vocabulary, showcasing distinct inter-ethnic cultural exchange and integration. In contrast, the Maoxian Sarang retains a more rugged character. Dancers typically wear elaborate Qiang ethnic costumes, perform with brisk rhythms, and are closely tied to local folk beliefs, agricultural traditions, and commercial activities[2].

From the perspective of tourism geography, the Sarang dance in these two places has gradually evolved from a purely spontaneous folk activity into a performance form with cultural tourism and economic value. As a famous China tourism geography node, Mao County's Sarang dance has become an important window to showcase Chinese folk customs and agrarian culture, with strong market communication power. This transformation from "lifelike" to "stage-like" provides rich material for dance teaching in higher vocational education, while also raising the new issue of how to balance "authenticity" and "aestheticization".

3. Investigation on the Present Situation of Qiang Sarang Dance in Higher Vocational Education: Taking Beichuan and Maoxian as Samples

3.1 Curriculum Design and Textbook Development

Research indicates that vocational colleges in Mianyang and Aba Prefecture, including Mianyang Vocational and Technical College, Sichuan Preschool Education College, and Aba Normal University, have progressively incorporated the Sarang Dance into their physical education, arts, or general education curriculum. However, the systematic development of teaching materials remains inadequate. Current instructional methods predominantly rely on "veteran artists entering campuses" or oral instruction by teachers, lacking standardized printed and digital teaching materials.

The Kitagawa model emphasizes the fitness benefits and mass participation of Sarang dance, with standardized teaching movements that are simplified for mass dissemination.

Maoxian County Sample: Emphasizing the preservation of the original movement characteristics, highlighting subtle tremors of the knee joints and the power sensation of the hip. In the school-college collaboration, Maoxian County tends to integrate the Sarang Dance with local intangible cultural heritage projects, conducting specialized research camps.

3.2 Faculty Structure and Teaching Effectiveness

The shortage of teachers is the bottleneck restricting the development of Sarang dance in higher vocational education. Most of the art teachers in higher vocational colleges graduated from normal schools and received systematic training in Western ballet or classical rhythm. When teaching Sarang dance, they often unconsciously "balletize" or "stage it", which makes the dance lose its original "earthly flavor". Meanwhile, folk artists from Beichuan, Maoxian and other regions, despite their exceptional skills, struggle to translate the intricate dance vocabulary into structured classroom language due to the lack of modern pedagogical support. This educational mismatch results in students achieving superficial resemblance without grasping the essence, leaving them unable to deeply comprehend the ethnic totems, religious symbolism, and social functions embedded in the Sarang dance.

4. Reconstruction of the Inheritance Path of

Qiang Sarang Dance in Northwest Sichuan in Higher Vocational Education

4.1 Professional Course Design Based on the Integration of Industry and Education

Higher vocational education should fully utilize the cultural and tourism resources of Beichuan and Maoxian, transforming the Sarang Dance from a mere art course into a vocational skill. For instance, the "Qiang Sarang Guiding" module could be incorporated into the "Tourism Service and Management" program, equipping students with the ability to lead dances and explain cultural backgrounds on-site at scenic spots.

Situational teaching: combining the landscape construction in tourism geography, simulating the real scenes of Beichuan earthquake site and Qiang City in Maoxian, training students' artistic expression ability in specific environment[3].

Modular practical training: The Sarang dance is decomposed into three modules—basic footwork, regional style, and ritual narrative. For students in Beichuan, the focus is on analyzing cultural evolution from the perspective of Han-Qiang integration; for the Maocounty region, emphasis is placed on the protection of original ecology and the restoration of ritual sense.

4.2 Construction of Digital Teaching Resource Database and Knowledge Map

Given the complexity of Sarang dance movements and the diversity of its schools, it is advisable to adopt the approach of intelligent generation in artistic image creation to establish a Sarang dance motion capture database. By conducting 3D sampling of movements from representative inheritors in Maoxian and Beichuan, an annotation system can be developed.

This digital approach not only enables standardized teaching but also facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration to develop cultural and creative products or interactive AR training systems, enhancing both the fun factor and professional depth of student learning. When building the resource library, it is crucial to keenly identify the trend of simplified physical forms in Sarang dance, preserving traditional structures while integrating with modern aesthetic explorations.

4.3 Deeply Intervening in the Integration of Industry, Education and Research in Local

Community

Vocational education should not be isolated but should actively integrate into the community cultural ecology of Beichuan and Maoxian. Institutions should regularly organize students [4]to conduct field research in places like Beichuan's "Yu Cave," allowing them to experience the vitality of the Sarang Dance in real-life settings.

Teaching through Competition: In collaboration with the cultural and tourism departments of Beichuan and Maoxian, the 'College Students' Sarang Dance Invitational Competition' was organized to attract intangible cultural heritage inheritors and university faculty and students, breaking down the barriers between urban and rural areas.

Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshop: Establishing a resident studio for heritage bearers within the school, where students serve as assistants to collaboratively excavate and reconstruct the endangered Sarang dance segments.

5. Empirical Analysis: The Difference of Teaching Effect of Beichuan and Maoxian Salang Dance

After the interview and evaluation of the students in the Sarang dance course, it is found that the regional cultural identity has a significant positive effect on the teaching effect.

5.1 Differences in Cultural Cognition

Students from Beichuan demonstrated heightened cultural awareness and innovative spirit when learning Sarang dance. Rooted in the deeply embedded Yu lineage culture of Beichuan's historical narrative, they more readily interpreted the dance's modern evolution through the lens of Chinese cultural identity and ethnic integration [1]. They actively incorporated contemporary pop music elements into Sarang performances, aligning them with the demands of today's tourism performance market.

5.2 Differences in Skill Mastery

In contrast, students from Maoxian County demonstrated superior performance in dance dynamics and rhythmicity. The widespread practice of Sarang dance in local communities has cultivated their exceptional physical memory. During lessons, these students not only actively learn but also frequently serve as peer instructors. This collaborative learning approach has

significantly enhanced the quality of Sarang dance instruction at the Maoxian campus.

5.3 Differences in Industrial Integration

Employment data reveals that graduates with Salang dance skills demonstrate strong competitiveness in the northwestern Sichuan tourism belt. Beichuan graduates predominantly work at community cultural service stations and patriotic education bases, while Maoxian graduates are more likely to join large-scale live performances and folk culture villages, highlighting a distinct orientation toward cultural tourism geography.

6. Challenges and Future Prospects

6.1 Challenges Faced

Homogenization Crisis: In the advancement of vocational education, there is a tendency to oversimplify Sarang dance movements and flatten regional differences in pursuit of ease of learning. If the Beichuan Sarang and Maoxian Sarang are uniformly standardized as "standard teaching materials" in classrooms, it would lead to the erosion of the diversity of intangible cultural heritage.

Cultural consumption tendency: How to find the balance between maintaining the purity of Sarang dance as a carrier of national belief and satisfying the consumption demand of cultural tourism industry is an ethical problem that higher vocational education must face.

Talent outflow: After graduation, the relevant talents cultivated by higher vocational education still suffer from serious outflow due to the limited local employment environment and salary treatment, leading to the phenomenon of "cultivation and loss".

6.2 Development Strategies

Establish a multi-stakeholder collaborative inheritance mechanism: led by the government, in collaboration with vocational colleges, local governments of Beichuan and Maoxian, and cultural enterprises, to jointly develop the skill assessment standards for Sarang dance and incorporate them into the vocational qualification certification framework.

Strengthen the education of "reflective historical research" by introducing the theories of ethnology and history into the dance teaching, so that students can not only dance, but also explain the uniqueness of Beichuan and Maoxian in the

historical relationship between Han and Tibetan, and enhance their cultural connotation.

Promote the integration of cultural creativity and art education: Develop derivative design courses based on the visual symbols of Sarang dance, transforming ethnic art into sustainable productive forces.

7. Conclusion

The integration and development of the Qiang ethnic group's Sarang Dance in Northwest Sichuan within higher vocational education represents a profound dialogue between intangible cultural heritage vitality and modern educational systems. Using Beichuan and Maoxian as case studies, this research reveals how geographical environment, historical narratives, and economic structures profoundly constrain cultural inheritance. Vocational colleges should not merely treat the Sarang Dance as an artistic display, but instead empower this traditional dance with contemporary significance through interdisciplinary collaboration, industry-education integration, and digital transformation. Through studying cultural resilience in Beichuan's "deep localization" context and developing Maoxian's "folk tourism geography" dimension, vocational education can establish a distinctive curriculum system that harmonizes artistic principles with professional competitiveness. Moving forward, the preservation of Sarang Dance will transcend rural bonfires, leveraging modern vocational education's classrooms and stages to create a new chapter in Northwest Sichuan culture—maintaining ethnic identity while embracing modernization. Educators must uphold cultural integrity, guard against commercialization-induced fragmentation of cultural symbols, and ensure this "rhythm on clouds" truly takes root in educational soil for intergenerational transmission.

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