

An Analysis of the Characteristic Meaning of “One Dance, Multiple Ethnicities” in the Gansu Region of China

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Abstract

Within the context of the Chinese national community, which reflects a long history of multi-ethnic communication and integration, the sheepskin fan dance, characterized by the concept of “one dance, multiple ethnicities,” has emerged in Gansu. This dance embodies the spiritual values of integrity, inclusiveness, sharing, and co-creation. Centering on the sheepskin fan dance in the Gansu region, this paper examines its ontological characteristics, situates it within the framework of contemporary societal themes, and conducts a comprehensive analysis of similar folk dances with shared features. The aim is to guide the development of folk dances in the modern era while deepening their role and significance in fostering a strong sense of Chinese national identity.

Keywords

Consciousness of the Chinese national community
Sheepskin fan dance
One dance, multiple ethnicities
Gansu

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1. Introduction

In this context, building on existing research, this paper explores the intersection of the consciousness of the Chinese national community and dance art, with the sheepskin fan dance of Gansu as the research focus. By emphasizing its characteristics of “one dance, multiple ethnicities,” this study aims to enhance the cohesion and sense of identity within the Chinese nation through the lens of dance art. This approach also embodies an active

awareness of the Chinese national community.

Gansu has been a multi-ethnic province since ancient times. The dance phenomena arising in this environment not only reflect the traditional culture of the Chinese nation but also embody the distinctive cultural traits of each ethnic group. Within Gansu, the development of dance culture is particularly unique. Among these traditions, the sheepskin fan dance has a long history and widespread presence. The sheepskin fan

dance is performed in the Wushan Mountains of Tianshui, Longnan Xihe, Minxian County of Dingxi, and Weiyuan areas of Gansu Province, all exemplifying the “one dance, multiple ethnicities” characteristic.

2. Integration and inclusive coexistence

The characteristics of “one dance, multiple ethnicities” are closely interconnected with the consciousness of the Chinese national community. From a historical perspective, although the performances of the sheepskin fan dance in Xihe, Dingxi, Weiyuan, and Tianshui Wushan in Gansu Province vary in timing, they are all situated in southeastern Gansu and share a common trajectory in the historical evolution and development of the Chinese nation ^[1]. On the one hand, the “one dance, multiple ethnicities” characteristic reflects shared cultural and performance forms among ethnic groups. On the other hand, it has endured throughout the historical development of various ethnic communities in Gansu. From a historical perspective, the sheepskin fan dance of Longnan Xihe, Dingxi Minxian, Weiyuan, and Tianshui Wushan does not exhibit the feature of “one dance, multiple ethnicities” as a result of short-term interactions or exchanges. Instead, this characteristic has emerged from the long-term development and integration of diverse ethnic groups over time ^[2].

The cultures of various ethnic groups have collided and interwoven throughout the long course of history, giving rise to shared cultural commonalities. The sheepskin fan dance in different regions reflects the characteristics of “one dance, multiple ethnicities.” Over thousands of years of history in Gansu, through the evolution of social and historical development, various ethnic groups have gradually formed a state of communication and integration. Together, they have created a shared cultural and historical narrative while preserving their unique identities.

From a spatial perspective, the connection of mountains and rivers facilitates the blending of dances. The sheepskin fan dances of Longnan Xihe, Dingxi Minxian, Weiyuan, and Tianshui Wushan coexist within Gansu, unified by their origin in the land of the Chinese nation. These dances share the same physical space and are deeply interrelated. The characteristics of

“one dance, multiple ethnicities” are not only marked by shared prosperity and mutual reliance but also by inclusiveness, which is a core element of this concept. In their interaction with diverse cultures, the sheepskin fan dances of different regions neither reject nor harm one another. Instead, they attract, integrate, and adapt to each other, embodying inclusiveness and diversity in their evolution ^[3].

Although the Han ethnicity plays a central role in the inheritance of this tradition, the cultural composition of the sheepskin fan dance also incorporates elements and relics from the Tibetan, Qiang, and other minority ethnicities. In its performance, Tibetan, Qiang, and other ethnic groups also participate, blending diverse ethnic cultures into a unified expression. This kind of cultural inclusiveness does not imply the dissolution of any single ethnic group’s culture, nor does it mean the indiscriminate absorption of all cultural elements. Instead, it promotes the development and preservation of the essence of traditional cultures from various ethnic groups, fostering a shared cultural heritage among them.

3. The co-creation and sharing of national cultural symbols

Cultural symbols are representations that embody unique cultural meanings and connotations. National cultural symbols reflect the ideological spirit and collective emotions shaped by the historical development of people, highlighting distinctive national and regional cultural characteristics. The sheepskin fan dance serves as a symbolic representation of national culture ^[4]. Without a common intersection of shared material achievements and interests, it is impossible to form a consensus or a strong sense of community. The memory of history is the process through which all ethnic groups share their past. In the course of cultural exchanges, the spread of the sheepskin fan has facilitated interaction and communication between different regions and ethnicities, building a shared spiritual home for all, united by common emotions. The emergence and formation of the sheepskin fan dance in the Gansu region was not the creation of any one nation ^[5]. The national cultural symbols we see today have been shaped by the efforts of many ethnic groups, each contributing their culture

and strength. In terms of culture and performance, the sheepskin fan dance incorporates elements from Tibetan, Qiang, Han, and other ethnic groups, creating a strong sense of unity. These symbols are not exclusive to the Tibetan, Qiang, or Han cultures, but rather represent the cultural heritage of the entire Chinese nation.

The sheepskin fan dance, which embodies the “one dance, multiple ethnicities” characteristics, integrates the diverse cultures of local ethnic groups. It allows shared national cultural symbols to transcend ethnic and regional boundaries, carrying distinct aesthetic values and spiritual qualities. These symbols are not limited to one specific culture. They are shared and participated in by multiple ethnic groups, creating a collective experience. This reflects the historical reality of long-term communication and integration among China’s ethnic groups, woven together by a shared and interactive Chinese culture^[6]. It is not only a clear expression of Chinese culture but also an important cultural representation within the Chinese national community.

The sheepskin fan dance, with its characteristic “one dance, multiple ethnicities,” highlights the concept of sharing. The term “multiple ethnicities” directly reflects this idea. Its remarkable “adaptability” allows it to evolve and thrive across different ethnic groups and regions while maintaining the distinctiveness of national cultural symbols. This process results in a unique national culture and a stable, collective sharing pattern. The “one dance, multiple ethnicities” characteristics are evident in the harmonious and shared national community environment. Whether in external symbols or internal culture, the mutual ownership and collective enjoyment of this tradition by all ethnic groups is revealed.

4. The construction of geo-community and spiritual community

The terms “Chinese nation” and “community” combine to form the concept of the “Chinese nation community.” Ferdinand Tönnies argues that “the basic forms of community are consanguineous community, geographical community, and spiritual community.” A geo-community refers to people living together in the same geographical area, while a spiritual community involves individuals who influence and coordinate with each other within the

same environment^[7]. Since the construction of a geo-community and spiritual community, the characteristics of sheepskin fan dance with “one dance, multiple ethnicities” in the Gansu area have a happy land for development, laying a foundation for the construction and development of the Chinese nation’s community consciousness.

The characteristics of “one dance, multiple ethnicities” highlight the interaction and “common presence” among various ethnic groups, preventing the contradictions stemming from cultural, geographical, linguistic, identity, and customs differences from defining their relationships. On one hand, the geo-community is reflected in the performance of the sheepskin fan dance across different regions of the Gansu Province. While there are regional variations, there is a shared cultural phenomenon, with many commonalities in form and tradition. On the other hand, it is also demonstrated through the communication and interaction of different ethnic groups within the same space. Shared geography and living conditions embody the natural commonalities among these groups. “Common existence” not only provides the spatial foundation for group interaction but also offers emotional support for individuals living together in the same space^[8].

From a geographical perspective, Gansu lies at the intersection of the Loess Plateau, the Inner Mongolia Plateau, and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Longnan West, Dingxi Minxian, Weiyuan, and Tianshui Wushan share similar living environments. These areas are adjacent to the plateau, with rugged and complex terrain, and they all rely on the Yellow River, creating a relatively isolated space. Born within the same geographical region, they are all part of the Chinese nation. This shared environment fosters interaction among various ethnic groups and a common historical memory of the sheepskin fan dance, which has helped shape the geographical community. It has also provided the foundation for the development of the “one dance, multiple ethnicities” characteristic of the sheepskin fan dance^[9].

Spiritual and emotional connections serve as the glue that binds the community together. A spiritual community is a unique entity where individuals believe that others can feel their emotional state, share in empathy, and collectively maintain this emotional bond. The sheepskin fan dance, as a folk art inspired by this

shared spirit, has been created and participated in by many ethnic groups, becoming a spiritual product of all ethnicities. Amid the interweaving and coexistence of different cultures, the characteristics of “one dance, multiple ethnicities” have emerged through the sheepskin fan dance. Through the shared memory and interaction of all ethnic groups, emotional synchronization and spiritual connection are fostered during the common performance and appreciation of the dance. This process explores the relationship between diversity and unity, highlighting the role of shared memory in creating a sense of collective identity^[10].

5. Conclusion

Jointly awakening the national spirit and emotional consensus created by “consistency,” the sheepskin fan dance’s “one dance, multiple ethnicities” features bring people together from all ethnic groups. The emotional bonds between these ethnic groups form the internal connection, based on a shared spirit that has accumulated over time. This unity allows people from all ethnicities to become closely linked, highlighting national centripetal force and cohesion, and becoming the best representation of the spiritual community. Furthermore, it provides a unique perspective for the study of ethnic exchanges and integration in Gansu, offering cultural support for the exploration of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community.

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