

The aesthetic interpretation on Wooden Drum Dancing of Wa people

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ABSTRACT: The Wa nationality, a typical ethnic group in Yunnan province, is an ancient one lives across Yunnan. The main residences of it are border area beside northern Yunnan and the Wa States in Burma. Among all the Wa dances, Wooden Drum Dancing leads a vital position, and it is also a symbolic dancing in the culture of Wa people. The feature of Wooden Drum Dancing is that every action expending by the beats of wooden drum, namely, first the wooden drum, then the Wooden Drum Dancing. Dancing is an important content in the life of Wa people, and the aesthetics of life comes from dancing, so they present their value on worship by the form of dancing. This article is going to interpret the aesthetic standard on Wa people's Wooden Drum Dancing by the view of aesthetics, and come into a conclude that the inspiration of such dancing came from practice and their worship to nature and ancestor. The Wooden Drum Dancing displays totally the tough air and solidarity of Wa people, which also presents the fair society of them. The Wooden Drum Dancing is an enriched art that Wa People took from particle life, so dancing of Wa is often classified into the aesthetic area of plain. The information of people's living situation displayed by Wa dancing also conveys their rich emotions. The sense of beauty within Wooden Drum Dancing will give others a solemn feeling. The formal beauty is displayed by the rhythm of upper part of body, and the power beauty is displayed by the rhythm of the lower part of body.

Keywords: aesthetic value; Wa people; Wooden Drum Dancing

Wa people is a unique and ancient minority in Yunnan province which is located in cross-border of Yunnan. You can find Wa people in the border on Yunnan and Cambodia, Thailand and north Burma, however the main residence of them are south area of Yunnan and Wa State in Burma. And the main distribution areas are Ximeng, Cangyuan, Menglian, Gengma, Lancang, Shuangjiang, Zhenkang and Yongde, besides these counties, in Xishuangbanna, Dehong, Baoshan, there are also a few of Wa people and other ethnic groups. The main residence of Wa people is from 99 degree east to 100 degree east, and 22 degree north to 24 degree north, which is located in the place between Langcang River and Salween, along the expanded area of south part of Nu Jiang. Because of its mountainous and few flatland, it also known as Village of Wa Shan.

Wa people believe its original religion, Christian, Buddhism, Mahayana and Hinayana which are two branches of Buddhism. In the past years, Wa people believed in polytheism, and the original religion concerning animalism is believed widely, especially the Wa people in Ximeng. It is common for Wa people to believe in animalism. Because in the long history, the

Wa had low productive, and they cannot make a scientific explanation of any natural phenomenon, and get rid of the illness and natural disaster which made them afraid. In their mind, mountain, river, other living creature and any unexplained natural phenomenon have the SOUL in them. The concepts of entrusting to soul, god and ancestor are the same for Wa people, and they reckon that these spirits will dominate the world to bring ordinary people fortunate and unfortunate, thus people began to worship them. The object worshiped by the Wa are giant and various which can be divided into natural worship, ancestor worship and so on.

Wa people not only believed that their ancestors' spirits still alive, but also believed that the super power of ancestors can protect them, which lead to worship. Such adoration came into being after the concepts of "spirits never die" and "blood admiration" were developed together. Commonly, there will be a table for ancestor worshiping in the home of Wa people, they kowtow to their ancestors in front of the table where a shrine stands in every festival, and in the important activities, they will recite the words of libation

telling the ancestors of the coming activities and to pray for peace from them.

The dance of every ethnic group originated in sacrifice activity, so did the Wa. Wa dance is linked closely to their sacrifice activity, and even now, Wa people living in Wa Shan still passes the ancient sacrifice dance down. Wooden Drum Dance is a typical one among Wa dances. Wooden Drum, called “Ke Luo” in the Wa language, is an essential tool for Wa people to exorcise ghosts, summon tribal members, send emergency information to neighbors, and fight against enemy. Thus, Wa people take it as the object of worship which can protect the place from danger, and the artifact which can send the exorcism information to the god by knocking wooden drum. Before liberation in 1945, each Wa village has at least one drum room, and each drum room has a pair of wooden drums which are called male drum and female drum. There are many kinds of wooden drum dances in performance, such as Hand-On Dance, Pulling Wooden Drum, Beating Wooden Drum, Gongtou Dance, Knife Dance, Head Dance, Swinging Hair Dance, etc.. All these dances are performed with the beats by beating wooden drum, and the performers will dance according to the beats of wooden drum. Thus, such kind of dance is called as Wooden Drum Dance.

1 THE CULTURAL QUALITY OF WA WOODEN DRUM DANCE LINKS CLOSELY TO THE NATION'S LIVING ENVIRONMENT

The ethnic group dance presents national culture, it has rich connotation, and we can get comprehensive national traditional culture by reading the information conveyed by the dance steps. Wa Wooden Drum is the cultural legacy from ancestors of the Wa, which has rich connotation till now, and the Wooden Drum Dance is the most typical dance.

The Wa existed in Yunnan province for thousands years, and kept the ancient life style in a long time, so they admire nature and rely on it to survive. For them, everything and every creature are given the souls and power over nature. Based on such link to the nature, the Wa became the nation with polytheism. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Wa who lived in Yunnan welcomed a new social climate, and then they stepped into the socialist path as an original nation. The difference of Wa people can reveal from this is that their national dance kept the original culture from being assimilated by dance elements of other regions and nations. Thus, Wa dance is a pure national dance with the origin of dance itself. Because of the unique cultural connotation, Wooden Drum Dance could present aesthetic standard of Wa dance.

2 THE UNIQUE CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF WA WOODEN DRUM DANCE

2.1 *The social and historical culture in Wa Wooden Drum Dance*

The Wa Wooden Drum Dance is a cultural system came into being in the process of the social and historical development of the Wa. The feature of this dance is that every action spreads by the beats of wooden drum, which means only the wooden drum are beat first and then the Wooden Drum Dance will be performed.

The Wa was the matriarchal clan society at the very beginning, and when they stepped into the later period, people's life are changed largely. It is a nation that lived in the nature for generations, mountain is its main residence, and high hills, valleys and forest are the vital factors for them. Because of the fertile land of mountain, ancestors of the Wa started making living by farming. However, it also means there will be the place inhabited by beasts, and the crops they planted were hit by them inevitably. At that time, Wa people could do nothing with beasts and since they can't put up with the fact that their crops will be ruined all by beasts, they beat the wooden stick in hurry. The large voice of beating wood scared the beasts away. Since then, Wa people used this method to celebrate autumn harvest. The first wooden drum is made by copying this beating wooden stick, and people took it as the mascot of its nation. The Wa knocked wooden drum to celebrate harvest and danced to the beat of it. In next spring farming, Wa people will make a new wooden drum and sacrifice this new-made one. The actions of beating wooden drum and dancing were from daily life. With the systemization of these dancing steps and the continuous artistic development of the Wa society, Wooden Drum Dance became a folk art. However, the original form of wooden drum and basic steps of dance haven't been changed widely. From matriarchal society to now, the Wa always remains its features, and such un-alienated dance is very less in the history of Chinese dancing.

2.2 *The Wooden Drum Dance presents equal value of Wa society*

In the long history of China, many dances had sorts of class nature. Dances steps will be different from different classes, which even became a symbol of dividing social classes. For example, the royal dance is performed for country's highest class, but the dancers were from the bottom of society, so the class gap between them was very clear. However, the Wooden Drum Dance is different, because there is no value of class within it, and everyone in the Wa can take part in. As we known, Wa people are polytheism, they treat gods as superb, thus everyone is equal besides

gods. Such concept of equality can be inserted from the dance lines.

Wa people didn't set a strict rule for the place where dancers should stand in the Wooden Drum Dance, and there are no leading dancers neither. The main array of it is circle which centers on wooden drum. Because of no limitation of social class, every dancer could enjoy a lot while dancing.

Beating Wooden Drum is also called Dai Kelie in Wa language, and it is one of the most ancient and typical dances which is spread widely in Wa village. Once carpenters finished the wooden drum, it will be put in the wooden drum room and be beaten for people to dance. The whole village, even the entire clan will dress up well while hearing the sounds, and then gather and congratulate. The wooden drum room just like a noise market, filled with people regardless of age and gender, who join hands in a large circle, and dance and sing with the other instruments. The drummers are always men in a group of two or four. They hold the stick in right hands and beat with bamboo chip in the left hands, coming with four different high or low voices, which became the unique drum sounds of Wa village.

The basic step of the beating Wooden Drum dance is that the two legs should be spread as wide as shoulders, body leans forward in half squat position, and then shakes hips and turns around. Uplift and stretch right leg and then draw back three times frequently, or uplift left leg and make a rotation with waving stick. When the performance welcomes the upsurge, enlarge the extent of moves and dance intensely around wooden drum. The sounds of drum and singing are solid, and the movements of dance are boorish, plain, tough and open. It is a jubilant scene.

2.3 *The Wooden Drum Dance presents the national spirits of Wa people*

The Wooden Drum Dance is a dance that could recreate by oneself, and has religious belief. Because the ancient Wooden Drum Dance is performed for sacrifice, its strong significance of sacrifice means such religious dance worships polytheism. Every movement and shouting of dance all shows the awe from the bottom of the heart.

The Pulling Wooden Drum is also called Ke Lu Ke Luo in Wa language. The number of participants is unlimited, which is usually above seventies or eighties. Prepare four rattans and line people in eight groups, which mean a line of people will stand in the two ends of each rattan, just like a tug of war. When the Moba sings, everyone should uplift the foreleg and fall down heavily with beats, and the body leans forward and backward at the same time. While the group sings it back which sounds like "O Ha", they lean backward, unbend the front leg, and shift the back leg into a lunge.

Movements of Pulling Wooden Drum are steady,

plain and tough, which have vivid characteristics, and present totally the spirits of hardy and solidarity of Wa people.

The totem of Wa people is ox which could be found in the design of wooden drum. Ox is the most ancient livestock in farming for Wa's ancestors, thus in their minds, ox is noble and will bring luck to them. A Cangyuan rock painting from more than 3000 years ago depicted the scene that human and ox lived together, and they lead, pasture and feed cattle. Although the pictures are still, wooden drum dance can present it by dynamic steps. The inspiration of dance came from practice, what made Wooden Drum Dance different from others is that it is an ancient dance passed down from the very beginning, and even though there will be some tiny differences in different times, its factors are still remained. The main tool of wooden drum is more artistic, and its steps are also complex, which proved that the level of Wa people's lives is improved, and they pay more attention to pursue art and culture. Modern Wa Wooden Drum Dance is influenced by the social and historical culture, which presents not only the inheritance from its ancient cultural factors, but also the dynamic thoughts of Wa people. Because this ethnic group enclosed themselves in its own cultural circle for thousands years, lacking to communicate with outside world, the records of its history and culture are rarely remained.

3 THE AESTHETIC ORIENTATION OF WA WOODEN DRUM DANCE

Since perspectives of beauty are different, the aesthetic orientation will be different definitely. Wa dance is an enriched art from their daily life, thus Wa dance fell into the aesthetic range of Plain. The information of Wa people's living condition consisted in the Wa Wooden Drum Dance, and the latter also conveyed the expression of Wa people. It can be called as a dynamic expression of beauty.

3.1 *The aesthetic perception consisted by dance temperament of Wa Wooden Drum Dance*

Wa people lived in the subtropics area with moderate climate. Affected by India Ocean Current, it has plenty rain and fertile land which are good for animals and plants. Through the five production methods - gathering, hunting and fishing, agricultural, animal husbandry, and industry these, they live multiply based on the agriculture. The dance form of Wa Wooden Drum Dance existed dependently, which was their living content. Wa people lived in the mountains, and they make their livings by hunting. Since went into mountains frequently, they lost weight, and they imitated poses of climbing, that is, moving left and right hands forward alternately. While doing exercise, they keep knees bouncing and bended, and shake hips back and

forth. All these daily movements became the basic steps of Wa Wooden Drum Dance, and the vibrating rhythm liked the beats they climbed the mountain. Given the above, we find that the content of Wooden Drum Dance is the expression of their life style. Wa people are good at dancing and singing. When they are free, there will be dances, even when they are working, there will be songs around. Especially in the autumn harvest, they will dance Wooden Drum Dance gladly. In one hand, they convey their happiness because of harvest; in the other hand, they thank gods by the form of sacrifice. Movements of such dance express solemnity. After busy season, Wa people will use this method to relax themselves, giving full vent to tiredness.

From the perspective of production and life, even Wa people work as farmers, their harvest cannot be compared with people in the plain land. They have to improve their resistance ability to cope with natural powers, because such mountainous life is passed down from their ancestors. Such bad life condition means they will meet danger any time, so Wa people become more powerful and have enough courage to overtake the nature, and they also can cope with kinds of difficulties with positive attitude.

We will have a comprehensive understanding of Wa people's mentality through the form and beats of Wa Wooden Drum Dance, for example, the speed of dance steps can present the speed of mental activity, and the strength of dance movement can express the mental mood. From the movements of Wooden Drum Dance, we could know the characteristic and temperament of Wa people, and admire correctly the beauty that is consisted by dance temperament.

3.2 *The beauty of form consisted by dance rhythm of Wa Wooden Drum Dance.*

(1) The beauty of form consisted by the rhythm of upper body in the Wa Wooden Drum Dance

The rhythm of upper body in Wooden Drum Dance focuses on the movements of breast. When people dance with beats of wooden drum, their breast will move forward and back down, like parabola. Take the Throw Breast as an example, it is the movements of breast turning in a circle, and the main point is thorax which makes breast move like parabola. About the breath in the process of dance, when the breast is parabolic movement, breathe steady and slowly. While dancing, dancers should take a slow inspiration and then the parabola comes to the topmost. With the heavy beats of breast, the mental condition of dancers will be released which will make the dance movement of Wooden Drum Dance more stead. From the direction of movements during the breast activity, we find that the movements are straight, which could show the tough beauty of dance.

(2) The beauty of strength consisted by rhythm of lower body in the Wa Wooden Drum Dance

The rhythm of lower body in the Wa Wooden Drum Dance means movement of two legs. The two legs cross each other and knees bend when right leg hooks forward, and the power existed inside will come out. As time goes by, the space of dance expands relatively. When dancer is in the condition of up-stretch, the weight of heel down and the different directions of stress have a conflict power between them. Inner power of body will move from one part to every part of the whole body, and at this time, the power is going to burst out.

3.3 *The beauty exists in dance contents of Wa Wooden Drum Dance*

In order to celebrate harvest and make a good wish in the next year, Wa people will held sacrifice activity in every December, and the Wa Wooden Drum Dance is the main content of sacrifice - people use such dance form to please gods. Thus before making wooden drum, they go into the mountain to choose best peach tree or Red Hair tree. Then Moba will chant mantras constantly and walk around the chosen tree, before people cut it down. In the next day, Wa people pull the wooden drum into their village, and they place wooden drum outside village five days later, which means the Wooden Drum Dance is going to perform, as well as the sacrifice activity. It is a grand activity that the whole people dance with the rhythm of wooden drum. The activity will last around ten days. There are two aspects cover the Wooden Drum Dancing in the sacrifice activity, one is that Wa people dance hand in hand around the wooden drum, the other one is that when wooden drum is placed in the shelf, people will make a circle, dancing and beating together. Wooden drum is the centre of the whole dance. Whole people living in village will take part in singing and dancing without bending knees, their body lean forward in a rush, their heads uplift when singing, their feet move in an anti-clockwise direction, and their hands up and down. Now the instrument played for dancers is not only wooden drum, special like the Hulusi, but also the Big Mangluo. Dance brings joy, but what it expresses is steady and noble, which is the worship to gods. Usually, it is men to beat the wooden drum when Wa people dance. Their beating movements are in a large extent with feet jumping together. As the speed of drum beats become faster and faster, the dancers will come into an intense condition, which is the spirit of gods worship presented from the Wa Wooden Drum Dance presents.

4 SUMMARY

In a word, this ancient nation lives in the mountains and the main content of their life is dancing which enriches their mental life. When they are free, they dance to relax themselves. Wa Wooden Drum Dance

is the most typical among the Wa dances, and the difference is that it is an ancient dance that is performed for sacrifice activity, thus it expresses a sense of solemn. However, it is the core of Wa dances, and when we explain it from the aesthetic perspective, we will have a deep comprehension.

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