

Cross-Cultural Exchange and Practice in Dance Education: A Case Study of the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University

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Abstract. This case study examines how dance education at Yunnan Arts University (YAU) supports cross-cultural exchange along three axes: innovation and inheritance, international collaboration, and community-oriented cultural sharing. Using the Dance School's recent initiatives—including Asia-Pacific Dance Week—as focal examples, we analyze the institutional mechanisms that enable exchange (platform building, event organization, and collaboration protocols) and trace their near-term outcomes for training and dissemination. These activities align with regional strategies that position Yunnan as a cultural gateway to South and Southeast Asia and have accelerated the internationalization and professionalization of YAU's dance curriculum. Rather than advancing general advocacy, the paper documents what travels across contexts and where culturally specific practices require mediation. The findings offer a grounded account of how university-based dance programs can contribute to sustainable cross-cultural exchange.

Keywords: Dance education, cross-cultural exchange, international cooperation and exchange, inheritance and innovation

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, dance education is not only an important means of artistic inheritance, but also a crucial bridge for cross-cultural exchange. The Dance School of Yunnan Arts University, through hosting and participating in various dance education and teaching activities, has gathered dance educators, scholars, and practitioners from different countries and regions to jointly discuss the development of dance art, education, and the importance of cross-cultural exchange. This paper first analyzes how dance education, while inheriting traditional dance culture, also promotes innovation in dance art, particularly its development in the modern context. It then explores how dance education provides an inclusive platform for people from different cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and respect among cultures. Through international cooperation and exchange, the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University has deepened its dialogue and understanding with dance arts from different cultural contexts and strengthened the global dissemination and cultural exchange of traditional dance arts. This paper aims to provide a referable analysis and insight into the role of dance education in global cultural exchange.

2. Inheritance and innovation: the cultural mission of dance education

Dance education not only inherits traditional dance culture but also promotes the innovation of dance art. Through education, the new generation of dancers can not only understand and master the essence of traditional dance but also innovate and develop within the modern context. On one hand, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized in his speech at the Cultural Inheritance and Development Forum: "Chinese civilization is the only continuous civilization in the world that has developed to this day in the form of a nation, reflecting the continuity of Chinese civilization. This continuity is the foundation for the Chinese nation to follow its own path, and is key to understanding ancient, modern, and future China." This provides the theoretical and practical foundation for the dance education at Yunnan Arts University in inheriting tradition [1,2]. For example, as part of the 2023 graduate program, the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University introduced a practical course on traditional folk dance classical combinations. The course enrolls students from multiple provinces and couples studio practice with guided study of Yunnan's ethnic dance vocabularies. Field-based workshops and rehearsal labs—centered on movement analysis, costume/prop handling, and repertory fragments—give students firsthand exposure to regionally specific techniques and aesthetics. In this setting, "Millennium Purple Pottery" (Honghe Prefecture Cultural Work Troupe), presented at the Third Yunnan Province Dance Original Works Exhibition, serves as a teaching case: drawing on the Jianshui purple-pottery craft lineage, the work stages artisans' techniques and intergenerational transmission as choreographic material. Classroom discussion uses the piece to frame heritage stewardship as a learning objective—linking repertoire study to questions of responsibility, community partnership, and skills transfer.

In policy terms, the emphasis on "preserving core traditions while supporting innovation" positions heritage transmission as a first order goal with context-appropriate experimentation to follow [3,4]. In practice, Yunnan Arts University operationalizes this stance through cross-regional teaching exchanges and visiting-scholar modules. For the 2023 graduate cohort, for instance, Professor Daorina (Inner Mongolia Arts University) delivered a short course that introduced step patterns, musical phrasing, and costume conventions from Mongolian folk repertoires; seminars were paired with studio drills and repertoire breakdowns. These arrangements expanded students' comparative frame and created a channel for technique, notation, and pedagogy to circulate across regions. The original work "Forest Spirit" (Yunnan Performing Arts Co., Ltd.), shown at the Third Yunnan Dance Original Works Exhibition, is discussed in class as an example of form-conscious innovation: white feather fans articulate peacock-inspired footwork and tail-display motifs, allowing students to analyze how symbolic imagery can be translated into teachable movement units. Together, these activities strengthen recognition of ethnic dance lineages while providing practical models for contemporary adaptation.

It is evident that whether through the original works exhibitions organized by the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University or relevant departments in Yunnan Province, the central theme is to effectively inherit Yunnan's rich ethnic dance culture through dance education and practice, while also showcasing the new vitality of Yunnan's dance art in innovation. These efforts together promote the balanced development of dance education in both inheritance and innovation, cultivating a new generation of dancers with social responsibility and innovative abilities.

3. Integration and connectivity: the role of dance education in international exchange

Dance education provides a platform for people from different cultural backgrounds to connect and integrate, promoting mutual understanding and respect between cultures. The Dance School of Yunnan Arts University has been committed to actively expanding international and cross-regional exchanges and cooperation, offering a diverse range of platforms and opportunities for both faculty and students.

In terms of international exchange and cooperation, the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University has participated in various international cultural exchange activities, such as showcasing Yi, Dai, and Jingpo ethnic dances at the "Happy Chinese New Year" celebration held in Rungis, France, and engaging in academic exchanges with artists from multiple Southeast Asian countries at the "Art KU Dance Festival" in Malaysia. These efforts have deepened dialogue and understanding with dance art from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the cooperation agreement signed with the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts Dance School has further promoted collaborative efforts in dance education and artistic innovation, advancing the international development of the Dance School. The Dance School of Yunnan Arts University advances cross-regional engagement through three program types: field research, community outreach, and heritage-focused training. First, faculty-led research trips to Xishuangbanna combine site visits with rehearsals and interviews conducted with local ethnic troupes; these activities anchor classroom study in region-specific repertoires and performance practices. Second, in partnership with the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Weixin County, students and instructors deliver arts-education workshops for left-behind children and community members, positioning cultural outreach as an explicit learning objective and documenting basic participation and feedback for course reflection. Third, an internship and training base in Longpeng Town (Shiping County) supports the transmission of intangible cultural heritage—such as the cigarette box dance—by pairing technique coaching with simple documentation and mentoring. Collectively, these arrangements strengthen ties with partner regions while giving students structured opportunities for comparative learning and practice. Claims about broader impact are framed through these mechanisms rather than general advocacy.

Policy guidance from the 11th CPC Yunnan Provincial Congress (27 Nov 2021) emphasizes integration with national strategies and outreach to South and Southeast Asia [5]. Within this context, I participated in the first "Asia-Pacific Dance Week" International Dance Teaching Workshop at Yunnan Arts University. The workshop combined lectures, technique classes, and repertoire labs led by visiting scholars; sessions asked participants to analyze how symbolic motifs travel across contexts and where adaptation is required. My field notes document how YAU functioned as a convening platform—facilitating peer observation, vocabulary exchange, and short-form collaborations among cohorts from different cultural backgrounds. Rather than asserting outcomes in general terms, this account specifies what was exchanged (vocabulary, pedagogy, motifs) and how: through structured sessions and instructor-mediated discussion. In this bounded sense, the workshop illustrates one pathway by which university-based dance programs contribute to regional connections envisioned by the policy [5].

4. Future perspectives: the internationalization and professionalization of dance education

The internationalization and professionalization of dance education are the trends for future development. Through international cooperation and exchange, dance education can absorb and integrate the excellent elements of different cultures, thereby enhancing the quality of education and its international influence. In his important discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned that this initiative has become an important international public good benefiting global development and a key practice platform for building a community with a shared future for humanity [6,7]. This indicates that international cooperation and exchange can absorb and integrate the best elements of different cultures, which aligns with the trend of internationalization and professionalization of dance education at the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University. In 2023, faculty and students from the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University participated in the "Chinese Culture Dance Festival—Hong Kong Dance Expo," held in Hong Kong. Collaborations with troupes from multiple regions supported intangible cultural heritage (ICH) work through repertory exchanges, joint showings, and technique coaching. Framed in the same year, the Regional Dance Culture

Research International Academic Forum—organized by the Dance School under the Belt and Road context—brought together nearly 150 artists and scholars from 62 institutions across 10 countries and regions. Plenary sessions mapped trends in dance education and culture, while panels focused on curriculum design, ICH documentation, and training pathways. Rather than advancing general claims of impact, the forum functioned as a concrete mechanism: it expanded the School's partner network and generated follow-up items (syllabus swaps, visiting-scholar invitations, and shared repertory notes) that support the internationalization and professionalization of dance education. Showcasing Yunnan's ethnic dances thus occurred alongside transferable teaching resources and cooperation protocols, which anchor subsequent exchange.

In policy and education discourse, Belt and Road initiatives are often read as frameworks for exchange and capacity-building [6,7]. Within that frame, sector-specific convenings create operational channels for cultural sharing. At the 2023 China–ASEAN Dance Arts Exchange Conference—which the Dance School joined—experts from Indonesia, Singapore, and China compared approaches to talent cultivation, historical research, and creative practice; session outputs included syllabus outlines, case repositories for ICH teaching, and candidate topics for joint residencies. On 27 Nov 2024, the first "Asia-Pacific Dance Week" International Dance Teaching Workshop at Yunnan Arts University concentrated on Chinese dance development, pedagogy, cross-ethnic exchange, and technology use in instruction. Lectures were paired with technique classes and repertoire labs, enabling participants to test transferable motifs and to note where context-specific mediation was required. Read together, the conference and workshop illustrate how dance education promotes cross-cultural dialogue: by positioning exchange as curriculum work (materials, tasks, assessment rubrics) rather than as advocacy alone. Any claim about "global citizenship" is thus grounded in course design and participant interaction, not in general slogans.

5. Conclusion

This study treats the Dance School of Yunnan Arts University as a case-based account of how university programs enable cross-cultural exchange through identifiable mechanisms: platform building (forums, workshops), curricular design (repertoire labs, visiting-scholar modules), and heritage-oriented practice (ICH training bases and community outreach). Rather than advancing general advocacy, we summarize what travels across contexts (movement vocabularies, teaching materials, collaboration protocols) and where mediation is required (local aesthetics, notation systems, costume/prop conventions). Looking forward, the value of these practices depends on evidenceable outcomes. We propose three workstreams: Curriculum assessment — document course-level outputs (syllabi, repertory notes, assessment rubrics) and map them to learning objectives such as technique transfer and comparative analysis; Partnership tracking — maintain a register of exchanges (co-taught classes, residencies, MoUs) with simple indicators for follow-up continuity; Heritage stewardship — pair technique coaching with basic documentation protocols for ICH items (e.g., rehearsal logs, prop/costume handling notes), clarifying community roles and consent procedures. Under these conditions, internationalization and professionalization are not slogans but programmatic tasks anchored in materials, methods, and participant interaction. The contribution of dance education to cross-cultural exchange is thus framed as measurable practice—replicable across sites while bounded by local cultural specificities.

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