

Contrast in the Classification of Fujian Folk Dance and the Construction of Textbooks

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Abstract: This study first analyzes four distinct forms of Fujian folk dance, highlighting the notable differences in their cultural characteristics and dance qualities. It then categorizes these dance forms to align with textbook construction, discussing in depth the principles guiding the development of textbooks that correspond to these classifications.

Keywords: Fujian folk dance; Dance classification; Constructions of textbooks; Guiding principles

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1. Introduction

From its very inception, Fujian folk dance has been deeply intertwined with the customs and traditions of the local people. It serves as a true reflection of their beliefs, etiquette, rituals, and aesthetic preferences in dance. Over thousands of years of inheritance, development, and integration, Fujian folk dance has not only expanded in quantity and artistic refinement but has also permeated various aspects of social life. It has become an indispensable part of folk activities, including worshipping deities, paying homage to ancestors, celebrating festivals, and marking significant life events such as weddings and funerals. These dance movements have been refined, exaggerated, and artistically developed by folk artists across different dynasties, gradually forming a distinctive style rich in local characteristics. Today, Fujian folk dance and folk culture continue to promote and influence each other, accumulating and evolving over generations, resulting in a profound cultural legacy.

2. Types and classification of Fujian folk dance

Historical records document the cultural evolution of Fujian folk dance, with references to its traditional forms appearing in historical texts from various dynasties. One of the earliest depictions is the rock carving of music and dance sacrificial scenes found on a cliff in Xianzitang, Hua'an, Zhangzhou. These primitive murals depict dancers in a squatting position with their legs bent at a 90-degree angle, upper arms extended horizontally, and forearms bent either downward or upward. Each dancer is adorned with a tail decoration that reaches the ground. Although no

written records exist from this early period, these vivid images provide valuable insights into how Fujian's primitive ancestors used music and dance in sacrificial rituals.

During the Tang Dynasty, Fujian folk dance flourished. (1) Volume 3 of *Bixi Manzhi* cites *Youxian Guchui*, which describes the bustling cultural scene around Antai Bridge in Fuzhou: "The area was already densely populated, with boats lined up like clouds. On both sides of the river, wine shops and song-singing buildings stood, while the sounds of flutes and pipes drifted through the willow and banyan leaves." (2) In the Five Dynasties period, Dunren Zhan's poem *I Moved to Quanshan City, and Marquis Liu Invited Me to Visit the County Garden* illustrates the vibrant atmosphere of the time: "Tens of thousands of soldiers' weapons are scattered, and in thousands of households, the sounds of silk and bamboo instruments are heard. After the dancers with slender waists finish dancing, the fragrance of makeup wafts, and after the painted-face performers complete their makeup, the blush from wine appears." (3) Similarly, *The Gazetteer of Minhou County* records the grand performances of *Baixi* (a form of folk entertainment): "Various acrobatic troupes filled the roads, with the sounds of flutes and drums resounding through the sky, lasting throughout the night." By the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Quanzhou had become the largest port in the East, attracting artists from northern China. The influx of musical and dance traditions they brought greatly enriched Fujian's dance culture. Historical records from different periods provide detailed descriptions of dance themes, content, forms, music, costumes, and the grand performance scenes of the time.

Based on these records, we can broadly categorize Fujian folk dances into four distinct types: (1) Ritual dances: Performed as part of religious and ceremonial practices. (2) Folk custom dances: Rooted in seasonal customs and traditional festivities. (3) Martial arts-inspired dances: Incorporating elements of martial arts into their movements. (4) Opera-related dances: Integrating storytelling with song and dance performances. Each of these categories exhibits unique cultural characteristics and artistic qualities, highlighting the diversity and richness of Fujian folk dance.

2.1. Ritual dances rooted in religious rites

Religious ritual dances, which are deeply embedded in religious ceremonies, reflect the spiritual aspirations of human nature and emphasize key religious concepts such as mystery, purification, and symbolism. In Fujian, folk religious activities encompass Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other diverse religious beliefs. This strong religious atmosphere not only provides fertile ground for the survival of Fujian's local religious dance traditions but also fosters the prosperity of its folk religious dance art.

Fujian's religious ritual dances can be classified into four main types, each representing a distinct tradition: Taoist rituals, Buddhist ceremonies, Confucian sacrifices, and Shamanistic dance forms. (1) Taoist ritual dances: As a vital component of Taoist culture, Fujian's Taoist ritual dances involve symbolic gestures, the drawing of talismans, and the chanting of incantations during sacrificial ceremonies. These dances are further categorized into two styles: literary (liberal arts) and martial arts performances. (2) Buddhist music and dance: With a long history in Fujian, Buddhist music and dance are typically performed in temple halls or at ritual sites where Buddhist families hold ceremonies. (3) Confucian dances: These dances are characterized by refined choreography and are performed not only during sacrificial ceremonies but also at banquets. They serve as a means of self-cultivation, educating the public in moral development and promoting positive social customs. (4) Shamanistic dances: The structure, masks, and costume designs of Fujian's Shamanistic dances are rich in symbolism. These dances evoke deep personal experiences, allowing performers to transcend themselves and transform into representations of ghosts and deities. Across these various forms of religious ritual dance, there is a common emphasis on spiritual pursuit, often prioritizing symbolic meaning over dynamic rhythm and movement.

2.2. Folk dances rooted in seasonal customs

Folk dances integrated with seasonal customs constitute the largest category of Fujian folk dances, offering a diverse range of forms and rich cultural significance. These dances encapsulate the everyday traditions and social customs of ordinary people, incorporating elements such as collective singing and dancing, humor, and wit. They directly reflect the collective national consciousness, the survival instincts of the common people, the local cultural landscape, interpersonal relationships, and the authentic emotions that connect individuals to society.

Given that Fujian's folk dance culture is deeply influenced by religious consciousness at a macro level, there is often an intricate connection between folk and religious dances. This interdependent relationship results in folk dances incorporating religious elements and vice versa.

Despite their shared roots in everyday life, Fujian's folk dances vary in form, content, and style. They can be broadly categorized as follows: (1) Masked dance: Performed within the context of exorcism rituals. (2) Farming dance: Rooted in agricultural rituals and traditions. (3) Ballad dance: Centered around singing and dancing games. (4) Imitative dance: Inspired by the movements of animals and plants in nature. These folk dances, in their various forms, serve as cultural expressions that embody the traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles of the people of Fujian.

2.3. Martial arts-inspired dances rooted in martial arts

Martial arts-inspired dance, choreographed by incorporating martial arts techniques, reflects the enduring and hereditary characteristics of Fujian's martial arts tradition. Fujian is a province with a deep-rooted martial arts heritage. Initially, martial arts-inspired dance often depicted glorious achievements by imitating combat victories or served as a training method for martial techniques. It was also performed as collective martial dance drills to boost military morale.

With the end of warfare, martial arts-inspired dance, once primarily used on the battlefield, gradually permeated daily life, evolving into various folk martial dance forms that combined entertainment with competitiveness. Beyond enhancing physical fitness and promoting health, martial arts-inspired dance also embodied the spirit of national defense and home protection. As a result, it continued to develop and evolve across different dynasties.

In Fujian folk dance, martial arts-inspired dance can be broadly categorized into three types: (1) Fitness dance: Focused on physical conditioning and well-being. (2) Weapon-based dance: Featuring choreographed movements with traditional weapons. (3) Lion dance: A dynamic and symbolic performance that blends martial arts with cultural expression.

2.4. Opera dances rooted in songs and dances

Opera dance, which centers on portraying stories through song and movement, utilizes dance to represent rich life experiences, depict distinct character personalities, and unfold complex, dramatic narratives. In opera, the "acting" and "fighting" segments are considered its dance components.

Fujian is home to more than thirty types of local operas, where dance and opera share an inseparable bond. Many local minor operas originated from traditional songs and dances, and through continuous integration and development, dance performance elements have become fully embedded in opera art. Some highly dance-oriented local operas, in turn, have influenced and borrowed from dance traditions. This reciprocal relationship has led to the fusion phenomenon of "dance in opera and opera in dance."

Opera dance follows the strict "stylization" principles of opera, requiring precise, delicate movements and graceful postures. These movements must align with specific characters and settings while also advancing the dramatic plot, providing essential visual support for the complete artistic presentation of opera. Thanks to the rigorous norms and master-apprentice traditions in local opera, numerous ancient court music and folk dances of significant historical and cultural value have been well preserved in Fujian's opera performances.

Based on different forms of dance in Fujian opera, opera dance can be broadly classified into three types: (1) Court music and dance: Originating from ancient court performances of the Song and Yuan dynasties. (2) Religious opera: Ritualistic opera developed during the late Qing and early Ming dynasties. (3) Local minor operas: Opera forms that have spread across various regions of Fujian.

3. Comparison between Fujian folk dance classification and textbook construction

Fujian folk dances can be categorized into four main types: religious dance, folk dance, martial arts-inspired dance, and opera dance. Religious dance is further divided into four subtypes: Taoist dance, Buddhist dance, Confucian dance, and Shamanist dance. Folk dance consists of four forms: masked dance, farming dance, ballad-style dance, and imitative dance. Martial arts-inspired dance includes three forms: fitness dance, weapon-based dance, and lion dance. Opera dance is classified into three forms: court music and dance, religious opera, and local minor operas. Based on these distinct dance types and forms, corresponding textbook models can be developed: religious dance textbooks, folk dance textbooks, martial arts-inspired dance textbooks, and opera dance textbooks. **Table 1** is a comparison of the relationships between them^[1,2].

Table 1. Comparison of various types of dances^[3-5]

Dance type	Teaching material content Textbook form	Cultural background	Performance content	Style characteristics	Dance form	Training objectives
Religious dance	Taoist dance	Taoist ritual	1. Throwing cymbals 2. Shigong Dance 3. The Dance of the Fairies Washing the Mirror 4. Lotus Lamp Dance 5. Prayer altar dance 6. Paper-cut Flower Dance 7. The Movement of Yamen Runners	Ceremony dance	Men dance alone; Women dance alone; Group dance	Sacrificial Music and Dance
	Buddhist dance	Offering through physical actions	1. Flying Apsaras Musicians and Dancers 2. Fragrant Flower Dance	Buddhist music and dance	Women's group dance	Flying Apsaras Music and Dance
	Confucian dance	Ancestral temple sacrificial ceremony	1. Culture and dance 2. Martial dance	Sacrificial dance	Men's group dance	Elegant Music Yiyue Dance
	Witchcraft dance	Witchcraft rituals	1. Suoluo Lian 2. Fire Tripod Elder Man and Fire Tripod Elder Woman 3. Lotus - Picking Dance 4. The Dance of the Wet Nurse Walking the Astral Steps to Pray for Blessings 5. Thunder - gesture Dance 6. Bamboo Planting Dance Style 7. Six-knot Flower Praying Dance	Witchcraft ritual dance	Men's group dance; Two-person dance	1. Suoluo Lian 2. Witchcraft ritual dance 3. Traditional dance of She nationality
Folk dance	Masked dance/Masquerade dance	Exorcism ceremony	1. Nuo Mask Dance 2. Mask Dance/Masked Dance	Nuo ceremony with masks	Men's group dance	Nuo dance
	Farming dance	Farm-related celebrations	1. Qianggu Dance 2. Fengpo Drum Dance 3. Fengpo Drum Dance 4. Four Treasures Dance 5. Tea Basket Drum in Dance 6. Dragon Dance	1. Drum-beating dance 2. Dance with props	Group dance	Percussion dance
	Ballad category	Song and dance games	1. Tea-Picking Lantern Dance 2. Daqiantao Dance 3. Dance with Jingle Bells 4. Step dance/treading dance 5. Bamboo Forest Sword Flower Dance 6. Sleeve Flapping Dance	Sing and dance joyfully	Group dance	Song and dance, a song and dance
	Simulation dance	Simulation game	1. Dance of the Bear 2. Man Carrying Woman Dance	Drama pantomime	Two-person dance	Simulation dance

Table 1 (Continued)

Dance type	Teaching material content		Cultural background	Performance content	Style characteristics	Dance form	Training objectives
	Textbook form						
Martial arts dance	Fitness dance		Building up one's body and improving health	Hai Fan Dance	Prop dance	Group dance	Mussel dance
	Instrumental dance		Military drill	1. Daguantai Dance 2. Song Jiang's Army Formation 3. Yingge Dance 4. Rattan Shield Drill 5. Shield Dance 6. Guangbing Dance 7. War Platform Drum 8. Performance of Big Drum and Parasol 9. Hunting Dance 10. Bell and Knife Dance 11. Pat the Lion Target	Martial arts drills	Team dance	1. Round shield 2. Twin sticks 3. Rattan shield 4. Shield 5. Knife with bell 6. Dances with drums
	Lion dance		Festival entertainment	1. Quanzhou Lion Combat Dance 2. Green Bamboo Lion Manipulation 3. Lion Array	Festival entertainment	Team dance	Lion dance
Theatrical dance	Court music dance		Celebration banquet ceremony	1. <i>Eighteen-step Ritual Mother</i> Perform the Rites with Hands Down 2. Lotus Picking Dance 3. Sword and Utensil Dance 4. Mingfei Dance 5. Dance of the Rainbow Feather Garment	Court dance	Women's group dance; Women dance alone	classical dancing
	Religious opera		Ancestral Temple Sacrificial Rites	1. Nine-grade Lotus Lantern 2. Dacheng Opera	Ritual Opera	Solo dance; Group dance	Ritual opera
	Local minor drama		Song and dance play	1. The 'Fan Dance' in The Romance of the Western Chamber in Ruilan's Adventure in the Rain 2. 'Colorful Ball Dance' in Li Yaxian 3. The 'Ball-throwing Dance' in The Rooftop Match-making 4. 'Chest-slapping Dance' in Zheng Yuanhe	Opera song and dance	Women's group dance Men's group dance	1. Fan Dance 2. Umbrella Dance 3. Colorful Ball Dance 4. Ball-swinging Dance 5. Clown Dance 6. Chest-slapping Dance

4. Principles for the construction of teaching materials

4.1. Emphasizing the cultural essence of Fujian folk dance

Fujian's folk dance culture boasts a long and rich history, with distinct regional characteristics across different areas. Furthermore, as cultural evolutionists have noted, these dances reflect various stages of social development. Due to variations in natural and social environments, the historical and cultural traditions passed down in each region differ, resulting in unique cultural and ecological features. Over time, these characteristics have gradually formed and endured, shaping the distinctive trajectory of human dance culture in Fujian. This legacy holds significant value in cultural history. Therefore, when addressing the classification of Fujian folk dances and the development of teaching materials, it is essential to preserve the cultural authenticity of these dances. Teaching materials should not only reflect the artistic and technical aspects of folk dances but also convey their deep-rooted cultural significance, ensuring that students appreciate the historical and social contexts in which these dances evolved ^[6].

4.2. In-depth folk research and documentation

The collection, classification, and analysis of existing folk song-dance and folk dance-music materials serve as the primary methods for refining and developing Fujian folk dance teaching materials. Folk dances evolve in response to their environments, social contexts, and specific performance occasions. For example, the "Chest-Slapping Dance"

is found not only in Quanzhou but also in Tong'an, illustrating the regional variations summarized by the phrase "different customs every hundred li, distinct practices every ten li." As a result, even the same dance may exhibit different regional cultural imprints. To truly understand the development trends of Fujian folk dances and align teaching research with contemporary needs, it is crucial to immerse oneself in folk traditions—experiencing and analyzing their transmission and evolution firsthand. Fieldwork should go beyond merely documenting the dynamic forms of dances. It should also encompass the collection and organization of related elements such as dance music, costumes, props, written records, visual materials, notable figures, performance formations, stage settings, and living customs. More importantly, research should emphasize uncovering the cultural principles and deeper meanings embedded within dance movements. Only through comprehensive investigation and analysis can the true essence of Fujian folk dances be captured, ultimately enriching the development of high-quality teaching materials.

4.3. Training-oriented, representative, and systematic teaching materials

According to incomplete statistics, Fujian has more than 700 types of folk dances. Given the constraints of limited teaching hours, it is unrealistic to incorporate all these dance forms into textbooks. Professor Meina Jia emphasized that the refinement of teaching materials must "take the teaching purpose as the guiding principle, selecting choreography that is valuable, scientific, and rigorous. The correct approach to constructing folk dance teaching materials is to refine content from the outside in, aligning with the natural development of such materials." Folk dances derived from traditional sources cannot be directly equated with textbook content. Instead, the material must undergo repeated analysis and evaluation to identify the most representative and instructive dance types. These selected dances should then be refined, combined, and systematically arranged so that raw materials can be transformed into structured and effective classroom textbooks. Additionally, the compilation of dance sequences must adhere to the following principles: A distinct and representative regional style; a clear training objective; high training value; and a systematic approach to structuring teaching materials ^[7].

5. Conclusion

As a significant cultural symbol reflecting the spiritual and artistic life of the people of Fujian, folk dance is an integral part of the region's cultural heritage. This study has explored the classification of Fujian folk dance and presented personal perspectives and recommendations. The relationship between different dance classification models and the development of applied teaching materials has been summarized, encompassing textbook content, cultural context, expressive elements, stylistic characteristics, dance forms, and training objectives. It is proposed that in the process of integrating Fujian folk dance classifications with teaching material development, original folk resources should first be systematically collected and organized. The selection of teaching materials must emphasize training value, representativeness, and systematic structuring. Most importantly, preserving the cultural and regional authenticity of Fujian folk dance is essential. Only by doing so can Fujian folk dance flourish as a distinctive and vibrant part of China's folk dance culture, showcasing its unique local characteristics for future generations.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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