

# The Phenomenon of Mask Dance in East Asia from the Lens of Dance Teachers

Yue Teng

University of Baguio, Baguio 2600, Philippines

---

## ABSTRACT

This paper explored the phenomenon of mask awareness in East Asian dance from the perspective of dance teachers in Shiyou Village, Jiangxi Province, China. It aimed to determine the evolution of mask dance, explore the cultural influences of East Asian dances on the mask dance, and examine the significance of mask dance in dance education from a cultural perspective. A qualitative research design was used, involving interviews with four experienced dance teachers to collect their views and experiences on mask dance. The interviews were transcribed, analyzed thematically, and corroborated with literature research. The study revealed the cultural symbols, meanings and functions of mask dance in East Asia. It highlighted the role of mask dance in preserving cultural heritage, enhancing social cohesion, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and stimulating artistic innovation. The paper provides useful insights for dance practice and cultural heritage in the region.

## KEYWORDS

Mask Consciousness; East Asian Dance; Traditional Dance; Mask Dance Culture.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of mask awareness in East Asian dance is a remarkable area of research. As a cultural symbol, masks are widely used in dance performances around the world. The mask consciousness in East Asian dance presents the characteristics of diverse symbols and ritualization. These characteristics not only enrich the artistic expression of dance, but also reflect the different understanding and interpretation of mask dance. When the primitive dance gradually moved out of the realm of "practical activity" and into the realm of "aesthetic activity," it meant that "dynamic imagery" was noticed. The most important thing that should not be overlooked when examining the "dynamic imagery" of the primitive dance is its evolution from a "body language" posture to a "ritualized" posture (Yu et al., 2005). This paper explores the phenomenon of mask awareness in East Asian dance. By studying the cultural background and historical evolution of masks in dance, the important position of masks in dance is revealed. As a unique form of artistic expression, the mask has multiple meanings in the dance, including role-playing, emotional expression, symbolic meaning and so on (Wang, 2017). This study further analyzes the function of masks in dance and their interaction with the audience, specifically dance teachers. Finally, this study explores the influence value of mask in contemporary society and its innovative application in traditional and modern dance.

The study focuses on dance teachers' perspectives on mask dance in Southeast Asia. This paper aims to study the use of masks and their meanings in Southeast Asian dance, revealing the conscious symbols and cultural connotations of masks in dance performances. This offers a fresh perspective on the understanding of mask dance and aims to enrich the existing literature.

Dance teachers' perspective on mask dance is crucial because it provides insights into the cultural, historical, and artistic significance of the practice. They can offer guidance on the technical aspects of performing with a mask, such as movement and expression, and emphasize the importance of masks in storytelling and character portrayal within the dance tradition. Their knowledge helps students understand and appreciate the deeper meanings behind the mask dance, enriching their performance and learning experience. It is important to preserve traditional folk dance in university dance curricula in addition to learning the essentials of foreign cultures (Yang, 2024).

Comparing the design, use and symbol of dance masks in different countries allows for the exploration of the commonness and diversity in mask art, and the influence on East Asian cultural identity and inheritance (Chen, 2013).

## 1.1. Literature Review

A lot of literature and journals have been published on mask dance. The following is a brief description and analysis of the writings and journals that describe the phenomenon in various countries and regions of the world.

China's mask dance is the most characteristic of Nuo dance according to research. For example, Zhu Heng Fu wrote the "Chinese Nuo Opera Development History and Art Form Research," which is based on the author's years-long investigation of Nuo opera across the country. According to relevant historical records and Nuo development course outline, an in-depth study on the elements of Nuo and the main types of opera will put forward many new ideas. Academic discussions mostly revolve on Nuo Dance, masks, race society, ginger play, Meilian play, incense play, Shi Gong play, Yang play, ground play, shaman, Qiangmu and Tibetan opera and handful of Taiji, July will jump, Dongtong push, Maugus, nine sacrifices, jumping in the dodder and other historical and artistic forms of in-depth discussion. These academic discussions promote the study of Nuo culture. Generally, China has a lot of mask dance. According to Ma Guojun's "China Nuo Opera and East Asian Traditional Theater Comparative Study," the industry of Nuo work from the East into Japan, South Korea and other neighboring countries has been blended with a lot of Nuo culture outside the cultural factors. Therefore, the output of Nuo culture remain in the local Nuo.

Any study on Nuo culture has a considerable academic value. Additionally, the Japanese writer Ritsuko Hirota writes "Ghost of the Road - China's masks and rituals" which describes the origin of Nuo culture, development and dissemination, and through the investigation report in various parts of China. The book aims to introduce the so-called ghosts with the image of the gods, rituals, beliefs, and entertainment performances. There are also comparative studies focusing on appearance. For example, Qu Liuyi's book, "Tibetan Sacred Dance - Drama and Mask Art" and as well as his other book (co-authored with Qian Fu), "Introduction to Oriental Nuo Dance Culture," are a detailed compendium and analysis of Chinese mask dance culture.

Japanese Noh Theater is also an art form of performing with a face according to the geographical division, and has certain developmental origins with Guizhou Di Opera in China. In the exploration of Japanese Noh Theater, Han Dan's book, "Oriental Physical and Mental Viewpoints on Japanese Noh Theater--From the Perspective of Cultivation, Body, and Space," elaborates on the physical and mental aspects of Noh Theater, and on the inner activities and body awareness of spatial movements of the performers. The book is a detailed exposition of the performer's mind and body, the performer's inner activity and the body's awareness of spatial movement. Yin Jiage's paper (2015) "Analyzing the Research of Mask Dance between China and Southeast Asian Countries--Taking Guangxi Huanjiang Maonan and Bali, Indonesia as Examples" describes in detail the mask dance of the Balinese people in its many forms and compares it with that of the Maonan in Huanjiang County, Guangxi Province of China, and the two different mask dance cultures. The two different mask dance cultures are compared.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. The theory of Functionalism in Cultural Anthropology**

Mask dance is a form of cultural expression. In East Asia, the human behavior consciousness has formed an important part of human cultural characteristics. The focus of this study can be analysed through cultural anthropology, specifically through the theory of functionalism in cultural anthropology. Culture is a whole; it includes material, spiritual and institutional levels (Erickson, 2002). Each level has its own characteristic functions to meet the different needs of people. Similarly, mask dance has social functionality, and this cultural phenomenon is investigated on the cultural system of various countries in East Asia. In the lens of structuralism theory, understanding the patterns of cultural phenomena and social order means studying the structure of cultural symbols and meanings. The phenomenon of human dance behavior is connected through the mask symbol, and the interrelationship between cultural symbols is emphasized through the structuralism theory. The human psychological construction of the mask consciousness is similar to the totem belief. Frazer (1910) believes that “the totem view is not only a religious belief, but also a social structure.”

### **2.2. Social Cognitive Theory**

Mask dance is a social behavior in which the dancers will perceive and understand the mental state of others. This study uses social cognition theory to help understand the emotional transmission of masks between dancers and the audience's understanding and interpretation of dance performance. The theory can also aid in understanding the influence of masks on the communication and interaction between audiences. This theory can be a guide in the unpacking the origin of the mask-conscious dance form in East Asian dance, exploring its association with social, historical and religious factors, and analyzing its developmental changes in different historical stages. Moreover, it can be a means to analyze the artistic characteristics of Southeast Asian dance, such as dance movements, music, costumes, props, etc., and to explore its unique artistic styles and forms of expression.

To study the position and role of mask dance in East Asian folk culture, one should analyze its association with local folk activities, festivals, and celebrations, as well as its inheritance and development within society and culture. This involves conducting fieldwork on East Asian mask dances, observing their performance forms, participant groups, and social functions. By doing so, one can gain a deeper understanding of their cultural connotations and social significance.

### **2.3. Cross-cultural Comparison Theory**

This theory advances the comparison of the typical mask dance forms of East Asia with those of other regions, analysing their similarities and differences, and exploring their status and influence in global dance culture. Within East Asia, there are also notable differences in mask dances between countries. Studying these differences provides a deeper understanding of the diversity and complexity of East Asian dance. Additionally, East Asian dances are closely linked with religious culture. This involves examining the religious elements embedded in the dances, such as symbols and ceremonies, and exploring their association with religious beliefs. By classifying and analysing the characteristics and expressions of religious dances according to different beliefs in Southeast Asia, one can gain a comprehensive understanding of their cultural and spiritual significance. In applying the above theories to the research, we can combine the specific mask dance content, and performance forms as well as related literature to conduct in-depth research and analysis, in order to understand the cultural connotation and artistic value of Southeast Asian dance in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner.

## **2.4. Significance of the Study**

The study of mask ideology in East Asian dance is diverse. It can reveal information about culture, religion, society and individual, and has profound significance and value to the study of history, humanities and even the study of dance teaching.

Mask dance is usually associated with a specific traditional culture and ethnic identity, and is an important part of certain ethnic cultures. Studying mask dance helps to protect, inherit and promote these intangible cultural heritages, so that they will not gradually disappear with the passage of time (Ban, 2023).

Mask dance is often a collective performance activity of nations, communities or groups. Through joint participation and experience of mask dance, the connection and cohesion between people can be strengthened, and the sense of identity of common identity and values can be enhanced.

Mask dance often has unique artistic forms and symbolic significance. Through the study of mask dance, the understanding and respect for different cultures can be enhanced, and cross-cultural communication and harmonious development can be promoted.

Through the study of mask dance, artistic innovation and cultural creativity can be discovered and as a consequence, can provide new inspiration and direction for the development of contemporary dance art.

In general, the study of mask dance helps to protect and inherit cultural heritage, enhance social cohesion and identity, promote cross-cultural communication and understanding, and stimulate artistic innovation and cultural creativity, which is of positive significance to social development.

## **2.5. Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover the phenomenon of mask awareness in East Asian dance from the perspective of dance teachers. Specifically, this study aimed:

- 1) To determine the evolution of mask dance as observed by the dance teachers in Shiyou Village, Jiangxi Province, China.
- 2) To determine the cultural influences of the East Asian dances to the mask dance of Shiyou Village, Jiangxi Province, China as perceived by the dance teachers.
- 3) To explore the significance of mask dance in dance education from a cultural perspective.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Study Design**

To study the phenomenon of dance masks in Southeast Asia, a qualitative research design was used. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and explain the phenomenon to gain insight into the meaning and symbolism behind it. In studying the awareness of dance masks in Southeast Asia, this study took the following steps.

First, the interview questions were developed based on the objectives of the study. Second, interviews with dance teachers were conducted to collect personal views and experiences on mask dance. The interviews were then transcribed for further analysis.

The collected data from the interviews were organized and analyzed into themes to extract meaningful insights such as discovering the specific roles and meanings of masks in dance, as well as the dancers' perceptions and experiences of masks. Additionally, literature research helped corroborate the themes developed from the analysed transcripts.

Through the above steps, one can delve into the consciousness of masks in Southeast Asian dance, reveal the cultural symbols and meanings behind them, and provide useful references for dance practice and cultural inheritance.

### **3.2. Population and Locale of the Study**

The population of the study focused on the dance teachers as they are engaged in the art of dance in the East Asian region. This group is knowledgeable on the traditional and modern significance of dance masks in East Asia and have in-depth research on the history, culture, and symbolic meaning of dance masks. East Asia is the scope of the study since masks are the most typical dance form in the region. Dance teachers with a certain number of years of research experience or people engaged in dance research are selected participants. There were four (4) participants in the study.

The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling. The participants were four experienced dance teachers from Shiyou Village, Jiangxi Province, China. These participants were specifically selected for their knowledge and experience in mask dance, which aligns with the study's focus on understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of dance teachers.

In qualitative research, saturation is achieved when additional data collection no longer yields new insights. The four dance teachers as participants led to saturation due to their expertise and depth of knowledge, allowing them to provide rich, detailed information about various aspects of mask dance. In-depth interviews with these experienced teachers generated substantial data, with consistent patterns and themes emerging early on.

Furthermore, the scope of literature for corroboration is generally from East Asia. The locations where the awareness of dance masks in East Asia is studied mainly include various research institutes, academic organizations, universities, or research institutes in East Asia, such as China, Japan, and Korea. These locations are rich in traditional dance and mask culture, providing a rich cultural resource and practical foundation for research. There are also a number of published works and literature for reference.

### **3.3. Data Gathering Tools**

The data collection tool was primarily in the form of interviews. Specifically, a face-to-face and semi-structured interview was conducted with dance arts practitioners, including a list of open-ended questions and prompts. Any observations during the interview were supplementary to the primary data (which is the interview transcript). The interview questions were designed based on the objectives. There were three parts, each responding to the objectives of the study.

### **3.4. Data Gathering Procedure**

The data collection procedure for this study began with the interview questions designed for the interviews, which were carefully designed to address the research objectives. To improve the validity of the interview content, the interview questions were reviewed by experts. Moreover, valuable input from experienced researchers and dancers was incorporated.

Next, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants different from the target participants to assess the clarity and validity of the questions. Based on the feedback from the pilot test, the information was adapted to ensure the reliability of the interview content.

After refining the interview guide, potential participants were approached and informed of the purpose and significance of the study. Voluntary participation and confidentiality were emphasized and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Video and audio equipment were used to record all interviews and observations for subsequent analysis and generalization of data.

Throughout the process, a strict code of ethics was adhered to and the privacy of the participants was prioritized. Once the data collection was completed, the analysis phase began with the thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

### **3.5. Treatment of Data**

The processing of collected data was done through data wrangling, which organized collected data into an analysable format that can bring together data from different sources. Analysis of the collated data was done by exploring the data with appropriate analytical methods and identifying patterns, character relationships, or trends in the transcripts, including content analysis of the dance, thematic analysis of the dance, and phenomenological explanations of the mask dance. Next, based on the results of the data analysis, the data were interpreted to discover the meaning and insights. Finally, the results were presented, and the results of data processing and analysis were presented in for sharing and communication.

### **3.6. Ethical Considerations**

In conducting this study, ethical considerations were strictly observed. The researcher made sure health, confidentiality, and rights of the participants were prioritized. The ethical framework guiding this study was based on principles such as informed consent, ensuring that participants receive comprehensive information about the purpose of the study, its procedures, and the potential risks and benefits. The voluntary and non-mandatory informed consent of each participant were sought, and the guaranteed right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences were considered essential.

Confidentiality was a core principle of the research process and the data collected, including questionnaires, were handled with maximum confidentiality.

Participants were assigned codes or identifiers in anonymity of their contributions, and only the researcher had access to the raw data. Privacy measures were also extended to a secure storage and transmission of data, using encryption for digital data, and keeping physical records in locked and secure locations. The researcher was committed to the responsible retention and secure disposal of data in compliance with data protection regulations.

Transparency and honesty characterized interactions with participants, who received clear and truthful information about research intentions, potential impacts, and expected outcomes. Any restrictions or potential conflicts of interest were publicly disclosed.

As a commitment to ethical research practice, the dissemination of results will be carried out in an accurate and transparent manner. Research results will be shared with institutions at the research site, providing valuable insights into the knowledge base of the local academic community.

The final study report will be published in a journal but the any identifying information from the participants shall remain confidential and will not be publicly disseminated. Ongoing ethical reflection and adherence to these ethical considerations guided every stage of the research process, ensuring the integrity and ethical soundness of the research.

### **3.7. Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the results and analysis of the findings of the study.

#### **3.7.1. The Evolution of Mask Dance as Observed by Dance Teachers**

The teachers highlighted the deep cultural roots of mask dance, emphasizing its significance in preserving and conveying traditional values, stories, and customs. Several sub-themes emerged under this broader cultural theme, each illustrating a different facet of how mask dance contributes to and

evolves within its cultural context: cultural evolution, raising awareness on culture, displaying national culture, carrying cultural heritage, expressing local culture, and rootedness in folk culture. There are local cultural values represented in mask dance performances, including the significance of struggle, discipline, religion, and life (Yanuartuti & Winarko, 2019).

The teachers highlighted the deep cultural roots of mask dance, emphasizing its significance in preserving and conveying traditional values, stories, and customs. The teachers noted that mask dance plays a crucial role in raising awareness about cultural practices and traditions. By performing and teaching these dances, they help to educate audiences and students about the rich cultural histories and values embedded in each movement and mask. Interviewee 1 specified a way this is done in the province:

“...organizing local festivals, performances, and workshops, mask dancing continues to exist and develop in contemporary society. These activities not only attracted a large number of tourists, but also raised the public awareness and interest in traditional culture.”

The performance of mask dance at festivals was another significant sub-theme. Teachers explained that these dances are integral to various festivals and celebrations, where they play a vital role in communal gatherings, religious ceremonies, and seasonal festivities, reinforcing their importance in cultural and social life.

The dance teachers emphasized that mask dance carries cultural heritage, acting as a vessel through which historical narratives, ancestral wisdom, and traditional arts are transmitted from one generation to the next. This aspect of mask dance ensures the continuity and preservation of cultural heritage. Interviewee 2 also described the importance of dance teachers in this process:

“Through their observation and participation in the evolution of mask dance, dance teachers have provided valuable experience and profound insight into the modern transformation of this traditional art form. They are not only the guardians of traditional culture, but also the bridge of cultural innovation and communication.”

Mask dance is often performed to display national culture, serving as a symbol of national identity. The teachers explained that these performances are not only a source of national pride but also a way to showcase the unique cultural elements of their country to the world.

Beyond national significance, mask dance also expresses local culture. Teachers described how specific dances are deeply rooted in the customs, dialects, and daily lives of particular communities, providing a localized cultural expression that is unique to specific regions. For example, a study on an Indonesian mask dance is shown to depict cultural values of their society (Permata et al., 2024). Similarly, a local mask play in Andong City Korea is seen to represent a “cultural brand of Korea” (Kwon & Cho, 2018).

Mask dance is firmly rooted in folk culture, originating from the everyday lives and practices of ordinary people. Since culture has an impact on many facets of life, mask dances are critical in the depiction of human lives (Bordoloi, 2020). The teachers highlighted how these dances emerged from folk traditions, rituals, and celebrations, reflecting the lived experiences and collective memories of the community.

The theme of progressiveness was evident as the teachers discussed how mask dance has adapted to modern contexts. Several sub-themes emerged that illustrate the dynamic evolution and continued relevance of mask dance: combination of traditional and modern dance skills, gradual replacement by painted facial masks, and respect for culture and need for innovation.

The teachers spoke about how contemporary mask dance often presents a fusion of traditional techniques and modern dance skills. This combination allows the dance to remain rooted in its historical origins while appealing to contemporary audiences through innovative choreography and updated performance styles. Interviewee 3 characterizes the advantage of this in an example: “the

combination of traditional Nuo dance masks with modern dance movements makes the ancient Nuo dance glow new vitality on the modern dance platform.”

Another significant trend noted by the teachers is the gradual replacement of traditional masks with painted facial masks. This adaptation reflects a shift towards more practical and versatile performance methods, allowing dancers greater freedom of expression and movement while still maintaining the essence of mask dance. In other local communities, adjustments in the masks are done to amplify visibility (Den Otter, 2023).

The teachers emphasized that the evolution of mask dance reflects a delicate balance between respecting cultural heritage and the need for innovation. While preserving traditional elements is crucial, integrating new ideas and themes ensures that the dance remains relevant and engaging in a rapidly changing world. Unfortunately, some local communities no longer perform their mask dances due to urbanization, modernity and migration (Den Otter, 2023). However, through touch of new cultivation, these local cultural treasures can be revived and depicted. The dance can be performed as a single dance as well as a brief, technologically-infused dance drama. (Yanuartuti & Winarko, 2019). Tourism has also been seen as a means to revitalize cultural tradition (including dance culture) (de Jesus, 2012; Den Otter, 2023).

The interviews also revealed the various external influences that have shaped mask dance. Teachers pointed to the impact of history, globalization, and cross-cultural exchanges in altering the traditional forms and introducing new elements into the performances. Interviewee 4 comprehensively describes this cultural exchange in light of mask dances:

“Chinese mask dance has ties to mask dance in other Asian countries, especially in Japan, South Korea and Indonesia. These influences are not only reflected in the style and use of the mask, but also in the expression form and cultural significance of the dance. For example, Japanese Noh opera is an ancient form of drama, using various exquisite masks, such as ghost, female and old faces, which have profound symbolic meanings in dance and performance. The mask of Nengju is mainly used to express different characters and emotional states. Its meticulous craft and the expressive force of the mask have an impact on the design and production of traditional Chinese masks, especially in the artistic expression of the mask and the connection between the mask and the characters. Symbolic elements in Japanese masks, such as mysticism and spirituality, have influenced mask dance in some parts of China, especially when presenting mythical and religious themes. For example, Japanese masks are often used to express supernatural power, and this technique of expression is also used by some traditional Chinese mask dance. The Korean mask drama is a traditional dance with a strong social critical nature, in which masks play an important role. Talchum Masks are usually used to express social roles and human characteristics, and this technique of expression has had an impact on the mask dance in some parts of China.

In general, Chinese mask dance has historically communicated and influenced with mask dance in Japan, Korea and Indonesia. The mask dance in these countries has different degrees of influence on the artistic expression, craftsmanship and cultural significance of the traditional Chinese mask dance, and at the same time also forms their own unique expression styles and forms. Through these cross-cultural exchanges, Chinese mask dance is constantly enriched and developed, while maintaining its unique national characteristics.

The remarkable diversity of human expression may now be appreciated and recognized thanks to the opportunities provided by globalization. Because of globalization, new dance expressions are emerging that connect the ancient and modern, the urban and the indigenous, and the secular and the sacred (Shapiro, 2008; Solomon & Solomon, 2016).

Lastly, the religious aspect of mask dance was underscored by the teachers, who described how religious beliefs and rituals are intricately woven into the fabric of these dances. Several sub-themes emerged that illustrate the deep spiritual roots and purposes of mask dance: religious evolution,

expressing awe in gods, rootedness in religious beliefs, driving away evil spirits, and praying for abundant harvest and peace.

The religious aspect of mask dance was underscored by the teachers, who described how religious beliefs and rituals are intricately woven into the fabric of these dances. The teachers noted that mask dance was historically performed to express awe and reverence for the gods. The elaborate masks and dramatic movements were designed to honor deities and convey the dancers' deep respect and devotion. Interviewee 4 narrates how ancient dances evolved into what it is today:

“In the context of agricultural society, mask dance is often closely related to agricultural production, and is used to pray for natural gods to bless the vigorous growth of crops and ensure an annual harvest. Witchcraft ritual is an important background in the early form of mask dance. Dancers perform by wearing symbolic masks in order to achieve the purpose of communicating with the gods. With the passage of time, the mask dance gradually changed from the mysterious religious rituals to an important part of the folk festival activities, and became a popular folk art form in various places.”

Mask dance is deeply rooted in religious beliefs, with many dances originating from sacred rituals and ceremonies (Dana et al., 2023). The teachers emphasized that these dances often embody spiritual teachings and reflect the cosmologies of the cultures from which they arise. Another significant function of mask dance was to drive away evil spirits. Teachers explained that these dances often included powerful, symbolic movements and masks intended to protect communities by warding off malevolent forces. Interviewee 3 calls this function as a means to “ban out of evil spirits and illness.” Mask dances were also used to pray for abundant harvests and peace. The teachers described how these performances were integral to agricultural and communal rituals, invoking blessings from the gods to ensure prosperity and harmony. This spiritual relevance of dance is supported by Dana et al. (2023).

### 3.7.2. The Cultural Influences of East Asian Dances

The mask dance is a fascinating cultural artifact that encapsulates the dynamic interplay of tradition and innovation within East Asian performing arts. Rooted in ancient Chinese rituals, this dance form has evolved over centuries, absorbing and integrating diverse influences from neighboring cultures. Through interviews with dance teachers and experts, this section explores the multifaceted impact of East Asian dances on the development and transformation of the mask dance. This discussion delves into three main themes: artistic characteristics, cultural innovation, and multicultural elements, shedding light on how cultural exchange and mutual learning have enriched and diversified this traditional Chinese art form.

The mask dance embodies a rich tapestry of cultural influences, particularly from other East Asian countries. The interviewees highlight how the artistic characteristics of foreign mask dances, such as those from Bali, Japan, and Korea, have informed and enriched the Chinese tradition. For instance, the intricate and ritualistic movements of Balinese mask dance have inspired Chinese choreographers to pay greater attention to the internal meaning and detailed choreography of their dances. Interviewee 2 has also added how Chinese and Japanese mask dance are alike: “Performance techniques and dramatic elements in Chinese mask dance may show parallels with Japanese Noh drama’s use of masks for character portrayal or Korean Talchum’s social commentary.”

This cross-cultural influence has led to a deeper appreciation and integration of complex movements and symbolic gestures in Chinese mask dance. Cross-cultural exposure to dance can also activate newfound appreciation to one’s own cultural heritage (Solomon & Solomon, 2016).

The interaction between Chinese mask dance and the mask traditions of Japan, Korea, and Indonesia has also spurred significant cultural innovation. Interviewee 2 emphasizes that the collision of different cultural backgrounds promotes innovative inspiration, leading to a modern transformation of traditional Chinese mask dance. This innovation is not merely aesthetic but functional, enhancing the expressive range and thematic depth of the performances. For example, the incorporation of

Japanese Noh drama's techniques, Korean Talchum's social commentary, and the ritualistic elements of Indonesian Topeng has enriched Chinese mask dance, making it more diversified and relevant in contemporary contexts.

Sachsenmaier (2016) corroborates innovation as a result of the fusion between and among different cultures is. For example, cross-cultural encounters can be a vehicle for "new forms of experience." Similarly, the fusion of cultures can result in innovative choreography (Solomon & Solomon, 2016).

The multicultural elements integrated into mask dances underscore the dynamic nature of cultural exchange in East Asia. Interviewee 3 notes that under the influence of other countries' mask dances, Chinese mask dance has evolved from traditional to modern aesthetics, becoming more diversified in its expression. The fine craftsmanship and emotional depth of Japanese music, the lively and ironic style of Korean masquerade dance, and the strong sense of ritual in Balinese performances have all contributed to this evolution. These influences are reflected in the detailed processing and improved expressive capabilities of Chinese mask dance, illustrating a blend of indigenous and foreign elements that enrich the cultural heritage of Shiyou Village.

Cross-cultural comparison theory as well as cross-cultural studies affirm the mutual enrichment that is the result of cultural interactions (Monroy et al., 2022; Sachsenmaier, 2016).

The mask dance is a testament to the power of cultural exchange and mutual learning. The influences from East Asian dances have not only preserved the traditional aspects of Chinese mask dance but also propelled it towards new heights of artistic expression and cultural innovation. This interplay of regional influences highlights the interconnectedness of East Asian cultures and the continual evolution of their traditional arts in a globalized world.

### 3.7.3. The Significance of Mask Dance from a Cultural Perspective

Mask dances, prevalent in many East Asian cultures, offer a unique lens through which students can explore and appreciate the complexities of cultural expression. These dances are not merely performances but embodiments of spiritual, historical, and social narratives that have been passed down through generations. Integrating mask dance into dance education can significantly enhance students' understanding of these cultural narratives, promoting both respect for and insight into diverse cultural heritages.

The themes derived from interviews with dance teachers highlight several crucial aspects of incorporating mask dance into dance education. These include the implementation of cross-cultural experiences, in-depth learning, the popularization of mask dance culture, the retention of cultural elements, and support for innovation and development. Each theme underscores the importance of a holistic approach to teaching mask dance, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills, and fostering an environment where tradition and innovation coexist harmoniously.

The teaching of mask dance in dance education plays a pivotal role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. By integrating historical and cultural backgrounds, students are exposed to the uniqueness and commonalities of mask dances across East Asian countries. To achieve this, Interviewee 1 suggests the following:

"...by comparative analysis of the facial painting of Chinese Peking Opera and the mask art of Japanese music, students can experience the similarities and differences between the two in the expression of emotions and characters. At the same time, the introduction of Korean masquerade and Indonesian Bali dance to show the cultural characteristics of different regions."

Cross-cultural experiences can be further enhanced through workshops by East Asian artists and watching multinational mask dance performances, as suggested by the other dance teachers. Such initiatives not only provide firsthand exposure to diverse cultural practices but also deepen students' understanding and respect for the richness of East Asian dance traditions. Moreover, these experiences are enhanced when combined with active learning strategies like workshops, which have

been shown to improve student engagement and cultural awareness (Rosa et al., 2021). By immersing students in practical, hands-on activities, they can develop a more profound appreciation and connection to the local culture and its global influences.

A comprehensive mask dance curriculum includes both theoretical learning and practical application (Kassing & Jay, 2020). This approach, which Interviewee 2 calls an “infiltration,” helps students understand the artistic and cultural values embedded in mask dancing. Combining dance practice with theoretical explanations enables students to grasp how specific dance techniques express cultural meanings and emotions. Analyzing the forms and styles of different mask dances allows students to appreciate the cultural significance behind each movement and gesture. Multimedia resources such as videos and interactive software can enhance the teaching effect and stimulate students' interest in exploring the diverse connotations of East Asian dance culture. (Malarsih, 2016; Saputri & Lestari, 2021).

To popularize mask dance culture, it is essential to teach the skills and concepts of mask dance effectively. Specially trained teachers can impart the ideas and techniques to students, supported by comprehensive teaching materials that cover mask making, dance skills, and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, Interviewee 1 encourages academic research and promoting public engagement through media and community activities. The dance teachers also recommend public participation in festivals and local performances to broaden the reach and appreciation of mask dance.

Social media platforms and online content, such as performance videos and cultural interpretations, can expand the audience and influence of mask dance. The use of social media can be a means to share dance globally (Loring & Pentz, 2021). A study on the “Reinvention of Traditional Culture and Modern Social Participation in Chinese Classical Dance” indicated that the use of video technology to reach the public positively impacts cultural promotion and public social participation (Li & Tan, 2022).

Preserving the essence of mask dance is crucial in maintaining its traditional spirit while promoting its cultural heritage. Teaching the historical, cultural, and traditional aspects of mask dance ensures that students understand its deep-rooted significance. Innovative approaches, such as using modern technology while retaining traditional elements, can help mask dance evolve without losing its authenticity. Interviewee 4 captured the retention of cultural elements when he said: “Innovation can be made in the material, shape, color and decoration of the mask, but ensure that these changes correspond to traditional cultural connotations.”

The successful balance between tradition and modernity is supported by the studies of Den Otter (2023), Li (2019), and Li & Tan (2022). Emphasizing the symbolic and emotional expressions inherent in mask dance movements reinforces the cultural and spiritual values they embody.

Supporting the creation of dance works that combine modern themes with traditional mask dance can promote artistic innovation and development. Interviewee 3 recommends establishing support systems, such as special funds and research institutions. These systems can provide the necessary resources and financial backing for these endeavors. Collaboration between artists, incorporating modern dance elements, digital technology, or multimedia into mask dance, can create unique visual and sensory experiences. Interviewee 4 has mentioned “...using virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technological means, to show the innovative version of the mask dance, while retaining its traditional nature.”

Encouraging students to engage in creative projects related to mask dance fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of its cultural significance. This social learning and interaction approach is supported by the social cognitive theory (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). Dance education fosters a community where students engage with peers and mentors. These interactions reinforce cultural norms and practices, creating a shared understanding and appreciation of dance culture.

Dance education serves as a medium for transmitting cultural heritage and traditions as well as a vehicle for community building, cultural exchange, and cross-cultural understanding (Wu, 2023). By learning and performing traditional dances, students help preserve and propagate cultural values and practices.

By integrating these themes into dance education, students can develop a comprehensive understanding and respect for the cultural richness of mask dance. This approach not only preserves traditional cultural elements but also encourages innovative expressions that resonate with contemporary audiences.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1. Conclusion**

1) The evolution of mask dance showcases a rich blend of cultural, progressive, influenced, and religious dimensions. Influences from East Asian countries and globalization have further enriched its expression. Mask dance has evolved into a popular folk art form, maintaining its spiritual functions while adapting to contemporary society. This evolution underscores its adaptability and resilience in honoring both tradition and modernity.

2) The cultural influences of East Asian dances on Shiyou Village's mask dance reveal a dynamic blend of tradition and innovation. Influences from Balinese, Japanese, and Korean dances have enriched Chinese mask dance, inspiring detailed choreography and enhancing artistic expression. Cross-cultural exchanges have led to modern transformations, integrating elements from various East Asian traditions and resulting in a diversified and contemporary form of mask dance. This ongoing cultural interaction preserves tradition while advancing artistic and cultural relevance.

3) Mask dance in dance education is vital for deepening students' cultural understanding. It offers cross-cultural insights, blending theory and practice to reveal the cultural significance of dance techniques. Effective teaching and public engagement promote mask dance, while preserving traditional elements and embracing innovation ensures its authenticity. Supporting creative and technological advancements fosters artistic development.

### **4.2. Recommendations**

Based on the findings, these are the recommendations of the study:

1) Given the rich cultural, progressive, influenced, and religious dimensions of mask dance in Shiyou Village, it is recommended to foster continued innovation and preservation through a multifaceted approach. Support for modernization and preservation, enhanced cultural education, and technological integration are some of the many ways to do this.

2) To further enhance the mask dance of Shiyou Village, it is recommended to actively support and promote cross-cultural exchanges with East Asian dance traditions. This can be achieved by encouraging collaboration and documenting and showcasing the evolution of mask dance.

3) To enhance the cultural role of mask dance in dance education, it is recommended to combine theory and practice in the curriculum and utilize media and public events to expand the reach and influence of mask dance, including social media and community festivals.

## **REFERENCES**

[1] Yu, P. (2005) *Dance culture and Aesthetic*. Beijing: Renmin University press.

- [2] Wang, L. (2017). *Mask Dance: Between Man and God—Creative Conception of Mask Dance*. 2017 National College Dance Professional Teaching Seminar. Chinese Society of Ethnology; Shandong Youth University for Political Science.
- [3] Yang, T. (2024). Exploring the Relationship of Traditional Cultural Literacy and Dance Teaching in Shanxi Vocational College of Art. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 12(2), 195-199. <https://doi.org/10.54097/b4918036>.
- [4] Chen, Y. (2013) On the Realistic Cultural Value of Chinese Mask Dance. *Popular Literature and Art*. Academic Edition. doi: CNKI:SUN:DZLU.0.2013-05-128.
- [5] Yin, J. (2015). An analysis of the study of mask dance between China and Southeast Asian countries--Taking the example of Guangxi Huanjiang Maonan and Bali, Indonesia. *Art Technology* (10), 33-34. doi:CNKI:SUN:YSKK.0.2015-10-031.
- [6] Erickson, F. (2002). Culture and human development. *Human development*, 45(4), 299-306. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000064993>.
- [7] Frazer, J. G. (1910). *Totemism and exogamy: a treatise on certain early forms of superstition and society* (Vol. 3). Macmillan and Company, limited.
- [8] Ban J. (2023-07-13) *Dancing Mask (Chi Ge Day Three)*: CN201430335646.6 .CN303114528S.
- [9] Yanuartuti, S., & Winarko, J. (2019). Revitalization of Jatidhuwur Jombang Mask Dance as an Effort to Reintroduce Local Cultural Values. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 19(2), 111–116. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i2.20437>.
- [10] Permata, S., Masunah, J., & Kasmahidayat, Y. (2024). Value of Life in Benjang Mask Dance (pp. 280–288). [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-100-5\\_39](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-100-5_39).
- [11] Kwon, D.-H., & Cho, S.-J. (2018). Evolution of Traditional Dance Culture the Case of Hahoe Mask Dance in Andong, Korea. *Research in Dance and Physical Education*, 2(2), 55–61.
- [12] Bordoloi, S. D. (2020). ‘Mukha’: The Mask Tradition of Assam-with Special Reference to Samaguri Sattra. *Cultural Syndrome*, 2(1), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.30998/cs.v2i1.267>.
- [13] Den Otter, E. (2023). The Legend of Biton and Faaro: A Reinterpretation of a Creation Myth from the Epic of Bamana Segu Performed with Puppets and Masks in Mali. *AOQU (Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses). Rivista Di Epica*, 4(2), 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.54103/2724-3346/22202>.
- [14] de Jesus, D. (2012). The [re]traditionalization of Aboriginal territories by tourism: a comparative study between the Kadiweu (Brazil) and the Maori (New Zealand). *Studies and Perspectives in Tourism*, 21(6), 1389.
- [15] Shapiro, S. B. (Ed.). (2008). *Dance in a world of change: Reflections on globalization and cultural difference*. Human Kinetics.
- [16] Solomon, J., & Solomon, R. (2016). *East Meets West in Dance: Voices in the Cross-Cultural Dialogue*. Routledge.
- [17] Dana, I. W., Alfirafindra, R., & Anggraeni, A. (2023). The philosophical values of Rejang Dayung as an ancient dance inherited from Pura Luhur Batukau, Tabanan, Bali. *Gelar : Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 21(2), 152–161. <https://doi.org/10.33153/blr.v21i2.5355>.
- [18] Sachsenmaier, S. (2016). Ways of doing, ways of thinking, ways of moving together: Considerations for cross-cultural encounters and exchanges in and through dance practice. *Choreographic Practices*, 7(2), 305-326. [https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.7.2.305\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.7.2.305_1).
- [19] Monroy, E., Imada, T., Sagiv, N., & Orgs, G. (2022). Dance across cultures: Joint action aesthetics in Japan and the UK. *Empirical studies of the arts*, 40(2), 209-227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02762374211001800>.
- [20] Rosa, S., Olivia, I., Gayatri, S., Fitria, T. N., & Rojabi, A. R. (2021). Increasing Youth Awareness of Local Culture Through Active Learning. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 16(4), 1582-1601. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1316458>.
- [21] Kassing, G., & Jay, D. M. (2020). *Dance teaching methods and curriculum design: comprehensive K-12 dance education*. Human Kinetics Publishers.
- [22] Malarsih, M. (2016). The Tryout of Dance Teaching Media in Public School in The Context of Appreciation and Creation Learning. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 16(1), 95. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v16i1.4561>.
- [23] Saputri, L. H., & Lestari, W. (2021). Video: Evaluation Media of Dance Practice Learning in the Era of Covid-19 Pandemic. *Paedagoria : Jurnal Kajian, Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Kependidikan*, 12(1), 27–32. Retrieved from <http://journal.ummat.ac.id/index.php/paedagoria>.
- [24] Loring, D. D., & Pentz, J. L. (2021). *Dance appreciation*. Human Kinetics Publishers.
- [25] Li, K., & Tan, H. (2022). Reinvention of Traditional Culture and Modern Social Participation in Chinese Classical Dance. *The Educational Review, USA*, 6(10), 578-583. <https://wap.hillpublisher.com/UpFile/202211/20221114181752.pdf>.

- [26] Li, Q. (2019). Innovative Research on the Integration of Traditional Ritual Music Culture and classical dance teaching. [https://webofproceedings.org/proceedings\\_series/ESSP/ICATPE%202019/TPE051110.pdf](https://webofproceedings.org/proceedings_series/ESSP/ICATPE%202019/TPE051110.pdf).
- [27] Rumjaun, A., & Narod, F. (2020). Social learning theory-albert bandura. *Science education in theory and practice: An introductory guide to learning theory*, 85-99. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-43620-9\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-43620-9_7).
- [28] Wu, S. (2023). Dance and Social Interaction: Exploring the Role of Dance Art in Social Transformation. *Highlights in art and design*, 4(3), 96–99. <https://doi.org/10.54097/sh59xe9r>.