

Traditional Dance Heritage of Southeast Shanxi Province China

Hou Jinfang¹ & Nurulakmal Abdul Wahid²
 Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
 e-mail: y623012195@qq.com¹, nurulakmal@fmsp.upsi.edu.my²

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Abstract

Traditional dance holds a significant place not only in the realm of artistic expression but also in the preservation of a community's cultural identity and heritage. As societies worldwide strive to safeguard their cultural heritage, traditional dance has emerged as a crucial field of study. This study focuses on the traditional dance heritage of southeast Shanxi province, China. This study uses ethnographic research methods to investigate the traditional dances and culture of Southeast Shanxi. By synthesizing academic research, this study aims to develop effective practices in traditional dance to ensure the continued preservation and appreciation of traditional dance forms as essential components of cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural heritage, *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, protection, traditional dance

Introduction

Cultural heritage was first addressed in international law in 1907, and a body of international treaties and texts for its protection has been developed by UNESCO and other intergovernmental organizations since the 1950s (Janet Blake, 2013). Lots of research implemented around the world demonstrates that preservation of cultural heritage enhances environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability. Cultural heritage can contribute towards the well-being and quality of life of communities, can help to mitigate the impacts of cultural globalization, and can become an incentive for sustainable economic development (*Indrè Gražulevičiūtė*, 2006). Therefore, the implementation of cultural heritage and the relevant application and protection strategies on a global scale are effective means to conform to the trend of globalization and protect cultural diversity.

In January 2017, the general office of the CPC Central Committee and the general office of the State Council issued the opinions on carrying out the inheritance and development project of Chinese excellent traditional culture. This opinion points out the importance, necessity, and urgency of inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture and has made a detailed deployment to protect and inherit cultural heritage. It takes "increasing publicity and education efforts" as an important task. Therefore, it is necessary not only to protect cultural heritage but also to inherit it effectively and spread it from generation to generation (Wang, 2018).

Being an indispensable part of our folk tradition, the traditional dance bears elements of our cultural tradition and heritage and passes them down from generation to generation. Therefore, it contributes substantially to the reinforcement of our cultural identity and plays a crucial role in the 'cultural development' of our society (Georgios & Lykesas, 2018). It can be seen that traditional dance is part of the cultural heritage, which deserves more attention from us and should be passed on to future generations.

Methodology

This study follows the principles of Ethnographic methods. Ethnography is not only a research method but also a process and result of cultural display. It uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human society. Ethnographic methods are a means of tapping local points of view, households, and community “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Greenberg, 1990), a means of identifying significant categories of human experience up close and personal. Ethnography enhances and widens top-down views and enriches the inquiry process, taps both bottom-up insights and perspectives of powerful policymakers “at the top,” and generates new analytic insights by engaging in interactive, team exploration of often subtle arenas of human difference and similarity. Through such findings, ethnographers may inform others of their findings with an attempt to derive, for example, policy decisions or instructional innovations from such an analysis. This study goes deep into the southeast of Shanxi Province to study traditional dance, obtain first-hand information, comprehensively observe and participate in the study of traditional dance, and analyze the ontology and culture of traditional dance with qualitative research.

Gaoping nine lotus lamp

There are many kinds of traditional dances in the southeast of Shanxi Province. One of the important traditional dances in Southeast Shanxi Province is the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp. *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is a form of traditional dance that originated in *Gaoping* city and is known for its unique dance style and complex dance formation. According to a study by Hou (2018), the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp dance is a form of cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations of performers in Southeast Shanxi Province and is an important part of the region's cultural identity.



Figure 1. *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp (Source: Researcher collection)

Performing form

The *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp has local characteristics in the art performance, smooth arrangement, beautiful dance steps, harmonious music collocation, and its singing involves a wide range of content, has a strong appreciation and performance, and a wide range of popularity. During the performance, the body's center of gravity is tilted forward, the upper body takes twisting, swinging, and shaking as the main motion law, and the lower body takes various steps to match the dancing of the upper body. The dance lamp is the main means of performance of the nine lotus lamps; the upper body dance lamp movements are sliding lamp, swinging lamp, around lamp, shaking lamp, turning lamp, split lamp, big flower, small flower, male and female flower, etc. The main steps at the foot of the three steps are a jump, cross step, toe step, jumping step, front point step, pad step, tuck leg step, etc. Performers holding lanterns and dancing, eyes with the lights, lights with the pedestrian, sometimes like floating on the water quietly, sometimes like a meteor shower cutting the sky, climaxing and such as waves, dazzling actors with "wear lights such as shuttle" performance to show the nine lotus lights

"floating on the water, flying on the ground" wonderful place (Hou, 2018). The *Gaoping* Nine Lotus Lamp is a popular traditional dance form in the *Gaoping* area. There are temporary *Gaoping* Nine Lotus Lamp performance teams in many places in *Gaoping*.

Performance characteristics

The *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp spread for more than 300 years and formed its unique dance characteristics. Using the ethnographic research method, taking root in *Gaoping*, after a long period of observation and research, found some performance characteristics of the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp.

First of all, due to the large performance venue, the steps of the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp need to be mainly running. At the same time, running requires steady and light running, which emphasizes the solid basic skills and body coordination of the actors. The *Gaoping* Jiulian Lantern will attract the audience's attention and win the audience's applause in the light and smooth performance, bringing the audience a happy and joyful mood.

Secondly, the movement route of the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is carried out on the circle, and all formations are changed based on the circle, such as "yi wo feng," "jianzi gu," "shuangkai men," etc. Each formation expresses different emotions. The variety of formations makes the whole dance full of vitality. As shown in the figure below.

The third feature is the coexistence of song and dance. The *Gaoping* Nine Lotus Lamp is a typical traditional dance while singing and dancing. During the performance, local folk tunes will be added to sing about the happy life of the people and express the quality of life of the people in the new era, giving a sense of the times.



Figure 2. Yi Wo Feng movement (Source: Researcher collection)

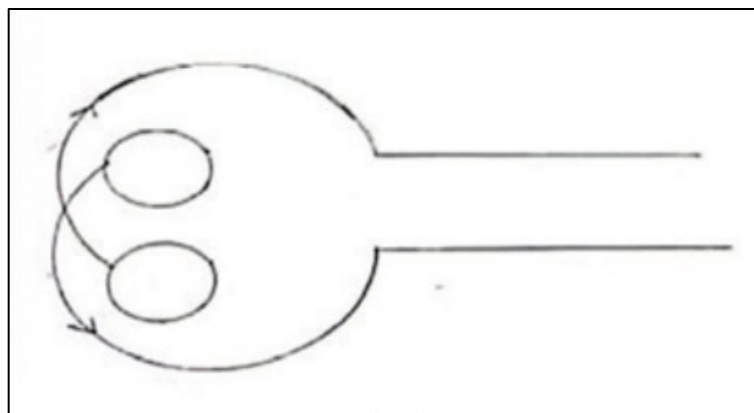


Figure 3. Jianzi gamesmen route (Source: Researcher collection)

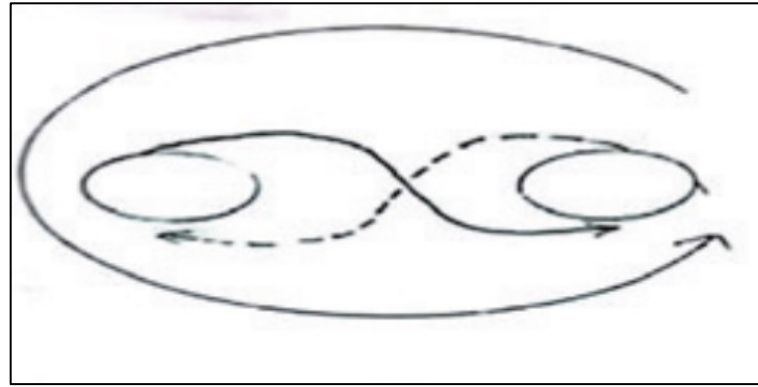


Figure 4. Shuangkai men movement route (Source: Researcher collection)

Cultural Value

Culture is a kind of social phenomenon, which is the product of long-term creation by people. At the same time, it is a historical phenomenon and the accumulation of social history. *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp have their unique local characteristics and rich expression, reflecting the cultural wisdom and spiritual creation of the local people. *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is not only affected by the geographical environment, but also the influence of social and cultural environment is crucial to its production and development. According to a study by Fu (2022), Yan Emperor culture, farming culture, folk culture, Jin Shang culture and other different social and cultural forms, through the influence and restriction of the dance style, determine the source, function, and form of the nine-lotus lamp. Ancestor worship under the infiltration of Yan Di culture. The plot of land under the influence of farming culture. The mysterious color promoted by folk culture. The harmonious aesthetics under the promotion of Jin Shang culture.

In a word, *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp has a long history and deep tradition, and many dance performance contents accumulated by it are passed down. It not only has the performance, artistry, and appreciation of dance art, but also provides a relatively fresh form for the cognition and aesthetic research of local culture. It is the most accurate historical data for studying the history of local people's civilization and spiritual life. *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is a traditional dance worthy of protection and inheritance, which should be widely studied by young people and passed down from generation to generation.

Results

At present, the contemporary people's entertainment has undergone a qualitative change, the impact of multi-culture has affected the aesthetic appreciation of young people, few of whom are willing to take the initiative to learn and inherit this folk art, so the inheritance and development of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp has come to a precarious situation. First of all, the existing old artists are generally aging, and the representative inheritors have died one after another, and the problem of no successor is particularly prominent. Secondly, *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is now in a state of natural development, and the cultural chain of art itself is not strong enough and extremely fragile. Most of them are spontaneous organizations of the masses, lacking scientific inheritance system and development ideas, and the humanistic spirit of dance culture is relatively empty. Finally, the research of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is also very scarce, and it is only briefly discussed from the current situation, source and development, and the level of intangible heritage protection (Fu, 2022). In addition,

Gaoping City Cultural Center has initially established a long-term plan for the rescue of folk cultural heritage, including *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp.

After a series of investigation and analysis, the difficulties facing nine lotus lamps in the process of protection and inheritance are: insufficient funds and insufficient government investment in protection; Inheriting artists face the danger of discontinuity and loss; The influence of foreign culture (Chen, 2020). The protection of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is very important and worthy of modern people's attention, so it is very meaningful research to traditional dance heritage in southeast Shanxi.

The researcher obtained information from *Gaoping* Cultural Center or relevant government departments, such as the decline in youth participation in *Gaoping* *Jiulian* Lantern, the aging of inheritors, and the lack of academic research, which will be presented in the form of a table. As shown in Table 1, the age distribution data of the participants in the activity.

Table 1. Age distribution of participants in the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp event

Changes in the proportion of young people participating in <i>Gaoping</i> nine lotus lamp (2010-2024)			
Year	Proportion of participants aged 18-30 (%)		Remarks
2010	35%		High level of youth participation
2015	25%		Significant impact of foreign culture
2020	15%		Rise of digital entertainment
2024	10%		May decline further without intervention

Obtain the age information of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp inheritors from *Gaoping* City Cultural Center or Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center, and use Table 2 to present the aging ratio of practitioners.

Table 2. Age distribution of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp practitioners

Age distribution of <i>Gaoping</i> nine lotus lamp practitioners (2023)			
Age group	Practitioner ratio (%)		Remarks
20-40 years old	10%		Young practitioners are scarce.
40-60 years old	30%		Middle-aged practitioners are the main force.
Above 60 years old	60%		The aging problem is serious.

Through domestic academic databases such as CNKI, *Wanfang* Data, and VIP, we searched for the number of research papers on the theme of "*Gaoping* nine lotus lamp." Through international academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, we searched for the number of related English papers. We conducted a statistical analysis of the search results and compared the differences in the number of domestic and foreign research. The details are presented in the following Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of academic research related to the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp

Comparison of academic research related to the <i>Gaoping</i> Nine Lotus Lamp (2010-2024)			
Year	Number of domestic research papers (articles)	Number of international research papers (articles)	Remarks
2010	5	1	Research is in its infancy.
2015	10	2	Research is gradually increasing.
2020	15	3	Domestic research is growing rapidly.
2024	20	5	There is still a large gap in international research.

Through the presentation of tables and charts, we can clearly see that 1) The proportion of youth participation has been declining year by year, from 35% in 2010 to 10% in 2024; 2) The aging problem of

practitioners is serious, and practitioners over 60 years old account for as high as 60%; 3) There is a gap in academic research; although the amount of domestic research has increased, international research is still insufficient. These data intuitively reflect the core problems faced by *Gaoping* Jiuhe Lantern in inheritance and development and provide a strong basis for the formulation of targeted policies. In the face of the above challenges, suggestions for the protection and inheritance of the *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp are provided.

Discussion

As an important traditional dance cultural heritage in southeast Shanxi, *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp faces multiple challenges such as inheritance gap, insufficient funds, and cultural impact. In order to effectively protect and inherit this folk art, specific countermeasures need to be formulated from multiple levels, such as government support, inheritance system construction, cultural promotion, and research.

First, strengthen government support and capital investment. The government should set up a "*Gaop* in Lamp Lo Lamp Protection and Inheritance Special Fund" to support the living security of old artists, the training of inheritors, the organization of cultural activities, and the development of related research projects. At the same time, the protection and inheritance of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp should be included in the long-term planning of local cultural development, the responsible departments should be clarified, and phased goals should be formulated to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the policy. Tax incentives or subsidies should also be provided to enterprises, social organizations or individuals involved in the protection and inheritance of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp to encourage social forces to participate.

Second, establish a scientific inheritance system. Through the "mentor-apprentice system" or "inheritor training class" and other methods, select the younger generation of inheritors, provide systematic dance skills training and cultural theory learning, and ensure the continuation of skills. In addition, modern technologies (such as 3D modeling, motion capture, etc.) are used to digitally record the dance movements, music, costumes, etc. of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, and a complete database is established to facilitate learning and research by future generations. The "*Gaoping* nine lotus lamp Inheritance Base" is established in *Gaoping* City as a center for skill teaching, cultural display and academic research to attract more young people to participate.

Third, promote cultural education and popularization. Incorporate the relevant knowledge of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp into the local curriculum system, and let students contact and understand this traditional art from an early age through art classes, interest classes or club activities. In addition, *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp performances are regularly held in communities and villages, combined with opportunities such as festivals and cultural festivals to enhance the cultural identity of the masses. You can also use new media channels such as short video platforms (such as Douyin, Kuaishou) and social media (such as WeChat, Weibo) to produce popular science videos and documentaries of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp to expand its influence.

Fourth, strengthen academic research and theoretical support. Encourage colleges and universities and scientific research institutions to conduct in-depth research on the historical origins, artistic characteristics, and cultural values of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp to form systematic theoretical results. Regularly hold academic seminars related to *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, and invite experts and scholars from home and abroad to discuss strategies for its protection and inheritance. Organize the historical data, dance skills, inheritance stories and other contents of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, and publish a series of cultural books as reference materials for popularization and research.

Fifth, cultural innovation and integration. On the basis of maintaining the traditional characteristics of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, try to combine it with modern dance, music, stage technology and other elements to create works that conform to contemporary aesthetics and attract young audiences. Make *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp a local cultural brand, and enhance its economic value and cultural influence through cultural tourism and cultural and creative product development. In addition, through publicity and education activities, enhance the cultural identity and pride of local residents in *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, and resist the excessive impact of foreign culture.

Sixth, improve social participation and cultural exchange. Encourage enterprises, social organizations and individuals to participate in the protection and inheritance of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp, and form a diversified protection mechanism of "government-led and social participation". In addition, *Gaoping* nine lotus

lamp is regarded as an important part of traditional culture and actively participates in cultural exchange activities to enhance its popularity.

The protection and inheritance of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp is a long-term and systematic project that requires the joint efforts of the government, society, academia and the public. The implementation of the above policies can not only effectively alleviate the current difficulties, but also inject new vitality into this traditional art, making it shine with new brilliance in modern society. It is hoped that all sectors of society can attach great importance to it and contribute to the inheritance and development of *Gaoping* nine lotus lamp.

In recent years, there has been a growing concern about the disappearance of traditional dances in different parts of the world. This is due to various factors, including changing societal values, urbanization, and globalization (Chen, 2019). Therefore, preserving traditional dances has become a critical issue, and several initiatives have been launched to conserve and promote this cultural heritage. It is evident that this research can contribute to the preservation and promotion of traditional dances in the region. Southeast Shanxi Province is a culturally rich region of China that has a long history of traditional dance. This study can help preserve the region's cultural heritage by passing down knowledge and skills to future generations.

Apart from this, this study can also contribute to the economic development of the region. By promoting traditional dance as a cultural attraction, it can bring in tourism revenue and create job opportunities for residents (Brouder & Teixeira, 2015). The traditional dance can also help in the development of the cultural industries in the region, which can contribute to the overall economic growth of the area.

Finally, by learning about traditional dance, students can develop skills in dance, music, and performance, and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural practices and values of the region (Liu, Zhou & Xiao, 2020). This can provide them with a unique educational experience and create opportunities for personal growth.

In summary, the cultural heritage of traditional dance in Southeast Shanxi Province can preserve culture, promote cultural sensitivity, and provide educational implications. It helps preserve unique customs, promotes cultural pride, and encourages students to engage with their heritage. Additionally, it can foster cultural diplomacy by creating ties with other regions and countries interested in traditional dance.

Conclusion

Traditional dance has the characteristics of "living" inheritance and great dependence on the specific natural and humanistic ecological environment (Liao, 2018). On the one hand, the survival wisdom of the social group in the specific cultural space and the cultural emotion of the national community are accumulated. On the other hand, as a kind of living culture, its practicability and usability make it have the tool value of promoting the development of students and the whole cultural society (Li, 2019).

The traditional dance in southeast Shanxi has also played a positive role in the local social and economic development, which can revitalize the local unique national culture, engender national characteristics in education, and make the traditional dance in southeast Shanxi glow with new vitality and vitality. The society calls on youth groups, especially college students, to pay attention to the cultural traditions of social public space and pay attention to the inheritance and development of traditional dance in local culture. Only in this way can we truly popularize the knowledge of traditional dance, train the professionals of traditional dance in southeast Shanxi, and then improve the level of protection and inheritance. At the same time, it is also conducive to promoting the development of local tertiary industry economy and the prosperity and development of local cultural undertakings.

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