

A Study on the Inheritance and Protection Strategies of Yunnan Dai Dance

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Abstract

This study focuses on the inheritance and protection of Yunnan Dai dance, a representative intangible cultural heritage of China, which carries the historical memories, nature-worship beliefs, and aesthetic wisdom of the Dai people. Against the backdrop of globalization and modernization, Dai dance is confronted with such challenges as inheritance discontinuity (intergenerational gaps), commercial alienation, and limited dissemination channels. By adopting methods of literature review, field investigation, case analysis, and comparative study, this paper systematically sorts out the artistic characteristics, current inheritance situation, and existing problems of Yunnan Dai dance, and extracts core artistic elements and practical experiences from successful cases (including university teaching reform, new media communication, and the **integration** of culture and tourism).

Ultimately, this study constructs a four-dimensional inheritance and puts forward specific implementation strategies. It aims to promote the transformation of Yunnan Dai dance from “static protection” to “dynamic inheritance”, not only providing a path reference for the sustainable development of Dai dance but also offering a replicable practical paradigm for the protection and innovation of ethnic dances in countries around the world.

Keywords: Yunnan Dai Dance, Inheritance and protection, Intangible cultural heritage, Strategy, Cultural conservation, Digital protection, Cultural-tourism integration, International communication

Introduction

Located in the southwest of China, Yunnan is a vital gathering place for multi-ethnic cultures. As a brilliant pearl in Yunnan's ethnic folk art, Dai dance boasts a long history. Its origin can be traced back to the ritual ceremonies in the early days of Dai society. It not only carries the Dai people's historical memories, nature-worship beliefs, and aesthetic wisdom but also has formed a unique artistic style characterized by gentle movements, vivid imagery, and rich connotations. Representative forms such as the Peacock Dance have become prominent symbols of Dai culture.

Historically, during the 13th to 15th centuries, with the prosperity of Dai kingdoms and cultural exchanges, Dai dance gradually matured and absorbed elements from neighboring ethnic groups. In modern times, it was included in China's list of intangible cultural heritage for protection, becoming an important carrier of Dai culture and national cultural confidence.

The inheritance and protection of Dai dance are not only crucial to the continuation of Dai cultural genes but also of great significance to enriching the diversity of China's traditional culture.

Within the academic community, the inheritance and development of Dai dance have long garnered widespread attention. Existing studies primarily focus on its historical evolution, artistic characteristics, and inheritance models. For example, Lu and Lu (2023) conducted research on the cultural connotations and inheritance of Dai folk dance; Shen and Bai (2021), taking Yunnan Arts University as a case study, explored the inheritance and development of the Ruili Dai Peacock Dance in institutions of higher education.

At the practical level of dance inheritance, two major pillars—folk inheritance communities and school-based inheritance—have been established. However, through a systematic review, this study

reveals that under the impact of globalization and modernization, there are significant gaps and shortcomings in the existing knowledge system and protection efforts.

- **Singularity of theoretical frameworks and fragmentation of strategies:** Previous studies suffer from limitations such as over-reliance on a single theory, frequent use of qualitative research methods, and fragmented strategies. This has resulted in a lack of systematic theoretical support, solid empirical evidence, and operable systematic strategies for the inheritance and protection of Dai dance. In particular, the existing knowledge system is inadequate when it comes to addressing how to achieve the “dynamic inheritance” of Dai dance.

- **Insufficient in-depth exploration of core issues:** Dai dance faces four core contradictions within its inheritance ecosystem, yet there is a lack of systematic, multi-dimensional integrated analysis and quantitative evaluation. Specifically, these contradictions manifest in the following four aspects:

Inheritance Interruption and Intergenerational Gap: Low participation among the younger generation and an aging group of inheritors; **Commercial Alienation and Loss of Connotation:** Excessive commercialization driven by tourism has led to the simplification or even distortion of the cultural connotations of Dai dance; **Lag in Digital Protection:** Inheritance primarily relies on the “oral instruction and physical demonstration” method, while digital protection efforts remain in a “fragmented” stage. Additionally, most Dai dance dissemination on new media is “individual behavior,” with content mainly focusing on “movement demonstrations” (accounting for 85%) and minimal cultural interpretation (accounting for only 15%). A classified analysis of literature indicates obvious deficiencies in research on digital protection, which urgently requires supplementation; **Weak Policy and Financial Support:** The government’s protection system suffers from three key deficiencies: a lack of specialized policies, insufficient funding input, and an absence of supervision mechanisms; These challenges and gaps highlight the limitations of the existing knowledge system in facilitating the transformation of Dai dance from “static protection” to “dynamic inheritance”.

Based on the aforementioned research status and

practical needs, the core objective of this study is to construct a scientifically feasible protection system and promote the genuine realization of “dynamic inheritance” for Dai dance.

This study breaks through the limitations of the single theoretical paradigm used in previous research and innovatively adopts a dual analytical framework integrating the “Theory of Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage” and the “Dance Ecology Theory founded by Mr. Zi Huayun”. This framework provides a more macroscopic and systematic research perspective for in-depth understanding of the artistic ontological characteristics of Dai dance and the laws governing its inheritance ecosystem. **Research Methodology Level,** this study comprehensively employs multi-dimensional methods, including literature review, field investigation, case analysis, and comparative research. It also introduces the Delphi Method to conduct quantitative evaluations of core protection elements. Ultimately, it scientifically identifies three top-priority protection elements: the “Animal-imitating Dance”, the peacock imagery, and the master-apprentice inheritance experience—significantly enhancing the scientific nature and empirical rigor of the research. **Practical Construction Level,** this study also demonstrates prominent value in practical application:

On the basis of a systematic analysis of the current inheritance status and core elements, the study innovatively proposes a four-dimensional dynamic protection system consisting of “education as the foundation, digital empowerment, symbiosis between culture and tourism, and international communication”. This upgrades Dai dance protection from the traditional “static preservation” to a new height of “ecological living inheritance”.

To address the deficiency of fragmented strategies in previous studies, it further designs 12 specific implementation strategies, covering the construction of a multi-level education system, the development of a Dai dance digital gene bank, and the formulation of industry standards for the integration of culture and tourism. These strategies directly target and solve core issues such as the intergenerational gap, commercial alienation, and insufficient digital protection, providing an operable path for the implementation of “dynamic inheritance”.

Application Value, the multi-level education system, digital empowerment mechanism, and “protection-benefit balance” model for culture-tourism integration constructed in this study not only provide a clear path reference for the sustainable development of Dai dance but also offer a replicable and promotable practical paradigm for the protection and innovation of other ethnic dances worldwide.

Objective

This study adopts the dual-theoretical framework of the Theory of Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the Dance Ecology Theory. Centered on the core proposition of “dynamic inheritance” of Yunnan Dai dance, it aims to achieve in-depth integration of theoretical guidance and practical problem-solving.

Basic objective: The basic objective is to systematically deconstruct the artistic system and inheritance ecosystem of Dai dance, based on the “ontology-environment” framework of Dance Ecology Theory. The study will apply the morphological analysis method from Dance Ecology Theory to systematically sort out the ontological dimensions of Dai dance through pathways of factor decomposition and feature extraction.

For the movement morphology system, the study will use the “multi-value delimitation” feature of the “dance domain” to conduct micro-level decoding of core movement rhythms and dance morphological characteristics.

Additionally, the study will interpret dance accompaniment objects and their cultural connotations: it will examine how the rhythms of instruments such as elephant-foot drums, row gongs, and cymbals in the music system are preserved as “ecological items” during Buddhist festivals (e.g., the Water-Splashing Festival) to pray for abundant grain harvests; it will also analyze how the “degree of body separation” and “looseness” of costumes restrict lower-limb movements, thereby shaping the stylistic characteristics of Dai dance.

Problem-oriented objective: The second objective is problem-oriented. Guided by the “dynamic continuity” principle of the ICH Living Inheritance Theory, it aims to identify the core contradictions of the

inheritance ecosystem and priority elements for protection. Taking the three core principles of ICH as evaluation criteria” humans as the core carriers, culture requiring living continuity, and communities as the original soil”. the study focuses on the ecological imbalance in Dai dance inheritance amid globalization and modernization. Through field investigations and systematic reviews, the study identifies four key contradictions in current inheritance:

Intergenerational Gap: Aging inheritors and low participation of the younger generation; Commercial Alienation: Loss of cultural connotations and stylized issues such as “three types of simplification” in performances; Inadequate Digitalization: Fragmented documentation and low dissemination efficiency; Weak Policy Support: Shortage of funds and lack of specialized regulations.

Meanwhile, the study employs the Delphi Method (involving 5 experts) to conduct a priority assessment of the core elements of Dai dance ontology, clarifying the elements that require priority protection and providing a scientific basis for subsequent strategy design.

Strategy-oriented objective: The final objective is strategy-oriented. It aims to integrate the research results of the aforementioned dual theories, construct a four-dimensional dynamic protection model, and promote the transformation of Dai dance from “static protection” or “survival-oriented protection” to “ecological inheritance” or “development-oriented inheritance.” The study establishes a four-dimensional protection system covering “education as the foundation, digital empowerment, symbiosis between culture and tourism, and international communication”, and proposes 12 specific implementation strategies. These strategies target core contradictions to ensure the “living inheritance” of Dai dance, with examples including:

Education Dimension: Learning from the experience of Yunnan Arts University to implement a “dual-tutor system”; Digital Dimension: Applying 3D motion capture technology and developing a digital library; Culture-Tourism Dimension: Formulating standards for culture-tourism integration (e.g., Performance Standards for Dai Dance in Scenic Areas); International Communication Dimension:

Strengthening cross-border academic exchanges and cooperation.

The final outcomes of this study not only provide a path reference for the sustainable development of Dai dance but also offer a replicable practical paradigm to promote the protection and innovation of ethnic dances worldwide.

Method

Literature review method

Academic literature: Four research papers on Dai dance, published between 2020 and 2024, were retrieved from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). Core works include *Cultural Connotations and Inheritance of Dai Folk Dances* (Lu & Lu, 2023) and *Inheritance and Development of Ruili Dai Peacock Dance in Colleges and Universities* (Shen & Bai, 2021). These studies focus on sorting out the historical evolution, artistic characteristics, and inheritance models of the dance, providing a theoretical and case-based foundation for subsequent research.

Official materials: Policy documents released by China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network and Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism (e.g., 14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Yunnan Province), as well as annual reports of inheritance bases (2018-2023), to understand the current status of policy support and protection practices.

Historical documents: Records of Dai dance in ancient books such as *Book of the Later Han*, *New Book of Tang: Biography of Nanzhao*, and *Dianhai Yuhengzhi*, to verify the historical origin of the dance.

By systematically organizing relevant academic literature, official materials, and historical documents, this study provides crucial support for addressing issues such as “the lack of systematic theoretical support, empirical evidence, and structured strategies for the inheritance and protection of Yunnan Dai dance”.

Firstly, relying on academic literature, the study clearly sorts out the artistic characteristics, existing inheritance models, and core dilemmas of Dai dance. Meanwhile, it accurately identifies the limitations of previous studies, including “over-reliance on a single theory, over-reliance on qualitative research methods, and fragmented strategies”. This not only defines the

innovative direction for the current study but also avoids redundant exploration.

Secondly, by integrating official materials released by the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network and the Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism (e.g., the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Yunnan Province) as well as the annual reports of inheritance bases (2018-2023), the study fully grasps the current status of policy support for Dai dance protection, the effectiveness of practical efforts, and practical problems such as fund shortages and lack of regulations. This ensures that the subsequent design of strategies is more aligned with policy orientations and practical needs.

Thirdly, through historical documents such as *Book of the Later Han*, *New Book of Tang: Biography of Nanzhao*, and *Dianhai Yuhengzhi* (a classic work on Yunnan’s local history and culture), the study verifies the historical origin of Dai dance—which is rooted in nature worship and folk activities—consolidating its cultural foundation. This ensures that the study’s discussion on “inheriting the cultural connotations of the dance” does not deviate from historical context.

These three types of documents complement each other: they not only establish a comprehensive cognitive framework covering “history-current status-dilemmas” for the study but also provide documentary basis for the subsequent integration of dual theories, introduction of quantitative methods, and construction of a four-dimensional protection system. This ensures the study consistently focuses on “solving practical inheritance problems and filling gaps in previous research”, enhancing the study’s relevance and scientific rigor.

Field investigation method

Survey scope:

Conducted on-site investigations in 3 Dai-inhabited areas in Yunnan from July to October 2023:

Inheritance bases: 8 bases across 3 levels, including the National-Level Peacock Dance Inheritance Base in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, the Provincial-Level “Little Peacock Protection and Inheritance Base” in Ruili, Dehong, and the County-Level Dai Dance Inheritance Base in Menglian, Pu’er.

Educational institutions: 12 schools across 4 types, including Yunnan Arts University (professional

institution) , Ruili Ethnic Middle School (middle school) , Ruili Mengmao Central Primary School (primary school), and Manting Village Primary School in Xishuangbanna (rural primary school).

Cultural and tourism venues: 6 venues across 4 types, including the main venue of Xishuangbanna Water- Splashing Festival, Gaozhuang Xishuangjing Scenic Area, Mangshi Golden Pagoda Scenic Area in Dehong, and Pu'er Sun River Forest Park.

The survey sites of this study are selected from three Dai-inhabited areas in Yunnan: Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County of Pu'er City. These sites cover 8 inheritance bases (including national- level, provincial- level, and county- level ones), 12 schools (encompassing “professional institutions-ethnic middle schools- ordinary primary schools - rural primary schools”), and 6 representative cultural and tourism venues. The selection criteria for the survey sites are as follows:

First, geographical representativeness: The three areas are core and sub-core inhabited areas of Dai culture in Yunnan, undertaking the functions of national-level protection of Peacock Dance, being the birthplace of Ruili Peacock Dance, and grassroots inheritance of Dai dance respectively. This allows the reflection of inheritance characteristics across different regions.

Second, comprehensiveness of scenarios: Inheritance bases, schools, and cultural and tourism venues correspond to the three core fields of Dai dance” official protection-educational inheritance- practical dissemination”. addressing the limitation of single-scenario research in existing literature.

Third, hierarchical coverage: The inheritance bases include national- level, provincial-level, and county- level ones, while the schools cover different educational stages. This enables the presentation of differences in the allocation of inheritance resources and hierarchical characteristics, ensuring that the samples can comprehensively reflect the actual situation of Dai dance inheritance.

Survey content:

A total of 8 key figures were interviewed, including 2 national-level inheritors (N1, N2) ; 3

provincial-level inheritors (P1, P2, P3); 2 professional teachers (Teacher T1 from Yunnan Arts University, Teacher T2 from Dehong Normal University); and 1 scenic spot manager (Manager M1 from Xishuangbanna Dai Garden). Each interview lasted 1.5 to 2 hours, and the current status of inheritance work, the difficulties encountered, and the urgent needs to be addressed were fully recorded.

Participatory observation: Participated in “master-apprentice teaching” at inheritance bases (3 times a week for 2 weeks), Dai dance classes at schools (3 times a week for 4 weeks), and performance rehearsals at scenic spots (1 times a week for 1 weeks). This recorded practical issues in the inheritance process (e.g., non-standard movements of elderly artists, low interest among students).

Case study method

Four typical cases were selected and analyzed from four dimensions: “Innovation,” “Education,” “Communication,” and “Cultural-Tourism Integration.” Following the analytical logic of “extracting successful experiences, identifying practical shortcomings, and matching the needs of the model,” this analysis can promote the transformation of the four- dimensional model from a “theoretical framework” to an “implementable system.”

Artistic innovation case: Yang Liping’s Spirit of the Peacock

Hailed as a classic Chinese dance work of the 20th century, Spirit of the Peacock premiered on stage in 1986 and remains vibrant to this day. Drawing on Dai folk dance as its core material, the work starts with the basic image of the “peacock,” preserving core movements such as the “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) and “peacock hands.” Without being confined by the traditions of conventional peacock dance, it pursues “spirit through form,” aiming to create an elf-like, noble life imagery. The work has been performed in countries including Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and the United States. With a performance history spanning 39 years, it has attracted over 10 million audience members. During its overseas tours, it has been widely recognized for its ability to “retain Dai cultural symbols (the peacock imagery) while aligning with international aesthetics.” This experience directly supports the “cross- border

collaborative creation” strategy under the “International Communication” dimension of the four-dimensional model.

Educational inheritance case: Representative folk dances of yunnan ethnic minorities (National first-class course)

This national first-class course is offered by the Dance Performance major at Yunnan Arts University. It includes Dai dance and primarily covers the history of Dai dance, core movement training, and field research practice. The course has also established a mechanism for “ICH inheritors entering campuses,” where national and provincial-level Dai dance inheritors conduct regular teaching sessions. This case provides support for two key strategy designs under the “Education” dimension of the four-dimensional model:

First, it confirms the necessity of the “dual-tutor system” in universities (taught by both university dance teachers and ICH inheritors), addressing the shortcoming of traditional school-based inheritance—its “detachment from folk contexts.” Second, it promotes the refinement of a “hierarchical curriculum system.” For example, the “field practice” module from this case can be integrated into upper primary and junior high school curricula, solving the problem identified in surveys: “rural primary schools only teach movements without cultural interpretation.” This upgrades the Education dimension from “general inheritance advocacy” to a “phased, collaborative-oriented” precision design.

New media communication case: Dancer Ma Wenjing’s TikTok account

Launched in 2020, Ma Wenjing’s TikTok account adopts the following content strategy: “Dai Dance Master Classes” (teaching-focused), “creation sharing” (of dance works), “inheritor stories” (interview-based, e.g., the inheritance experience of Mao Xiang), and “behind-the-scenes dance” (recording rehearsal processes). The account has posted 433 videos, gained 39,000 followers, and achieved a maximum single-video playback volume of 12 million. Surveys show that 75% of its followers are under 30, effectively expanding the young audience base. The value of this case lies in two aspects: “experience extraction” and “shortcoming correction”:

On one hand, content such as “dance creation sharing” and “rehearsal sharing” verifies the effectiveness of new media in expanding young audiences, directly supporting the content design of the “official account matrix” under the “Digitalization” dimension of the four-dimensional model. On the other hand, the case reveals a shortcoming: 85% of the content is movement demonstrations, while only 15% includes cultural interpretation. This has prompted the model to further integrate “cultural interpretation,” preventing digital communication from devolving into “superficial movement replication” and ensuring that “technological communication” and “cultural transmission” proceed in tandem. As a result, the Digitalization dimension has been upgraded from “pure technological application” to “dual transmission of skills and culture.”

Cultural-tourism integration case: Xishuangbanna’s Mengbana Xi

Launched in 2018, Mengbana Xi is a 150-minute performance by a professional dance troupe, divided into five chapters: “Banna Scenery,” “Auspicious Peacocks,” “Water-Splashing Songs,” “Blessings from the Sacred,” and “Spring Rhythm of the River.” During the 2023 Water-Splashing Festival, the performance was staged 20 times, attracting 12,000 audience members. A questionnaire survey showed that 85% of the audience “understood the cultural connotation of the dance,” successfully avoiding the sense of alienation caused by over-commercialization. The experiences from this case provide two key foundations for the “Cultural-Tourism Symbiosis” dimension of the four-dimensional model:

First, it clarifies the core indicators for the Standards for Dai Dance Performances in Scenic Areas, addressing the “three simplifications” problem (simplified movements, simplified cultural context, simplified artistic expression) found in 80% of scenic areas during surveys. Second, it promotes the design of a “cultural-tourism revenue feedback mechanism.” For instance, 30% of the “performance peripheral income” from this case is allocated to an inheritance fund. This ensures the Cultural-Tourism dimension is upgraded from “pure profit-seeking” to a “protection-revenue cycle,” infusing sustainability into the model.

Comparative research method

By comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the four inheritance models, this method provides a basis for formulating strategies.

It is found through comparison that a single model can hardly cope with the challenges in inheritance, and

thus “multi-model integration” is required. For example, school inheritance can be combined with family inheritance (by inviting family inheritors to give lectures) , and folk community inheritance can be integrated with master-apprentice inheritance (with masters and apprentices guiding village performances).

Table 1 Advantages and disadvantages of four types of inheritance models.

Inheritance mode	Advantage	Disadvantages	Applicable Scenarios
Family inheritance	Guarantee the authenticity of the craftsmanship (passed down orally and demonstrated physically, without deviation)	Narrow scope (only passed on to blood relatives, insufficient talent reserve)	Protection of core techniques (such as “Three Curves”)
Master - apprentice inheritance	Pay attention to cultural connotations (teaching movements + historical background)	Rely on the personal abilities of inheritors (prone to interruption due to the death of the inheritor)	Professional talent cultivation (such as dancers)
School inheritance	Large scale (covers a large number of students and expands the audience)	Out of touch with the folk (students lack field practice experience)	Popularized inheritance (such as teaching in primary and secondary schools)
Inheritance in folk communities	Close to life (integrated into festivals, ceremonies, with high participation)	Lack of standardization (actions are arbitrary and prone to deviation)	Folk basic inheritance (such as village performances)

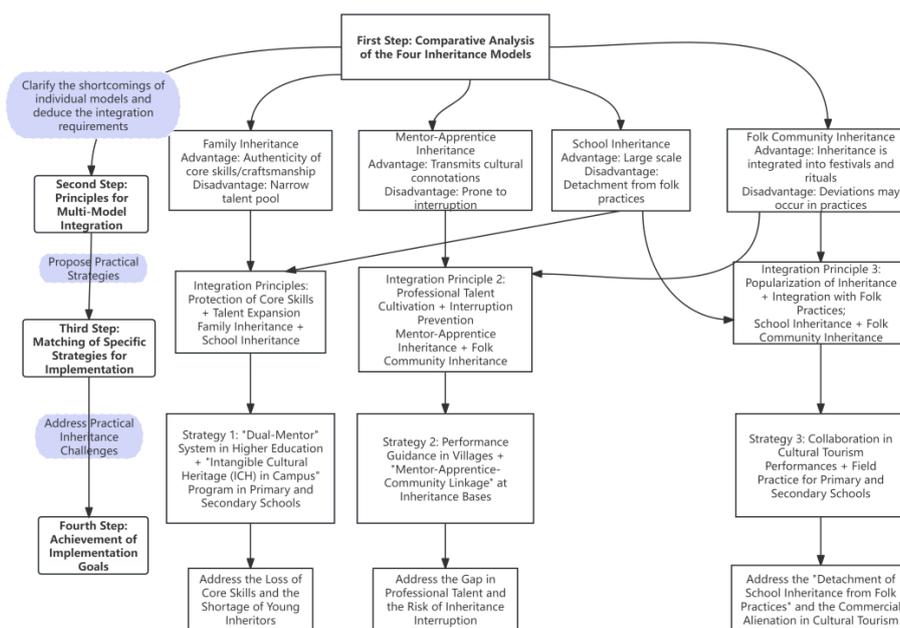


Figure 1 Multi-model integration flow chart

Source: Drawn by the Author

Finding

Artistic characteristics of Yunnan Dai Dance

Movement system:

This study employs the theory of dance ecology and focuses on analyzing the dimensional composition of dance itself. In the research on movement morphology, it leverages the multi-value bounded characteristics of “dance domains” (Wuchou) to conduct a micro-level interpretation of the core “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) and various dance hand gestures. Meanwhile, it delves into the cultural connotations embodied in dance accompaniments such as music and costumes.

The “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) is the most iconic morphological feature of Dai dance. Through the coordinated movement of human body parts—including the head, neck, shoulders, chest, waist, hips, and legs—it creates an “S” shaped body posture centered on the waist. Dance ecology emphasizes appropriately detailed factor decomposition and scientific analysis of the “dance body”; from this perspective, the “three-curved posture” specifically refers to the S-shaped dance posture formed by the torso, arms, and legs.

Specifically, the “three curves” of the torso, centered on the waist, manifest as a soft and graceful S-shaped curve extending from the hips to the tilted upper body, achieved through the linkage and twisting of the head, chest, waist, hips, buttocks, and legs. From the perspective of human anatomy, the execution of this movement mainly relies on the flexible movement and precise coordination of parts such as the cervical spine, thoracic spine, lumbar spine, and coccyx.

The “three curves” of the arms are defined as follows: the first curve spans from the fingertips to the wrist, the second from the wrist to the elbow, and the third from the elbow to the shoulder. Similarly, the “three curves” of the legs have a clear definition: the first curve runs from the raised ankle to the heel, the second from the heel to the bent knee, and the third from the knee to the hip.

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The “three curves” of the arms are manifested as follows: the first curve is from the fingertips to the wrist, the second from the wrist to the elbow, and the third from the elbow to the shoulder. The “three curves” of the legs also have a clear definition: the first curve is from the raised ankle to the heel, the second from the heel to the bent knee, and the third from the knee to the hip.

The form of Dai dance is deeply influenced by the dual factors of the natural ecosystem and the social-cultural ecosystem. These ecological elements collectively constitute the core matrix of the “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) dance domain (Wuchou). The formation of the “three-curved posture” originates from the imitation of nature—it not only involves the reproduction of the growth process of plants (from taking root and sprouting to blooming and bearing fruit) but also incorporates the reference to the forms and living habits of animals. For instance, when a peacock perches on a tree branch, the “S”-shaped curve formed by its drooping tail feathers highly aligns with the postural characteristics of the “three-curved posture.”

As the iconic movement of Dai dance, the “dance domain” (Wuchou) of the “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) is not a fixed standard for the S-shaped angle, but a threshold range that carries aesthetic value and expressive functions. The S-curve presented by the dancer through the coordinated bending of the head, chest, waist, hips, and other parts must fall within a range that reflects the Dai people’s national character—

dignified and delicate, soft in appearance yet firm in spirit—as well as their traits of grace, calmness, and gentleness like water. As long as the dancer’s movements visually maintain this soft, elegant, and rhythmic S-curve, the audience will still recognize it as a standard “three-curved posture,” even if there are slight differences in the bending amplitude or twisting angle.

Conversely, if the bending or twisting of the dancer’s body exceeds the allowable limits of the “dance domain” (e.g., excessive or insufficient bending leading to imbalance), it will create an obvious sense of visual disharmony and may even alter the movement’s inherent form and expressive function. For example, some dancers only imitate the external movement form of the “three-curved posture” without deeply understanding the inherent rhythm contained in the Dai people’s “water culture,” resulting in a significant gap in performance quality compared to outstanding dancers.

In actual dance performances, the “three-curved posture” is mostly presented in a dynamic form. Through changes in steps and the linkage of key movement parts, a “dance domain sequence” is formed, demonstrating the characteristics of combining movement and stillness, as well as integrating softness and firmness. By virtue of the resilient trembling rhythm, the continuous S-shaped bending is achieved across three dimensions: body posture, arms, and legs.

As one of the smallest units of expression in dance language, the hand gestures of Dai dance must accurately convey aesthetic and cultural connotations through their forms. Many hand gestures in Dai dance are derived from imitations of natural elements—such as the postures of peacocks drinking water or preening their feathers, and the dynamic movement of small fish flicking their tails. The diverse expressions of these hand gestures collectively embody the Dai people’s national aesthetic pursuits. Only when dancers achieve “pursuing spirit through form and integrating spirit with form” can they truly demonstrate the profound cultural heritage behind the hand gesture movements.

In summary, this study employs dance ecology methods, with the concept of “dance domain” (Wuchou) as the core analytical tool, to conduct research on the “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) and hand gestures of Dai dance. This research perspective goes beyond the simple imitation of the external forms of dance movements; instead, it regards the “three-curved posture” and hand gestures as movement sets that have formed in specific ecological environments and possess the characteristics of multi-value boundedness and cultural specificity. It provides a new path for understanding the rhythmic characteristics and stylistic connotations of Dai dance in a more scientific and systematic manner.



Figure 2 Dance posture of the “Three-Curved Posture” in Dai Dance

Source: Photographed by the author

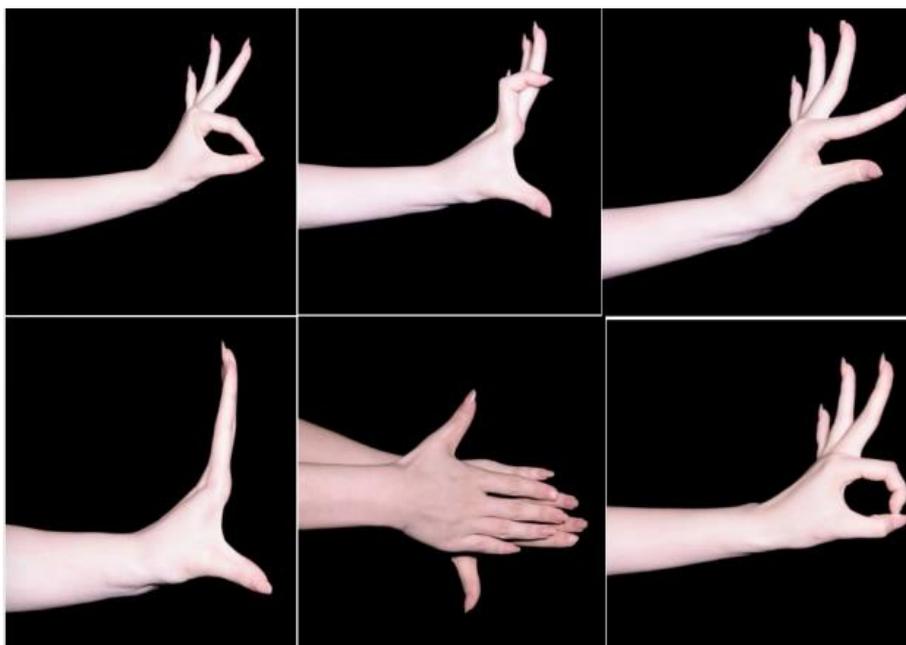


Figure 3 Schematic diagram of hand shapes in Dai dance

Source: Photographed by the author

Music and costumes

As one of the core accompanying elements of dance, music not only provides rhythmic and melodic support for Dai dance but also carries profound cultural connotations and social functions, forming a tight coupling with the rhythm of the dancer's body. The origins of Dai dance music and musical instruments are deeply intertwined with the local natural ecology, animal worship, and social life: for instance, the elephant-foot drum dance emerged during the agricultural era and originally had a distinct agricultural ritual purpose. A folk saying goes, "Each beat of the drum plumps the rice grains," which demonstrates that it embodies the cultural meaning of praying for a bumper grain harvest.

After Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Dai-inhabited regions, the functions of some musical instruments and dances underwent cultural reconstruction. Take the large drum as an example: it was conferred the sacred status of a "Buddhist drum," enshrined in Buddhist temples on ordinary days and only played during "Danfo" (a major Buddhist ceremony of the Dai people). This transformation altered its original entertainment function in "rural feasts."

Dance ecology places particular emphasis on how accompanying elements are influenced by the external cultural environment and form an ecological interaction network. The geographical location of Dai-inhabited areas—as a connecting hub on the "Southern Silk Road"—has precisely endowed their musical accompaniment with the characteristic of multi-cultural integration. Historical records from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) note that Dai music was categorized into three types: first, Baiyi Music (which imitated the Han people in crafting zithers, flutes, and huqins, and performed songs from the Central Plains); second, Burmese Music; and third, Cheli Music (whose style resembled the music of monks and Taoist priests in the Central Plains). This historical record clearly confirms that during the Ming Dynasty, Central Plains culture, South Asian culture, and the indigenous Dai culture had coexisted, interacted, and merged, permeating into the creation of Dai music.

To elaborate on the coupling relationship between dance and music, take the peacock dance of the Dai people in Ruili as an example: its accompanying instruments include the long elephant-foot drum, row gongs (paimang), and cymbals. The rhythm is mostly in 2/4 time, and the overall style is gentle and melodious. Dai dance itself, by contrast, is based on a slow

rhythm—its movements are graceful yet contain underlying strength, embodying the trait of “soft in appearance yet firm in spirit.” This rhythmic characteristic is highly consistent with the dancer’s stretching- contracting rhythm, the “three- curved posture” (sandao wan) poses, and the performance logic of combining movement and stillness.

Dance ecology points out that “dance steps are lower- limb movements synchronized with rhythm.” Therefore, the steady rhythm and 2/4 time signature of the musical accompaniment are highly unified with the “slow foot- lifting and slow foot- placing” steps in the dance, as well as the rhythm of the legs’ stretching, contracting, and trembling.

From the perspective of dance ecology, costumes are a key ecological factor influencing the form of Dai dance: through their physical constraints on the dancer’s body, they directly shape the body morphology and basic movement rhythm of Dai dance. The core style of traditional Dai costumes consists of tight- sleeved short tops and ankle- length tube skirts. This “wrapped” style creates a structural feature of “tight upper body and loose lower body”:

The tight design of the tube skirt restricts the range of hip movement, limiting the hips to small swings and reducing the scope of step expansion; however, the loose nature of the skirt hem reserves sufficient space for calf movement, allowing the formation of the unique “folding rhythm” (a rhythmic movement characterized by folded, undulating motions of the calves).

Constrained by the lower- body costumes, the steps of Dai dance are generally small, and dancers mostly take a semi- squat posture as their base. It is precisely this semi- squat posture, combined with the coordinated bending of multiple parts such as the waist and arms, that ultimately gives rise to the iconic “S” - shaped posture of Dai dance—the “three- curved posture” (Sandao Wan).

In addition, traditional Dai costumes feature an overall simple style. Their “body- hugging” cut results in a “low separation degree” from the limbs: the upper limbs have a larger exposed area, while the lower limbs have a smaller exposed area. This layout further restricts the freedom of lower- limb movement, concentrating the “prominent movement parts” of the dance on the wrists and arms, with a relatively larger range of motion for these parts. At the same time, the costumes have no

excessive decorative accessories—this not only avoids interference of accessories with body movements but also aligns with the Dai people’s aesthetic orientation of “regarding a simple, clean, and concise body as beautiful.”

In summary, an analysis of the accompanying elements of Dai dance using the theory of dance ecology reveals that costumes and music, as ecological factors, do not exist in isolation. Through “physical constraints” (from costumes) and “rhythmic guidance” (from music), respectively, and combined with the synergistic effects of geographical environment, religious beliefs, and labor practices, they ultimately shape the unique “three- curved posture” (Sandao Wan) and the “integration of softness and firmness” movement rhythm of Dai dance in a systematic manner.

Cultural charm

The inheritance status Quo and issues of Dai Dance in Yunnan

The practical status quo of the inheritance model

Taking the three core principles of ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) living inheritance” humans as the core carriers, culture requiring living continuity, and communities as the original soil” as its analytical framework, this section systematically examines the current inheritance status and underlying issues of Dai dance in Yunnan from three dimensions: the practical characteristics of inheritance models, existing challenges, and cultural sustainability risks.

At present, the inheritance of Dai dance has formed a core system driven by the “dual engines” of “folk groups and professional institutions,” and has derived four typical inheritance models: family inheritance, master- apprentice inheritance, school- based inheritance, and community folk inheritance. Each model exhibits differentiated characteristics across different dimensions of ICH living inheritance, while also exposing common and individual issues that affect cultural sustainability.

Family Inheritance: Represented by the NI family in Dehong, Yunnan, family inheritance is the most traditional form of Dai dance inheritance. It epitomizes the principle of ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) living inheritance “humans as the core carriers” and achieves a high degree of authenticity in craftsmanship

through an oral and heart-to-heart (kouchuan xinshou) bloodline inheritance mechanism. As a national-level inheritor of the peacock dance, N1 has successively passed on his/her skills to his/her children and is now teaching his/her grandchildren: children observe the performances of elders from an early age, start systematic learning of basic movements at the age of 7-8, and advance to master complex routines after the age of 15. This “intergenerational relay” ensures the authenticity of the core techniques of Dai dance, such as the “three-curved posture” (Sandao Wan) and peacock hand gestures. However, from the perspective of cultural sustainability, this model has significant limitations: it has a narrow talent pool, making it difficult to meet the demand for the broader living continuity of Dai dance. If there is no suitable heir within the family, it is highly likely to lead to a break in the craftsmanship, directly threatening the continuity of cultural inheritance.

Master- Apprentice Inheritance System: The master-apprentice system represented by National-level Inheritor N2 occupies a dominant position in the professional field. This inheritance model is closer to folk traditions, and its predecessor was the “Little Peacock Base” in Ruili City — the base recruits approximately 60 students annually, adopts a “classroom-based teaching” approach, and focuses on imparting knowledge through the “integration of movements and folk stories” (for example, when explaining the “peacock drinking water” movement, it tells the legend that “the peacock is an auspicious bird”). Talents trained under this model possess an extremely high level of professionalism, but the model is completely dependent on the individual effort of the inheritor. Due to advanced age (79 years old), N2 has been unable to continue teaching in recent years.



Figure 4 National-level Peacock Dance Inheritor N2’s Inheritance and Training Base

Source: Photographed by the author

School- Based Inheritance: As the mainstream model since the 21st century, school-based inheritance is divided into two categories” professional training in institutions of higher education” and “popularization education in primary and secondary schools.” It has effectively broken through the scope limitations of traditional inheritance and responded to the demand of ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) living inheritance for “expanding the cultural inheritance group.”

At the higher education level, Yunnan Arts University launched the “Ethnic Dance Inheritance Program” in 2011. By 2023, it had trained over 400 graduates, 80% of whom have joined cultural centers and inheritance bases at all levels, becoming a professional inheritance force. At the basic education level, many primary and secondary schools in Ruili City and Xishuangbanna Prefecture (e.g. Mangmao Primary School in Ruili City) have incorporated Dai dance into

physical education classes, with a student participation rate of 65% in 2023.

However, from the perspective of the ICH living inheritance principle that “culture requires complete living continuity,” this model has obvious shortcomings: most courses remain at the level of “movement imitation teaching” and lack in-depth interpretation of the core cultural connotations behind

Dai dance, such as “water culture” and “nature worship.” This leads to a situation where the young inheritance group only masters the technical form but fails to understand the cultural core, resulting in an inheritance dilemma of “retaining the form but losing the spirit” and weakening the sustainability of cultural inheritance.



Figure 5 ICH into campus course (Peacock Dance Training Class at Mengmao Primary School, Ruili City)

Source: Photographed by the author

Inheritance Model in Folk Communities: Centered on the “festival performances” in Dai villages, the community-based folk inheritance is the most life-integrated form of inheritance. It fully embodies the principle of ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) living inheritance” communities as the original soil”—relying on folk contexts such as the Water-Splashing Festival, the Door-Closing Festival, and the Door-Opening Festival. Under the guidance of folk artists, villagers voluntarily participate in performances. In 2023, over 200 people in Manting Village took part in the Water-Splashing Festival performances, achieving deep integration of culture and daily life.

However, the “non-standardized” nature of this model also poses risks to cultural sustainability: in pursuit of visual effects, young villagers arbitrarily modify core techniques. This damages the technical authenticity and cultural expressive function of Dai dance, violating the requirement of ICH living inheritance to “preserve the core cultural traits.” In the long run, it may lead to the distortion and alienation of

cultural genes.

Existing core issues

Through field investigations and data analysis, there are currently four prominent issues in inheritance:

1. Inheritance disruption: There is a stark contrast between the aging of inheritors and the low participation of young people. According to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritors released by Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, among the 6 national-level inheritors of Dai dance in the province, 4 are over 60 years old, and only 2 are over 50 years old. At the “Little Peacock Base” in Ruili City, Dehong Prefecture, among the disciples recruited from 2020 to 2024, those under 20 account for 15%, compared with 40% from 2000 to 2010, showing an accelerating trend of generational gap.

There are mainly three reasons for the low participation of young people:

- Low economic returns - The subsidies for inheritors are insufficient (20,000 RMB per year for

national - level inheritors and 3,000 RMB per year for municipal - level inheritors), and young people are more inclined to work outside (The migrant - working rate of Dai youths in Xishuangbanna reaches 60%);

- Long learning cycle - It takes 1-2 years to master

the core movements and young people lack patience;

- Weak cultural identity - Influenced by popular culture, the young group thinks that Dai dance is “outdated” and prefers modern dances such as hip - hop and street dance.



Figure 6 DehongDai Ethnic Group’s Shelf Peacock Dance (Inheritor: Qiao Ersuo)

Source: Photographed by the author



Figure 7 Xishuangbanna Dai Deer Dance “Ga Duo” (Inheritors: Shang Maohan and Shang Mao’en)

Source: Photographed by the author

2. Commercial alienation (Loss of cultural connotations): Tourism development has turned Dai

dance into a “visual commodity”, with its cultural connotations simplified and even distorted. Field

investigations have found that 80% of Dai dance performances in five scenic spots in Xishuangbanna and Dehong have the “three - simplification” problems:

- Simplification of performance content: Traditional peacock dance has set traditional routines. However, in scenic spots, the storylines that reflect its cultural connotation have been cut down.

- Superficial movements: Most performers are temporary workers in the scenic spots who have not received systematic training. Their movements are mostly imitations of popular dance segments on the

1. Insufficient digital protection (Inefficient recording and dissemination): Currently, the inheritance still relies on “oral and physical instruction”, and the digital protection is in a “fragmented” stage:

- Fragmented recording: Only Yunnan Arts University and the Xishuangbanna Inheritance Base have carried out some digital work. For example, Yunnan Arts University completed the high-definition video recording of 15 classic dance routines, but did not conduct 3D motion capture. The Xishuangbanna Inheritance Base established a “inheritor database”, but only recorded basic information (age, inheritance years), and did not include technical details (such as movement essentials).

- Inefficient dissemination: New media dissemination is mostly “individual behavior” and lacks systematic operation. Although artists such as Ma Wenjing have opened short video accounts, the content is mainly “movement display” (accounting for 85%), and there is little cultural interpretation content (accounting for 15%). The survey shows that 70% of fans only “think the movements are beautiful” and do not understand the cultural connotation of the dance.

- Little application of technology: Immersive technologies such as VR and AR have not been popularized.

2. Weak policy and financial support (Incomplete guarantee system): The government’s protection and support for Dai dance has “three shortages”:

- Lack of special policies: Currently, most of Yunnan Province’s intangible cultural heritage protection policies are “general - type” (such as the 14th Five - Year Plan for Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection), and no special plans have been formulated

internet, and their costumes do not conform to the traditional culture of the Dai people. The revealing nature of female costumes deviates from the religious beliefs of the Dai ethnicity.

- Commercialization of connotation: To attract tourists, scenic spots have tied the dance to consumption— watching the performance requires purchasing high- priced tickets (198- 298 yuan per person), while no cultural explanations are provided. Tourists can only “watch the excitement” and are unable to understand the auspicious implications of the dance.

for Dai dance. There is a lack of specific measures such as “talent training plans” and “standards for the integration of culture and tourism”.

- Lack of capital investment: The subsidy standards for inheritors are low - 20,000 RMB per year for national - level inheritors and 3,000 RMB for municipal - level inheritors, which is not enough to cover the training costs (such as the purchase of costumes and musical instruments).

- Lack of a supervision mechanism: There is a lack of regulation for commercial performances in tourist attractions. “Standards for Dai dance performances” (such as requirements for duration, movements, and cultural explanations) have not been formulated, resulting in the commercial alienation of Dai dance with no one to supervise.

Core artistic elements that need to be protected on a priority basis

Based on the above analysis, Dai ethnic group dance needs to prioritize the protection of three core elements. These elements are the carriers of the cultural connotation of the dance. Once lost, the dance will lose its “ethnic characteristics”:

Action elements: The traditional dance movements and rhythms of the animal-imitating dance need to be protected through “standardized recording and systematic teaching” to avoid distortion.

Cultural symbols: The peacock imagery (symbolizing auspiciousness and purity, originating from nature worship and Buddhist culture), the elephant - foot drum (representing the Dai people’s rice - farming life and male strength) These symbols need to be spread through “cultural interpretation + cultural and creative development” to enhance public awareness.

Oral heritage: Dance legends, master - apprentice teaching experience and folk songs. These heritages need to be preserved through “oral history recording +

audio archiving” to prevent loss due to the passing of inheritors.



Figure 8 Lincang Dai Dance “Jinnara” (Inheritor: Yan Bai)

Source: Photographed by the author

Table 2 Statistics on evaluation scores of core elements.

Core element types	Specific elements	Expert Score (Average)	Protection priority	Suggestions for Protection Methods	Core Grading Criteria
Action elements	Animal-imitating Dance	4.8	Highest	3D motion capture + standardized teaching materials	Core of Dance Ontology; High Risk of Distortion; Irreproducible Technical Collaboration
Culture symbol	Peacock imagery	4.5	High	Cultural Exhibition + New Media Interpretation	Spiritual Symbols of Dai Dance; with Dual Connotations of Nature Worship and Buddhism
Oral heritage	Teaching experience between master and apprentice	4.2	High	Oral history recording + video teaching	Tacit Knowledge; Relies on the Personal Experience of Inheritors; Faces the Risk of Loss as Inheritors Age
Action elements	dance hand shapes	4.0	Medium	Folk basic inheritance (such as village performances)	Low technical complexity; Easy to standardize
Cultural symbols	Elephant - foot drum	3.8	Medium	Protection and Exhibition of Musical Instrument Making Techniques	Carrier of rice-farming culture; However, the production techniques can be recorded via video

Core element types	Specific elements	Expert Score (Average)	Protection priority	Suggestions for Protection Methods	Core Grading Criteria
Oral heritage	Dance Legends	3.5	Medium	Picture book development + Storytelling	Cultural background of the dance; Yet it can be preserved in the form of text/stories
Action elements	Collective dance rhythm	3.2	Medium-low	Rhythm score recording + Community performance	Auxiliary elements of movements; Can be reconstructed through music scores
Oral heritage	Folk songs	2.8	low	Audio Archiving + Folk Song Concert	Accompaniment elements; Wide inheritance scope; Low risk of endangerment

Assessment of the protection priority of core elements

To scientifically determine the protection order, this study adopted the “Delphi method” and invited 5 experts (2 intangible cultural heritage protection scholars, 2 Dai dance inheritors, and 1 official from the culture and tourism department) to score the core elements (on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being the highest priority). The results are as follows:

The evaluation results indicate that The “Animal-imitating Dance” posture, peacock imagery, and master-apprentice teaching experience are the top priorities, and resources should be invested in their protection as a matter of priority.

Paths for the inheritance and protection of Yunnan Dai ethnic minority dance

Based on the research results, this study constructs a four-dimensional protection system of “Educational Foundation- Digital Empowerment- Cultural and Tourism Symbiosis-International Communication”, and proposes 12 specific strategies to ensure the “living inheritance” of the dance.

Build a multi-level educational inheritance system: Solve the problem of intergenerational gaps

Education is the foundation of inheritance. It is necessary to establish a multi-level system of “professional training in colleges and universities and popularization in primary and secondary schools and inheritor studios”, covering people of different ages and

expanding the scope of inheritance.

1. Construction of Majors in Colleges and Universities: Cultivate Professional Heritage Talents

Curriculum System Optimization: Draw on the experience of Yunnan Arts University to optimize the curriculum:

- Core Content: “History of Dai Dance” (add a chapter on “Comparison of Cross - border Ethnic Dances”, such as the comparison with the Thai dance of Thailand), “Core Movement Training”, “Interpretation of Cultural Connotations”;

- Practical Courses: “Fieldwork Practice” (organize students to intern in Dai villages for 2 weeks every year, participating in the teaching of the inheritance base and village performances), “Dance Creation Practice”;

- Faculty Allocation: Hire national - level and provincial - level inheritors to teach part - time (12 - 16 class hours per year) to ensure that students learn the “authentic” skills.

Innovation in Talent Development Model: Implementation of the “Dual-Mentor System”. Each course is assigned one university faculty member and one inheritor (of traditional dance heritage). To complete the course, students must pass two assessments: “Traditional Dance Performance and Inheritance Program Design” (e.g., designing a Dai ethnic group dance teaching program for primary and secondary schools).

2. In primary and secondary schools, “Intangible Cultural Heritage Entering Campus”: Cultivating the Identification of the Younger Generation

Popularization of Courses: Incorporate Dai dance into the “local curriculum” in primary and secondary schools in Dai - inhabited areas (such as schools in Xishuangbanna and Dehong), with 1 class hour per week. Compile graded textbooks:

- Lower - grade primary school (Grades 1 - 3): Focus on “gamified teaching” to cultivate interest;
- Upper - grade primary school (Grades 4 - 6): Learn basic movements and combine with physical exercise (for example, the “Three - bend Posture” stretches the lumbar muscles);
- Middle school (Grades 7 - 9): Learn simple dance routines and understand the cultural connotations of the dance (such as the auspicious meaning of the Peacock Dance).

Diversified activities: The “Dai Dance Culture Festival” is held every year, including performance competitions, costume exhibitions, story - telling and other links.

Teacher Training: Regularly organize primary and secondary school teachers to participate in the “Dai Dance Training” (taught by inheritors and university teachers). In 2025, the Mangshi Cultural Center carried out ethnic dance training activities, with a total of 100 trainees, which has solved the problem of “teachers not knowing how to teach”.

3. Construction of Inheritor Studios: Strengthening the Power of Folk Inheritance

Standardized Construction of Studios: Establish 10 “Dai Dance Inheritor Studios” in places such as Xishuangbanna, Dehong, and Lincang. Each studio is equipped with “three major functional areas”:

- Teaching Area: Dance rehearsal hall (with an area of over 100 m², equipped with mirrors and ballet bars);
- Recording Area: Video recording room (equipped with high-definition cameras and 3D motion capture equipment), reference room (for storing teaching materials, musical scores, and old photos);
- Exhibition Area: Small - scale exhibition (elephant - foot drums, and the performance costumes of senior artists), open to the public.

Funding and Policy Support: The government

provides 100,000 RMB in funds to each studio every year (for equipment purchase and inheritor allowances), and offers tax incentives (such as tax exemption for the sales of cultural and creative products of the studio).

Institutionalize the Master - Apprentice Training: Encourage inheritors to recruit 5 - 10 apprentices each year and carry out “systematic training” (twice a week for one year). The training content includes movements, culture, and teaching ability (such as how to teach primary and middle school students). The studio needs to record the teaching process (video and text) to form an “inheritance file” to prevent the loss of skills.

Digital protection and new media communication: Breaking geographical and communication restrictions

Digitalization is the key to solving the problems of “fragmented recording and inefficient dissemination”. It is necessary to expand the influence of dance through “archiving of core techniques and new media operation and immersive experience”.

1. Digital Archiving of Core Techniques: Establishing a “Digital Gene Bank”

3D Motion Capture and High- Definition Recording: Led by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Yunnan Province, in collaboration with the Yunnan Arts University and university research teams, digital records are made of 100 traditional dance routines:

- 3D Motion Capture: Use an optical motion capture system (such as OptiTrack) to record the core movements (such as “Three Curves”, “Peacock Spreading Its Tail”) performed by inheritors, generating editable 3D models for teaching and creation;
- High- Definition Video Recording: Use a 4K camera to record the complete dance performance, accompanied by explanations from the inheritors (such as movement essentials and cultural connotations) to form “video textbooks”;
- Audio Archiving: Record the playing of musical instruments (hulusi, elephant-foot drum) and folk songs, and establish a “Dai Dance Music Library” for the convenience of creators.

Establish the “Digital Library of Yunnan Dai Dance”: Integrate digital resources onto an online platform (official website and mini-program) and open it to the public. Set up three sections: “Movement

Learning”, “Cultural Interpretation”, and “Inheritance Stories”.

- “Movement Learning” section: Provide 3D movement breakdown diagrams and video tutorials. Users can slow down and pause for learning.

- “Cultural Interpretation” section: Explain the history and symbols (such as the peacock imagery) of the dance through pictures, texts, and animations.

- “Inheritance Stories” section: Release interview videos and old photos of inheritors to showcase the inheritance process.

2. New media operation: Expand the young audience group

Construction of Official Account Matrix: New media accounts (Tiktok, Kuaishou, WeChat Official Account, Bilibili) are jointly opened by the Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism and the Inheritance Base to form a “matrix communication”:

- Tiktok/Kuaishou: Release “short, concise and fast” content, such as “Learn Peacock Hand in 1 Minute” and “The Daily Life of Inheritors behind the Scenes”, update 3-5 pieces per week, invite well-known inheritors like Ma Wenjing to participate in filming to increase attention;

- WeChat Official Account: Release in-depth content, such as The Historical Evolution of the “Three - Bend” in Dai Dance and The Manufacturing Process of the Elephant - Foot Drum, 1 piece per week, to attract cultural enthusiasts;

- Bilibili: Release long videos, such as complete dance performances and interviews with inheritors (30-60 minutes) to meet the needs of professional users (such as college students and researchers).

Content Innovation Strategy: Develop “Dance +” content in line with the preferences of the young group:

- “Dance + Popular Science”: Produce the animated video The Little Peacock’s Dance Diary, explaining dance movements and culture with cartoon characters;

- “Dance + Challenge”: Launch the Learn the Three Curves in 10 Days challenge, encourage users to shoot learning videos, and reward excellent works (such as textbooks signed by inheritors);

- “Dance + Live Streaming”: Conduct “Live Teaching by Inheritors” once a month, where users can ask questions online to enhance interactivity.

3. VR/AR Immersive Experience: Innovative Forms of Communication

VR Experience Project Development: Develop two VR projects, “Virtual Xishuangbanna Water-Splashing Festival” and “Virtual Peacock Dance Performance”.

- “Virtual Water-Splashing Festival”: When users wear VR devices, they can “be present” at the Water-Splashing Festival site. They can choose from three roles: “dancer”, “audience”, and “drummer” to experience the collective carnival of Dai ethnic group’s dance. When choosing the “dancer” role, the system will prompt the standard degree of movements (such as “The angle of the three-bend is insufficient, please adjust your waist”).

- “Virtual Peacock Dance Performance”: Users can “watch” the 3D - modeled Peacock Dance performance, freely switch perspectives (such as observing hand movements up-close), and click on the screen to view the cultural explanations of the movements (such as “This movement imitates a peacock grooming its feathers”).

Experience Scenario Promotion: Deploy VR devices in museums (Yunnan Provincial Museum), scenic spots (the venue of the Water-Splashing Festival in Xishuangbanna), and schools (Yunnan Arts University), where users can experience for free.

Cultural and tourism integration for sustainable development: Balancing conservation and economic returns

The integration of culture and tourism is the key to solving “commercial alienation”. It is necessary to achieve a win-win situation between “cultural protection” and “economic benefits” through “high-quality performances + festival activation + cultural and creative development”.

1. Standardization of on-site scenic area performances: Avoid commercial alienation

Formulate Performance Standards: The Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, in collaboration with the inheritance base, formulates the Performance Specifications for Dai Dance in Scenic Spots, clarifying the “three elements”:

- Duration Requirements: The performance duration of traditional dances should be no less than 10 minutes (e.g., the Peacock Dance, Gaguang Dance, and

Elephant-Foot Drum Dance are each 5 minutes long), and it must include a “cultural explanation session” (5 minutes, during which the inheritor or tour guide explains the connotation of the dance);

- **Movement Requirements:** Core movements such as the “three curves” and “peacock hand” must be retained, and arbitrary modification is prohibited; performers must undergo training (be eligible to take up their posts only after passing the assessment) and be familiar with the cultural background of the dance;

- **Scene Requirements:** The performance venue should be decorated with Dai elements (such as peacock-pattern decorations and elephant-foot drum props) to create a cultural atmosphere and avoid mixing with commercial advertisements.

Create High-quality Live-action Shows: In the core scenic spots of Xishuangbanna and Dehong (such as the Ancient Sipsongpanna Town, the Grand Golden Pagoda in Mangshi), create the “Live-action Show of Dai Culture”, integrating dance, music and folk customs.

2. Festival Activation: Enhancing the Sense of Cultural Participation

Hold the “Yunnan Dai Dance Culture Festival”: It is held alternately in Xishuangbanna and Dehong every year for three days and consists of four major sections:

- **Opening Ceremony Performance:** Invite folk dance troupes, university teams, and inheritors to perform traditional and innovative dances;

- **Workshops:** Inheritors teach basic movements, and both tourists and students can participate;

- **Cultural Forum:** Invite scholars and inheritors to discuss the inheritance and protection of the dance, and release the “White Paper on the Inheritance of Dai Dance”;

- **The Closing Ceremony and Award Gala:** Select the “Best Inheritance Team” and “Best Innovative Work” to inspire the power of inheritance.

Integration into Traditional Festivals: Add the “cultural experience session” of dance to the Dai people’s Water - Splashing Festival, the Closing-Door Festival, and the Opening - Door Festival:

- **Water- Splashing Festival:** Organize the “Thousand- People Gaguang Dance” performance. Tourists can join in, and inheritors will guide the movements. Set up the “Dai Dance Costume Experience Area” where tourists can wear silver ornaments and tube

skirts and take photos as souvenirs.

- **Closing-Door Festival:** Hold the “Peacock Dance Blessing Performance”. Dancers convey the blessings of “peace and harvest” through the performance, enhancing the religious and cultural connotations of the dance.

3. Cultural and creative product development: Form a “protection-revenue” cycle

Develop cultural and creative products based on core elements: Centering around core elements such as the peacock imagery, elephant-foot drum, develop cultural and creative products.

Cultural category:

- **Picture books** on the theme of peacock dance (such as *The Dance Journey of the Little Peacock*, suitable for children), postcards of dance movements, and music - stand in the shape of an elephant - foot drum (combining practicality and decoration);

- **Apparel category:** Simplified Dai dance costumes (suitable for daily wear, such as T - shirts and dresses printed with peacock patterns).

Establish a “Profit Feedback” Mechanism: 30% of the sales profit of cultural and creative products is invested in the “Dai Dance Development Fund”, which is used for subsidies to inheritors, digital protection, and school curriculum construction.

International exchange and cross - cultural communication: Enhancing global influence

As a cultural symbol of cross - border ethnic groups, Dai ethnic dance needs to promote the “going - out” of Chinese national culture through “overseas performances + cross - border cooperation + academic exchanges”.

1. Overseas Performances and Cultural Promotion

- **Participation in International Dance Festivals:** Organize Chinese dance majors (college students) and professional dance troupes to participate in major international dance events in Thailand, South Korea, Japan, and other countries, and perform traditional and innovative dance works.

- **Holding “Overseas Special Performances of Chinese Dai Dance”:** Hold one special performance per year in the capitals of Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos (Bangkok, Nay Pyi Taw, Vientiane), and combine it with “cultural lectures”

(explaining the history of the dance and cross - border cultural connections) and “workshops” (teaching basic movements) to attract local people to participate.

2. Cross - border cooperation among dance institutions

Talent Exchange Program: Establish an “Exchange Student Program” with dance institutions in Southeast Asia. Each year, select Chinese students majoring in Dai dance to study in Thailand and Myanmar. At the same time, accept students from these countries to study in China to promote the exchange of skills.

3. Academic exchanges and international communication

- Host the “China- Southeast Asia Dai Ethnic Dance Inheritance and Protection Forum” once every two years. Invite scholars and inheritors from China, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos to participate, discuss protection strategies for cross-border ethnic dances, and promote the formation of an “international protection network”.

- Multilingual Dissemination: Translate the content of the “Yunnan Dai Dance Digital Library” into English, Thai, and Burmese, and make it accessible to Southeast Asian countries. Open English accounts on YouTube and Facebook, and release videos of dance performances and cultural interpretations to expand the international audience.

Discussion

Centered on three progressive core objectives.” basic objectives, problem- oriented objectives, and strategy- oriented objectives”. This study integrates literature research, multi- scenario field surveys, the Delphi method, and typical case analysis to construct a closed loop of “theoretical analysis, empirical verification, and practical implementation” that aligns with each objective.

At the basic objective level, relying on the theoretical framework of dance ecology, this study uses the characteristics of “dance domains” (Wuchou) to deconstruct the morphological features of Dai dance. It clarifies the ecological causes and cultural connotations of the “three-curved” (Sandao Wan) posture, analyzes the influences of accompanying instruments such as the elephant-foot drum and tube skirts on dance forms and styles, and explores the inheritance ecology— by

evaluating the adaptability of four inheritance models (family, master- apprentice, school, and folk community) and reflecting the interactions between inheritance subjects and the natural, cultural, and social ecosystems.

At the problem-oriented objective level, based on the theory of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) living inheritance, this study identifies four core contradictions (e.g., intergenerational gaps and commercial alienation) through key informant interviews and cultural tourism surveys, and quantitatively determines the priority protection elements using the Delphi method.

At the strategy-oriented objective level, this study integrates the two aforementioned theories to construct a four- dimensional strategy of “education as the foundation, digital empowerment, cultural- tourism symbiosis, and international communication”. Each strategy is supported by empirical evidence, such as the “dual-tutor system” in colleges and universities, the application of 3D motion capture technology, the formulation of cultural tourism performance standards, and cross-border dance cooperation.

Additionally, methodologically, this study adopts “multi-scenario cross-validation” to enhance credibility; practically, it proposes the logic of “dynamic strategy adaptation.” The research provides a reference for the ecological inheritance of Dai dance and similar studies.

Suggestion

Strengthening Academic Research : In interviews, national-level inheritors (N1 , N2) have repeatedly mentioned that “the technical mnemonics and dance legends of veteran artists are mostly passed down orally and through demonstration; if not recorded, they may be lost with the passing of inheritors.” Provincial-level inheritors (P1 , P2 , P3) also emphasized that “existing research mostly focuses on the surface of movements, ignoring the connection between Dai dance and Dai Buddhist culture as well as agricultural life.” Based on this, it is suggested that universities and research institutions should be encouraged to conduct in-depth research on the history, techniques, and cultural connotations of Dai dance, systematically sort out its development context, and establish a comprehensive database. For example, launch the “Oral History Project of Dai Dance” to record the oral experiences and techniques of inheritors; use resources such as 3 D

motion capture data (e.g., standardized movement models of Dai dance), music scores (accompaniment scores for elephant-foot drums, paizhang gongs, cymbals, etc.), and costume patterns to build an open online academic platform for sharing among universities, research institutions, and inheritance bases. Universities (such as the surveyed Yunnan Arts University and Dehong Normal University) should be encouraged to establish a “Dai Dance Research Center,” and collaborate with disciplines such as dance studies, digital technology, and tourism management to carry out interdisciplinary research on topics like “digital inheritance” and “cultural-tourism integration,” so as to fill the gaps in existing research.

Improving Policy and Financial Support : Municipal-level inheritors (whose current subsidy is mentioned in interviews as 3,000 RMB per year) have reported that “the subsidy is only sufficient to cover part of the cost of costume materials and cannot support systematic teaching.” The government should formulate the Special Plan for the Inheritance of Yunnan Dai Dance, increase subsidies for inheritors (e.g., raise the subsidy for municipal-level inheritors to 10,000 RMB per year), and establish the “Dai Dance Development Fund” to support training, performances, and digital protection. At the same time, formulate administrative regulations to standardize tourism performances and prevent the tendency of excessive commercialization.

Building a “Social Participation Platform for Dai Dance”: Led by the Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, integrate resources from enterprises, public welfare organizations, universities, and communities to establish an online supply-demand matching platform (e.g., release information such as “inheritor training programs,” “corporate sponsorship projects,” and “community teaching volunteer recruitment”) to achieve precise resource matching. Guide enterprises to sponsor Dai dance activities (e.g., title sponsorship of the “Dai Dance Culture Festival”), support public welfare organizations in launching the “Dai Dance Community Promotion Program” (organizing workshops in urban communities), mobilize the public’s enthusiasm for protection, and form a synergy among the government, institutions, and society.

Conclusion

Focusing on Yunnan Dai dance, this study systematically achieves three preset research objectives through multi-dimensional methods including literature review, field investigation, case analysis, and Delphi method:

Relying on dance ecology, it completes the systematic deconstruction of Dai dance’s artistic system (e.g., the dance domain characteristics of the “Three-Curved Posture” and the ecological influence of music and costumes) and inheritance ecology (the adaptability of four inheritance models);

Based on the Theory of Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), it identifies four core contradictions in inheritance (such as intergenerational gaps and commercial alienation), and through quantitative evaluation, determines the “Three-Curved Posture”, peacock imagery, and master-apprentice teaching experience as the highest-priority protection elements;

It constructs a “four-dimensional dynamic protection model” (Education - Digitalization - Cultural-Tourism Integration - International Communication) and 12 specific strategies, promoting the transformation of Dai dance from “static protection” to “ecological living inheritance”.

This study holds both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it integrates the theories of dance ecology and the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), breaking through the single paradigm; methodologically, it uses the Delphi method to quantify the priority of protection elements, enhancing scientific rigor; practically, it achieves sustainable inheritance through a four-dimensional collaborative mechanism. Its theoretical value lies in providing a new analytical framework for the research on ethnic dances. Its practical value is reflected in that the mechanisms proposed in the strategy, such as multi-level education and digital gene bank, can be replicated and applied to the protection of other ethnic folk dances.

As a “living carrier” that bears the Dai people’s cultural genes and spiritual core, the inheritance of Dai dance is not only the continuation of skills, but also the preservation of the ethnic group’s cultural memory. While this study provides theoretical references and practical paths for the ecological inheritance of Dai dance, the protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a long-term and dynamic project. In the future,

it is still necessary to continuously explore the innovation and optimization of inheritance mechanisms in conjunction with the development of the times and social needs—protecting the authenticity of traditional skills while endowing them with vitality to adapt to modern society. This will allow Dai dance to continue to radiate its unique charm in the balance between cultural inheritance and the development of the times, and also provide a replicable practical model for the “living continuity” of more ethnic cultural heritages.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

1. Scope and purpose of AI tool usage: AI tools were solely used for non-core research auxiliary work, specifically including: (1) Assisting in organizing the logical framework of the literature review (e.g., sorting out the research context of Dai dance inheritance from existing academic papers and policy documents, without generating original research conclusions); (2) Optimizing the expression of the English abstract and keywords (ensuring compliance with academic norms while maintaining the accuracy of the author’s original intent).

2. Limitations of AI tool usage: All core research links were independently completed by the author, with no involvement of generative AI. All original data (e.g., interview records of national-level inheritors, participation rates of primary and secondary school students, statistical data of scenic spot performances) and research conclusions fully reflect the author’s independent research achievements.

3. Verification and responsibility attribution of AI-generated content: The author has conducted a comprehensive review and verification of all content generated or optimized by AI, and no errors, biases, or violations of academic ethics (e.g., plagiarism, false data, misinterpretation of cultural connotations) were identified. The author assumes full responsibility for the authenticity, accuracy, and academic integrity of the final content of the manuscript, and ensures that the use of AI has not affected the originality and scientificity of the research.

4. Compliance with academic norms: This declaration truthfully discloses the usage of generative AI during the manuscript writing process, which is in line with international academic ethics requirements for scientific research involving AI tools. The author

confirms that there is no undisclosed AI usage, and is willing to accept supervision from the journal editorial department, academic institutions, and the public.

The author hereby confirms that the content of the above declaration is true and complete. The author shall bear all legal and academic responsibilities arising from any false information in this declaration.

CRedit author statement

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In the research and writing process of the paper “A Study on the Inheritance and Protection Strategies of Yunnan Dai Dance”, the author’s specific contributions are as follows:

Conceptualization: The author independently designed the core research framework of the paper, innovatively integrating the “Theory of Living Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)” with the “Dance Ecology Theory founded by Mr. Zi Huayun”. On this basis, the author constructed the “four-dimensional dynamic protection system for Dai dance inheritance” and clarified the core proposition of “promoting the transformation of Dai dance from ‘static protection’ to ‘living inheritance’”, thus defining a clear theoretical direction and target positioning for the research.

Data curation: The author collected, organized, and archived all original research data, including field survey data (covering interview records of 8 key figures, involving 2 national-level inheritors and 1 scenic spot manager, as well as participatory observation notes of inheritance base teaching and school dance classes), expert scoring data via the Delphi method (composed of 5 experts: 2 ICH protection scholars, 2 Dai dance inheritors, and 1 official from the cultural and tourism department), and statistical data of scenic spot performances. These data provide solid support for the research and analysis.

Formal analysis: The author applied the Dance Ecology Theory to deconstruct the morphological characteristics of Dai dance, focusing on interpreting the “Wuchou (dance domain)” attribute of the “Three-Curved Posture (Sandao Wan)”, and conducting an in-depth analysis of the ecological impact of elements such as elephant-foot drums and tube skirts on dance forms.

The author also conducted a quantitative evaluation of the priority of 8 core protection elements using the Delphi method, and systematically analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of 4 inheritance models (family, master-apprentice, school, and folk community), clarifying the applicable scenarios of each model to provide an analytical basis for subsequent strategy design.

Investigation: The author independently designed and implemented field investigations, covering 3 Dai-inhabited areas in Yunnan (Xishuangbanna, Dehong, Pu'er). Specifically, the author visited 8 inheritance bases (including national, provincial, and county levels), 12 educational institutions (covering professional institutions, ethnic middle schools, ordinary primary schools, and rural primary schools), and multiple cultural and tourism venues. In-depth interviews (lasting 1.5-2 hours) were conducted with 8 key figures, and practical problems in the inheritance process were recorded in detail to ensure the research is closely aligned with real inheritance scenarios.

Methodology: The author integrated multi-disciplinary research methods including literature review, field investigation, case analysis, comparative research, and the Delphi method to form a systematic research approach. This included defining the selection criteria for 4 typical cases, determining the composition of experts and scoring rules for the Delphi method, and designing a "multi-scenario cross-validation" plan to further enhance the credibility and scientific rigor of the research.

Writing - original draft: The author independently completed the original draft of the entire manuscript, ensuring consistent academic logic and accurate content expression, and fully presenting the research ideas and findings.

Writing - review & editing: The author conducted a comprehensive review and revision of the paper: optimizing the logical structure of the "four-dimensional protection strategy"; polishing the academic expression (including adjusting the reference format to meet the specifications of the journal *Asian Social Issues*); and confirming that there is no infringement of intellectual property rights in the paper, so as to ensure the academic integrity and compliance of the paper.

The author confirms that all the above contributions are true and accurate, and that no other individuals who meet the criteria for authorship have been omitted. The author assumes full responsibility for the authenticity of this contribution statement.

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