

THE AESTHETIC FORM OF DANCE OF LISU NATIONALITY “A CHI MU GUA”

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to conduct an in-depth examination of the aesthetic characteristics of the Lisu dance “Achimua Gua”. The study subjects primarily include Lisu dance inheritors, expert scholars, and performers, and qualitative data analysis is performed through methods such as interviews, observations, and literature research.

The research findings:

Reveal a close correlation between the aesthetic form of the Lisu dance “Achimua Gua” and the behaviors of goats. The dancers vividly replicate the leaping, running, and bounding characteristics of goats through coordinated movements and postures. While demonstrating a high level of technical proficiency, the dancers also convey emotions of celebration and resilience in the face of challenges, reflecting the intimate connection between aesthetic form and emotions. The dance’s dynamic forms include actions like squatting, swaying, turning, and shoulder-touching, presented in diverse formations and performance styles, enhancing the liveliness and interactivity of the dance. The aesthetic form is closely intertwined with the culture and history of the Lisu people. This connection reinforces the cultural significance of the dance, reflecting the values and traditions of the Lisu people. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic form of the Lisu dance “Achimua Gua” and the rich relationship between aesthetic form and cultural connotations. It provides valuable insights for the preservation, inheritance, and cross-cultural dissemination of Lisu dance.

Keywords: Lisu Dance; Achimua Gua; Aesthetic Form; A Chi Mu Scrape

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Lisu people, descendants of the ancient Di and Qiang tribes, are an ancient and historically rich ethnic group located primarily in the river valleys of the Jinsha River, Lancang River, Nu River, and Dulong River in Yunnan Province, China. According to the “China Statistical Yearbook – 2021”, the Lisu population is approximately 762,900. The Lisu people are renowned for their song and dance arts, with their dance forms largely being collective dances. These include dances such as “Wa Qi”, “Qian O”, “Wa Qi Qi”, “Achimua Gua”, “Sanxian Dance”, “Huluseng Dance”, “Jumping Songs”, “Jumps”, “Foot Tapping”, “Guozhuang”, and “Reba”. In Lisu culture, “Achimua Gua” is considered one of the representatives of traditional folk dances. The name of this dance comes from the Lisu language and literally means “Goat’s Song and Dance”. It is also known as “Luodang Mugu”, with “Luodang” referring to a “ravine” (Lu Jianbiao & Ou Guangming, 2014). This dance form is created by imitating the sounds and movements of goats and is characterized by vivid goat-like postures. It expresses the Lisu people’s profound love for various animals and their optimistic spirit in facing challenging living conditions.

As a significant intangible cultural heritage, the Lisu ethnic dance “Achimua Gua” carries the cultural essence passed down through generations. However, in the face of rapid changes in modern society and the wave of globalization, this precious cultural heritage faces significant challenges. In recent years, with the acceleration of urbanization and the rise of new media, the challenges confronting the Lisu ethnic dance “Achimua Gua” have become increasingly apparent. The transmission of the dance is gradually being affected, and the younger generation’s interest in this tradition is waning. This raises a critical question: how to protect and pass on the valuable cultural heritage of the Lisu ethnic “Achimua Gua” dance in contemporary society. In this context, research into its aesthetic forms has come to the forefront. By gaining an in-depth understanding and analyzing the aesthetic characteristics of the Lisu ethnic “Achimua Gua” dance, we can better comprehend the uniqueness of this cultural tradition and how it encapsulates the history, values, and spirit of the Lisu people. This not only helps raise awareness of the Lisu ethnic “Achimua Gua” dance among the younger generation but also provides compelling arguments for its preservation and transmission.

Vasili Kandinsky’s views are particularly profound, especially regarding the balance between abstraction and concreteness in dance. His theory emphasizes that as abstract modes of thought become more liberated, the abstract qualities of dance expression also become more liberated. This aligns precisely with what the “Achimua Guo” dance aims to convey (Kandinsky, 2014). Drawing from Thomas Munro’s aesthetic formalism as a theoretical framework, conducting a descriptive study of the aesthetic features formed in the “Achimua Guo” dance, and analyzing the formal characteristics of the dance movements and the cultural aspects associated with the dance (Monroe, 1984).

In summary, in the study of the aesthetic characteristics of the Lisu dance “Achimua Guo”, the emphasis is placed on how aesthetic forms are closely intertwined with cultural significance and how the dance expresses elements of Lisu culture and history by emulating the traits of goats. Through interviews, observations, and literature research, a comprehensive analysis of the aesthetic forms of the Lisu dance “Achimua Guo” is

conducted, revealing the connection between aesthetic forms and cultural significance. It also demonstrates how these aesthetic forms reflect the Lisu people's reverence for goats and their optimistic resilience in challenging environments. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide valuable insights for the preservation, inheritance, and cultural dissemination of the Lisu dance "Achim Guo".

2. OBJECTIVES

To study the characteristics of the aesthetic form of "A Chi Mu scrape" dance of Lisu nationality

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social and historical background of the "Achim Guo" dance

According to extensive literature research, the Lisu ethnic group is a widely distributed ethnic minority in Southwest China. According to the "China Statistical Yearbook - 2021", its population is approximately 762,900. They are mainly distributed in Weixi County (including Kangpu, Yezhi, Badi and other places) on the upper reaches of the Lancang River in Yunnan and the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan. There are also some scattered in Lijiang, Sichuan and other places. The Lisu ethnic group has experienced many large-scale migrations in history. The reasons include war, ethnic oppression, seeking economic resources, religious factors and the influence of government policies. These factors have led the Lisu ethnic group to live in the border areas of Southwest China for a long time, especially in the Nujiang River and Lancang River basins. Their migration experience is very tortuous. Nevertheless, the Lisu ethnic group has never been able to get out of the surrounding mountains.

The history of the Lisu ethnic group can be traced back to after the 16th century. They have experienced three large-scale migrations and finally settled in the Nujiang River and Lancang River basins. The lifestyle of the Lisu ethnic group is inseparable from goats. This animal plays an important role in their daily life and productive labor. Therefore, the Lisu people are full of respect and affection for goats. This feeling is embodied in their creation of the "Achim Guo" dance by imitating the movements of goats (Lu Jianbiao & Ou Guangming, 2014).

The "Achim Guo" dance vividly shows the Lisu people's love for various animals and their ability to maintain an optimistic and upward spirit in a harsh living environment. This dance retains a profound, simple, primitive art style and unique characteristics. Nowadays, "Achim Guo" is mainly inherited in Badi Township, Yezhi Township, Kangpu Township and other places in Weixi County. It is not only a dance for the masses to entertain themselves, but also carries the deep connection between the Lisu people, goats and the natural environment. It is a vivid expression of this culture.

2. The clothing characteristics of the “Achimua Gua” dance and its relationship with the dance

2.1 Clothing characteristics

Both men and women of the Lisu ethnic group in Weixi mostly wear linen clothes woven and made by themselves, which reflects traditional handicrafts and lifestyles. With the development of the times, clothing styles are diverse and colors are rich, reflecting the communication and integration with the outside world and the pursuit of a better life.

Features of men’s clothing: The men’s clothing of “Achimua Gua” includes “kebalaheng” felt hat, “amushuly” decorations and so on. The felt hat is made by rolling wool and has the functions of keeping warm and decorating. The decorations are made of wheat straw and add unique decorations to men’s long hair, reflecting the bravery and boldness of Lisu men and reflecting traditional culture and lifestyle (Siqin Gaowa & Li Maolin, 1994).

The charm of women’s clothing: Women’s clothing includes “guoheng” pointed hats, long white linen jackets and so on. The pointed hat is made of blue cloth and has a unique shape, giving people a fresh and beautiful feeling. The long white linen jacket shows the dignity and elegance of women. The colors and styles of women’s clothing are more diverse, reflecting the softness and delicacy of Lisu women (Siqin Gaowa & Li Maolin, 1994).

2.2 The relationship between clothing and dance.

Consistency in style: The colors, patterns, and styles of the costumes of “Achimua Gua” are consistent with the dance style. The dance style is profound, powerful, rough, and vigorous. The colors of the costumes are mostly natural tones. The patterns and styles are simple and generous, jointly creating a primitive and archaic artistic atmosphere.

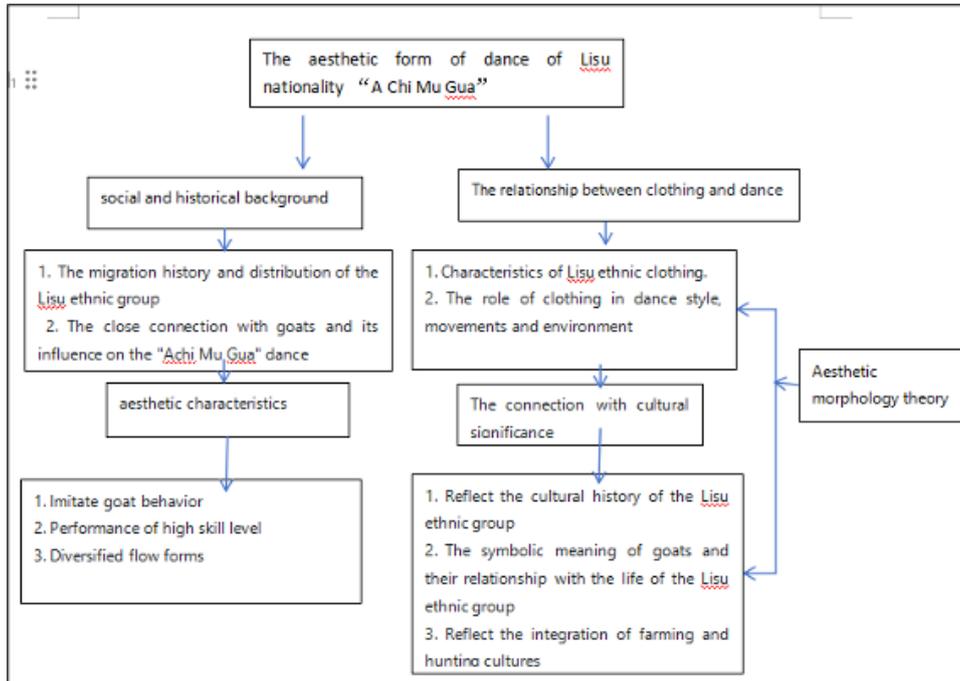
Enhancing dance movements: Costumes can enhance the arc of dance movements and exaggerate dance characteristics. For example, men’s wide-legged trousers with large crotches and women’s pleated skirts can swing with movements to produce a greater amplitude, making dance movements more vivid and powerful. Decorations on costumes can also sway with dance movements to increase visual effects (Weixi Lisu Autonomous County Cultural and Sports Bureau, ed. (2010).

Integration of dance and environment: The costumes of “Achimua Gua” are not only a part of the dance but also the environment in which the dance exists. They blend with elements such as the dance venue and music to jointly form a complete artistic space, allowing the audience to feel the unique charm of Lisu culture (Weixi Lisu Autonomous County Cultural and Sports Bureau, ed. (2010).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



5. METHODOLOGY

This study is dedicated to conducting an in-depth analysis and exploration of the Lisu dance "Achimu Gua" through the comprehensive application of diversified research methods.

5.1 Participant Selection

For this study, the inheritors, experts, scholars, and performers of the Lisu dance "Achimu Gua" are selected as the main participants. Through targeted screening, it is ensured that the participants have in-depth understanding and rich practical experience of the "Achimu Gua" dance and can provide valuable viewpoints and information for the research.

5.2 Design of Data Collection Tools

In terms of the design of data collection tools, this study carefully selects a variety of tools to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the research. Firstly, a professional recording pen is equipped for face-to-face interviews, and a smartphone with excellent recording function is used for remote telephone interviews to completely retain the dialogue content with the respondents and provide detailed voice materials for subsequent analysis. Secondly, the notebook is crucial in the interview process and is used to record key information and non-verbal information, such as the expressions and body movements of the participants, providing rich

materials for the research to deeply understand the meaning behind the interview content. Thirdly, a high-performance video camera is used to shoot the entire dance performance to comprehensively capture the dance movements, formation changes, performance venue atmosphere, etc. from different angles for subsequent detailed analysis and in-depth exploration of the artistic expression form and aesthetic characteristics of the dance. Finally, with the help of the authoritative academic database CNKI, a large number of academic journals, academic papers and other literature materials are widely obtained. At the same time, the rich resources such as books, monographs, and research reports related to the “Achimua” dance in the library are fully explored, and the literature acquisition channels are further expanded through interlibrary loan services to provide a solid theoretical foundation and rich background knowledge for the research.

5.3 Data Analysis Methods

In the data analysis process, qualitative analysis methods are used for interview content to deeply explore the key information such as the participants’ viewpoints, aesthetic experiences of the “Achimua” dance and its connection with Lisu culture. Through detailed text analysis and theme extraction, a solid basis is provided for the analysis of the dance’s aesthetic form. For the details of the observed dance performance, systematic classification and detailed descriptive analysis are carried out. The details of the dance movements, formations, performance venues, music, costumes, ornaments and props are classified and accurately described to vividly show the actual presentation of the aesthetic form. For literature materials, comprehensive induction, summary and in-depth comprehensive analysis are carried out. The historical, cultural, aesthetic form and other contents related to the “Achimua” dance are sorted out, and key viewpoints and theories are extracted to construct the theoretical framework of the research and enrich the background knowledge of the research, laying a profound theoretical foundation for in-depth understanding of the aesthetic form characteristics of the “Achimua” dance and its close connection with cultural connotations.

The comprehensive application of these research methods can help comprehensively and deeply understand the aesthetic form characteristics of the Lisu dance “Achimua” and reveal its close connection with cultural connotations.

6. RESULT

6.1 Aesthetic characteristics

6.1.1 Imitation of Goat Behavior: In terms of aesthetic characteristics, we observed that the movements and postures in the “Achimua” dance closely mimic the behaviors of goats. Dancers reproduce the characteristics of goats, such as jumping, running, and leaping, through coordinated movements. These movements exhibit fluidity, coordination, and liveliness, reflecting the dancers’ precise imitation of goats (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The movement of goats leaping

Source: Internet <https://mr.mbd.baidu.com/r/18B63G6bPfa>

6.1.2 High Level of Skill: Due to the remote mountainous location of Wesiri County, with limited external interactions, the Lahu people have traditionally relied on nomadic lifestyles and hunting for their livelihood. Goats have been essential companions for the Lahu people, and when imitating the leaping actions of goats, their movements naturally involve leaping from the air down to the ground, rising from the ground, and the steps involving both feet. Leaping into the air is a prominent feature of the “Achimu Gua” dance, and the dancers’ leaps are remarkable and have a wide range. They perform graceful and skillful aerial movements, while simultaneously conveying emotions of celebration and overcoming challenges. This adds to the visual appeal of the dance.

When performing ‘dui jiao ban’ (literally ‘footboard dance’), the dancers sing and dance simultaneously, with two people forming a pair. The entire group moves in a clockwise direction while performing the ‘dui jiao ban.’ During the ‘long pan xuan’ (literally ‘dragon spiral’) dance, they sing the lyrics ‘New Year has arrived’ and form a single vertical line, repeatedly executing ‘tiao bai bu’ and ‘duo cuo bu’ movements in a ‘long pan xuan’ formation. While dancing ‘wu xuan feng’ (literally ‘dance the whirlwind’), they sing the lyrics ‘If I don’t dance, I won’t be satisfied’ repeatedly, with men and women alternating or arranging themselves in a circular pattern. Two people form a pair, and the entire group repeatedly performs ‘da jiao gen’ movements while moving clockwise, just like they are swirling like a whirlwind, fearless of strong winds and huge waves (Chinese National Folk Dance Integrated Editorial Department, 1999).

When performing ‘xuan zhuan mo pan’ (literally ‘spinning millstone’), they sing ‘New Year and spring have arrived.’ Men and women face each other alternately, forming a circle, and the entire group performs the ‘duo ye bu’ (literally ‘stamping foot’) movement. During the ‘tiao ying bin ke’ (literally ‘welcoming guests through dance’) dance, they sing ‘New Year and spring have arrived’ as well. Men and women form a large circle, facing the center, and repeatedly perform ‘peng jian’ (literally ‘shoulder bump’) movements. In the last two beats of each song, they alternately stamp their feet in place. When dancing ‘xun qiu ai lu’ (literally ‘seeking a lover’),

they sing ‘If I don’t dance, I won’t be satisfied (Chinese National Folk Dance Integrated Editorial Department, 1999).’ This expresses the joyous life of the Lisu people, similar to goats in the mountains, and the transmission of love messages to their loved ones (Figure3).

Figure 3

When the dancers perform the ‘xuan zhuan mo pan’ (literally ‘spinning millstone’) movement



Source: Internet <https://www.meipian.cn/1k8wq6v3>

6.1.3 Diverse Flowing Forms: The flowing forms encompass movements such as crouching, swaying, turning, and shoulder contact, presented in various formations and performance styles like circles, straight lines, semicircular arcs, and curves. The diversity of these movements enhances the liveliness and interactivity of the dance.

6.2 The Correlation between Aesthetic Form and Cultural Significance

6.2.1 Reflection of Cultural Significance:

Through literature research and interviews, we have found that the aesthetic form of the ‘Achimua Gua’ dance is closely related to the culture and history of the Lisu people. The movements and forms in the dance are not only artistic expressions but also a vivid reflection of Lisu traditional culture. During an interview with Mr. Li Changping, an inheritor of Lisu traditional clothing, she mentioned that most Lisu men and women in Weixi wear self-made hemp clothes. Over time, Lisu clothing has undergone significant innovations, featuring diverse styles and vibrant colors. Especially, the combination of ‘rainbow woven ribbons’ and ‘flower wax patterns’ is a distinctive feature of Lisu clothing in Weixi. In performances of ‘Achimua Gua,’ men typically wear ‘Kepa La Hong’ (felt hats rolled from wool), with long hair adorned by ‘Amu Shulü’ (ornaments made from wheat straws). They wear white short jackets with wide lapels, black-and-white striped long shirts with open fronts, wool belts, left-side ‘Huala Biao’ (specially made embroidered pockets), carry long knives, and have crossbows, arrow quivers, and wide-legged pants with wool or hemp leg bindings below the knees. Lisu women’s attire includes ‘Guoheng’ (pointed hats made of blue cloth), fine white hemp or cotton robes, overlaid with purple, red, or black vests. They wear pleated skirts (short skirts) made from fine white hemp, with embroidered floral sashes tied around

their waists and rainbow-colored belts. They carry ‘Huala Biao’ on their right side. (Siqin Gaowa & Li Maolin, 1994) (Figure4).

Figure 4

When Lisu Ethnic Dance Costumes



Source: Antique Elegance of Lisu

The attire of “Achimua Gua” serves a vital role in elucidating the dance’s initial function. Its colors, patterns, and styles serve as a reflection of the aesthetic psychology of the dance, harmonizing with its robust, powerful, rugged, and athletic style, characterized by predominantly external large movements (Ye, L. (2001). Gifts and pleated skirts, plays a role in intensifying the curvature of dance movements and amplifying dance characteristics. Consequently, they can be described as both an integral component of the dance and an essential element of the dance’s environment.

6.2.2 Culture and symbolic significance of “Achimua Gua” dance

6.2.2.1 Symbolic Significance of Goats: In Chinese culture, goats are considered a symbol of innate beauty, purity, and preciousness. In ancient texts, “beauty” and “goodness” were often synonymous, and goats were commonly associated with beauty and goodness. This aesthetic culture has had a profound influence on Chinese aesthetics, literature, and philosophy. Ancient people would often wear goat horns to symbolize beauty and auspiciousness, expressing the belief in “beauty through goats.

6.2.2.2 Goats and Lisu Tribe Life: The life of the Lisu tribe is closely intertwined with goats. Goats play a significant role in their daily life and productive labor. Having been companions with goats for an extended

period, the Lisu people are not only familiar with the characteristics of goats but have also established an intimate relationship with these animals. This emotional connection is portrayed in the “Achimua Gua” dance, which encompasses the imitation of the gentleness and leisure of goats as well as their qualities of resilience, fearlessness in the face of difficulties, and unwavering perseverance.

6.2.2.3 Cultural Symbol Fusion: The “Achimua Gua” dance embodies the fusion of farming and hunting cultures. Goats are not only livestock for the Lisu tribe but also reflect their intricate relationship with the natural environment. The dance’s movements imitate the gentleness and leisure of goats while conveying the spirit of resilience and fearlessness in the face of difficulties, reflecting the coexistence of the Lisu tribe’s farming and hunting traditions.

The “Achimua Gua” dance represents the rich and diverse Lisu culture, reflecting the symbolic significance of goats, their close connection to Lisu life, and the harmonious blend of farming and hunting elements within the culture. This dance not only conveys the emotions, spirit, and way of life of the Lisu people but also serves as an art form with profound cultural connotations.

7. DISCUSSION

The study of the aesthetic forms of Lisu ethnic dance “Achimua Gua” offers an intriguing perspective in aesthetics, delving into how this dance form manifests its unique charm on the aesthetic level. Through multiple field visits to Yunnan, the author discovered that “Achimua Gua” dance of the Lisu people primarily expresses itself by imitating the sounds and movements of goats, setting it apart from other dance forms. This makes “Achimua Gua” one of the representatives of Lisu folk songs and dances, albeit receiving relatively less attention. Hence, this article will discuss its research value through several aspects:

1. Dynamic Aesthetics: Lisu ethnic dance “Achimua Gua” is renowned for its highly dynamic performances. It creates captivating dynamic aesthetics through the dancers’ exceptional skills, high-flying leaps, and fluid movements. Audiences can feel the dynamism and intensity, sparking aesthetic contemplation regarding movement, space, and time (Wang D, (2015).

2. Affective Aesthetics: “Achimua Gua” dance is not merely a display of technique and movements but also conveys profound emotions. Performers exhibit emotions such as jubilation, excitement, and resilience while expressing reverence for goats and their living environment. This affective aesthetics can resonate with the audience, conveying the inner emotions of the performers and delving into how “beauty and emotions” impact aesthetic experiences (Wang D, (2015).

3. Cultural Aesthetics: “Achimua Gua” dance is deeply rooted in Lisu culture, with aesthetic forms closely intertwined with cultural significance. Performers convey their reverence for nature and animals by imitating goat behaviors, which relates to cultural aesthetics. This pertains to the study of how culture shapes aesthetic standards and experiences (Wang D, (2015).

4. Visual Aesthetics: “Achimua Gua” dance features striking visual elements, including the dancers’ costumes, accessories, props, and diverse formations and performance styles. These elements enhance the visual

appeal of the dance, connecting to visual aesthetics and exploring how aesthetic experiences are conveyed through visual elements (Gombrich, 2008).

In summary, the study of the aesthetic forms of Lisu ethnic dance “Achimua Gua” provides a comprehensive range of discussions in aesthetics. From dynamic aesthetics to affective aesthetics, cultural aesthetics to visual aesthetics, this dance form showcases multi-dimensional allure in aesthetic aspects, encouraging audiences to contemplate aesthetic experiences from different angles. This holistic aesthetic perspective enriches the study of Lisu culture and dance, while also bringing new depth to the application and exploration of aesthetic theories.

8. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

1. Cultural Protection and Inheritance: Given the profound connection between aesthetic forms and Lisu culture, it is recommended to take measures to protect and pass down Lisu dance “Achimua Guo”. This may include promoting the dance within the educational system, establishing cultural preservation projects, and fostering the interest and participation of the younger generation.

2. Digital Archives: To safeguard this cultural heritage and pass it on to future generations, it is advised to establish digital archives, including videos, photos, and written records, to preserve the history and evolution of the dance.

3. Cross-Cultural Dissemination: Research has shown that the aesthetic forms of Lisu dance “Achimua Guo” have cross-cultural appeal and potential in global dissemination. It is recommended to introduce this dance into domestic and international cultural exchange activities to enhance global recognition of Lisu culture.

9. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implication of the Study

1. Academic significance Enriching the research on ethnic and folk dances: In-depth study of the aesthetic form of the Lisu “Achimua Gua” dance provides new cases and perspectives for the research on Chinese ethnic and folk dances, helping to enrich the theoretical system of ethnic and folk dances. Inheriting and developing traditional culture: Excavating the cultural connotations and symbolic meanings of the “Achimua Gua” dance helps to better inherit and develop the traditional culture of the Lisu ethnic group

2. Social significance Promoting cultural exchange and integration: As an important representative of Lisu culture, the research results of the “Achimua Gua” dance can promote cultural exchange and integration among different ethnic groups and enhance understanding and friendship among ethnic groups. Driving the development of cultural tourism: The “Achimua Gua” dance has unique artistic charm and cultural value and can become an important resource for cultural tourism and promote the development of the local cultural tourism industry.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Apply the dance movements of “Achimua Gua” to the creation of children’s dances Select dance movements suitable for children, such as jumping rubbing steps, jumping swaying steps, and backward jumping steps, and simplify and adapt them to make them more in line with children’s physical characteristics and

cognitive levels. Combine children's interests and hobbies and life experiences to create creative and interesting children's dance works to stimulate children's interest and love for Lisu culture.

2. Strengthen the inheritance and protection of Lisu culture Carry out educational and promotional activities on Lisu culture to raise people's awareness and importance of Lisu culture and enhance cultural confidence. Cultivate inheritors of Lisu culture and establish and improve a cultural inheritance mechanism to ensure the sustainable development of Lisu culture.

3. Expand research fields and methods. Combine the theories and methods of other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology to conduct interdisciplinary research on the "Achimu Gua" dance and deeply explore its cultural connotations and social values. Use modern technological means such as video recording and data analysis to conduct digital protection and research on dances and provide new approaches and methods for the inheritance and development of dances.

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