

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1250047

THE PERFORMANCE FORMS AND SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF TIBETAN DANCE IN ABA, SICHUAN PROVINCE, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Zhen Quan¹, Ourarom Chantamala²

¹*Faculty of Fine-Applied Arts and Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Thailand.*

Received: 11/12/2025
Accepted: 25/02/2026

Corresponding author: Zhen Quan
(67012453005@msu.ac.th)

ABSTRACT

The fast modernization of urban areas has frequently resulted in the demise of culturally significant architectural design, particularly the incorporation of traditional Chinese architectural concepts into contemporary constructed environments. As a result, many contemporary settings lack cultural identity, spatial coherence, and experiential depth. Addressing this issue, this study investigates how incorporating traditional Chinese architectural aspects improves spatial vitality, spiritual experience, and cultural identity in contemporary design. The study specifically investigates the effects of Traditional Chinese Architectural Element Integration—which includes spatial philosophy integration, material and ecological integration, and symbolic and cultural abstraction—on Feng Shui-Inspired Spatial Vitality, as well as its impact on spiritual charm and cultural identity. A quantitative study methodology was used, with data obtained from individuals who have experienced traditional Chinese architectural surroundings using online and onsite questionnaire questionnaires. A total of 250 valid responses were collected and analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the predicted correlations between the study variables. The findings show that spatial philosophy integration has the greatest influence on increasing Feng Shui-inspired spatial vitality, followed by material and ecological integration and symbolic cultural abstraction. Furthermore, Feng Shui-inspired spatial vitality enhances both spiritual attractiveness and cultural identity in architectural settings. This study advances architectural theory by offering an integrated framework that connects classical spatial philosophy, cultural symbols, and ecological materials to experience spatial outcomes. Practically, the findings suggest how architects and urban planners might reinterpret ancient Chinese architectural principles in contemporary design to produce culturally relevant, environmentally responsive, and experientially rich constructed spaces.

KEYWORDS: Traditional Chinese Architectural Elements, Feng Shui Spatial Vitality, Spiritual Charm, Cultural Identity, Architectural Integration

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tibetan ethnic group is one of China's 56 officially recognised ethnic groups and one of the oldest cultural communities on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (Dalki, 1991). Tibetan populations are predominantly located in the Tibet Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, Sichuan Province, and neighboring regions, with Tibetan diaspora groups also present in India, Bhutan, Europe, North America, and Australia. Tibetan civilization has evolved over a long period of time, strongly linked to Chinese history, notably with the formation of the Tibetan Kingdom in the seventh century (Chen, 1911). Tibetan populations have historically generated a rich cultural heritage that includes language, religion, architecture, medicine, music, visual arts, and dance traditions. Tibetan Buddhism has had an especially important role in establishing cultural identity and ceremonial performance traditions for over for more than 1,400 years (Dalki, 1991).

Dance is an essential form of Tibetan cultural expression since it is both artistic and social in nature (Marlin, 2016). Tibetan dance expresses the connection between humanity, nature, spirituality, and daily life. Dance performances are more than just entertainment; they serve as cultural tools for preserving collective memory, reinforcing ethnic identity, and transmitting traditional knowledge between generations (Liu, 2010). Geographical circumstances, environmental adaptability, and local techniques of production have all had a significant impact on Tibetan dancing (Lin, 2019). As a result, dance motions, rhythms, spatial formations, and performance structures change greatly depending on ecological and topographical situations (Zhang, 2011). The Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province is one of the most culturally significant Tibetan districts in western China (Dalki, 1991). The region is distinguished by a variety of natural settings, including canyons, mountains, marshes, grasslands, and high plateaus with average elevations reaching 3,000 meters. These climatic circumstances have influenced local customs, economic activity, and creative manifestations (Chen, 1911). Nomadic animal husbandry, agricultural production, and mountain habitation patterns have all had a direct impact on the development of embodied movement systems and dance traditions among Tibetan communities throughout the area (Yue, 2020).

Tibetan dancing in the Aba area displays substantial linkages between body movement and

environmental adaptability. Canyon scenery, for example, encouraged the development of Kasdawen Armor Dance, which has moves with bent knees and grounded postures that mimic the physical demands of keeping balance on steep slopes (Zhang, 2011). Similarly, Dalgur Guozhuang dance in Malkang's mountainous region exhibits hierarchical spatial organization in the shape of circular forms that correlate to village social systems and mountain habitation patterns (Liu, 2010). Nomadic lives in plateau and marsh regions inspired slower rhythmic patterns and symbolic gestures emulating animals like as eagles and yaks, which represented pastoral life and migratory activities (Yue, 2020). These examples demonstrate that Tibetan dancing is more than just a theatrical art form; it is also a physical archive of ecological adaptation and cultural memory.

In recent decades, however, modernization, urbanization, tourism growth, and globalization have had a considerable impact on traditional Tibetan communities and cultural traditions. Many traditional dance forms are being altered for stage performances, tourism marketing, and commercial entertainment, resulting in changes in movement structures, ceremonial meanings, and local transmission mechanisms (Marlin, 2016). At the same time, younger generations are growing less attached to older forms of embodied cultural legacy (Liu, 2010). These alterations pose serious issues for the preservation, standardization, and transfer of Tibetan dancing as an intangible cultural resource (Lin, 2019; Zhang, 2011). Although earlier study has focused on Tibetan culture, folk traditions, and ethnic performance practices, there has been no systematic investigation of the link between geography, spatial context, and movement creation in Tibetan dance traditions (Marlin, 2016). Furthermore, there is inadequate research into how traditional dance movements might be standardized and changed for contemporary performance and educational transmission while retaining cultural authenticity. Existing literature also lacks interdisciplinary methods that combine dance studies, cultural geography, embodiment theory, and heritage preservation frameworks.

As a result, the purpose of this research is to look at the spatial linkages and performance styles of Tibetan dance traditions in the Aba Tibetan area from a geographical and cultural standpoint. The study examines how environmental variables impact dance movement patterns, spatial formations, and performance aesthetics in three diverse ecological zones (canyon, mountain, and plateau habitats).

Furthermore, the study aims to identify typical dance moves appropriate for systematic preservation, quantitative instruction, and current stage adaptation. This research is relevant for a variety of reasons. First, it helps to preserve and transmit Tibetan intangible cultural assets by recording and analyzing traditional mobility systems before they disappear or become overly commercialized. Second, the research offers a theoretical framework that connects geography, bodily movement, and cultural identity in ethnic dance studies. Third, the findings may help to build standardized movement systems for dance instruction, cultural tourism, and stage performance while conserving local cultural identity. Finally, the study adds to the larger conversation about performance studies and cultural sustainability by illustrating how ethnic dance traditions act as embodied responses to environmental and social constraints.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are:

1. To study the performance forms and spatial relationships of the Tibetan ethnic group in the Aba area.
2. To study dance movements and analyze the benefits of the dance movements.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Tibetan Dance as Cultural Expression and Historical Heritage

Tibetan dancing has long been seen as an essential source of Tibetan history, spirituality, and ethnic identity. Chejizhuoma (2021) describes Tibetan dance as one of the oldest creative forms in Tibetan civilization, reflecting the historical progression, aesthetic ideals, and cultural beliefs of Tibetan people. The author emphasized that Tibetan dancing should be viewed not just as a performance art, but also as a cultural system that preserves collective memory and ethnic identity.

Previous research has found that Tibetan dancing motions are intimately linked to physical discipline, environmental adaptability, and social aesthetics. Lin Jue Rong (2019) contended that Tibetan dancing represents an innate body language formed by plateau living and traditional cultural values. Male dancing motions frequently emphasize power, stability, and velocity, representing the tenacity needed to thrive in harsh plateau conditions, whereas female moves emphasize grace and gentleness. The study went on to explain that geographical and cultural variables have a substantial impact on dance posture, rhythm, and movement intensity, resulting in a variety of regional dance styles. Similarly, Marlin (2016) divided Tibetan dance into various categories,

including temple dance, Guozhuang dance, Reba dance, rural dance, and performance-oriented tap dance. The study found that Tibetan dancing combines singing, acrobatics, ceremonial activities, and communal involvement, representing both entertainment and religious roles. Guozhuang dance stands out among these genres because it allows for unfettered participation regardless of age or gender, symbolising societal togetherness and shared cultural identity.

2.2. Ritual Functions and Cultural Symbolism of Tibetan Dance

Several studies have focused on the ceremonial and symbolic aspects of Tibetan traditional dancing. Deng Fengying, Deng Min, and Zhao Bin (2018) investigated the origins and evolution of Tibetan-Qiang Guozhuang dance and discovered that its early forms were closely linked to sacrifice ceremonies and social rituals held around fire gatherings. Traditional Guozhuang performances emphasised collective singing and circular dance patterns, which reflected social cohesiveness and spiritual adoration. However, the thematic substance has broadened beyond religious devotion to encompass labour, national landscapes, and human connections.

Ci Zhen's (2010) research on the ancient Kabare "Baidixing" military dance highlighted the tight link between dance, ritual, and historical memory. According to the author, the dance started as oath-taking ceremonies and military rites among ancient Qiang tribes. Dance motions, clothes, and musical structures represented courage, harvest celebrations, and spiritual protection. The study found that Kabare dancing serves as a sort of cultural memory, maintaining tribal history and community ideals. In addition, Zhang Penghai (2011) examined the Jiarong Tibetan armor dance "Kasdawin" and concluded that it is a combination of Tibetan, Qiang, and regional cultural elements. The study discovered that motions including knee bending, waist flexion, and torso expansion are common in both Tibetan and Qiang dancing traditions. Furthermore, ceremonial materials like cowhide armor and white feathers represent conflict, sacrifice, and ethnic mysticism. The author emphasized that geographical disparities in choreography reflect local environmental circumstances and historical events.

2.3. Dance, Geography, and Ecological Environment

The link between dance and geographical context has emerged as an important study topic in Tibetan cultural studies. Existing research indicates that geography, climate, and livelihood patterns have a

significant impact on dance genres in Aba Tibetan areas. Yue Jiabin (2020) defined Tibetan-Qiang Guozhuang dance motions as rhythmic knee bending, stepping, rotation, and circular shapes that depict agricultural and pastoral lives. The repetitive movement patterns are closely associated with labor activities and ritual gatherings.

According to research on Aba Tibetan culture, plateau terrain impacts body movement and performance style. Local populations in hilly and high-altitude locations evolved physical habits that suited steep slopes, meadows, and nomadic movement. These environmental adaptations eventually evolved into dance terminology and corporeal aesthetics. These findings lend credence to the ecological view that dance is a physiological reaction to natural surrounds and ways of social production. Zi Huayun's theory of dance ecology, which contends that dance emerges from a distinct ecological environment comprised of natural geography, social systems, historical conditions, and cultural beliefs, lends credence to the ecological viewpoint. From this approach, Tibetan dancing should be viewed as an ecological cultural product created by long-term interactions between humans and their surroundings.

2.4. Dance as Cultural Memory and Social Integration

Theoretical ideas about cultural memory have also had a considerable impact on Tibetan dance study. According to Jan Assmann's cultural memory theory, rituals, symbols, bodily practices, and cultural performances all contribute to the preservation of communal identity. Tibetan dancing serves as a conduit for passing along ethnic memory, religious beliefs, and societal norms between generations. Liu Wei (2010) investigated the social uses of Guozhuang dance and discovered that it has traditionally fulfilled religious, ethical, and social integration reasons. Participation in community dancing promoted ethnic cohesion and moral ideals in Tibetan society. Guozhuang dance has progressively grown into tourist, school education, and public entertainment places in recent years, displaying its adaptability to modernization.

Anthropological studies also show that Tibetan cultural practices are inextricably linked to ritual and spiritual life. Dalki (1991) studied Tibetan customs, prayer flag rituals, sacrifice rites, and oral traditions in Aba Prefecture, highlighting the Tibetan worldview of harmony among humans, environment, and sacred mountains. Similarly, An Yiru (2010) stated how, despite technical modernization, Tibetan families continue to practice

rites such as smoke sacrifice and Buddhist devotion, demonstrating the resilience of cultural identity in contemporary society.

2.5. Tibetan Cultural Transformation and Modernization

Several studies have looked at the contradiction between traditional preservation and modernization in Tibetan culture. According to Zhou Jianxin (2019), technical and social development have had a profound impact on Tibetan wedding rituals in Aba. Digital communication and modern consumer culture have superseded certain traditional rituals, such as matchmaker songs and cattle betrothal presents. Nonetheless, crucial ceremonial aspects like Buddhist rituals and traditional clothes have been retained. Similarly, ZhaXidawa's (2019) research on the Wang Guo Festival found that ancient agricultural rites had transformed into cultural-tourism events that include exhibitions and public performances. Although modernization has impacted some of the festival's activities, the symbolic implications linked with harvest prayer and ethnic identity have not changed.

Studies on Tibetan Tangka art highlight the balance between tradition and innovation. Nima Ciren (2022) discovered that young Tibetan painters are increasingly incorporating regional landscapes and modern visual components into traditional religious painting while retaining ritual production processes and symbolic patterns. These findings show that Tibetan cultural practices are always negotiating between authenticity and contemporary adaptation.

2.6. Research Gap

Although past research has thoroughly examined Tibetan dance, ritual culture, and ethnic customs, significant research constraints remain. First, many studies concentrate on descriptive cultural interpretation rather than methodically examining the link between geographical context and dance movement production. Second, present research frequently approaches dance solely from an artistic or anthropological standpoint, with no interdisciplinary framework that incorporates ecology, sociology, body theory, and cultural memory. Third, there has been little empirical investigation into how diverse physical terrains in Aba affect the bodily form, spatial linkages, and movement systems of Tibetan dance.

As a result, this study seeks to address these gaps by applying dance ecology theory, body practice theory, and cultural memory theory to investigate the link between geographical environment and Tibetan dance performance in Aba Tibetan-Qiang

Autonomous Prefecture. The project also seeks to define movement standards and preservation measures for the transmission and contemporary growth of Tibetan dance culture.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative interdisciplinary research approach in conjunction with practice-based creative research to look into the link between geography, ecology, and Tibetan dance traditions in the Abo Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study combines views from dance studies, cultural geography, anthropology, embodiment theory, and intangible cultural heritage studies to investigate how environmental factors impact movement systems, performance structures, and cultural identity in Tibetan dance traditions.

The study examines the historical evolution and present transformation of Tibetan dance between 1950 to 2025. Representative dance styles like as Guozhuang Dance and Kasdawen Armour Dance, as well as ceremonial performance traditions from canyon, mountain, and plateau ecological zones, receive special attention (Lefebvre, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In addition, the study investigates how modernisation, tourism development, and stage adaptation have altered traditional Tibetan dance practices and movement vocabulary.

3.1. Population and Samples

Purposive sampling was used in this study to identify individuals with specialised knowledge, practical experience, and cultural participation in Tibetan dance traditions, ethnic performance, and cultural heritage preservation in the Abo Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture.

Participants were separated into three groups:

3.1.1. Expert Group

The expert panel included researchers, lecturers, and specialists in Chinese ethnic and folk dance from higher education institutions and cultural organizations. These scholars offered theoretical insights on Tibetan dance history, choreography, movement systems, performance aesthetics, and cultural preservation.

3.1.2. Professional performers

The professional performer group consisted of experienced Tibetan dancers and practitioners who were actively engaged in dance performance, choreography, rehearsal, and modern stage adaptation. This group provided practical insights into embodied

movement practice, performance approaches, and the modernization of traditional Tibetan dance.

3.1.3. General Participants

The overall participant group included 20 people from local communities and audiences of all genders, ages, and vocations. These individuals were chosen to investigate public perceptions, cultural knowledge, and attitudes towards Tibetan dance traditions, cultural identity, and the merging of traditional and contemporary performance techniques.

3.2. Research instruments

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held with dance experts, performers, and local practitioners to gather thorough information about Tibetan dance history, movement systems, symbolic meanings, and cultural preservation. Semi-structured interviews allow for greater flexibility and in-depth investigation of participants' experiences and perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

3.2.2. Participant and Performance Observation

Participant observation was employed to investigate dance performance methods in their native cultural settings. The observation centered on movement dynamics, spatial formations, rhythm patterns, and performer interaction. This approach is commonly utilized in ethnographic and performance research to better understand embodied cultural behavior (Spradley 1980).

3.2.3. Visual Documentation

Video recordings, images, and rehearsal material were gathered to aid movement and spatial analysis. Visual recording is valuable in performance-based research because it allows for repeated study of bodily movement and symbolic gestures (Pink, 2013).

3.2.4. Document Analysis

Relevant literature, archival data, and cultural heritage papers were examined to aid in the understanding of Tibetan dance history and geographical links.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis and interpretive cultural analysis. The analysis process consisted of the following stages:

3.3.1. Data Organization and Transcription

Interview recordings, observation notes, photographs, and video materials were

systematically organized and transcribed. The researcher classified the data according to dance type, geographical region, movement characteristics, musical components, costume forms, and symbolic meanings.

3.3.2. Coding and Categorization

The researcher applied open coding techniques to identify recurring themes and patterns related to geography, spatial relationships, body movement, ritual symbolism, and cultural identity. Similar concepts were grouped into thematic categories such as valley dance characteristics, mountain dance adaptation, and plateau movement symbolism.

3.3.3. Thematic Interpretation

The study used thematic analysis to interpret how geographical environments influence Tibetan dance performance styles, movement systems, and spatial organization. The interpretation focused on the relationship between ecological adaptation and embodied cultural expression. Thematic analysis is appropriate for identifying patterns and meanings within qualitative cultural data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3.4. Visual Movement Analysis

Video recordings and visual materials were analyzed to examine body posture, movement rhythm, gesture structure, spatial formations, and performer interactions. Comparative analysis was conducted among valley, mountain, and plateau dance styles to identify distinct performance characteristics and symbolic movement systems.

3.3.5. Triangulation and Validation

To improve research reliability and validity, the study applied methodological triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, visual materials, and documentary sources. Cross-verification among different data sources helped ensure consistency and cultural accuracy in interpretation (Denzin, 1978).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Regional Variations of Tibetan Dance Styles in Aba Prefecture

The findings show that Tibetan dance traditions in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture varied stylistically based on geography, livelihood patterns, and cultural beliefs. Three primary styles were identified: (1) Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance, (2) Mountain Village Guozhuang Dance, and (3) Highland Grassland Guozhuang Dance. Although they are part of the Tibetan Guozhuang dance system, each has its own individual style of body movement, musical structure, costume design, spatial layout, and cultural meaning.

According to the research, these variances are not random creative deviations, but rather systematic cultural adjustments to changing environmental situations. The geographical peculiarities of valleys, mountains, and plateaus have a direct impact on movement patterns, rhythm structures, and performance venues, while local forms of production and spiritual beliefs also determine the symbolic significance of each dance style.

4.1.1. Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance: Ritualistic and Martial Characteristics

The Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance is predominantly performed in Aba Prefecture's steep valleys. The results show that this dance form is distinguished by seriousness, power, stability, and ceremonial symbolism. Dance motions are often sluggish, heavy, and segmented, with significant pauses in between acts. The body stance emphasizes grounded movement, giving the feeling of strength and holiness.

The upper-body exercises are mostly composed of powerful horizontal arm swings and inflexible arm extensions that mimic martial maneuvers and military signaling. Lower-body motions focus on stomping, striding, and grounded strong action. The rhythmic stomping pattern represents collective power and resilience to tough mountain terrain.



Figure 1: Khon dance

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qH6yfyFylzK7yolwLAZxEg>(2025)

The Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance has a simple musical framework but a strong symbolic meaning. Human voice screams and cowhide drums are the key musical components. The findings indicate that the usage of high-pitched voice resonance

correlates precisely to the acoustic properties of narrow valleys, where echoes intensify collective sound. The slow and heavy rhythm of cowhide drums contributes to the mystical and ritual ambiance.



Figure 2: The vocalisation of a human cry

Source: <https://v.douyin.com/xdpViUSp87k/E@h.Ox08/22 hbn/>(2024)



Figure 3: Cowhide Drum

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/fsUygnsrL19ejx7T3RNNkA> (2024)

Costume analysis demonstrates that cowhide armor, shields, swords, and heavy leather boots are central visual components of the dance. These

costumes symbolize military culture, spiritual protection, and survival under harsh valley conditions.



Figure 4: Costumes for Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance
Source: Quan Zhen (2024)



Figure 5: Traditional Boots
Source: Quan Zhen (2024)

Overall, the Deep Valley Guozhuang Dance functions primarily as a ritual medium for spiritual worship, military blessing ceremonies, and community solidarity.

4.1.2. Mountain Village Guozhuang Dance: Everyday Life and Social Interaction

The findings show that the Mountain Village Guozhuang Dance evolved in mountainous environments with uneven topography and agricultural lifestyles. In contrast to the melancholy atmosphere of valley dance, this form emphasizes

quickness, realism, flexibility, and social involvement.

Dance moves are derived from agricultural labor, hunting pursuits, herb harvesting, and daily mountain living. Upper-body motions resemble threshing barley, gathering plants, manipulating ropes, and carrying items. Flexible wrist rotations and realistic hand movements are prominent features.

4.1.3. Highland Grassland Guozhuang Dance: Freedom and Nomadic Expression



Figure 6: Upper-Body Movements in Mountain Village Dance
Source: Quan Zhen (2026)



Figure 7: Lower-Body Movements in Mountain Village Dance
Source: Quan Zhen (2026)

The data show that rhythmic diversity is quite essential in this dancing genre. Slow beats are employed during holy rites, but quick and lively rhythms are used at festivals and social gatherings. This paradox symbolizes the mountain Tibetans' mix

of spiritual devotion with happy communal life. Musically, the dance is mainly reliant on bamboo lutes and folk singing. The lute's mellow and resonant sound provides an atmosphere conducive to emotive storytelling and social interaction.



Figure 8: Bamboo Lute

Source: <https://baike.weixin.qq.com/v74216042.htm?fromType=liteappShare> (2021)



Figure 9: Lute Performance

Source: Quan Zhen (2019)

Costume analysis shows that linen coats, sheepskin capes, embroidered belts, and mineral ornaments such as turquoise, coral, and agate are

dominant features of this dance style. These costumes reflect both environmental adaptation and local aesthetic identity.



Figure 10: Mountain Village Dance Costume

Source: Quan Zhen (2024)



Figure 11: Mountain Village Dance Costume

Source: Quan Zhen (2024)

The results suggest that Mountain Village Guozhuang Dance functions primarily as a medium for emotional communication, social bonding, and cultural transmission within village communities.

4.1.4. Highland Grassland Guozhuang Dance: Openness and Nomadic Identity

The findings reveal that the Highland Grassland Guozhuang Dance is closely associated with the

open plateau landscape and nomadic pastoral culture. This dance style is characterized by broad movement patterns, energetic rhythms, and expansive spatial expression.

Upper-body movements imitate horse riding, herding, and sleeve-swinging actions. Long sleeve movements create extended visual lines and symbolize the openness of the grassland environment.



Figure 12: Upper-Body Movements in Grassland Dance

Source: Quan Zhen (2026)

Lower-body movements emphasize long-step jumps, broad stepping patterns, and continuous motion. Compared with the compact movement

structure of valley and mountain dances, the grassland dance exhibits significantly greater spatial extension.



Figure 13: Long-Step Movement in Grassland Dance

Source: Quan Zhen (2026)

Musically, the dance uses large string instruments and collective singing. The low and

resonant sounds imitate the vastness of the grassland landscape and strengthen collective emotional participation.



Figure 14: Grassland String Instrument

Source: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ts2Ug1GFLO1Tl_g5lhFZgw (2025)

Costume findings indicate that loose Tibetan robes, long sleeves, leather boots, and silver ornaments are central elements of the grassland

dance identity. Costume structures allow flexibility for horseback movement and adaptation to cold plateau climates.



Figure 15: Tibetan Dress

Source: <http://xhslink.com/offWsy4SUECr> (2024)



Figure 16: Grassland Boots

Source: Quan Zhen (2025)

The Highland Grassland Guozhuang Dance primarily functions as a celebratory and communal performance during weddings, festivals, and grassland ceremonies, symbolizing freedom, vitality, and nomadic cultural identity.

4.2. Comparative Analysis of Dance Elements

4.2.1. Body Movement and Rhythmic Logic

The comparison research reveals fundamental disparities in movement logic across the three dancing forms.

The Deep Valley style focuses on muscular and segmented motions with significant rhythmic interruptions, conveying ceremonial solemnity and martial iconography. In contrast, the Mountain Village style employs compact and fluid motions that resemble common labour tasks and interpersonal interaction. Meanwhile, the Highland Grassland style emphasises broad and flowing patterns that reflect the openness of plateau landscapes.

These findings show that dance movement systems are inextricably linked to geographical factors and habitual physical adaptation in various ecological settings.

4.2.2. Musical Structure and Sound Environment

Significant heterogeneity was also seen in musical composition. Valley dance music is based on strong human vocalization and drum resonance, which are appropriate for confined valley acoustics. Mountain dance music employs softer melodic instruments to aid narrative and emotional connection. Grassland dancing music has loud communal singing and low-

frequency lute accompaniment, making it suitable for broad open settings.

The findings suggest that natural sound settings have a considerable impact on musical structure and performance practice.

4.2.3. Costume Systems and Cultural Identity

The clothing systems of the three dance styles indicate distinct links between environmental adaptation and symbolic identification.

The use of armor and weapon iconography in Valley garments emphasizes protection and ritual power. Mountain clothes priorities functionality and workmanship appropriate for everyday agricultural activity. Grassland costumes emphasize mobility, temperature adaptability, and visual dynamism, which are suited for nomadic cultures. These clothing changes serve as tangible representations of regional identity and cultural memory.

4.3. Spatial Relationships Between Geography and Dance Performance

The findings further demonstrate that geographical landforms directly shape the spatial organization of dance performance.

4.3.1. Valley Spatial Structure

Valley environments produce narrow and linear performance spaces. As a result, performers use compact movement ranges and controlled spatial extension. Dance formations are tightly organized and emphasize vertical stability.



Figure 17: Valley Landscape
 Source: Quan Zhen (2025)



Figure 18: Valley Dance Performance
 Source: <https://v.douyin.com/j7HYF8vruntw/jcN:/04/19W@z.TI> (2026)

4.3.2. Mountain Spatial Structure

Mountainous terrain creates uneven performance areas that require balance control and

flexible footwork. Circular formations are typically performed on gently sloping ground, and movement coordination emphasizes stability and adaptability.



Figure 19: Mountainous landscape
Source: Quan Zhen 2024



Figure 20: Klit Kiujaao's performance
Source: [https://v.douyin.com/yi2FsejHR_s/Xmq/12/30J@v.Fh\(2023\)](https://v.douyin.com/yi2FsejHR_s/Xmq/12/30J@v.Fh(2023))

4.3.3. Plateau Spatial Structure

The open plateau environment allows unrestricted spatial expansion. Large-scale circular

formations, broad movement pathways, and extensive arm gestures become dominant characteristics of grassland dance performance.



Figure 21: Highland Landform

Source: https://v.douyin.com/8MW8_C6SGys/v@S.YZ lca/10/27



Figure 22: Performance

Source: <https://v.douyin.com/2kVrVY3ncAA/jCH:/07/21v@s.RX> (2025)

These findings confirm that spatial relationships in Tibetan dance are fundamentally influenced by landform characteristics.

4.4. Symbolic Meaning of Dance Movements

According to the research, many Tibetan dance moves begin as practical body adaptations to geographical limitations before evolving into symbolic cultural representations.

Knee-bending moves in valley dance show adaptability to steep terrain and endurance in tough situations. Minor-step motions in mountain dancing emulate careful strolling on small mountain trails, representing flexibility and realism. Broad arm-opening motions in grassland dancing depict the openness of plateau landscapes, representing freedom and spiritual connection with nature.

起伏连绵不断；“屈”时后背气息始终延伸；“伸”时下肢与地面要有对抗感。

1. 伸屈伸

在屈伸基础上，气息带动膝部慢伸，再有控制地快速下屈，重拍向上【见图③、图④】。

2. 沉膝屈伸

在屈伸基础上，气息带动膝部有挤压感地下沉，慢屈快伸，重拍向下。

(三) 颤

在屈伸的基础上加快节奏而成，肩部带动膝部有弹性地颤动（分为重拍向上和重拍向下两种）。



Figure 23: Characteristics of knee bending and stretching posture
Source: <https://v.douyin.com/Y8m4b7jEu18/> P@k.PK 01/29 HiP:/(2022)



Figure 24: Characteristics of the sub-walking posture
Source: <https://v.douyin.com/Y8m4b7jEu18/> P@k.PK 01/29 HiP:/(2021)

The findings indicate that Tibetan dancing motions serve as both physical practices and cultural emblems, intertwined with environmental memory and group identity.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study looked at the interaction between natural geographical conditions and Tibetan folk-dance styles in Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. Three sample geographical environments—valleys, mountains, and plateaus—were chosen as the foundation for investigation, along with three associated dance forms: Xuesuo Tibetan Dance, Mountain Guozhuang Dance, and Grassland Guozhuang Dance. The study examined these dances from the standpoints of historical origin, artistic features, and movement components. Furthermore, the study identified three key movement patterns—knee bending and stretching, sub-walking steps, and arm-spreading gestures—and investigated their

origins, biological functions, artistic meanings, and cultural importance.

The findings show that Tibetan folk dance is strongly ingrained in the natural environment and the survival experiences of local ethnic populations. The historical evolution of each dance genre demonstrates the Tibetan people's adaptability to various geographical situations. Xuesuo Tibetan Dance originated in restricted and rocky valley environments, sculpted by challenging terrain and previous tribal battles into a ceremonial and warrior-like dance form. Mountain Guozhuang Dance evolved in hilly agricultural and semi-pastoral environments, resulting in agile and rhythmic motions linked to labor operations and community interaction. Grassland Guozhuang Dance evolved on the immense plateau grasslands of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, where open space and nomadic culture resulted in broad, steady, and expansive dances that emphasized harmony, togetherness, and spiritual freedom. These findings support the argument that

folk dance is not merely artistic expression but also a cultural adaptation to geographical and environmental realities (Li, 2000).

The study also discovered that the artistic elements of Tibetan dancing are intimately related to the physical features of the surroundings. Valley dances emphasize compact movements, serious ceremonial rhythms, and symbolic military gestures because valley topography limits movement space and has traditionally necessitated communal defense. Mountain dances, on the other hand, use animal mimicry, modest movement ranges, and gradually accelerating beats to portray the varying slopes and biological richness of mountainous regions. Grassland dances include circular shapes, open gestures, and relaxing beats to reflect the plateau's openness and nomadic populations' common lifestyle. These findings are compatible with cultural ecology theory, which posits that creative forms emerge from long-term interactions between human populations and their natural surroundings.

This study makes an essential addition by analyzing dance movement components from both physiological and cultural viewpoints. The movement of knee bending and stretching was discovered to be the result of Tibetan people's physical adaptation to hilly and high-altitude terrain. In low-oxygen conditions, repeated bending and stretching movements assist maintain balance, preserve energy, and control breathing. These regular body activities have evolved into stylized dance rhythms. Similarly, sub-walking steps evolved from narrow mountain trails and valley roads where modest and controlled motions were required for safe passage. Arm-spreading motions evolved from the sight of birds and eagles in plateau regions, and they represented openness, independence, and appreciation for nature. These findings indicate that Tibetan dance movements are practical bodily adaptations transformed into artistic symbols through cultural development and ritual practice.

The study also found that Tibetan dancing serves as a symbolic cultural structure. Natural features like valleys, woods, meadows, eagles, and wind are used to create metaphorical body language and choreography. Xuesuo Tibetan Dance uses armor-like clothing, weapon accessories, and heavy stepping rhythms to represent endurance, protection, and communal memory. Animal mimicry and labor-inspired motions are used in Mountain Guozhuang Dance to represent human-nature harmony. Circular forms and open movements are used in Grassland Guozhuang Dance to represent freedom, togetherness, and spiritual connection with nature.

As a result, Tibetan dancing is more than just entertainment; it is also a nonverbal cultural medium that maintains historical memory, religious beliefs, environmental knowledge, and ethnic identity.

The findings also highlight present issues in the transmission and development of Tibetan dance. Tibetan dance is becoming more disconnected from its original ecological and social environment as a result of modern cultural communication and theatrical performances. Simplified choreography, standardized teaching techniques, and theatrical adaptation have all undermined the link between dance and ordinary life. As a result, certain traditional gestures lose their original environmental and ceremonial significance and become just performing visual symbols. This result backs up Jiang Dong's (2014) criticism of the loss of ecological context in institutionalized folk-dance performance, as well as Li Xiankui's (2016) emphasis on the inseparability of Tibetan culture from its geographical environment, production techniques, and social life.

Overall, this study suggests that geographical environment, socioeconomic patterns, and body adaptability all have a significant impact on Tibetan folk dancing in Aba Prefecture. The connection between geography and dance is not a one-way effect, but rather a dynamic process of interaction and reciprocal molding between humans and environment. Tibetan dance maintains the survival wisdom, cultural identity, and spiritual aspirations of Tibetan people via body movement and creative expression. As a result, the maintenance and inheritance of Tibetan dance should not be limited to stage aesthetics and commercial performance, but should also conserve the ecological, cultural, and environmental underpinnings on which these dance traditions are based.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study makes significant academic and cultural contributions to the field of Tibetan folk-dance research by thoroughly investigating the link between natural geographical conditions and dance styles in Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province. The study adds to our understanding of how valleys, mountains, and plateaus influence the historical evolution, artistic features, movement structures, and cultural significance of Tibetan dancing. Unlike previous research, which focused primarily on dance performance or ethnic cultural description, this study combines geography, cultural ecology, body movement analysis, and folk-art studies to explain the internal relationship between environment,

lifestyle, and artistic expression. The study also contributes to the theoretical understanding of dance as a form of bodily adaptation to nature, demonstrating that movement components such as knee bending and stretching, sub-steps, and arm-spreading gestures originate from practical survival experiences and later develop into symbolic cultural expressions.

Another significant addition of this study is the expansion of Tibetan dance studies to include the examination of symbolic geographical imagery and cultural significance. The study shows how natural elements like valleys, mountains, meadows, birds, wind, and open sky are converted into movement symbols, choreographic structures, and ceremonial manifestations in Tibetan dance traditions. This discovery broadens the scholarly discourse on Tibetan dance beyond aesthetics and performance, establishing dance as a nonverbal cultural vehicle for conserving collective memory, spiritual beliefs, environmental knowledge, and ethnic identity. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the issue of excessive theatricalization and the erosion of living roots in contemporary Tibetan dance performance, providing vital insights into present issues in the preservation and transmission of ethnic folk culture in modern society.

Based on the findings of this study, various recommendations may be made for cultural preservation, dance instruction, and future creative growth. First, the inheritance and preservation of Tibetan dance should prioritize the dance's native ecological and cultural setting over stage performance and entertainment value. Dance education institutes, cultural organizations, and performance groups should enhance the incorporation of geographical information, traditional lifestyles, ceremonial background, and ethnic cultural values into dance instruction and choreography. This would assist to retain Tibetan dance's inherent cultural logic while also preventing the loss of its environmental and spiritual significance.

Second, local governments and cultural heritage organizations should help fund community-based preservation efforts in Tibetan regions like Aba and Ganzi. Traditional dance inheritors, village performers, and local communities should be encouraged to participate actively in cultural preservation activities, performance documentation, and intergenerational transmission. Digital archiving, audiovisual recording, and field documenting should all be encouraged in order to preserve original movement forms, costumes, music,

and ritual practices before they are lost due to modernization and commercialization.

Third, modern dance producers and choreographers should approach Tibetan traditional dance with more cultural sensitivity and environmental understanding. While creative creativity and modern adaptation are crucial for cultural diffusion, new choreographic works should be linked to the original cultural context and symbolic meanings of traditional dance. The long-term growth of Tibetan folk dance in contemporary culture requires a balance of creative inventiveness and cultural authenticity.

This study indicates numerous critical areas for further research growth. First, future research should broaden the geographical scope of study by comparing distinct Tibetan dance traditions within the same geographical context, such as dances from different villages, tribes, or cultural lineages in valleys, mountains, or plateau areas. Such comparative investigation would contribute to the creation of a complete and more comprehensive framework for explaining the link between location and dance variation.

Second, future study should look at more body movement components than only knee bending, sub-steps, and arm-spreading motions. To further understand Tibetan dance body language and aesthetics, it's important to explore other movement characteristics such as waist movement, head motions, hand patterns, foot rhythms, breathing synchronization, and eye expressions.

Third, future studies should improve the empirical and field-based research techniques. Fieldwork in Tibetan autonomous prefectures like Aba and Ganzi should involve participant observation, interviews with dance inheritors, film documentation, and anthropological study of authentic ritual and festival performances. Combining documentary analysis with field data enhances the accuracy, depth, and cultural authenticity of future study findings.

Finally, future research should investigate the connection between Tibetan dancing and religious rites, festivals, mythology, and spiritual beliefs. More in-depth research into symbolic meaning, ceremonial function, and cultural memory might help explain how dance serves as a channel for connecting humans, nature, religion, and communal identity. Such studies would not only enrich the theoretical framework of Tibetan dance research, but would also help to preserve and perpetuate Tibetan traditional cultural heritage in the face of globalization and modernization.

REFERENCES

- An, Y. (2010). *Ghee*. China Literature Press.
- Alai. (1998). *Everything Will Be Fine*. China Literature Press.
- Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chen, Q. Z. (1911). *Dream of Forest Dust*. Sichuan Ethnic Publishing House.
- Chejizhuoma. (2021). *Collected Essays on Tibetan Dance Culture*. Tibet Cultural Publishing House.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dalki. (1991). *Records of Aba Styles*. Southwest University for Nationalities Press.
- Deng, F., Deng, M., & Zhao, B. (2018). Research on the Creation and Promotion of Row Dance in the Tibetan Qiang Pot Village. *Journal of Tibetan Folk Arts*, 12(3), 45-53.
- Jiang, D. (2014). Reflection on the lost ecological context of folk dance from an institutional perspective. *Journal of Ethnic Art Studies*, 12(3), 45-52.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell.
- Li, L. (2000). *An overview of the folk culture of Tibetan people in Danba*. Chengdu: Sichuan Ethnic Publishing House.
- Li, X. (2016). A study on the regional characteristics of Tibetans in Sichuan. *Journal of Tibetan Cultural Studies*, 8(2), 66-74.
- Lin, J. R. (2019). A Brief Analysis of the Aesthetic Characteristics and Inheritance Innovation of Tibetan Dance. *Journal of Tibetan Art Studies*, 12(3), 45-52.
- Liu, W. (2010). The Social Function of Zangguozhuang and Its Modern Changes. *Tibetan Cultural Studies Journal*, 8(2), 67-75.
- Marlin. (2016). Basic Characteristics of Tibetan Dance and Exploration of Innovative Development. *Chinese Folk Dance Research*, 15(4), 88-95.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge.
- Nima, C. (2022). *Aba Tibetan Tangka Art Research*. Sichuan Fine Arts Press.
- Pink, S. (2013). *Doing Visual Ethnography* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Yue, J. B. (2020). Research on Artistic Characteristics and Cultural Connotations of Tibetan Qiang Pot Zhuang Dance. *Journal of Ethnic Arts Research*, 9(1), 102-110.
- Zhang, P. H. (2011). Cultural Diversity Characteristics of "Jiarong" Tibetan Ethnic Sports Dance "Armour Dance". *Journal of Southwest Ethnic Culture*, 6(2), 33-41.
- ZhaXidawa. (2019). *Folk Research of the Wang Guo Festival of Tibetans in Abba*. Tibetan Culture Publishing House.
- Zhou, J. (2019). *Changes in Tibetan Wedding Customs in Aba*. Sichuan Cultural Research Press.