

The Relationship between Dachuan Baijie Muddymen Dance and “Da Xia” and “Da Wu”*

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Dachuan Baijie Muddymen Dance is a kind of dance with local characteristics. From its dance movements and prop usage, it should be related to ancient Ba people’s war dance, as well as to recorded ancient dances such as “Da Xia” and “Da Wu”.

Keywords: Muddymen Dance, Ba people, war dance, “Da Xia”, “Da Wu”

Introduction

Muddymen Dance, also known as Muddy God Dance, Beggar Dance, Begging for Food Dance, Bald Dance, etc., is called Muddymen Dance because during performances, mud is applied to the naked body. It is distributed in western Hubei, Chongqing, eastern Sichuan and other provinces in China, and has a certain inheritance relationship with dances such as Rou Lianxiang and Da Lianxiang in terms of development. In many places, these dance names are similar.¹ The confusion in the name makes the distribution and origin of this dance even more confusing. However, if we look at the specific performance forms of dance, the relationship between the Muddymen Dance and Rou Lianxiang is more closely related, while the difference between it and other dances such as Da Lianxiang is more obvious, and it should belong to a different type of dance.

The Difficulty in Dance Relationship Exploration

As a form of dance, Muddymen Dance is mainly popular in western Hubei, Chongqing, and eastern Sichuan, while as a means of begging, it is popular in a wider range. As a dance form, Muddymen Dance has different performance forms in various regions: in western Hubei and Chongqing, it is mostly performed alone, with simple movements that mostly involve smearing mud on the body to reflect certain body language. Muddymen

* **Acknowledgement:** this paper is funded by Fund Project: Research Center for the Protection and Development of Tangible Cultural Heritage in East Sichuan in 2022 (Project No. 2022YB17); 2018 Sichuan University of Arts and Sciences Ba Culture Research Special Project “Ba Culture Literature Compilation and Research” (Project Number: 2018BWH001Z).

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¹ In the *List of Sichuan Dance (Dance Types) and Objectives*, the distribution range of “Lianxiao” is “throughout Sichuan”, also known as Lianxiang, Nianxiao, Gun Lianxiao, Qiangun, Dadaoqian, etc., while “Rou Lianxiao” is distributed in Jiulongpo, Nan’an, Jiangbei, Yongchuan, Rongchang, Bishan, and Da County, also known as Muscle Lotus, Muscle Blacksmith, Muddymen Dance, etc., and is classified as a Chinese Han ethnic dance. Refer to the editorial committee of “*Chinese Dance Chronicles*”. *Chinese Dance Chronicles. Sichuan Volume* [M]. Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing House. 2013: 385. However, this dance is classified as a Tujia ethnic dance along with Rou Lianxiang in Lichuan County, Hubei Province, as compiled by the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center. *Introduction to the Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List* [M]. 2010: 166-167.

Dance in Baijie Town, Dachuan District, Dazhou City has numerous props, and its dance movements are not limited to painting, which is fundamentally different from the above-mentioned Muddymen Dance. Overall, the main popular areas for Muddymen Dance are also areas where the Tujia ethnic group resides, and the Tujia ethnic group is generally considered to be the cultural descendants of the ancient Ba people. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on exploring whether Muddymen Dance is related to the Ba people and what kind of relationship it has. Due to the fact that the Ba people, as a cultural group, have disappeared into the long river of history, and there are not many records of them in Chinese literature that has been passed down. Although the Tujia ethnic group is considered to be their descendants, due to the profound influence of Han culture on their living habits and culture, they have also become very different from the Ba people. Therefore, it is difficult to explore the origin and development of this dance from literature or real life.

Analyzing the Source of Dance from the Perspective of Dance Itself

From the perspective of the performance props used by Muddymen Dance, although the items used in the performance include palm leaves with handles, bovine scapula bone, short wooden sticks, bamboo pipes, etc., which seem to be relatively crude and easy to obtain, considering the reality that this dance is passed down among beggars, it should be due to the insufficient financial resources and convenience of the performers themselves. Because these objects have strong symbolism, and their corresponding symbolic objects can also be found in historical documents. From the literature, it can be seen that King Wu of Zhou, in his “Oath in Muye” during the campaign against King Zhou of Shang, encouraged the recruited combatants, including Ba and Shu people, and included the words “call them hold their Ge, spear, and shield, and give them an oath” (Li & Wang, 2004, p. 204), indicating that the main weapons of battle were Ge, spear, and shield. At that time, short spears were used in close combat, and some Ba people used shields such as Bandun, also known as Bandun barbarians. In Muddymen Dance, these props may be imitations of the weapons used. In the Muddymen Dance, there is also the practice of applying wet mud all over the body, which should be an imitation of ancient Ba people’s tattoos to intimidate their enemies.

From the performance process and dance movements, it can be seen that the Muddymen Dance is not a solo dance, but rather involves many interactive group dances, which is related to the emphasis on cooperation and coordination among soldiers in the military. During the performance of the Muddymen Dance, there are many jumping and rolling movements, and even the action of flipping weights. The movements are rough and bold, full of masculinity. There are constantly rolling and jumping movements inside, which is also in line with the tactical training needs of the ancient Ba army. Some of them are related to the formation of troops, some depict scenes of combat and confrontation, and some are scenes of entering protected areas in sequence and then exiting in unison. According to Yang Yinliu’s *Draft of Ancient Chinese Music History*, Zuo Shanghong believed that the Ba people’s military dance should have the following characteristics: first, it should be strong and powerful, second, male nude dance, third, it should be accompanied by drum music, and fourth, it should have a certain plot structure (Zuo, 2007, pp. 1-6). The Muddymen Dance basically conforms to such characteristics.

The Dance Recorded in Historical Documents

The specific performance form of the Muddymen Dance is closer to another type of dance recorded in historical documents. Another piece of music and dance recorded in the *History of Ancient Chinese Music* is “Da Xia” or “Xia Yue”, which was originally a tribute to the achievements of Yu the Great. It is divided into nine sections and uses a primitive wind instrument called Yue as the main accompaniment instrument. According to the *Book of Rites—Location of Mingtang*, during this dance, the performers “danced the ‘Da Xia’ (Great Xia Dance), wearing a kind of leather hat called ‘Bian’ and a white dress, exposing their upper body to depict the attire of ancient laboring people” (Yang, 1981, p. 7). Guo Ke believes in “The Dress Code and Dancer Identity in ‘Da Xia’” that “Su Ji” is a white dress with pleats around the waist, while “Pi Bian Su Ji” is a clothing accessory for those with noble status. “Su Ji” is a garment that exposes the inside after revealing the outer garment (Guo, 2009, pp. 156-162). Of course, the “Da Xia” in the “Book of Rites” should be a sacrificial dance that had already become aristocratic during the Zhou Dynasty, and the initial dance form of “Da Xia” should probably have a more primitive dance pattern as described in the *History of Ancient Chinese Music*. “Pi Bian” is likely derived from a headpiece made of feathers or animal skin, while the grass skirt may be the precursor of “Su Ji”. Removing the outer coat to reveal the underwear should be a later development form of bare chested dancing. Moreover, “Da Xia” is considered to be a dance that combines both civil and military arts. According to “Neize” in the *Book of Rites*, aristocratic men can only perform dances after reaching the age of twenty and becoming crowned. That is to say, this is a battle dance that can only be performed at an age where one can carry weapons and become familiar with military equipment. In the *Book of Rites*, it is also recorded that during the worship of the late emperor in the temple, in order to please the “emperor’s corpse”, the monarch would hold a ceremonial robe and wear a crown, leading the courtiers to dance. Their position was to ascend to the east of the dance troupe.

Guo Ke believes that the performance of monarch holding spear and shield in the text matches the performance of “red shield and jade spear” in “Da Wu”, and it is highly likely that it is a dance of “Da Wu”. In handed down literature, “Da Wu” and “Da Xia” often appear side by side, while the record in “Location of Mingtang” of the *Book of Rites* states that “Da Wu” was danced first, followed by “Da Xia” (Guo, 2009, pp. 156-162). The hand holding spear and shield and the upper position on the east side here are similar to the Muddymen Dance, which seems to indicate that the Muddymen Dance has a dance origin relationship with “Da Wu” and “Da Xia”.

It is speculated that the ancient Ba people referred to the dance form of the Xia people. In the “Hai Nei Nan Jing”, it is recorded: “The minister of King Qi of Xia called Meng Tu, who was offering sacrifices to the gods of Ba, and people requested to sue at Meng Tu’s place. Those with blood on their clothes were held, and they requested to live on. Meng Tu lived on a mount on the west of Dan Mount. Dan Mount was on the south of Dan Yang, so he lived in Dan Yang” (Yuan, 1992, p. 326). This at least indicates that the Ba people had a close relationship with the Xia Dynasty. And “Da Wu” imitates the dance of King Wu of Zhou during his campaign against King Zhou of Shang, which also includes the battle dance performed by the Ba people during the spearhead. This form of dance has been imitated and inherited by the Muddymen Dance, thus being preserved. From this, it can be concluded that dances like “Da Wu” and “Da Xia” are mostly group dances, with nude performers wearing dresses and using certain props as dance equipment.

Conclusion

So overall, the original battle dance of the Ba people was influenced by the Xia people and made a brilliant appearance during King Wu’s campaign against King Zhou of Shang, while at that time they only danced without singing. However, due to its non orthodox “barbarian” dance and its similarity in content to “Da Xia” and “Da Wu”, it was not incorporated into the dance of the Temple of Heaven by the Zhou people. In the Han Dynasty, Emperor Gaozu Liu Bang saw the battle dance passed down from Ba area and incorporated it into the Music Department dance. After the Han Dynasty, successive dynasties transformed it to better meet the requirements of palace dance. Until the Tang Dynasty (Chen & Jia, 2010, pp. 420, 576), it was disliked by the rulers and expelled from the Music Department (Xu & Ren, 2017, pp. 123-126). However, in folk culture, some dancers have become beggars, while others have learned and passed down in the form of Dachuan Baijie Muddymen Dance, becoming the unique clay figurine performances we see today. It is speculated that the Muddymen Dance, as a remnant of war dance, should be a military arts dance combined with the frequent wars of the Ba people. And when the Ba people fully entered the agricultural era during the Sui and Tang dynasties, this kind of war dance lost its soil of existence among the people. Although some of them were absorbed into funeral dances, hand waving dances, etc., as a dance form, it gradually disappeared as Ba people entered the agricultural era. And this also created an opportunity for beggars to pass on knowledge and transform into Muddymen Dance. Having experienced changes such as wars, cultural rifts, and demographic shifts, it did not interrupt but continued until the early days of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

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