

# Research on the Integration Teaching of Dance-related Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Ethnic Folk Dance Professional Course in Local Universities

Lan Xun<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China  
236625688@qq.com

**Abstract:** In recent years, China has been paying increasing attention to intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and exploring new paths to stimulate the vitality of ICH by relying on characteristic resources and actively promoting the integrated development of "ICH+" under the new trend. Based on the current requirements for the creative transformation and innovative development of ICH, the paper proposes an innovative platform that integrates "dance-related ICH+professional course in local universities" starting from the urgency of talent cultivation in local universities and the transmission of dance-related ICH through personal example as well as oral instruction. The aim is to establish the Ethnic Folk Dance professional course in local universities, focusing on the distinctive development in professional courses and dynamic teaching methods, so as to provide a solid foundation for nurturing talents in dance-related ICH and the development of dance discipline, fostering mutual collaboration, sharing, and improvement between both parties.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, Integration Teaching, Ethnic Folk Dance, Professional Course

## 1. Background of Integration Teaching

Intangible cultural heritage (hereinafter referred to as ICH), as the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, is a precious, important and cultural resource that needs to be preserved and inherited. As an important part of ICH, the prosperity of dance-related ICH contributes to the prosperous development of Chinese nation culture. Although the preservation and research of ICH in China started late, with the official accession to *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*<sup>1</sup> of UNESCO, the strength and speed of preservation for ICH in China is amazing. In addition, with the promotion and enhancement of the aesthetic education concept, dance education in universities has ushered in new opportunities.

In recent years, scholars have carried out certain researches on the preservation and inheritance of ICH, dance-related ICH, and dance education in universities, but the research is not targeted enough and not thorough enough, which leaves room for progress. Especially in the dance education in universities. It is worth pondering in what way, what kind of courses to offer or what kind of existing courses to integrate in order to develop education more scientifically and effectively. At present, dance-related ICH is facing the problem of how to preserve its authenticity and inherit it dynamically. Meanwhile, professional education in universities faces the practical problems of improving education level, enhancing education attractiveness, enriching education system and improving professional talents training. This paper discusses whether the dance-related ICH and professional education in universities can be closely integrated, promote and improve with each other, give full play to the contemporary value of ICH and the resource advantages of dance education in universities, and establish the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities, focusing on the distinctive development in professional courses and dynamic teaching methods, so as to promote the comprehensive preservation and steady inheritance of dance-related ICH while promoting the

1.The Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted at UNESCO's 32nd General Conference in October 2003 and aims to protect intangible cultural heritage represented by tradition, oral expression, festive rites, handicrafts, music, dance, etc.

collaborative and innovative development of education in universities.

## 2. Necessary Conditions for Integration Teaching

### 1) Triple Guarantee

Dance-related ICH is a living record centered around "people" and conveyed through body movements. It carries the artistic forms of ethnic groups, undergoing changes and being passed down from generation to generation in various ethnic groups and regions. The most ideal mode of preservation and inheritance for dance-related ICH is spontaneous inheritance within ethnic groups. However, in today's society, internal preservation and inheritance alone are insufficient to bear the heavy responsibility of preserving ICH. With the gradual progress of national efforts in ICH preservation, attempts and explorations are made to achieve preservation and inheritance through various platforms. In this paper, the platform refers to local universities, but in addition to those platforms, it is also necessary to establish a safeguarding system through a collaborative mechanism for ICH preservation. **First, the availability and accessibility of teaching space forms a foundation for the implementation of the "dance-related ICH+professional course in local universities."** In the study of the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course, in order to improve the quality of dance learning, the school, considering the particularity of local dance-related ICH, such as dances with large props or multiple participants that require a teaching space outside the classroom, needs to take various measures to ensure full coverage of learning venues and equipment, guaranteeing the smooth implementation of ICH inheritance teaching. **Second, a qualified faculties are the driving force behind the steady progress of ICH preservation and inheritance, and teaching.** The faculty refers to both inheritors of dance-related ICH and university teachers. Both positions are indispensable and interconnected, and should adhere to tradition without losing its essence in order to activate and enhance the power of dance-related ICH inheritance in the field of education in the new era. **Third, sufficient financial support is the backbone of the development of "ICH+professional course."** Local governments and universities should fully utilize their financial support and guiding functions, increase the financial investment, establish dedicated funding mechanisms for ICH preservation in universities, and implement measures to ensure standardized utilization of funds. Only through these actions can the work of ICH preservation and inheritance be further implemented, and the teaching of dance-related ICH be carried out smoothly.

### 2) Collaboration Between three Parties

With the gradual progress of national efforts in ICH preservation, various fields have leveraged their respective strengths and realized the preservation and inheritance of ICH through the specialized platform. However, ICH, guided by the core principle of "people-oriented" requires the active involvement of key inheritors in the platforms to carry out practical preservation work and foster coordination and cooperation among different forces. In this paper, the "three parties" refers to the people involved. **The first party is the inheritors.** The inheritor should shoulder the responsibility of cultural conscious inheritance and practice, and should also have self-discipline and self-restraint in social behavior in industry or field. We should actively carry out propaganda activities, carry out the art of disciples, train new people, and lead the practice of true cultural transmission. For dance-related ICH, authentic and dynamic inheritance is essential. The inheritors, as the core guardians, must personally engage in the teaching process, fully exercising their roles in transmitting, assisting, mentoring, and teaching. **The second party is the students.** The recipients of education in dance-related ICH are students enrolled in university dance programs who represent the new driving force in the ICH inheritance chain. Through the authentic teaching by the inheritors, they can more efficiently and smoothly absorb the dance content compared to the general public. Through learning to train outstanding dance academic scientific research-type talents to provide a solid foundation for the development of dance, but also to train dance practice talents to help inherit and development. This approach not only promotes talent cultivation in dance-related ICH, but also injects "new capabilities" into local dance inheritance and provide "new impetus" for the continuation of the tradition. **The third party is the teachers in universities.** In many regions of China, the inheritance work is carried out by teachers who learn, modify, arrange, and then teach the content to students. While this practice can be seen as an innovative transmission of dance-related ICH, for students, who have not been exposed to or learned the authentic and original form of ICH, this approach has deviated from the essence of preservation and inheritance. Therefore, university teachers should first adhere to the original heritage of the inheritors. From the perspective of teachers, they can assist the inheritors in theoretical teaching or provide guidance in later-stage training. This further enhances students' understanding and

comprehension of the dance-related ICH they are studying, achieving both adhering to the tradition and not losing its essence.

As the three implementing parties to realize the integration teaching of dance-related ICH and the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities, it is necessary to systematically organize and select the dance content for teaching, to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the educational content incorporated into the course of *Chinese Ethnic Folk Dance*—and the genuine preservation and inheritance of traditional dances, thus realizing the organic integration of "dance-related ICH+professional course in local universities".

### 3. Teaching Platform for Integration

#### 1) Professional Practical Teaching in the *Ethnic Folk Dance* Course

Local universities serve as the optimal grounds for cultural research and inheritance. In most local universities with dance majors, *Ethnic Folk Dance* is the core course for dance majors and a compulsory course for dance careers. It creates conditions for students to engage extensively with folk dance culture and master dance performance skills. Its teaching objectives are to teach the heritage of Chinese folk dance culture and the style of folkloric dance, enabling students to master the vocabulary, style, teaching methods and performance skills of various styles of ethnic folk dances from different ethnic groups and regions. And cultivate students' belief and ability to be passionate about Chinese folk dance and aspire to be involved in dance performance and education, laying the foundation for becoming qualified dance performers and educators in the future<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, it is evident that the *Ethnic Folk Dance* course in university dance programs possesses distinct advantages in the preservation and inheritance of traditional dance culture. In the *Ethnic Folk Dance* course at these universities, there are professional inheritors for the transmission of China's traditional regional dance culture, featuring multi-faceted modes of inheritance and offering abundant opportunities for further development. Moreover, the dance education in universities diverges from societal inheritance, as it strives for a deeper exploration of culture. The *Ethnic Folk Dance* course, embedded within the professional dance courses, bears direct relevance to dance-related ICH and is closely aligned with the essence of regional dance-related ICH. Through organic integration with the course, diverse and rich approaches can be explored in terms of inheritance and educational aspects. However, it is worth noting that prior to the implementation of the course, it is necessary to clarify the differences between dance-related ICH and professional dance education, and effectively coordinate the relationship between them. This prerequisite ensures the organic integration and development of dance-related ICH in the course. For instance, in contrast to the educational objectives in the original *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course, a course that incorporates dance-related ICH should prioritize the core principles of "root safeguarding" education, "inheritance" education, and "transmission" education. Only through authentic teaching and learning methods can students be provided with the proper guidance for the dynamic preservation and inheritance of dance-related ICH.

#### 2) Teaching Content of the "*Ethnic Folk Dance*" Professional Course

Based on the rule of education and teaching requirements, as well as the unique characteristics of dance art, the author has made clear plans from the following aspects and put forward relevant ideas and suggestions.

**First, the selection of dance-related ICH categories.** As of 2022, a total of 356 dance categories have been selected as national ICH in China. In addition to national ICH, China also has a list of provincial, municipal and county-level ICH. From collection to documentation, from innovation to development, more and more dance categories are being excavated and sorted out. However, the recognized number appears to be huge, but not every category is preserved intact. Even after being recognized as an ICH, there are individual categories that cannot be inherited due to various factors, and even fall into endangerment. Throughout universities in China, in activities such as the introduction of ICH into the campus, the preferred dance ICH categories are mostly well-preserved, steadily inherited and well-developed. However, the author holds that the reason for preserving these traditional cultures is that they are easily destroyed or disappeared. We should follow the policy of "preservation focused, rescue first"<sup>[2]</sup> in the preservation of ICH, and adopt the practice of "general investigation, while rescuing, and preserving" to give priority to the preservation of endangered ICH categories. Therefore, in the selection of dance-related ICH categories, i.e. course contents, priority can be given to municipal and county-level dance-related ICH categories that are on the verge of disappearing and have difficulties in inheritance, making concerted efforts to promote the preservation of endangered ICH

categories, so that precious, endangered and important regional traditional dances can be effectively preserved.

**Secondly, promote the popularization of dance-related ICH education concepts.** Educational concepts refer to the ideas or notions formed by the educational subject's thinking about education and its phenomena<sup>[3]</sup>. They are the outcome of rational understanding as well as the crucial initial step in educational output. In the common *Ethnic Folk Dance* course, teachers employ various ethnic teaching materials and training methods in different styles, complemented by vivid and effective teaching techniques. After undergoing processing and arrangement, they will process and beautify rhythm manipulation, use of space, form, and structure, and then instruct students, so as to enhance students' grasp of diverse ethnic performance styles. However, in contrast to the common *Ethnic Folk Dance* course, ICH education emphasizes the core concepts of "root safeguarding" education — the protection of the essential substance or nature of dance-related ICH — as the primary focus, followed by "inheritance" education, and finally "transmission" education. Therefore, based on the core concepts of "root safeguarding" education, "inheritance" education, and "transmission" education and the educational concepts of popularizing ICH preservation and inheritance, correct guidance should be provided to inspire students in the dynamic preservation and inheritance of ICH.

**Thirdly, lay a solid theoretical foundation for practice.** Currently, although the *Ethnic Folk Dance* in universities is a practical course, besides imparting skills and dance forms in teaching, the historical and cultural content embedded in dance can also be explored, organized, and realized through the *Ethnic Folk Dance* course. Therefore, in the initial stages of teaching, university teachers can assist the inheritors in imparting the cultural content and humanistic spirit behind dance forms at the theoretical level, establishing a foundation of ICH cultural awareness among university students. By rooting the theoretical knowledge in the soil, fruitful results can be achieved in the course of learning. The early popularization of theoretical knowledge not only improves and enriches the teaching system of the *Ethnic Folk Dance* course, but also provides a solid theoretical basis for the subsequent practical course content. At the same time, it also provides a powerful approach to cultivating academic and comprehensive talents in dance education.

**Fourthly, blossom with vitality in the practical courses.** The "practical" refers to the dance practical courses in the middle and later stages. Through the theoretical introduction in the earlier stages, students have gained a conceptual definition and an understanding of the content and forms of dance-related ICH, playing an introductory role in the smooth progress of practical courses. In the practical courses, teaching is centered around the inheritors. The concept of "root safeguarding" should be integrated throughout the entire teaching process, and the dance taught should remain authentic and be taught and learned in its original form without any modifications or innovations<sup>[4]</sup>. Moreover, in course design, the inheritors should differentiate themselves from the general student population, making the classroom teaching content more focused on training and systematic in nature, deepening the practical training value and educational significance of integrating dance-related ICH and *Ethnic Folk Dance* course. To quote the famous dancer Jia Zuoguang, "To innovate folk dance art on the basis of excavation, inheritance and accumulation, we should focus on capturing dance images in life, perfecting techniques, and keeping eye on folk dance with modern concepts." This shows that practice not only allows students to be skilled in techniques, but also allows them to experience folk dance, and to understand and master more dance knowledge. Therefore, after completing the basic learning in classroom, we can develop our practice in "supplementary education". The survival of dance-related ICH is inseparable from its primary soil. Without a specific environment, ICH will lose the soils and spaces it lives on. Therefore, in addition to the fixed classroom learning of *Ethnic Folk Dance*, more rich and varied practical activities should be offered, such as collect folk songs, so that students can personally practice, feel and experience, discover and express themselves in life, and feel the close connection between ethnic folk dance and people's life and culture for every moment, so as to improve the efficiency of teaching.

**Lastly, promote transmission through artistic presentations.** Through classroom learning, students in the dance major acquire the most authentic dance movements and techniques, and then showcase them through course presentations and other means of artistic expression. The process of artistic presentation serves as an additional educational experience for students. When they perform on stage as dancers, the recognition they receive will further strengthen their sense of identity in regional dance culture and self-confidence. Moreover, artistic presentation functions as an effective means of transmitting dance-related ICH. Through various dance performances to display traditional dance culture in the public eye, promote the development of intangible cultural heritage. By combining the course with artistic practice and social engagement, a mutual and interconnected relationship is

established<sup>[5]</sup>, fostering a rich nourishment for the integration of "dance-related ICH+professional course in local universities."

#### 4. The Value of Integration

Dance-related ICH possesses the art form and cultural symbols derived from the profound historical and cultural accumulation, and its connotation carries the historical memory of a nation or region. Unlike ballet, modern dance or ballroom dance, the expression of dance-related ICH is not excessively decorated, with simple and unsophisticated clothes and simple forms. The authentic "original" beauty represents an orderly life, spiritual perfection and purity of faith. The offering of integration courses for dance education in local universities allows students close access to our national treasure from their own learning environment and to give play to their own advantages to create more value. In this paper, by exploring the integration teaching of dance-related ICH and the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities, it is considered that the value can be realized in the following aspects:

##### 1) From the Aspect of ICH

###### **Contributes to the exploration of local cultural heritage and the viability of dance-related ICH.**

The dance-related ICH is so historically significant to the development of a nation, precisely because it embodies the aesthetic personality and cultural spirit of a specific nation or group, and its uniqueness has no substitute for other cultures that are dependent on modern industrial society. In today's fast-paced and highly information-driven society, various ICH are facing multiple challenges from modern civilization and foreign cultures, with many of them at risk of being lost. With their unique regional characteristics, local universities assume a unique mission and an essential role in the preservation and inheritance of ICH. They cultivate special ICH inheritors by virtue of their professional course construction and local resource advantages, which not only ensure the viability of ICHs but also strengthen the foundation of regional culture, promoting the healthy and sustainable development of dance-related ICH.

##### 2) From the Aspect of Professional Education in Universities

**Facilitates new thoughts in the teaching reform of professional course and promotes the development of dance education.** By utilizing the openness, diversity, and ethnic characteristics of dance-related ICH in the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course, it not only nurtures students in preserving and inheriting the foundations of traditional culture, but also promotes collaborative innovation and development in higher education. It also enhances the appeal of dance education and professional dance courses, and promotes the development of dance education in local universities. In addition, according to the requirements of Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which provided that "...build a curriculum system and teaching material system of intangible cultural heritage, and publish books on general education of intangible cultural heritage...strengthen the discipline system and professional construction of intangible cultural heritage in Colleges and universities...", the construction of ICH disciplines in universities in China have been put on the agenda. The integration teaching of dance-related ICH and the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities contributes to the construction of discipline groups around "science of cultural heritage", and establishes a solid foundation for the training of ICH talents and discipline construction, in line with the realistic needs of China's ICH in the new era.

##### 3) From the Aspect of Integration Development of Both Sides

**Establishes a platform for resource sharing, promoting mutual collaboration, sharing, and joint improvement.** After 20 years of practical exploration, China's ICH preservation has evolved from simple actions to multidimensional preservation, developing a unique four-levels list system of ICH categories and a unique way of preservation and inheritance as well as development. Universities play an important role as one of the important preservation subjects of ICH. Through the research on the integration teaching of the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities, the dynamic educational model of "ICH+university" and "ICH+profession" can be advanced. By seamlessly integrating ICH education with contemporary educational approaches, it fully leverages the interconnectedness between "internal" and "external" elements, and collectively promotes the cultivation of ICH talents and the construction of disciplines, creating a harmonious and shared scene nationwide. The integration teaching also plays a distinctive role in the construction of a human community with a shared future.

## 5. Conclusions

In the current era, relying on the professional talent cultivating mechanisms and course objectives of local universities, a reasonable and scientific path can be found for the effective preservation and inheritance of dance-related ICH education. This paper explores the integration teaching of dance-related ICH and the *Ethnic Folk Dance* professional course in local universities and proposes "to promote the popularization of dance-related ICH education concepts", "to lay a solid theoretical foundation for practice", "to blossom with vitality in the practical courses", "to promote transmission through artistic presentations" and other contents focusing on the distinctive development and dynamic teaching methods, so as to promote and enrich the ways and modes of inheritance, and collaborate in cultivating ICH inheritors. The feasibility of the ideas and approaches mentioned above still requires practical testing. They need to be explored in practice so that they can be gradually formed and improved. Besides, on the basis of existing research, how to further bring into play the advantages and characteristics of each university, and to collaborate with schools, enterprises and localities for education, jointly helping the creative transformation and innovative development of the dance-related ICH, are topics to be considered and practiced in the future.

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