

Exploring the Aesthetic Characteristics of Shanxi Folk Dance and the Integration of Contemporary Aesthetic Culture

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese folk dances face increasing challenges in the context of cultural globalization and shifting aesthetic values. This study explores the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance and its integration into contemporary cultural expression. Focusing on three representative genres—Tiguzi Yangge, Xiaohua Opera and Flower Drum. The research examines key elements such as movement style, rhythm, costume, and emotion. A qualitative, three-tiered approach was employed, including theoretical review, fieldwork in three regions, and thematic analysis of dance practices in stage productions, university classes, and digital platforms like TikTok and Bilibili. The findings show that Shanxi folk dance embodies strong physicality, symbolic gestures, and regionally rooted visual forms. While traditional formats emphasize ritual and collectivity, modern audiences favor personalization and visual immediacy. Adaptations in choreography, education, and digital storytelling have enhanced the visibility and relevance of these dances. The study concludes that a model of “preservation – transformation – reconstruction” supports the sustainable development of folk dance by balancing cultural continuity with innovation. This research contributes practical insights for revitalizing traditional dance in today's media-saturated environment and provides a framework for connecting regional heritage with global aesthetic trends.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by applying Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory to develop a new framework of “aesthetic features—contemporary reception—integration pathways”, exploring the aesthetic transformation of Shanxi folk dance body symbols in digital media, and filling gaps in traditional aesthetic reconstruction and renewal research.

1. Introduction

Shanxi folk dance, as a vital component of traditional Chinese dance culture, is widely recognized for its distinctive regional style and rich cultural symbolism. Characterized by vigorous movements, grounded physicality, and rhythmic variation, these dances reflect the local social environment, agricultural practices, and ritual traditions (Huang, 2015; Wang, 2018; Sun, 2022). From the powerful “three bends” of Northern Shanxi Tiguizi Yangge to the delicate expressiveness of Xiaohua Opera in Central Shanxi and the vibrant rhythm of Southern Shanxi Flower Drum, the aesthetic diversity of Shanxi folk dance offers a vivid portrait of localized artistic expression.

In recent years, however, the aesthetic landscape has shifted under the influence of urbanization, mediatization, and digital culture. Contemporary audiences, especially younger generations, increasingly favor visual immediacy, individual expression, and fragmented cultural experiences (Wang, 2018; Su, 2020). This shift presents challenges to the continued relevance and communicative efficacy of traditional folk dances, many of which are deeply rooted in collective rituals and rural narratives.

While existing scholarship has addressed the historical origins, typologies, and heritage preservation of Shanxi folk dance (Li, Liu & Liu, 2015; Xu, 2019; Dong, 2019), relatively fewer studies have explored its aesthetic structure in relation to contemporary cultural expectations. A closer examination of how regional folk dances engage with changing aesthetic values is needed to support both cultural continuity and innovation in the transmission of intangible heritage.

1.1. Research Questions

- i. What are the core aesthetic features of Shanxi folk dance?
- ii. What are the changes in the aesthetic culture of the current society?
- iii. How to achieve effective integration of Shanxi folk dance with contemporary aesthetic culture?

1.2. Research Objectives

- i. Systematically sort out and summarise the traditional aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance.
- ii. Analyse the development trend and core characteristics of the current social aesthetic culture, and explore how to reshape the public's art appreciation habits and acceptance mechanism.
- iii. Explore the paths and strategies for effective integration of Shanxi folk dance with contemporary aesthetic culture in the context of stage creation, teaching and dissemination, and new media.

1.3. Significant of The Study

Against the background of the pressure of contemporary expression and dissemination of traditional culture, it is of great academic and practical significance to systematically examine the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dances and explore the path of their integration with contemporary aesthetic culture (Wang & Yeh, 2018; Zhou, 2016).

On the one hand, this study helps to construct the aesthetic paradigm of Shanxi folk dance from the overall dimension, and make up for the insufficient attention to its aesthetic ontology in the existing studies (Luo, 2021); on the other hand, focusing on the dissemination and acceptance mechanism of folk dance under the trend of mediated and visualised aesthetics can respond to the real needs of contemporary society for the innovative expression of traditional arts, and provide theoretical support and path references for the modern transformation of local cultures, promotion of aesthetics, and the living inheritance of non-heritage (Su & Chen, 2022).

The innovation of the thesis lies in the following: Firstly, the research framework of “aesthetic characteristics - acceptance mechanism - integration path” is constructed; Secondly, it is the first time to summarise the aesthetic elements of Shanxi folk dances from a holistic point of view; Thirdly, it is the combination of theoretical discussions and practical paths, which can provide a reference for the contemporary expression of traditional dances.

2. Literature Review

Literature review is a fundamental part of scientific research, which is of great significance in clarifying research perspectives, constructing theoretical frameworks and discovering academic gaps. It is important to clarify the theoretical and empirical research direction of this study and lay the foundation for the specific research content (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance and its integration with contemporary aesthetic culture, so it is necessary to start from the current situation of research in related fields, to clarify the existing results and theoretical resources, in order to provide a solid foundation for subsequent research support.

2.1. Introduction

This section conducts a systematic review along three key dimensions: First, beginning with the general research on folk dance, existing literature offers rich perspectives on its definitions, functions, and performative features. Scholars such as Kealiinohomoku (1970), Hanna (1987), and Yu (2005) emphasize the regional specificity and social symbolism of folk dances. These viewpoints are particularly useful for situating Shanxi folk dance within the broader context of dance anthropology. However, systematic studies focusing on the aesthetic structures of regional folk dances remain scarce.

Second, with a focus on regional studies of Shanxi folk dance, researchers such as Wang (2014), Yang (2018), Wang (2018), and Wei, B. (2021) have explored stylistic features, ritual functions, and pedagogical approaches of representative genres such as Tiguzi Yangge, Xiaohua Opera, and the Flower Drum. Nevertheless, existing discussions of aesthetic characteristics are relatively fragmented and lack integrative theoretical studies that conceptualize Shanxi folk dance as a unified cultural-symbolic system.

Third, in terms of dance aesthetics and contemporary expression, studies by Fraleigh (1987) and Adshead-Lansdale (1999) provide essential theoretical tools for analyzing aesthetic reception, embodiment, and performativity in dance. Yet, there is still a notable absence of scholarship addressing how traditional regional dances in China adapt

aesthetically within a transforming media environment and develop renewed modes of expression.

Through the literature review and critical integration of the above three directions, this section will clarify the position of this study in the existing academic achievements, and identify three major gaps in the current research on Shanxi folk dance: first, the lack of generalisation and abstraction of the overall aesthetic characteristics; second, the failure to systematically connect traditional aesthetics with contemporary cultural changes; and, third, the analyses of the paths of integration mostly remain at the level of surface content, lacking in-depth exploration of aesthetic logic and mechanisms of acceptance. These theoretical gaps are the core directions that this paper intends to respond to and fill.

2.2. Folk Dance

As an important part of national culture, folk dance is rooted in production life, religious beliefs and customs and ceremonies, and shows distinct regional and national characteristics. Wang (2014) pointed out in *The History of Chinese Dance* that folk dance is collective, programmatic and varied, and is an important carrier of national cultural memory and identity expression. Sachs (1937) also emphasised its close connection with customs and institutions, and argued that dance is constantly being 'recoded' in cultural transmission.

Anthropological perspectives see folk dances as symbolic forms of group identity and social relations, and Kealiinohomoku (1970) suggests that all dances are products of culture, breaking down the dichotomy between 'refined' and 'folk'. Nahachewsky (2001) employs an ethnographic approach to emphasise the communal function of dance and the process of transmission. Sociological studies focus on the social and ideological functions of folk dances. Shay (2002) analyses their manifestations in political identity, migrant adaptation and national construction, and UNESCO (2003) defines them as intangible cultural expressions created and transmitted by communities.

Artistic perspectives place more emphasis on its aesthetic characteristics and the transmission of skills. Feng (2002) argues that the movements, music and costumes of folk dances together constitute their artistic integrity, while Long, Xu and Ou (2003) point out their collective and self-indulgent qualities, highlighting their unique formal beauty.

In summary, different disciplines have defined folk dance in different ways: cultural studies emphasise ethnicity and symbolism (Kealiinohomoku, 1970), anthropology focuses on community structure and interaction (Hanna, 1987), sociology explores social adaptation and functionality, and art studies focuses on formal beauty and physical expression. In recent years, research tends to shift from static categorization to dynamic vision, and integrates methods of communication science and cognitive science, which has led to the gradual evolution of the definition of folk dances towards the direction of diversification, openness, and symbolic development. This provides a theoretical foundation and analytical framework for understanding the inheritance and regeneration of folk dance in modern society.

2.3. Historical Traceability of Shanxi Folk Dance

Regarding the historical origins and evolutionary path of Shanxi folk dances, scholars have mainly explored them from the perspectives of religious rituals, social changes and multi-ethnic exchanges.

Wang (2014) based on cultural remains and documentary materials, suggests that Shanxi folk dances originated from primitive rituals, and that the dragon dance patterns and alligator drums in the Taosi ruins are regarded as symbolic expressions of their religious dances. This view emphasises the sacredness and collective spirit of the dance, but focuses on the interpretation of static images and lacks a dynamic evolutionary perspective.

Feng (2002) on the other hand, puts dance in the context of historical and social structural changes, pointing out that since the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, the loosening of the ritual and music system has led to the gradual shift of Shanxi dance from religious rituals to folk entertainment, with the consequent enhancement of its aesthetic function, and a freer and more diverse dance form.

Liu (2005) further added that during the Northern Wei Dynasty, Shanxi showed a strong fusion of multi-ethnic cultures, and that the rhythm and power of nomadic cultures such as Xianbei and Xiongnu intersected with the narrative nature of Central Plains dances, resulting in an increasingly composite style of dance.

Although the above studies have provided rich materials on the origin, functional evolution and cultural integration of dance, most analyses still focus on the historical facts and functional transformation of dance, and have not yet revealed the aesthetic logic and aesthetic mechanism behind the evolution of dance forms (Desmond, 1997; Yu, 2005).

Therefore, starting from the historical origin not only helps to clarify the cultural logic of Shanxi folk dances, but also provides a deep foundation for grasping their overall aesthetic characteristics (Foster, 1986). Based on the inheritance of the above research results, this paper will further explore, from the perspective of the intersection of dance aesthetics and aesthetic culture, how Shanxi folk dances have formed their unique movement language, visual style, and body narrative, so as to provide historical basis and theoretical support for their integration with contemporary aesthetic culture.

2.4. Style and aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance

Due to the uniqueness of its geographical environment, historical background and way of life, Shanxi folk dance has formed distinctive regional characteristics in terms of style and aesthetic expression. Existing studies have mostly started from the dimensions of classification of dance types, movement styles and rhythmic characteristics, laying the foundation for the generalisation of its dance aesthetic features.

Wang (2014) classified Shanxi folk dances into the bold and masculine type of Northern Shanxi, the delicate and subtle type of Central Shanxi, and the cheerful and lively type of Southern Shanxi, pointing out that the differences in styles are due to geography, climate and social structure. The Northern Shanxi Tiguzi Yangge is known for its wide-open and

wide-open movements and strong rhythms, which show the beauty of power (Zhao, 2020); The Central Shanxi Xiaohua Opera expresses the flexibility and metaphorical nature of women's bodies with movements such as 'tilting head and dodging' and 'three bends', constructing an aesthetic temperament of 'shyness with spiciness' (Qiao, 2013); The Southern Shanxi Flower Drums are integrated into festivals and labour scenarios, with light movements, cheerful rhythms, and idyllic rhythm (Wei, B., 2021).

In terms of movement expression, Shanxi folk dance is highly stylised and rhythmically intense. Its typical 'strong-weak-strong' rhythmic structure and respiration-based movement dynamics constitute a unique bodily grammar system, in which movement functions as a narrative medium for conveying emotion and cultural experience. Qin (2015) further emphasises that the strong rhythmic accompaniment of suona and gongs not only strengthens the sense of dance dynamics, but also fits in with festive rituals and labour rhythms, reflecting the synchronisation of time rhythms and social rhythms.

From the perspective of dance aesthetics, the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance can be summarised into three points: firstly, 'roughness with finesse', which contains delicate emotions in robust movements (Fraleigh, 1987); secondly, 'rhythmic body narrative', which realises the externalisation of emotions through the combination of rhythms and movements (Foster, 1995); and thirdly, 'local body', which embodies cultural temperament and aesthetic psychology, such as the boldness of Northern Shanxi, the introversion of central Shanxi, and the enthusiasm of Southern Shanxi, showing the diversity and deep cultural structure of regional aesthetics (Wang, 2014).

Despite the fact that there have been many studies describing the classification of styles and characteristics of dance genres, there is still a lack of systematic construction of the overall aesthetic mechanism (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999; Fraleigh, 1987; Yu, 2005). Most of the studies focus on the movement level, failing to respond to the theoretical propositions of 'how aesthetics are generated' and 'how they are accepted'.

Therefore, on the basis of the previous researchers, this paper will try to construct an overall aesthetic paradigm of Shanxi folk dance from the perspectives of dance aesthetics, body expression and cultural aesthetics, so as to respond to the problem of insufficient theoretical integration and to lay an aesthetic foundation for its contemporary expression and dissemination.

2.5. The theoretical basis of dance aesthetics

Dance aesthetics is concerned with the formal laws, physical expression and aesthetic value of dance, aiming to reveal the aesthetic logic behind dance movement, rhythm, spatial structure and its cultural meaning. In the early days, Laban (1966) suggested that the space, time and energy of dance constituted the aesthetic core of dance, while Langer (1953) emphasised that dance is a 'fictional rhythm of life', which arouses the audience's inner resonance through emotional movements.

In contemporary performance Foster (1995) points out that the body is not only an aesthetic medium, but also an ontology of meaning generation, and that dance constitutes a space for interaction between culture and the body, while Hanna (1987) argues that the aesthetics of dance should not be confined to the beauty of the form, but also focus on its role in cultural identity and social interaction. Domestic scholars, such as Feng (2002), put forward the aesthetic principle of 'both form and spirit',

emphasising the national spirit and cultural context behind the beauty of form in dance; Wang (2014) advocates that the aesthetics of dance should be placed in the dual context of life and history.

In recent years, the study of dance aesthetics has gradually integrated philosophy of the body, social aesthetics and media aesthetics, turning to focus on visual pleasure, rhythmic acceptance and audience experience in the digital environment (Foster, 1986). This development provides theoretical support for the modern dissemination of traditional folk dance.

In summary, dance aesthetics provides a theoretical basis for understanding the movement style, rhythmic structure and emotional expression of Shanxi folk dances, as well as an analytical path for their integration and construction in contemporary aesthetic culture.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, integrating semiotic theory, ethnographic fieldwork, and contextual analysis to explore the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance and its integration with contemporary aesthetic culture. The research design is grounded in Barthes' (1972) semiotic framework, which provides analytical tools for decoding cultural symbols and tracing the evolution of meaning across different social and media contexts.

3.1. Research Design

The core analytical approach of this study is based on Barthes' (1972) tripartite semiotic model—signifier, signified, and myth—which enables a multi-level interpretation of symbolic elements embedded in dance movements, costumes, rhythms, and spatial structures. By treating folk dances as sign systems, the research examines how bodily symbols convey cultural meaning, regional identity, and aesthetic values in both traditional and recontextualized forms.

The research framework consists of three interrelated stages:

- i. Theoretical analysis of symbolic structures and aesthetic paradigms;
- ii. Fieldwork in key Shanxi regions to gather empirical data;
- iii. Comparative case analysis across performance, pedagogy, and digital media.

3.2. Research Methods

3.2.1. Semiotic Analysis

Using Barthes' (1972) semiotic model as the theoretical foundation, the study analyzes key symbolic elements in Shanxi folk dance. For instance, the “three bends” posture in Northern Shanxi's Tiguzi Yangge, the twisting and wringing gestures in Central Shanxi's Xiao Hua Opera, and the percussion-based movement in Southern Shanxi's Flower Drum Dance are interpreted as culturally encoded signs. These embodied symbols reflect not only aesthetic traditions but also the lived experience, labor ethics, and gendered expressions rooted in Shanxi's regional culture.

3.2.2. *Ethnographic Fieldwork*

Fieldwork was conducted in three representative locations—Shuozhou (Northern Shanxi), Zuoquan (Central Shanxi), and Yicheng (Southern Shanxi). Data collection included participant observation, video documentation, and semi-structured interviews with dancers, instructors, and audience members. These sources provided primary materials on movement vocabularies, performance conventions, and symbolic interpretations in local dance practice.

3.2.3. *Contextual Case Analysis*

A comparative analysis was conducted across three application settings: (1) stage choreography, (2) university dance pedagogy, and (3) short video platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili. The study examines how traditional symbolic elements are adapted, transformed, or re-coded in these different contexts. Attention is given to the shift in aesthetic reception, symbolic meaning, and audience engagement under the influence of media logic and consumer culture (Desmond, 1997; Foster, 1995).

3.3. Data Types and Sources

This research draws on a range of qualitative data sources to support its multi-dimensional analysis. Movement and rhythm data were collected through field recordings and archival videos of stage performances, forming the basis for the semiotic analysis of bodily expression (Foster, 1986). Pedagogical materials were obtained from classroom observations and instructional videos, particularly in Shanxi University's folk dance courses, contributing to the analysis of educational integration strategies. Digital content from TikTok and Bilibili was selected to examine symbolic reconstruction and visual aesthetics in new media contexts. In addition, interviews with dancers, teachers, and audiences provided insight into meaning-making and reception processes, especially in relation to aesthetic identity and cultural values.

3.4. Validity and Limitations

The methodological framework—combining semiotics, ethnography, and contextual comparison—ensures internal coherence between theoretical inquiry and empirical analysis (Farnell, 1999). It enables the research to trace the transformation of aesthetic symbols across traditional and contemporary domains. However, certain limitations exist. The geographical scope of the fieldwork is restricted to three cities, and the digital media analysis may be affected by algorithmic bias and stylistic homogenization. Future studies may enhance generalizability by incorporating broader audience analytics and cross-platform media tracking.

4. Findings

4.1. Aesthetic Characteristics and Contemporary Expression Path of Shanxi Folk Dance

This section presents core findings concerning the aesthetic characteristics of Shanxi folk dance and their transformation in contemporary contexts. Based on data derived from ethnographic fieldwork, pedagogical observations, stage practices, and digital media analysis, the discussion is organised around three thematic dimensions:

traditional aesthetic logics, evolving modes of aesthetic reception, and pathways for integration. Collectively, these findings demonstrate how traditional dance aesthetics can be both preserved and dynamically recontextualised within modern cultural frameworks.

4.1. Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics of Shanxi Folk Dance

Shanxi folk dance has formed a very local and aesthetically unique dance style in the long-term historical evolution and cultural accumulation. Based on the comprehensive observation of typical dances such as Northern Shanxi Tiguzi Yangge, Central Shanxi Xiaohua Opera and Southern Shanxi Flower Drum, its aesthetic characteristics are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

In the Northern Shanxi Tiguzi Yangge, the interplay between power and emotion is embodied through a highly codified movement language. Among its most iconic elements is the "three-bend posture" (Figure 1), characterized by the coordinated actions of chest thrusting forward and hips pushing backward (Huang, 2015). These movements serve as signifiers—visible bodily forms that mimic the physical exertion of hard agricultural labor. As such, they signify the embodied experience of the Yellow River's working people, capturing the enduring image of individuals "facing the loess with their backs to the sky." This symbolic configuration not only reflects the raw, masculine aesthetics of resilience and strength—what might be described as the aesthetic of "taking beauty by force"—but also operates as a myth, in Barthes' (1972) terms. It naturalizes a regional labor identity into a broader national narrative of industriousness and perseverance. Through this semiotic lens, the bodily expression of Tiguzi Yangge transforms from a functional dance posture into a culturally loaded mythological construct, embedding historical memory within the everyday performance of folk tradition (Sun, 2022).

Figure 1: Tiguzi Yangge "Chest thrust forward, Hip thrust backward and Three-bend posture"



Source(s): Author's own Photo

In contrast to the rugged dynamism of Northern Shanxi, Central Shanxi's Xiaohua Opera (Figure 2) emphasizes delicate bodily details to articulate emotional nuance, embodying what Wang (2018) refers to as the aesthetic of “rigid-flexible” harmony. The hallmark movements—twisting and wringing of the upper body combined with the subtle shaking of the lower limbs—create a distinctive rhythm characterized by trembling, jumping, kicking, twisting, swinging, and flinging. These embodied gestures function as signifiers, encoding culturally gendered aesthetics that imitate the softness, restraint, and shyness traditionally associated with femininity. As such, they signify an idealized image of womanhood rooted in regional norms of grace and subtlety (Qiao, 2013). Within Barthes' (1972) semiotic framework, these gestures also constitute a myth—a naturalized system of meaning that elevates gendered modesty and emotional refinement into a broader aesthetic ideal, thus transforming Xiaohua Opera from a local performance form into a vehicle for transmitting socio-cultural values through bodily expression.

Figure 2: Xiaohua Opera “Twisting” and “Wringing”



Source(s): Author's own Photo

Similarly, in Southern Shanxi's Flower Drum tradition (Figure 3), the performance structure is grounded in a contrast between a spiritually dynamic upper body and a rhythmically grounded lower body (Wei, 2017). Movements such as twisting, pushing, shrugging, and swinging in the upper torso are coordinated with squatting, jumping, and turning motions in the legs. These rhythmic and highly energetic gestures, accompanied by vigorous drum beats, serve as signifiers of ceremonial and communal vitality. They signify devotion to the gods and reverence for nature, reflecting a performative embodiment of agricultural rituals and spiritual beliefs. Viewed through Barthes' (1972) lens, this dynamic choreography becomes a mythical system, wherein repetitive bodily acts transform into symbols of collective faith, rural cosmology, and ancestral continuity.

The Flower Drum dance thus transcends mere entertainment, embedding sacred and ecological values within the aesthetics of motion.

Figure 3: Flower Drum “Boys and girls performing face-to-face drumming”



Source(s): Author's own Photo

Secondly, the beauty of rhythm is closely related to folk life. Shanxi folk dances are often accompanied by gongs, drums and suona, with distinctive and layered rhythms, which not only serve the structure of the dances, but also reflect the reality of the basis of the rhythms of life, such as festivals, labour, and ceremonies (Wei, 2017; Wei, H., 2021). This kind of rhythmic beauty combines practical function and emotional expression, constituting the folk aesthetic characteristic of the integration of dance and life.

Thirdly, the symbolism of visual composition and costume colours. Northern Shanxi Tiguizi Yangge mostly uses highly saturated colours such as red and yellow to strengthen the festive atmosphere; Central Shanxi Xiaohua Opera costumes will incorporate elements of Beijing Opera, Yu Opera and other operas, with increased decorativeness, more ornate costumes and brighter colours. The Southern Shanxi Flower Drums, on the other hand, pay more attention to the visual extension of colour to rhythm and movement, and more commonly wear white towels on the head, lapel clothes, sashes and lantern trousers. These costume elements not only serve the form, but also strengthen the emotional rendering and symbolic transmission function of the dance.

Finally, from the perspective of the overall aesthetic paradigm, Shanxi folk dance constructs an aesthetic logic that integrates physicality-rhythmicity-emotionality, reflecting the ‘life-ritual-art’ continuous genealogy of folk dance. It embodies the original beauty and cultural expression in the continuous spectrum of ‘life-ritual-art’ of folk dance.

4.2. Analysis of the Evolution and Reception Mechanism of Contemporary Aesthetic Culture

In the contemporary context of media, urbanisation and rapid development of consumer culture, aesthetic culture is undergoing a profound transformation, which is manifested in the following significant features:

First, the individualisation and visualisation of aesthetic interests. The communication methods represented by short video platforms and social media have strengthened the dominance of fast-paced, instant feedback and visual impact, and aesthetic behaviour tends to be emotional and entertaining (Montag, Yang, & Elhai, 2021). The traditional folk dance structure of 'slow rhythm, heavy movement, and strong mood' faces cognitive barriers among some youth groups.

Secondly, the logic of cultural consumption reshapes the way of artistic acceptance. Dance is increasingly seen as a 'visual consumer product', and its content acceptance has changed from a linear, ritualised aesthetic to a fragmented, scene-based experience. This has led to the risk of 'symbolic misinterpretation' or 'over-adaptation' of traditional dances, and the tension between maintaining authenticity and satisfying communication effectiveness (Bennett, 2015).

Thirdly, the aesthetic identity mechanism of youth has changed. In modern times, the acceptance of traditional culture relies more on 're-narrative' and 're-mediatisation', for example, reconstructing traditional content through modern contexts such as variety shows, stage dramas, short videos, and so on. They are concerned not only with the beauty of form, but also with emotional resonance and the establishment of cultural self-identity (Yu & Wang, 2018).

Therefore, understanding the current aesthetic and cultural turn helps to reconstruct the contemporary expression mechanism of folk dance from the perspective of receptive aesthetics and media culture (Su, 2020), and provides the cognitive foundation and communication logic support for the subsequent integration strategy.

4.3. Fusion Practice of Shanxi Folk Dance and Contemporary Aesthetic Culture

In the diversified fields of stage, teaching and new media, Shanxi folk dance is constantly exploring the path of adapting to contemporary aesthetic culture, reflecting the complex negotiation between 'cultural roots' and 'modern translation':

4.3.1. Visual Adaptation in Stage Creation and Editing

In recent years, local arts organisations in Shanxi have integrated modern lighting and scenery into their performances, strengthening the visual rhythm and emotional atmosphere, and forming a viewing relationship that is more suited to modern aesthetic needs. At the same time, many works try to link folk action units with a narrative structure to enhance the overall aesthetic tension (Chen & Liu, 2022).

4.3.2. Integration and Transformation in College Teaching

For example, in the 'Xiaohua Opera Combination Class' of the Dance Department of Shanxi University, students understand the emotional logic and regional aesthetics

behind the movements through the decomposition of the movements and the teaching of the cultural background. In the movement training, the triple unity of 'sense of rhythm - body movement - cultural temperament' is emphasised, so as to strengthen the simultaneous enhancement of aesthetic value and artistic quality. From an anthropological standpoint, Wang (2024) argues the basic kinetic rhythms of Xiaohua Opera—such as its delicate tremors, jumps, and fan work—serve as a cultural-semantic foundation, and thus classroom decomposition and cultural framing reinforce the simultaneous elevation of aesthetic appreciation and artistic quality.

4.2.3. Communication Reconstruction in New Media Platforms

Short-form videos of Shanxi folk dance disseminated via platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili have significantly enhanced rhythmic intensity and visual impact through techniques such as music mixing, slow-motion filters, and the integration of contemporary dance elements. These aesthetic strategies contribute to a form of symbolic reconstruction, allowing traditional movement vocabularies to be recontextualized within modern media environments. This innovative mode of transmission not only broadens audience engagement but also amplifies the aesthetic visibility of Shanxi folk dance in the contemporary cultural landscape. However, as Sun (2024) observes, while such digital adaptations serve as effective catalysts for cultural diffusion, they may simultaneously compromise cultural depth by prioritizing trend-driven content over contextual authenticity. This paradox underscores the dual imperative in digital folk dance dissemination: to enhance accessibility and visual appeal while safeguarding symbolic richness and cultural specificity.

To sum up, the contemporary expression of Shanxi folk dance embodies the aesthetic path of 'preservation-transformation-reconstruction'. Through the restructuring of movement rhythm and optimisation of visual presentation as well as the adaptation of educational content, Shanxi folk dance has gradually achieved an effective docking with contemporary aesthetic culture. This process not only preserves the core values of traditional dance, but also gives it new vigour in modern society through innovative forms and contents.

5. Integration Strategy and Aesthetic Education Path Construction

In the transformation of the aesthetic structure and the reshaping of the media environment, how Shanxi folk dances can maintain their cultural roots while effectively connecting with contemporary aesthetic culture is a key issue in the revitalisation of traditional arts. On the basis of the previous research, this section proposes integration strategies and educational paths for traditional dances around the dimensions of 'renewal of beauty expression' and 'reconstruction of beauty cognition', aiming to promote their sustainable dissemination and aesthetic regeneration in multiple arenas.

5.1. Integration Strategy 1: Aesthetic Adaptation in Formal Innovation

In the stage and video presentation, traditional folk dance needs to take the initiative to connect with modern viewing habits and visual aesthetic tendencies without departing from the ontological style. To this end, the following three aspects can be adapted to the form:

In the process of formal innovation, Shanxi folk dance can realise aesthetic adaptation through three dimensions of rhythm, vision and narrative, in order to more effectively meet the needs of contemporary audience and the logic of media communication.

Firstly, in terms of rhythm structure, Shanxi folk dance should strengthen the sense of 'rhythm' and 'duration control'. Traditional folk dances are mostly performed for long periods of time during festivals and festivals, with relatively slow rhythms and complicated movements. However, modern audiences prefer a fast-paced and efficient performance experience (Wilson & Henley, 2022). Therefore, by sectionalising the dance content and reconstructing it into a refined combination adapted to stage performances and short video transmission, it can not only enhance the rhythmic tension, but also better attract the audience visually and emotionally.

Secondly, in terms of visual composition, traditional folk elements can be visually upgraded through costume design, lighting and colour application and choreographic space layout, so that the movement imagery and colour symbols can gain new expressive power and attraction in the modern aesthetic context (Du, 2023).

Again, in terms of narrative, the dance should be avoided to be presented as a collage of fragmented movements, but through the logic of cultural narratives such as folklore stories and festival ceremonies, to build a 'contextualised' performance structure, and to enhance the audience's emotional resonance and cultural identity. The inheritance and development of Shanxi folk dance also needs to pay attention to its cultural characteristics and protection mechanism. Yang (2018) pointed out that the inheritance of Shanxi folk dance needs to be combined with modern education methods and adapt to the new social environment through innovative teaching models. This innovation should be reflected not only in the form, but also in the depth and breadth of the content to ensure the continuation of its cultural value.

Through the synergistic innovation of the above three aspects, Shanxi folk dance will realise a modern reconstruction of its form on the basis of retaining its ontological qualities, thus integrating more effectively into the contemporary aesthetic and cultural context.

5.2. Integration Strategy II: Recoding Mechanism in Media Platforms

In the context of new media, the communication mode of dance shows the trend of fragmentation, decentralisation and symbol reconstruction, and traditional folk dance needs to take the initiative to participate in the process of 'recoding' of the communication mechanism if it wants to achieve effective communication.

First of all, we should pay attention to the granularity of content and communication adaptation, through the production of short-length, highly recognisable dance video clips, highlighting the representative movements, regional costumes and rhythmic markers, which can significantly enhance the visual impact and communication efficiency of Shanxi folk dances on short-video platforms (Wilson & Henley, 2022). Such granular content is more likely to attract the attention of modern audiences, especially in the fast-paced social media environment.

Second, the communication strategy of multi-context mash-up and style crossover can be explored. On the basis of respecting the logic and stylistic integrity of the dance

movements, it moderately integrates pop music, street dance movements or visual special effects to build a dialogue structure of 'traditional + pop' to enhance audience interest and aesthetic identity (Shiga, 2007). This kind of cross-border integration can not only attract a wider audience, but also inject new vitality into traditional dance, making it more attractive in the contemporary cultural context.

Once again, attention should be paid to the construction of cultural symbols in the network discourse system, combining regional cultural topics and self-media narratives, and refining symbolic labels such as 'body language from the yellow earth', so that Shanxi folk dance can establish a unique cultural identity and discourse dominance in cyberspace. Through the above strategies, Shanxi folk dance can not only expand its influence in digital communication, but also realise the contemporary expression and cultural regeneration of traditional aesthetic imagery in media culture.

5.3. Aesthetic Education Path: Integration Practice in College Education

As an important carrier of traditional art aesthetic education, colleges and universities determine to a large extent the aesthetic cognition and cultural identity of young people through their teaching concepts and practice paths. Taking Shanxi University and other colleges and universities as an example, the effective integration of folk dance teaching should be carried out at three levels, namely, aesthetic orientation, skill training and practical output.

First of all, the teaching design should focus on the guidance of aesthetic awareness, through the teaching of cultural background and aesthetic interpretation, so that students can understand the emotional logic and cultural semantics carried by the movement before learning, so as to realise the multi-layered process from 'imitating movement' to 'perception - understanding - expression'. In this way, students can realise the transformation from 'imitating movements' to 'perceiving-understanding-expressing' multi-level aesthetic experience (Xu, Niu, Li, Xu, & Cao, 2024).

Secondly, in the process of technical training, we should strengthen the ability to identify styles, and through analysing the differences in body language and emotional expression of different dance styles in Northern, Central and Southern Shanxi, we can help students reflect local style characteristics in their technical performance, so as to achieve the dual training of skills and aesthetics (Li, 2024).

Finally, a practical linkage mechanism between the classroom and the social field should be constructed, encouraging students to re-express what they have learnt through stage choreography, short video creation and public exhibitions, which not only enhances the power of artistic dissemination, but also expands the outreach function of aesthetic education in colleges and universities. Through this teaching path of deepening connotation and expanding extension, the traditional aesthetic spirit of Shanxi folk dance will be organically inherited and innovatively disseminated in university education.

5.4. Summary

The core challenge facing Shanxi folk dance in contemporary expression is how to achieve formal renewal and aesthetic reproduction while retaining cultural depth. This section proposes a path of integration from the three dimensions of formal adaptation,

media recoding, and aesthetic education in colleges and universities, aiming to build a bridge between traditional folk dance and contemporary aesthetic culture. This strategy not only responds to the current structural changes in the way art is received, but also provides a feasible demonstration of the path for the living heritage and contemporary dissemination of Shanxi folk dance.

6. Conclusion

The research focuses on the three dimensions of 'the ontology of beauty', 'the acceptance of beauty' and 'the transformation of beauty' to carry out theoretical construction and practical analysis, and puts forward a targeted framework of understanding and integration strategies. The main research results are as follows:

First, at the level of traditional aesthetic characteristics, this paper systematically summarises the movement language, rhythmic structure, emotional expression and visual style of Shanxi folk dance, pointing out that the core of its aesthetic is 'roughness with finesse, a strong sense of rhythm, and the fusion of physicality and emotionality', and reflects a strong regional cultural temperament and physical aesthetic logic (Hou, 2024).

Second, in the analysis of contemporary aesthetic and cultural transformation, this paper reveals the impact of contemporary aesthetic trends such as individualisation, visualisation and mediatisation on the traditional dance reception mechanism, emphasising that the mode of dance dissemination, the rhythm of aesthetic reception and aesthetic expectations have undergone structural changes (Krajac, 2023). In contemporary society, the rise of short-video platforms and social media has made the dissemination of dance more rapid and widespread, but it has also brought new challenges, such as the individualisation and visualisation of aesthetic interests. These changes require traditional dance to innovate in form and content to adapt to new aesthetic demands.

Thirdly, in the exploration of integration practice, through the cases of stage creation, university teaching and new media dissemination, the triple path of 'rhythmic adaptation-visual enhancement-cultural re-narrative' is proposed to construct an effective articulation between Shanxi folk dance and contemporary aesthetic culture (Kico, Grammalidis, Christidis, & Liarakapis, 2018). At the same time, this study emphasises the reshaping of aesthetic education and advocates the integration of cultural explanation and style identification into university dance education, so as to promote the re-cognition of traditional aesthetics. Through these practices, Shanxi folk dance has not only achieved organic inheritance in college education, but also gained wider dissemination on the new media platform.

In summary, this paper not only promotes the construction of the overall aesthetic system of Shanxi folk dance in theory, but also provides an operable path of contemporary expression in practice, providing new perspectives and methodological support for the revitalisation and modern dissemination of local traditional arts.

6.1. Theoretical Contribution and Practical Significance

At the theoretical level, this paper expands the boundaries of the application of dance aesthetics in the study of folk dance, breaks through the limitations of the previous

research focusing on the classification of dance genres or the inheritance of techniques, and puts forward the overall analytical framework of ‘aesthetic characteristics-acceptance mechanism-integration path’, which fills in the gap of the traditional folk dance that lacks a systematic aesthetic construction.

At the practical level, the visual adaptation strategies, media dissemination methods and aesthetic paths proposed by the study have strong applicability and promotion value, which can help stimulate the aesthetic vitality of Shanxi folk dances in the contemporary society, and provide a theoretical basis and path revelation for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and the transformation of aesthetic education.

6.2. Limitations and Prospects

This study faced certain limitations due to constraints in time and resources. The fieldwork primarily focused on folk dances from the cities of Shuozhou, Zuoquan, and Yicheng in Shanxi Province. As a result, the research scope remains somewhat limited and does not comprehensively represent the entire region. Additionally, although the media analysis covered major mainstream platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili, it did not extend to a broader range of international communication networks, which may have restricted the generalizability of the findings.

Looking forward, future research could expand in several important directions. One promising avenue is cross-regional comparative studies, which would involve comparing Shanxi folk dance with traditional dance aesthetic systems from other provinces or countries. Such comparisons could enrich the theoretical framework and deepen the understanding of local dance within a broader cultural context. Another potential direction is to explore the role of digital technologies—such as AI-generated dance and virtual stage design—in influencing both the dissemination and aesthetic experience of traditional dances. This could offer new insights into how technology reshapes cultural heritage in the digital age. Furthermore, integrating aesthetic psychology with audience data analysis could help reveal the mechanisms behind contemporary audiences’ aesthetic responses and acceptance of traditional dance forms, providing a more comprehensive view of the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity.

In the contemporary era marked by cultural pluralism and aesthetic differentiation, the “rediscovery” of Shanxi folk dances involves not only the preservation of traditional skills but also the reconstruction of their aesthetic spirit. This study aims to offer an academic contribution characterized by depth, sensitivity, and strategic vision to support the living development of local arts in the new era.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The research study has strictly adhered to all ethical guidelines and procedures involving human participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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