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# The Extraction and Teaching Transformation of the Movement Vocabulary of Lingnan Lion Dance

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**Abstract:** Lingnan lion dance is an intangible cultural heritage that integrates martial arts, dance, and music. Its dance movement vocabulary not only serves as a carrier of skills but also embodies profound folk culture and spiritual symbols. In the face of the common problems in the current lion dance inheritance, such as “emphasizing form but neglecting spirit,” “low efficiency of oral transmission and hands-on teaching,” and the lack of a systematic teaching system, scientific refinement and teaching transformation of the movement vocabulary have become the key to its contemporary inheritance and development.

**Keywords:** Lingnan lion dance; Dance movement vocabulary; Teaching transformation

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## 1. Introduction

The Lingnan lion dance, as a symbolic folk activity prevalent in Guangdong, Guangxi, and overseas Chinese communities, has a history dating back to the Tang and Song dynasties. It is a highly integrated entity of martial arts, dance, drum music, and folk beliefs. It is not only a visual feast during festivals, but also a cultural symbol that consolidates community identity, prays for good fortune and well-being, and showcases the spirit of martial valor. The core of the lion dance performance lies in the coordinated manipulation of the lion head and body by two performers through a series of highly stylized and highly expressive dance movements, simulating the form, habits, and interpreting specific narratives (such as “picking the green”) of the lion. Eventually, it forms a unique body language system: the lion dance movement vocabulary<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. The basis for the refinement of the Lingnan lion dance movement vocabulary

### 2.1. The composition of cultural roots

The cultural roots of the Lingnan lion dance movement vocabulary are closely linked to the geographical, historical, and social background of Lingnan. Lingnan is mountainous, with complex terrain, which makes the local people need to possess flexible and agile body coordination and adaptability. The movements in the lion dance, such as leaping, moving, dodging, and avoiding, are elements related to the way people move in the mountains and forests, reflecting their

adaptation and utilization of the natural environment. At the same time, Lingnan has experienced multiple immigration waves throughout history, and different cultures have collided and merged here. The lion dance culture has absorbed elements from the Central Plains culture, Baiyue culture, and overseas cultures, and its movement vocabulary contains the robustness and power of Central Plains martial arts, as well as the agility and liveliness of Baiyue dance, forming a unique cultural integration form <sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2.2. The meaning of ritual symbolism**

The lion dance performance in Lingnan has a deep ritual connotation, and its movement vocabulary carries rich symbolic meanings. For example, the core movement “picking the green,” where “green” is usually replaced by lettuce, symbolizes wealth and vitality. Through a series of movements such as exploring green, testing green, picking green, and spitting green, the lion represents the pursuit and acquisition of wealth, good luck, and vitality. The entire “picking the green” process is like a solemn ceremony; each movement has a specific sequence and meaning, representing wishes for blessing, warding off evil, welcoming new beginnings, etc. In addition, the movements such as shaking the head, swaying the tail, and blinking in the lion dance performance not only imitate the form-like appearance of the lion god, but also symbolize the arrival of auspiciousness, warding off evil and disasters, bringing peace and good fortune to people.

## **2.3. Types of dance expression**

From the perspective of dance expression, the Lingnan lion dance movement vocabulary can be divided into two types: the vigorous and powerful type and the light and agile type. The vigorous and powerful type of movements is characterized by large opening and closing movements and great rhythmic changes, usually using large-scale body movements and strong rhythm changes to reflect the majesty and strength of the lion. This type of movement is often seen in large-scale celebrations and important ritual occasions, creating a spectacular atmosphere through powerful performances, showcasing the heroic spirit and strength of the Lingnan people. The light and agile type of movements focuses on the delicacy and flexibility of the movements, with small-scale jumps, rotations, and rapid changes as the main features, emphasizing the liveliness, playfulness, and charm of the lion. This type of movement is often used in small festivals or community activities, allowing the audience to feel the fun and friendliness of the lion dance performance, bringing them closer to the audience <sup>[3]</sup>.

# **3. The scientific refinement of the Lingnan lion dance movement vocabulary**

## **3.1. Experience collection and cultural acquisition**

During long-term performance practices, the inheritors and senior performers of the Lingnan lion dance have formed exquisite physical memories, combining traditional and contemporary movement techniques, rhythm control, etc., which are both lifelike and complete, and represent a profound understanding of the inheritance process, life experiences, and emotional expression. These long-term accumulated experiences and summaries are emotional impulses, and also the source from “experience” to “mastering.” At the same time, conducting on-site research on different styles and diverse forms of performances, collecting original materials of unique movement vocabulary, can form a rich movement resource library, laying a solid foundation for cultural acquisition <sup>[4]</sup>.

## **3.2. Action refinement and dynamic analysis**

Refining the original materials is an essential process in creating a teaching material. Analyzing the core rhythm, dance posture, movement trajectory, and other elements of the actions, studying the logical patterns among the actions, and clarifying the composition of the original form are necessary to achieve professional attributes. Additionally, defining the action terms for the powerful and vigorous type of actions and the light and agile type of actions with their folk original names, emphasizing the analysis of the movement process in terms of hand positions, foot positions, emotions, and

rhythms, enables the formation of a unique style. Only then can the typical dance action vocabulary reflect the unique characteristics of the dance genre.

### **3.3. Module construction and teaching orientation**

There is no absolute standard for classifying teaching combinations. The action forms and functions can be analyzed and then modularized for construction. Different modules can be formed based on the progressive and sequential thinking of actions, from simple to complex. For example, classification can be made according to the performance theme (such as exploration, gathering, fighting, etc.) and the style of the action (strong and vigorous type, light and agile type), forming a step-by-step progression from element training to performance combination. Each combination has the original action characteristics and functions, embodying the “academy-style” teaching orientation of “derived from folk, superior to folk,” making the lion dance action vocabulary more systematic, standardized, and professional <sup>[5]</sup>.

## **4. Transformation path of contemporary teaching of Lingnan lion dance**

### **4.1. Innovative teaching model**

By leveraging the advantages of modern educational technology, adopt a teaching method that integrates online and offline resources for complementary benefits. In the online part, create high-quality instructional videos, utilize multimedia to showcase the details and rhythm of the lion dance movements, and develop a specialized app for learning lion dance movements, providing step-by-step teaching, slow-motion playback, and key point explanations, enabling learners to break through the limitations of time and space, flexibly and autonomously arrange their learning process, and promptly consolidate and review relevant knowledge at any time. In the offline part, arrange face-to-face practical courses, where experienced teachers conduct on-site demonstrations and personalized guidance, promptly correct and provide feedback on learners’ movement deviations, ensuring the accuracy and expressiveness of the movements. Additionally, actively introduce group cooperative learning mechanisms, through group practice, interactive discussions, and collaborative presentations, to enhance communication and cooperation among learners, not only improving movement skills but also stimulating learning interest through team interaction and promoting mutual progress.

### **4.2. Incorporating modern elements**

While preserving the traditional charm and cultural essence of the lion dance, we actively integrate various modern artistic and sports elements, giving this ancient art form a brand-new vitality. For instance, we can draw inspiration from the distinct rhythm and free rhythm of modern street dance, and creatively transform the basic movements, routine transitions, and overall arrangement of the lion dance. This will make the traditional lion dance visually more dynamic and impactful, closer to contemporary aesthetics, and enhance its artistic expression and appeal. At the same time, we can integrate the typical movements of the lion dance, such as leaps, rolls, and head movements, with the structure of fitness exercises, and design a series of lion dance fitness courses that combine exercise benefits with cultural experiences. These courses can be targeted at young people to cultivate their coordination and rhythm sense, or be suitable for the exercise needs of middle-aged and elderly people, emphasizing flexibility and balance. Thus, we can promote lion dance culture among different age groups, further expand its dissemination channels and social influence, and achieve a win-win situation of cultural inheritance and public health.

### **4.3. Integration with fine arts curriculum**

Integrate the teaching of Lingnan lion dance movement vocabulary into the school’s physical education and art curriculum system. From primary school to university, design differentiated teaching contents based on the physical and mental development characteristics of students at different age groups. In the primary school stage, a fun lion dance movement experience course can be the main focus, cultivating students’ interest in lion dance culture; in the middle school stage,

increase the difficulty and complexity of the movements, emphasizing the training of students' movement skills and the cultivation of their teamwork ability; in the university stage, conduct courses on lion dance culture research and innovative practice, encouraging students to engage in academic exploration and artistic creation. Additionally, the school can organize lion dance interest clubs and teams, participate in various competitions and performances, to enhance students' professional level and comprehensive qualities.

## 5. Conclusion

The refinement and teaching transformation of the movement vocabulary of Lingnan lion dance is a systematic project that connects tradition with modernity, and skills with culture. This article holds that a successful transformation must be based on a deep analysis of the cultural composition of the movement vocabulary, clearly identifying its three attributes as ritual symbols, biomorphic art, and emotional expression. The scientific process of refinement lies in decomposing the movement patterns, capturing typical movements, and extracting the style, thereby converting the silent, holistic body knowledge into explicit and operable knowledge modules.

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## Disclosure statement

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