

Exploring the Evolution and Cultural Significance of Guangdong Lion Dance in Chinese Traditional Culture

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Abstract

The Guangdong Lion Dance, a vital component of China's intangible cultural heritage, embodies rich historical, traditional, and artistic forms deeply rooted in Chinese culture and society. This study offers an exhaustive examination of the Guangdong Lion Dance, elucidating its historical evolution, stylistic attributes, and cultural essence. It delves into the complex cultural structure and dynamics of this significant element of China's intangible cultural heritage. The research accentuates the pivotal role of the Guangdong Lion Dance in traditional Chinese and societal interactions, underscoring its enduring relevance and transformative journey across centuries. Employing a literature review methodology, the study meticulously gathers and analyzes existing works and publications related to the Guangdong Lion Dance. It predominantly leverages databases like SCOPUS, Web of Science, and CNKI, focusing on keywords like "Lion Dance" and "Guangdong Lion Dance" to aggregate a wide array of scholarly articles, books, and digital archives for a comprehensive analysis that retraces the development, stylistic metamorphosis, and cultural resonance of the Guangdong Lion Dance. The primary findings unveil the Guangdong Lion Dance as a vibrant cultural symbol, intertwining martial arts, folklore, and collective celebrations. The results emphasize the artistic nuances and cultural significance of the Guangdong Lion Dance, highlighting its role in reinforcing cultural identity and community cohesion. It epitomizes the resilience, communal spirit, and cultural continuity of the Chinese people. The analysis delineates the dance's symbolic lexicon, elucidating its capacity to convey societal values, group identity, and spiritual aspirations. The study also identifies adaptive strategies of the Guangdong Lion Dance, showcasing its enduring relevance through its ability to contemporize while preserving core symbolic elements. This work enriches academic understanding of Chinese traditional culture and underscores the importance of protecting such cultural customs in an increasingly globalized world. The research advocates for in-depth explorations of cross-regional comparisons and diaspora extensions of the Guangdong Lion Dance to investigate its global

dissemination and adaptability in multicultural contexts. Enhanced research will aid in comprehending the global footprint of the Guangdong Lion Dance, contributing to the protection and perpetuation of its vitality. Moreover, the study calls for attention to the economic and social impacts of lion dance performances on local communities, facilitating a comprehensive grasp of the dance's significance both within and beyond China's borders. Protecting such cultural practices is crucial as they evolve and resonate in the globalized world.

Keyword: Guangdong Lion Dance, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Significance, Festive Traditions, Chinese Traditional Culture

Introduction

The Guangdong Lion Dance stands as a vivid emblem of China's intangible cultural heritage, embodying the intricate interplay between folklore, martial arts, and community spirit prevalent in Southern China. This time-honored tradition, with roots stretching back to ancient dynasties, continues to captivate and unite communities with its vibrant performances, particularly during significant festivals and celebrations. This study ventures into the heart of the Guangdong Lion Dance, aiming to unravel its historical layers, examine its diverse stylistic expressions, and decode its rich cultural symbolism. By engaging in a comprehensive literature review, the research casts a wide net, drawing from an array of academic papers, books, and digital repositories to construct a nuanced narrative of the dance's evolution. From its mythological origins to its contemporary adaptations, the study seeks to understand how the Lion Dance serves not only as a spectacle of artistry and athleticism but also as a potent medium for cultural storytelling, community bonding, and the expression of collective identity. Amidst the backdrop of globalization and cultural homogenization, this article underscores the significance of the Guangdong Lion Dance in preserving cultural heritage, fostering social cohesion, and nurturing a sense of belonging among participants and spectators alike, thereby contributing to the vibrant tapestry of global cultural diversity.

Research Method

In this study, we employed the literature review method, focusing on collecting and analyzing existing works and publications related to the Guangdong Lion Dance. We consulted a large number of academic papers, books, and online resources, mainly based on literature databases such as SCOPUS, Web of Science, and CNKI. We conducted relevant literature searches using "Lion Dance" and "Guangdong Lion Dance" as keywords, then synthesized and analyzed the articles to gather information on its history, styles, and cultural significance. Through this approach, we understood the traditional roots of the Guangdong Lion Dance and how it has evolved over time. By comparing different sources of information, we were able to form a comprehensive understanding of the lion dance, highlighting its significance in Chinese culture and festivals. This method allows us to draw conclusions based on a wide range of existing knowledge without conducting new field research.

Research Findings and Discussion

The origin and development of Guangdong Lion Dance

In the "National List of Representative Projects of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (2006) of China, the concept of lion dance is defined as follows: The lion dance, also known as "Lion Dance", "Lion Lantern", "Dancing Lion", and "Dancing Lion Dance", is often performed during

festivals and celebratory events. The existing lion dances are divided into two main categories: the southern lion and the northern lion, with the Guangdong lion dance belonging to the southern lion category in Chinese lion dance. The Chinese character "醒" carries the meaning of awakening or rousing, so a direct translation of "广东醒狮" into English would be "Guangdong Waking Lion." In this article, we use "Guangdong Lion Dance" instead of "Guangdong Waking Lion" to maintain consistency with the terms widely recognized in international discussions, ensuring the clarity and broader understanding of this cultural custom. The Guangdong Lion Dance (Figure1) is a cultural activity that integrates martial arts, dance, music, etc., and is categorized as a traditional dance. It involves the coordinated effort of two individuals to mimic various lion movements, achieving a representation of form and spirit, embodying a project with distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics (Chen, 2016). The Guangdong Lion Dance uses unique folk craft items such as lion heads, lion costumes, and dancers' attire as its primary props. The spirit, martial arts proficiency, and performance skills of the dancers form various performance routines of the Lion Dance, creating an auspicious and lively atmosphere that meets the needs of various folk customs (Chao, 2023). On May 20, 2006, with the approval of the State Council, the Guangdong Lion Dance was listed in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Figure 1: Guangdong Lion Dance Performance (Guangdong Provincial People's Government Local Records Office, 2017, http://dfz.gd.gov.cn/sqyl/fwzwhyc/content/post_1109684.html)

To date, the Lion Dance has developed over a history of more than 1600 years. According to historical records, the earliest origins of the Lion Dance trace back to the Three Kingdoms period, with the first written record of the Chinese Lion Dance found in Meng Kang's "Book of Han: Record of Rites and Music," which mentioned performances involving playing with lion figures. The Lion Dance became popular during the Southern and Northern Dynasties and saw significant development as cultural exchanges between China and the West became more frequent. By the Tang Dynasty, during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the Lion Dance reached its peak (Chen, 2016). During the Tang Dynasty, the Lion Dance was performed only during grand court celebrations and was not casually performed otherwise. Among these, the "Five-Direction Lion Dance" was a large-scale performance of the time. As recorded in the "New Book of Tang: Record of Rites and Music," lions of five colors—blue, white, red, black, and yellow—represented the five directions: east, west, south, north, and center. The simultaneous dance of the lions symbolized peace and good fortune for the world. After the Tang Dynasty, the Lion Dance became widely popular among the common people (Liang et

al., 2018). Meng Yuanlao's "Dream Pool Essays of the Eastern Capital" from the Song Dynasty mentioned that many Zen temples held vegetarian feasts and lion dances during the Double Ninth Festival. Additionally, the famous Southern Song painting "Children Playing in Spring" vividly depicts a group of children dancing with a lion, led by a boy guiding the lion, a scene very similar to modern Lion Dance performances. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Lion Dance had become popular among the common people, spreading throughout China (Li, 2012).

The Guangdong Lion Dance, belonging to the southern style of Chinese lion dances, evolved from the northern lion. According to "Guangdong Provincial Annals: Physical Education Annals - Folk and Ethnic Traditional Sports - Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, Dragon Boat," the Guangdong Lion Dance (southern lion) originated from the northern lion, historically evolving from the lion dances of the Tang Dynasty imperial court. After the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, as Central Plains immigrants moved south, lion dance culture was introduced to the Lingnan region in southern China, hence termed "southern lion"(Li, 2009). Historical records indicate that the lion dance appeared in Guangdong during the Ming Dynasty, originating in Nanhai County (now Foshan City, Guangdong Province). The Guangdong Lion Dance is now popular among Chinese communities in Guangdong, Guangxi, and Southeast Asia; within Guangdong, it is mainly found in Foshan, Suixi, Guangzhou, and other counties and cities. After reaching the Lingnan area, the lion dance evolved in response to local customs, thus differentiating from the northern lion. The Guangdong Lion Dance focuses on resemblance, exhibiting a myriad of expressions. The lion's head, inspired by opera facial makeup, features vibrant colors and exquisite craftsmanship, with movable eyelids and mouths. Its most distinctive feature is a single horn on its head, slightly curved forward, showcasing a unique artistic style (Huang, 2013).

The formation and development period of the Guangdong Lion Dance spanned from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republic of China era, characterized by the popularization of lion dance activities among the populace. During the Cultural Revolution, the lion dance entered a stagnant period, as it was deemed a feudal remnant, hindering its development. After the reform and opening-up policies were implemented, it entered a recovery period (1978-1989), marked by the revival of folk lion dances and the redefinition of lion dance from a folk custom to a sport. From 1990 to the present, it has entered a thriving period, reflected in the competitive development of the Guangdong Lion Dance in the context of globalization and the re-identification of lion dance culture during the application for intangible cultural heritage status (Xie, 2019).

Classification of Guangdong Lion Dance

Lion dance has a long history in our country, and generally speaking, it can be divided into two major schools: the Northern Lion (Figure 2) and the Southern Lion (Figure 3). The Northern Lion, also known as the Great Lion, resembles a real lion in appearance, with its body adorned primarily with yellow mane, and only the red and green colors on the headgear are used to distinguish between male and female lions. In terms of design, the Northern Lion is neither as large nor as dazzling as the Southern Lion. During performances, the Northern Lion often appears in pairs, with one person acting as a warrior, using an embroidered ball to lead the lion in dance; when dancing, the movement is sometimes steady, sometimes lively, and often utilizes actions such as falling, tumbling, and rolling to depict the lion's behavior,

fully demonstrating the Northern Lion Dance's charm. Overall, the Northern Lion performance is realistic, focusing on imitation. The Northern Lion is prevalent in the regions north of the Yangtze River in our country, with Xushui in Baoding being the birthplace of Northern Lion Dance culture, historically known as the "Ancestor of the Northern Lion" (Yang, Yang, & Sun, 2022). The Southern Lion performance is more abstract, focusing on capturing the spirit, with the Guangdong Lion Dance being a typical representative of the Southern Lion. The Guangdong Lion Dance can be mainly categorized into the following types.



Figure 2: Northern Lion



Figure 3: Southern Lion (Guangdong Lion Dance)

In terms of appearance and production, they can be divided into "Heshan lions" and "Foshan lions". The "Heshan Lion" has eyes and jaw corners that are not exposed but still convey a sense of awe. It features a flat, oval mouth, is lightweight yet fierce, and has a slightly shorter tail. The "Foshan Lion," on the other hand, achieves a balance of form and spirit, closely resembling the real animal. It is characterized by finely shaped eyebrows, large eyes that can move, a wide mouth with protruding lips, an apricot nose, visible teeth and tongue, prominent cheeks, a high but narrow jaw, a full forehead, and a slightly shorter tail. The main difference between the two lies in the lion's head. The Foshan lion's head (Figure 4) is much larger in proportion to its body, earning it the nickname "big head lion." It features a forehead similar to that of the God of Longevity, broad and protruding, commonly referred to as

"Shouxing's forehead." On both sides of the forehead are a pair of large eyes, with the outer corners extending towards the back of the head and the brow ridges prominent. The upper eyelids are turned outwards, known as "tiger eyes," with the pupils bulging out in a hemispherical shape. The base of the nose bridge is indented, with the tip and nostrils of the nose significantly protruding, known as "apricot nose." The upper jaw is more prominent, and the mouth is wide and flat. The Heshan lion's head (Figure 5) is somewhat flatter and longer than the Foshan lion's head, with the upper jaw curving upwards and the mouth protruding forward. Due to its resemblance to a duck's bill, it is also called the "duck-billed lion." Foshan lions are categorized by color into two types: the multicolored lion and the black and white lion. The multicolored lion, known as the "literary lion," features a high forehead, large mouth, white eyebrows, and white beard, exuding elegance and attracting attention with its bright colors. The black and white lion, known as the "martial lion," has a green nose, iron horns, and bristle-like whiskers, exuding a dignified and proud aura. Each lion head is adorned with over a hundred multicolored pompoms and more than three hundred copper mirror pieces, shining brightly and capturing the eye. The people of Guangzhou refer to it as the "Lion King" (Ye, 2022). The extremely exaggerated shapes are a result of the ancient people of Guangdong's artificial construction and imagination of mythical creatures, expressing their reverence for auspicious beasts (Peng, 2020).



Figure 4: Foshan mounted lion



Figure 5: Heshan mounted lion

In recent times, its main forms of performance are the traditional lion dance and the competitive lion dance. In the Guangdong Lion Dance, the lion's form is composed of two dancers: one for the lion's head and the other for the lion's tail. They utilize various steps and

movements to perform highly difficult actions such as soaring, shifting, dodging, pouncing, spinning, and leaping. These movements express the lion's diverse states and psychological traits, including happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, movement, stillness, shock, and doubt (Zhang, 2011). The development of the Guangdong Lion Dance has evolved from traditional ground and bench lion dance performances to lion dancing on high platforms and poles, and further to pole-top lion dancing. The difficulty of pole-top lion dancing continues to increase, incorporating wire walking and leaping through the air. The height of the poles has also been increasing, with some reaching nearly 3 meters. This demands increasingly higher levels of martial arts foundation, performance art, and even acrobatic skills from the dancers, enhancing the spectacle for the audience. Today's Guangdong Lion Dance, especially the competitive style, has integrated the forms of the "Heshan Lion" and the "Foshan Lion," presenting a more formidable appearance and more agile movements (Li, 2012).

The character types are divided into two categories: cultural lions and martial lions. The character designs of the Guangdong Lion Dance are actually based on the facial makeup of historical figures from the Three Kingdoms period as depicted in Cantonese opera. According to the role types in Cantonese opera, they are divided into two main categories: Wen Shi (civil lions) and Wu Shi (martial lions). Among them, the Liu Bei Lion is a highly representative civil lion, characterized by a facial makeup that signifies loyalty, integrity, and a composed nature. The martial lions include the Guan Gong Lion and the Zhang Fei Lion, whose facial makeup embodies benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, and bravery (Cai, 2020).

In summary, Figure 6 presents the classification characteristics of the Guangdong Lion Dance as organized by the author, distinguishing mainly in three aspects: in terms of appearance and craftsmanship, the Guangdong Lion Dance can be divided into "Heshan Lion" and "Foshan Lion"; the main performance styles include traditional lion dance and competitive lion dance; and in terms of character types, there are the Wen (civil) lion and the Wu (martial) lion.

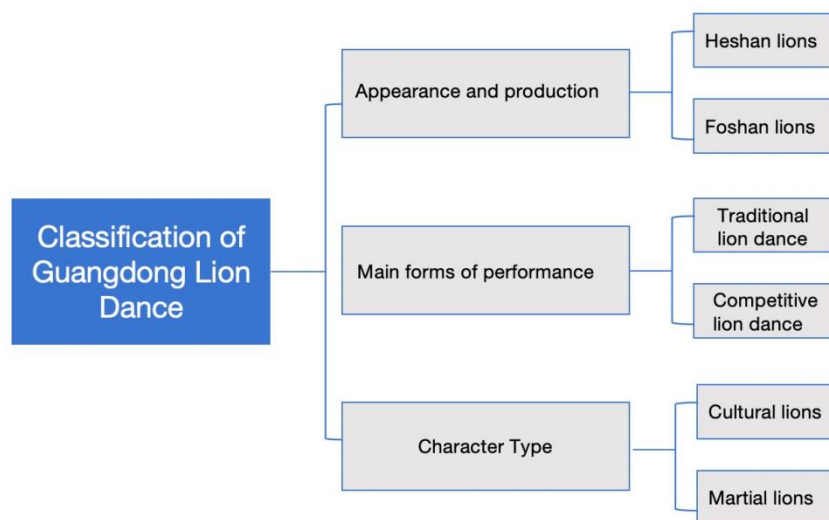


Figure 6: Classification of Cantonese Lion Dances (drawn by Qiu Liping)

Characteristics of the Guangdong lion dance performance

Characteristics of the Guangdong Lion Dance Technique. The Guangdong Lion Dance performance is accompanied by gongs, drums, and cymbals to express the lion's emotions and states such as joy, anger, movement, stillness, doubt, fear, exploration, looking, sleeping,

and drunkenness, achieving a lifelike and emotionally rich depiction, which is a significant feature of the Guangdong Lion Dance and is dearly loved by people. The dance focuses on skill and martial arts fundamentals, typically involving two or three performers. One person dances with the lion's head, another with the lion's tail, and sometimes a third person plays the role of the "Big Head Buddha." The Big Head Buddha leads with a large fan, followed by a drum and gong team. The drumming features light, robust, and fierce beats, directing and hinting at the lion's movements (Huang, 2013). The Guangdong Lion Dance emphasizes the lion's expressions and implications, conveying various emotions and actions such as joy, sorrow, greed, doubt, fear, satiation, sleep, and awakening to depict the lion's mentality. It tells vivid stories through over 20 step techniques such as Si Ping Ma (four-level horse stance), Zi Wu Ma (noon-midnight horse stance), Kai He Ma (open-close horse stance), and Qi Long Bu (riding the dragon step). The lion dance movements, characterized by pauses and staccato rhythms, incorporate Southern Fist martial arts steps, showcasing fast, fierce, rigid, and abrupt actions. To display the lion's diverse image, the dancers' hand positions, steps, and choreography are highly demanding. Dancers hold the prop lion head, operate mechanisms to make the eyes, ears, and mouth open and close with emotional changes, and coordinate hand and body movements. The amplitude of the movements relies on the torso's twisting and the arms' pushing and pulling of the lion head (Xue, 2022).

The performance sequence of the Guangdong Lion Dance includes emerging from the cave, descending the mountain, crossing the bridge, drinking water, picking greens, drunken sleep, waking from drunkenness, ascending the mountain, and playing with a ball, with specific actions planned according to the length of each performance. "Picking greens" is the climax of the lion dance, featuring a rich variety of routines, high technicality, and difficulty, achievable only with years of practice and suitable height and weight. In modern times, highly competitive actions like "Plum Blossom Pile Lion" and "Lion Walking on Tightrope" have been developed and are widely used in lion dance competitions (Cai, 2020).

Ceremonial Characteristics of Guangdong Lion Dance. Chinese traditional culture places great importance on etiquette, and the Chinese nation has long been known as a "state of ceremonies." Etiquette includes both manners and rituals. In the development of the lion dance culture, great attention is paid to the process of etiquette, gradually forming a unique form of etiquette. "Starting with etiquette, growing with etiquette" has become a conventional etiquette standard in Guangdong lion dance activities. Etiquette norms govern the entire process of the lion dance, including: new lion dance etiquette, dance sequence etiquette, meeting lion etiquette, lion dance congratulatory etiquette, lion dance sacrificial etiquette, etc. There are different etiquette norms for performances on different occasions. The essence of lion dance etiquette lies in "respect, courtesy" and "inclusiveness, amiability," which reflects from one aspect the basic spirit of Chinese culture: "unity of heaven and man, people-oriented, vigorous and effective, valuing peace and moderation" (Zhang, 2020).

Guangdong lion dance pays great attention to etiquette in aspects such as the first dance of a new lion, starting the dance, entering temples, and entering houses. The first dance of a new lion involves a solemn ceremony called "eye-dotting." People first clean the new lion, symbolizing the lion receiving auspicious energy. The person dotting the eyes holds a new brush and dots each eye of the lion, followed by thunderous drumming, the new lion dances, and the whole scene boils over. The start of the Guangdong lion dance is also meticulous.

Under the cue of drumming, the lion head dancer and the lion tail dancer jump in and bow respectively before they can officially start drumming and dancing the lion. When two lions meet, they perform a greeting ritual, dance around for a week, exchange greetings with the lion's mouth, shake hands to show friendship, and then retire with a slow Seven-Star Drum (Hu, 2012). Additionally, before entering a temple, a greeting ritual is performed, entering from the right, and after actions such as probing, biting, and rubbing, the lions enter the temple to worship the deities, dance around for a week, and then retire after another round of worship. When encountering other lion dance teams, one must not stand higher than the other but show respect by standing lower (Cai, 2020). Due to the long duration of the lion dance, it's often necessary to change the person dancing as the lion head midway. At this time, the dancer must enter from behind the left side of the lion's neck when the lion head is raised high. Entering from the front or right side to take over the lion head is considered disrespectful. The dance of two lions is the most ideal way to welcome guests, with the two lions dancing a welcome dance to the light and joyful accompaniment of drums, and after exiting to the sides, the Laughing Buddha leads the guests to their seats (Hu, 2012).

Cultural Connotation of Guangdong Lion Dance

The Guangdong Lion Dance, as an important component of China's intangible cultural heritage, holds significant meaning in Chinese traditions and social life. Figure 7 is an induction by the author of the cultural connotations of the Guangdong Lion Dance, which can provide readers with a more intuitive understanding of the various cultural significances exhibited by the Guangdong Lion Dance.

Cultural Connotation of Guangdong Lion Dance	Seeking good fortune and warding off evil spirits, auspiciousness and good wishes
	Lion Dance for Praying for Fortune and Good Luck
	Patriotic sentiments
	Hero worship
	The spirit of martial arts
	Cultural Identity

Figure 7: Cultural Connotation of Guangdong Lion Dance (drawn by Qiu Liping)

Seeking good fortune and warding off evil spirits, auspiciousness and good wishes.

Regarding the origin of the Guangdong lion dance activities, there are two widely circulated folk stories. According to "Guangdong Folk Customs," in the early Ming Dynasty, a strange beast appeared in the Foshan area, causing hardship for the people. Some people made a lion out of bamboo branches and colored cloth and used drums and gongs to scare the beast away, and it worked (Huang, 2020). The local villagers believed that the lion could suppress demons and eliminate evil, signifying good fortune and wishes, so every Chinese New Year, they would go from house to house to offer New Year's greetings in the form of a lion dance. People would also hang green vegetables on their doors for the lion dance to "pluck" after the performance. Year after year, the lion dance New Year's greetings gradually became a local custom (Hu, 2012).

In ancient times, epidemics were common in the Guangdong area, leading to a large number of deaths. Fortunately, shortly after each outbreak of the epidemic, a divine beast named

"Nian" would appear. Its arrival would quickly quell the epidemic. To thank the "Nian" beast for its help, people would make its likeness out of bamboo and colored cloth during the agricultural off-season and dance in front of each household to the accompaniment of drums, to ward off evil spirits and pray for good luck (Jiang, 2011). Because the "Nian" beast liked to eat vegetables, people would place a plate of vegetables in front of their doors for it to consume. Over time, the shape of the "Nian" beast became more and more like a lion, hence it was called "lion dance," and the custom of eating vegetables evolved into "picking the greens." Since then, the lion dance to ward off evil spirits has become a traditional custom in Guangdong, especially in the Pearl River Delta region, and the lion's plucking of greens has become an integral part of the lion dance performance (Duan, 2006).

Lion Dance for Praying for Fortune and Good Luck

The people of Guangdong hold a special regard for the "everlasting prosperity" symbolized by lettuce, stemming from the phonetic resemblance of "lettuce" (生菜) to "generate wealth" (生财), giving rise to associated meanings like "opportunity" and "business." By the end of the Qing Dynasty, driven by the demands of large businesses and affluent families, the tradition of lion dance "picking the greens" for wealth and blessings became popular among the common folk: "In Guangdong customs, during the Lantern Festival on the lunar calendar, streets are adorned with lights and fireworks, and martial arts schools send out lion dances to parade through the city in celebration. Wherever the lion dance goes, large businesses and wealthy households often hang a sum of silver wrapped in red paper, along with a head of lettuce, high at their doors to attract the lions to 'pick the greens.' Generally, the higher and more perilous the 'greens' are hung, the more silver they contain, and the martial arts school that manages to 'pick' these 'greens' takes great pride." The interaction and celebration between the people welcoming the lion and the lion dancers, created through the lion dance picking the greens, reflect the societal psyche of welcoming the New Year, praying for wealth, and seeking auspiciousness (Xie, 2021).

Patriotic Sentiments

In the early days, the lion dance was known as "Rui Shi" (Auspicious Lion). The name "Rui Shi" continued to be used until the 17th year of the (Republic of China, 1928). However, because "Rui" and "Sleep" (睡) sound the same in Cantonese, a slogan was proposed: "No sleeping lion, the Auspicious Lion awakens." After that, "Rui Shi" was renamed "Awaking Lion" (Guangdong Lion dance), symbolizing the awakening of the Cantonese people and the hope that the Chinese would no longer be bullied by foreigners (Liang et al., 2018).

Hero Worship

Guangdong lion dance is deeply influenced by classical opera, and its most distinctive feature in facial makeup is the selection of heroes from the Three Kingdoms period such as Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Ma Chao, and Huang Zhong as idols. Following the characteristics of Cantonese opera, the Liu Bei lion is dressed in white, yellow, or pink face; the Guan Yu lion in red face; the Zhang Fei lion in black face; the Zhao Yun lion in silver or blue face; and the Huang Zhong lion in a yellow-gray face. Additionally, there are various types of facial makeup such as red with two colors, black with two colors, multicolored with two colors, and seven-colored with two colors, each paired with different decorations. Dressing the roles of Guangdong lion dance according to one emperor and five tiger generals from the Three Kingdoms, completely embodies the heroic image in Cantonese opera (Jiang, 2011). When

lion dancers choose lion heads with different facial makeup to perform, they should endow them with corresponding character traits. For example, dancing the Zhang Fei lion should emphasize his rudeness and bravery; dancing the Guan Yu lion should display his righteousness and tolerance everywhere; dancing the Liu Bei lion should show fairness and calmness. The lion dancers, associations, and hosts all reflect their own hero worship tendencies through their choices.

The Spirit of Martial Arts

Foshan in Guangdong is a stronghold of southern Chinese martial arts, giving birth to masters such as the Hung Gar grandmaster Wong Fei-hung, Lam Sai-wing, the Wing Chun grandmaster Leung Jan, Ip Man, and other great masters of southern martial arts. From the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period, numerous martial arts schools were established, each with its own lion dance troupe. In addition to practicing martial arts, members of these schools also devoted themselves to mastering the art of lion dancing (Zhao, 2023). The lion dance's body movements, hand gestures, and footwork had to be integrated with the martial techniques of their own style, tightly weaving "martial" and "dance" elements together to form a unique style of lion dance. The now-popular high-pole performances, some reaching nearly 3 meters in height, require the lion head and tail performers to coordinate on the poles, performing wire-walking and aerial leaps, which are thrilling and demand a strong martial arts foundation and mental fortitude from the performers. Guangdong lion dance, in both its performance movements and etiquette standards, embodies the typical martial spirit.

Cultural Identity

The Guangdong Lion Dance integrates hero worship with the martial spirit, combining the joy and entertainment of "Cai Qing" (picking the greens), the pursuit of luck and wealth, and a spirit of facing challenges head-on. It showcases the diligence, bravery, and wisdom of the Chinese people through the lion's fearless, intelligent, and indomitable spirit. Its spiritual power is immense and has a broad cultural identification role (Xie, 2022). During the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, the Guangdong Lion Dance served as a flag of anti-Qing sentiment. To avoid the Qing government's bans, anti-Qing activists secretly taught or practiced martial arts and engaged in martial arts performances and exchanges during festival gatherings. During festivals, they organized lion dance competitions and martial arts performances and exchanges under the guise of "Lion King Competitions" or "Lettuce Festivals." The Guangdong Lion Dance became an important cultural symbol of resistance against the Qing Dynasty.

As an outstanding intangible cultural heritage, the Guangdong Lion Dance is an essential part of festive celebrations, characterized by distinct national style and typical local features. It is beloved by people in southern China and Chinese communities worldwide. The lion dance, symbolizing justice, power, bravery, and optimism, has taken root in the hearts of Chinese people and overseas Chinese (Lyu et al., 2023). Despite advancements in societal civilization and the passage of time, people's recognition of the lion dance, carrying the Chinese spirit of loyalty, righteousness, benevolence, and courage, remains unchanged. The national spirit represented by the Guangdong Lion Dance continues to be endowed with new meanings through the ages (Liu, 2013). With China's economic development, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people interactions, the Guangdong Lion Dance has also spread abroad, visible wherever Chinese communities gather. It closely ties the love of homeland among Chinese

people and overseas Chinese, gradually becoming an essential link in maintaining national sentiment and fostering friendships between China and the world (Li, 2017).

Conclusion

This article explores the Guangdong Lion Dance, an important component of China's intangible cultural heritage, revealing its deep-rooted significance in Chinese tradition and social life. Based on documentary research, the study unveils the historical development, classification, characteristics, and cultural connotations of the Guangdong Lion Dance. The research highlights the symbolic role of lion dancing in attracting wealth and warding off evil, the integration of lion dance with martial arts, and the evolution of lion dance as a medium for cultural expression and identity, especially during festive celebrations. Through this investigation, the Guangdong Lion Dance is shown to be more than just a performance art; it is a living cultural tradition that embodies the resilience of the Chinese people, the spirit of community, and the continuity of culture. This work not only aids the academic understanding of Chinese traditional culture but also emphasizes the importance of protecting such cultural practices in an increasingly globalized world. This study advocates for an in-depth examination of the Guangdong Lion Dance across different regions and diaspora communities to explore its adaptation mechanisms in the context of global dissemination and multicultural backgrounds. Enhancing research can contribute to understanding the global footprint of the Guangdong Lion Dance, aiding in the protection and inheritance of its vitality. Furthermore, the research should also focus on the economic and social impacts of lion dance performances on local communities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the significance of lion dancing both within and outside China. Protecting such cultural practices is crucial as they continue to evolve and resonate in a globalized world.

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