

FLOWER DANCE HERITAGE: HISTORY, PRESERVATION, CONTINUITY AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION*

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Abstract

This research article aims to: (1) investigate the inheritance and innovation mechanisms embodied in the music and dance movements of three series of works derived from the Fengyang Flower Drum tradition; (2) analyze how Xiao Qinghong integrates traditional elements of Fengyang Flower Drum into modern physical fitness practices through an interdisciplinary approach combining music and dance studies; (3) construct a theoretical framework for understanding the “dynamic inheritance” of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the context of modern fitness culture. The data were analyzed by employing a descriptive research design, using literature review, music and dance analysis, and in-depth interviews with the inheritor Xiao Qinghong.

The results of the research were: (1) Xiao Qinghong’s fitness exercises preserve the rhythmic and stylistic essence of traditional Fengyang Flower Drum while adapting its music, movement, and costume elements to suit modern fitness functions; (2) the study establishes a “trinity model” of inheritance integrating music preservation, movement communication, and prop coordination, embodying the logic of dynamic inheritance; (3) the transformation

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of Fengyang Flower Drum into a national fitness activity provides a replicable model for creative transmission of ICH, enhancing cultural continuity and public participation.

Keywords: Fengyang Flower Drum, Xiao Qinghong, Flower drum fitness exercise (dance), Active inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, Creative concept

Introduction

Fengyang Flower Drum Fitness Exercise, as an innovative product of the traditional Fengyang Flower Drum and intangible cultural heritage inheritance concept, is rooted in the flower drum art and cultural soil of Fengyang County, Anhui Province. Based on the dance movements of the national intangible cultural heritage Fengyang Flower Drum, a gymnastics system that combines rhythmic beauty and fitness functions has been scientifically adapted. From the creation of the first set of fitness exercises in 2012 to the current three sets of fitness exercises, the intangible cultural heritage of Fengyang Flower Drum. In recent years, with the promotion of the national fitness strategy, Fengyang Flower Drum Fitness Exercise has developed from a local cultural symbol into a nationally influential characteristic fitness project, widely used in community sports, campus recess exercises, and elderly fitness, becoming a typical case of the coordinated development of traditional cultural activities and the construction of a healthy China. Due to its novelty, there is no relevant academic theoretical research. This article is a descriptive research conducts research from the perspective of music and dance studies, focusing on three sets of Fengyang Flower Drum fitness exercises to fill this academic gap.

Objectives

1. Organize the historical conditions and the music & dance traits of Fengyang flower drum dancing, and show the traditional traits inherited in Xiao Qinghong flower drum fitness exercise.

2. Xiao Qinghong uses an innovative combination of rhythm, melody, timbre in music, and movement, clothing and movement again in dance to implement a theoretical logic of "synthesis of the traditional and modern."

3. Dive into the dual function of Fengyang Flower Drum Fitness Exercise as both inheritor of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and contributor to national fitness activities. Base on Xiao Qinghong's idea of inheritance practice in pursuing a transformation path of modernization of Fengyang flower drum. The main content includes filling in the academic void left out from Fengyang flower drum fitness exercise studies.

Literature Review

Most existing studies remain confined to the static description of traditional forms and lack an analysis of the dynamic process by which contemporary inheritors transform musical and dance elements into fitness exercises. In particular, they neglect the theoretical refinement of Xiao Qinghong's practice. Studies emphasize borrowing traditional elements: music uses original fragments (Xu, 2001), dance adapts iconic movements, e.g., Mongolian "shoulder shaking".

There is a lack of research on the compilation of fitness aerobics "led by ICH inheritors", failing to reveal how inheritors conduct the creative transformation of musical and dance elements based on their own understanding of tradition. Xiao Qinghong's practice has not been regarded from the academic dimension yet, issues about the extraction standards of Fengyang flower drum music & dance components of Xiao Qinghong, integration logic, and aesthetic

pursuits are not systematically studied, thus the experience of "ICH + fitness" innovation is unable to be elevated into theory.

Methodology

1. Literature research method

This research has sorted out the history and traditional characteristics of Fengyang flower drum. Constructing analytical frameworks for ethnic musicology, dance studies, music and dance studies, and theories related to intangible cultural heritage inheritance, such as "dynamic inheritance" and "creative transformation".

2. In depth interview method:

Conduct in-depth interviews with Xiao Qinghong and observe the curriculum of the intangible cultural heritage Fengyang Flower Drum 3. Music ontology analysis method:

Analyze the audio of three sets of works, based on auditory analysis and Xiao Qinghong's oral narration.

4. Dance movement analysis method:

Using the "Dynamic Rhythm Deconstruction Method", the core elements of the movements, such as the knee joint angle of the "Boji Bu" and the technique display of the combination technique "Danfeng Chaoyang", are dismantled. Using three sets of Fengyang Flower Drum Fitness Exercise performance videos as the object, analyze the collaborative relationship between "action queue music structure clothing color scene applicable audience" and interpret it.

Conceptual Framework

First it explains the essence of flower drum dance fitness, referring to 4 items about Fengyang flower drum: origin, music, dancing & costumes; protection,

popularization, and promoting of Fengyang flower drum, and introduction to related flower drum dance fitness for Xiao Qinghong.

Second, it explores the inheritance practice and modern transformation path of Fengyang flower drum from a music and dance studies perspective, focusing on the core dimensions of Xiao Qinghong's inheritance concept (including music, movements, costumes and props, and inheritance paths), future practice directions, and the inheritance concepts that music and dance workers should hold.

Last but not least, the article does a thorough analysis of inheritance and innovation, the academic and practical values of Fengyang flower drum, as well as its summary of academic achievements, practical significance, and prospects of the research on Fengyang flower drum’s inheritance (Figure 1).

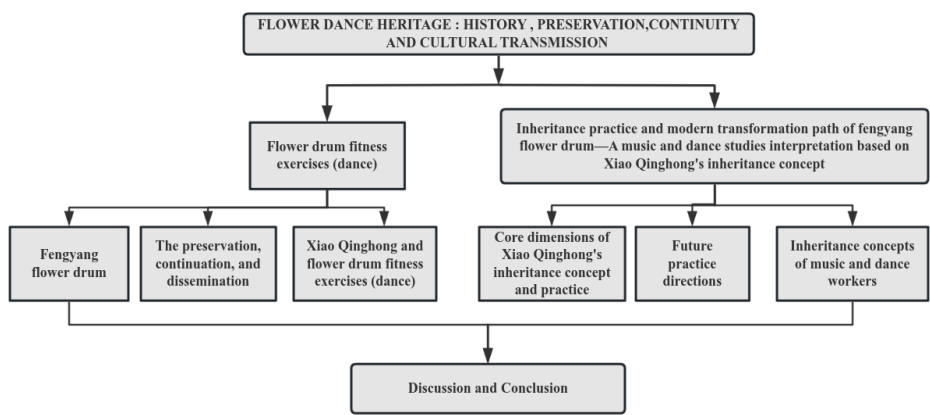


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by the researcher)

Results

1. Flower Drum Fitness Exercises (Dance)

1.1 Fengyang Flower Drum

1.1.1 The history of Fengyang Flower Drum

Fengyang flower drum came into being as immigrants in the Ming dynasty transported drums and gongs to Fengyang area. It was integrated singing, dancing and performance (Yin,2025), which were related with the agrarian labor. In early Ming dynasty's written documents, it had achieved great popularity and even appeared in the pictures of that time; after the Qing Dynasty, it became more and more popular, and eventually went into the palace (Xia & Chen,2023). In the Republic of China, it developed towards urbanization and absorbed western instruments and western plays. After 1949, it developed on singing new songs and large size band and instruments combination. Since the Reform and Opening-Up, TV station and international stage may find flower drum performance there (Qian & Gao,2019). Since 2006, it has been included in the national list of intangible cultural heritage.

1.1.2 The Tradition and Development of Fengyang Flower Drum Music

The formation of Fengyang Flower Drum is geographically and customarily influenced. Geographically speaking, it comprises the fusion of northern and southern regions with the Huaihe River area as the main arena for performance. Traditionally, it merges sacrificial functions, song-dance-music, and specified wedding songs.

Traditional music (ancient to mid-20th century) features pentatonic core melodies, with Yangge and Fengyang flower drum branches, and "double point" and "single point" drum beats. Instruments evolved from waist drums to handheld flat drums, with bamboo root drumsticks.

New innovations after the 1950s introduced multi-segment structures and modern harmonies, enabling more emotional expressions. Small flat drums and bamboo root drumsticks ensured uniform instruments, further symbolizing Xiaoluo returning, forming a modern reconstruction out of drums, and also signaling drums transcending from being mere accompaniment instruments to

usable dance props that would convey more meaning about the regional culture identity of Fengyang.

1.1.3 The Tradition and Development of Fengyang Flower Drum Dance

Traditional Fengyang Flower Drum dance (ancient to mid-20th century) centers on "pragmatism," with basic actions like single and alternating double strikes, "Boji Bu" postures, and "Pair rotation" for rap dialogue. Performances, mainly two-person rap (Su,2011), occur informally, with dance serving as visual aid for rap. The style blends sadness and resilience, reflecting survival wisdom.

The arrival of modern innovations (since the 1950s) endowed modern dances with expressiveness. The number of performance events escalated from two to as many as ten thousand; dance performances became far more diversified as a consequence.

The historical development of Fengyang Flower Drum is a process of transformation from a means for living to a representative icon of culture, a period during which changes occur naturally. Modernization preserves core content but adopts various ways in expression, validating the continuity of the cultural genes carried forward via core elements selection and their corresponding functional transformation. This can be seen from Xiao Qinghong's overseas performances (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Xiao Qinghong, the inheritor of Fengyang Flower Drum, a national intangible cultural heritage project at Lincoln Center in the United States, won the Outstanding Performance Award at the 2019 Global Talent Competition
(Source: Photographed by the researcher)

1.1.4 The historical evolution and cultural expression of Fengyang Flower Drum costumes

Fengyang Flower Drum costumes, carrying Jianghuai cultural memory, evolve with its artistic development and cultural communication needs. Traditionally, "large lapel coat + apron (fandan)" traces to Ming Jianghuai folk costumes, using indigo/black/white (in line with Ming civilian attire regulations). Fandan adapts to work and performances, with structural links to Ming waist wraps, and its piping craftsmanship shares homology with Anshun Tunpu, reflecting immigrant cultural inheritance. Modern transformation follows "functional adaptation and cultural persistence": shortened aprons avoid restricting dance movements; high-saturation colors (red, pink, blue) and peony patterns enhance stage recognition while retaining tradition. Xiao Qinghong noted the inclusive integration of multi-ethnic elements, consistent with Ming costume cultural integration.

In international communication, these costumes become cultural envoys, gaining recognition in Italy, the US, and Vienna (Figure 3). Their evolution embodies "contemporary translation of traditional genes", offering enlightenment for intangible cultural heritage's living inheritance.



Figure 3 The dance costume improved by Xiao Qinghong, worn by her daughter during the performance in the Vienna Hall (Source: Photographed by the researcher)

The vitality of the Fengyang flower-drum hinges on its ongoing preservation, innovation and dissemination. Migration of people, the reach of media and internet, exchange and communication in culture is the spread vehicle; exchanges with the world makes the honor of being globalized. The interaction of preservations, continuations, and dissemination is what sustains the vibrancy of Fengyang Flower drum dancing for today and tomorrow.

2. Xiao Qinghong and Her Three Sets of Flower Drum Fitness Exercises (Dance)

2.1 Introduction to Xiao Qinghong and Flower Drum Fitness Exercises

Xiao Qinghong (April 1967-), a female from Fengyang, Anhui, is the sixth-batch provincial intangible cultural heritage inheritor of Fengyang Flower Drum. She has long engaged in its inheritance and innovation, arranging programs for events like the World Expo. Exposed to local arts since childhood, she studied under masters and grew into an industry backbone. Qinghong blends tradition with innovation, incorporating elements from various folk arts. She promotes Fengyang Flower Drum internationally, performing in Italy and the US. She leads the creation of three sets of Fengyang Flower Drum Fitness Dance, promotes its integration with national fitness, and compiles a standardized textbook. Her biggest innovation is drumming, distilling labor movements into dance.

2.2 First set of Fengyang flower drum fitness exercises

Driven by Anhui's fitness policy, Chuzhou and Fengyang's cultural and sports departments collaborated, with Xiao Qinghong and Mei Zhoucheng forming the core team. Following a "music-first, action-adaptation" model due to budget constraints, they created a 4-minute 28-second routine with 20 movements, integrating classic flower drum actions, e.g., "dustpan steps", and fitness science. It won multiple awards domestically and internationally, was promoted province-wide via training and competitions, and featured in thousand-person performances.

Musically, it adopts a Chinese pentatonic scale, retains traditional rhythms, e.g., "dong dong ba", through electronic sampling, and blends erhu with Western orchestration, set at 120 BPM to match aerobic fitness needs. Movement-wise, it preserves upper-limb drumming techniques while simplifying lower-limb steps, integrates folk symbols like "danfeng chaoyang", and uses "square-scattered" formations. The sequence follows both folk "qi-cheng-zhuan-he" logic and a fitness-focused "warm-up-intensification-relaxation" structure, achieving a successful cross-border transformation of traditional art into mass fitness.

2.3 Second set Mature Period (2020): Feng Wu Gu Xiang

"Feng Wu Gu Xiang" initiated by the Anhui Provincial Association of Elderly Sports and the Fengyang County Bureau of Culture and Tourism, the project aimed to innovate upon the first set's foundation, addressing its artistic limitations by incorporating original music and diverse drumbeats.

Conception and Preparation Stage (late 2019-early 2020): Xiao Qinghong centered the design on the dynamic imagery of a "phoenix soaring", integrating narrative clues of "perching-raising the head-taking off-soaring. "Xia Yurun was invited to create original music, incorporating elements of Fengyang folk songs and diverse drumbeats. Compilation and Polishing Stage (January-October 2020): Xiao Qinghong integrated national fitness yangko arrangement rules and feedback from inheritors like Liu Lili and Xiong Guanxia, completing the movement system after eight revisions. Innovations included cultural element integration, scientific fitness functions and a structural breakthrough ending with a climactic "phoenix flying high. "Finalization and Naming (late 2020): The second set, named "Feng Wu Gu Xiang", "lasted 4 minutes and 33 seconds, featuring 20 movements named with the character "phoenix", such as "Phoenix Spreading Its Wings."

2.1 Music and Dance Analysis

(1) Music Analysis:

The musical piece was based on the Fengyang Flower Drum folk motif and consists of five sections—Introduction, Exposition, Development, Recapitulation, and Coda—integrating G major and G Dorian modes and the rhythm as well as interval modulation of G Dorian mode creates an active and expressive music theme (Xu, 2013).

(2) Dance Analysis:

The essential movements in the dance still contain those of Red Phoenix Facing the Sun and phoenix spreading wings, which integrate traditional techniques into the scenarios for fitness. Changes in spatial arrangement and formation also embody cultural metaphors, bringing into play both aesthetic enjoyment and fitness exercise. "Feng Wu Gu Xiang" means an iterative upgradation, it refers to a fusion of intangible cultural heritage and national fitness policy on higher level.

2.4 Popularization Period (2023): Promotion of Fengyang Flower Drum Work - break and Class - break Exercises

2.4.1 Social Background and Inheritance Motivation of the Third Set of Flower Drum Fitness Exercises

The primary feature of the third set was its de-technicalisation as it tried to allow people to engage in traditional Fengyang flower-drum through simplified techniques. The group deconstructs Fengyang Flower Drum's cultural symbolization system through the three-level modules: the level-one core module, drum surface patting, the main melody of Fengyang song, realizes cultural recognition; the level-two auxiliary module, the simple "dustpan step", preserves movements and characteristics; level-three redundant modules, complex double-strip drumming, multi-dimensional changes in formations, are eliminated. Following the principle of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Movement design focuses on universality, controlling joint activity ranges to suit various groups such as office workers and children. The children's version uses hand patting instead of drum strips, while the staff version emphasizes short-

term work-break practice. Abdominal breathing is added in finishing exercises to aid physiological regulation, reflecting scientific fitness principles. The "triple synergy" model involves intangible cultural heritage inheritors, multi-field experts, and administrative bodies.

Set three puts forward a "gradient adaptation" model. It has technical levels suitable for the ability level of the masses, functional expansion transitioning from an art and fitness integration type to a national promotion type, and it establishes a three-tiered communication network. The model is very beneficial to the modern conversion of cultural heritage projects.

2.4.2 Music Analysis of the Third Set of Flower Drum Fitness Exercises

(1) Source of Materials and Style Origin

The music, compiled by Xia Yurun uses folk music as its core, retaining melodies and intervals that ensure cultural distinctiveness. The structure follows a sequence of "opening tune-marching tune-segmented exercises-finishing exercise-breathing exercise" aligning with physiological rhythm needs.

(2) Musical Structure and Movement Adaptability

Overall structure leads body to be in the preparatory state with slow tempo and regular rhythm. And segmented exercises combine varied rhythmic melody with limbs movement respectively, forming a dynamic curve of exercise rhythm. Melodic development and auditory guidance keep theme running through, avoiding monotony and enhancing participants' attentiveness and involvement.

2.4.3 Dance Analysis of the Third Set of Flower Drum Fitness Exercises

(1) Core Characteristics of the Dance Movement System

Movement design focuses on "whole body movement + precise stretching", keeping the traditional "Red Phoenix Facing the Sun" etc. rhythms and movements, and simplifying some high difficulty moves. The system is adapted

to everyone's practice according to their situation, safe, applicable to any age group and fitness level.

(2) Section-by-Section Dance Movement Analysis

Cultural symbols are blended into each part of the body. For example, the preparation phase reflects the dynamic features of Fengyang flower drum's "road drum", while upper limbs exercise includes flower circling drumming movement integrated with functional movements; neck exercise integrates "Phoenix Starts from Step" into neck releasing, chest expanding exercise modifies the traditional "turning body for drumming" into modern action; full-body exercise and jump exercise combines traditional beauty and modern aerobics, finish exercise incorporates both cultural rituals and scientific stretching.

3. Inheritance Practice and Modern Transformation Path of Fengyang Flower Drum — A Music and Dance Studies Interpretation Based on Xiao Qinghong's Inheritance Concept

3.1 Core Dimensions of Xiao Qinghong's Inheritance Concept and Practice

Representative inheritor Xiao Qinghong has developed a "tridimensional integration" framework for the inheritance of the Fengyang flower drum:

3.1.1 Music Preserving the Soul

Xiao stresses that "gudian" (rhythm beats) is the soul of Fengyang flower drums. This implies that whoever wants to master it must first grasp gudian. Since drumbeats are the vehicles for rhythm and cultural representative symbols, understanding them is important for inheriting skills as well. Moreover, there is an interconnection between Fengyang flower drums and folk songs embodying the concept that "music and songs share the same origin", that is, music bears the local dialect and folk memory.

3.1.2 Movements Conveying Meaning

Xiao adheres to the principle of "taking from life and using in life," deriving movements from daily life scenes. Movements evolve from simple Ming Dynasty waist drum beats to contemporary "Feng Dance Hometown" themes, ensuring

new movements retain traditional elements like "knee trembling" and "waist twisting."

3.1.3 Collaboration of Costumes and Props

Props, like the bamboo root drumsticks, are used extensively by Xiao. The size and length of the bamboo root drumstick determine the force and rhythm applied to the surface of the drum. The evolution of waist drum into handheld drum symbolizes that its structure was adjusted according to various performances scenes. Xiao remains consistent in her drumbeat showcases that highlight skill technique through respective conventions on props.

3.1.4 Inheritance Path

Xiao's practice has formed what she calls a "three-generation circulation", learning from older artists; teaching younger inheritors; and rearing new talents. Her emphasis on "Intangible Cultural Heritage Teaching from Childhood" aims to form a child's early cultural identity in this teaching. She put forward the "five skills (speaking, singing, dancing, teaching)" and the "dedication", which upgradess the inheritance of her style from single technical inheritance to group culture reproduction.

3.2 Future Practice Directions

Future inheritance requires a complete and long-term mechanism that covers institutional guarantee, inheritor training, and communication scenes.

3.2.1 Constructing a Collaborative Inheritance Ecosystem

Incorporate intangible cultural heritage courses into the local education system and link community cultural stations to extend "starting from children" from classrooms to life scenarios.

3.2.2 Enhancing Inheritor Training

Enhance one's teaching ability via certain training to break down the skills to be taught into teachable parts and transfer tacit knowledge into applicable modules.

3.2.3 Expanding Scenario Adaptability

Develop "campus versions" for teenagers and "community versions" for fitness, retaining core drumbeat showcases. Use digital technologies to build a communication matrix of "offline performances + online teaching."

3.3 Inheritance Concepts for Music and Dance Workers

People-Centered Inheritance. Attach more importance to the emotional identity and cultural consciousness of record inheritors instead of mechanical reproductions. Upholding Tradition and Innovating. Maintaining correctness (basic norms, key symbols and spiritual essence), innovating adaptive form changes. Construct a communication path of "rooted locally — international dialogue," highlighting recognizable symbols in international communication to make intangible cultural heritage a universal language.

In summary, the study shows that the transmission of intangible culture through the process of folklore and folk art is actually the dissemination of genes of our cultural heritage embodied in these mediums. It demands outstanding musicians and dancers to embed and transmit cultural genes, infuse new energy into traditional forms through innovation, and bring this art into the local as well as internationally.

Discussion

This study analyzes Xiao Qinghong's three sets of Fengyang Flower Drum fitness exercises, revealing how traditional rhythm, techniques, and symbolism integrate with modern fitness concepts. By preserving core elements while infusing contemporary relevance, she achieves multidimensional reconstruction, embodying the "dynamic inheritance" logic of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Musically, traditional drumbeats like "dongdongba" adapt to fitness rhythms, blending heritage with modernity. Dance movements, such as those from "DanFeng ChaoYang," merge with exercise principles, balancing fitness efficacy

and cultural authenticity. This approach bridges tradition and modernity, offering a replicable model for ICH transformation.

The study fills gaps by systematically documenting Fengyang Flower Drum's history and artistic traits, enriching ICH inheritance theory. Xiao Qinghong's "dynamic inheritance" framework provides a scholarly reference for modernizing traditional arts. The proposed "trinity" model—music preservation, movement communication, and prop coordination—offers methodological insights for music and dance studies.

Practically, the research guides ICH's creative transformation, promoting public engagement in Fengyang Flower Drum fitness. It enhances cultural recognition through health-oriented activities, enriches spiritual life, and supports sustainable development. The framework's operational guidelines facilitate traditional elements' integration into contemporary fitness, offering a scalable model for ICH modernization.

Recommendations

Looking ahead to the future, the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage still face many challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, with the rapid development of society and the rapid advancement of technology, the environment for the inheritance of traditional culture has undergone profound changes. How to explore more effective inheritance paths and models in the context of the new era has become an urgent problem to be solved. On the other hand, with the increasing diversification and individualization of public cultural demands, the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage also require continuous innovation and adjustment to meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people. Therefore, future research should continue to deepen the understanding and exploration of the inheritance mechanism of intangible cultural heritage, focus on the close integration of

theory and practice, and promote the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture.

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