

Cultural Integration and Institutionalization of Music and Dance in the Northern Wei Dynasty

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Abstract: *The music and dance of the Northern Wei Dynasty played a significant role in the history of Chinese music and dance. On one hand, it adopted and reinforced the Han ethnic music and dance tradition since the Zhou Dynasty. On the other hand, it pioneered the formation of a new music and dance system during the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which was based on the integration of multiple ethnic and cultural elements. In terms of its contribution, the music and dance of the Northern Wei Dynasty achieved the integration of multiple cultures, including the nomadic culture of the northern steppes, the farming culture of the Han people in the central plains, and the culture of the Western Regions. Furthermore, this integration was institutionalized. The institutionalization of the music and dance of the Northern Wei Dynasty was accomplished through the joint efforts of various factors. These included the development of the Chinese traditional ritual and music system, the promotion of political and economic development throughout society, the need for political governance by the Xianbei rulers, and the struggle of the Han Chinese elite for political power. Together, they made music and dance a symbolic form that integrated art and politics, the Han culture and the cultures of the surrounding ethnic minorities.*

Keywords: *Northern Wei; music and dance; cultural integration; institutionalization*

1. Introduction

In the history of ancient Chinese music and dance, the Northern Wei Dynasty played an important role. On one hand, it adopted and reinforced the Han ethnic music and dance tradition since the Zhou Dynasty. On the other hand, it pioneered the formation of a new music and dance system in the Sui and Tang dynasties, based on the integration of multiple ethnic and cultural elements. In terms of its contribution, the music and dance of Northern Wei realized the integration of multiple cultures, including the culture of steppes in the north, the farming culture of the Han people in the central plains, and the culture of the Western Regions. Furthermore, this integration was institutionalized.

2. The Inherent Demand for Cultural Integration of Music and Dance in Northern Wei

The cultural integration of the music and dance of Northern Wei has two meanings: one is the fusion of music and dance itself, that is, the fusion of various ethnic music and dance, such as the nomadic music and dance from steppes, the central plains farming music and dance, and the Western Region music and dance, in terms of content and form; the other is that music and dance, as a means, integrated various ethnic cultures such as the Xianbei and Han ethnicities under the background of traditional Chinese ritual and music politics.

The development of music and dance in Northern Wei can be divided into three distinct periods. The first period, prior to the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, was marked by the expansion of Northern Wei's territory and the integration of diverse ethnic groups. To mitigate internal conflicts and foster a sense of loyalty to the central authority, cultural integration was deemed necessary. In the realm of music and dance, Northern Wei's approach was to incorporate various ethnic music and dance into the Han Chinese ritual culture system, as recorded in the "Record of Music" section of *The History Book of Wei*, which traced back to the founding emperor Tuoba Gui's decree to Deng Yuan to compile music and dance. ^{[1]1888} The second period was during the reigns of Emperor Xiaowen and Emperor Xuanwu. In order to establish his legitimacy and reduce ethnic differences, Emperor Xiaowen undertook a series of radical sinicization reforms. Emperor Xuanwu continued and consolidated the reforms. In music and dance, Northern Wei adhered to the traditional Han Chinese ritual music system and aimed to cultivate a *Ya* (refined) style and Confucian ideology, as demonstrated in the revised requirements for music and

dance during the *Taihe* era (477-499 CE) of Emperor Xiaowen, such as "only classical court music is appropriate for palace performances" and "eliminate tunes that are not in accordance with the classics."^{[1]1889} The third period occurred after Emperor Xuanwu's reign, during which Northern Wei's power waned and the court was plagued by turmoil. During the reign of Erzhu Rong, the Han people were massacred, and the music and dance system was damaged. After the fall of the Erzhu clan, the court needed to restore and continue the previous reforms, particularly the reconstruction of classical court music and dance. Since the sinicization policy during Emperor Xiaowen's reign had been somewhat successful by this time, the Confucian-inspired idea of "music and politics being in harmony" had been adopted by both Xianbei aristocrats and court officials. Therefore, the court's enthusiasm for ritual music and dance was not weakened but rather intensified, and hopes were placed on the development of music and dance as a way to govern the state. This might explain why, in the last year before Northern Wei's downfall, during Emperor Xiaowu's second year named *Yongxi* (533 CE), court officials were still actively revising music and dance.^{[1]1895-1889} Although the goals of cultural integration during the three periods of Northern Wei's music and dance development varied, they all aimed to eliminate ethnic differences and conflicts through cultural integration. In addition to integrating Han and Xianbei ethnic groups, Northern Wei also incorporated various ethnic music and dances of the Sixteen Kingdoms period, and assimilated the music and dance of Western regions such as Shanshan and Yanqi, among others.^[2]

The task of cultural integration faced by the Northern Wei was extremely arduous. They governed a country with multiple ethnic groups, religions, languages, and economic lifestyles, covering a vast territory. In consciously or unconsciously using the Han Chinese ritual music culture as the mainstay to integrate other cultures, the music and dance policy of the Northern Wei in the period of Tuoba Gui and Tuoba Tao or during the reigns of Emperor Xiaowen and his successors, the integrated cultures may also produce responses or even resistance. Therefore, cultural integration served the political power and was a rigid demand of the Northern Wei regime at that time, which had to be promoted in a compulsory way, eventually forming a systematic model.

3. Reflection of Cultural Integration on Music and Dance in Northern Wei

3.1 Integration of Music and Dance Forms and Styles

The first step taken by the Northern Wei in cultural integration was to learn and absorb Han culture. According to Chen Yinke's research, the Tuoba Xianbei tribe's adoption of Han music and dance culture was partly influenced by the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the first half of the Southern Dynasties (and another part from the culture of the Hexi Corridor).^[3]Chen Yinke mainly considered this from the perspective of Southern Dynasty officials such as Liu Fang. From the perspective of musicians and choreographers, the same conclusion can be drawn. In the second year of Emperor Xuanwu's *Yongping* era (509 CE), Minister Liu Fang instructed seven musicians and choreographers from Yangzhou and Yiyan (both in Southern Dynasty territory) to teach "the dance of *Bayi* (the dance formation has eight rows and eight columns), *wen* dance, martial dance, the playing of bells, wind instruments, string instruments, and the melody of *Dengge* (a song sung at the altar)" according to "Record of Music" in *The History Book of Wei*.^{[1]1891} Looking at the timeline, the year when Liu Fang began to revise the ritual music and dance was exactly the eighth year after the establishment of the Liang Dynasty (the first period of the Southern Dynasty). This means that the music and dance style represented by the seven musicians and choreographers from the South may still belong to the early Southern Dynasty period.

In the early stage of the Northern Wei Dynasty, Emperor Tuoba Gui appointed Deng Yuan to "establish musical modes and coordinate music," and introduced the *Bayi* and *Huangshi* music and dance performances.^{[1]1888} During ancestral worship ceremonies, the music and dance pieces *Wangxia*, *Yingshen Qu*, *Shenzhuo*, *Bibu*, *Bayi*, and *Songshen Qu* were performed in a specific order.^{[1]1888} These names suggest that, except for the *Huangshi* dance, which was created by Tuoba Gui himself, the rest were mainly drawn from Han music and dance traditions since the Western Zhou period. In the fourth year of the *Zhengshi* period (507 CE), Gongsun Chong memorialized Emperor Xuanwu on the various music and dances managed by the government's music and dance administration, the Yuefu. The list included "more than sixty pieces such as *Wangxia*, *Sixia*, *Dengge*, *Luming*, and so on from the previous generation's classical court music and dance, and also included *Wenshi*, *Wuxing*, *Shaowu*," as well as Tuoba Gui's newly created dance *Huangshi*, and later added *Wuyi* (ethnic minorities in the Wu region), *Dongii* (ethnic minorities of the East), and *Xirong* (ethnic minorities of the West) dances.^{[1]1891} This

suggests that by the middle and late period of the Northern Wei Dynasty, apart from the *Huangshi* and a small number of the music and dances from the ethnic minorities, the royal court mainly performed Han music and dances.

During the early period of Northern Wei, attempts were made to incorporate Han Chinese music and dance into the traditional Xianbei tribal rituals, including the "ritual of the sky" performed in the western suburbs of the capital. According to the "Record of Rites" in *The History Book of Wei*, the Xianbei ritual involved witches who danced on the altar while shaking their drums.^{[1]1827} This dance may have been similar to the shamanic dance of the Evenk and Ewenki ethnic groups in Northeast China today. The "Record of Music" in *The History Book of Wei* also described the addition of Han Chinese metal bell and stone chime music, as well as the *Bayi* dance, to the western suburbs ritual during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen.^{[1]1888} This "mixed-style" ritual coexisted with the pure Han Chinese style Southern suburbs ritual of the sky for some time. However, in the 18th year of the Taihe reign period (494 CE), Emperor Xiaowen discontinued the western suburbs ritual, and only the southern suburbs ritual of the sky was retained.^{[1]1837}

Despite the ongoing sinicization of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Xianbei people retained their own traditions of music and dance. The Xianbei song *Zhenren Dai Ge* was widely used in feasts and rituals, praising the ancestral founding of the Xianbei and the rise and fall of their rulers,^{[1]1889} which was consistent with their custom of singing to record family history. Based on research by Tian Yuqing, the tradition of singing to record family history was also widespread among the Xianbei people.^{[4]202-206} Even during the reign of Emperor Xiaowen, who actively promoted sinicization, the elderly minister Yuan Pi made a broad record of national affairs and sang about the political successes and failures, which was highly valued by the emperor.^[5] Some inscriptions on the tombstones of noble Xianbei buried in the late Northern Wei contained "examples of singing to record family history."^{[4]208}

In Northern Wei tomb murals, Xianbei music and dance were also used in some feast scenes. For example, in the banquet scene on the south wall of the M7 tomb chamber in the Shaling area of Datong (a city in Shanxi Province, China), four dancers were arranged in a horizontal row in the center of the banquet, standing on one leg and lifting the other leg in a bent position, which resembles the leg-lifting jump in some today's dances of the Evenki and Oroqen ethnic groups in northeastern China.^[6] This dance form also appeared in the banquet scene on the north wall of the M9 tomb chamber of the Tongjiawan in Datong.^[7] It was likely the representative dance of the Xianbei at that time.

In addition, the Northern Wei Dynasty also absorbed music and dance from ethnic groups in the Western Regions. Historical records explicitly state that Tuoba Tao "had communication with the Western Regions, and set up a department for the music and dance from Yuepan country."^{[1]1889} Furthermore, *Records of temples in Luoyang* recorded that in the city of Luoyang, more than ten thousand households of foreigners who had been assimilated, including many people from the Western Regions, resided in the Siyi District in the south of the city.^{[8]120} This suggests that there were already a large number of people from the Western Regions within the territory of the Northern Wei, and therefore, the music and dance of the Northern Wei should have included those from the Western Regions. Archaeological evidence supports this, such as the presence of a Hu people (the ancient Chinese name for the peoples of the northern borderlands and western regions) music band in the banquet and music scene depicted in the wall paintings of the Northern Wei tomb at Yunbolilu, Datong.^[9] Hu people dance figures were also discovered in the tombs of Song Shaozu in Datong^[10], Yunbolilu Northern Wei Tomb M10^[11], and Ranhua Tomb in Yanshi^[12].

3.2 Integration of Music and Dance Ideas

The cultural integration of Northern Wei is reflected not only in the forms and styles of music and dance but also in the absorption of Han Chinese music and dance ideas/ideologies.

An important aspect of the Northern Wei's absorption of Han Chinese music and dance ideals was the pursuit of *Ya Zheng* (refined and neutral) in Confucian music and dance ideology. This pursuit of *Ya Zheng* applied not only to style but also to content. The "Record of Music" in *The History Book of Wei* records that in the early Taihe period, Emperor Xiaowen "pursued the refined classical arts, demanded that the music must be in keeping with the refined and neutral style."^{[1]1889} Subsequently, the Northern Wei imperial court made many revisions to music and dance, emphasizing *Ya Zheng*. For instance, in the spring of the 11th year of Taihe (487 CE), Empress Wenming decreed: "The ancient kings created music to improve customs and manners, and it is not suitable to play music in the court that is not included in the classical courtly repertoire. It is necessary to collect both new and old music pieces,

explore the principles of music, and remove non-standard pieces to improve court music further." [1]1889 This suggests that the Northern Wei's pursuit of *Ya Zheng* in music and dance was consistent.

The music and dance revision initiated by Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei in the early Taihe era was not completed; nevertheless, eventually "music and the dance from different regions and barbarian tribes were slightly added to the imperial music. Musical instruments made of metal and stone, and dance props made of feathers and yak tails, are even more magnificent than in the past." [1]1889 Using music and dance from various regions and incorporating elements from different barbarian tribes into sacrificial and banquet ceremonies to symbolize the unified royal authority originated in the Western Zhou Dynasty. The book *Zhou Li* recorded that the *Meishi*, *Maoren*, and *Diloushi* were officials in charge of the music and dance of the barbarian tribes. [13]508-512 In the Han Dynasty, *Yuefu* (an official music and dance institution) included musicians and dancers from different regions and ethnic groups, such as the *Jiangnan Guyuan* and *Bayu Guyuan*. [14] Therefore, the music and dance revision initiated by Emperor Xiaowen followed the precedent of the Han dynasty in integrating diverse regional and ethnic traditions into a single system, symbolizing the unity of royal authority and the centripetal force of people from various regions and ethnic groups under the Northern Wei regime that regarded itself as the orthodox Chinese civilization.

In early Chinese thought about nature, *Qi* was considered the basic element of all things in the world, and it was also believed that music had its origin in Qi. Therefore, music could naturally be involved in all human social activities and was believed to have the power to connect humans with gods. [15]451-456 It can be seen from a decree issued in the winter of the 15th year of Taihe (491 CE) that the rulers of Northern Wei at that time also accepted this idea: "Music is what influences heaven and earth, affects gods and spirits, balance *yin* and *yang*, and communicates with humans and ghosts. Therefore, it can associate the wind of mountains and rivers to spread virtue to the whole world..." [1]1889-1890 The important aspect of music's involvement in human affairs is the use of musical scales to determine weights and measures. The earliest records of this practice can be found in the "Shun Dian" section of the *Book of History*, which describes how Emperor Shun correlated temperament and measure. [16] There are systematic discussions on this aspect in "Music Book" of *Shi Ji* and "Music and Calendar Records" of the *History Book of the Han Dynasty*. [15]483-484 The revision of Northern Wei's classical court music and dance also reflected this pursuit. In the tenth month of the first year of the Zhengshi era (504 CE) of Emperor Xuanwu, an official report by Li Chong suggested that "examinations should be made to determine its authenticity, and the musical scales should be thoroughly researched and weights and measures should be distinguished." [1]1890 Later, with the aim of ensuring that the musical scale of the bell corresponded to weights and measures, Emperor Xuanwu commissioned Gongsun Chong to revise the music and dance. [1]1891

Music and dance could also be a symbol of power and desire. "The emperor is at the top of the dominance hierarchy" and "occupies the largest share in the distribution of desires." [15]285 Through the distribution of music and dance, the emperor could distribute power and desires, thereby establishing a hierarchical order or reaching an agreement with his subjects. Early theoretical discussions of this aspect can be found in the book *Xunzi*. Northern Wei's emperors inherited this idea and applied it in practice. The *Records of Temples in Luoyang* records two occasions when Northern Wei rulers rewarded their officials with *guchui* (the band with main drums and wind instruments): during the Zhengguang reign (520-525 CE), Prime Minister Yuan Yong was rewarded with "one hundred people, including ritual bearers with ceremonial vessels made of feathers, *guchui*, and swordsmen;" [8]129 and in the fourth year of Yanchang (515 CE), after Yuan Yi's death, Empress Dowager Ling bestowed "one hundred people, including ritual bearers with ceremonial vessels made of feathers, *guchui*, and swordsmen, and two elegiac bands." [8]138 It is worth noting that in both cases, *guchui* was paired with swordsmen as rewards, further illustrating the power attributes of music and dance.

4. Reflection of Institutionalization on Music and Dance in Northern Wei

To fully integrate their diverse cultures, the Northern Wei dynasty needed to formalize their practices through institutionalization, which played a pivotal role in the cultural integration process. The institutionalization of music and dance in Northern Wei was not only reflected in written laws, but also in the behavioral norms and ideas that were widely accepted at the time.

Although there are no surviving written laws and regulations regarding music and dance in Northern Wei, the records in some historical books indicate that ritual and music activities were governed by textual regulations and constraints. According to the decree issued in the second month of

the sixteenth year of the Taihe era (492 CE), "The law is implemented among the people. There are clear regulations for sacrifices, and the rewards and punishments are clearly defined. Sacrifices must follow established practices... Now we will strictly follow the previous decrees and regulations, and make decisions according to them."^{[1]1836} This suggests that Northern Wei had established its own written ritual and music system by referring to the previous decrees and regulations of its predecessors.

Furthermore, the *Zhou Li* was an important reference text for Northern Wei's ritual and music system. *The History Book of Wei's* "Record of Rite" documents that in the eleventh month of the nineteenth year of the Taihe era (495 CE), Emperor Xiaowen and his officials discussed the ritual of worshipping Heaven on *yuanshi* (a round altar). The edict stated that "according to the *Zhou Li*, the worship of the Heavenly God at *yuanshi* is a great ceremony... although the design of existing *yuanshi* rituals of our Wei court refers to rituals from the time of the Three Emperors to the previous dynasty, we have not yet referred to the *Zhou Li* and made it into laws."^{[1]1837} During the subsequent dialogue between the emperor and his officials, Liu Fang said, "I carefully examined the part of 'Murenzhi' in the *Zhou Li*..." and Cui Yi said, "I refer to the *Zhou Li* to use drums and percussion instruments on all eight sides during the sacrificial ceremony..."^{[1]1838} In the autumn of the second year of the Yongping era (509 CE), the Director of the Imperial Secretariat, Gao Zhao, and others submitted a memorial to the emperor, stating that the specifications of the musical instruments made by Gongsun Chong were different from those in the *Zhou Li*, and requested that Liu Fang be authorized to remake the instruments according to the *Zhou Li*.^{[1]1891} In the second year of the Yongxi era (533 CE) of Emperor Xiaowu's reign, the Director of the Chamberlain for Ceremonials, Zu Ying, and the Secretary of State Officer, Zhangsun Zhi, submitted a memorial stating that "we have made a careful examination of the *Zhou Li*, and the music is described separately as follows... we examined the duties of the *Xiaoxu*, as well as the provisions for musical instruments, as recorded in the *Zhou Li*... we used the dimensions and methods of making bells and drums by Fushi and chime stones by Qingshi as recorded in the 'Kao Gong Ji' of the *Zhou Li* to make musical instruments."^{[1]1887-1902} These references to the *Zhou Li* in the discussions on ritual and music in Northern Wei indicate that the text was strictly followed and took on the nature of laws. This strict adherence to the regulations of the *Zhou Li* was a prominent manifestation of the institutionalization of music and dance in Northern Wei.

In addition, Northern Wei strictly followed the traditional rules of time and occasion for conducting music and dance activities. According to the "Biography of Emperor Taizu" of *The History Book of Wei*, on the *dinghai* day (the twenty-fourth day) in the second month, the musicians were ordered to enter the school to learn dances and present offerings to the saints and sages."^{[1]25} The chapter "Biography of Confucians" in *The History Book of Wei* also recorded that in the spring of the fourth year, the musicians were ordered to enter the school to learn dances and present offerings to the saints and sages.^{[1]245} These activities clearly followed the regulations of some traditional Han Chinese ritual classics, such as "Spring Officials" in the *Zhou Li*: "*Daxu*: Hold a plank in his hand, waiting for the students to attain. In the spring, enter the school, perform the ritual of presenting food to teachers and conduct the dance".^{[13]491-492} "Monthly Rules" in the *Book of Rites* stated, "In this month, the Music Master is ordered to enter the school to learn dances. Then, revise the canon of sacrifice."^[17] The chapter "Xia Xiao Zheng" in the *Book of Rites Signed by Dai De* mentioned that "On the *dinghai* day, enter in school to learn *Wan Dance*".^[18] The record of this annual "learning dance in spring" activity appeared twice in *The History Book of Wei*, and it took place during the reign of the Founding Emperor Tuoba Gui, indicating that the Northern Wei Dynasty had a strong institutional awareness of the time for music and dance activities from the very beginning.

The institutionalization of music and dance in the Northern Wei Dynasty is further demonstrated by its alignment with official ranks and titles. According to the "Biography of the Queen's Relatives" in *The History Book of Wei*, after the death of the Lord of the Situ, Hu Guozhen, he was posthumously awarded the title of Grand Preceptor, with additional nine ceremonial vessels as a sign of honor, and granted the right to use the music of *xuanxuan* (display of musical instruments hung on three sides) and perform the dance of the *Liuyi*.^{[1]241} The section titled "Spring Officials" in the book of *Zhou Li* stated: "With regard to the use of musical instruments, kings use *gongxuan* (displaying musical instruments hung on four sides), vassals use *xuanxuan* (displaying musical instruments hung on three sides), high officials use *panxuan* (displaying musical instruments hung on two sides), and general intellectuals without particularly high social status use *texuan* (displaying musical instruments hung on one side)."^{[13]494} In "The Fifth Year of Lord Yin" in *Gongyang's Annotations on the Book "Spring and Autumn"*, it was recorded that, for the regulations of the dance, the king use *Bayi* (the dance formation has eight rows and eight columns), vassals use *Liuyi* (the dance formation has six rows and six columns), high officials use *Siyi* (the dance formation has four rows and four columns).^[19] Therefore, it

can be seen that Hu Guozhen's use of music and dance followed the traditional normative practice of the Central Plains. This normative practice is also evidenced by the musical and dance artifacts found in Northern Wei tombs. Taking several tombs with relatively intact musical and dance figurines and clear identity of the tomb owners, such as the Yuan Zhi Tomb^[20], Yuan Shao Tomb^[21], Yang Ji Tomb^[22], Wang Wen Tomb^[23], Ran Hua Tomb^[12], and Lü Ren Tomb^[24], from the Luoyang region of the Northern Wei Dynasty as an example, *Table 1* shows that there is a general trend where the higher the rank of the tomb owner, the more musical and dance figurines there are, and only officials above the second-rank are eligible to own equestrian musicians. According to the ancient belief of "treating the dead as if he were alive," the configuration of these figurines should reflect the actual use of music and dance at the time. In addition, a comparison of the musical and dance artifacts in tombs from Pingcheng (before the Northern Wei moved its capital to Luoyang) and those from Luoyang (after the move) shows that the hierarchy of music and dance in Pingcheng tombs is much weaker and there are many ethnic minority music and dance artifacts mixed in, unlike the more uniform types of music and dance in Luoyang. This indicates that the hierarchy and institutionalization of music and dance in the Northern Wei Dynasty were a gradual process of development and strengthening.

Table 1: Comparison between the Rank of Northern Wei Officials and the Accompanying Burial Figures of Music and Dance

Tomb owner	Burial time (CE)	Highest official position	Official rank	Total number of figurines	Number of music and dance figurines	Type of music and dance figurines
Yuan Zhi	529	Grand Guardian, Minister of Civil Affairs	First-rank	212	21~40	Dance figurines, seated musicians, equestrian musicians
Yuan Shao	528	Grand Guardian, Minister of Civil Affairs	First-rank	115	14	Dance figurines, seated musicians, equestrian musicians, standing drummers
Yang Ji	533	Right Honorary Grand Officer	Second-rank	86	10	Dance figurines, seated musicians
Wang Wen	532	General of Fujun Holding the Emperor's Token	Deputy second-rank	62	7	Dance figurines, seated musicians, standing drummers
Ran Hua	526	General Who Guards the Far Reaches	Fourth-rank lower grade	31	10	Dance figurines, seated musicians
Lü Ren	532	General Who Pacifies the Distant Reaches	Fifth-rank upper grade	23	2	Dance figurines

5. Motivating Factors for the Institutionalization of Music and Dance in Northern Wei

The institutionalization of music and dance during the Northern Wei period was the result of a concerted effort from multiple factors.

Firstly, the continuous development of society, politics, and the economy demanded more refined institutions, which was the primary driving force behind the institutionalization of music and dance. If we examine the long period from the Han to Northern Wei Dynasty, we can observe that after the "decline of ritual and classical court music and dance" in the Spring-autumn Warring period (770-221 BCE), Chinese music and dance began to be standardized and institutionalized. During the Western Han period (202 BCE-8 CE), people such as Shusun Tong and Jia Yi attempted to create new rituals and music, but they were largely unsuccessful, and various folk music and dance continued to flourish. During the Eastern Han period (25-220 CE), although music and dance began to be institutionalized, it was still unregulated due to the prevalence of divination, sorcery, and the worshipping of spirits. The

Cao Wei Dynasty (220-265 CE) mostly followed the Han Dynasty's system, and although there were still instances of the mixing of court and folk music or dance, some measures were taken to standardize music and dance etiquette. For example, during the reign of Emperor Weiming's (an emperor of the state of Wei during the Three Kingdoms period) period, some court officials such as Liao Xi and Wang Su proposed to standardize the music and dance system, which was approved by the emperor.^[25] During the period of the Western and Eastern Jin and the Sixteen Kingdoms (265-439 CE), there was political turmoil, and there were few contributions to the establishment of ritual music. However, during the Northern Wei Dynasty, the court placed great importance on ritual music and dance. From the first year of the Tianxing period (398 CE), when Deng Yuan established *yayue* (classical court music and dance), to the second year of the Yongxi period (533 CE) when the name of the *yayue* was finally determined as *Dacheng*, a total of 136 years had elapsed. During that time, numerous discussions and revisions were made to the classical court music and dance, demonstrating the high level of importance that Northern Wei placed on music and dance standardization.

The continuing institutionalization of music and dance (emphasizing the importance of the *Zhou Li* in particular) from the Han to the Northern Wei was driven by the evolving society of medieval China, which demanded higher levels of institutions. According to Liang Mancang, the *Shili* (the etiquette of general intellectuals without particularly high social status) system established based on the authority of clan recorded in the book *Yi Li* during the Han Dynasty could no longer adequately serve the needs of governing the nation after the Han Dynasty. On the other hand, *the Zhou Li*, which served as the theoretical core of the "Five Rituals System" during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, "constructed a more extensive and complex system than the *Yi Li*, and provided a theoretical model for combining ritual systems with state institutions".^[26] Therefore, Northern Wei continuously promoted the institutionalization of music and dance, following the example of *Zhou Li*, to meet the evolving society's demand for institutions.

Secondly, the institutionalization of music and dance in the Northern Wei Dynasty was the result of the political governance needs. After taking over the Central Plains, most northern ethnic minorities in Chinese history had to demonstrate their legitimacy as the ruling power in governance. This was achieved by showing that they had inherited Han Chinese cultural traditions in governance. Thus, the Northern Wei rulers imitated and absorbed various aspects of Han Chinese political structure, religious beliefs, customs, literature, and art, and even sought to surpass the Southern Dynasties in these aspects. The revision or creation of rituals and music and dance was one of the essential aspects of this endeavor. In the second year of Yanxing (472 CE) during Emperor Xiaowen's reign, a decree was issued stating that "there were unacceptable practices in the Huai and Xu regions (these areas used to be within the boundaries of the Southern Dynasty), leading to the destruction of the religious ceremonies and the violation of the rituals. These practices included the participation of female witches, the debauchery of the ceremonies, animal sacrifices with drumming and dancing, and actor or actress's performance... To rectify the situation, the worship of Confucius's temple and ancestral halls must exclude women and those who violated the laws would be punished." ^[192] This decree shows that during Emperor Xiaowen's reign, the Northern Wei Dynasty's ritual and music standards were even stricter than those of the Southern Dynasties. During the middle and late Northern Wei period, the pursuit of *yazheng* style in court music and dance indeed surpassed that of the Southern Dynasties. According to the *Down version of Zheng Xi's stone table* inscription carved during the reign of Emperor Xuanwu, Zheng Xi commented that the music and dance of the Song of Southern Dynasties were somewhat mournful but lacked elegance and formality. The reaction of the Southern officials was "puzzled and silent."^[27]

Thirdly, the institutionalization and development of the music and dance system in the Northern Wei Dynasty were influenced by the political struggles of the Han Chinese elites for power. Since the Xianbei people established the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Central Plain's Han gentry needed to consolidate their political position and gain discourse power by developing music and dance institutions. However, the early Northern Wei rulers only used the Han gentry for their own benefit, and their status in the court was never secure. Despite making significant contributions to the development of the music and dance institutions, people like Deng Yuan and Cui Xuanbo were still seen as captives or surrendered officials and could be suspected and killed by Xianbei rulers, as exemplified by Li Li and Cui Hao. Emperor Xiaowen's promotion of sinicization reforms notwithstanding, some Xianbei nobles such as Mu Tai, Yuan Pi, and Lu Rui held anti-sinicization sentiments. Consequently, the Han gentry in the court could only support and promote sinicization policies, including the development of music and dance institutions, to assimilate the Xianbei nobles ideologically and to promote the acceptance of Han people and culture from within. By doing so, they aimed to obtain political discourse power.

6. Conclusion

The institutionalization and integration of music and dance in Northern Wei were rooted in the Han Chinese music and dance system, and the process was not always smooth. Initially, the Xianbei rulers had mixed feelings towards Han culture, and despite the Taihe reforms during Emperor Xiaowen's reign that promoted Han culture, anti-Han sentiments persisted among some Xianbei elites. Later, during the period of political turmoil caused by the powerful vassal Erzhu Rong at the end of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the achievements of the music and dance reforms of the Xiaowen reign were almost completely destroyed. Nevertheless, the transformation of music and dance in Northern Wei did not come to a halt due to these setbacks. After the fall of Erzhu Rong, Zhangsun Zhi and Zu Ying quickly restored the classical court music and dance system. Subsequently, the successor states named Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou, which originated from the Xianbei-led Sixteen Military Town, established their own music and dance systems based on the model of Northern Wei. This suggests that the institutionalization and integration of music and dance in Northern Wei were not merely superficial, but profound conceptual innovations.

The direct cause of the cultural integration and institutionalization of music and dance in the Northern Wei Dynasty was ethnic conflict. According to Confucian music and dance philosophy, "music unites, and ritual distinguishes."^[28] Music and dance played a role in resolving conflicts, and the ritual that accompanied music and dance established a new order after conflicts. This process of resolving conflicts and establishing a new order is also the process of cultural integration and institutionalization. Throughout the history of China's music and dance development, the process from ethnic conflict to cultural integration and then to institutionalization seemed to have a certain historical inevitability. During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, there was a tribal conflict between the eastern Shang and western Zhou, and Zhou Gong used rituals and music and dance to integrate culture and establish a system. In the Southern and Northern Dynasties, ethnic conflicts led to cultural integration and institutionalization, which was completed during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Each ethnic conflict acted as a catalyst that propelled the development of music and dance history into a new cycle.

The influx of the Xianbei people into the Central Plains certainly intensified ethnic conflicts during a certain period, but it also injected new vitality into the Central Plains' music and dance. The vibrant and exuberant character of northern ethnic groups, "extensive exchanges between various ethnic groups," and the West Asian music and dance that came into the melting pot of Central Plains culture from various channels all contributed to this vitality.^[29] The conflict of multi-ethnic cultures did not erase the essence of Han peoples' traditional ritual and music culture, but instead prompted people to re-examine the ancient legacy of the Western Zhou Dynasty, to discover the commonalities of ethnic groups within it, and ultimately led to the Northern Wei music and dance accommodating the cultures of different regions and peoples, connecting the past and present, and paving the way for the music and dance of the Sui and Tang dynasties.

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