

Cross-century, Together with the Lion's Journey: A Case Study of Lion Dance Practice in Wuzhou, Tengxian Secondary School

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Abstract: As a traditional Chinese folk art that often appears during important festivals or commercial activities, the cultural value and influence of the “lion dance” is very far-reaching. In the past 20 years, with the rapid development of society, the protection and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture have become a top priority on the road to preserving historical memory, and the lion dance culture popular in southern China and Southeast Asia, like many other traditional Chinese cultures, is facing the challenge of how to continue passing on. By reviewing the materials, this study learned that there is a lion dance cultural hall in Wuzhou, Guangxi, which has a history of nearly 200 years - Bilin Tang, which has received the support of the Wuzhou Municipal Government to deliberately establish the first professional lion dance major in the Tengxian Secondary School. Out of a desire to gain a clearer understanding of the current status of the preservation and inheritance of this traditional Chinese culture, the author finally contacted Mr. Zhong Dao Ren, the current director of Bilin Tang, and with his support, the author went to Tengxian Secondary School to interview in person. The author communicated with Mr. Deng and the students of the lion dance troupe and obtained a lot of valuable information and materials. Meanwhile, the author conducted more in-depth research under the guidance of Professor Bradd Shore at Emory University, resulting in this paper. The inheritance of the lion dance culture encounters not only the problems of funding, government support, and motivation for an inheritance but also the problem of how to make the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and the development of the trend of the times mutually integrate into the current social context. To avoid the extinction of traditional Chinese folk art like the Southern Lion culture, it is necessary to attract more attention and resonate the interest of young people in such culture. Only the organic integration of traditional culture with modern elements can be an effective means for the long-term survival of traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: traditional folk art, lion dance, southern lion, cultural preservation, anthropology

1. Introduction

The art of lion dance in China has a long history and is mostly seen at traditional Chinese festivals and commercial events. The lion is a symbol of good luck and prosperity so the lion dance

symbolizes the goodwill of the Chinese people to eliminate disasters and seek good fortune. With the joint efforts of Chinese people all over the world, the lion dance culture has been continuously passed down and has gone global, and there are lion dance performances and competitions wherever there are Chinese people around the world. The lion dance has become an excellent intangible cultural heritage and folk sports art in China [1]. It has a history of over 1,000 years in China and was widely developed as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). At that time, the lion dance has become a necessary performance for the Chinese New Year festival. The performers dressed up as beasts, such as braves and lions, under the music of gongs and drums, vividly showing various movements to pray for joy and good luck [2, 3]. During the performance, the lion dancers have to display southern martial arts with various gestures, which are very masculine. In the course of more than a thousand years of development, the lion dance has formed two styles of performance, the North and the South [4].

The Chinese lion dance originates in the “Northern Lion.” According to legend, in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 A.D.), Emperor Wu made an expedition to Gansu and captured 100,000 Hu people. Emperor Wu of Wei made the Hu people offer dance entertainment [5, 6]. The Hu people carved the head of the beast with wood, two giant and five small, clad in animal clothes, set eight pieces of music, and more than 30 warriors, dancing in front of the emperor. Emperor Wu was so pleased that he gave the name “Northern Wei Lion” and allowed the captives to return to their country. The lion dance spread in the north and became known as the “Northern Lion.”

Another legend is that during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when Emperor Qianlong went to the south of the Yangtze River, he dreamed of a colorful beast coming to pay homage. After returning to the capital, Emperor Qianlong ordered someone to make one in the image of the beast he saw in his dream, and ordered people to dance during festivals and celebrations, as a metaphor for national peace and prosperity [7-9].

2. Current Status of Chinese Lion Dance Culture and “Bilin Tang”

At present, there are more than a hundred lion dance associations in China, mostly in folk societies and some university sports specialties, with dozens of troupes participating in various competitions every year [10]. Bilin Tang, which the author visited in Wuzhou, is a very well-known association in this field and is known as the “Lion King of the South”.

Bilin Tang was founded in the early Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty 200 years ago. At that time, it was initiated by several knowledgeable people and supported by a group of villagers, thus establishing a civil society. Bilin Tang was originally a private school. In the early Republic of China, in the 1920s and 1930s, a skilled master took the initiative to teach martial arts to a schoolboy who was often bullied. After the boy had learned, he taught martial arts to other children. This is the story of Kung Chi, the founder of Bilin Tang.

On the other hand, in the early nineteenth century, Master Ho Choi studied under several monks. To study more deeply the traditional martial arts and lion dance culture, the late master Ho Choi decided to study under the tutelage of Bilin Tang and study the martial arts with the martial arts master Kung Chi.

It was in the 1940s that Ho Choi decided to move to Hong Kong, and with his departure of him, the affairs of the association faded away over time. After he settled in Hong Kong, he established the Zen-Kong Bi-Lin Athletic Association in the 1950s, with Zen representing Foshan and Kong representing Hong Kong [10, 11]. The aim is to maintain the love between China and Hong Kong and to bring together a group of fellow martial artists to promote the spirit of traditional Chinese martial arts and lion dance arts.

When 2006, Mr. Zhong Dao Ren, a previous disciple, reunited with the older generation of masters in consultation to rebuild Bilin Tang. After the reorganization, Bilin Tang began

participating in various community celebrations and co-organizing some governmental and civic activities, performing martial arts and lion dance performances, and participating in major domestic and international lion dance competitions.

In the same year, 2007, the Bilin Foundation was established to help some poor school children in the mountainous areas of China and rebuild schools in danger. Bilin Tang is a non-profit organization, and it undertakes various kinds of festivals and performances. All proceeds will be allocated to the foundation, which has now supported the construction of more than ten schools in the mountainous areas of China, supporting nearly 5,000 children.

The lion dance culture is a popular folk art in China and has always had a good heritage base. However, with the high development of the world economy and the continuous integration of global cultures, Western culture seems to be more in line with the tendency of the younger generation to chase after modern trends. On the other hand, the inheritance of many excellent Chinese traditional folk arts, which represent the elements of Eastern culture, is gradually showing the trend of having no one to succeed them due to the lack of young people's participation, and many excellent traditional cultural arts are slowly being lost in the tide of social development. Chinese Southern Lion culture has also quietly become a part of this wave, facing the question of where to go. As a Chinese adolescent, the author has been interested in the history and culture of Beijing since the author was a child, as the author has always been in the cultural atmosphere of such an ancient capital. It is with such a complex mindset that the author decided to take the preservation and inheritance of the Southern Lion culture as the topic of this research.

3. Research Object and Methodology

3.1. Research Object

The origin and development of the lion dance, the social function of the southern lion, the cultural background, the factors affecting its growth, and the current status of the development of competitive lion dance.

3.2. Research Methodology

The author has read articles published in journals such as Martial Arts Research, Journal of Guangxi College of Education, and Ethnic Traditional Sports from the faculty and students of Guangxi Normal University School of Physical Education, Guangxi University of Science and Technology as important references in the research process.

The author focused on researching the origin and development of Southern Lion Dance culture in China, reading several papers to determine the research methodology, compiling and studying the dilemmas encountered in the inheritance of Southern Lion Dance, as well as innovative countermeasures for future development. Through the previous study of cultural anthropology and the understanding of Southern Lion Dance culture, the author has tried to interpret the characteristics of lion dance activities from the perspectives of traditional, ethnic, and cultural, and has experienced the irreplaceable functions and values of lion dance culture [12].

Through a video interview with Mr. Zhong Dao Ren, the president of BilinTang, he explained to the author the historical development of BilinTang and its achievements and guided the direction of this research project. In addition, the author systematically learned anthropological knowledge related to the generation and function of human rituals and research methods for academic projects through the course under the guidance of Professors Bradd Shore and Dian Dian, who provided the author with academic guidelines.

The author personally went to Wuzhou, Guangxi to visit the Tengxian Secondary School to learn about the historical evolution of the southern lion culture, to study the production process of lion

dance heads, to watch the lion dance training and performance of the local students, and to try on the costumes and perform basic lion dance movements. Moreover, the author interviewed 10+ lion dance instructors and students within the school and gained a deep understanding of the current state of development and preservation of the southern lion culture. The author became good friends with a lion dance graduate from the school, who told him about the daily arrangements of lion dance students and his lion dance learning experience. After compiling the information from the interviews, the author believes that there are still some shortcomings in the heritage of the current lion dance culture, and the author has explored the root causes of some of these problems.

Based on many academic theories, the author carefully compiled and analyzed information on the development of lion dance sports in China and finally arrived at conjectural answers.

4. Interpretation of the Cultural Characteristics and Value of Lion Dance

As a traditional folk art that the Chinese people are proud of, the lion dance culture has been passed down to today and is a well-known name with thousands of years of accumulation. A new world, a new beginning, the art of lion dance is also supported by the government and some aspiring people like Mr. Zhong to sustain its development. The characteristics and values of lion dance culture are mainly expressed in the following aspects.

4.1. Traditional

The lion dance is a traditional sporting activity that has long been passed down in folklore and is closely linked to people's lifestyles and cultural thoughts. The essence of the lion dance is the worship of the totem by the Chinese ancestors, which has been raised to the level of faith. This ritualistic sporting activity is closely related to the purpose of faith. The lion dance is only a ritual symbol, behind the ritual is to express the feelings of worship to the gods through the form of "sacrifice" and praying to the gods in the hope of blessing themselves and their families with peace, happiness, and abundant harvest.

4.2. Ethnic

The distinctive ethnic features of the lion dance are the reason why it has been so popular among people of all nationalities since its inception. The lion dance is closely related to people's lives and is an alternative way for people of all nationalities to express their own national culture, religious beliefs, and customs. For example, the Tujia family holds a lion dance every spring and insists on dancing to every household every time to drive away evil spirits and eliminate disasters.

4.3. Cultural

The production of lion dance equipment, the form of expression, performance techniques, and movement choreography all carry traditional Chinese cultural factors, and many myths, allusions, and legends that have been passed down are its materials. For example, the colors of the lion dance are mostly red, yellow, and black, symbolizing the loyalty, righteousness, and bravery of Guan Yu, Liu Bei, and Zhang Fei during the Three Kingdoms period. At the same time, the lion's temples and eyebrows are divided into black and white, with white symbolizing the respected elders or those in power, while black symbolizes the young.

4.4. Social Meaning

Through the interview with Uncle Zhong, the author discovered that there is also a deeper social meaning to the lion dance. Many of the children engaged in lion dance are from poor families or are

delinquents who initially dropped out of school and wandered into society, but it is the spirit of overcoming all difficulties and challenges in the lion dance culture that makes them look forward to the future and rekindles the striving soul within them. And as the current director of Bilin Tang, Uncle Zhong had the same experience. During the interview with him, the author learned that he became involved with the Southern Lion at the age of 8 and joined the Chan Kong Bi-Lin Sports Association at the age of 11 to learn martial arts and Southern Lion skills from Mr. He Cai, the Grandmaster of Bi-Lin Tang. In 1972, when he was just 13 years old, Uncle Zhong was forced to drop out of school due to poverty and stepped into society to make a living. With his unyielding determination and integrity, he worked his way up to running a logistics company. This laid a solid financial foundation for him to return to Foshan later with his master's last wish to revive Bilin Tang. In 2006, after having a certain amount of savings, he decided to revive the prestige of Bilin Tang at his own expense. Coming from a poor farming family, and having suffered a lot in his later life, Uncle Zhong knew the importance of knowledge and skills. He told me, "the author made a promise to myself as a young man: If one day the economic conditions become better, the author must contribute to the communities and help the poor children so that they can receive education, learn skills and become useful members of the society." "Just an ordinary person, but like to do some charity work to the best of their ability." Starting in 2000, when his career was just taking off, he started his journey of helping students. He travels to and from the Mainland and Hong Kong several times a year, visiting many areas of the poor mountainous regions in China. Sichuan, Guizhou, Qinghai, and other places have left their footprints of helping students and the poor.

5. Current Situation and Difficulties in the Heritage of Lion Dance

The Chinese lion dance art has undergone many changes, but it still plays an important role in today's traditional culture and is a splendid piece of China's intangible cultural heritage. The lion is considered by the people of Guangdong as an important symbol that can ward off evil and protect the family's safety, and the performers of the lion dance represent bravery and strength. The lion dance is a traditional and excellent cultural and artistic event in China, but currently in danger of being lost, for the following reasons:

5.1. Limited Impact, Lack of Publicity and Exposure, Narrowed Audience

In today's rapidly developing society, the publicity of traditional sports is very limited, and lion dance activities are not well reported, leading to the general public becoming increasingly alienated and unaware of them. Even with the support of the government, lion dance sports have entered the campus, but two-thirds of the students are not too fond of such sports. The reasons for this are insufficient publicity, students' lack of deep knowledge of lion dance, schools' failure to provide students with the appropriate environment for lion dance, and almost no professional classes to carry out, resulting in a lack of professional lion dance experience.

5.2. Constrained by Economic Factors and the Dangers of the Sport, the Lion Dancers Are Aging, and There Is a Serious Shortage of Backup Talent Inheritors

Society is changing and the environment in which people live is also changing. The inheritors of the lion dance movement are generally older and earn less. Middle-aged people go out to work, while young people have little understanding of traditional culture, leading to a disconnected situation. The author had seen a Chinese animated film "I Am What I Am" released in December 2021, a film that brought the lion dance profession to many audiences. In the film, the left-behind child, Juan, leaps to the tall pillar with the lion's head in the drumbeat of the lion team at the end, completing the transformation from "sick cat" to "lion". The film is not designed to have a traditional happy

ending. To make a living, the main character has to go out to work after completing his life reversal. After watching, the author wondered: Is the prize money from the lion dance competition not enough to support the family? But when the author came face-to-face with the lion dancers at Tengxian Secondary School, the author realized that this was true. After communicating with the lion dancers, the author learned that because lions ward off evil spirits, whenever various festivals and happy events are held, people like to find lion troupes to perform. Several lions spit out brocade flags from their mouths as they jump and tumble to send off good luck. The lion troupe's economic resources, in addition to personal funding from Uncle Zhong, mainly rely on participation in some commercial performances. However, two lion dancers performing feverishly for an hour and a half, a time may only earn a few thousand yuan, and each team member's salary may only be about 300 yuan.

Another factor that causes the sport to be feared by many young people is the risk of injury. On this trip to Tengxian, the author was lucky to meet Deng Binguang, the first athlete to become an NPC deputy of Guangxi through lion dance. He started learning lion dance at the age of 8. In 2004, at the age of 14, Deng Binguang and his partner became famous in the World Lion Dance Championship in Malaysia and was the first lion dancer to win the title of "King of the East" for his country in a top-level international competition. From the visible scars on his legs, it is clear that he has experienced many injuries during his career as a lion dancer. In the interview, he said, "For lion dancers, there may injuries of varying degrees of severity every day." In the high pile performance, the lion dancers believe that the most difficult is the "tightrope walking". The lion's head goes, usually, a foot will come out first, gently touch the wire and then retract, which is 'Testing'. Soon, the lion's four feet need to steadily step on the three-meter-long wire. The lion's head and tail not only have to work together to walk across, but the performers also need to lift the lion's head and do difficult movements. This is a great test of the performers' basic skills, if they are not careful to lose balance on the wire, their skin will be worn by the wire, and get seriously injured. Therefore, this is the reason why many young people today are discouraged from this sport.

5.3. Shortage of Funds and Inadequate Institutions

The development and promotion of the lion dance require great financial support. During the interview with Mr. Zhong, the author learned that he has personally funded tens of millions of yuan to maintain the operation of the association since he rebuilt Bilin Tang in 2006, and even gave up his shares in the company. According to him, the training equipment and venues of the Southern Lion troupes are generally outdated. In some villages, southern lion sports enthusiasts have also received financial support from some relevant departments through their efforts, though it is still less and the plight is not well improved. Because the lion dance has not been industrialized, the associations can only operate independently, self-funding, or given fewer sponsorship funds according to the personal preferences of enterprises. The shortage of funds makes it difficult to meet the needs for further development of the lion dance. As he said in this interview with Mr. Deng, "It is difficult for us to survive." On the one hand, he hopes that more and more people will join the lion dance career, but on the other hand, at the current income level, it is very difficult to maintain the livelihood of most lion dancers. The more traditional the profession is, the more young people need to join and pass on. But because the financial and income levels are difficult to meet the needs, more and more people are leaving their loved lion dance. After listening to his introduction, the author can't help but feel that the lion dance culture, which originated in the Three Kingdoms period, seems to have become a "sunset industry" with little development today after more than a thousand years of evolution. The cultural heritage is more than enough, but the capital is not adequate. The author, therefore, appeals to the government and more enterprises to give support to

do more research on protecting the heritage of the Southern Lion, the protection of the ecological movement, the necessary equipment for the performance, and the allocation of funds.

5.4. The Impact of Foreign Culture

As a traditional art, the Southern Lion carries the excellent genes of Chinese culture. However, due to human social development and environmental changes, the conditions for its survival have been weakening and deteriorating. Modern media have opened up people's horizons and of course, changed the environment in which traditional sports survive. People receive all kinds of foreign cultural information and ignore their own country's cultural activities. But we should also see that skateboarding, roller skating, and skiing from the West are more in line with the preferences of the younger generation in terms of the spectacle of movements, the modernity of equipment, and the safety, which also inspires how to make Chinese traditional culture and art more adaptable to the demands of the era.

6. Suggestions for the Future Development of Lion Dance Based on Its Current Situation

Government support and media publicity should be strengthened, and efforts should be made to build a new development model of "social participation, government support, and market leadership".

Through this visit, the author saw that Mr. Zhong had exhausted most of his family's assets and sold his company to raise funds to keep the lion dance alive and well. He also keeps traveling around to promote the association and to expand the influence of lion dance culture. Under his leadership, the troupe began to be active in various competitions around the world, and from 2016 to 2018 alone, Bilin Tang participated in 81 lion dance competitions at home and abroad, winning 41 gold, 25 silver, and 14 bronze. In addition, he also led his team members to actively cooperate with well-known media at home and abroad. Through his efforts, the lion dance performance successfully appeared on the stage of the Spring Festival Gala and the Lantern Festival Gala, so that people all over the country further appreciated the charm of the lion dance culture. Deng Binguang, who won the title of "King of the East", is actively engaged in the promotion of lion dance culture after his retirement and was elected as a representative of the district people's congress. He combines his professional expertise to vigorously promote the excellent traditional lion culture, so that more and more people are concerned about the lion dance, learn the lion dance, and love the lion dance.

The cultural and professional level of lion dance performers should be further improved so that they can become high-quality cultural inheritors.

From the on-site interviews, the author learned that most of the people involved in the lion dance had not received a good cultural education, and the overall literacy level was not high. Even though there are currently some schools in China that have established lion dance programs, the cultural requirements for the participants are not high, and most of the students are not interested enough in cultural classes. Most of the students had to abandon the lion dance career after graduating from secondary school to make a living and engage in careers such as security guards and firefighters, making it impossible to retain the number of lion dancers. During the interview, Mr. Zhong also regretted that despite his efforts to persuade the Wuzhou government to set up a lion dance program in the Tengxian Secondary School, the current scale of only two classes and 50 students can hardly be maintained due to the lack of teachers and funds. Further expansion requires attention from more schools, cooperation between folk associations and schools, and the establishment of related majors in more universities so that education can raise students' awareness of national culture while cultivating more emerging lion dance talents. National festivals and competitions should be held

regularly to actively strengthen the promotion of traditional sports culture and enhance the public's attention to the lion dance.

After observing the players' daily training at the interview site, it was only when the author got up close that the author felt the charm of this traditional Chinese art. Most of the sports that young people like today are modern sports such as soccer, basketball, skateboarding, etc. The author thinks that on the one hand, this is because these sports themselves are very widespread around the world and have modern elements that are loved by young people; But on the other hand, the author thinks there is a problem with the promotion of traditional Chinese arts like lion dance. Compared to soccer and basketball events, not many competitions are held for traditional sports like lion dance, and even if there are some, they are probably only held within a few associations, and not actively promoted so that more people, especially young people, can pay attention to them. If more young people can experience it up close like the author did, the author thinks more young people will like it and even fall in love with this sport.

7. Research and Reflection

Through the field trip to Tengxian Secondary School in Guangxi, and combined with other excellent examples of promoting traditional Chinese culture, the author has gained a deeper understanding and thoughts of the current preservation of the Southern Lion culture.

As an essential part of traditional Chinese culture, the lion dance has a long history, and its unpredictable movements and lifelike costumes make it a delightful national art that often appears in life during festivals or celebrations. However, with the rapid development of society, performing arts and sports activities with modern elements are more adapted to the needs of today's society and are more popular among the new generation of young people. Just like Darwin's theory of biological evolution "survival of the fittest", the new model will slowly replace the old one. The traditional lion dance, which has been handed down for nearly a thousand years, is also facing the situation of survival of the fittest in the rush of modern trends.

After reading the literature from multiple sources and visiting the field, the author found some urgent issues on the road to the inheritance of the Southern Lion culture that must be solved, and the author would like to present some reflections and speculations here.

Although the government is aware of the important value and significance of traditional culture preservation, the lack of policy support and financial assistance has slowed down or even made the development of some traditional culture heritage businesses difficult.

First of all, after the online interview, the author learned that the Tengxian Secondary School the author came to on this visit was funded by Mr. Zhong, the director of Bilin Tang, and jointly operated by the government, which only provided meager financial support in the process of building the school. It is evident that as the first secondary school in the country to have a lion dance major, the government did not pay enough attention to it. But now that Mr. Zhong is 70 years old, he has sold his company and invested hundreds of billions of yuan in supporting that school. But can we imagine that if in the future, Mr. Zhong is not financially able to support himself, or if he passes away, then will there be someone else who can take over his responsibility and keep Bilin Tang and this secondary school going? Despite the high priority given by the government at the policy level, financial support is often stretched to the limit.

Therefore, as a lover of traditional culture, the author hopes that through scientific research and analysis with other cultural preservationists, we can jointly call on the government to pay more attention to the cause of cultural preservation and assist cultural organizations in solving the many practical problems that constrain the development of Southern Lion culture due to the lack of funds through the formulation of policies.

The inheritance of Chinese traditional culture still needs to be solved by the government. Normally we can see that in other popular sporting events, such as soccer and basketball, there are many well-known Chinese companies generously sponsoring some teams, often with tens of millions or even hundreds of millions of dollars in capital, but few companies are willing to spend millions of dollars to sponsor lion dance teams and lion dance competitions. The reason for this is that lion dance activities are not influential enough and the audience is too narrow, so they cannot bring commercial promotion value to enterprises. However, the author believes that if the government can give more policy guidance to enterprises so that they can enjoy the social effect brought by the sponsorship, and form a sense of cultural recognition to support the preservation of Chinese traditional culture, more Chinese enterprises and entrepreneurs will be willing to take over the responsibility from Mr. Zhong, so that the lion dance culture can continue to be passed on better.

It is important to promote the traditional Chinese cultural heritage on more campuses and to standardize and professionalize the development of the lion dance sport to make more young people love this activity.

The promotion of lion dance culture on campus has many important implications, such as making more students understand and enjoy the excellent local culture and promoting the inheritance of some regional culture. At the same time, the popularization of the lion dance can cultivate students' sense of identification with traditional Chinese culture. During the face-to-face interviews for this study, the author discovered some of the dilemmas of promoting southern lion culture on campus. In addition to the funding issues just mentioned, there is a lack of faculty, a lack of support from urban families due to urban-rural value differences, few venues for lion dance activities, and the impact of modern entertainment on traditional culture. Tengxian Secondary School has successfully brought lion dance culture to the campus, bringing schooling opportunities to rural children while fostering their love of lion dance culture and their determination to spread it. The abundant achievements have made the lion dance team selected from this school world-famous and the pride of the country. It is not difficult to speculate on the development strategies of combining traditional culture and education from the case of Tengxian Secondary School. For example, developing special teaching materials and introducing lion dance into the classroom; solving the problem of teacher shortage through school-enterprise cooperation; innovating lion dance based on its original techniques and presenting performance in a modern artistic form; bringing lion dance performance back to the community and into the view of the public, etc. After observing the training of the students on site, the author had the opportunity to experience the basic movements of lion dance under the guidance of the instructor. The author tried to jump from one pile to another, but the author fell off due to the unstable footing, fortunately, there was a thick mat on the ground to protect him from injury. But in the actual performance, the lion dancers have to carry the heavy lion head in nearly 2-3 meters high piles tumbling and jumping, and there will be no protective mats on the ground. The difficulty and danger are self-evident, which makes more and more young people discouraged from this sport. During the interview, the author learned that lion dance is a skill that takes a lot of time and effort, and children may initially find it fun, but to excel, it can take 5-6 years to learn (take the high pile performance as an example). The basic skills will have to be practiced for three or four years: the high pile is made of iron, and falling from the pile, even if there is a protective mat underneath, there will inevitably be abrasions. Therefore, it is only through a standardized educational system in schools, under the guidance of specialized teaching, that young people who engaged can reduce their chances of injury and thus increase the popularity of that sport.

By solving the problems of adapting to social trends and the risk of injury, and by getting more young people interested in the sport, this traditional Chinese cultural art will have more market space and thus be passed on.

While watching the lion dance performance, the author experienced a wondrous change of emotion. For the first few minutes, the eyes lingered intently on the performers, pondering each of their movements, and the author even had the thought that “lion dancing is cool” and wanted to try it myself. But after a while, the impression the author had of the lion dance changed to one of extreme noise, monotonous costumes, difficulty, etc. As a high school student, the changing feelings may just show that lion dance may not fit the trend of contemporary youth interests. The author couldn’t help but ask me what the hobbies of today’s youth are, and the first answer that came to mind was skiing. Skiing is also a sport with a long history, but it is still popular and loved by many young people, and it is even a bit absurd to discuss whether skiing will be lost today. This made me realize that government support and publicity measures can only save the lion dance for a while, but whether it can resonate with the spirit and emotions of a new generation of young people is an important factor in identifying whether the culture can be passed on in the long run. Therefore, the inheritance of lion dance culture today needs to be integrated with modern elements, which can be manifested by shaping special sports industry brands, producing and selling special cultural and creative products, building cultural amusement parks for children to experience traditional heritage crafts, etc., to cultivate a new generation of young people’s attention and love for traditional culture.

In the school’s cultural exhibition hall, the author saw several new and interesting lion heads, such as those painted with Hello Kitty and Spider-Man designs. This reminds the author of the paper-cutting artist he met earlier on Wangfujing Culture Street in Beijing. When the traditional patterns failed to meet the needs of young customers, the artist innovatively researched and produced paper cutouts in the shape of cartoon characters, which were well received by children. Therefore, the author boldly envisioned that the United States has Disneyland, where the various entertainment activities are themed by cartoon characters that we are familiar with since childhood. Chinese traditional culture also has many characteristic elements. Can these be used to build a park with the theme of Chinese traditional culture so that children can appreciate it while being entertained from an early age?

8. Conclusion

The study of the southern lion culture made the author feel proud and happy about the long history and profoundness of Chinese traditional culture, which has been passed down to this day for nearly a thousand years. The encounter with the lion dance not only made the author marvel at its exquisite skills and long history but also made him ponder how we should take measures to preserve and pass on these long-standing and precious traditional cultures in the context of today’s rapid social development. First, the traditional culture needs to be better connected to the market to effectively solve the problem of a funding shortage. The government should take the lead in working with enterprises and associations to explore the commercial value of lion dance, rather than just relying on individual sponsorship. Second, the model of introducing excellent traditional culture into schools is highly desirable, but it is obvious that the current government is not promoting it with enough strength and determination. Stronger support should be given to bringing traditional Chinese culture into schools so that more of the younger generation can recognize and understand its value. Third, an important criterion for identifying the longevity of culture is whether it can have a spiritual and emotional resonance with young people. Southern lion culture is only a microcosm of many traditional Chinese cultural arts, such as Chinese opera, martial arts, etc. They also face the dilemma of being contrary to the trend of the times. Efforts to integrate traditional culture into modern elements to attract more young people’s interest and love are a top priority. At the same time, it is necessary to learn more from some successful practices abroad to promote the convergence of global culture and traditional Chinese culture. “One day to become a lion dancer, then maintain the soul of the lion for the whole life.” As a traditional Chinese cultural art, the lion

dance has its hardships; as a profession, the lion dance also has its dilemmas. In addition to the self-promotion of the lion dancers, perhaps more is needed from the government, enterprises, associations, and individuals to join. Let the lion dance become a national trend, so that more young people could see the fun of the lion dance, love that culture, and play on for generations. If more people like lion dance, there will be more opportunities for its inheritance, and the plight faced by the Southern Lion today may be able to usher in a turnaround.

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