

Analysis of the Square Dance Function from the Perspective of “Liminality and Communitas”

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Abstract: This paper takes the public square dancing in Jilin city as the research object and expounds the representation behavior from the theoretical perspective of the symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner's "liminality and communitas", which is embodied in the temporary social structure separation of square dance participants under the "selfless" dancing state, so as to eliminate their self-marginalization. This paper finally reveals that the participants in square dance can improve their status and reshape their body and mind through square dance activities, so as to maintain the integration of themselves and social structure.

Keywords: Square Dance; Marginalization; Reshape the Body and Mind; Liminality and Communitas

1. Introduction

Square dance has spread throughout China and even around the world at a full speed, and become a well-known sports activity for leisure and entertainment. However, the original group memory carried by this easy-to-learn square dance undoubtedly exposes many problems such as social public management when it is moved to modern society. For example, Wang Qianni's article, Stigma and Conflict: Square Dance in the Crack of the Times, explains the metaphor and irony behind the appearance of square dance. From the stigma of aunts and the emergence of conflicts with others, we can see that aunts are trying to use unique language symbols to declare and speak to the whole society, and become the noise of the society. The ideas and thoughts of the masses also collide in the extreme conflict between silence and noise. Nowadays, the era and society full of fractures make square dance a rescue medicine for people in marginalized areas, which makes us think about how the symbol of square dance can dispel and bridge people's living difficulties.

2. The Argument of Metaphorical Ritualization of Square Dance

2.1. The Enlightenment of the Definition of Ritual and Ritualization

We usually associate the word ritual with rituals in religion and mythology, but anthropology has placed the word in a broader field in the study of rituals. From Durkheim's single religious ritual to the entry of secular society and Gluckman's expansion of socialized rituals, and to the criticism of putting it in the religious category, we can see that ritual is not only the main body in the field of religion and mythology. And it is also beyond the Baidu Encyclopedia's definition of ceremony referring to the order form of ceremony, such as flag-raising ceremony, etc. In ancient times, the word also has the meaning of taking, deportment or referring to the French system of determining calendar days.

Peng Zhaorong's book Theory and Practice of Ritual in Anthropology mentions the enlightenment of the main aspects of ritual: first, as an integral part of the process of animal evolution; second, as a limited and bounded social relationship, combination form and structural framework; third, as a symbol and social value discourse system; fourth, as the activity procedure of performing behavior and process; fifth, as the experience and experience expression of human social practice. Reviewing the form development of square dance, it is established in a certain range of social relations, accompanied by culture, politics, economy and society, and reflects the discourse of this era with the behavioral symbols of square space performance, while the participants of square dance will experience the transformation of society and the transformation of identity roles. In the square, the passing by at a glance and neighborhood introduction of the masses have become two major ways to participate in square dance, which also constitutes an orderly relationship network, and this network is precisely a bridge for people

to communicate with each other through the way of dance and form a group with the same identity under the social change of self-experience. Therefore, dance is not a change within the noumenon, but a product of the times and exists as a symbol.

In his book *Theory and Practice of Ritual in Anthropology*, Peng Zhaorong refers to Huxley's view on ritualization and argues that ritualization is in fact a purposeful choice under natural and social pressures, forming an adaptive network of forms and behavioralized emotional motives. If we put this point of view in the current square dance, whether it is the unique label of the uprising of women's army or the square world of uncles and aunts, it undoubtedly implies the invisible pressure of people from all walks of life in society. With the acceleration of the aging of the social environment, although they are squeezed by the free time of taking children on the surface, it is the background of social transformation and the influence of individual status transformation that lead them to gradually move away from marginalization, just as Chen Suping said after going into the life of square dancing aunts: It is not aunts who create square dancing, but the change in society that leaves them no choice. Therefore, when square dance plays the role of releasing pressure, emotion and adapting to society, it also hides the contradiction between individual and society by network dredging.

2.2. Discussion on the Origin of Square Dance in Ritualization

From the highly cited literature in CNKI with the title and theme of square dance or its origin, many articles show that square dance has the commonness of ritualization. Li Rui's article *The Origin and Development of Square Dance* explores the origin of square dance from ancient times, modern times and contemporary times, and holds that the earliest form of square dance is derived from religious sacrifices, and from the turning point of promoting the political means of defending the country and eliminating violence and peace in modern times, it finally develops into a well-known and popular square dance. In Tianshan's article *Thoughts on the Development of Square Dance in the Perspective of National Fitness*, it is mentioned that square dance has gradually developed from early survival behavior to sacrificial activities and evolved into today's dance form through inheritance. In Mou Dinghong's article *Summary and Prospect of Square Fitness Dance Research*, it is explained that square dance happened as early as the primitive hunting period, when people danced around the fire, drove wild animals and conducted sacrificial acts, which also laid the foreshadowing for today's square dance.

After referring to the above literature, the author thinks about whether square dance has the characteristics of ritualization or whether square dance has changed the nature and characteristics of ritualization in the changes brought about by today's society and culture. The author believes that although there are many disputes about the definition of square dance in academic circles, the main viewpoints focus on the definition of space, form and history. Nevertheless, no matter how square dance is defined in academic circles, people cannot avoid thinking about its form. The exploration of the historical origin of square dance is to understand the noumenon of this dance more clearly. From the historical perspective, whether the above-mentioned scholars believe that square dance has the origin of sacrifice or other scholars put forward the view that it is related to loyalty dance during the Cultural Revolution or modern Yangko dance, we can see the changes of dance in culture, politics and society, as well as the form of square dance, whether it has experienced the changes of the times or not. It derives in the new social context and changes its dance function. However, let's put aside the major origin arguments of square dance put forward by scholars for the time being, and from the point of view of people's ritualized state in Victor Turner's book *Structure and Anti-Structure*, the author believes that the state brought by square dance to participants is consistent with Victor Turner's liminality and communitas stage of ritual state. Here, the author does not mean that it has some simple connection with religion, ceremony or sacrifice, but wants to emphasize that the subtle connection between them is generated under the background of social contradictions, and alleviates the conflict through liminality and communitas, so that the author can explore the theory of square dance as a symbol of ritualization.

3. Discussion on the Liminality and Communitas of Square Dance

In the field of anthropology, ritual, which is defined as a category of social behavior, is a kind of social drama from interpersonal communication to cultural change through performance, by Victor Turner. Indeed, square dance does not survive in the functional representation of exercise and fitness, but with the continuous development of social culture, it has been separated from the original appearance and become the product of this era. It comes from the spontaneous organization of the

masses and tries to communicate with the society, so exploring the relationship between square dance in a specific community and social structure has become the core of breaking through its morphological representation. In the following, the author borrows Victor Turner's concept of structure and anti-structure and then to structure, and expounds the process transformation of square dance participants through liminality and *communitas* proposed by Turner, in order to expound the self-construction of participants under the generation of square dance from the social structure of participants.

3.1. Equality in Liminality — the Original Structure of Selflessness

People often say that the square dance is the patent of Dama, in which the word Dama mainly contains the following two meanings: first, it shows the main gender composition of the participants in the square dance; second, it reflects the main age group of square dance participants. But we seem to have forgotten why there are so many aunts dancing in the square, and they even appear outside the Louvre Square in Paris, France! Indeed, Chinese women are suffering from the change from collective to individual survival labor, from hard work to return to the family or even empty nest family, and are trying to bridge the gap between different stages of life by retaining the era image of that year and by dancing square dance in a state of selflessness, while meeting certain psychological needs.

The form of square dance we are familiar with, is mainly formed from the people's morning and evening exercise fitness, after which people began to pursue beauty, and the types of square dance become particularly rich and mixed. Over time, this form of self-entertainment promotes the development of square Dance and gradually grows into a spontaneous team. Each team is composed of a large number of members, and the collective communication of the team members in the square is the means and ways to carry out interpersonal communication and enrich self-integration into society in the exercise, so the transitional stage of this way can be more intuitive to understand the square dance itself by using the concept of liminality.

The word liminality is proposed by anthropologist Victor Turner in Van Genep's concept of rites of passage, which refers to the transition between two stable states at the junction of structures. Through the concept of liminality, he interprets the resolution of contradictions and conflicts in social structure through the etiquette of Endemba people. The author believes that the same is true of square dance, which is a symbol of women or a group in the social structure of contradictions and conflicts to resolve. The concept of liminality is placed in square dance, and the pre-liminality stage is the stable state formed by this group in society. From the group structure of participating in square dance, the age, family, economic and cultural level of this group are different, and they play different roles in society. When this role enters the square dance, they play a stable and non-volatile role in society, which we call the pre-liminality stage. Subsequently, the group participated in square dance activities: they exchanged and interacted with their teammates at a fixed time and place; after accumulated exercise, they had a temporary separation from their families and original identities, and reached a selfless state in the dance catharsis. Of course, it is also because of the effective selfless basis that the *communitas* in the later liminality period can become a means of harmonizing the social structure. Taking Jilin Square Shuffle Dance as an example, the dance rose in the underground dance hall of Melbourne, Australia in the 1980s, and it was not clearly recognized until 1992 when Australia began to unify the name of this dance as Shuffle, and then with the development of network media, it has rapidly developed from a small underground dance to a popular culture that can be accepted and recognized by the public and can occupy a place in the mainstream media. According to the survey data, it is the visual impact of the personality and self-expression movement formed by the similar disco-style music and the cool basic footwork of T-Step and Running Man that makes people curious and eager to try. During the author's fieldwork, the participants experienced a psychological process from curiosity to trial, challenge and selflessness when they were in the state of the dance, and they vented and achieved the state of selflessness through intense music and dance under the pressure from society, work and family. Therefore, selflessness makes the participants of square dance change from a stable life state to a dancer's identity, forming a temporary separation from the past identity, which is conducive to the participants to get rid of their own social identity, thus temporarily avoiding the traces of their contradiction and fracture in society.

3.2. Reconciliation in the Communitas Stage — Marginalization Elimination of the Trend of Time

Since the reform and opening up, China has experienced a historical change from liberation politics to life politics, and opened the process of social individualization, that is, individuals will break away

from or liberate from the shackles of the original social relations, and at the same time lose a sense of security, and then need to use a new social obligation to re-shape social relations. Hou Shengchuan and Song Liang put forward the current situation of collective disconnection in their article *Social Problems Reflected by Square Dance Events*, and the space constructed by the city's culture and society nowadays makes the reunion of door-to-door courtyards in the original life and the collective form of working together year after year, away from the appearance of the collective age. The space transformation of the space-time construction of the two gradually enlarges people's physical and psychological space, while the collective atmosphere of the square created by the square dance eliminates the psychological gap between the land and the city wall, as well as the group of people who are isolated and marginalized by the city. In the article, *The Social Psychological Analysis of Hot Square Dance* by Li Na, the hot phenomenon of certain factors originates from the role of change so that people gradually into the marginalized zone, but through the square dance to compensate for the sense of neglect. In the *communitas* mode, society presents a state of no organizational structure or only basic organizational structure, and becomes a community with no obvious difference between them or a community with equal status and obedience to the authority of ritual elders. The *communitas* environment is also the structural state of group communication formed by square dance participants gathering in public activity space, which gradually reconciles the problem of self-marginalization in society under the selfless situation of collective heat behavior. When the participants finish the square dance practice, the state of selflessness gradually dissipates and returns to society, and at this time, the *communitas* stage and the stable stage before the liminality seem to return to normal, but in fact, the participants have already released their loneliness and catharsis through the exercise of selflessness, thus returning to society and family.

From the liminality of participants participating in square dance to the *communitas*, it has experienced a complete process of structure to anti-structure to structure regression, that is, from the original social structure to the entry of square dance, after breaking away from the original social structure and entering the liminality and *communitas*, it has formed the closure of the era fault and the return of social structure. This makes the groups that are susceptible to infection, imitation and suggestion, be reconciled in the social structure under liminality and *communitas*.

4. Functional Interpretation of Square Dance Symbols — Maintaining the Balance between Self and Social Structure

4.1. Remodeling of Spiritual and Psychological Support

The survey results of China Family Development Report 2015 show that the aging of our society has aggravated the burden of daily life of the elderly, and at the same time, the elderly also need to rely on other family members to take care of, more than 90% of the elderly in China at home, more than 88 million families with over-65-year old, accounting for more than 20% of the national family. The acceleration of social aging is undoubtedly one of the factors to promote the development of square dance. The previous research results show that square dance participants are not to meet the simple fitness needs, but more importantly, with the help of square dance, a large-scale group activity, to express in the environment, so as to fully meet the desire of participants' individual needs. Square dance participants in this part of the crowd experienced these two distinct levels of lives, the joy of work promotion in youth, and the sense of loss from the marginalization after old retirement, which forced them to need to find a mood adjustment environment. Their children's independent life and busy work lead to the separation of family life between generations, the decline of happiness index of middle-aged and old people and the loss of their only child, which make them feel lonely in the loss of marginalization. The emergence of square dance makes this group of people with common nature gather together and have objects to talk and accompany. Therefore, most of the retired or marginalized square dance participants lose the prospect of self-development and gradually reduce their self-value assessment, so they gain pride and confidence by dancing square dance, alleviate the loss and loneliness of career and family marginalization, and solve their spiritual needs of self-realization. This secondary development makes up for the spiritual vacancy of participants.

4.2. The Return of Body Construction

Some scholars believe that the reason for the popularity of square dance is the liberation of women's nature, and the phenomenon of aunt represented by square dance reflects the self-development demands of middle-aged women. It is the awakening of middle-aged women's consciousness. Liu Jian

and Wu Finance described the change of women's lifestyle through three aspects in the article *Group Interaction and Identity Construction of Square Dance Women's Daily Life*. First, the female group gradually embeds from the traditional social relations mechanism; second, with the growth of women's group rights consciousness, women's identity begins to be recognized by the social community; third, women pay more and more attention to the realization of self-interest, and begin to actively pursue their own way of life, so living for themselves has increasingly become a creed. We found that women change the identity of the group by the community consciousness and they are no longer the class of oppression and discrimination. According to the survey data of square dance in Jilin City, the age distribution of female participants is mainly between 50 and 70 years old. The collectivism period they have experienced has disintegrated in the current social life, and when they break away from the traditional collective society and re-enter the individual self-life transformation, they are also constantly looking for a sense of self-belonging in the weakening. The environment of square dance is to recall and reconstruct the past collective era from the centralized aggregation of multiple individuals, which solves the problem of self-social relationship and status bridging.

In addition, the role of change is to promote people to an important factor in the marginalization of society, while people are playing a variety of roles in life all the time, from the experience of children, to the pillars of society, to the elderly with children and grandchildren, and to the process of the elderly losing their only child, and this process means that the role of change in status of the lower people in society results in the marginalization. But obviously, in the author's research interview, many aunts used I am very happy to comment on the feeling of dancing, and even the hot summer and cold winter cannot stop their dancing in the square, and they are very happy to say: We also dance in the Spring Festival! It can be seen that square dance is so popular with the masses, and square dance live broadcast can be seen everywhere in the square, which indicates this heat is undoubtedly playing a role in enhancing the status of square dance identity. Its role is mainly reflected in the process of square dance conversion rate of the original identity of dancers, bringing a positive and optimistic state, promoting the original marginalized status and effectively resolving social contradictions.

5. Conclusion

Starting from the ritualized symbol of square dance metaphor, this paper applies Victor Turner's concept of liminality and communitas to the analysis and discussion of square dance form, and through the process from structure to anti-structure and then to return structure, discusses the role of balance between self and social structure played by square dance under the cognitive fracture suffered by square dance participants in society.

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