

# PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS OF ORIGINAL ECOLOGICAL DANCE IN THE BIJIE CITY AREA OF GUIZHOU PROVINCE

Xiangyue LI<sup>1</sup> and Supavadee POTIWETCHAKUL<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand;  
1025190185@qq.com (X. L.); supavadee.po@ssru.ac.th (S. P.)

## ARTICLE HISTORY

**Received:** 28 April 2025

**Revised:** 12 May 2025

**Published:** 29 May 2025

## ABSTRACT

This Article aims to study the performance characteristics of the original ecological dances in Bijie City, Guizhou Province. Through a combination of documentary research and fieldwork, we systematically analysed the movement vocabulary, cultural symbols and social functions of the Miao Lusheng Dance ‘Gun Shan Zhu’, the Yi Bell Dance and the Yi Sama Dance. The study found that: 1, the three dances are rooted in migration history and production practices, forming the core features of ‘ritual’, ‘narrative’ and ‘labour’; 2, the form of performance is mainly group dance, with high synergy between movements and ethnic instruments (lusheng, brass bells), and ecological metaphors carried by costumes, colours and props; 3, In contemporary heritage, dance has achieved a fusion of tradition and modernity through technological innovation and stage adaptation, but faces challenges such as a succession of inheritors and loss of cultural context. The study proposes the construction of a ‘campus inheritance’ protection system, which plays an important role in cultural protection and inheritance, and promotes the innovative development of original ecological dances.

**Keywords:** Original Ecological Dance, Performance Characteristics, Bijie City

**CITATION INFORMATION:** Li, X., & Potiwetchakul, S. (2025). Performance Characteristics of Original Ecological Dance in the Bijie City Area of Guizhou Province. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(5), 80.

## INTRODUCTION

As the Bijie City area of Guizhou Province is located in a karst landscape area, with the terrain dominated by plateaus and mountains, the specific natural environment has laid the groundwork for the physical form, movement and style of the original folk dance, and through the fusion and influence between the natural environmental factors and the social environment, the original ecological dance with local ethnic characteristics has been formed. Most of the original folk dances in the region are used to worship the ancestors for their unyielding and persevering spirit during the migration of the nation, as well as for the ideal of building a harmonious homeland and the desire for a peaceful and free life, which is a form of dance produced in the mood of reverence. And the original ecological dance is a form of performance produced in the people's life activities, which is a part of the folklife and production activities, and is a folk dance art based on the folklife and the aesthetics of the masses.

To sum up, the original ecological dance in the Bijie City area of Guizhou Province has the characteristics of natural geographic environment, the characteristics of national culture and spirit, and the popular characteristics of folk life, and the study of the original ecological dance has a multifaceted significance.

In this study, the Miao Lusheng Dance "Gun Shan Zhu", the Yi Bell Dance, and the Yi Sama Dance are among the original ecological dances in Bijie City, Guizhou Province. Among them, the Miao Lusheng Dance "Gun Shan Zhu", which has been passed down in the Miao and Yi Townships of Pork Farms in Nayong County, Guizhou Province, is one of the Lusheng dances handed down from generation to generation by the Miao people. It is one of the Miao dances that have been handed down from generation to generation by the Miao people. It is a Miao dance that integrates Lusheng playing, dance performance and acrobatics in order to commemorate the courageous and unflinching spirit of our ancestors during the great migration.

Yi Bell Dance of the Yi People, the Bell Dance is a traditional folk dance of the Yi people to commemorate the dead, initially it was held by the king's chief to memorialise the late king's sacrificial ceremony, and to show the style of riding and fighting on the sacrificial song and dance field. During the dance, the bells in the hands should be rung to control the rhythm, and the "Bell Dance" got its name from this. Subsequently, this war-like dance evolved into a ritual farewell dance, which became a dance to appease the souls of the warriors who died in the battlefield and to console the dead. (Zhou Yaqiong, 2017)

The Yi Sama Dance is one of the traditional labour dances of the Yi people. The Sama Dance originated from the slash-and-burn farming era, when Yi ancestors sang a question-and-answer duet for self-entertainment and self-pleasure in order to alleviate the fatigue of labour during the hemp planting labour, and men and women improvised, which sang orally and mentally about the process of reclaiming the land for hemp planting and spinning threads and weaving fabrics. After a long time of practical labour and singing, the Yi people gradually summed up the essentials of hemp planting and weaving, and adapted them into dances to be passed on.

The purpose of choosing the Miao Lusheng Dance "Gun Shan Zhu", the Yi Bell Dance, and the Yi Sama Dance is that these three original ecological dances have unique stylistic characteristics and inheritance significance, and they have unique artistic charm and expressive power. Through the study of these original ecological dances, we can draw nutrition from them and promote the innovation and development of modern art, original ecological dance is also an important part of human civilisation, which carries rich historical, cultural and national information. Through the study of original ecological dances, we can better understand and pass on these cultural heritages, protect cultural diversity and prevent cultural loss.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### Current Research on Original Ecological Dance in China

Original ecological dance, as an important carrier of ethnic culture, has garnered significant academic attention in recent years. Scholars in China have primarily studied its forms, cultural connotations, and preservation strategies. For instance, Liu Yuanlin and Dong Yinghao (2011) explored the performance styles and cultural values of the Miao Lusheng dance, highlighting its close connection to the Miao people's migration history. Wu Shu (2020) examined the artistic characteristics of the Yi Bell Dance, emphasizing its ritualistic and symbolic significance in sacrificial ceremonies. Additionally, Chen Xin (2021) analyzed the developmental status of the Guizhou ethnic dance "Gun Shan Zhu", noting its unique acrobatic techniques but also its challenges in cultural transmission.

### Uniqueness of original ecological dance in Bijie

Located in the Guizhou plateau, Bijie's multi-ethnic environment has fostered diverse dance forms. Peng Hua (2010) noted that the Miao "Gun Shan Zhu" recreates ancestral land-reclamation history through acrobatic rolls, showcasing strong narrative elements. An Yi (2007) analyzed the robust style of Yi dances in Weining, linking them to mountainous farming culture. However, existing studies often focus on individual dance types, leaving a gap in comprehensive research on Bijie's original ecological dance ecosystem.

### Research Gaps and This Study's Contribution

Although the existing literature has analysed the case studies of the Miao Lusheng Dance and the Yi Bell Dance, it has rarely explored the commonalities and evolutionary patterns of their performance characteristics. There is a lack of in-depth analyses on the movements, music and costumes of these dances. In this paper, we systematically analyse the performance characteristics and forms of the original ecological dances in the Bijie area through the literature research method and the field survey method, in order to make up for the deficiencies in this field and provide a theoretical basis for cultural protection.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study integrates the literature research method and fieldwork method to analyse the performance characteristics of the original ecological dances in the Bijie City area of Guizhou Province.

In terms of the literature research method, the historical evolution and stylistic characteristics of the original ecological dances in the regions of Bijie City were comprehensively sorted out through extensive collection and systematic collation of relevant literature, which provided the study with rich background knowledge and theoretical support.

On the field investigation method, the following work was mainly carried out:

**Fieldwork:** Going deep into the areas of Bijie City where the original ecological dances were circulated. During local traditional festivals and celebrations, we observed the performances of the Miao Lusheng Dance 'Gun Shan Zhu', the Yi Bell Dance, and the Yi Sama Dance. Observe the dancers' gestures, dance rhythms, costumes and props, as well as the interaction between the dances and the environment and the audience, and record the complete process of the dance performances.

**Participation:** The researcher actively participated in the local dance activities and learnt the dance movements. In the study of 'Gun Shan Zhu', she experienced the difficulty and rhythm of the dance movements, and the requirements for dancers' physical qualities and skills; the author learnt the Yi Bell Dance from a professional performer of the Bijie Cultural Centre in 2022, experiencing the waist-axis movement and the rhythm of the ringing bells, and choreographed the Bell Dance for the vocational school students as the opening ceremony of an art festival in April 2022; she tried to learn the Yi Bell Dance as the opening ceremony of an art festival; and tried to learn the Yi Bell Dance from a professional performer of the Bijie

Cultural Centre. dance as the opening ceremony of the festival; try out the Yi Sama dance and watch the rehearsal process and performance of the song and dance drama ‘Watching - Sama’ in 2022 to understand its artistic expression of simulated labour movements. Through participating in the experience, we gained a deeper understanding of the source of inspiration for the creation of the dance movements and the emotions embedded in them.

Through the fieldwork, a wealth of first-hand information was obtained, which corroborates and complements the documentary research, providing strong support for the study from the actual performance and folk perspective, and revealing the performance characteristics of the original ecological dances in the Bijie City area in a comprehensive and in-depth manner.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The ‘Gun Shan Zhu’ is a traditional Miao folk dance that combines reedsheng playing, dance performance and skill. During the performance, the performer holds a six-pipe lusheng in his hand, blows and jumps, or sometimes with his head as a foot, or sometimes with a person climbing on his shoulder, rolling around eight pikes (now using a bowl full of water instead of pikes), requiring precise calculation of the angle of the roll, the performance of the skillful, difficult and exceptionally thrilling action, and therefore known as the ‘Pearl of the Plateau’ in Guizhou. It is therefore known as the ‘Pearl of the Plateau’ in Guizhou.

When observing and learning, researchers found that the Gun Shan Zhu has five characteristics: ‘ancient, land, living, difficult and high’. ‘Ancient’: Gun Shan Zhu originates from ancient stories and follows ancient traditions. When performing Gun Shan Zhu, the dancers wear pheasant-plume hats, embroidered white coats, hemp grass shoes, and girls wear skirts, girls wear skirts. The ancient and simple movements, rough and bold style characteristics and high technical skills are closely related to the migration of the Miao people. The knives and water appearing in the dance are metamorphosed from the ancient witch dance, which contains primitive religious colours. Both the costumes and the customs follow ancient traditions. ‘Land’: Gun Shan Zhu was born in the people, grew up in the people, and was inherited from the people. In the process of learning Gun Shan Zhu, no matter in any poor conditions need to complete the dance action, such as ‘inverted pile’ actors need to shoulder to the ground, feet hanging in the air, relying on abdominal strength to control the body in the air. The local character of Gun Shan Zhu is very prominent, and everything is presented in the form of an audience. ‘Live’: Gun Shan Zhu is characterised by “live action, live content and live form”. Nowadays, Gun Shan Zhu not only retains the original basic action modelling, but also integrates elements of acrobatics, martial arts and opera. In Gun Shan Zhu dance, the difficulty of the Lusheng dance steps and techniques changes constantly with the performance process. The number and age of the performers are also flexible, and the essence of the dance can be performed by one person or many. ‘Difficulty’: In the process of learning, the researcher also felt the high difficulty of the Gun Shan Zhu movement, jumping and blowing at the same time, and in the process of performing, the lusheng can not leave the mouth, which is a big challenge to the dancers' physical fitness and skills, such as ‘Short pile spin’, the performer needs to squat to maintain the centre of gravity at the same time the left foot lifted to the left side of the empty row small semicircle, collect the foot back to continue to do the same action, has been rowing circles, these actions require the actor to have excellent physical strength and martial arts literacy. ‘High’: The performance of Gun Shan Zhu requires the performer to play the reed sheng while steadily completing thrilling and exciting moves such as “Double Flying Swallow” and “Dieluohan”. ‘Double Flying Swallows’ is like shooting a crossbow, with the upper dancers stepping on the shoulders of the lower dancers, and the lower dancers need to steadily lift the upper dancers, maintaining their own centre of gravity while mastering the stability of the upper dancers, and the aerial dancers’ limbs are stretched out in the shape of flying swallows. ‘Dieluohan’ generally consists of four to eight actors, actors stacked on top of each

other, the bottom dancers crouch steadily in a horse stance, knee bending, centre of gravity sinking, for the upper layers of dancers to build a stable foundation, which requires the performers to have strong stability and strength, but also requires the actors to develop a long-term practice and tacit understanding. The formation of this dance rhythm and form is mainly influenced by the geographical environment and labour and living habits, and then continuously refined and improved, and the final form of the body evolved into a dance (Figure 1)



**Figure 1** Gun Shan Zhu

The Yi Bell Dance is a traditional folk dance performed by the Yi people to commemorate the spirits of the dead. The ‘bell’ is a crucial part of the Yi Bell Dance, which is not only a prop held by the dancers, but also a symbol of the cultural character of the Yi people. It is usually made of a copper bell about 25cm long, with a 1cm diameter copper tube in the middle of the bell, 3-7 small bells at both ends, and a 20-30cm long red silk ribbon in the middle. In traditional performances, the bell dance is presented only by men, and the costume is only a simple black long shirt with a red cloth belt worn around the waist. In modern dances, female performers have been added to the repertoire, and the costumes and props are more elaborate and varied. Men wear black long shirts or vests (symbolizing the land), embroidered with red flames (Yi totem); women wear colourful pleated skirts or trousers with Yi elements, and the handles of the bells are wrapped with woolen ropes, with the colours red, yellow and blue representing the sun, grains and rivers respectively, embodying the cosmic view of the Yi people of the ‘unity of the heavens and mankind’.

The traditional bell dance does not need musical accompaniment, but purely human voice shouting ‘ho – woo’ as the introduction, the main rhythm relies on the natural sound of the copper bells and stomping, forming a ‘three bells and one stomp’ fixed. The main rhythm relies on the natural sound of the bells and the stomping of the feet, forming a fixed rhythm of ‘three bells and one stomp’ (three bells and one stomp). The dancers take the abdomen as the axis, turn their hands up and down, turn their wrists to shake the brass bells and wave the colourful ribbons, turn back and forth at the waist and abdomen, and then bend and stretch their upper bodies; their arms shake in an orderly manner so that the bells make strong rhythmic sounds, and their feet also move and jump with the bells. The movement is rich, with head up and backward, lunge forward, sudden squat, roll on the ground, etc. The rhythm is a walk and a stop, slow and orderly. During the teaching process, the researcher found that the movements of the Yi Bell Dance are more bold and rugged, and usually women's movements are more soft and do not have the tension and robustness of men's movements. However, this gender difference in movements is not absolutely clear, but rather, it is mirrored and intertwined with each other in the cultural inheritance and artistic expression. For example, the male movements, with their large arm waving and powerful foot stuttering, seem to recreate the heroic posture of our forefathers on the battlefield. The softness of women's movements, on the other hand, maps out their gentle and delicate role in traditional family life, such as turning gently and

ringing bells gracefully. With the development of the times, the Bell Dance has evolved, incorporating the daily life of the Yi ancestors who used to trek across mountains and rivers, opening paths and bridges in the face of water, as well as the beautiful scenario of men ploughing and weaving and enjoying themselves. In the actual performance, the two are in harmony with each other, creating a unique artistic charm. With the development of the times, the Yi Bell Dance is also evolving, giving new vitality to the Yi Bell Dance on the basis of inheritance.



**Figure 2** Yi Bell Dance

The Yi Sama Dance is one of the traditional labour dances of the Yi people. It combines poetry, song and dance into one, and the performers wear traditional Yi costumes. Generally speaking, young men and women like to use contrasting colours in their costumes, with many patterns to show their vitality; middle-aged people's costumes are relatively plain in colour, with fewer patterns, which makes them look dignified. The patterns and laces on the costumes are mostly hand-embroidered with a single needle and thread, and the patterns pay attention to 'regularity' and 'symmetry'. The male actors hold props such as hoes, simulating the actions of cutting down barrens, burning grass, reclaiming land and sowing seeds, etc. The hoe has become an important tool in the dance to express the strength of men and the labour scene. The female performers hold props such as a bamboo basket, simulating the right hand's action of grasping hemp seeds and spreading hemp, reflecting the meticulousness and dexterity of women in labour. The dance consists of nine segments: opening the land, purifying the soil, loosening the soil, spreading hemp seeds, cutting hemp, peeling hemp, performing hemp, washing hemp and weaving. The section of clearing the land: the male holds a hoe and does the action of 'splitting the soil and turning over the ground', with the knee joint bent at 45° and the waist swinging in an '∞' shape with the rise and fall of the hoe, simulating the way of force of reclaiming a mountainous area; the section of sowing seeds: the female carries a bamboo basket (containing hemp seeds) in her left hand, and the 'three-finger pinch and scatter' in her right hand is used for sowing. The sowing section: the woman carries the bamboo basket (containing the hemp seeds) in her left hand, and the right hand 'pinches and scatters with three fingers', the wrist arcs from the inside to the outside, and the movement is as light as 'the spring breeze brushes the soil'. The music is in the form of a 'question and answer' duet, and the lyrics in Yi language are: 'How to select hemp seed?' and 'When is the best time to harvest?' 'When is the best time to harvest?' The singing mode is the Yi 'Du Huo Tune' (Feather Tune), with a moderate range, which makes it easy for the dancers to sing and dance at the same time. The lyrics and movements form a 'narrative intertext', for example, when singing 'straighten the hemp pole', the dancers collectively stand upright and stretch their upper limbs, forming a visual metaphor



of 'plant growth'. Sama Dance is not only a dance form but also a combination of duet and drama. 'Watching Sama' takes rural revitalisation of Huayu Village in Bijie City as the main background for its creation, and tells the story of Yi girl Yitu, who returned to her hometown to start her own business after graduating from university, creating a beautiful and happy new home. It has strong ideological, ornamental and artistic qualities. (Figure 3)



**Figure 3** Yi Sama Dance

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### Discussion

In the process of research, the authors found that the original ecological dance in Bijie City area of Guizhou Province, although it has historical and cultural significance, unique performance style and strong ethnic flavour, has little attention and weak popularity.

### The main body of inheritance

For example, the Miao Lusheng Dance 'Gun Shan Zhu', 'Gun Shan Zhu' has strong skills, which makes the audience feel very shocked and has a strong attraction, but also due to the difficulty of the movement, it needs to be guided by professional inheritors and long-term practice, the number of inheritors is limited, which also limits the dissemination and popularity of "Gun Shan Zhu". However, due to the difficulty of the movement, it needs the guidance and long-term practice of professional inheritors, and the number of inheritors is limited, which also restricts the dissemination and popularity of "Gun Shan Zhu".

In terms of diversifying the main body of inheritance, apart from relying on the existing professional inheritors, we can consider incorporating original ecological dances into the curriculum of local schools, starting from the youngest children and cultivating the interest and skills of the younger generation. This will not only expand the base of inheritors, but also allow the younger generation to naturally accept and pass on this culture as they grow up.

### Place of performance

Most of these original ecological dances are performed only in local festivals, and the original ecological dances have certain requirements on the technicality of the performers, the number of performers and the performance props, which also leads to the limitation of the performance opportunities and venues.

Is it possible to expand and innovate performance venues, and combine cultural festivals with tourism: using Guizhou's rich tourism resources, original ecological dances can be integrated into cultural tourism products, such as organising regular cultural festivals and tourism festivals to attract domestic and foreign tourists to come to watch them, thus expanding their influence. At the same time, consideration can be given to setting up fixed performance venues in scenic spots to increase performance opportunities. Use the Internet and new media platforms, such

as short videos and live broadcasts, to deliver the charm of the original ecological dance to a wider audience.

### **Performance Forms**

The performance form of the original ecological dance is obtained from the experience of the predecessors, so the performance movement and form are relatively single, although the later in the performance of adding a lot of skills and changes in formation, the audience will be tired in the long term, which requires more professional dancers and choreographers to add the beauty of the dance movement and innovative adaptation, so as to comply with the aesthetics of the modern public, in order to attract more attention. This will attract more attention.

Adding innovation and modernisation to performance forms and experimenting with cross-border co-operation: encouraging cross-border co-operation between original ecological dances and modern dance, music, theatre and other art forms to create works that have a traditional flavour as well as being in line with modern aesthetics. Such works can attract the attention of traditional dance enthusiasts as well as the interest of more young audiences. On the basis of maintaining the original style of dance, more story elements with local characteristics and cultural connotations are incorporated to promote the expression of emotions and the transmission of culture. This can better trigger the resonance of the audience and improve the attractiveness and infectiousness of the dance.

Therefore, the protection and inheritance of the original ecological dance in the Bijie City area of Guizhou Province requires the joint efforts of the government, society, schools, inheritors and the general audience. It is only through diversified, professional and innovative strategies and measures that the culture of the hometown can be brought to the modern society, so that more people can understand it and pay attention to it, and so that the original culture can be effectively protected and inherited.

### **Innovative Paths for Contemporary Inheritance**

To build a 'school education' inheritance, the Bijie region has constructed an age-graded and stratified curriculum system. At the primary and secondary school level, the 'Yi and Miao Dance Story Picture Book' is designed as the carrier of the initiation course for the lower grade students, so that they can understand the dance culture through painting and role-playing; at the middle and upper grades level, the rhythmic training of the bell dance is combined with the music class, and the 'Copper Bell Percussion' course is arranged. In the middle and upper grades, the rhythmic training of the bell dance is combined with music classes, and 'brass bell percussion' courses are arranged, and the bell dance and sama dance are adapted into recess exercises; colleges and universities have set up 'dance choreography and creation workshops', encouraging dance majors to use elements of the original ecological dance to create modern dances, and to cultivate innovative thinking. Promote the establishment of 'non-genetic inheritance practice bases' between colleges and communities, adopting the 'theory + practice + creation' trinity teaching mode. Students regularly go to the community to carry out dance teaching and field research; invite the inheritors to come into the university to hold master classes, and guide the dance students to carry out graduation creations integrating traditional dance and modern art, so as to form a two-way empowerment between academic research and folk practice.

### **Conclusion**

The original ecological dances in Bijie City, Guizhou Province, have unique performance characteristics, which not only show the unique charm of various ethnic cultures, but also reflect the living customs and historical traditions of the local people. These dances are of great significance in the transmission of ethnic culture and the enhancement of ethnic identity and cohesion, etc. A proper combination with modernity is necessary for the effective transmission and popularisation of the original ecological dances. This study hopes to let more readers understand the artistic characteristics and connotations of the original ecological dances in Bijie



City, Guizhou Province, and at the same time provide new inspirations and foundations for educational scholars and dance artists, so as to promote the innovative development of the original ecological dances in order to effectively protect and pass on these cultures.

## REFERENCES

- An Yi. (2007). Analysis of the Aesthetic Value of Yi Folk Dance Taking Yi Dance in Weining County, Guizhou as an Example. *Journal of Guizhou Normal College*, 023(003), 44-47.
- Chen Xin. (2021). The Development Status and Thoughts of Guizhou Ethnic Dance "Gun Shan Zhu". *Music Time*, 000(001), 11-13.
- Li Yue. (2010). The ecology and development of the Guizhou Miao Lusheng Dance "Gun Shan Zhush". *Science and Education Magazine (in Chinese)*, (04), 171-172
- Liu Yuanlin, & Dong Yinghao. (2011). The performance form of Guizhou Miao Lusheng Dance and its cultural value. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (4), 4.
- Li Zheng. (2013). Philosophical assertion of the value of traditional sports performance programmes of Guizhou minority ethnic groups--Taking the Miao Lusheng dance "Gun Shan Zhu" as a model. *Contemporary Sports Science and Technology*, (4), 2.
- Peng Hua. (2010). Discussion on the Cultural Characteristics and Social Functions of Miao "Gun Shan Zhush". *Education and Culture Forum*, 2(1), 5.
- Wu Shu. (2020). Research on the artistic characteristics and cultural inheritance of Guizhou Yi bell dance. *Journal of Guizhou University: Art Edition*, 34(1), 4.

**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.



**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. This is a fully open-access article distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).