

Article

Embodied Heritage and Cultural Memory: A Comparative Study of Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur Dance Traditions in Inner Mongolia

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Abstract: This study investigates the cultural meanings and ethnic memory embedded in the traditional dances of three minority groups in China's Inner Mongolia: the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur. Through comparative analysis, the research explores how these dances function not only as aesthetic expressions but also as profound symbols of cultural identity, ecological consciousness, and totemic belief. Examining movement vocabularies, ritual functions, and performance contexts, the study reveals that dance acts as a multidimensional medium—bridging past and present, sacred and communal, natural and symbolic. More than artistic practices, these dances serve as living archives of ethnic heritage, embodying intergenerational knowledge, historical narratives, and communal values. The Oroqen's hunting-mimetic dances, the Evenki's shamanic rituals, and the Daur's festive performances each demonstrate how dance reflects cosmological worldviews and sustains cultural identity. In the context of modernization and cultural homogenization, traditional dance emerges as a form of cultural resilience and resistance. This study argues for the vital role of indigenous dance in maintaining ethnic distinctiveness while enabling adaptive innovation. By highlighting the social, spiritual, and ecological functions of dance, this research contributes to the preservation and appreciation of China's intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Oroqen; Evenki; Daur; ethnic dance; cultural identity; ecological consciousness; ritual performance; intangible cultural heritage

1. Introduction

The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is a culturally rich multi-ethnic area in China, home to three small yet culturally significant minority groups: the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur. Despite their relatively small populations, these groups possess vibrant traditional systems, with dance playing a central role in cultural expression. Their dance traditions offer a lens into their ways of life, spiritual beliefs, and worldviews [1]. In ethnographic and dance studies, folk dance is increasingly recognized as a vital medium of cultural expression and identity construction, especially in minority communities where rituals, collective memory, nature worship, and transmission of traditions often take embodied forms [2]. The Oroqen "Deer Dance", for example, is not merely animal mimicry but an expression of reverence for spiritual forces in nature, embodying ecological philosophy through movement and rhythm. However, current scholarship on these minority dances tends to focus on isolated case studies, lacking a comprehensive comparative analysis. The connections between

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different dance types—such as fire dances, mimetic dances, and religious dances—and their embedded cultural meanings have yet to be systematically explored. Ref. [3] observes that mimetic dances often reflect a group's primitive cognitive structures, carrying symbolic and mythological meanings derived from daily life. Nevertheless, deeper analyses remain limited. This study aims to fill that gap by adopting a comparative approach that combines literature review and ethnographic theory. It reviews the historical development, classifications, movement languages, and rhythmic patterns of the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur dances. Applying frameworks from dance anthropology, the research explores how these dance forms construct cultural identity and maintain collective memory from both artistic and cultural perspectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Existing Scholarship on Minority Dances

Although the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur groups possess rich and distinctive dance traditions, scholarly engagement with their dance forms has been relatively sparse and fragmented. Most existing research on these minority groups has prioritized areas such as linguistic preservation, ethnic attire, religious beliefs, and subsistence practices [4], while dance—a critical medium of cultural expression—has received limited focused attention. The paucity of detailed analyses concerning the movement vocabulary, structural typology, and ritual functions of their dances reflects a broader gap in ethnographic literature and dance anthropology [5], in *Introduction to Chinese Ethnic Dance*, underscores that mimetic dances offer a unique lens through which hunting-based societies articulate their lived experiences and cosmological perceptions. He suggests that these dances are not merely performative acts but encapsulate foundational mythologies and totemic belief systems. For instance, the Oroqen “Hunter’s Dance” and “Eagle Dance” utilize stylized gestures such as crouching, leaping, and arm extensions to simulate animal behavior, symbolizing the group’s veneration of animal spirits and ancestral connections. These dance forms, rooted in shamanic belief systems, serve as both a record of hunting practices and an embodied expression of spiritual cosmology. The Evenki’s “Shaman Drum Dance” exemplifies the fusion of religious ritual and dance performance. The dance combines circular rotational movements, rhythmic drumming, and vocal incantations to facilitate communication with ancestral spirits [5]. The dance’s choreography is marked by trance-inducing spins, trembling limbs, and symbolic gestures, all of which express a deep ontological relationship between the dancer and the spirit realm. These features elevate the dance from mere aesthetic expression to a spiritual vehicle for healing, prophecy, and ancestral communion. In contrast, Daur ethnic dances display a stronger orientation toward festivity and communal celebration. Frequently performed during events such as the “Aobao Festival” or seasonal gatherings, these dances incorporate expansive group formations, call-and-response singing, and percussive footwork [6]. Their function often revolves around reinforcing kinship ties, celebrating agricultural abundance, and fostering social cohesion. However, despite their importance in communal life, Daur dances have seldom been studied through the lens of choreographic structure, movement semiotics, or sociocultural symbolism. Most existing literature remains descriptive or archival, lacking in-depth theoretical interrogation. While there exists a foundational body of descriptive scholarship, particularly regarding the Oroqen and Evenki, much of it remains confined to folklore documentation or anthropological surveys with limited analytical depth. The structural complexity, symbolic gestures, and interrelations between movement and cultural meaning in these dance forms warrant more systematic and comparative academic investigation.

2.2. A Framework for Dance Classification

To enable a more nuanced interpretation of the expressive modalities and cultural meanings embedded in the dances of the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur peoples, this study adopts and refines the classification system proposed by Huang Weiruo (2008) in *Dance Anthropology and Chinese Ethnic Dance Studies*. Huang identifies four major categories of ethnic dance: ritual dances, life dances, entertainment dances, and symbolic mimetic dances. Each category is delineated by its function, performance context, and stylistic features, providing a valuable framework for cross-cultural analysis. Building upon Huang’s schema, this study proposes a tailored classification that aligns

more closely with the observed characteristics of the three minority groups' dances: (1) bonfire dances, (2) mimetic dances, and (3) religious dances. This tripartite typology enables clearer comparative analysis by aligning form and function with cultural context. Bonfire dances are community-oriented performances typically associated with seasonal festivals, ancestor worship, or agricultural rituals. For example, the Daur "Andai Dance" is a canonical bonfire dance that features concentric group movements, rhythmic hand-clapping, and dynamic call-and-response chanting. The emphasis on participatory circularity and percussive rhythm underscores its social and integrative functions, fostering group identity and festive atmosphere. Mimetic dances are defined by their symbolic imitation of animal or natural behaviors, reflecting the cognitive and ecological frameworks of hunting societies. The Oroqen "Deer Dance", for instance, involves carefully codified gestures that mimic the movements of deer—cautious steps, alert turns, and bounding leaps—to embody both the hunter's respect for the animal and a belief in spiritual coexistence. These dances often serve pedagogical functions, instructing younger generations in the ethics and techniques of traditional hunting life. Religious dances are ritualistic in nature, performed in contexts that demand spiritual mediation, healing, or divination. The Evenki "Shaman Dance", led by spiritual practitioners, integrates drumming, spinning, incantations, and symbolic costumes (such as animal skins or feathered headpieces) to establish communion with supernatural forces. These dances are deeply codified, often reserved for sacred occasions, and carry complex theological symbolism relating to cosmology, illness, fertility, and moral transgression [7]. This refined classification not only helps clarify the functional and aesthetic distinctions between the dance forms of the three minority groups but also provides a robust foundation for the comparative analysis that follows. It highlights the multifaceted nature of ethnic dance—as spiritual medium, cultural repository, social ritual, and aesthetic practice—underscoring its centrality in the lived experiences of minority communities in Inner Mongolia.

3. Comparative Analysis of Dance Forms

3.1. *Bonfire Dances: Rhythm and Communality*

Bonfire dances occupy a central role in the communal and ceremonial life of both the Evenki and Daur peoples, serving as ritual enactments of unity, spiritual reverence, and cultural vitality. In Evenki culture, bonfire dances are frequently performed during shamanic festivals and seasonal rites. These dances are marked by repetitive, circular patterns performed around a central fire, accompanied by steady drumming and vocal chants. Participants often move in synchronized steps, forming concentric circles that symbolize the cosmic order and the unbroken cycle of life. The fire itself serves as a spiritual axis, representing the ancestral realm and the natural forces invoked during ritual [8]. The slow, rhythmic tempo and meditative quality of the dance encourage communal attunement and foster a sense of sacred temporality. In contrast, the Daur bonfire dances are more dynamic, characterized by pronounced physical vigor and theatrical expressiveness. These dances incorporate robust, high-impact movements such as jumping, crouching, throwing, and rhythmic stamping, often performed by male dancers to emulate the vitality and resilience associated with hunters and warriors [9]. These movements are not only physically demonstrative but symbolically charged, highlighting the human capacity to engage with and triumph over nature. The bonfire acts as a site of collective memory and celebration, where ancestral spirits are honored, and communal bonds are reaffirmed through exuberant bodily expression. Unlike the meditative focus of Evenki dances, Daur bonfire performances often integrate humorous storytelling, competitive elements, and interactive gestures, reinforcing their social and entertainment functions. Despite these differences, both dance traditions reflect a deep-seated connection between fire, community, and cosmological meaning. The structural use of circular formations, rhythmic coordination, and bodily synchrony signifies a shared understanding of dance as a vehicle for communal cohesion and ritual communication.

3.2. *Mimetic Dances and Hunting Tradition*

Mimetic dances are particularly prominent in Oroqen culture, where they serve as both pedagogical tools and spiritual enactments of ecological harmony. These dances are deeply intertwined with the Oroqen's traditional hunting lifestyle and their animistic worldview, which regards animals as spiritual beings and ecological kin. The "Deer Dance", for example, is composed of flowing, alert movements that imitate a deer's

cautious foraging, abrupt pauses, and swift directional shifts. These gestures not only evoke the physical traits of the deer but also signify the Oroqen's reverence for this totemic animal as a symbol of wisdom, agility, and survival [10]. Similarly, the "Eagle Dance" mimics the powerful flapping of wings, aerial spirals, and watchful scanning of the skies, embodying the eagle's role as a spiritual messenger and protector. The choreography involves expansive arm gestures, spinning turns, and piercing vocalizations, all of which dramatize the spiritual connection between human and bird. These dances often accompany narrative storytelling, where elders recount myths and historical episodes related to the animals being portrayed. Functionally, mimetic dances serve as rites of passage, performed during coming-of-age ceremonies or pre-hunt rituals to prepare participants psychologically and spiritually. They offer embodied instruction in the skills, ethics, and cosmological insights of traditional life. The use of rhythmic drumming and animal-skin attire further anchors the performance in ritual aesthetics, transforming the dancer into a hybrid being that mediates between the human and animal worlds. Through these performances, the Oroqen maintain a dynamic system of ecological knowledge, spiritual belief, and ancestral continuity.

3.3. Religious Dances: Shamanism and Symbolism

Religious or shamanic dances represent the most spiritually charged form of performance among the Evenki, Oroqen, and Daur communities. Rooted in indigenous cosmologies, these dances are intended to mediate between the physical and metaphysical realms, facilitating communication with ancestors, deities, and elemental spirits. In Evenki society, religious dances are primarily conducted by female shamans, known as saman, who are believed to possess the ability to enter altered states of consciousness. The "Shaman Drum Dance" is a highly structured ritual involving rhythmic drumming, circular spinning, and trance-like body trembling. The shaman's costume—adorned with feathers, bells, animal motifs, and fringe—plays a symbolic role, transforming her into a liminal figure capable of journeying through different spiritual realms. Movements such as arching backward, shaking limbs, and vocalized incantations signify the presence of spirit possession, healing, or divine revelation [10]. The Oroqen also perform shamanic dances, though with distinct stylistic and symbolic features. These dances often focus on invoking forest spirits and ancestral protectors during significant life events such as childbirth, illness, or death. The choreography includes grounded, stamping movements and focused hand gestures, which are interpreted as signals to guide or ward off spirits. Shamanic paraphernalia such as wooden masks, antler crowns, or incense smoke may be incorporated to heighten ritual efficacy and visual symbolism.

The Daur religious dances are typically more intimate and subdued, performed within family settings or small village ceremonies. These include fertility rites, ancestor blessings, and healing rituals. The movements are restrained and dignified, often consisting of repeated bowing, kneeling, and circular gestures made around sacred objects. While less theatrical than Evenki or Oroqen shamanic performances, Daur religious dances convey deep spiritual intentionality and cultural reverence. The understated nature of these performances reflects a form of spiritual interiority, where meaning is conveyed through silence, stillness, and repetition. Across all three groups, religious dances affirm spiritual beliefs, preserve sacred knowledge, and reinforce community identity through embodied ritual. They are not only performances but acts of cultural cosmology, wherein the dancer becomes both a vessel and a conduit for ancestral power and divine communication. These dances stand as profound expressions of the communities' philosophical outlooks on life, death, and the spiritual interconnectedness of all beings.

4. Cultural Connotations and Ethnic Memory

4.1. Dance and Cultural Identity

Dance operates as a crucial medium for expressing and preserving ethnic identity among the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur peoples. It functions not merely as a form of aesthetic display but as a living, embodied text that encodes historical memory, cultural values, and group belonging. The Oroqen "Deer Dance" exemplifies this role vividly. Beyond its surface-level mimetic form, the dance symbolically reenacts the Oroqen's worldview centered on harmonious coexistence with nature. The deer, a revered totemic animal, signifies not

only ecological adaptability but also spiritual purity and ancestral protection. Through stylized movements that reflect attentiveness, grace, and agility—such as slow, measured steps and abrupt directional shifts—the dancer channels the essence of the deer, thereby affirming the group’s ecological identity and spiritual lineage. In this sense, dance becomes a sacred act of cultural remembrance, reinforcing who the Oroqen are and what they value. The Daur “Andai Dance”, traditionally performed during communal festivals or healing ceremonies, encapsulates the collective spirit of Daur society. Its group-based circular formations, rhythmic stomping, and call-and-response vocal patterns emphasize social solidarity, intergenerational continuity, and kinship cohesion. Each synchronized gesture is a physical reiteration of shared cultural narratives—stories of ancestry, resilience, and mutual care. In this choreography, cultural memory is not just remembered but enacted, reinforcing identity through collective participation. The Evenki’s ritual and ceremonial dances also contribute to the articulation of cultural identity, particularly through shamanic performance where the body of the dancer becomes a vessel for ancestral voices and spiritual cosmologies. Thus, for all three groups, dance serves as both a repository and transmitter of ethnic identity, tightly woven into the fabric of cultural survival and renewal.

4.2. Ecological Consciousness and Totemic Belief

In the cosmologies of the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur peoples, dance is not only an artistic expression but a reflection of deep ecological awareness and totemic philosophy. These dance traditions emerge from a worldview in which nature is animated by spiritual forces, and humans coexist with the natural world in a reciprocal relationship. The Evenki “Sun Dance” is a ceremonial performance that honors the solar deity as the giver of life, light, and cosmic balance. Dancers employ outward-spreading arm movements, spinning motions, and upward gazes to mimic the radiance and omnipresence of the sun. The choreography is designed not only to worship but also to align the human body with the cyclical order of nature—sunrise and sunset, seasons, and growth [9]. The dance thus becomes an embodied cosmological model through which environmental reverence is expressed and ritualized. In Oroqen culture, the deer embodies a nexus of ecological and spiritual values. Their reverence is manifested through ritual dances that imitate deer movements, encapsulating the animal’s wisdom, agility, and attunement to the forest. The “Deer Dance” functions as both homage and invocation, allowing the dancer to spiritually commune with the natural world. The performance transmits a philosophy of balance, interdependence, and mutual respect—key tenets of the Oroqen’s environmental ethics. The Daur incorporate similar principles into their animal mimicry dances, particularly those imitating birds and beasts. These performances, often seen during seasonal festivals, celebrate the rhythms of nature, migration, and fertility. The light, fluttering movements of bird dances, for example, reflect ideals of freedom, grace, and harmony. Through such choreographies, the Daur symbolically reaffirm their place within the broader ecological system, where humans and animals share kinship and destiny. In all three traditions, totemic belief and ecological consciousness are not abstract philosophies but lived practices enacted through the body. Dance serves as a ritual bridge between species, realms, and generations, reinforcing an ethic of coexistence and sustainability.

4.3. Dance as Social Structure

Beyond cosmological and ecological dimensions, dance also serves as a foundational medium for organizing and reproducing social structure in the three minority communities. Through choreographed performance, social norms, generational hierarchies, gender roles, and moral values are enacted, negotiated, and sustained. The Daur “Aobao Festival” is an exemplary setting where dance becomes a performative space for reestablishing communal order and kinship roles. Group dances involve participants from different age groups, with distinct movement roles assigned based on gender and generational status. Elders often lead the chant or drumbeat, symbolizing their role as custodians of tradition, while youth engage in vigorous physical movements that showcase vitality and readiness for adulthood. The physical arrangement—often circular—also signifies unity and equality within the tribal hierarchy. In this way, dance structures the social fabric while creating a participatory ritual for community integration. Evenki wedding dances offer another compelling example. These choreographies reflect various stages of the marital union: courtship, alliance formation, and familial incorporation. Dances are divided into sections symbolizing different aspects of the wedding process—such as

negotiation, blessing, and communal joy. Men and women perform differentiated movements—men emphasizing protective strength and women enacting nurturing gestures—that reinforce socially constructed roles within marriage and family. The dance becomes a script through which the values of fidelity, respect, and social obligation are performed and learned. Among the Oroqen, dance plays a vital pedagogical role in intergenerational knowledge transfer. During communal performances, young dancers learn under the guidance of elders, who model gestures and correct errors in real time. These performances are semi-formal settings where ethical behavior, bodily discipline, and cultural literacy are taught through kinesthetic experience. The social choreography extends beyond the dance floor, informing expectations in hunting, parenting, and spiritual conduct. Thus, in all three communities, dance operates as a system of symbolic action that reflects and sustains the logic of social life. It is at once an artistic, pedagogical, and institutional practice, embodying and transmitting the norms that structure daily interaction and long-term cultural survival.

5. Interethnic Comparison and Cultural Integration

5.1. *Variations in Movement and Rhythm*

The dances of the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur peoples exhibit distinct movement vocabularies and rhythmic structures, each shaped by the group's environment, subsistence practices, and spiritual traditions. These variations in movement and rhythm offer critical insights into the embodied worldviews of each ethnic group. Evenki dances are often characterized by refined upper-body gestures and spiritually evocative movements. Ritual dances, particularly those led by shamans, emphasize hand gestures, shoulder rolls, and rhythmic trembling—movements that suggest the invocation of spiritual forces or divine possession. The rhythm is typically steady and trance-inducing, driven by the beat of ceremonial drums. This controlled and meditative quality reflects the Evenki's shamanic cosmology, where dance is a conduit for metaphysical communication and spiritual transformation. In contrast, Oroqen dances highlight dynamic and powerful lower-body actions. Movements such as deep lunges, crouches, leaps, and animal-like stances dominate their choreographic lexicon. These physical vocabularies mirror the agility and alertness required in their traditional hunting lifestyle. For example, in the “Deer Dance,” dancers emulate the flight response of prey—quick turns, sudden freezes, and directional shifts—symbolizing the interdependence between humans and the natural world. Rhythms are often percussive and syncopated, reflecting the unpredictability of the forest environment.

Daur dances, meanwhile, tend to be more fluid and rhythmic, often performed in collective formations that highlight synchronization and interpersonal harmony. Their festival dances emphasize group cohesion through repeated steps, clapping sequences, and circular movement patterns. The rhythm in Daur dance is upbeat and celebratory, inviting participation and reinforcing communal bonds. These stylistic elements align with the Daur emphasis on social unity, joy, and cultural continuity. In summary, the Evenki emphasize spiritual elevation through subtle, upper-body expression; the Oroqen embody survival and ecological observation through grounded, animalistic movements; and the Daur celebrate social identity through flowing, coordinated group choreographies. These movement patterns are not arbitrary but deeply embedded in each community's lived experience and cultural logic.

5.2. *Functional Divergence in Cultural Context*

Beyond stylistic differences, the functions of dance within each ethnic group further illuminate their respective cultural frameworks and cosmologies. Among the Oroqen, dance holds a prominent educational function. Dances such as the “Eagle Dance” and “Deer Dance” serve as mnemonic tools for transmitting survival strategies, ethical teachings, and hunting knowledge to younger generations. These performances are not limited to entertainment but are deeply integrated into rites of passage and pre-hunt ceremonies. By embodying the behavior of animals and environmental cues, dancers learn to navigate their ecological world while internalizing communal values such as respect for nature, courage, and restraint. Evenki dances, on the other hand, primarily fulfill spiritual and ritualistic purposes. As a culture deeply rooted in Shamanism, their dances function as sacred acts that bridge the human and supernatural realms. Whether invoking the blessings of ancestors or healing the ill, Evenki dances carry theological

weight and symbolic precision. Ritual dances are performed at seasonal festivals, funerals, births, and crises, reflecting a cosmology in which the spiritual world is ever-present and interactive. Here, the dancer is often not a performer but a spiritual medium, and the dance serves to maintain cosmic balance and moral order. In contrast, Daur dance traditions center around social cohesion and celebratory expression. Dance is most frequently encountered in public festivities such as the “Aobao Festival”, weddings, harvest celebrations, and village gatherings. The functional focus is on fostering a sense of shared joy, mutual support, and cultural pride. Daur dances are less concerned with metaphysical invocation and more with reinforcing interpersonal ties and intergenerational solidarity. Through collective movement, the community reaffirms its identity and continuity in the face of social change. Thus, while the Oroqen employ dance for ecological pedagogy, the Evenki for ritual sanctity, and the Daur for social celebration, all three illustrate how dance is mobilized in service of the community’s most essential cultural functions.

5.3. Integration of Dance with Oral Traditions

In all three ethnic cultures, dance is not an isolated art form but part of a broader expressive ecosystem that includes oral storytelling, music, myth, and ritual. This integration enriches the communicative power of dance, transforming it into a multimodal vehicle of cultural transmission. The Oroqen’s “Deer Dance”, for instance, is typically accompanied by oral narratives that recount mythological episodes, ancestral feats, or hunting lore. Elders narrate while younger dancers perform, creating a dialogic relationship between speech and movement. The story informs the dance, and the dance animates the story. This co-performance strengthens intergenerational bonds and ensures that cultural knowledge is preserved in both verbal and embodied forms. Evenki shamanic rituals similarly exemplify the confluence of dance, myth, and sound. The shaman’s dance is interspersed with incantations, spirit songs, and drumbeats that evoke ancestral memory and cosmological structures. Each gesture is synchronized with chant-based invocations, and the overall performance enacts a sacred story—such as a journey to the spirit world or the reincarnation of a soul. The integration of symbolic props—e.g., drums, bells, feathered costumes—further layers the dance with visual and sonic meaning. In this context, the body becomes a narrative device, relaying complex theological concepts through motion and rhythm. In Daur festivals, dance is typically accompanied by communal singing and oral legends that celebrate historical heroes, folk tales, or moral parables. The choreography often reflects the narrative content—for example, imitating the posture of a famous warrior or the flight of a mythical bird. Musical instruments such as the *morin huur* (horsehead fiddle) or hand drums provide rhythmic scaffolding, while verses guide the tempo and emotion of the dance. Through these performances, the community reasserts shared values and celebrates its cultural heritage. Collectively, these practices illustrate how dance functions as a living archive—one that synthesizes oral, musical, visual, and kinesthetic knowledge into a cohesive cultural expression. This integration ensures not only the retention of tradition but its embodiment, performance, and adaptation across generations.

6. Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of the dance traditions of the Oroqen, Evenki, and Daur peoples, this study reveals the intricate and multifaceted relationships between embodied movement, cultural belief systems, ecological worldviews, and social organization. The dances of these three ethnic groups are not merely artistic expressions but serve as vital conduits through which cultural memory, cosmological knowledge, and communal identity are transmitted, preserved, and transformed. Each dance tradition encapsulates a unique synthesis of spiritual belief, environmental interaction, and social structure, demonstrating the profound cultural logic embedded in bodily practice.

The analysis has shown that Evenki dances are deeply infused with shamanic spirituality, functioning as ritual acts that mediate between the human and supernatural realms. Oroqen dances, by contrast, are grounded in ecological consciousness and survival pedagogy, using animal mimicry as a means of environmental education and ancestral reverence. Meanwhile, Daur dances reflect a strong orientation toward social cohesion and festive expression, emphasizing group unity, intergenerational continuity, and cultural celebration. Across all three traditions, dance emerges as a holistic medium that integrates oral storytelling, music, symbolic gesture, and social ritual into a unified cultural system. Movement becomes a form of embodied narrative through which

values, histories, and cosmologies are not only communicated but lived. This interweaving of function and form reaffirms the essential role of dance in sustaining the integrity and vitality of minority cultures in Inner Mongolia. In the context of accelerated modernization, urbanization, and cultural homogenization, these traditional dances face increasing threats of marginalization and erosion. Many of the rituals and festivals in which these dances once thrived are undergoing rapid transformation, and the transmission of embodied knowledge from elders to youth is becoming increasingly fragmented. As such, the revitalization, documentation, and adaptive reinvention of these dance traditions are crucial for the long-term preservation of intangible cultural heritage. This study calls for a reframing of traditional dance not as static folklore or heritage artifact but as a dynamic, evolving form of cultural expression that continues to mediate identity, knowledge, and belonging in contemporary contexts. By foregrounding dance as a site of cultural resilience, this research contributes to broader discourses on heritage preservation, intercultural understanding, and ethnographic theory. It affirms that traditional dance, when sustained and supported, offers powerful insights into how communities define themselves, relate to their environments, and imagine their futures. This research underscores the enduring value of ethnic minority dances as living archives of cultural wisdom. These dance traditions are vital not only for the communities that sustain them but also for the wider scholarly field of dance studies, cultural anthropology, and heritage policy. In acknowledging the significance of movement as a form of knowledge, this study lays a foundation for future comparative research and for inclusive, community-centered approaches to cultural preservation in China and beyond.

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