

Cultural Ecology and Changes of Tujia Waving Dance in Southeast Chongqing

Lanmei Fu¹, Asst. Prof. Dr. Nataporn Rattachaiwong², Prof. Dr. Qianqiu Jin³

ABSTRACT

As one of the most significant cultural symbols in the Tujia region of southeast Chongqing, the waving dance is a sacrificial dance with waving as the basic movement and is one of the most symbolic cultural forms in the region and an artistic production reflecting people's spiritual temperament and ideological crystallization. The key to strengthening the sense of community of the Chinese nation is the sharing of regional culture and the cultivation of cultural identity. The understanding of it should not be separated from the historical and realistic context. This paper tried to explore appropriate ways of the existing problems of "cultural context fracture", "folk belief ambiguity", "changes of transmission mode" and so on. By constructing the regional historical memory and cultural identity, the effective protection of culture and the construction of spiritual civilization can be realized.

Keywords: *Waving dance in southeast Chongqing; Tujia nationality; Cultural ecology; Cultural identity.*

1. Introduction

The Tujia people of southeast Chongqing trace their roots to the Wuling Mountains, situated at the crossroads of Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, and Guizhou. Geographical barriers, including mountains and rivers, coupled with the influence of the Jimi system and the native chieftain system, created a distinct and relatively enclosed cultural milieu in this region. Historical policies, such as the Song Dynasty's national isolation decree and the later relaxation of territorial restrictions during the Qing Dynasty, have shaped the socio-cultural landscape of the Tujia people, leading to increased interactions between the Han and minority nationalities (Zhang Yuanman, 2017: 36).

The impact of the Han culture gained momentum during the relocation of the Kuomintang capital to Chongqing amid the Anti-Japanese War, resulting in a comprehensive dissemination of Han cultural influence. Amidst this dynamic cultural backdrop, the Tujia waving dance emerged as more than a traditional ritual for ancestor worship and celebration. It became a symbolic representation of the ongoing cultural dynamics and competition for cultural status among various ethnic groups.

Despite its significance as a cultural heritage in southeast Chongqing, the Tujia waving dance faces challenges. The shifting social structure has led to the evolution of this dance from a

¹ Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand.

² Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand.

³ Jiangnan Film and Television Art Vocational College, China.

ceremonial practice to a more performance-oriented expression of ethnic identity (Wu Xuemei 2009). Moreover, signs of cultural erosion, such as the diminishing presence of various cultural elements in the ceremony, the decline of the Tujia language, and the blurring of traditional beliefs, signal a potential rapid decline in the overall cultural vitality of the Tujia people in southeast Chongqing.

This academics article aims to delve into the gaps in existing studies concerning the cultural form of the Tujia waving dance in southeast Chongqing. Furthermore, it will explore the significance of cultural symbols within the broader Tujia region, shedding light on the intricate interplay between cultural evolution, ethnic identity, and the preservation of traditional practices.

2. The Concept and Cultural form of Tujia Waving Dance in Southeast Chongqing

The waving dance serves as a comprehensive manifestation of traditional practices among the Tujia people in southeast Chongqing. Referred to as "Sheba Day" in the Tujia language, "swinging hands" in Chinese, and "migration waving dance" in Youyang, Chongqing, denoting its origin during migration, this cultural phenomenon represents an ideological guide regulating both the spiritual and tangible realms of the Tujia community. It stands as a pivotal force contributing to the equilibrium between societal structures and individual lives.

This ceremonial dance involves the active participation of priests, locally known as "Mr. Tu," and the engagement of local villagers (Wu Xuemei, 2009: 27-28). Executed spontaneously by villagers following sacrificial rituals performed by the priests in honor of gods and ancestors, the waving dance unfolds over a duration ranging from three to fifteen days. Encompassing diverse facets such as agriculture, daily life, military competitions, and recreational games, these activities play a crucial role in fortifying the cultural awareness of the minority group and fulfilling the psychological needs of the community.

The profound impact of these rituals and activities contributes significantly to enhancing the cultural cognition of the minority populace while addressing the psychological requirements of the masses. Ultimately, this dynamic interplay achieves a delicate equilibrium between the traditional order of the clans and the overarching stability of the broader society.



Figure 1 Tuwang Temple in Xiushan, Southeast Chongqing (prepared by Xiushan Cultural Center) It is a venue for Tujia people to hold hand-waving dances in Xiushan area of Chongqing. The eight gods revered by Tujia people are enshrined inside.



Figure 2 The Eight Great Gods of Xiushan in southeast Chongqing (Prepared by Xiushan Cultural Center)

The primary functions of the waving dance can be categorized into three distinct purposes: firstly, as a ceremonial act to offer sacrifices to the *tusi*; secondly, as a ritual to dispel evil forces and invoke good fortune; and lastly, as a form of entertainment and celebration. In southeast Chongqing, two variations of the waving dance exist: "big waving" and "small waving."

The "big waving" dance, a grand-scale event involving multiple ethnic groups, centers around the worship of the "eight great gods" and emphasizes blessings and good fortune. This expansive activity, occurring every three to five years, attracts a substantial gathering, sometimes numbering in the thousands. The ceremony takes place in the grand waving hall, incorporating various teams such as the flag team, worship team, dance team, band, armor team, and artillery team. These teams collectively depict scenes from human origin, migration, wars, hunting, and other aspects of life, creating a culturally rich and solemn ambiance. Performers, adorned in traditional attire, wield long Feng banners, carry shotguns and Qi Mei bars, and play musical instruments like horns and saunas. The dance, characterized by actions such as "single waving," "double waving," and "cycle waving," also incorporates diverse ritualistic and agricultural movements, showcasing the Tujia people's rugged and unrestrained character.

Conversely, the "small waving" dance is a more intimate affair, typically conducted by a majority or a family for ancestor worship and entertainment. Limited in scope, this activity

takes place in the first month of the New Year and in late spring, focusing on sacrifices, waving dances, and "Maogusi," (it is derived from the Tujia people commemorating their ancestors' pioneering wilderness, fishing and hunting, as an art form of performing the waving dance combined with Tujia people's offering sacrifices to their ancestors) a commemorative art form combining the waving dance with offerings to ancestors. The performance portrays scenes of hunting, farming, and other life activities, creating a solemn yet joyful cultural atmosphere.

The significant scale of the "big waving" dance underscores the Tujia people's courage and wisdom, reflecting their profound desire for good fortune and peace in life. This dance serves as a lens through which the Tujia people's migration, farming practices, and overall living conditions are portrayed. Both "big waving" and "small waving" dances share common movements such as single waving, double waving, and cycle waving, with performances marked by coordinated gong and drum beats and intricate narrative storytelling. In the Youyang area, Tujia waving dance movements primarily depict ethnic migration and cultural life, encompassing actions like 'sowing,' 'planting rice seedlings,' 'collecting rice seedlings,' 'drumming,' and 'celebrating harvest,' as documented by Zou Mingxing (2003: 108). The eight great gods: It refers to a legacy of Tujia patrilineal clan for ancestor worship, and the Peng Tujia family in Longshan and Yongshun are all their ancestors. The names of the eight gods are: Aochao, Heshe, Xitilao, Xihelao, Lidu, Sudu, Nawumi and Longci. These movements are characterized by coordinated hand and foot motions, emphasizing simplicity, cleanliness, and the robust strength inherent in Tujia culture.

3. The Vicissitudes of Youyang Waving Dance

Throughout history, the waving dance has undergone a transformative journey, evolving from a "religious ceremony" to a "daily ceremony," with its cultural significance enriched and updated across multiple stages. This evolution has been instrumental in shaping the development of the waving dance, with four distinct stages delineating its historical trajectory.

The initial stage spans from the Qin Dynasty to the period of bureaucratization of native officers, covering the years 1046 BC to 1704 AD. Originating as the "Bayu dance," it was initially a court sacrifice dance associated with the Ba people, ancestors of the Tujia. The dance gained prominence during the "Battle of Muye," and later, during the Qin Dynasty's decline, it entered the royal court (Qin Chen, 2011). The subsequent imposition of the Jimi system and Tusi system reinforced the belief in the "eight great gods" and the king of Earth, forming a robust folk belief chain. During chieftain rule, the waving dance served dual functions: honoring deceased chieftains and fostering community cohesion. This period also witnessed the establishment of chieftain temples dedicated to ancestor worship, solidifying the worship of the "King of Earth" as a god, a belief still integral to Tujia traditions today (Suja, Edward, W., 2004: 2).

The second stage spans from the period of bureaucratization of native officers to the end of the 19th century (1735–1949). This era saw the replacement of Tusi by officials, leading to the suppression of the waving dance under the pretext of eliminating "bad habits." Confucian ethics played a role in restricting the dance, emphasizing the separation of men and women. Despite the ban, the waving dance persisted, assuming a more recreational role during occasions such as New Year celebrations. The turbulent times, including the Opium War, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, and the War of Liberation, saw the waving dance emerge as a faith medium offering solace during the struggles faced by the Tujia people (Xi Yusong, 2017).

The third stage commences after the founding of New China (1949–1983). The 1953 national

culture survey and the subsequent recognition of the Tujia people as an independent ethnic minority in 1957 marked a resurgence of Tujia culture. However, the Cultural Revolution brought suppression to sacrificial activities, including the waving dance, relegating it to near obscurity (Editorial Board of Yongshun County Annals, 1995).

The fourth stage unfolds in the 1980s with the establishment of autonomous counties, notably Xiushan, Youyang, Pengshui, and Qianjiang. Active participation in cultural exploration and dissemination activities marked a reawakening of Tujia culture (Davis, Merrill Wyn, 2022: 3). The rediscovery of the waving dance in 1982 and its subsequent recognition as intangible cultural heritage in 2008 contributed to a revival of Tujia ethnic culture. Despite this resurgence, the true depth of the waving dance's ancestral belief remains challenged, as it is often recognized only on a superficial level as "culture and art," (Brown Mike, 2005: 14) "cultural heritage," or a "national symbol." (Herzfeld Michael, 2013: 3).

4. Loss of Identity in Cultural Change

Throughout the evolution and safeguarding of the Tujia waving dance cultural system in southeastern Chongqing, a complex interplay of cultural conflicts, integrations, and compromises has unfolded. This dynamic process has led to a gradual weakening of national identity and personality amid shifts in Tujia traditions, language erosion, and blurred ethnic communication. Additionally, the symbolic elements of identity have faced a rapid decline (Castor Manuel, 2006).

One influential factor contributing to this transformation is the variation in folk beliefs, resulting in changes in cultural form. The worship of the original belief's eight great gods by Tujia people in the Wuling Mountain area has been impacted by the infiltration of Buddhist and Taoist temples, shaking the core beliefs of the Tujia people (Qin Jinfu, 2013: 80). With the disappearance of cultural elements such as the Tuwang temple, legends, ethnic costumes, and language, the cultural form and function of the waving dance have undergone significant mutations (Suja, Edward, 2004: 18). This has, in turn, affected the sense of belonging and cultural identity of the Tujia people.

The exploration method employed over the years has added complexity to cultural identity. Initially, widespread and diverse waving activities fostered a relatively common cultural identity. However, recent years have seen a decline in such activities in southeast Chongqing, leading to difficulties in cultural identity. Ancestors' beliefs also vary across regions, further complicating the cultural identity in different areas.

The unscientific protection and dissemination of the waving dance have hindered its benign development. The failure to gain approval for the Xiushan waving dance as "municipal intangible cultural heritage" (Qiao, 2009), coupled with limited resources, resulted in the abandonment of exploring Tujia waving dance in that region. In contrast, Youyang County has systematically collected, adapted, and popularized the waving dance, enhancing its movements and expanding its aesthetic appeal. However, the inheritance of the waving dance, in the Harmonious Symbiosis of Hand Dance Culture in Youshui River Basin, as highlighted by Mo Daishan, has not been scientific and comprehensive (Li Longhai, 2005: 1).

The break in the cultural context has led to the transformation of spiritual faith. The heightened value of the waving dance post-2008, under the banner of cultural protection and rescue, has seen widespread promotion in society, notably in schools. While this has led to a rapid spread and increased recognition, the detachment of the dance from its ancestral belief risks damaging

its cultural connotation and function. The popularization of the form, when divorced from its cultural roots, may lead to audience misunderstanding and a loss of the dance's original essence (Cheng L.G., 2016: 27). The recognition of the waving dance has seen enhancement, reflecting a renewal of cultural concepts and improved ideological cognition. Nonetheless, there is a need to protect not just contemporary creations but also fine cultural works without transformation to provide a foundation for future artistic and cultural endeavors.

5. Construction of National Consciousness in the National Community

To fortify the sense of community within the Chinese nation involves the strengthening and cultivation of national cultural characteristics while acknowledging and appreciating diverse cultures. This process aims to foster social consciousness within the implicit cultural order, ultimately promoting the collective unity and progress of the nation. Core elements of national consciousness for the Tujia people, such as the Tujia language, sacrificial ceremonies (embodied in various folk art activities like the waving dance), and folk religion, serve as significant cultural symbols that embody Tujia characteristics. However, in contemporary Tujia villages, identifying cultural symbols in clothing, language, behavior, and belief has become challenging.

In the present age, deepening the sense of community within the Chinese nation and enhancing national cultural consensus can be approached from the following perspectives:

Firstly, leveraging policy advantages to aid the Tujia people's cultural identity related to the waving dance is crucial. Given the government's dominant role in political, economic, and cultural spheres, a favorable policy environment has emerged. Government attention to the gathering places of Tujia waving dance, coupled with media engagement, policy formulation, educational initiatives, and social mobilization, lays the foundation for the preservation of Tujia waving dance traditions. Additionally, Tujia ethnic identity, with its resources advantage, gains visibility in cultural exhibitions, tourism, and cultural villages, attracting attention from both within and outside the ethnic group and fostering the construction of cultural identity associated with the waving dance.

Secondly, emphasizing the involvement of ethnic elites in identifying with the waving dance is recommended. Leveraging the influence and understanding of Tujia elite, who possess a deep connection with the nation, enables the exploration, expansion, development, and inheritance of the waving dance. Their comprehensive understanding of the habits, history, and culture of the ethnic group, coupled with their influential position, fosters a deeper understanding of waving dance culture among community members. This, in turn, enhances external publicity and influence, strengthening the cohesion and cultural identity of the ethnic group.

Lastly, recognizing that the form, history, legends, attire, language, and art of the waving dance play a pivotal role in forming ethnic identity, it is essential to integrate these cultural elements into people's daily lives in an organized manner. By immersing individuals in these cultural elements, they can be subtly influenced, gaining a genuine understanding of cultural meanings, differences with the outside world, and ultimately constructing a sense of cultural identity. This cultural cognition, however, remains subject to change with the evolving times, continually shaping the cultural identity of Tujia waving dance in southeast Chongqing.

6. Conclusion

In the new era, strengthening the sense of community within the Chinese nation involves cultivating mutual trust, mutual assistance, and mutual love based on cultural identity and

communication among all ethnic groups. The waving dance, as a crucial cultural symbol in southeast Chongqing, propels the in-depth development of regional culture and economy. Amid changing times, the waving dance acquires different cultural meanings, reflecting shifts in social systems and historical contexts. In the era of new cultural development, where culture drives economic development, the waving dance stands as the core of Tujia unity and cultural identity, laying a solid foundation for building the sense of community within the Chinese nation.

The study endeavors to address the noticeable gaps within the current body of knowledge regarding the cultural form of the Tujia waving dance in southeast Chongqing. By synthesizing information gathered from historical, cultural, and anthropological perspectives, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Tujia waving dance, its evolution, and its cultural significance within the broader Tujia region.

The findings presented in this paper illuminate the historical roots of the Tujia people in southeast Chongqing, emphasizing the impact of geographical barriers, historical policies, and cultural exchanges on the development of their unique cultural practices. The narrative unfolds to reveal the multifaceted nature of the Tujia waving dance, transcending its role as a mere ceremonial activity to become a metaphor for cultural competition among ethnic groups. Through the lens of this dance, one witnesses the intricate interplay between cultural elements, societal changes, and the gradual erosion of traditional practices.

The examination of the Tujia waving dance across different historical stages underscores its adaptability and resilience in the face of political transformations, bureaucratic interventions, and social upheavals. The dance's evolution from a religious ceremony to a daily ritual reflects the dynamic nature of cultural practices and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The revival and recognition of the waving dance in contemporary times, especially with its inclusion in the national intangible cultural heritage list, underscore its enduring cultural importance and the ongoing efforts to preserve and celebrate Tujia traditions.

Moreover, the article highlights the pivotal role of the waving dance in shaping Tujia identity and fostering a sense of community within the broader Chinese nation. The dance, along with other cultural elements like language, sacrificial ceremonies, and folk beliefs, serves as a core aspect of national consciousness among the Tujia people. However, it also brings to light the challenges faced in the modern era, where traditional symbols are fading from daily life, and cultural identification becomes more elusive.

As the study delves into the gaps and nuances of the Tujia waving dance, it becomes evident that the preservation and promotion of this cultural heritage require a multifaceted approach. Government policies, the involvement of ethnic elites, and strategic cultural integration into daily life are identified as key factors in strengthening Tujia cultural identity. The recognition of the waving dance as a symbol of unity and cultural identity within the Chinese nation emphasizes the broader implications of preserving cultural heritage in fostering a shared sense of community.

In essence, this study contributes to the existing scholarship by providing a nuanced exploration of the Tujia waving dance and its cultural significance. By doing so, it offers insights into the broader discourse on cultural preservation, ethnic identity, and the intricate dynamics of tradition and modernity within the diverse tapestry of Chinese culture.

References

- [1] Brown, M. (2005). *Cultural Geography*, Translated by Yang Shuhua and Song Huimin, Nanjing University Press.
- [2] Castor, M. (2006). *The Rise of Network Society*, Translated by Xia Zhujiu et al., Social Sciences Academic Press.
- [3] Cheng, L.G., (2016). Route distribution of the Sichuan-Salt Ancient Road. Historical role and Heritage Composition: Based on field investigation from 2014 to 2015. *Journal of Yangzhou University*.
- [4] Davis, M. W. (2022) *New Knowledge of Anthropology*, Sanlian Bookshop.
- Editorial Board of Yongshun County Annals. (1995). *Annals of Yongshun County in the Republic of China*. Volume 11.
- [5] Herzfeld, M. (2013). *Anthropology* Huaxia Press.
- [6] Li L. (2005). Differentiation of the Concepts of Ethnic Integration, Ethnic Assimilation and Ethnic Cultural Integration. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*.
- [7] Qin C. (2011). Cultural Changes and Debates of Tujia Waving Dance in Wuling Mountain Area. *Dance*.
- [8] Qiao, J. Z. (2009). *Land and Song: A Study of Traditional Music and Dance Culture and Its Geographical and Historical Background*, Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press.
- [9] Qin J. (2013) Study on the inheritance Status of Tujia Years in Youshui River Basin. Nationalities Publishing House.
- [10] Suja, E. W. (2004). *Postmodern Geography: Reclaiming Space in Critical Social Theory*. Translated by Wang Wenbin, Business Press.
- [11] Wu X. (2009). *Returning to the Margins: The Reconstruction of Social Order in a Tujia Village in the Qing Dynasty*. China Social Sciences Press.
- [12] Xi Y. (2017). A Study on the Evolution and Inheritance of Tujia Waving Dance after bureaucratization of native officers. *Journal of Zunyi Normal University*.
- [13] Zhang Y. (2017). A Study on Tujia Singing Activities in Qingjiang River Basin: Based on a Survey of Folk Performance. China Social Sciences Press.
- [14] Zou M. (2003). *Youyang Tujia Waving Dance*. Southwest Normal University Press.