

# The New Changes in Form and Cultural Motivations of Banquet Dance in Medieval China

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**Abstract:** Since China entered the medieval period, cultures from India, Central Asia, and northern nomadic peoples entered the Central Plains of the Han Chinese region, bringing new forms and reshaping the aesthetic form of Chinese banquet dance. Compared to the previous period, the new banquet dance of the medieval period exhibits three characteristics: first, the contraction of dance space; second, the symbolization of dance movements; and third, the concretization of dance content. These three characteristics jointly contributed to the gradual transformation of Chinese dance from technical display to narrative drama since the Han Dynasty and also had an impact on the aesthetic taste of the audience.

**Keywords:** Chinese; medieval; banquet dance; culture; transformation

## 1. Introduction

Banquet dance is an essential component of ancient Chinese dance. Since the Eastern Zhou period, court music and dance had declined and a large amount of folk dance entered the court, making banquet dance the most influential type of dance in society. Thus, it reflects the aesthetic taste of dance in the entire country. After entering the medieval period of China (the Wei-Jin, Northern and Southern dynasties, the Sui and Tang dynasties), diverse cultures originating from India<sup>①</sup>, the Western Regions<sup>②</sup>, and northern nomadic ethnic groups entered the central plains of the Han Chinese region. Large-scale ethnic fusion and the introduction of foreign religions, among other factors, not only brought new forms of dance but also reshaped the aesthetic form of Chinese banquet dance, laying the foundation for the further evolution of dance in later periods.

The new aesthetic characteristics of banquet dance in medieval China were distinct from those of the Han Dynasty. From the dance images in Han Dynasty's brick and stone carvings, pottery figurines, and murals, as well as the descriptions of dance in Han poetry, it can be seen that Han Dynasty's banquet dance emphasized the display of skills. Dancers often used large-scale body movements, coupled with props such as kerchiefs, sleeves, plates, and drums to occupy the space in a comprehensive way. Moreover, they often performed in a manner resembling acrobatics, displaying an artistic sense of powerful skills and techniques, which gave people a sense of surprise and wonder. On the other hand, these flashy dances were often mixed in with *baixi* (a term for the various performing arts of the Han folk in ancient China, particularly acrobatics.), various performances filling the audience's visual and auditory space to the fullest, thus achieving a "comprehensive depiction of things"<sup>[1]</sup> and "an impossible resemblance."<sup>[2]</sup> In summary, Han Dynasty's banquet dance demonstrated largeness and fullness in space, was fast-paced and swift in rhythm, and emphasized simple and intense emotional expression rather than complex plots or emotional representation. In contrast, some new forms of banquet dance that emerged during the medieval period under the influence of diverse cultures emphasized conveying complex and specific aesthetic connotations through diverse and detailed dance movements within a small bodily space.

## 2. Contraction of Dance Space

Compared to the Han Dynasty, many banquet dances of the medieval period gave the most intuitive impression of spatial contraction. This spatial contraction includes both the space of movement and the space of formation.

From the unearthed dance figurines and murals, it can be seen that the dance movements during this period rarely had the kind of arm lines projecting outward as seen in the Han Dynasty's portrait brick or

stone carvings. Especially in the female dancers, there was a tendency for the arms to be inwardly collected. This is reflected clearly in the female dance figurines unearthed from the Northern Wei and Sui-Tang periods in Shaanxi and Henan. The arms of these figurines mostly move within a small space range in front or to the side of the torso. From Tang poets' descriptions of the banquet dance of their time, this kind of convergence is evident, with the most typical example being the drooping hands movement (*chuishou*) that appears frequently in Tang poetry. For instance, Zhang Ji wrote in his "Song of Chu Palace": "The *Ba* (an area in southwest China) girl dances to the king, turning back with drooping hands to tie the bright beads."<sup>[3]</sup> Yuan Zhen also wrote in his "In Memory of Shuang Wen": "How could she dare to droop her hands, and not dare to look back with her waist?"<sup>[3]</sup> From the literal meaning, "drooping hands" is not the same state as the "fluttering sleeves creating wind" and "the fluttering silk like a winding dragon ascending the clouds"<sup>[4]</sup> of Han Dynasty dance, but rather a more introverted dance posture.

As for the lower limb movements, banquet dances during the medieval period also reflected the contraction of space. In the Han Dynasty's portrait bricks or stones and terracotta dance figurines, the dancer's lower limbs were mostly in a bow step or a large stride, with the angle between the two thighs often over ninety degrees. In contrast, during the medieval period, the range of motion of the lower limbs in banquet dances was greatly reduced. For example, in the Southern Dynasties portrait bricks unearthed from Dengxian, Henan, two female dancers danced facing each other with their legs side by side in a half-moon<sup>Ⓢ</sup> posture.<sup>[5]</sup> In Sui-Tang dance figurines, the standing posture with straight legs accounted for a large proportion. Even if the knees were slightly bent, the range of motion was not as large as that commonly seen in Han Dynasty dance. As for the Hu (the ancient Chinese name for the peoples of the northern borderlands and western regions) dances widely popular during the Sui-Tang period, such as *Hu Teng* and *Hu Xuan*, the emphasis is on the leaping and spinning within a small space range, as indicated by their names, rather than the expansion of the external space seen in Han Dynasty dance.

The emergence of this trend is first related to the influence of Indian and Western dance. There are many records in historical books about the introduction of Indian music and dance to China. For example, *The History Book of the Sui Dynasty* and *Old History Book of the Tang Dynasty's* records of *Qibuyue*, *Jiubuyue*, *Shibuyue* (the seven, nine, and ten departments of music and dance) all include the Indian music and dance.<sup>[6][7]</sup> Moreover, the Western Region's music and dance, such as those from Kucha and the Shule, which were introduced to the Chinese Central Plains during this period, were also influenced by Indian music and dance. According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a classical Indian treatise on drama and dance that was compiled between the 5th century BC and the 5th century AD, Indian dance places great emphasis on expressing meaning through gestures. To accurately convey the meaning of gestures to the audience, the movements of the upper limbs must be controlled within a limited space. The upper limb movements of Chinese medieval banquet dance were influenced by this aspect. As for lower limb movements, ancient North Indian and Western music and dance tended to showcase leg skills within a smaller space range, and the aforementioned *Hu Teng* and *Hu Xuan* are typical examples. This characteristic of lower limb spatial contraction can also be seen in classical Indian Kathak dance, which has been preserved in northern India to this day. Additionally, a prop called *wuyan*, originating from India and the Western Regions, also influenced the space range of lower limb movements in Chinese banquet dance. *Wuyan* is a small piece of textile, also known as *wuxi*, *qushu*, and so on, on which dancers perform. As the Tang poet Cen Shen wrote in his poem "Song for Field Officer Tian's Beautiful Dancer Who Dances Like a Lotus", "The hall is covered with red *qushu*, and one dance will amaze the world."<sup>[3]</sup> According to research by Professor Duan from Peking University, the term *qushu* (*wuyan*) is a transliteration of the ancient Indian Pali language.<sup>[8]</sup> The "Records of the Western Regions" in the *New History Book of the Tang Dynasty* recorded that during the Tang Kaiyuan period, the Mi Kingdom presented a *wuyan*;<sup>[9]</sup> while the "Records of the Western Regions" in the *Old History Book of the Tang Dynasty* recorded that in the ninth year of Tianbao period (750 CE), Persian envoys presented red fur embroidered *wuyan* and long fur embroidered *wuyan*.<sup>[7]</sup> These records indicate that *wuyan* was originally introduced into China from India and Central Asia. Many Tang poems described the use of *wuyan* in banquet dance, such as Chang Fei Yue's "Poem to the Beautiful Woman Named Tanrong", "Raise the hand to fix the flower hairpin, turn around and dance on the brocade *wuyan*,"<sup>[10]</sup> and Bai Juyi's "Writing a Poem on the Small Boat Again, Presented to Secretary Zhou, and Teased Weizhi", "*Wuyan* should be used by slim-waisted girls, while the fairy boat cannot hold bone-heavy people."<sup>[3]</sup> In murals, tomb paintings, pottery, jade, stone carvings, and other artifacts from the Sui and Tang dynasties that contain dance imagery, *wuyan* can often be seen.<sup>[11]</sup> In conclusion, it can be seen from the descriptions in Tang poems and images of dance artifacts that the space range of lower limb

movements of dancers on *wuyan* at that time was greatly constricted.

Furthermore, the dance style of northern nomadic people also influenced the spatial arrangement of banquet dances. During the Sixteen Kingdoms, Northern Wei, Northern Qi, Sui, and Tang periods, a large number of nomadic tribes, such as Xianbei, Qiang, Gaoche, and Di, entered the Central Plains. Their dance forms and aesthetic preferences became an integral part of banquet dances in the Central Plains. The common characteristic of their dances is that the movement amplitude is small and they do not emphasize large spatial arrangements. Take the three banquet dance movements in the Northern Wei period as an example: the first movement involves the dancer standing in place with hands on knees while moving feet vertically; related dance figurines can be seen in the Ran Hua tomb, Yuan Shao tomb, and Hengshan Road Northern Wei tomb HM621.<sup>[4]</sup> The second movement is similar to the first, except that one hand is placed on the knee while the other hangs down. This type of dance figurine can be found in the tombs of Yaozhao Huren of the Eastern Wei Dynasty and Tomb II-51 of the Gu'an Cemetery.<sup>[5]</sup> The third movement involves one hand on the knee and the other hand on the waist, and relevant dance figurines can be seen in the Ruru Princess tomb, the He Shaolong tomb of Northern Qi, the Shushun Lady tomb of Northern Qi, and the Jia Bao tomb of Northern Qi.<sup>[6]</sup> The common feature of these three movements is that the spatial expansion in the horizontal direction is extremely limited, and almost only the vertical stepping of the lower limbs is left. This movement style may have been influenced by the limited space in nomadic felt tents.

### 3. Symbolized Dance Movements

In the medieval period, some newly emerged banquet dance movements showed a trend towards symbolization. Symbolization refers to the detailed classification, naming, and meaning of dance movements, and the fixation of the matching relationship between the form and content of the movements. However, this symbolization is never completely possible, but only shows a tendency towards linguistic symbols.

The first step in the symbolization of dance movements is to make a detailed distinction between movements. This is manifested as the diversification of movements. Only by making the movement vocabulary as rich as possible can more dance phrases and dance segments be formed through the combination to express richer meanings. The richness of the movements in medieval banquet dances was indeed greatly improved compared to the Han Dynasty. From Han Dynasty stone or brick carvings and terracotta dance figurines, it can be seen that the arms of the Han Dynasty dancers were mostly straight lines and sleeves were used often. In contrast, in medieval dances, whether from dance figurines or murals, it can be seen that the dancers' elbows and other small joints are fully utilized to form more combinations of movements, and the direction of the arms is also more diverse. From some Dunhuang murals, we can even see movements similar to those in modern opera dance, such as Shun Feng Qi (flag in tailwind), Tuo An Zhang (holding one palm and pressing the other), and Dan Tuo Zhang (holding one palm), formed by the combination of the bending and straightening of both arms.<sup>[11]</sup> The lower limb movements in medieval banquet dances were also more diverse than in previous dynasties. The lower limb movements commonly seen in the Han Dynasty dances were only a few forms, such as the bow step, standing with both legs together, straddling, and kneeling with one leg. In the medieval period, in addition to these movements, there were also various movements similar to those in opera dance, such as Duan Tui (knee bending and leg leveling), Ye Tui (knee bending behind the other knee and feet lifting), and Shang Yang Tui (leg lifting forward and knee bending), as well as a variety of jumping movements, which can be seen from the murals and poetry descriptions of the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

The symbolization of dance movements is also reflected in the naming and classification of movements, which strengthens the exclusivity of each movement symbol. Descriptions of dance in Han poetry are mostly impressionistic and rough, while the vocabulary used to describe dance movements in medieval poetry shows a tendency towards standardization and terminological language. For example, the term *chuishou* (drooping hands) frequently appears in the poetry of the Southern and Tang dynasties, with a distinction between *dachuishou* (large drooping hands) and *xiaochuishou* (small drooping hands). Both Wu Jun<sup>[12]</sup> and Nie Yizhong<sup>[13]</sup> wrote poems titled "*Dachuishou*", while Wu Jun's poem "*Xiaochuishou*" contains the line "Tentatively repeat small hand drops."<sup>[12]</sup> Wang Han's "Spring Song of the Midnight" includes the line "walking with small drooping hands,"<sup>[12]</sup> and Li Shangyin's "Niyi" includes the line "gazing at small drooping hands,"<sup>[14]</sup> and so on. According to the *Miscellaneous Records of the Music Bureau* by Duan Anjie, "Dance is the visual expression of music.

There are big drooping hands and small drooping hands."<sup>[15]</sup> In addition to poetry, the Tang dynasty liquor game dance notation found in Dunhuang documents also reflects this kind of symbolic thinking. Although there are various interpretations of the way the dance notation is read today, most agree that words such as *wu*(dance), *nao*(twist), *zhuai*(pull), *yao*(shake), and *ju*(lean or rely on) in the dance notation each represent different dance postures or dance procedures. In conclusion, whether in poetry or dance notation, the way in which medieval people named and classified dance movements reflects an understanding of dance tending towards standardization and rationalization.

During the Wei-Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, and Sui-Tang periods, the symbolization of dance movements was also reflected in the introduction of dance gestures from India. The hand gestures in Indian dance are highly abstract, and the matching of the form and content of the movements is based on unconditional conventions rather than on intuitive similarity. This type of dance gesture was introduced to China along with Buddhism. Currently, although there are not many depictions of gestures in the wall paintings and dance figurines of ancient Chinese banquet dances, it can be inferred from the dances depicted in Buddhist grottoes murals and carvings along the Silk Road that gestures were certainly present in the banquet dances of that time. An indirect example is that there are many images of Rong Qiqi and the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove in the Southern Dynasty brick carvings unearthed in Nanjing and Danyang regions.<sup>⑦</sup> Although some of these figures are not dancing, their hand gestures and sitting postures are extremely similar to the dance images in the murals and carvings of the Kizil and Yungang grottoes. This provides a glimpse of the aspect of Southern Dynasty dance. Coincidentally, Shi Cun from the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts and Wang Qian from Xi'an Beilin Museum have copied a set of Tang Dynasty seated dance figurines based on overseas lost cultural relics.<sup>⑧</sup> The sitting posture of this set of figurines is quite similar to that of the figures in the Southern Dynasty brick carvings, and one of them also has similar hand gestures and arm movements to the Listening to the Dharma and Offering dance and the Heavenly Palace Music and Dance in the Dunhuang grottoes from the Northern Liang and Northern Wei dynasties.<sup>[16]</sup> This indicates that the hand gesture-focused dances of the Tang Dynasty had a certain inheritance relationship with the dances of the Southern and Northern dynasties. In addition, a unique hand gesture in Tang Dynasty female dance figurines was unearthed in Changwu, Shaanxi: the dancer stood upright, with her hands clasped together, her index finger pointing upward, and the other fingers curled up. This gesture is called *sūcīmukha* in Indian classical dance.<sup>⑨</sup> This dance figurine was probably used for performances involving chanting and singing with hand gestures. Overall, although the abstract dance gestures from India did not directly lead to the abstraction of ancient Chinese banquet dances, and their original connotations were mostly replaced, these gestures may have played a certain role in some opera or danced plays, and provided a new mode of thinking for them.

The diversification of dance movements, the classification and naming of movements, and even the direct adoption of Indian dance gestures by the Chinese were all mainly due to the influence of Indian culture, especially the unique way of thinking of ancient Indians permeating Chinese dance. Firstly, in terms of cultural attributes, many works of Chinese medieval banquet dance contained Indian cultural elements. For example, Bodhisattva Man Dance<sup>[7]</sup>, Vajra Dance<sup>[17]</sup>, Qiuci Music and Dance, etc. are all music and dance works with Buddhist themes. Moreover, some Buddhist or Brahman monks and believers directly participated in music and dance activities, such as Shaman Zhigong<sup>[6]</sup>, Cao Sengnu<sup>[18]</sup>, and Cao Brahman<sup>[19]</sup>. From a holistic perspective, although Buddhism was the main medium for cultural exchanges between China and India at that time, the influence of Indian culture on China was widely pervasive in various fields. This can be seen from the names of books recorded in the "Catalogue of Classics" of *The History Book of the Sui Dynasty*, such as *Brahman Jiejia Astronomy*, *Brahman Calculus*, *Brahman Herbal Formula*, and so on.<sup>[6]</sup> Even the classic *Golden Seventy Theory of Number Theory Sect of Indian Brahmanism* and the script of the Indian Sanskrit play *Sariputra Legend* were transmitted to China.<sup>[20]</sup> Therefore, the influence of Indian culture on Chinese culture was holistic, and banquet dance was just one aspect of it. Secondly, in terms of thinking style, ancient Indians were accustomed to classification, counting, analysis, and reasoning, which were integrated into their arts, philosophy, religion, science, and other fields.<sup>[21]</sup> This way of thinking also had a broad impact on various artistic categories in China's medieval period. Starting from the Six Dynasties period, China produced numerous literary and artistic theories that classified and graded art, including Zhong Rong's *Grading of Poetry*, Yu Jianwu's *Grading of Calligraphy*, Xie He's *Grading of Paintings*, and Sikong Tu's *Twenty-four Classifications of Poetry*. This way of understanding art is very similar to India's *Natyashastra*. The symbolization of dance movements in medieval banquet dances is also a specific reflection of the Indian artistic thinking mode in dance.

#### 4. Concrete Dance Content

Compared to the Han Dynasty, the content of banquet dances in medieval China became more concrete, which was mainly manifested in two aspects: the enhancement of narrativity and the synthesis of forms.

The enhancement of narrativity was a major trend in the entire Chinese literary and artistic world after the Han Dynasty, and dance was no exception. This was mainly reflected in the song-and-dance dramas (an early form of Chinese opera). In his book *A Study of Song-Yuan Opera*, Wang Guowei defined Chinese operas as "combining singing and dancing to perform a story." This kind of opera "began in the Northern Qi Dynasty" and was "widely seen" in the Tang Dynasty.<sup>[22]</sup> In other words, the dances in the operas of the Northern Qi Dynasty and the Sui and Tang Dynasties, such as *Damian*, *Botou*, and *Tayao Lady*, partially assumed the narrativity function of performing stories. However, on the other hand, Wang also believed that "the drama of the Tang and Five Dynasties period, either with singing and dancing as the main content, loses its freedom, or it performs a single story and cannot be accompanied by singing and dancing."<sup>[22]</sup> Here, Wang opposes singing and dancing to performing stories. Regarding this, Ren Bantang made sharp criticism. He believed that if singing and dancing "originate from the plot, revolve around the theme, complement each other, and are inseparable, then what is wrong with 'impurity' (in drama)? In the Tang Dynasty drama such as *Sumozhe*, the water-splashing game was used to depict the main theme of begging for cool, and the plot of a banquet in *Cure Jealousy* was accompanied by singing and dancing, which was necessary for realistic needs. As for the dance between people and lions in *Xiliang Ji*, it was used to create joy and pleasure at first and then reverse to depict the subsequent pain and bitterness. In *Tayao Lady*, the protagonist dances and sings to air her grievances, which is more of an inter-couple thing... It was different from the general decorated singing and dancing."<sup>[23]</sup> Ren's argument is very pertinent. From his argument, we can see that dance narration in operas is essentially the same as narration in some modern dance dramas, in which dance is not just a decoration or embellishment, but an organic part of the plot, serving to advance the plot. Ren divides the dances in song-and-dance dramas into three types: the dance integrated with the *kefan* performance, the dance inserted into the plot, and the dance that imitates the martial arts of war.<sup>[23]</sup> This classification shows that the dance narrative in the song-and-dance dramas of the medieval period was already very mature and had the embryonic form of today's opera dance.

Although dance can be used for narrative purposes, the polysemy of dance movements itself may weaken the accuracy of expression. The integrated performance form of song and dance in song-and-dance dramas solves this problem. Integration refers to the combination of singing, speaking, drama, and dance to form a performance. The lyrics of the songs and the lines of the speaking restrict the polysemy of dance movements, making the conveyance of meaning more accurate. According to Ren Bantang's investigation, song-and-dance dramas in the Tang Dynasty that simultaneously include singing, dance, and speaking are *Tayao Lady*, *Xiliang Ji*, and *King Lanling*. Works that contain dance and singing include *Yiyang Zhu*, *Fighting the Beast and Revenge (Botou)*, *Sheliefu*, *Sumozhe*, *Feng Guiyun*, *Su Zhonglang*, *Divine White Horse*, *Nong Jiadaliier*, *Yangtuo Huntuo*, *Lion with nine heads*, *Yiqian*, *Lu Canjun*, *Fan Kuai Solves difficulties for the Emperor*, *Guankoushen Dui*, and *Cure Jealousy*.<sup>[23]</sup> As Ren said, "If a dance is performed alone, it would become *baixi*." In other words, the speaking and singing in song-and-dance dramas anchor the meaning of dance, making the content of dance more specific.

The sudden rise of the song-and-dance dramas in medieval China is closely related to the influence of foreign cultures. These cultural factors mainly involve Buddhist literature and art, Indian Sanskrit drama, and even theatrical elements possibly transmitted from Persia. Many previous scholars, such as Wang Guowei, Xu Dishan, Zheng Zhenduo, Chang Renxia, Xiang Da, Ren Bantang, and Ji Xianlin, have conducted extensive research on these issues, which will not be repeated here.<sup>⑥</sup> It should be emphasized that in medieval times, narrative was not only reflected in the song-and-dance dramas, but also in the music, art, and literature of the same period. For example, the court of the Northern Wei Dynasty often created odes to extol the deeds of its heroes<sup>⑥</sup>, while the Buddhist grottoes contained a large number of wall paintings depicting jataka and sutra stories, and the genres of novels and narrative poetry did not emerge until after the Han Dynasty. Therefore, the acceptance of narrative in literary and artistic works in medieval times was holistic and had a certain psychological structure, which was possibly related to the epic narrative tradition of nomadic tribes. Since the Xianbei tribe entered the Central Plains after the Northern Wei Dynasty, they brought this tradition to the Han areas. In his book *Research on the Tuoba History*, Tian Yuqing conducted extensive research on the Xianbei tribe's tradition of "singing family history."<sup>[24]</sup> In fact, Indian and Persian cultures also contain certain

elements of nomadic tribes, such as the Kushan Dynasty in northern India, which was established by the nomadic Yuezhi people, and the ancient Persians who had the blood of the Aryans who engaged in nomadic life in the early days. Therefore, behind the acceptance of heterogeneous cultures, there may be a resonance of latent culture.

## 5. Conclusion

In the last part of his book *A Study of Tang and Song Dynasties' Daqu*, Wang Guowei raised a question: "The movements in Daqu dance all have a sense of order, which is incompatible with the freedom of movement in drama. However, in Song Dynasty drama, many of them can be found in novels, and they can perform scenes of any time and space, even perform humor, independent of the song. How can these two be merged? And when will they be merged?"<sup>[25]</sup> Although Wang Guowei was discussing Tang and Song Daqu, the essence of his question actually involved how the dance, which was biased towards skills display since the Han Dynasty, was integrated into the song-and-dance drama, and finally evolved into the narrative-oriented and more concrete expression of dance in the later opera. From the previous discussion, it can be seen that the crux of this problem lies in the transformation of banquet dance in terms of form and style under the influence of heterogeneous cultures in the Middle Ages. The convergence of various factors such as the shrinking of dance space, the symbolization of dance movements, the enhancement of narrative, and the use of multiple art forms together ultimately led to the generation of opera dance.

The formal transformation of the medieval banquet dance also implies a change in aesthetic taste. The symbolization of dance movements can lead to the formation of some fixed dance movements or performance routines, while the enhancement of narrative will lead to the gradual canonization of some storylines, such as the popularity of *King Lanling* and *Tayao Lady* from Northern Qi to late Tang. In this case, the aesthetic focus of some senior audiences is not on the dramatic effect of the plot, but on the performance skills of the actors. The shrinkage of dance space also benefits the actors' performance of some delicate movements. This phenomenon can be confirmed in the history of drama and dance in both China and the West - most audiences, whether in Chinese opera or European classical ballet, do not care about the fixed plot in those familiar classical works. For them, the real focus is the performance of the roles on stage.

The reasons behind the influence of heterogeneous cultures on the medieval banquet dance, in addition to the issues commonly discussed in the fields of dance and drama history, involve two aspects: the political environment and the cultural nature of the arts. During the Wei-Jin-Northern and Southern Dynasties period (220-589 CE), feudal separatism and continuous warfare, as well as invasions by northern nomadic peoples, severely impacted the traditional ritual music and dance culture of the Central Plains. At the same time, India's Gupta Empire (approximately 320-540 CE) was at the height of its cultural golden age, with highly developed music, dance, and drama that provided ample conditions for cultural exports. The Sassanid Empire (224-651 CE) situated at the crossroads of Eurasia also reached the pinnacle of cultural development. Therefore, China at least in the first half of the medieval period had a cultural deficit in the artistic exchanges with these two strong neighbors in South and Central Asia. In addition, after experiencing more than 300 years of turmoil during the Wei-Jin-Northern and Southern Dynasties, China had a desire to return to order, which was reflected in dance as well. The Indian dance mentioned earlier embodies the Indian people's "habit of classification, counting, analysis, and reasoning" thinking style, which corresponds to the Chinese pursuit of order, a pursuit that permeated the entire medieval period in China.

## Notes

① In this article, "India" refers to several countries in the Indian subcontinent that share certain cultural characteristics, including modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.

② In ancient Chinese literature, the meaning of the Western Regions (*Xiyu*) varied with the changing political boundaries of the Central Plains dynasties. In the "Xiyu Zhi" (the Western Regions Records) of *The History Book of the Han Dynasty*, the Western Regions mainly referred to the region west of Yumen Pass and east of Congling. In the Sui Dynasty, the Western Regions mentioned in the literature were west of Dunhuang and east of Congling, and north of Khotan. After the 14th year of the Zhenguan era of the Tang Dynasty (640 CE), the country's borders continued to move westward, and

the scope of the Western Regions successively became west of Gaochang and north of Khotan. For the sake of convenience in narration, this article defines the geographic scope of the Western Regions as including all the concepts of the Western Regions from the Han Dynasty to the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

③ "Half-moon position" is a term in Chinese Han-Tang classical dance. It refers to bending the joints of the ankle, knee, waist, ribs, and neck to create a lateral curve of the spine. This is described in Deng Wenyong's *Teaching Methods of Chinese Han-Tang Classical Dance* (Shanghai Music Press, 2011, p. 97).

④ The images of the three burial dance figurines can be seen in Wang Zhulin's "Brief Report on the Excavation of Two Northern Wei Tombs in Yanshi, Henan", *Archaeology*, 1993, Issue 5; Huang Minglan's "The Northern Wei Tomb of Yuan Shao in Luoyang", *Archaeology*, 1973, Issue 4; and Deng Xinbo's "Brief Report on the Excavation of the Northern Wei Tomb on Hengshan Road in Luoyang", *Cultural Relics*, 2009, Issue 3.

⑤ The images of the two burial dance figurines can be seen in Ci County Cultural Center's "The Eastern Wei Tomb in Dongchen Village, Ci County, Hebei Province", *Archaeology*, 1977, Issue 6; and Pan Weibin's "Eastern Wei Tomb No. 51 in Gu'an Cemetery II, Anyang City, Henan Province", *Archaeology*, 2008, Issue 5.

⑥ The images of the four burial dance figurines can be seen in Zhu Quansheng and Tang Chi's "Brief Report on the Excavation of the Tomb of Princess Ruru of Eastern Wei in Ci County, Hebei Province", *Cultural Relics*, 1984, Issue. 4; Li Xiuping and Yu Gu's "Clearing Report on the Northern Qi Tomb of Mr. and Mrs. He Shaolong in Anyang", *Central Plains Artifacts*, 1987, Issue. 1; and the Henan Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau's *The Northern Dynasties Tombs in Anyang*, Science Press, 2013, p. 30, 90.

⑦ The images can be found on the official website of Nanjing Museum: <http://www.njmuseum.com/zh/collectionDetails?id=465>.

⑧ This set of dance figurines was replicated with the support of the Chinese National Art Fund and was exhibited at the Shaanxi Provincial Library Exhibition Hall from April 2nd to 10th, 2021.

⑨ The images can be found in Liu Enbo's *Chinese Dance History: Ancient Heritage Images*, published by Shanghai Music Press in 2010, page 232, figures 3-18. These dance figurines are also collected in various museums in the United States, such as the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The explanation of the *sūcīmukha* in Indian classical dance can be found in Bharata-Muni's *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, translated by Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951), pp. 176-177.

⑩ The literature involved in this discussion includes Wang Guowei's *A Study of Song-Yuan Opera*, Zheng Zhenduo's *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*, Xu Dishan's "The Form of Sanskrit Drama and Its Impact on Chinese Drama", Chang Renxia's *The Silk Road and Cultural Arts*, Xiang Da's *Chang'an in the Tang Dynasty and the Civilization of the Western Regions*, Ren Bantang's *The Plays in the Tang Dynasty*, and Ji Xianlin's "The Relationship between the Tocharian Play 'Meeting of Maitreya' and the Emergence of Chinese Opera".

⑪ It is recorded that Emperor Taiwu of Northern Wei, Tuoba Tao, ordered his singers to sing praises for his courtiers, saying, "Intelligence like Cui Hao, integrity like Dao Sheng." Emperor Wen of Northern Zhou ordered his musicians to compose ten songs titled *Changshan Gong Ping Liang Ge* (Ode to Lord *Changshan's* Pacification of Liang) and had his courtiers sing them. Reference: Li Yanshou, *Beishi*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000, p. 532, 556.

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