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### Research Article

# The Contemporary Value and Promotion Path of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance

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#### ABSTRACT

This article aims to highlight the role of traditional dances in preserving historical experiences and cultural memories. Various traditional dances from different regions and ethnicities in China, including the Yihuang Hegang dance, hold significant historical and cultural values. In the context of modern civilization, how can the Yihuang Hegang dance demonstrate its contemporary relevance? This paper seeks to integrate the artistic form of Yihuang Hegang dance into the core aspects of social, cultural, and spiritual values. It explores the historical origins, contemporary significance, and promotion strategies for the Yihuang Hegang dance. The research findings emphasize linking the promotion of Yihuang Hegang dance culture with modern new media technology to diversify its publicity methods. The article explains and analyzes the combination of traditional "intangible cultural heritage" and modern civilization through artistic practice and theory. This approach serves as a means to study the sustainable development of agricultural civilization in contemporary society through creative transformation.

## 1. Introduction

Yihuang Hegang dance holds a significant place in the daily lives and cultural heritage of the local population, necessitating thorough study to ensure its sustainable development. As noted by Bai Li (2022), Yihuang Hegang Dance in Jiangxi Province serves as a profound historical testament, embodying the ingenuity and cultural values of its creators. It represents a cornerstone of Jiangxi's folk culture, reflecting the distinctive mindset and values of the local community (Bai Li, 2022).

The imperative of promoting and creatively transforming Chinese traditional culture, including Yihuang Hegang dance, underscores the need for multidimensional approaches to its cultural preservation and evolution (Bai Li, 2022). This dance form not only encapsulates historical narratives but also resonates deeply within local social and cultural frameworks, fostering cultural confidence and self-improvement among its practitioners and enthusiasts.

However, gaps in current research exist regarding the comprehensive exploration of Yihuang Hegang dance's contemporary relevance and the precise methodologies needed for its effective promotion. While Bai Li (2022) discusses the cultural core and artistic forms of Yihuang Hegang dance, there remains a need for deeper analysis into its socio-economic impacts and strategies for integrating it into broader cultural policies. Additionally, Fei Mingxiang (2022) highlights the importance of integrating traditional dances into urban settings to enrich cultural transmission, yet gaps persist in understanding how these efforts can be optimized to achieve sustainable cultural heritage outcomes (Fei Mingxiang, 2022).

The study aims to address these gaps by examining the transformative potential of Yihuang Hegang dance through the lens of cultural inheritance and contemporary relevance. By elucidating its cultural significance and identifying effective promotional strategies, this research seeks to provide comprehensive guidance for the future development and preservation of Yihuang Hegang dance.

### Contemporary Value of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance

#### Cultural Heritage and Identity

Hegang Dance is a vital part of the cultural identity of the Jiangxi Yihuang region. It encapsulates the historical and social narratives of the local community, acting as a living repository of cultural memory (Benson, 2011). As cultural heritage is increasingly recognized for its role in fostering community identity and continuity, Hegang Dance stands out as a crucial element in preserving and promoting local traditions (Wang, 2020).

#### Artistic Expression and Education

Hegang Dance offers substantial value in the realm of artistic expression and education. It provides a medium through which dancers can explore and convey complex emotional and cultural narratives. The dance's intricate movements and rhythms contribute to its aesthetic appeal and educational potential, offering rich material for academic and practical exploration in dance education (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Furthermore, it helps in the holistic development of students by enhancing their physical coordination, cultural knowledge, and artistic skills (Benson, 1975).

#### Psychological and Social Benefits

Participating in Hegang Dance can yield significant psychological and social benefits. Studies have shown that engagement in traditional dances can reduce anxiety and enhance mental well-being (Bourne, 2018). The communal aspect of Hegang Dance fosters social cohesion and provides a sense of belonging and shared identity among participants (Scaini et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in contemporary society, where such traditional communal activities can counteract the isolating effects of modern lifestyles (Craig Usher, 2021).

### **Promotion Path of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance**

#### **Education and Curriculum Integration**

Integrating Hegang Dance into educational curricula at various levels can effectively promote its practice and appreciation. This includes incorporating the dance into physical education programs, cultural studies, and extracurricular activities. Educational institutions can play a pivotal role in sustaining and propagating traditional arts by fostering an early appreciation and understanding among students (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

#### **Community Engagement and Events**

Community engagement is essential for the promotion of Hegang Dance. Organizing festivals, workshops, and performances can stimulate interest and participation in the dance. These events provide platforms for showcasing the dance to wider audiences, thereby enhancing its visibility and appeal. Additionally, involving local communities in these activities can help preserve the authenticity and integrity of the dance traditions (Wang, 2020).

#### **Digital Media and Technology**

Leveraging digital media and technology offers a modern pathway for promoting Hegang Dance. Creating high-quality video content, online tutorials, and virtual performances can reach global audiences and engage younger generations who are adept with digital platforms. Social media campaigns can also raise awareness and attract new enthusiasts (Benson, 2011).

#### **Government and Institutional Support**

Government and institutional support are crucial for the sustainable promotion of Hegang Dance. Policies and funding aimed at preserving intangible cultural heritage can provide the necessary resources for education, research, and promotional activities. Collaborative efforts between governmental bodies, cultural organizations, and educational institutions can create a supportive ecosystem for the dance's development (Scaini et al., 2022).

The contemporary value of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance is multifaceted, encompassing cultural heritage, artistic expression, and psychological well-being. Promoting this traditional art form requires a comprehensive approach that includes educational integration, community engagement, digital media utilization, and institutional support. By adopting these strategies, the rich cultural legacy of Hegang Dance can be preserved and appreciated by future generations.

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## 2. Objectives

To strengthen the cultural inheritance and protection of Yihuang Hegang dance, this study aims to explore its historical origins, contemporary significance, and the paths to perpetuate its unique characteristics. This research aims to provide guidance and valuable research references for the future development of Yihuang Hegang dance.

## 3. Research Methodology

### Scope of the Study

Content Scope, this study focuses on the historical origins, contemporary value, and promotion paths of Yihuang Hegang dance. Object Scope, the research targets "inheritors" of Yihuang Hegang dance, certified by relevant government departments, as well as music experts in Yihuang Hegang songs and editors of Yihuang County Annals. Area Scope, The study encompasses 1-2 towns and townships in Yihuang County, Jiangxi Province, and its surrounding areas. This study employs a multi-method approach to comprehensively investigate the historical origins, contemporary significance, and promotion strategies of Yihuang Hegang dance. The methodologies include:

### Field Research

1) Direct Observation: Immersing in local dance performances, workshops, and community events to observe the practice and contemporary context of Yihuang Hegang dance.

2) Participant Observation: Engaging actively in dance sessions and cultural activities to gain firsthand experience and insight into the cultural significance and community dynamics.

3) Interviews: Conducting structured interviews with local dancers, cultural experts, historians, and community leaders to gather qualitative data on the cultural values, social impacts, and contemporary adaptations of Yihuang Hegang dance.

#### 4. Results

##### Tracing the historical origin of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance



**Photo1:** Yihuang Hegang Dance folk artists

**Photo source:** Author of this article

Yihuang Hegang Dance, an integral part of China's intangible cultural heritage, is a traditional folk dance developed by local mountain dwellers who rhythmically cut firewood using Hegang knives. This dance, accompanied by folk activities, boasts a history of over 600 years. Originating from labor, it embodies the essence of rural life where production activities are spontaneous expressions reflecting the harmony between humans and nature. In earlier times, mountain dwellers primarily sustained themselves through woodcutting. During their journeys, they relieved loneliness through conversation, laughter, storytelling, and riddles. The dance involves striking poles with wooden knives, which over time evolved into various percussion techniques on different parts of the knife—front, back, head, bow, and handle—creating a range of rhythmic sounds. The poles are maneuvered by hand, on shoulders, or tilted on the ground, allowing for diverse movements and tricks. This culminates in a "bumper dance" of singing and dancing, providing leisure and entertainment during breaks from work or rest periods.

##### **The difference between Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance and other dances.**

Yihuang Hegang dance is an art form that combines song and dance. In the 1980s, it was included in "The Integration of Chinese Ethnic and Folk Dance · Jiangxi Volume." As an

independent dance theme, it stands out not only for its unique musical beats but also for its distinctive performance props. Unlike most traditional Chinese Han dances, which feature hand towel flowers, fans, silk, and floral elements as primary props, Yihuang Hegang dance incorporates people's labor tools—specifically Hegang knives and firewood—as its performance props. Moreover, these props serve dual roles, also functioning as musical instruments within the dance to maintain its rhythm.



**Photo2:** The author in Yihuang County local Hegang dancers to learn to shoot

### **Performance forms and artistic features of Yihuang Hegang Dance**

The performance forms of Yihuang Hegang dance include:

Antiphonal song: female singing male hit bar, male singing female hit bar, stop hitting bar after singing a paragraph of lyrics. While singing and dancing, the performers joined the formation in the performance, and the stripes also evolved into a pattern inserted in the ground, and formed the natural footsteps of the stripes dance movement. Its dance movement range is small, more square steps, the number of people can be more or less, with life, labor characteristics.

The artistic movements of Yihuang Hegang Dance encompass three main types: hand percussion actions, cereal bar position changes, and marching footsteps. Hand percussion actions in Hegang dance evolved from simple percussion with a firewood knife to more complex rhythms involving the front, back, handle, and grooves of the knife, synchronized with folk songs. This includes striking, touching, and brushing the firewood against surfaces to create distinct rhythmic patterns. Changes in cereal bar positions involve tilting them into the ground, carrying them on shoulders, holding them in hand, and executing rotations and

transformations. Various combinations include striking bars in unison, alternating between male and female performers, and halting percussion after singing a segment of lyrics. The three types of marching movements—general marching, single-straddle horse, and double-straddle horse—simulate walking on mountain paths, alternating between advancing, retreating, and crossing motions.

### **Essentials of action**

Yihuang Hegang dance is distinguished by its hand percussion Hegang actions, emphasizing the crucial role of wrist power. The use of wrist strength influences the distinct tones produced by striking and handling the props, highlighting the significance of rigorous wrist strengthening exercises. Mastering the use of these props requires substantial wrist strength accumulation to skillfully convey the rhythmic nuances and accurately express the emotional depth inherent in the dance.

### **Mood when performing Yihuang Hegang dance**

The emotions conveyed in Yihuang Hegang dance performances can be categorized into two main types. Firstly, performers express inner emotions, often cheerful and joyful, by varying the rhythm and intensity of their strikes on the stripes. Secondly, they convey messages verbally while singing, improvising lyrics that correspond to the rhythm of the dance. This includes humorous observations about their surroundings, such as mimicking mountains, objects, or people they encounter during the performance.

### **The contemporary value of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance**

Integrate the artistic form of Yihuang Hegang dance within the framework of social, cultural, and spiritual values to explore its connotations, significance, characteristics, emotional expressions, and contemporary relevance. This approach aims to achieve harmony between thematic elements and external environments, fostering group and social cohesion. By harnessing the cultural power of traditional Yihuang Hegang dance within local society, this study seeks to promote cultural consciousness, build cultural confidence, and encourage cultural self-improvement through detailed investigation.

### **The market value of Yihuang Hegang dance**

Yihuang Hegang, as an intangible cultural heritage, can transform into cultural resources by exploring its contemporary value and promotional strategies while emphasizing inheritance, protection, and innovation. This transformation can be achieved through several avenues: (1) Using "Literature to Promote Tourism" involves leveraging cultural resources to enhance local tourism, integrating Hegang dance performances into scenic attractions to create a cultural identity for tourism. (2) "Cultural Education" integrates traditional intangible cultural heritage with modern civilization, thereby enhancing the cultural literacy and identity of local residents. (3) "Literature in Development Promotion" utilizes culture and art to stimulate rural revitalization and economic growth, contributing to local economic development. Enriching the functions of Yihuang Hegang dance can lead to significant economic benefits.

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### **Path of Jiangxi Yihuang Hegang Dance Promotion**

To effectively promote the protection of intangible cultural heritage and foster the development of Yihuang Hegang dance culture, it is crucial to cultivate a strong sense of traditional folk-dance heritage and preservation. First, integrating modern new media technologies is essential to diversify the promotion of Yihuang Hegang dance culture. For instance, producing short videos of Yihuang Hegang dance and sharing them across platforms like TikTok can leverage the broad reach and rapid dissemination of new media to enhance the preservation of traditional folk dances. This approach particularly aims to engage and raise awareness among young people, thereby bolstering the social appeal of these dances and encouraging active participation in cultural promotion and protection efforts.

Secondly, local government departments should actively organize cultural outreach initiatives, such as bringing various traditional folk dances into urban areas and schools. These efforts enrich the pathways for transmitting Yihuang Hegang dance culture, continually enhancing the effectiveness of intangible cultural heritage protection. Such activities also aim to educate the public about the profound significance and value of preserving and advancing traditional folk-dance culture.

Thirdly, by leveraging cultural resources, traditional Yihuang Hegang dance can manifest its contemporary relevance. Adopting strategies like "literature-based tourism promotion" integrates these dances into scenic spots, establishing them as cultural landmarks for local tourism. Initiatives like "literature-based development promotion" and "literature-based educational promotion" further capitalize on these dances, generating substantial economic benefits while promoting cultural awareness, confidence, and self-improvement. These multidimensional approaches are essential to ensuring the high-quality and comprehensive promotion of Yihuang Hegang dance culture.



**Photo3:** Yihuang Hegang Dance performance co-created by the author

**Photo source:** The author created Yihuang Hegang dance

## 5. Discussion

The promotion and preservation of Yihuang Hegang dance as an intangible cultural heritage involve multifaceted strategies that integrate traditional cultural values with modern methodologies. According to Bai Li (2022), effective cultural heritage protection necessitates a robust understanding and appreciation of traditional folk-dance culture. Integrating modern new media technologies, such as utilizing platforms like TikTok for disseminating short videos of Yihuang Hegang dance, emerges as a pivotal strategy. This approach not only enhances the visibility and appeal of these cultural practices among contemporary audiences but also stimulates interest and participation, especially among younger demographics (Bai Li, 2022). Moreover, local government initiatives play a crucial role in fostering cultural awareness through public outreach activities. Fei Mingxiang (2022) argues that bringing traditional folk dances, including Yihuang Hegang dance, into urban settings and educational institutions contributes significantly to cultural enrichment and preservation efforts. These efforts serve to educate the public about the dances' cultural significance and reinforce their value as essential components of intangible cultural heritage (Fei Mingxiang, 2022).

Furthermore, the transformation of Yihuang Hegang dance into a contemporary cultural asset through initiatives like "literature-based tourism promotion" underscores its potential economic benefits. By integrating these dances into local tourism strategies and cultural branding, communities can capitalize on their cultural uniqueness to attract visitors and stimulate economic growth (Bai Li, 2022). Wang Chao (2021) discusses similar strategies where traditional dances contribute to cultural confidence and local development through tourism

initiatives. Such efforts not only preserve the authenticity of these dances but also contribute to local economic sustainability and cultural vitality (Wang Chao, 2021). In conclusion, the comprehensive approach outlined in this research underscores the importance of balancing traditional cultural values with modern promotional techniques to safeguard and promote Yihuang Hegang dance. By leveraging new media, enhancing educational outreach, and integrating cultural resources into economic development strategies, stakeholders can ensure the continued vitality and relevance of Yihuang Hegang dance in contemporary society (Yan Jin, 2021).

## **6. Conclusion**

Hegang Dance in Yihuang, Jiangxi Province served as a crucial medium for expressing the daily lives and emotional sentiments of early inhabitants, holding significant cultural importance. Every aspect of Yihuang Hegang dance reflects the local people's livelihoods, cultural milieu, national identity, customs, and values. It represents a collective expression of local wisdom and creative cultural achievements, embodying profound cultural connotations and values.

In summary, despite its simple form, Yihuang Hegang dance is rich in artistic expression. It provides spiritual and aesthetic enjoyment to local communities, serves as an outlet for exploring life's meaning, and prominently displays the region's distinctive historical and cultural characteristics. It carries profound cultural implications and a value system worthy of preservation. Understanding the artistic culture of Yihuang Hegang dance is essential to appreciate its charm fully. While this paper has proposed suggestions for enhancing the contemporary relevance and promoting the Yihuang Hegang dance, it acknowledges that further exploration by scholars is necessary to comprehensively address all aspects. Currently, the primary challenge facing Yihuang Hegang dance is its survival and development amid the pressures of modernization, which risks altering its traditional form and aesthetic appeal. Therefore, dedicated attention from scholars and experts is needed to safeguard its cultural and spiritual essence, ensuring continuity into the future.

Furthermore, the author aims to contribute to the diversity of national cultures and support the flourishing of Chinese cultural heritage through the exploration of Yihuang Hegang dance in this study.

## **7. Suggestion**

To ensure the survival and development of Yihuang Hegang Dance, future research should focus on its comprehensive documentation, including video recordings and detailed notes on choreography, to preserve its traditional form. Comparative studies with other traditional dances can highlight its unique cultural significance. The integration of modern technology, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), can create immersive educational experiences that attract contemporary audiences.

Sociocultural impact studies are essential to explore the dance's role in shaping community identity and its influence on modern social and cultural dynamics. Developing educational programs and outreach initiatives in schools and cultural institutions will increase awareness and appreciation among younger generations. Policy advocacy is crucial to secure financial support and legal protection for the dance, ensuring its preservation.

Innovative approaches to adapt the dance for contemporary audiences without compromising its traditional essence are needed to maintain its relevance. Encouraging interdisciplinary research combining anthropology, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies will provide a holistic understanding of Yihuang Hegang Dance's cultural importance and contribute to the broader appreciation and preservation of this valuable cultural heritage.

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