



Cultural Memory and Identity in Motion: Analyzing the Performance Characteristics of Yellow Mud Drum Dance

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Abstract

The Yellow Mud Drum Dance is deeply rooted in the ritual customs of the Yao people, functioning both as a repository of cultural memory and a dynamic expression of collective identity. This study explores the performance characteristics of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance, a traditional Yao ritual, within the broader context of cultural preservation and adaptation. Based on fieldwork conducted in Jinxiu, Guangxi, China, this study employed qualitative research methods, including participant observation, interviews with local practitioners, and performance analysis, to examine the choreography, music, and spatial arrangements of the dance. The results indicate that these elements play a critical role in enhancing community cohesion and fostering emotional resonance among participants. As the Yellow Mud Drum Dance transitions from ritual spaces to modern performance venues, its evolution preserves core symbolic elements while demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of traditional cultural expression in the face of modernization and globalization. This study underscores the importance of preserving such performative cultures, while also allowing room for innovation to ensure they continue to play a meaningful role in contemporary society.

Keywords: Yao Yellow Mud Drum Dance, Dance Performance Culture, Culture Change

1. Introduction

The Yellow Mud Drum Dance is a crucial part of Yao culture, deeply rooted in the rituals and traditions of the Yao people. Historically, this dance has been not only an art form but also an important medium for transmitting cultural memory and reinforcing group identity (Cai, 2017). It plays a vital role in Yao rituals, especially those related to ancestor worship and religious ceremonies, symbolizing the unity of the community and the connection between the present and the ancestors. The Yellow Mud Drum Dance serves both as a performance art and a ritual practice, embodying a dual significance: it visually and audibly expresses Yao cultural values, while also acting as a repository of collective memory passed down through generations (Li, 2012). The synchronized movements, rhythmic drumming, and spatial utilization in the dance

create a shared emotional experience for participants, strengthening social bonds within the community.

However, like many traditional customs, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance faces challenges brought by modernization and globalization. As the Yao community becomes more influenced by broader societal forces, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has gradually extended beyond the local ritualistic folk culture context into the marketized, modernized, and globalized social environment. This transition has not only allowed traditional music and dance forms to persist in local ritual contexts but also evolve into an aesthetic culture catering to diverse demands, profoundly impacting its preservation and development (Deng, 2015). During this process, the form and expression of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance have continuously evolved to meet new aesthetic demands and cultural exchanges. There is growing attention to the preservation of cultural traditions, especially as "the establishment of the market economy is reshaping the structure and model of traditional Chinese culture with unprecedented force, redefining the place of traditional folk culture in both geographical and social spaces(Ma, 2011)." In this context, the market economy, technological advancements, and the expansion of global markets have not only changed people's lifestyles but also disrupted traditional forms of cultural expression. This dance, once thriving in ritual settings, is now increasingly performed in modern venues, including stages for tourism and cultural exhibitions. This shift raises a key question: how can traditional customs be protected, transformed, or even diluted in the face of these changes? As some scholars have noted, "The overall transition to modern society inevitably leads to a long-term process of cultural transformation. It is not a sudden leap into modernity but a gradual reconstruction driven by multiple factors according to its own developmental logic" (Zhao, 2013). Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial for ensuring that this dance performance culture remains vibrant while adapting to contemporary contexts.

Studying the performance characteristics of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance is crucial for understanding how it continues to serve as a dynamic tool for preserving cultural memory and expressing collective identity. The choreography, music, and spatial arrangement of the dance are not only artistic expressions but also carry profound symbolic meanings that reinforce Yao cultural values and beliefs. Analyzing these elements provides insights into how ritual practices can adapt to modern contexts without losing their core meaning. Although the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has a long history and significant cultural meaning, there are still evident gaps in current research, particularly concerning how such traditional dances evolve within contemporary performance contexts. Many studies on intangible cultural heritage often focus on the broader aspects of traditional preservation, while overlooking the subtleties of how specific performance elements are retained or altered in contemporary practice. This study aims to examine the choreography, music, and spatial arrangements of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance to understand how it continues to maintain its cultural significance in a modern context while retaining its symbolic importance to the Yao community.

By examining both traditional and contemporary contexts, this study seeks to explore the symbolic cultural significance of this dance and its adaptations amidst modernization and globalization. Specifically, this paper seeks to understand how these elements—choreography, music, and spatial arrangements—are preserved or transformed as the dance transitions from ritual settings to modern performance stages. Additionally, the study explores how these elements contribute to fostering community cohesion and emotional resonance both within the traditional Yao context and the broader, more globalized environment. This research focuses on two primary objectives: (1) analyzing the choreography, music, and spatial arrangements of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance to explore its symbolic significance and how these elements reinforce Yao cultural values and community cohesion. (2) Investigating the transition of the

dance from its traditional ritual origins to contemporary performance spaces, with particular attention to which cultural elements are retained, adapted, or reinterpreted, especially as the dance shifts from ritualistic to performative contexts. This research offers a model for understanding how traditional performing arts evolve and maintain relevance in a rapidly changing world, while continuing to play their original roles within their native cultural contexts.

2. Methodology

This study focuses on Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and investigates the Yellow Mud Drum Dance and its performance culture from 2021 to 2023. The study aims to explore the evolution and cultural significance of the dance in the context of modernization and cultural globalization, with an emphasis on ritual performances and cultural tourism activities.

This study employs qualitative research methods, combining ethnographic fieldwork, key performance element analysis, spatial analysis, and literature review to capture the complexity of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance. The research focuses on two main aspects: cultural tourism activities (2021–2023) and ritual performance contexts (2022–2023). The section on cultural tourism analyzes how the dance is adapted and commercialized in response to market demands and how it is shaped into a local cultural brand within the context of cultural globalization. The ritual performance section explores the role of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance during the Pan King Festival, especially its integration into the “Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King” ceremony, and investigates its symbolic significance in the Yao community. The sampling framework targeted key informants involved in both ritual and cultural tourism contexts and was divided into four specific groups for in-depth interviews and participant observation. These groups included: (1) Yellow Mud Drum Dance inheritors—four participants selected for their knowledge of the traditional choreography, history, and ritual significance of the dance based on their roles in cultural transmission; (2) Yao spiritual leaders—four individuals who supervised spiritual and religious rituals during the 2022 and 2023 ancestor worship ceremonies, offering insights into the ritual significance of the dance; (3) Yellow Mud Drum dancers—ten participants chosen based on their involvement in both ritual and contemporary performances; and (4) scholars and experts—three experts specializing in Yao culture, performance studies, and intangible cultural heritage.

The fieldwork for this study primarily involved ethnographic research conducted in Jinxiu from 2021 to 2023, with a focus on key events such as the Pan King Festival. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were used to explore the rituals and performances of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance. Researchers conducted participant observation to examine the spatial organization, choreography, and emotional resonance of the dance, while also collecting oral histories through interviews with elders, dancers, and cultural practitioners to investigate its emotional and social impacts. The analytical framework for the data is divided into three key areas: (1) Choreography and rhythm analysis, focusing on the movements, symbolic gestures, and drum rhythms of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance to examine their significance in both traditional and modern contexts, particularly how music and dance promote community cohesion and emotional bonds. (2) Spatial analysis, investigating the performance of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance in both sacred (ritual) and secular (tourism) spaces, assessing the spatial arrangements in ritual contexts and how modern stage performances affect or dilute traditional meanings. (3) Literature review, supplementing fieldwork with archival materials to trace the historical evolution of the dance and comparing it with similar Yao ritual dances in

other regions. Relevant historical documents, festival records, and cultural policy reports are analyzed.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Symbolic Meaning and Cultural Cohesion

3.1.1 Historical Memory and Cultural Performance

The Yao ethnic group's Yellow Mud Drum Dance, originating from the Ao Yao community in Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, Guangxi, is one of the most significant forms of the Yao long-drum dance. The history of the Yao Long-Drum Dance can be traced back to ancient Yao myths, including the Panhu myth, the origin of the Long-Drum, and the sea-crossing myth. The Panhu Myth narrates how the Yao people's ancestor, Panhu, transformed from a dog into a human, helped the emperor defeat his enemies, and married the emperor's daughter, becoming the Yao people's ancestor (Zhang, 2004). The origin myth of the Long-Drum explains the source of the Yao people's Long-Drum and its inseparable relationship with Panhu (Editing Group of "Guoshanbang", 2009, P2-19). The Sea-crossing Myth describes the historical migration of the Yao ancestors and the origin of the "Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King (also named Pan King Festival)" ritual (Editing Group of "Guoshanbang", 2009, P36-41). These three ancient legends form its cultural foundation, reflecting the historical context and collective memory of the Yao people. Particularly, the story of the Yao ancestor "Panhu" is central, whose legend and worship form the core of Yao culture.

During rituals and major festivals, the long-drum dance is regarded as an important medium for communicating with the ancestor Panhu. A solemn ceremony known as "Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King" is held during these events, symbolizing sacred reverence. The long-drum dance holds a crucial role not only in religious rituals but also in celebrations and social gatherings, making it an important symbol of Yao culture. For the Yao people, the inheritance of Pan King is diverse, encompassing ritual knowledge, textual records, and oral traditions. These elements intricately intertwine into a cohesive whole, forming the foundation of generational rituals" (Hirota, R. 2014). Therefore, in Yao ancestral myths, Panhu's influence runs deep. Through the performance of the long-drum dance, the Yao people continually infuse the core of these myths into the drum itself, making it a projection and embodiment of their history and livelihood.

Numerous Yao cultural customs have formed around the Panhu myth. Notably, the costumes in the Yao language branch exhibit features related to the Panhu myth. Historical records, such as those by Southern Song scholar Fan Chengda (1126-1193) in *Guihai Yuheng Zhi - Zhiman*, detail the attire of Yao people in northern Guangxi. For example, "The Yao, descendants of Panhu wear short clothes made of colorful coarse cloth, with their hair tied in cone-shaped buns and bare feet" (Qin, 1986, P184-184), depicting a vivid picture of their lives. The five colors in their attire come from the five-colored spots on Panhu. The two floral red cloth strips on the chest symbolize the blood shed by Panhu after his death. Yao clothing often includes tail-like designs, with head decorations, embroidered handkerchiefs, and bridal covers all deriving from the Panhu myth.

The Ming Dynasty's (1368-1644) *Guangdong Xinyu* also provides detailed descriptions of Panhu worship and costume details in the local Yao culture: The Yao claim to be descendants of Panhu... Women use five-colored silk to decorate their sleeves, with the front reaching the waist and the back extending to below the knees, called dog tail shirt", symbolizing they never forget their ancestor" (Qu, 1985, p212). The long back hem of the "dog tail shirt" design is still commonly seen in traditional Yao attire today, including headscarves wrapped into dog-ear

shapes. Modern Pan Yao, Shanzi Yao, Ao Yao, White Pants Yao, and Flowery Head Yao often have “*” shaped patterns embroidered on their clothing and headscarves, known today as the "Pan King Seal", reflecting Panhu worship (Figure 1). People embroider these totems on their attire to show reverence.



Figure 1: Embroidered "Pan King Seal" on the apron of an Ao Yao woman
Source: Anke Fu, 2022

The legends surrounding the origins of the Yellow Mud Drum in the Cao Yao community of Jinxi, Guangxi, illustrate the structural role this cultural symbol plays within the value system:

It is said that the Yao ancestor, Pan King, went hunting in the mountains. Due to the narrow mountain paths, Pan King had to guard a goat by the cliff. Unfortunately, the goat accidentally charged at him, causing him to fall off the cliff and perish on a tree branch below. Pan King's brothers found his body on the tree branch and were devastated. They chopped down the tree, cutting it into five wooden stumps to create one female drum and four male drums. The goat's skin was used to make the drumheads, resulting in the creation of five drums. When the drum was struck during the ritual for Pan King, it was discovered that it produced no sound, no matter how hard they hit it. Just as everyone was at a loss, a few drops of yellow mud fell from the beam above and stuck to the goat-skin drumhead. Someone then tried to strike the drumhead, and miraculously, the drum produced sound. Consequently, people named it the Yellow Mud Drum and began to perform the Yellow Mud Drum Dance.

(Li, X, 2012)

Clearly, the “Yellow Mud Drum Dance”, characterized by a series of meaningful movements involving the body and the long drum, serves as an embodied cultural symbol of the “Panhu belief”, bridging the gap between the present-day Yao people and their ancestor, Pan Wang, across time and space. From the ritualized process of making the Yellow Mud Drum to the conclusion of each ceremony, this symbolic act remains consistent throughout. The performance culture objects that we focus on today, namely the Pan King Festival and the Long Drum Dance, are direct manifestations of Yao culture influenced by the Panhu myth. In these rituals and dances, the Yao people commemorate and seek the blessings of their ancestor Panhu

through offerings and performances, while also expressing gratitude and reciprocity for their ancestors 'giving. Dances such as the Long Drum Dance or the Yellow Mud Drum Dance are regarded as expressions of reverence toward the Panhu deity, reflecting the Yao people's continuation and promotion of ancestral traditions. Thus, the relationship between the Pan Hu myth and the Pan King Festival and Long Drum Dance can be described as inseparable. Behind these cultural expressions lies a deep respect and transmission of the Panhu deity, which collectively forms an essential part of Yao culture, enhancing the cohesion and cultural identity of the Yao people.

3.1.2 The Symbolic of Dance Movements

The dance movements of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance not only possess aesthetic value but also embody rich cultural symbolism. Through these movements, the Yao people express reverence for their ancestors, a love for life, and their understanding and connection to both the sacred and the mundane. The core dance movements in the Yellow Mud Drum Dance, such as "self-rotation" (where the dancer rotates around themselves) and "orbital rotation" (where the dancer circles around a central object), directly reflect the Yao's cosmology and cultural narrative. These movements of the dancer's body not only create a sacred space in the physical realm but also symbolize the interaction and fusion between humans and deities, as well as between the body and the spirit. Particularly during the "Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King" ceremony and funeral rites, the counterclockwise "orbital rotation" holds profound religious significance, symbolizing the pathway into sacred space. The counterclockwise rotation reflects the Yao's traditional concept of yin and yang: left represents yang, while right represents yin. Therefore, movement in the counterclockwise direction is considered a means of approaching the sacred realm, with the dancer crossing the boundary between the sacred and the mundane through this action. The transition from counterclockwise to clockwise movement in the dance marks the process of returning from the sacred realm to the mundane world following the conclusion of the ceremony. Through these rotations and jumps, the dancer symbolizes communication with the deities while also expressing a profound understanding of life and death, as well as spirit and matter. The symbolic nature of these dance movements not only conveys religious beliefs but also strengthens the Yao community's recognition of the cycle of life and the cosmic order.



Figure 2: Yellow Mud Drum Placed at the Altar
Source: Anke Fu, 2023

Simultaneously, the core of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance's music lies in the drumming, which not only provides a rhythmic foundation for the dance movements but also carries symbolic significance. The Yellow Mud Drum consists of both male and female drums, symbolizing the balance and harmony of yin and yang. The female drum produces a soft tone, while the male drum produces a resonant sound; together, they create a rich rhythmic experience for the dance performance. The mud coating on the drumhead enhances the clarity and fullness of the sound, increasing its sacredness and ceremonial quality. The construction and playing methods of the male and female drums differ significantly. The female drum is typically suspended in front of the dancer, struck with a bamboo stick in the left hand while the right hand assists with the palm; in contrast, the male drum stands upright before the dancer, with the left hand gripping the narrow waist through the rope and the right hand striking the drumhead. These actions not only demonstrate technical skill but also represent the Yao people's philosophy of balancing yin and yang and coexisting the sacred and the mundane.

Furthermore, the physical form of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance is distinctive, particularly the dancer's "squat shiver", "step-squat", and "jump-squat" movements, which are focused in the lower body and exhibit a strong sense of rhythm and resilience. These leg-centric movements, combined with the rhythm of the drumming, showcase the unique dance style of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance. The slight twisting of the waist, in conjunction with the large movements of the legs, creates a distinctive dynamic balance. The dancer's steps exhibit a similarity to the "Bagua step" found in Taoist ritual dance, with outward-opening steps of the toes combined with body rotation, further reinforcing the religious symbolism in the dance movements. Particularly during the Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King ceremony, the dancer uses these steps and rotations to orbit the Pan Wang statue in both counterclockwise and clockwise directions, creating a highly symbolic ritual space.

In the Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King ceremony, the choreography and composition of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance exhibit a highly ritualistic spatial structure. Dancers combine "self-rotation" and "orbital rotation", creating a dynamic space centered around a focal point. The individual self-rotation of the dancers creates independent rotational trajectories, while the collective orbital rotation of the group performs multi-layered circles around the Pan King statue. The counterclockwise orbital rotation is a central aspect of Yao rituals, symbolizing entry into the sacred realm, while the clockwise rotation signifies the transition from the sacred to the mundane. Through this spatial structure, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance not only presents a visually dynamic effect but also symbolizes the interaction between cosmic order and religious beliefs within Yao culture. It is evident that the actions, music, and spatial construction in the Yellow Mud Drum Dance are not merely elements of artistic performance but also expressions of Yao cultural identity and social cohesion. Through these symbolic actions, the Yao people strengthen their cultural identity and, amid modernization, convey and reconstruct their cultural traditions through ritual dance.

3.1.3 The Spatial Arrangement of Dance Performance

The spatial arrangement is key to understanding the transition of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance from sacred to secular contexts. As a significant ritual dance of the Yao people, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance exhibits distinct spatial arrangements and performance styles in its traditional sacred spaces (ritual settings) and modern secular spaces (e.g., tourism and stage performances). These differences in spatial arrangement significantly affect both the form of the dance and its cultural symbolism. By analyzing these two types of spaces, we can better understand the dance's expression in different contexts and how space influences its traditional meaning and cultural significance.

Performance in Sacred Spaces

In traditional Yao religious ceremonies, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance is typically performed in sacred spaces. For instance, the Aoyao people often use the method of “divination” before the ceremony to select an auspicious time and place, which is a crucial step in the process. During my fieldwork in 2022 at the “Fulfilling the Vow of Pan King” ceremony in Shangguchen Village, Liuxiang Township, Jinxiu County, I observed that the preparations not only required determining the time and location but also involved the organization and arrangement of ritual participants. The specific time of each ceremony is decided by the temple master through divination, followed by discussions among village elders to ensure that every detail complies with traditional norms. After selecting an auspicious date and location, the villagers build a temporary ceremonial stage, called a “chang”, around the Pan King Temple. Three altars are set up within this space: the innermost one is the “Batan” (reserved for the shigong, or ritual specialist), opposite it is the “Shanglao” altar, also known as the Pan King altar, and further outside, there is the “Wailao” altar (designated as a space for spirits, though people may enter freely). In traditional ceremonies, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance creates a sacred atmosphere that is distinct from everyday life through specific spatial arrangements, such as offering sacrifices, setting up altars, and lighting incense. The separation of space symbolizes the sacredness of the area, allowing participants to enter this space through dance and interact with ancestors and deities. The dance movements, gestures, and drumming rhythms reinforce the connection between humans and deities within this space. The “orbital rotation” of the dancers around the Pan King statue during the performance is the most symbolically significant spatial dynamic in the ritual space. The counterclockwise rotation symbolizes the transition from the human world to the divine realm, while the clockwise rotation signifies the return of the ritual from the sacred to the mundane. Some scholars have noted that in the past, traditional Yao houses had two parallel central doors in the main house: the left was the “yang door” for living people, and the right was the “yin door” for spirits, used only during ancestor worship and funerals (Zhang, 1992, p.137). It is worth noting that with changes in modern lifestyles, the structure of Yao houses has undergone significant transformation, and the distinction between the “yin door” and “yang door” no longer exists. As a result, it has become more difficult for people today to directly interpret the deeper meaning behind the circular movements in rituals. However, this traditional form is still preserved in rituals, where the repeated circular movements, especially the counterclockwise and clockwise rotations, are not only formal expressions of the ritual but also emphasize the relationships between the participants’ roles. Through this form, people not only reinforce the historical and religious aspects of the dance but also, through spatial movement, immerse both the audience and participants in the core of the ritual experience. Thus, the sacred space is not just a physical location but also an emotional space. In the Yellow Mud Drum Dance, dancers create an atmosphere of emotional resonance through their movements and rhythms, allowing the audience and other community members to experience the flow and intensification of collective emotions within this space. The spatial arrangement, such as the circular movements of the dancers and the position of the central deity statue, helps create a collective religious emotional experience, strengthening community cohesion.

Performance in Secular Spaces

As the Yellow Mud Drum Dance increasingly enters modern stages and tourist destinations, its spatial layout has undergone significant changes. In modern settings such as tourism events or cultural festivals, performances of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance typically take place on stages or in public spaces, rather than in the sacred ritual spaces where it originally occurred.

The stage has replaced the traditional altar, and dancers no longer perform around religious symbols or altars. The dancers' movements and spatial arrangements are now more linear, conforming to stage design requirements. For instance, dancers may be arranged in formations or move across the stage, either front to back or side to side, rather than performing circular movements around a central point as in traditional rituals. At the same time, the spatial arrangements of modern stages prioritize the audience's visual experience. The dancers' performances are designed to be more structured and organized, ensuring that the audience can clearly view the performance from a distance. Thus, in secular tourism and stage performances, the spatial transition of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has had a significant impact on its traditional meaning. With sacred spaces replaced by stage spaces, the ritual elements of the dance have been diminished, shifting the performance's focus more toward the display of cultural symbols and entertainment. This spatial shift has to some extent diluted the symbolic meaning of the dance, transforming it into a form of folk display or cultural performance.

As can be seen from the above analysis, the transition of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance from traditional ritual contexts to modern performance venues illustrates the ongoing negotiation between cultural preservation and innovation. Traditionally, in sacred spaces, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance served profound religious and ritual functions. Dancers communicated with the divine through specific movements, rhythms, and spatial arrangements, allowing participants to enter a transcendent sacred space. In modern performance contexts, however, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has become more of a cultural performance, aimed at showcasing the Yao people's ethnic culture and artistic forms. The audience, mostly passive spectators, rarely engage directly. This functional shift may have diminished the sacredness of the dance, turning it into a form of "consumer culture" rather than an interactive ritual between the community and its faith.

Secondly, in terms of emotional resonance, the emotional flow in sacred spaces is naturally generated through the interaction between dancers, the audience, and the ritual space. The emotional connection in these ritual settings is a profound folk belief experience, where participants resonate emotionally with the community, ancestors, and deities through dance and music. However, in secular spaces, this emotional resonance may become more superficial. The role of the audience becomes more passive, and emotional resonance is shallower, with viewers focusing more on the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the dance rather than its underlying religious and cultural symbolism.

Lastly, in terms of ritualistic and modern performances, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance in sacred spaces is characterized by strict spatial and movement arrangements. Every movement, rhythm, and direction in the dance is connected to specific religious and cultural beliefs, with the space itself imbuing these elements with deep symbolic meaning. For example, counterclockwise circling movements in certain religious rituals may symbolize the cycle of life or communication with deities. In sacred ritual spaces, such movements carry a complete system of meaning. Removed from these cultural contexts, the meaning of the movements may become difficult to interpret or misunderstood. However, in modern stage performances, although the form of the movements may be retained, the relationship between the dance and its original space has changed. The absence of the ritual or cultural context makes it harder for the audience to grasp the deeper meaning of these movements. This is not just a matter of simplifying the dance form, but also of neglecting the space and its symbolic significance.

Overall, the spatial layout of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance and its cultural transformation reflect how traditional culture faces the tension between preservation and innovation in modern society. On one hand, the dance has gained new vitality in the context of modernization, spreading widely through stage performances and tourism displays. On the other hand, the

religious and ritualistic aspects of the dance have gradually weakened through secularization, and its cultural connotations and symbolic meanings have become blurred. The change in spatial layout is not merely a shift in physical environment; it has profoundly influenced the form of the dance, its emotional resonance, and the cultural symbolism behind it.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the performance characteristics of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance in both traditional and modern contexts, revealing how this dance effectively balances cultural heritage and innovation. Despite the impacts of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has adapted to evolving aesthetic demands while retaining its profound cultural significance. It remains an important symbol of Yao cultural memory and a tool for fostering communal emotional cohesion. A key finding of this study is that the preservation of traditional culture requires not only maintaining the dance form but also protecting the spatial environments in which these dances occur. These spaces play a crucial role in shaping cultural expression and meaning. Neglecting this aspect may reduce traditional culture to a mere spectacle, stripping it of its deeper religious, social, and cultural significance. This perspective offers a new approach to cultural preservation: beyond safeguarding the dance form itself, it is essential to consider the environments and cultural contexts in which these traditions thrive. Only in this way can traditional culture be passed down in a more comprehensive manner.

The Yellow Mud Drum Dance is not merely a performance art form but an important symbol of Yao social culture and collective memory. Its complex drum rhythms, dance movements, and ritualistic gestures reflect the deep reverence the Yao people hold for nature, their ancestors, and their community relationships. As an interactive ritual, this dance accumulates emotional energy and generates social cohesion, reinforcing Yao cultural identity. In the process of integrating into modern society and global culture, the Yellow Mud Drum Dance has demonstrated remarkable adaptability in both cultural preservation and innovation. It blends traditional elements with contemporary performance styles, preserving the essence of cultural heritage while offering a form that is accessible and compelling to modern audiences. This adaptability not only reinforces the significance of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance in local cultural preservation but also enhances its vitality in a global context.

In conclusion, the evolution of the Yellow Mud Drum Dance offers valuable insights into how traditional culture can adapt to modernization. As an integral part of Yao ritual culture, this dance emphasizes the formation and preservation of cultural memory and identity. Its evolution, while preserving core symbolic elements, demonstrates the resilience and flexibility of traditional cultural expression in the face of modernization and globalization. This study emphasizes the importance of protecting such performative cultures while also allowing space for innovation, ensuring they continue to play a meaningful role in contemporary society.

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