



วารสารธรรมเพื่อชีวิต

JOURNAL OF DHAMMA FOR LIFE

ISSN: 2822-048X

<https://soo8.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/dhammalife/index>

Original Research Article

Reflections on the Cultural Characteristics and Stage Creation of Lingnan Folk Dance

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ARTICLE INFO

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Keywords:

Lingnan Folk Dance; Cultural Characteristics; Stage Creation

Article history:

Received: 05/05/2024

Revised: 18/06/2024

Accepted: 16/07/2024

Available online: 28/09/2024

How to Cite:

Liu et al. (2024). Reflections on the Cultural Characteristics and Stage Creation of Lingnan Folk Dance. *Journal of Dhamma for Life*, 30(3), 491-501.

ABSTRACT

Lingnan folk dance is widely spread in the Lingnan region and its cultural core is Lingnan culture. Lingnan folk dance has a long history with deep cultural heritage, distinctive regional characteristics, rich dance varieties and unique movement language. At the same time, under the creation of generations of dance choreographers, many representative works of art have appeared. With the development of society, it is necessary to further analyse the cultural characteristics of Lingnan folk dance and sort out the choreographers and works created on the stage, so as to enhance the cultural identity of the society towards Lingnan folk dance and promote the sustainable development of Lingnan culture.

Introduction

Lingnan, in a broad sense, refers generally to the south of the Five Ridges, including Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Hong Kong, and Macau in China; in a narrower sense, it refers to Guangdong Province (Liu et al., 2024). However, when discussing Lingnan in terms of dance propositions, it is often viewed not only in terms of the geographical scope it confines but as an acronym for Lingnan culture (Chen, 2023; Liu et al., 2024). Lingnan folk dance is an important part of Lingnan culture and contains the cultural core of Lingnan (Zhang, 2022). The Lingnan folk dances in this study refer to the various types of folk dances circulating within the Lingnan region, mainly including those in both the field and stage arenas (Liu et al., 2024; Chen, 2023).

The Lingnan region contains three major ethnic groups, namely the Guangfu, Chaoshan, and Hakka, as well as the Li, Yao, Zhuang, and She ethnic minorities, which have each created a myriad of dance forms in the Lingnan region in the course of a long period of social and historical development (Liu et al., 2024). Under the influence of the unique natural ecological environment, diversified material production structure, and social lifestyle, Lingnan folk dance has been intermingled and evolved in a multifaceted and multidimensional way in the collision of different cultures (Chen, 2023; Zhang, 2022).

Lingnan folk dance creation can be understood as dance choreographers living in the Lingnan region or influenced by the regional culture, with the core objective of inheriting, promoting, and creatively transforming the Lingnan culture for dance creation activities (Liu et al., 2024). This kind of stage creation has a common identity, belonging, and value orientation to the Lingnan folk dance culture, and jointly promotes the development of Lingnan folk dance by constructing and excavating the Lingnan cultural characteristics and creating representative dance works of Lingnan (Chen, 2023; Liu et al., 2024).

Literature Review

The cultural significance of folk dances, particularly Lingnan folk dance, has been a subject of growing interest in dance studies. According to Liu et al. (2024), Lingnan folk dance is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of southern China, and it has evolved through the region's unique socio-cultural environment. These dances are representative of the indigenous, intuitive, and open characteristics that define Lingnan culture. Scholars have pointed out that Lingnan's geography, combined with its historical isolation from the Central Plains, has helped preserve its distinct cultural and artistic expressions (Liu et al., 2024).

Moreover, folk dances worldwide share a common theme of being intertwined with the community's daily life, as highlighted by Zhang (2022), who emphasizes that dance is not just a performance but also a means of communal storytelling. This resonates with the description of Lingnan folk dance, where ritualistic and celebratory practices play a crucial role in its cultural transmission. The choreographic developments of Lingnan folk dance further reinforce its significance as a dynamic art form that responds to both internal cultural needs and external artistic influences (Chen, 2023).

Objectives

1. To study the cultural characteristics of Lingnan folk dance.
2. To study the creation of Lingnan folk dances
3. To study the development path of Lingnan folk dance.

Scope of Research

1. Scope of the research population
The study population includes folk artists, choreographers and researchers of Lingnan folk dance.
2. Scope of research variables
To study the cultural characteristics, creation and social influence of Lingnan folk dance, mainly including the field and stage.
3. Time frame of the study
The research period starts from 2005 to 2024.

Research Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive **qualitative research methodology** to investigate the cultural characteristics and stage creation of Lingnan folk dance. The methodology consists of three primary approaches: **literature analysis**, **interview method**, and **observation method**, allowing for a thorough exploration of both historical and contemporary perspectives on Lingnan folk dance (Liu et al., 2024).

Literature Analysis

The first step of the research involved an extensive review of academic literature on Lingnan folk dance, as well as the broader contexts of Chinese folk dances and their cultural significance. This included examining historical texts, ethnographic studies, and artistic evaluations of folk dances within the Lingnan region. The literature review focused on understanding how the unique geographical, historical, and cultural influences of the Lingnan region shaped the development of its dance traditions (Liu et al., 2024). Key themes identified from this review include the indigenous nature of Lingnan dance, the integration of foreign influences due to Lingnan's historical role as a trade hub, and the evolution of dance forms in response to social changes. A major source of data was derived from databases such as China Knowledge Network, which provided access to critical Chinese studies on Lingnan culture and folk art forms. This literature analysis helped to frame the context of the research and identify significant gaps in the existing body of work, particularly in relation to the choreographic innovations of Lingnan folk dance in recent decades.

Interview Method

To gather qualitative data on the lived experiences and artistic insights of Lingnan folk dance practitioners, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a select group of folk artists, choreographers, and scholars. The interviewees were carefully chosen based on their

expertise in either performing or studying Lingnan folk dance, ensuring a deep understanding of both the practical and theoretical aspects of the dance form. The interviews explored topics such as.

The cultural symbolism embedded in Lingnan folk dance movements.

The creative process behind staging traditional dances in contemporary settings.

The challenges and strategies involved in preserving the authenticity of Lingnan folk dance while adapting it for modern audiences.

Data from the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The qualitative approach enabled a detailed exploration of the personal and cultural meanings attached to Lingnan folk dance and provided insights into how performers and choreographers navigate the balance between tradition and innovation.

Observation Method

The observation method was employed to study Lingnan folk dance in both its field and stage contexts. Field observations were conducted at local festivals and cultural events where folk dances are performed as part of community traditions. These observations focused on how Lingnan dance serves as a medium for community bonding, spiritual expression, and cultural continuity. For example, the research documented the ritualistic significance of dances like the Wo Lou Dance, which plays a role in agricultural celebrations and ancestral worship. In addition, the study involved observing stage performances of Lingnan folk dance, particularly those choreographed by professional dance troupes such as the Guangdong Opera and Dance Drama Theatre. These observations provided insights into the aesthetic choices made by choreographers to adapt traditional folk dances for contemporary audiences. Special attention was given to the use of costumes, props, and music, which are integral to the stylistic vocabulary of Lingnan folk dance.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from a combination of archival materials, audio-visual recordings of performances, and interview transcripts. The analysis process involved identifying recurring themes related to the cultural, historical, and performative elements of Lingnan folk dance. These themes were then cross-referenced with the literature to validate the findings and ensure that the interpretations aligned with the broader scholarly discourse on folk dance traditions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the research invited authoritative scholars in the field of Chinese folk dance to review and provide feedback on the data analysis. Their insights were instrumental in refining the conclusions drawn from the research, particularly in highlighting the significance of Lingnan's movement language and its impact on the broader discourse of Chinese dance.

Result

1. Characteristics of Lingnan Folk Dance

1.1 Cultural Characteristics of Lingnan Folk Dance

1.1.1 Native nature

Lingnan culture is essentially embodied as a kind of indigenous secular culture, which is determined by the production mode and life style of the Lingnan region. Lingnan culture is created by Lingnan people on the land of Lingnan, with its own soil, self-contained system and relative independence. This culture, despite many influences from the central and foreign cultures, has always maintained its regional indigeneity and absorbed nutrients from the central and foreign cultures to enrich and develop itself.

In addition, Lingnan is located in the southern frontier of China, separated by five mountains in the north and blocked by the sea in the south. In the ancient times when the traffic was not developed, it was a kind of geographically closed situation basically isolated from the Central Plains, and the Central Plains people basically did not know about Lingnan. This geographical environment, on the one hand, greatly limits the communication between Lingnan and the Central Plains, affecting the development of Lingnan's economy, politics and culture, on the other hand, the foreign influence is less, but also conducive to the formation and development of Lingnan's local culture, especially conducive to the accumulation of national culture, the formation of their own local ethnic characteristics, and easy to pass on. Most of the Lingnan folk dances are embodied in the life dances of various ethnic groups and folk families in Lingnan, and these dances are closely connected with various kinds of folklore activities. Most of these folklore has a deep historical and cultural origin and has been inherited and preserved from the ancient times, thus most of them still have a strong primitive cultural colour. For example, the Wo Lou Dance in Lian Tan Township, Yunan County, which has been passed down in the Nanjiang River Basin area, is a typical representative of Yunfu's ancient farming culture. The dance is a ritual of the ancient Luo Yue people to celebrate the harvest, pray for good weather and good harvest, and is a product of the combination of primitive witch culture and Nuo culture.

1.1.2 intuitive

Lingnan people's choice and preference for folk cultural activities, more intuitive way of perception, and less recourse to abstract concepts and rational discourse. They often use sensory enjoyment and affordable psychology to replace deep spiritual thinking, and thus that strong pursuit of fun, curiosity, plot and image of the small people's mood, has become the main body of Lingnan culture and entertainment. Lingnan culture from the content to the form of dynamic characteristics of change, this feature will make Lingnan culture is more difficult to form a deep cultural deposits and discursive results, but it can stimulate the life of the cultural organism, so that it continues to introduce new ideas to meet people's needs. The Lingnan people believe in ghosts and gods, and the ensuing rituals and forms of exorcising evil spirits, avoiding evil and praying for good fortune are even more numerous and complex, and the

simulation of making all kinds of totems and auspicious and sacred objects has become a common phenomenon in the folklore activities of the folk lineages of various ethnic groups in Lingnan. Lingnan folk dance, but all the animals in the world, no matter how ugly its original image, it can be beautified into the dance; and even originally no animals, it can be imagined, dressed up, choreographed into a dance. Among them, the dragon dance and lion dance are the most common. Another unicorn, brave, spring bull, dance deer, dance cats, dance dogs, dance chickens, dance geese, dance phoenix, dance cranes, dance centipedes and so on. These dances are intuitive, form and spirit, and they directly simulate the behaviour and form of animals, and the dances are funny and realistic.

Most of these dances originated from totem worship and beliefs, and later, with the development of society and to meet people's spiritual and cultural needs, they evolved from welcoming the gods and praying to the gods to entertaining the gods and people in various folk festivals. In addition, the performance of Xiao Yao Drums in Lianshan, northern Guangdong, also intuitively describes the labour process of building a house and erecting a roof through a series of dance movements, providing people with the most intuitive and dynamic image.

1.1.3 Openness

Since ancient times, Lingnan has been the earliest and largest important foreign trade port in China's history. The sea has brought Lingnan the advantage of openness, making Lingnan the window of China's foreign cultural exchanges. Some scholars have researched the transmission route of traditional folk dances in the Guangdong area and suggested that a part of the traditional folk dances in the Guangdong area spread from outside the province or from abroad. Among them, foreign refers to those formed by importation from foreign countries. For example, the camel dance of Chenghai was introduced from the Hu people in the western region. Of course, these issues are yet to be further examined in terms of their historical origin and evolution.

The openness of Lingnan folk dance is mainly manifested in three aspects. First of all, due to geographical factors, Lingnan around the social development is extremely uneven, from Nuo witch dance, square folkloric amusement, to stage art performances, as well as a very modern commercial atmosphere of entertainment songs and dances, so that the Lingnan folk dance presents a colourful, lively and energetic. Secondly, it manifests itself as the coexistence of various opposing heterogeneous cultures, and some of them even directly carry out cultural grafting and bring them for my use. This quality is commonly seen in all levels of Lingnan folk dance. For example, in the backstage parade of Chaoshan Yingge Dance, the ancient dresses, sunglasses and western-style clothes reflect each other, and the modern and ancient characters walk hand in hand; the lion dance, unicorn dance, and bravery dance, etc. are developed based on the initiative of learning from the outside world and combining with one's own speciality. Thirdly, the people of Lingnan have moved around the world. For example, today you can see jumping fish lanterns in remote mountainous areas; you can see English singing and dancing teams in the Leizhou Peninsula, thousands of miles away from Chaoshan. Even in Southeast Asian countries, one can see the folk songs and dances from Lingnan. All these show that Lingnan folk dance culture is not conservative, has no scruples, and dares to be tolerant of cultural gestures.

1.2 The Special Nature of Lingnan Folk Dance

1.2.1 Movement Language

From the ontological level of Lingnan folk dance, the composition of its special nature is mainly the movement language. The essence of Lingnan folk dance is Lingnan culture, and Lingnan folk dance works should embody regional flavour, Lingnan characteristics and life atmosphere. The colour of Lingnan folk dance is the Lingnan style of dance vocabulary, and the movement language with unique Lingnan characteristics is the most fundamental mark that distinguishes Lingnan folk dance from other dances. For example, the typical dance movements of the Chaoshan Ying Song are based on the pace and form of the Southern School of Wushu's short strikes, using the double sticks for direct sparring, or simulated strikes with imaginary objects, and consisting of small combinations of two or more people (usually in even numbers), which form the backbone of the dance section. At the same time, led by the head, the second stick and the snake charmer, the double stick in striking at the same time, driven by the wrist for continuous rolling, forming a continuous "stick flower", through running and jumping interspersed with large open and closed formation of dance, forming a strong rhythm, showing a picture of a heart-wrenching, fierce red-hot battle, so that people deeply feel the masculinity, virility and power of the dance, which makes people feel that they have a strong and strong sense of honour. It makes people deeply feel the shock of masculine, robust, yet rough and simple beauty. Another example, the Hailufeng money drum, row Yao long drum, the Pearl River Delta lion, Hakka cup flower dragon, western Guangdong Nuo dance and other forms of action, these existing dance, are in the Lingnan folklore, life, labour and gradually accumulated, evolved, when they constitute a relatively stable human movement symbol system, it naturally shows the difference between the nature of other dance specificity.

1.2.2 Other elements

For Lingnan folk dances, costumes, props and music have become an important extended part of the dance vocabulary, and they play a very important role in presenting the time, environment, place and characters in which the dance takes place. For example, the Chaoshan Ying Song borrows face paint and costumes to highlight the image and character portrayed in the dance. The Lingnan region includes not only Han Chinese but also some ethnic minorities, and the costumes of each region have their own local characteristics. In folklore, costumes often highlight the cultural and regional characteristics. On the other hand, the costumes also restrict the linguistic categories of the dances.

Secondly, among the animal dances of Lingnan folklore, there are hundreds of dragon dances, lion dances, unicorn dances, centipede dances, double-bitten goose dances, rooster dances, and so on. Most of these dances need props to perform, and it is the props as the core of the actual form of the dance, which constitutes the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of this part of the dance.

Thirdly, music and dance are often referred to as sister arts by scholars, and the music of different regions and nationalities often shows strong local cultural characteristics. The soundtracks of Lingnan folk dances contain roughly three kinds of music: Yue music (Cantonese music), Chao music (Teochew music) and Han music (Hakka Han music). In addition, there are also Hakka mountain songs with local characteristics, salty water songs from Zhongshan, tea-

picking tunes from northern Guangdong, and Leizhou songs from western Guangdong. These music and dance with strong Lingnan characteristics combine together to become an important part of the Lingnan folk dance vocabulary and a clear sign of style characteristics.

2. Stage Creation of Lingnan Folk Dance

2.1 The creation of Lingnan folk dance

2.1.1 Creation by theatre groups

As a professional team of Lingnan folk dance choreographers, the creative outlook and level of the troupe is in a sense an important parameter to measure the creation of Lingnan folk dance. For example, Guangdong Opera and Dance Drama Theatre has been adhering to the fine tradition of excavating Lingnan cultural materials, using art forms to display Lingnan customs, portraying the spirit of Lingnan people, and has created and rehearsed a series of Lingnan folk dance classics, such as the dance drama "Evening Breeze at the Cavalcade", "Shawan Past", and the dance "Raining Basho". Dance choreographer not only has the first Lingnan folk dance Liang Lun, but also Chen Qun, Huang Jianqiang, Wen Zhenya, Wang Yeol and other famous artists, Chen Jun, Li Nansuan, Gu Wenhao, Cui Huilin and other follow up the strength of the institution, as well as outside the invitation of Wang Gege, Zhou Leah, Han Zhen and other well-known choreographers in the country. Under the leadership of Chen Qiao, Guangdong Southern Song and Dance Troupe aims at discovering, inheriting, creating and rehearsing Chinese folk song and dance programmes with Lingnan characteristics, developing the art of ethnic minority songs and dances, rooting itself in the ethnic areas, drawing materials from life, and creating and adapting a large number of dance works with a strong local flavour, a unique ethnic style and distinctive characteristics of the times. In the early days, there were "The Third of March", "Grass Hat Dance", "Delivering Food with Joy" and so on. Recently, there are dance "over the mountain Yao", sound and dance poetry and painting "Yao Mountain Reflections", etc. Gao Bo, Sun Shan, Qiu Huasong, Qin Yanping, etc. as the representative of the Guangdong Southern Song and Dance Dance Troupe choreographers. Guangzhou Song and Dance Drama Theatre gathered talents and formed the Lingnan folk dance choreographers of Guangzhou Song and Dance Drama Theatre represented by Shi Qianjin, Wang Zhongsheng, Zhang Ling, Liu Feitong, Yang Hongbin, Qian Xin, Wang Sisi, etc. They created and performed a large number of excellent Lingnan works such as the dance drama "Wake up the Lion", the dance poem "Walking on the South of the Yangtze River" and the dance "House of Siege - Woman", etc., which made efforts and contribution to the carrying forward of the traditional culture of the south of Lingnan River, the inheritance and development of Lingnan River, and the publicity and promotion of Lingnan River culture. We will make efforts and contributions to the promotion of Lingnan culture.

2.1.2 Institutional creation

Institutional choreographers, as a team that cannot be ignored in the development of Lingnan folk dance, undertake the cultivation of Lingnan folk dance creative talents, creative practice and scientific research. South China Normal University, represented by Wang Haiying, led by Zheng Suping, Wang Hong, Wang Yibo, Zeng Minghui, Liu Yan and so on, has formed a

dance education, creation, inheritance and research group with the characteristics of Lingnan Normal University. They "pick from the folk, research in the classroom, create on the stage", in recent years have collected and extracted Lingnan folk dance materials, organised non-heritage dance into the classroom activities, they have created "Shouting Yao Mountain", "Heroic Flower" and other works. Xinghai Conservatory of Music, School of Dance is the largest and most complete dance department in Guangdong Province among the universities and colleges, and it has long been taking the inheritance of excellent Lingnan folk dance culture as its responsibility to carry out creative and practical work. Represented by Li Xiaoyan, she led Hu Snap, Tan Hongtao, Xiao Ruilian, Huang Si, Jia Donglin, Zhang Chuan, etc. to form a professional college dance choreography. They have created a small dance theatre "Southern Lion Dream", dance "Thirteen Houses. Impression", "Tidal Wave" and other works, and held large-scale original Lingnan folk dance works such as "Wind Rises from the South of Ling", "Wind Comes from the South of Ling", and "Don't Quit Being a Long-Time Lingnan Man", and other large-scale original folk dance works of Lingnan for exhibition and performance activities. Guangdong Dance and Drama Vocational College (Guangdong Dance School) is the second professional dance school established in new China. Under the leadership of Li Yongxiang, as the earliest professional college in Guangdong to carry out teaching, creation and research of Lingnan folk dance, it has played an important role in the development of the creation of Lingnan folk dance, and a group of creative talents such as Lu Yumei, Wang Peng, Lin Weijia, Ding Ran and so on have successively created the "Dance up", "Echoing - Ma Ma" and other large-scale original folk dance works. Dance up", "Echo - Mashi Street", "Raining Banana", "Prayer", "Nuo dance sad song" and a large number of Lingnan folk dance works. In addition, Zhao Yan and Zhang Yuelong of Shenzhen University, Chen Yanmin and Du Enyu of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Liu Bo of South China University of Technology, Chen Lufang, Park Hongmei and Liu Weiyu of Guangdong Province Vocational College of Foreign Languages and Arts, and Wang Kai of Guangzhou Polytechnic Institute are all representatives of the choreographers of Lingnan Folk Dance Colleges and Universities. Their works "Ridge on the Sun", "Back to Back", "Mountain Girl", "Past Events in Northern Guangdong" all interpret the Lingnan folk dance culture from various perspectives.

2.2 Development Path of Lingnan Folk Dance

2.2.1 Establishment of division of labour and collaboration mechanism

If only the people living in the Lingnan region who are engaged in dance creation activities are categorised as Lingnan folk dance choreographers, then this way of defining is no longer able to meet the development of Lingnan folk dance, nor is it in line with the reality of Lingnan folk dance choreographers' requirements, and it has become a constraint on the revival of the development of Lingnan folk dance. Lingnan folk dance choreographers should include people engaged in dance creation activities living in the Lingnan region and influenced by regional culture. For example, Zhou Liya and Han Zhen, the choreographers and directors of the dance drama "Shawan Past", do not live in the Lingnan region, but their creations are influenced by the Lingnan regional culture, and they extracted Cantonese music "Sai Long Jie Jin", "Raining Basho", and incorporated elements of Guangdong English songs and dances into their creations, thus realising the creative transformation of the Lingnan culture, which gives people the artistic sensation of overlooking the beautiful landscapes of the South, feeling the

rainy air of the Lingnan region, and listening to the melodious music of the Lingnan region. It is an artistic feeling of the Lingnan culture. Therefore, it should be included in the "circle" of Lingnan folk dance choreography, and in the future, we should open the door of the "circle" to attract excellent choreographers from all over the country and even the world to join Lingnan folk dance choreography in an accommodating attitude, so as to expand the "circle". While increasing the scale of the "circle", the cultural connotation of the "circle" should be continuously enriched. Gathering a group of dance choreographers who take inheritance, promotion and creative transformation of Lingnan culture as the core objective of dance creation, under the common Lingnan cultural identity, belonging and value orientation, in order to build and excavate the Lingnan folk dance brand which belongs to the characteristics of Lingnan culture. At the same time, a reasonable division of labour and collaboration should be established in the creative mechanism, to pay attention to and cultivate the new generation of Lingnan folk dance choreographers, the future belongs to the younger generation. Actively guide the new generation of groups to the older generation of Lingnan folk dance choreographers to learn, learn from the experience and nutrients of the previous generation, to achieve vertical inheritance and development, and even between different regional dance choreographers should learn from each other and exchange, and based on their own group strengths, to make up for the shortcomings of the reasonable division of labour and collaboration, and jointly promote the development of the Lingnan folk dance choreographers to grow and develop.

2.2.2 Inherit, promote and innovate Lingnan culture

Lingnan folk dance choreography has a team, there is a goal to monitor the map, more should inherit and innovate Lingnan culture. Firstly, it is necessary to excavate, extract and transform the dance materials and vocabulary of Lingnan regional characteristics, and construct dance forms, dynamic characteristics and aesthetic paradigms belonging to the Lingnan style. The typical dance movement vocabulary and symbols of Lingnan should be applied to the creative practice of Lingnan folk dance. Secondly, dance should be used as a medium to promote Lingnan traditional culture. Lingnan folk dance choreography as Lingnan folk

Discussion

The results indicate that Lingnan folk dance remains a vital cultural artifact within both the local and global cultural landscape. Its native character ensures the preservation of traditional values, while its intuitive and open characteristics allow for adaptation and reinterpretation in modern contexts. As such, Lingnan folk dance can be understood as both a reflection of regional identity and a vehicle for cultural diplomacy. The results further suggest that the diversity of movement language in Lingnan dance provides a robust platform for exploring new narratives in dance choreography, blending tradition with innovation (Zhang, 2022).

Conclusion

This research confirms that Lingnan folk dance embodies significant cultural, historical, and artistic elements that contribute to its continued relevance in modern society. Its regional specificity, combined with its adaptability, positions it as an important form of cultural expression that continues to evolve. Future research could expand on the specific choreographic elements of Lingnan folk dance and investigate how this form interacts with other global folk dance traditions.

Recommendations

Cultural Preservation Programs

More extensive efforts should be undertaken to document and archive Lingnan folk dances, especially those at risk of being forgotten due to modernization.

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Choreographers, cultural historians, and ethnographers should collaborate to enhance the preservation and promotion of Lingnan folk dance on international platforms.

Educational Integration

Lingnan folk dance should be introduced into educational curricula in southern China to promote cultural pride and continuity among younger generations.

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