

Research on Inheritance and Development of Lotus Lantern Dance in Changge Old City, Henan Province

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Abstract:

Henan, with its strategic location in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, is one of the cradles of Chinese culture, rich in history and vibrant cultural and artistic life. As time has passed, Henan's cultural and artistic development has rapidly advanced, reaching the pinnacle of Chinese cultural development. Thanks to its convenient transportation and vast resources, Henan has become a hub for various cultural and artistic activities across the country. The lotus lantern dance in Changge, Henan, a branch of cultural arts, holds significant importance.

Keywords:

Changge old city lotus lantern dance
Historical origin
Artistic characteristics
Inheritance and development

Online publication: April 26, 2025

1. Cultural environment and historical origin of the lotus lantern dance in the old city

Changge City, located in central Henan Province, borders the ancient capital of Xuchang to the south, the provincial capital Zhengzhou to the north, Kaifeng to the east, and Luoyang to the west. Since ancient times, it has been a strategic location, as the saying goes, He who controls the Central Plains controls Changge. According to the Changge County Annals, Changge is the site of the ancient Ge Tian clan. Archaeological findings show that Changge has multiple sites of the Peiligang culture, where

ancestors lived and thrived as early as 7,000 years ago during the early Neolithic period, engaging in activities such as animal husbandry and farming. The name Changge first appeared in the Spring and Autumn Annals, specifically in the fifth year of Duke Yin of Lu (718 BC), when the people of Song attacked Zheng and besieged Changge. During the Warring States period, the State of Wei built the city of Changshe to the south, and the Qin Dynasty established Changshe County. In the sixth year of the Kaihuang era of the Sui Dynasty (586 AD), Changge County was established, with its county seat in today's Laotown. Throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan,

Ming, Qing, and Republic of China periods, Changge's administrative structure remained unchanged. In 1960, the county seat was moved to Shangheqiao Town.

The Lotus Lantern Dance, also known as the Jumping Lantern Dance or the Lotus Flower Lantern Dance, is a typical children's collective dance from Changge, Henan Province. It originated in Changge City during the Qing Dynasty and has been popular in Changge and its surrounding areas for three centuries. The dance was created by Zhang Heng and his descendants in Ping Street, Laocheng Town, during the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty. Over 300 years of performance, it has evolved into a unique form of dance art distinct from other folk dances. In June 2009, it was listed as an intangible cultural heritage project of Henan Province. The Laocheng Lotus Lantern Dance is characterized by its strong folk social fire features and incorporates elements of traditional Chinese opera. Unlike other folk performers, the dancers are all teenagers, giving the dance a distinctive artistic style. During its performance, the dance incorporates elements of the formations and compositions of Central Plains folk dances, developing its own unique artistic features. The dances return to tradition and exploration of the richness of folk art are of great significance. By incorporating various elements of folk culture, opera culture, and folk music, the dance enhances the performance skills of the children and promotes their overall development and mental health. The inheritance and promotion of this dance are essential. The Lotus Lantern Dance of the old city, with its educational value for children, is a testament to the wisdom and labor of the people of Changge, Henan. This dance, a product of the Central Plains people's life and labor, embodies their aspirations and dreams for a better life, driving the continuous development of social culture ^[1].

2. Artistic characteristics of the lotus lantern dance in the old city

The Lianhuadeng Dance of the old city originated as a children's collective dance to celebrate the harvest in Changge County during the Qing Dynasty. Over 300 years, it has developed distinct artistic features. According to surveys, besides the grand Lianhuadeng Festival held annually, which often includes lion, dragon,

bamboo horse, and land boat performances, the dance is also performed at ancient temple gatherings in multiple villages. The dancers in the Lianhuadeng Dance include the commander and the light bearers. The commander stands at the front of the dance team, holding a small flag and directing the performance with flag signals. Regardless of the size of the dance team, there is always one commander. The light bearers are typically young girls and boys aged nine to twelve, with more girls than boys. The dance team usually consists of more than twelve people, sometimes up to twenty or thirty, all holding delicate lotus lanterns and wearing bright dance costumes. They follow the commander, dancing to the rhythmic beats of gongs and drums ^[2].

The performers of the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city are mainly children, who vividly embody the innocence and purity of childhood. Their movements are lively and dynamic, full of childlike fun, with a cheerful music rhythm, simple props, and lively performance techniques. This dance is performed day and night in Changge and its surrounding areas. During the day, the dance is characterized by its vibrant and enthusiastic movements; at night, from a distance, the lotus lanterns in the hands shine like stars in the sky, and the dance formations continuously change, lively and dynamic, forming characters and various shapes, such as Peace Under Heaven, National Peace and People's Safety, and People-Oriented. The Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city has a rich cultural heritage and unique folk customs, making it a typical children's dance. Its style is filled with childlike fun, lively movements, a brisk rhythm, simple props, and simple yet refined steps, showcasing a distinct local flavor and vitality.

3. The survival status and inheritance of the lotus lantern dance in the old city

The Lianhuadeng Dance of the old city, a children's dance with Central Plains folk customs, holds significant historical, social, and artistic value. Since the reform and opening up, China has been influenced by various cultures, leading to fundamental changes in people's lifestyles and aesthetic tastes ^[3]. The trend of urban-rural integration has further exacerbated the aging of the Lianhuadeng Dance of the old city's inheritors and

reduced its popularity, placing it at risk of extinction. In today's rapidly evolving modern civilization, researching and protecting traditional folk culture has become a crucial aspect of national cultural development. Henan, a region that has played a significant role in the history of Chinese dance, places particular emphasis on the preservation and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, especially the folk dance art.

According to interviews and family records, the lotus lantern tradition was initially passed down within the Zhang family. The fifth generation of the Zhang family, Zhang Heng, introduced the lotus lantern, which was further promoted by his sixth-generation descendant, Zhang Xi. By the eighth generation, Bao Guang, Jian Yi, and En Tong (a student at the Imperial Academy) had perfected the tradition. In the ninth generation, Xian Zhi (a student at the Imperial Academy, awarded a sixth-rank title), Yuan Di (a student at the Imperial Academy, also awarded a sixth-rank title), and Zhen Zai continued the tradition. In the tenth generation, Dong Tai, You Jiang, Wen Yuan, Xin Jing (a student at the Imperial Academy), Chang Tian, Yun Tong, and Tong Ju further developed the tradition.

Among these inheritors, Zhang Xi, Zhang Tingshu, and Zhang Yingzhou are the most representative. Born on December 30, 1876, and passing away in February 1966, Zhang Xi (whose academic name is Zhang Qingfu) was primarily a businessman. His family ran a general store, and he was widely respected for his honest goods and sincere, kind treatment of people. Not only was he a successful businessman, but he also had profound accomplishments in medicine and the arts, bringing endless joy to the community through his artistic talents. During festivals, he would join other art enthusiasts in playing music and singing, adding to the festive atmosphere. Due to his passion for the arts and the fact that his father and grandfather were prominent figures in politics and passionate about art, he organized and promoted this cultural activity. He gathered children aged nine to thirteen from the village, who created their own routines and designs, made their own props, and bought costumes. They practiced tirelessly, performing in the streets and alleys during festivals, significantly contributing to the development of the lotus lantern dance in the old city^[4].

4. The predicament of the inheritance of the lotus lantern dance in the old city

The protection of intangible cultural heritage in our country is a significant undertaking for today's society, bearing the responsibility of inheriting and developing history. Promoting traditional Chinese folk arts has become a top priority in the goals of inheritance and development. Therefore, attention and participation from all sectors of society are essential. Currently, the challenges faced by the Laocheng Lotus Lantern Dance in its inheritance process include the fact that the protection efforts remain largely led by relevant government departments, organized by cultural centers, with inheritors engaging in activities independently, and lacking a systematic approach. To address these challenges, the Laocheng Lotus Lantern Dance must take necessary measures to change the current situation. First, it should strengthen cooperation with the media to make this traditional folk dance more widely known and interesting^[5]. Second, it should collaborate with various sectors of society, such as enterprises and schools, to promote the Laocheng Lotus Lantern Dance through publicity, thereby increasing public awareness. Through teaching, research, and visits to experts and scholars, we can enhance societal understanding of the protection of intangible cultural heritage, encouraging greater attention and participation in the activities of protecting and inheriting the dance, thus involving more people. With the rapid development of China's market economy, cultural development has expanded from enterprises and institutions to schools and society at large. In a new stage of development, the development of intangible culture and these cultures are mutually reinforcing and inseparable^[6].

School is an important place for cultural inheritance, and school education is an important way of cultural inheritance in modern society. In today's society, where traditional methods of family and community inheritance are gradually declining, establishing a method for the inheritance of school education can help preserve the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city. Nowadays, the state is increasingly focusing on the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage, announcing several batches of key protection projects and providing substantial financial support. However, there are still some issues. While this has sparked a heritage application fever, the government needs to mature in its approach to development and

protection during implementation. Currently, the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city faces the challenge of insufficient publicity^[7].

This phenomenon highlights the severe lack of school-based educational inheritance for the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city. Since the performers are primarily children, schools are the ideal venue for this form of cultural transmission. Not only does it allow students to appreciate and engage with China's rich folk dance culture, but it also contributes to the preservation and development of this intangible cultural heritage. School-based inheritance is not only sustainable but also beneficial for students' physical and mental growth. However, current school dance education focuses more on modern dances, with few opportunities to perform traditional dances, leading to a significant gap in the inheritance of traditional dance. Today, the school-based inheritance model is considered a crucial method for ensuring the long-term development of the Lianhuadeng Dance in Changge Old City.

Due to the lack of promotion and education in schools and insufficient government funding, the school-based education of the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city remains a gap. To establish a method for inheriting this dance through schools, we can extend it beyond local primary and secondary schools within the province to include students from other ethnic groups outside the province who are interested in learning about the Lianhuadeng Dance culture. Therefore, relevant government departments should enhance their awareness of inheritance and development, actively promote and develop intangible cultural heritage projects, increase financial support, provide economic assistance, and offer additional training courses. These measures aim to gradually instill a sense of responsibility and mission among inheritors towards the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Through these efforts, the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city can be better protected, ensuring its continuation and development as an intangible cultural heritage project.

5. Thoughts and suggestions on the inheritance of the lotus lantern dance in the old city

Nowadays, every minute, intangible cultural heritage

bearers in our country are disappearing, and folk cultural projects are vanishing. The Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city mainly relies on the skills and arts of the bearers who have been passed down from generation to generation. Most of the older bearers are now elderly and have difficulty moving around. Therefore, the cultivation of new bearers has become more urgent than ever. Protecting intangible cultural heritage means protecting its bearers. Government departments should gradually improve their protection mechanisms. The Changge City government should provide fixed rehearsal venues and financial support to the bearers to conduct inheritance and dissemination activities. Government departments should actively implement national policies supporting bearers, providing them with better living and development opportunities. For bearers with poor living conditions, necessary living subsidies should be provided to meet their basic needs. For those with better economic conditions, social recognition and awards should be given based on their performance in various activities, enhancing their enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for inheritance. It is essential to ensure that funds reach each bearer, providing them with strong support to focus on inheritance and research, avoiding the risk of them being abandoned due to financial difficulties.

Nowadays, school education is a vital channel for the transmission of modern social culture. We advocate that school education should not only keep pace with the times and impart advanced cultural knowledge but also take on the responsibility of promoting and preserving the traditional national culture that has been passed down in China for centuries. Due to natural and historical reasons, the Lianhuadeng Dance in the old city can only be passed down through traditional methods of oral and physical instruction within families and communities. The relatively backward economic development at that time hindered the educational level of the Lianhuadeng Dance community, and historically, there has been no formal school-based education for the Lianhuadeng Dance. To ensure the continuous transmission of traditional culture, especially intangible cultural heritage, it is essential to fully leverage the role of school education. A new method of school-based inheritance should be established, starting with the education of Lianhuadeng Dance culture in local primary and secondary schools in

Changge. Government departments need to intervene, and the education department of Changge City should integrate the education of Lianhuadeng Dance culture into the regular education system, making it part of students' extracurricular activities and incorporating it into regular art program rehearsals. This not only nurtures new forces for cultural inheritance but also strengthens the close collaboration between the government and schools. Excellent folk arts and cultures should be integrated into the education curriculum of all levels and types of schools, and based on actual conditions, additional courses on Lianhuadeng Dance should be added. The specialized classes and training programs for lantern dance aim to find new breakthroughs in the inheritance of this ancient traditional art. As times evolve, while preserving traditional folk arts, they can also incorporate new elements, making the art form more vibrant and diverse. By bringing intangible cultural heritage into schools, this nearly lost art of lotus lantern dance can be popularized, ensuring its legacy is passed down through generations, continuing without end.

Since the reform and opening up, China has been influenced by a variety of cultures, leading to fundamental changes in people's lifestyles and aesthetic

tastes. As the socialist market economy rapidly develops, research on the inheritance and development of the traditional folk dance of Changge Lotus Lantern Dance in Henan has become scarce. Furthermore, with the rise of urban-rural integration, the aging of the traditional lotus lantern dance inheritors in the old city and the decline in its popularity have put it at risk. In light of this situation, today's society should pay more attention to and support the traditional lotus lantern dance of the old city. Protecting and inheriting the traditional lotus lantern dance is essential for preserving its historical legacy. Like all ancient national arts, protecting traditional ethnic folk arts is an urgent task for contemporary society. In the development of national cultural undertakings, it is not only necessary to study traditional folk dances but also to protect them. Henan stands out in the history of Chinese dance, facing the risk of traditional dances being lost. Therefore, protecting the existing living folk dances is crucial. The traditional lotus lantern dance of the old city is the crystallization of the labor and wisdom of the people of Changge, Henan. It is a product of the life and labor of the people of Central Plains, reflecting their aspirations and dreams for a better life. The dream drives the continuous development of social culture.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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