

Ritual Deconstruction and Community Identity Reconstruction of Andai Dance from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Revitalization

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Abstract: *In order to promote the inheritance and development of Andai Dance, this study analyzes its ritual deconstruction and the reconstruction of community identity from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) revitalization. It begins with a brief introduction to the connotation of ICH revitalization, affirming its value in the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Based on the origin and development of Andai Dance, the paper deconstructs its ritual elements from spatial and functional perspectives, clarifying its various components. Finally, it proposes strategies to revitalize Andai Dance and reshape its community identity, aiming to further strengthen community recognition of the dance, encourage greater public participation in its transmission and development, and fully realize the cultural value of this ICH.*

Keywords: *ICH Revitalization; Andai Dance; Community Identity; Reconstruction*

1. Introduction

In recent years, many effective methods have emerged in promoting the inheritance and development of China's intangible cultural heritage. Among them, ICH revitalization stands out as a representative approach, as it not only ensures the quality of cultural transmission but also facilitates stable and sustainable cultural development. Andai Dance, listed among the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage items in China, now faces challenges such as declining market demand for traditional skills and the increasing aging of heritage inheritors. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the ritual deconstruction of Andai Dance and reconstruct its community identity from the perspective of ICH revitalization. This will help solidify the grassroots community foundation of Andai Dance and promote its better revitalization, inheritance, and development.

2. The Connotation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Revitalization

ICH revitalization refers to truly bringing intangible cultural heritage into modern social life, making it vibrant and lively among ordinary people, and renewing its vitality. This is an important pathway to achieving sustainable inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. In fact, as early as 2017, China identified ICH revitalization as an important part of rural revitalization, requiring the activation of intangible cultural heritage to further promote rural economic development, strengthen ethnic cultural identity, and achieve cultural revitalization [1]. In 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage," which clearly stated the need to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of intangible cultural heritage and enhance cultural confidence. For ICH revitalization, it is also necessary to fully exercise creativity during the revitalization process, achieving further cultural innovation while preserving the fundamental aspects of the heritage, so that intangible cultural heritage can better integrate into modern society and gain broader development space. Besides focusing on innovative development, ICH revitalization also emphasizes active inheritance. Especially given the current shrinking market demand for traditional skills and the increasingly aging heritage inheritors, many valuable intangible cultural heritages face the risk of loss. Therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the protection of inheritors through ICH revitalization, highlight their subjectivity/agency, and rely on them to drive the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage, achieving the "visibility of people, objects, and life" of

intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its living transmission. Undoubtedly, intangible cultural heritage originates from real life, embodies people's wishes for a better life, and condenses the wisdom of laboring people. In the process of ICH revitalization and inheritance, the support and assistance of the public are indispensable. It is necessary to stimulate public emotional resonance and strengthen cultural memory among the people to enable intangible cultural heritage to remain vibrant and close to the public. In promoting ICH revitalization, integrating intangible cultural heritage into traditional craft markets and embedding it within communities are important approaches to realization.

3. Ritual Deconstruction of Andai Dance from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Revitalization

3.1 Origin and Development of Andai Dance

Andai Dance originated in Kulun Banner during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, which is now Tongliao City in Inner Mongolia, China. In its earliest stage, Andai Dance was a shamanistic religious dance used to drive away evil spirits and cure illnesses, praying to deities to remove disasters and treat certain women's "lovesickness". The entire dance ritual was presided over by a "Bo", or shaman, and had a complete procedure including preparation, initiation, climax, and conclusion [2]. By the mid-Qing dynasty, influenced by immigrant cultures and traditional Mongolian culture, Andai Dance gradually transformed from merely a religious dance into a celebratory dance. During events such as the Nadam Festival and other festive gatherings, people danced Andai Dance together in collective revelry, with participation sometimes reaching thousands of people.

3.2 Deconstruction and Analysis of Ritual Elements of Andai Dance

By deconstructing the ritual process of Andai Dance, many ritual elements can be identified, each bearing distinct symbolic meanings. Specifically, the ritual elements include: (1) circular formations, symbolizing a united community and cosmic order; (2) the swinging of silk ribbons, stepping, stomping, and jumping, symbolizing emotional expression and the desire to dispel illness and disaster through bodily language; (3) the shaman as the ritual leader and the ritual instruments, symbolizing the deity's agent and sacred objects, demonstrating the authority of the human-divine intermediary. Nowadays, with the passage of time and continuous progress in modern society, the mysterious religious characteristics of Andai Dance have gradually weakened. The shaman's authoritative role as the human-divine intermediary, ritual instruments, and fixed chants have gradually faded, leaving only the magnificent dance movements and footwork preserved, making it a folk dance for festive celebrations and communal revelry.

3.3 Deconstruction of the Ritual Function of Andai Dance

As described above, in the process of its development, Andai Dance gradually detached from its religious functions of healing and driving away evil spirits. Its function shifted to the expression of folk art, fulfilling the spiritual and entertainment needs of the people. In the 1950s, the inheritor Naren Mandula brought Andai Dance to the Beijing stage. The dance, praised for its distinctive style and artistic beauty, captivated the audience and caused a strong sensation. This event also marked Andai Dance's formal departure from the "altar," completing its transformation into a form of popular entertainment for the masses. During performances, thousands or even tens of thousands of people from different ethnic groups dance together, with colorful silk ribbons flying. The overall cultural and artistic atmosphere is passionate and intense, easily stirring collective emotions, further enhancing ethnic identity, igniting inner passion, and thus becoming a typical spiritual symbol of Mongolian culture.

3.4 Deconstruction of the Ritual Space of Andai Dance

In its early days, the ritual performance of Andai Dance was usually confined to religious ceremonies and specific festival celebrations. Over time, as the function of Andai Dance evolved, its ritual performance space also changed, gradually breaking free from these spatial constraints. It has penetrated grassroots communities and entered public spaces such as community centers, public squares, campuses, and tourist performance venues, greatly expanding its spatial range. For example, in Kulun Banner, Inner Mongolia, the successful hosting of the Andai Art Festival has encouraged

widespread participation from local people, creating everyday practices where “those holding a plow are farmers, and those holding silk ribbons are dancers.” This has allowed Andai Dance to integrate into the daily lives of the people, becoming an indispensable cultural carrier for public entertainment. In the information age, with the aid of advanced new media and information technology, the dissemination range of Andai Dance has further expanded, enabling more people to recognize and appreciate it. For instance, the Inner Mongolia Intangible Cultural Heritage Public Service Platform uses advanced VR technology to showcase the “mad beauty” of Andai Dance, fully demonstrating its artistic charm. Leveraging short-video platforms such as Douyin, the dance’s swinging silk ribbons and stepping movements have become widely known and popular, turning it into a cultural symbol of mass fitness. This has driven widespread dissemination and development of Andai Dance, aligning well with the requirements of intangible cultural heritage revitalization and inheritance.

3.5 Deconstruction of the Ritual Subjects of Andai Dance

In its early stage, the sole subject leading Andai Dance was the shaman. Nowadays, the subjects of Andai Dance have become more diversified. Besides the inheritors of Andai Dance, many leaders of grassroots art troupes, community residents, and others can also serve as agents in the dissemination and development of Andai Dance. For example, under the guidance of intangible cultural heritage revitalization, Naren Mandula, a representative inheritor of the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage Mongolian Andai Dance, formed an amateur Ulan Muqir troupe to cultivate young inheritors of Andai Dance, promoting its sustainable transmission and development. This signifies that the subjects of Andai Dance will become increasingly diverse. In many local schools in Inner Mongolia, through the “Intangible Cultural Heritage into Campus” program, Andai Dance is integrated as a campus course, enabling many students to become transmitters of Andai Dance. Local grassroots art troupes in Inner Mongolia have strengthened artistic innovation of Andai Dance and independently choreographed dances, becoming innovators in the dance’s performance. Community residents at the grassroots level can also become active agents of Andai Dance revitalization through dance fitness and festival culture. This enrichment of the ritual subjects of Andai Dance successfully breaks the traditional exclusive authority of the shaman as the sole subject, which is more conducive to driving the revitalization, inheritance, and development of Andai Dance.

4. Strategies for Reshaping Community Identity of Andai Dance from the Perspective of Intangible Cultural Heritage Revitalization

4.1 Cultivating Grassroots Community Inheritance Organizations to Activate Collective Cultural Memory

Andai Dance originates from the people; thus, its revitalization and inheritance should guide community members to participate actively. This will further enhance community identity, increase Andai Dance’s influence at the grassroots level, and attract more people’s involvement. In practical implementation, grassroots inheritance organizations should be actively cultivated. For example, community Andai Dance art troupes can be established, led and guided by Andai Dance intangible cultural heritage inheritors, with broad community residents managing the troupe independently, rehearsing Andai Dance autonomously, and organizing Andai Dance activities themselves. This will make Andai Dance an indispensable part of community residents’ daily cultural and entertainment activities, fully satisfying the spiritual and recreational needs of the community [3]. Through community Andai Dance art teams, based on the goal of cultural identity, Andai Dance parties can be held in community squares, and Andai Dance performances organized during festival celebrations. This transforms Andai Dance from a mere artistic performance into a cultural activity practiced by the community residents, further consolidating the foundation of Andai Dance’s revitalized inheritance and enhancing the community residents’ role as the main body of Andai Dance transmission. Through this model of co-governance between Andai Dance and community residents, a stable community cultural collective can be formed, strengthening Andai Dance’s community identity and driving its revitalized inheritance and development. To further improve Andai Dance’s influence in the community, typical Andai Dance elements—such as the aforementioned circular formations and swinging silk ribbons with stepping—should be consciously preserved during performances, while elements representing divine authority, such as the shaman’s role and ritual instruments, should be removed. This approach successfully awakens the deep-seated cultural memories hidden in the community’s hearts and strengthens emotional connections. Through events like mass dances with thousands of participants and

hand-in-hand bonfire celebrations, traditional Andai Dance carnival scenes are reenacted, further activating the ethnic belonging of community members, successfully enhancing Andai Dance's community identity and promoting better revitalized inheritance and development.

4.2 Integrating into the Education System to Consolidate the Foundation of Cultural Identity

From the perspective of intangible cultural heritage revitalization, reshaping Andai Dance's community identity should not be confined solely to within the community but should also focus on the youth. Young people are the future of the nation and the foundation for the revitalization and inheritance of Andai Dance. Therefore, youth should be guided to fully appreciate the artistic charm of Andai Dance, learn and engage with its content, and deeply imprint the cultural ideas represented by Andai Dance in their hearts. This will be more conducive to the revitalization and inheritance of Andai Dance and enhance its community identity. To achieve these goals, the opportunity of "Intangible Cultural Heritage into Campus" should be used to integrate Andai Dance into the local education system in Inner Mongolia as a featured curriculum, further consolidating the cultural identity foundation of Andai Dance. For example, at the primary school level, introducing Andai Dance as part of recess exercises can make Andai Dance a childhood memory for students, cultivating a sense of rhythm and appreciation for its artistic charm. At the secondary school level, history education can incorporate in-depth analysis of Andai Dance's development history and its underlying cultural symbols. At the university level, specialized courses analyzing traditional dance movements can be developed to successfully cultivate excellent inheritors who possess both academic abilities in Andai Dance inheritance and development and practical skills in its dissemination, thus fostering stronger cultural identity and encouraging more community residents to deepen their cultural recognition of Andai Dance. On this basis, stronger linkage between schools and communities can be enhanced by inviting elderly Andai Dance practitioners from the community into schools to share knowledge about Andai Dance, demonstrate traditional chants and dance movements to the youth, and strengthen intergenerational dialogue between young and old. This is more beneficial to the revitalized inheritance and development of Andai Dance and the enhancement of its community identity.

4.3 Promoting Innovative Community Expression of Andai Dance to Enhance Its Cultural Appeal

In modern society, with the continuous emergence of various new media platforms and the improvement of information dissemination efficiency, community members now have more choices for spiritual and cultural entertainment. Relying solely on traditional displays and performances of Andai Dance makes it difficult to attract more young community members and is not conducive to strengthening Andai Dance's community identity. To address this issue, it is necessary to seize the development opportunities of the information age, promote innovative cultural expression of Andai Dance within communities, enrich the cultural communication scenarios of Andai Dance, and further enhance its cultural appeal. This will successfully attract more young audiences in the community and strengthen the community identity of Andai Dance. In this process, innovation can be promoted in the ritual content of Andai Dance by extracting its core dance movements and rhythms, integrating modern choreography techniques, and creating some cross-genre works. This will innovate the forms of expression for Andai Dance, enhance its artistic stage appeal, and develop a popular culture centered on Andai Dance to capture the attention of more young community members. Integration of Andai Dance with other industries can also be strengthened. For example, developing Andai Dance-themed art and craft products, including leather carving costumes and cloisonné crafts, for exhibition and sale within communities can boost Andai Dance's influence [4]. Additionally, fitness courses centered on Andai Dance for youth and middle-aged and elderly groups can be created to attract community members to participate in fitness activities involving Andai Dance, enriching its functional diversity. By leveraging short video media platforms such as TikTok, Andai Dance movement challenge competitions can be held [5]. Transforming Andai Dance's silk-swinging and stepping movements into cultural symbols of community exercise and fitness will attract more community residents to imitate and participate, thereby promoting the dissemination and development of Andai Dance within the community, further enhancing its community identity and improving the effectiveness of its revitalized transmission.

5. Conclusion

In summary, from the perspective of intangible cultural heritage revitalization, Andai Dance, as a national intangible cultural heritage, requires further strengthening in promotion and dissemination

efforts. Particularly, deepening community identity is essential to root Andai Dance at the grassroots community level, which can provide continuous momentum for its revitalized transmission and development. In advancing the revitalized inheritance of Andai Dance, attention should be paid to enhancing the ritual deconstruction analysis, clearly identifying the elements worth preserving and eliminating outdated ones. Multiple approaches should be adopted to implement effective strategies that reshape the community identity of Andai Dance, making it a vital cultural and entertainment spiritual sustenance for community members. This will solidify the popular foundation and drive better inheritance and development of Andai Dance.

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