

Artistic Aesthetics and Cultural Inheritance of Gannan Tea-picking Dance

Zhang Xichen¹ and Li Mengnan²

Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, ShangHai Vocational College of Science and Technology, China

¹xichenzh3389@163.com, ²39678956@qq.com

Abstract

Chinese folk traditional dance has a long history. Most dances come from working life, usually the working people jointly create and perform, in order to show the life in a region and people's spiritual style. Gannan tea-picking dance has a history of hundreds of years. It is a unique dance art with unique aesthetic characteristics in Chinese traditional folk culture and art. This article starts from an aesthetic point of view, taking the "three amazing" of Gannan tea-picking dance as an entry point, analyzes its unique aesthetic style, expounds its historical heritage and innovation, and provides new ideas for the inheritance and development of Gannan tea-picking dance.

Keywords: *Gannan tea-picking dance, Aesthetics, Aesthetic style, Folk culture*

1. Introduction

Hakka culture is the sum of spiritual culture and material culture jointly created by Hakka people. On the one hand, it inherits the ancient orthodox Han culture, on the other hand, it integrates the indigenous culture of South China, and the special geographical environment forms a unique cultural ecology [1].

Gannan tea-picking dance is a wonderful flower in Hakka spiritual culture. It inherits the excellent tradition of ancient Chinese dance, and has been processed and carved by many famous artists, and finally formed today's unique aesthetic characteristics that give people a sense of beauty and art.

This paper interprets its unique artistic aesthetic sense and cultural heritage from an aesthetic point of view, so that people can have a deeper understanding of the style and artistic characteristics of Gannan tea-picking dance [2].

Gannan is located in the south of Jiangxi Province, accounting for nearly a quarter of the province's area, and is one of the Hakka gathering areas in China. The long and heavy history and culture have created a deep cultural heritage in this land. Gannan tea-picking dance is an art created and loved by Hakka people. It was born in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties and has a history of more than 300 years. Since most of his arts personnel are illiterate, they are mostly passed on by word of mouth, and there are not many historical records left. After the founding of New China, with the government's emphasis on traditional culture, it began to systematically sort out and excavate tea-picking and dancing in Gannan. It was mainly collected, organized, and condensed from the performances of many old folk

Article history:

Received (February 25, 2020), Review Result (April 5, 2020), Accepted (April 30, 2020)

artists. Because the artistic style presented is also closely related to the “art tactics” of the old arts. Among them, the Dwarf Step, Single Sleeve and Fan Flower “three amazing” are the most prominent external manifestations of Gannan Tea-picking Dance [3]. The unique movement forms and performances show the extremely rich cultural connotation of Gannan Tea-picking Dance. It also constitutes unique beauty of Gannan tea-picking dance, unlike other traditional dance art forms [4][5].



Figure 1. Hakka love tea-picking dance

2. Art presentation of “Three Amazing”

2.1. Dwarf Step

The dwarf step is one of the “three musts” of Gannan tea-picking Dance. The Gannan Hakka people lived in the mountains for a long time, and developed habits such as bowing to the tea, carrying shoulders, carrying weight, squatting under the load, and climbing when climbing in the daily life and productive labor, which was later refined and applied to Gannan tea-picking dance, then the unique dwarf step was formed. During the tea-picking season, tea farmers are on the way to pick tea in the mountains. Because of the high mountains and long roads, in order to maintain their balance, they need to bend their bodies and lean forward slightly; people need to bend down when picking tea because the tea tree is not high. The fresh leaves are put into the basket behind them, and sometimes they need to be compacted. These actions often need to be squatted to complete.

Over time, this movement characteristic from working life has been absorbed by Gannan tea-picking dance. After several generations of beautification and processing from artists, it has formed today’s dwarf step. Its characteristics are: the toe is pointed, the legs are half squat and move forward. Artists describe this image as “lion head, tiger back”, “monkey jumps on crutches, walks like butterflies and walks like water”.

2.2. Single Sleeve

The single-sleeve tube is another “Amazing” of Gannan tea-picking dance. It is common to use props to perform in folk art. The performance of props in Gannan tea-picking dance is reflected in the use of single sleeves. This single-sleeve tube is very different from the double sleeves in general opera, and its performance only relies on a single sleeve. Regarding the origin of the single sleeve, there is a beautiful legend that one of the ancestors of the creator of the tea-picking dance was cut off by someone, with the help of a beautiful tea-picking woman, the two finally became a couple. In order to make up for the deficiencies of her lover’s body, the female specially sewn a separate sleeve. The use of the single-sleeve tube as a prop to perform Gannan tea-picking dance not only has a commemorative value, but also greatly enriches the content of the performance and enhances the artistic expression of the dance, implying the culture exhibited by Gannan tea-picking dance.

2.3. Fan flower

Fan flower is another characteristic of Gannan tea-picking dance. Fan flowers in Gannan tea-picking dances have rich and varied forms and color changes, and almost all men, women and children in the Gannan region know the basic performance techniques of fan flowers. In the performance, the fan can not only be used to simulate life tools, but also used to match wonderful dance postures and movements. With the centuries-old inheritance of tea-picking dances in Gannan, the fan flower performance form is more and more abundant, and the double fan performance form has evolved. The cooperation of the fans not only beautifies the dance posture, but also enriches the language expression and artistic expression of the dance by adding the fans, so that the dance can express more emotions through the fans.



Figure 2. Stage performances of Gannan tea-picking dance

3. Artistic and aesthetic characteristics of Gannan tea-picking dance

3.1. Witty humor is the spiritual temperament of Gannan tea-picking dance

The early Gannan Hakkas were unable to express their inner emotions under the fence, and later they chose another way of telling. That is to say the words with opposite means, to

accept the past, to enjoy in the suffering. The Hakkas' idea of living happily in a miserable life - find beauty in ugliness. This kind of thought was absorbed by Gannan tea-picking dance and became its most outstanding inner temperament.

Many of the singing words in the tea-picking dance in Gannan show the characteristics of witty humor. For example, when you are sad, you are saying something that is not sad. When you are bitter, you are saying something that is not painful. In "Love", when the fourth brother stepped on the feet of the fourth sister, the fourth sister didn't complain, but she just said "Who is blind?"

We know the origin of Gannan tea-picking dance has a great relationship with the Gannan tea-picking drama. The latter is the artistic environment bred by the former.

Whether in performance form or performance content, the "three amazing" in dance will produce witty humor in disguise. For example, a tall man is played into a short, and the double sleeves are folded into single sleeves, these deformations and witty humor has become a unique temperament of Gannan tea-picking dance art.

3.2. Rich Hakka features

Gannan tea-picking dance has strong Hakka characteristics. First of all, although the musical foundation of Gannan tea-picking dance comes from the minor songs of Gannan folk songs, it gradually formed its own singing style over time, with unique line-ups and charming singing voices. At the same time, the hard-working Hakka people get creative inspiration from picking tea, making pig grass, picking bacteria, fried tea, plate of peanuts, and animal life in the mountains etc. It is closely integrated with the local customs. A unique dance form and style has gradually formed through imitation performances. It shows the profound cultural background and mass foundation of Gannan tea-picking dancing. In addition, the name of the dance also has a strong Hakka character, which can really be described as listening to the sound. For example, the action names of Hakka dialects such as "Crow Spreading Wings", "Toad Over Hill", "Lazy Cat Scratching Itching" are also used as dance names, corresponding to the corresponding dance moves. There are also names such as mountain songs, folk songs and song cards used as dance action names, such as butterfly song card names, to highlight the many steps and movements of butterflies in the dance. The rich Hakka cultural characteristics contained in the picking tea dance of Gannan make it a beautiful and unique artistic style. It can be said that beauty has charm, while beauty is seen in ugliness, and it is unique.

3.3. Art form of reading, singing and dancing

The fusion of singing, reading and dancing has become the basic performance form of Gannan tea-picking dance. Dance plays an important role in tea-picking in Gannan. It never be interrupted throughout. In the dance performance, there can be no reading singing and chanting, but there must have dancing. It can be said that every Gannan tea-picking actor is a dancer. In the performance, actors always maintain the artistic image of a dancer, and eventually achieves full dancing performance on stage. In the traditional song "Diao Guai" of Gannan tea-picking opera, it shows the rich fusion of body language, music language and written language. It perfectly combines the three performance forms of singing, reading and dancing. The joyful story of fishing crutches, and at this time, the dance moves actively cooperate with this story. The left hand is holding the suspender, the right hand is matched with the fan, stepping on the witty and humorous stage steps, walking step by step on the

stage. Through this shape performance, everyone experienced the unique charm and happiness of Gannan tea-picking dance.

4. Inheritance and innovation of Gannan tea-picking dance

4.1. Inheritance

Any art form has a great relationship with local folk customs, regional characteristics, and production and lifestyle. The origin of Gannan tea-picking dance is closely related to the history of tea cultivation, production and sale of local laborers. It's established on the basis of "Small Tea-picking", "Sister Picking Tea", etc. In the early stage of the creation, the dance elements of folk lanterns were also absorbed, and some elements in the dance of "Taoism" performances were also integrated in development.

County Jiulong Mountain Barrier's "Jiulong Mountain Tea-picking" had begun to form its own unique dance style. "Feng Mawei recruiting at the banquet" in the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty has a description of "noisy string singing tea". By the time of Jiaqing, "Jiulong Mountain Tea-picking" was processed by Li Ping to form a more coherent dance movement, and the connotation was fuller.

It can be seen that the inheritance of tea-picking dance in Gannan is all related to tea. In the 1960s, at that time sent a number of teachers and students from Gannan Literature and Art School went to Wangmudu in Ganxian County to learn from local folk old artists, and carried out inheritance and innovation on the basis of retaining the original stage characteristics [6][7].

4.2. Innovation

Innovation is the life of art and the source of power for cultural prosperity. Looking back at history, the innovation of Gannan tea-picking dance has never stopped.

In the 1960s, "Tea Boy Brother" was adapted from "Kowloon Mountain Picking Tea", and made innovative attempts to the fan tools in the tea-picking dance in Gannan, and innovated the fan's color matching, shape design and pattern design.

In the early 1980s, the fan-making tools were further innovated in Gannan tea-picking dance "Wife Trial". The fan the actor took showed a full circle for a while and a semi-circle for a while with a metaphorical changeable image.

In 2011, the tea-picking opera "Eight Sons Joined the Army" made a bold innovation in the traditional dance art form, which was expressed in the form of a musical, and the dwarf step was demonstrated by the dance movements of eight sons, which enriched the personality characteristics of the characters and rendered outstanding theme.

With the development, the innovation of tea-picking dance is not only reflected in the sleeves, fans and dance steps, but also in the figure of the dance and even the art of makeup, adding modern characteristics to the traditional dance. For example, in the dance segment of "Six Two and Four Sisters", the actor has the makeup of two characters at the same time, half is Liu Er, half is the Fourth Sister, when half of the face of "Liu Er" appears, the actor's dance movement show the greed and ugliness of the character "Liu Er". When the half face of the "Four Sisters" appears, the actor's dance moves show the sweetness and simplicity of the characters of the "Fourth Sister". In short, the times are developing and the history is progressing. The inheritance and innovation of Gannan tea-picking dance will always be continuing. Not only professional research units and dance units, but also extensive participation of society have made great contributions.



Figure 3. Gannan tea picking dance – Eight Sons Joined the Army

5. Conclusion

Gannan tea-picking dance is not only a unique form of dance in southern Jiangxi, but also has huge cultural connotation and value. For this reason, people in the field have continued their research on artistic characteristics and innovation. Taking the “three amazing” of Gannan tea-picking dance as an entry point, we analyzed its unique artistic aesthetic style and elaborated on its historical inheritance and innovation, with a view to providing a theoretical reference for the promotion and development of Gannan tea-picking dance.

References

- [1] Guo Binhao, “Comparative study folk dance type characteristics and cultural connotation of the regional environment – Taking Gannan tea dance and Nan Feng exorcise an example,” Master thesis, Jiangxi Normal University, (2014)
- [2] Guo Li, “An Analysis of the Origin of Fuzhou Jasmine Tea Culture and the Belief and Customs of Linshui,” *Tea in Fujian*, vol.37, no.4, pp.53-56, (2015)
- [3] Li Xueling, “On the Charm of Ugliness and Sublimation of Beauty in Folk Dance - From Tea-picking Dance in South Jiangxi,” *Ethnic Art Studies*, vol.2015, no.3, pp.73-80, (2015)
- [4] Qu Hongmei, “There are real meanings in the plain, and there are splendid folks—Analysis of the compilation characteristics of "teaching materials and teaching practice of tea-picking and dancing in Gannan," *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, vol.2014, no.S2, pp.102-106, (2014)
- [5] Lin Jianping and Wang Longsheng, “Influence of the Cultural Ecology to the Development of Gannan Tea-picking Dance,” *Journal of Gannan Normal University*, vol.35, no.2, pp.117-120, (2014) DOI: 10.13698/j.cnki.cn36-1037/c.2014.02.027
- [6] Xie Yan and Xu Zhongxi, “Analysis of Su Shi's Tea Poems and Hainan Tea Culture Fusion Tourism,” *Tea in Fujian*, vol.36, no.6, pp.61-63, (2014)
- [7] Wang Yuqing, “Gannan Tea-picking Dancing Style, Performance and Aesthetic Characteristics,” *Song of Yellow River*, vol.2019, no.6, (2019)