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# Review, Reflection and Strategies of Contemporary Lingnan Folk Dance Creation

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## ABSTRACT

Dance creation is an important way for the development and dissemination of Lingnan folk dance, and there have been many achievements in previous research and practice. With the transformation of contemporary society, its problems are becoming more and more prominent: the westernised creative thinking makes the traditional connotations gradually disappear, and the solidified creative technology obscures the dance qualities. In order to guarantee the cultural subjectivity and uniqueness of creation, choreographers and directors should establish the creative concept of production and protection, and carry out mutually reinforcing and complementary creative actions. At the same time, through the cultivation of comprehensive talents, optimisation of the competition mechanism, and the construction of the teaching system, the virtuous circle of Lingnan folk dance creative practice should be promoted.

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## Introduction

Lingnan refers to the area south of the Five Ridges in China, and Guangdong Province is one of the most central administrative divisions in Lingnan, so there is a strong interoperability between Lingnan folk dance and Guangdong folk dance. Folk dance creation is a kind of cultural activity with traditional dance as the mother theme, professional groups as the dominant group, theatre aesthetics as the criterion, and cultural innovation as the purpose, Lingnan folk dance has certain advantages here: on the one hand, field literature such as "Chinese Dance Journal - Guangdong Volume" records nearly 100 kinds of traditional folk dances, and as of 2024, Guangdong has 32 national non-heritage dances, which is the second largest in the country, and there are abundant cultural resources. On the other hand, Guangdong is one of the most important economic and cultural strategic places in China, and its economic strength is always at the top of the country, so it has a good foundation for attracting talents and building platforms.

In recent years, the number of Lingnan folk dance works has been rising, but only a few dance dramas have gained wide recognition in terms of quality. At the same time, the cultural impact of globalisation has obscured the way of presentation, value judgement, subjective and active thinking of traditional dance and the character of its artists. Based on the observation of the reality of folk dance creation in Lingnan, on the basis of reviewing its research and practice, we will think about the thinking and technology of creation, and put forward countermeasures focusing on the conception and action of creation, so as to benefit the creative practice of folk dance in Lingnan and its overall development.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Lingnan folk dance is a product of its geographical and socio-political context. Historically, the region south of the Five Ridges, where Guangdong is located, has played a significant role in shaping China's folk art forms. As Liu et al. (2024) note, Lingnan folk dance has adapted to societal changes, especially during key periods like China's opening-up in the late 20th century, which exposed the region to global influences. This historical evolution informs the current aesthetic and technical principles of Lingnan dance creation.

The effects of globalization are particularly pronounced in Lingnan folk dance. The introduction of Western choreographic techniques, combined with the global exchange of cultural practices, has led to a hybridization of traditional dances. Chen and Liu (2018) argue that while this cross-cultural influence has spurred innovation, it also poses a risk to the cultural authenticity of Lingnan folk dance. As Westernized movements become more prevalent, the dance's unique regional characteristics can become diluted.

The theoretical framework for contemporary Lingnan dance creation revolves around the tension between maintaining cultural identity and embracing modernity. Sociocultural

theory suggests that artistic creation is deeply influenced by the cultural, economic, and political conditions in which it occurs. Fang (2017) asserts that Lingnan choreographers must navigate these influences carefully to avoid losing the cultural essence of their work. The balance between cultural preservation and artistic expression lies at the heart of the theoretical discourse on folk dance creation.

In terms of aesthetics, Lingnan folk dance is characterized by its fluid movements, rhythmic complexity, and rich narrative structure. However, as noted by Liu et al. (2024), modern stage techniques have often overshadowed these traditional elements. This has sparked a theoretical debate about the future of Lingnan folk dance in an increasingly globalized world. The challenge for choreographers is to create works that resonate with contemporary audiences without compromising the cultural and aesthetic values that define Lingnan folk dance.

## **Objectives**

1. To study the thinking of Lingnan folk dance creation.
2. To study the technical way of folk-dance creation in Lingnan.
3. To study the development strategy of Lingnan folk dance creation.

## **Research Scope**

1. Scope of the research population

The research population includes the choreographers and inheritors of Lingnan folk dances.

2. Scope of research variables

The research is based on the creative process and social influence of Lingnan folk dance, mainly the effectiveness of stage creation.

3. Research Time Scope

The research period starts from 2014 to 2024.

## **Research Methodology**

### **1. Research Method**

The study understands the historical lineage and developmental status of Lingnan dance creation through the literature analysis method; understands the artistic concepts of choreographers through the interview method; and analyses the choreographic techniques used by choreographers through the observation method.

### **2. Data Collection**

The study collects interview data through audio and video recordings; and uses internal materials in libraries, the China Knowledge Network and the Guangdong Dancers' Association as the data base.

### **3. Data Analysis**

The study invites authoritative scholars to carry out analyses and validations, which include the authenticity of the data, the validity of the analyses and the innovativeness of the results.

## **Results**

### **1. Review of Contemporary Lingnan Folk Dance Creation**

#### **1.1 Review of academic research**

There is no specialised work on Lingnan folk dance creation for the time being, but more academic results have been accumulated. Firstly, the work "Research on the Inheritance and Development of Lingnan Dance" combs through the historical lineage of Lingnan folk dance creation from germination to prosperity in the context of the era before and after the founding of New China in the 1940s-60s, the reform and opening up in the 1980s, and the full integration into the globalisation process in the 21st century [1]. Secondly, papers such as Contemporary Development and Characteristics of Lingnan Dance and Study of Lingnan Dance Creation Groups summarise and summarise the works and choreographies. Thirdly, "Exploring the Creation of Puning Yingge Dance Stage", "Exploring the Creation of Lantian Yao "Dancing Fire Dog" Stage in Longmen, Guangdong", "The Integration of Tradition and Contemporary: The Creative Idea and Inspiration of Group Dance "Daughter of the Walking Mountain", "Weaving Cultural Memory of Stage Folk Dance "Leigong You Hongtu"", and "Research on Aesthetic Image in Contemporary Lingnan Dance Works". Study on the Aesthetic Image in Contemporary Lingnan Dance Works--Taking the Past Lingnan Dance Competitions as an Example" and other articles focus on individual cases for more in-depth analyses and discussions. The above results are conducive to sorting out the origin and paradigm of folk dance creation in Lingnan, but they are mostly factual descriptions and summaries of experience, and lack critical analyses and reflections from a cultural and philosophical point of view.

#### **1.2 Review of Artistic Practices**

Since 2014, many works with local folk culture have emerged in Lingnan. Large-scale dance dramas include works by Guangdong Provincial Song and Dance Drama Theatre's "Shawan Past" and Guangzhou Song and Dance Drama Theatre's "Waking - Lion", which

showcase folk dance styles in long narratives. Small dance South China Normal University, "the lion teasing", Xinghai Conservatory of Music, "the ballad in the heart", Shenzhen University, "embroidery shadow overlay incense", Guangdong Province, Guangdong Vocational College of Foreign Languages and Arts, "Lei Gong You Hongtu", Guangdong Dance and Drama Vocational College, "Praying for the" Spring Frolic, Guangzhou University, "love dyed Wo Lou", Shaoguan College, "over the mountain", Guangdong Technical Normal University, "over the sea", Zhanjiang Institute of Science and Technology, "searching for the trace of exorcism," and other works, which are based on the interpretation of traditional dance. These works incorporate modern elements on the basis of interpreting traditional dance and explore the contemporary transformation of folk dance.

Lingnan Dance Competition is an important competition for the display of Lingnan folk dance works, but also a platform for the cultivation of creative talents. The Lingnan Dance Competition has been held for eight consecutive sessions (2005-2023), and more than 600 original works have emerged. At the same time, it has nurtured choreographers from institutions and troupes such as Han Zhen, Zhou Leah, Qian Xin, Wang Sisi, Qiu Huasong, Shi Qianjin, and Chen Jun, as well as choreographers from colleges and universities such as Wang Haiying, Hu Snap, Ding Ran, and Wang Kai. On the whole, Lingnan folk dance creation is still heating up under the impetus of the event and exhibition, and the choreographer's common cultural adherence and individuality in artistic pursuit are the intrinsic driving force for its sustainable development.

## **2. Contemporary Lingnan folk dance creation thinking**

### **2.1 Reflections on the way of thinking**

From the viewpoint of sociology and psychology, Guangdong's special social and cultural conditions have a potential impact on the way of thinking of choreographers and directors. Firstly, Guangdong has been a trading port connecting China and foreign countries since ancient times, and is also one of the earliest regions in China to enter cultural globalisation. Secondly, the first modern dance troupe was established in Guangdong in the 1990s, marking the official arrival of Western modern dance concepts and techniques in Guangdong and their spread to the whole country.

Guangdong's open and tolerant social environment, the coexistence of diverse cultures and the prevalence of Western dance have given choreographers an international artistic vision, a cultural attitude that dares to innovate, and inevitably a Westernised creative mindset. On the one hand, choreographers and directors shift their self-will upwards, focusing on manifesting their individual cultural imagination. For example, the "Lion Dance" and "Playing Lotus Pond" in the Hakka incense and flower rituals, which originally had the cultural objectives of comforting the soul and overcoming the souls of the dead, are now shown on stage as a kind of fun dance game. On the other hand, choreographers will ignore the

constraints of cultural traditions and pursue aesthetic breakthroughs and innovations, and some creations are only beautiful in form but unclear in content.

For folk dance creation, when the form and meaning of traditional dance are completely separated, when the pursuit of aesthetics completely overrides the continuation of tradition, the cultural subjectivity of folk dance naturally shifts downward, resulting in the gradual disappearance of traditional connotations. On the one hand, choreographers and directors look down on traditional dances with the so-called professional vision during their visits to the countryside. On the other hand, choreographers and directors believe in the cultural dogma of "the stage is independent and creation is free" in the construction of aesthetics, and regard Western-style aesthetics as a standard that can be applied everywhere. This kind of creative thinking replaces and cancels out the local knowledge embedded in traditional dance, reducing the work to a logical extension of Western aesthetics. If the creation only pursues sensory stimulation and abandons cultural continuity, it is inevitable that the work will be detached from or even deviate from the cultural essence of folk dance.

## **2.2 Reflections on the technical approach**

The use of choreographic techniques for Lingnan folk dance creation is a common phenomenon that inevitably plays a role, either explicitly or implicitly, even if the choreographer does not intend to emphasise it. The Chinese Dance Choreography Course points out that different aspects such as movement orientation, spatial formation, movement route, movement direction and movement trend should be taken into consideration in stage scheduling. Choreography further summarises 10 methods of movement change, such as "repetition, contrast, balance, composite, simulation, connection", and collates seven choreographic techniques, such as "elemental choreography, modelling through method, part limitation method, music choreography, improvisation choreography method". Techniques.

When choreographers do not have an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of traditional dances or know little about them, they use fixed creative techniques to create time, which tends to obscure the morphological qualities of folk dances. First of all, there is the morphological variation from the traditional. From the perspective of the dance itself, traditional movements have been repeatedly dismembered, and unique rhythms have been finely cut and labelled as "impressionistic and materialised". Due to the elimination of traditional body dynamics, the stylistic attributes of the dances become ambiguous, and choreographers are forced to dissolve the speculation on the category through the titles of the works, the costumes and music, or oral explanations. Secondly, there is a morphological convergence between the works. From the point of view of artistic appearance, a kind of "slow walking and rolling on the ground" originated from Western modern dance has been implanted in a large number of works meaninglessly without supporting the theme of the works, and folk dance has become an objectified elemental embellishment. Examining a large number of works, it can be seen that different Lingnan folk dances have been transformed by the same

technology, coupled with the choreographer's habit of applying the style and style of other folk dances (such as Mongolian and Dai) to make the works look more or less the same.

In the Internet era, some choreographers choose to find creative inspiration in the fragmented information on the Internet, and through the skilful use of choreographic techniques, they quickly cut and put together their works. Such works seem to highlight the independent artefacts of Lingnan folk dance, but in fact they are a kind of cultural consumer product that caters to the market. In fact, although any technology itself is scientific and neutral, choreography is not a once-and-for-all creative formula, and if used without restraint, it may be reduced to an "AI tool" for mass reproduction of works.

### **3. Strategies for the creation of Lingnan folk dance**

#### **3.1 Creative concept strategy**

Chinese folk dance creation and development has always been the East and the West, the nation and the world of the proposition of entanglement [7], but from the past to the present, from theory to reality, human culture in the dialogue between tradition and modernity continue to develop and get a new life, the tradition is the basis of modernity, modernity is the tradition of the "extension of the difference" [8]. In this sense, artistic creation is not lost as a folk dance with the times of the cultural way, it can again activate the vitality of traditional dance, to achieve the economic and cultural value of traditional dance in the contemporary. As far as stage art is concerned, it is an elite art rather than a commodity art, and this kind of creation is destined not to be a personal creation, and the choreographer must bear the sacred responsibility for the aesthetic inheritance of folk dance [9]. Therefore, maintaining the cultural genes of traditional dance and adhering to the aesthetics of Chinese culture is the leading posture of artistic creation.

Choreographers and directors should establish the concept of production and protection in parallel creation. As the natural, field, folk dance integrated into people's lives is its true nature, if it is separated from this, any activity including creation will lose cultural rationality. From the perspective of cultural protection, artistic production is not in conflict with cultural protection. In recent years, the author has interviewed a number of inheritors and learnt that they are appreciative of artistic works that respect the original form and safeguard cultural accuracy, and will use some of the content they agree with for their own use. Therefore, creation based on the premise of protection enables creation to maintain the liveliness and diversity of their culture to a certain extent. In fact, regardless of the period, all the excellent and classic works that have been tested by history and chosen by the society invariably highlight their dance cultural specificity, and the circulation of such works can have a far-reaching impact on the survival of dance, which is a kind of cultural preservation achievement in itself.

#### **3.2 Strategies for Creative Action**



Some scholars have pointed out that the production of Chinese art in the last hundred years has been based on the Western concept of modernity as a paradigm [11], which makes it necessary for choreographers to go beyond the existing paradigm of creative techniques. Choreographers can build on the cultural concepts of a traditional community and create in accordance with the traditional concepts and behaviours of that cultural group. Or they can take traditional dance culture as the main body, borrow and digest foreign culture, and then carry out creative actions that are in line with the spiritual essence of folk culture. This kind of dance creation has two characteristics: firstly, the artistic concept of the work comes from the cultural connotation of the native society, based on the people's general beliefs, spiritual identity and aesthetic vision; secondly, it is to follow the cultural logic and formal law of the traditional dance, so as to absorb and integrate the foreign technology, and to establish the subjectivity of culture.

Choreographers and directors should carry out creative actions that promote and complement each other. Choreographers should be concerned with the urban viewpoint.

### **3.3 Strategies for creative development**

Cultivate comprehensive talents. Comprehensive talents are based on comprehensive qualities, not on occupations. As the cultural discourse in modern society has shifted to choreographers, teachers and scholars, folk artists have begun to laugh at themselves as "amateurs". However, no matter how fine the professional division of labour is, it is difficult to hide the fact that folk dance is a cultural synthesis. Therefore, even for non-choreographers, teachers and even local cultural officers, when they have a certain amount of cultural deposits, professional skills and social resources, they will naturally have a sense of understanding and creative impulses. The key to improving the quality of creation lies in the cultivation of composite talents, who possess expertise in creation and teaching as well as a deep understanding of local knowledge, and are kind of cross-cultural, cross-field and cross-disciplinary talents.

Optimise the competition mechanism. The current evaluation mechanism of the competition mostly adopts the expert scoring system, whereby the expert group consists of the practice groups of "province + province, institutions + troupes", and selects the comprehensive average score of many experts in order to pursue authority and fairness. Although these experts have outstanding works and rich experience, most of them are from the field of art creation. Based on the limited nature of human knowledge, some folk dance works that are antithetical to cultural traditions are favoured because of their well-trained and exotic packaging. For this reason, the exhibition mechanism of the event can be optimised, for example, by grouping folk dances into a unified category, adding scholars with a certain degree of research on traditional dances to the expert group, and setting up a "preliminaries" section before the official competition, so that the dialectical unity of the cultural connotations of the works and their extents can be scrutinised and evaluated in advance.



Constructing a teaching system. Historical experience shows that the teaching form of folk dance has a multi-dimensional bonding effect. For example, Beijing Dance Academy highly, Professor Tian Lu in the compilation of "Anhui flower drum lantern teaching materials analysis and teaching research", "Shandong Haiyang Yangge Tutorial" and other teaching materials, from the rich teaching and research experience extends the "Huai Shui Qing Orchid Bay", "Red Coral" and other artistic masterpieces. In recent years, some colleges and universities in Lingnan have made phased achievements in this area and started the construction of fine folk dance courses one after another, but a large number of colleges and universities are still not deeply aware of the significance of the teaching materials and classroom of folk dance. In the long run, the cultural support of folk dance is indispensable for the construction of special disciplines in colleges and universities, and the survival space of folk dance in the future may be transferred to the campus continuously. Therefore, the construction of folk dance teaching system can be regarded as an important way to effectively bridge the ecological fault of Lingnan folk dance.

## **Discussion**

The growing influence of Western choreographic techniques on Lingnan folk dance has sparked significant debate among scholars and practitioners alike. Liu et al. (2024) highlight the fact that while the number of Lingnan folk dance works has increased in recent years, only a few have achieved widespread recognition. This discrepancy is largely due to the challenges of preserving traditional elements in a modern context. As Western aesthetics take center stage, the cultural connotations of traditional dance forms risk being obscured. One of the primary challenges in Lingnan folk dance creation is the preservation of its cultural roots. Fang (2017) argues that the over-reliance on modern techniques can lead to a disconnection from the historical and cultural essence of the dance. For instance, traditional Lingnan folk dances, which once served specific cultural and ritualistic purposes, are now often reinterpreted in ways that prioritize aesthetic appeal over cultural authenticity. This shift has led to concerns that the cultural identity of Lingnan folk dance is being compromised in the pursuit of innovation. The unique cultural and social conditions of Guangdong further complicate this issue. Guangdong's history as a hub of international trade has exposed the region to a variety of artistic influences, which are reflected in its dance culture. Xu (2018) notes that this cultural diversity provides choreographers with rich material for innovation, but it also introduces the risk of diluting the distinct regional characteristics of Lingnan folk dance.

As a result, choreographers must carefully balance the incorporation of global influences with the preservation of local cultural identity. Modern audiences' evolving expectations also play a significant role in shaping contemporary Lingnan folk dance. As global entertainment becomes more prevalent, audiences have come to expect performances that blend traditional elements with modern aesthetics. According to Chen (2019), this shift in audience expectations places additional pressure on choreographers to innovate, often at the expense of preserving

traditional forms. While modernization is necessary for the survival of any cultural practice, it raises important questions about the future of Lingnan folk dance.

Education and pedagogy are also critical to the discussion on Lingnan folk dance creation. As Sun (2016) points out, many educational institutions lack a standardized curriculum for teaching folk dance. This gap in education leads to inconsistencies in the training of young choreographers, who may prioritize technical mastery over cultural understanding. To preserve the cultural integrity of Lingnan folk dance, it is essential that educational programs emphasize the importance of both artistic innovation and cultural preservation.

## **Conclusion**

The future of Lingnan folk dance hinges on the ability of choreographers, educators, and policymakers to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. As Liu et al. (2024) emphasize, while modernization is inevitable, preserving the cultural identity of Lingnan folk dance is essential for its continued relevance. The success of Lingnan folk dance creation will depend on the willingness of choreographers to embrace modern techniques while maintaining a deep respect for the traditions that define the art form.

The cultural responsibility of Lingnan folk dance creation extends beyond the individual choreographers. As Zhao (2019) notes, it requires collaboration between artists, educators, and policymakers to ensure that traditional forms of dance are preserved and passed on to future generations. This collaborative approach is essential for maintaining the cultural integrity of Lingnan folk dance in an increasingly globalized world.

Looking to the future, the evolution of Lingnan folk dance will be shaped by how well artists and cultural institutions can integrate modern techniques without sacrificing the dance's cultural roots. Fang (2017) suggests that choreographers must continue to explore innovative ways to present Lingnan folk dance on modern stages, while ensuring that their work remains true to the cultural heritage of the region.

Finally, the role of education in sustaining Lingnan folk dance cannot be overstated. As Sun (2016) concludes, educational institutions must take an active role in teaching both the artistic and cultural dimensions of folk dance. By doing so, they will help ensure that the traditions of Lingnan folk dance continue to thrive, even as the art form evolves to meet the demands of modern audiences.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the challenges identified in the literature, several recommendations can be made to ensure the continued development and preservation of Lingnan folk dance.

First, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive curriculum for teaching Lingnan folk dance. Sun (2016) suggests that such a curriculum should blend traditional cultural knowledge with modern choreographic techniques, providing students with the tools they need to innovate

responsibly. By grounding students in both the artistic and cultural dimensions of Lingnan folk dance, educational institutions can play a key role in preserving its cultural heritage.

Second, cross-cultural collaborations should be encouraged as a means of enriching the creative process without sacrificing cultural authenticity. Chen (2019) recommends that choreographers engage in collaborations with artists from different cultural backgrounds to bring new perspectives to their work. Such collaborations can help Lingnan folk dance creators draw on global influences while maintaining a strong connection to their cultural identity.

Third, cultural protection policies must be implemented to ensure that Lingnan folk dance remains rooted in its traditions. Zhao (2019) argues that stricter cultural protection guidelines should be established to promote cultural accuracy in dance performances. These guidelines would allow for artistic expression while safeguarding the cultural essence of Lingnan folk dance.

Fourth, fostering local talent is essential for the future of Lingnan folk dance. Liu et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of investing in local artists and providing them with opportunities for professional development. By supporting local talent, the region can ensure that its cultural traditions continue to evolve in ways that reflect the needs and values of the local community.

Finally, integrating Lingnan folk dance into broader cultural projects could help raise its profile and attract new audiences. Guo (2018) suggests that multidisciplinary collaborations involving dance, music, and theater could highlight the rich cultural heritage of Lingnan folk dance while engaging a wider audience. These collaborations would not only promote the art form but also ensure its relevance in a modern, globalized world.

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