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## Research Article

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# Aesthetic Characteristics of Mongolian Dance Under Ecological Environment

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## ARTICLE INFO

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the current state of the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance within the context of the present ecological environment. The research involves interviews with choreographers from Inner Mongolia who have directly participated in choreography and have won the "Chinese Dance Lotus Award." The primary focus is to identify the themes and issues related to how the ecological environment influences the aesthetics of dance. Based on the ecological environment of Inner Mongolia, the findings introduce and analyze the region's environmental context. The paper then explores the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance, highlighting its rich national identity and unique regional features. Under the influence of the ecological environment, Mongolian dance has developed distinctive aesthetic traits characterized by a combination of roughness, softness, and resoluteness. Mongolian dance, as a unique expression of grassland culture, reflects the history, culture, customs, and aesthetic values of the Mongolian people. It continually inherits and develops the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Mongolian community.

## 1. Introduction

Mongol tribes entered the Central Plains in the early 9th century and established the country, and the history and culture of the northern nomads were continuously integrated with the local culture. "The Mongols mainly live on the Mongolian Plateau in central Asia. Located in the southeast of the Mongolian Plateau, Monan Mongolia is called the Inner Mongolia Plateau. It is one of the four major plateaus in medieval China, second only to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, with an average altitude of about 1,100 meters and a total area of 1.183 million square kilometers (Jinsuo, 2001). The common development of Buddhist culture, Han culture and Western region culture has diversified and enriched the connotation of traditional nomadic culture, and promoted the formation and development of dance forms with the characteristics of traditional Mongolian culture (Beida, 2006). The development path of this national culture is mainly reflected in the development direction from the early hunting culture to the grassland nomadic culture, among which the Mongolian culture fully embodies the formation of the tribal civilization society, and also plays a role in promoting the development of ancient national dance culture. In addition, through the expression of primitive dance, it can promote the cohesion of tribal will, effectively stimulate the social function of collective behavior and activities, and fully reflect the group and collective characteristics of dance. Primitive dance is mainly a true reflection of the life at that time, showing consistency and group characteristics, and has become an important dance tradition in ethnic tribal dance activities, among which group dance is the most traditional and main dance form of modern Mongolians.

Like other ethnic dance forms, before the formation of the art form, the primitive dance of the Mongolian people was mainly to simulate and reproduce the life scenes of various ethnic groups in ancient times (Moldakhmetova, et al., 2018), and to experience happiness and pleasure from this dance form. Life scenes mainly involved fruit picking, fighting, marriage, hunting, etc., which became an indispensable part of people's lives at that time and also one of the ways of survival (Roy, 2021). In addition, this dance form has a strong performance, through the dynamic performance, the hunting process is expressed and described, so that the viewer's fighting spirit and pleasure can be effectively stimulated, tribal groups can also effectively play a role in motivating and uniting forces. This paper analyzes the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance through its development from tradition to modern times under ecological environment.

## 2. Objectives

To study the current situation of the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance in the current ecological environment.

### Scope

### Content scope

This paper aims at the influence of ecological environment on the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance in the current ecological environment when the choreographers from in Inner Mongolia created their works.

### **Population scope**

In view of the research objectives of this study, the subjects were choreographers from in Inner Mongolia, China, who directly participate in the choreography and have won the "Chinese Dance Lotus Award". There are 4 choreographers in total.

### **Regional scope**

Hohhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China

### **Time scope**

In November 2022, the author began to collect and access data, strengthen theoretical learning, seek theoretical support for this research, determine research topics, formulate research plans, enhance the understanding of the significance of this research, further clarify the research purpose, and master relevant research methods. January 2023 Read a lot of books and research papers to improve the level of academic research. In May, 2023, interview survey was conducted, data was collected for data analysis and interpretation, research results were drawn and articles were written. The last part of the thesis will be completed in July 2023.

### **Literature Reviews**

The study of Mongolian dance, deeply intertwined with the ecological environment, reveals unique aesthetic characteristics shaped by the natural landscapes and cultural heritage of the Mongolian people. Several scholars have explored how the natural environment influences the movements, costumes, and thematic elements of Mongolian dance, contributing to its distinct identity within the broader context of folk dance.

### **Influence of Ecological Environment on Mongolian Dance**

The ecological environment plays a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic elements of Mongolian dance. According to Zhang (2020), the vast steppes and nomadic lifestyle of the Mongolian people are reflected in the expansive and flowing movements of the dance. The wide, open gestures mimic the boundless horizons and the freedom associated with nomadic living, highlighting a strong connection between the dance forms and their natural surroundings.

### **Costume and Symbolism**

Costumes in Mongolian dance is not only a visual spectacle but also carry deep symbolic meanings tied to the ecological environment. Bai (2022) emphasizes that the traditional attire, often made from animal hides and wool, symbolizes the close relationship between the Mongolian people and their livestock. The use of earthy colors and natural materials in costumes underscores the dancers' connection to their land and environment.

### Thematic Elements

Mongolian dance often incorporates themes from daily life and nature, reflecting the community's reliance on and reverence for their ecological surroundings. Wang (2021) notes that many dances portray activities such as horse riding, herding, and hunting, all of which are integral to the Mongolian way of life. These thematic elements are not only expressions of cultural heritage but also a celebration of the natural environment that sustains it.

### Movement and Choreography

The movements in Mongolian dance are characterized by their vigor and fluidity, embodying the dynamic and resilient nature of the Mongolian people. Fei (2022) explains that the dance steps often mimic the movements of animals and the flow of natural elements like wind and water. This choreography creates a powerful visual narrative that connects the dancers to their ecological environment.

### Modern Adaptations and Preservation

As Mongolian dance evolves, there is a continuous effort to preserve its traditional elements while adapting to contemporary contexts. Scaini, Rossi, Rapee, and Bonomi (2022) argue that modern performances of Mongolian dance incorporate new artistic expressions while maintaining a strong link to the ecological themes and traditional aesthetics. This balance ensures that the dance remains relevant and vibrant in today's cultural landscape.

The aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance are deeply rooted in the ecological environment of the Mongolian steppes. The interplay between nature, daily life, and cultural expression creates a unique and vibrant dance form that reflects the identity and heritage of the Mongolian people. By understanding and preserving these connections, scholars and practitioners can ensure that the rich tradition of Mongolian dance continues to thrive.

## 3. Research Methodology

The researchers conducted a comprehensive literature search utilizing resources such as the website Baidu (<https://www.baidu.com>). Both Chinese and international literature were reviewed, including academic journals, dissertations, books, and other pertinent materials. The focus was on collecting information related to Mongolian dance, its aesthetic characteristics, and methods of protecting the ecological environment. This extensive review was aimed at expanding the framework of knowledge on these subjects.

### Interview Method

Eight choreographers from Inner Mongolia, who have directly participated in choreography and won the "Chinese Dance Lotus Award," were selected as the research subjects. The first step was to determine the themes and issues related to the impact of the ecological environment on dance aesthetics, considering factors such as the natural environment, climate conditions, and regional culture. Guided by these topics, questions were

posed to the respondents to understand their perceptions and experiences. Open-ended questions were used to steer the interviews, with inquiries such as, "What do you think are the main influences of the ecological environment on choreographers?" During the interviews, recording devices or notes were used to capture the conversations. After the interviews, the content was carefully collated and analyzed to extract meaningful insights and perspectives.

#### 4. Results

##### The aesthetic characteristics of the Mongolian nationality

##### The soft and beautiful concept of Mongolian dance

When it comes to Mongolian dance, we may think of more style characteristics such as rough and bold, but in addition to those shocking enthusiasm, Mongolian dance also has a certain sense of softness (xiongyan, 2001). For example, some typical movements, such as arm friction, shoulder friction, soft hand, etc., they are slow and soft, and those hard shoulder movements are very different from other hard and brittle movements. Therefore, although the appearance gives people a bold and uninhibited feeling, the Mongolian people also have a very delicate side, and the folk dance of the Mongolian people can also show a certain softness. The Mongols have always been known as the "A nation on horseback" and "Danceable nation".



**Figure 1:** Mongolian chopstick dance

**Source:** Xing Yupeng (2017)

Mongolian people's movements such as clapping, stomping, and waving their hands while grazing, their footsteps and gestures while riding, and their songs and dances during banches have all been recorded in the form of dance, constituting the most basic movements

and gestures of Mongolian dance. For example, horses drinking water, horses flying in the air, horses kneeling to rest, etc., are simulated and created from daily life, both modeling and physical beauty. In different works, dancers can express different emotions and shape different forms through the movements of horses' feet. Taking Jia Zuoguang's "Cup Dance" as an example, it is adapted and created on the basis of Mongolian folk dances "Top Bowl dance" and "chopstick dance". The play was first performed by Modegma in 1960. It's a form of performance where you dance with props. The softness of Mongolian folk dance is soft but not floating. Although the movements in the dance are relatively soft, the overall feeling is deep and smooth.

### The primitive beauty of Mongolian dance

Art comes from life. Mongolian people were born in nature, from the natural living conditions and natural living environment, long-term nomadic and hunting for a living, is bound to bring profound influence to the Mongolian dance. In their hearts, they are very grateful for the gifts and gifts of nature. They also naturally integrate their appreciation and understanding of nature into their artistic creation, so that the theme, movement, emotion and connotation of Mongolian dance are inextricably linked with nature. Many dances of the Mongolian nationality are inseparable from the grassland environment and life. It is in the open and natural grassland environment that the Mongolian people have developed a cheerful and simple, enthusiastic and unrestrained character and positive attitude, thus reflecting the simple beauty of Mongolian dance. Therefore, in the choreography and creation of dance works, it gradually moves towards this direction of beauty, and the work of "All Dressed Up Dance" vividly shows this typical aesthetic characteristic.

"All Dressed Up Dance" It is a Mongolian national dance work directed by He Yanmin in 2006, which mainly draws on the unique living habits of western Inner Mongolia and is inspired by the unique temperament of Mongolian women. The dancers use relaxed expressions and sensitive movements to well reflect the connotation of Mongolian women's confidence. At the same time, the changes of various forms also bring visual impact to people, so that we feel the natural and simple beauty of Mongolian folk dance (Figure 2-3).



**Figure 2:** Mongolian All Dressed Up Dance

**Source:** Sogou picture website (2023)





**Figure 3:** Mongolian all dressed up dance

**Source:** Sogou picture website 2023.08.15

### **The unrestrained beauty of Mongolian dance**

The passion and exuberance of Mongolian folk dance is closely related to their life in the northern grasslands. They gallop under the vast sky, dance in the vast grassland, accompanied by horses, cattle, sheep, thus forming their informal, passionate, unrestrained national character and aesthetic orientation. The dance work *Pentium*, which premiered in 1984, exemplifies this aesthetic characteristic. "Pentium" is a male group dance work that shapes the image of Mongolian young herdsmen around the pastoral life. It expresses the optimistic life attitude and spiritual outlook of the Mongolian people with the image of "ten thousand horses galloping", and highlights the spirited national character and indomitable national spirit of the nation. This series of large-scale movements and level changes make people's eyes flow continuously like a rolling river, so that the visual shock drives the emotional excitement, and feels the enthusiasm and unrestrained of the Mongolian people. As if you were in the prairie, you saw the grand spectacle of thousands of horses galloping, saw Mongolian youth waving to us, and saw us raising our glasses and cheering together. Influenced by the enthusiasm and momentum of the dance, it should be the power of the unrestrained beauty of the Mongolian folk dance. For example, in the Mongolian dance "Grassland Wine Song", many times, the movement of the feet is very large, and the center of gravity is also very fast. In order to keep the upper body movements consistent with the foot movements, the actors' breathing and upper body movements will also speed up, and the upper and lower body movements have

strict rhythm requirements in speed and amplitude, which fully reflects the passionate beauty of Mongolian dance and adds to the artistic charm of the dance.



**Figure 4:** Mongolian dance work "Pentium"

**Source:** Sogou picture website 2022.011.15

### **The resolute beauty of Mongolian dance**

Fortitude is a symbol of strength and is an important part of Mongolian folk dances. Ordos is a work created by Jia Zuoguang after he went deep into the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The music is sonorous and powerful, and many movements in the dance fully interpret the image of Mongolian men's bravery and the beauty of male dancers' fortitude and strength. Every step is deep and powerful, every hard shoulder is crisp and decisive, and in the stretching, movement hides the toughness of "just" and the toughness of "strong". The whole dance exudes a kind of magnificent and vigorous beauty, calm and tenacious, which is the beauty of a single man on the grassland, which is caused by the character of this nation, and it is also the dance aesthetic of this nation. The Mongolian people's spirit of not admitting defeat and not afraid of hardship, the stubbornness inherent in their bones and the persistence of never giving up are fully reflected in the firmness and strength of the dance.





**Figure 5:** Mongolian dance work "Cavalry"

**Source:** Xing Yupeng (2022)



**Figure 6:** Mongolian dance work "Cavalry"

**Source:** Xing Yupeng 2022.10.06

### The inner beauty of Mongolian dance

The proposition of "perfection is beauty" in Mencius' aesthetics is rich and profound. On the endless grassland, it has shaped the open-minded character of the Mongolian people and enriched their imagination. Dance is an art form that uses body language to construct art and express emotion. Mongolian people's love for life and dance has endowed Mongolian dance with richer emotions and connotations. Rich meaning, profound artistic conception. For example, the Mongols had the idea of worshipping the eagle, and in their dance, there were many hand movements that imitated the eagle.



**Figure 7:** Mongolian dance work "Eagling"

**Source:** Xing Yupeng (2023)

### Mongolian dance concept

Mongolian dance culture is as long as the development history of Mongolian society. As early as the 12th century, the Mongolian people used their own language to determine the names of many national arts. Later, on the basis of inheritance and development, integration and storage, with the production and life of hunting and animal husbandry, it gradually formed a dance with rich historical depth and distinct national aesthetic characteristics. Mongolian dances were recorded in Mongolian history books and poetry around the 12th century.

After the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty, Mongolian dance was further developed. In addition to the folk dance still showing an active posture on the grassland, the court music and dance are more vibrant. For more than half a century, the ancient Mongolian dance art

has been carried forward and achieved fruitful results and useful experience. Entering the new century, the creation of Mongolian dance presents a more vigorous and prosperous new situation. The unity of the spirit of The Times and the national style, the unity of inheriting the tradition and learning from each other, the continuous innovation, and the synchronization with The Times have improved and optimized the quality and quantity of the creation of Mongolian dance, and demonstrated the artistic beauty and youthful vitality of Mongolian dance.

### **Ecological environment of Inner Mongolia**

Thinking on the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance under ecological environment. In the process of modernization, if we do not act in accordance with ecological laws, the ecological environment will be destroyed, which will inevitably affect or even destroy the normal mode of production and living habits of relevant nations, thus bringing adverse effects on the protection and development of their culture and art. When the ecological imbalance of grassland in some areas leads to grassland degradation and even desertification, it directly affects the traditional grazing mode. With the change of production and life style in pastoral areas, such as settlement grazing, captive raising of livestock, even returning grazing to farming, and even villagization, the development and inheritance of Mongolian dance have been threatened and must be protected.

Traditional culture has shaped a nation's past, opened a nation's present, and nurtured a nation's future. Every nation has created its own "collective memory" as a group in its historical development, which is mainly manifested in many aspects of non-material culture (Klas, 2015). For example, various social and economic systems, customary law, life etiquette, festival folklore, folk beliefs, oral literature, artistic creation, music and dance, historical legends, heroic epics, reflect the norms of people's behavior, infiltrated and enjoyed by the masses, passed down from generation to generation, continuous participation and repetition, thus forming the "collective memory" of the nation. It promotes social integration. The language of a nation may be lost due to historical reasons and use the language of other nations, but the "collective memory" formed by the above customs and beliefs, life etiquette, folk oral creations, heroic epics, etc., still exists from generation to generation, thus strengthening the national consciousness and national identity, then the nation will not die out. To protect the culture of a nation is to protect the nation itself!

## **5. Discussion**

The objective of this study is to explore the current state of the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance in the context of its ecological environment. The findings reveal several key aspects of Mongolian dance aesthetics.

Researchers in this field generally believe that human culture is a system that ADAPTS to the ecological environment. At this point, there is an adaptation relationship between man and the environment, but it is necessary to emphasize both adaptation and transformation (Xiaowei, et al., 2006). Although in ancient society when the level of productivity was very low, human beings mainly adapted to the environment for survival, but when the level of productivity gradually increased, the ability to transform the environment to meet the needs of human production and life gradually improved, so it could not simply adapt to the environment. On the other hand, it is precisely because of the enhancement of human's ability

to control the natural environment that the ecological environment is being destroyed more and more seriously, and the relationship between the ecological environment and national culture is very close, so the relationship between this relationship is very worthy of serious discussion. It is worth noting that the relationship between ecological environment and national culture is very close. Different ethnic groups in similar ecological environment have their own characteristics in cultural creation, but there are certain commonalities. Different ethnic groups at the same or similar level of social development, due to their different ecological environments, have created cultures with different characteristics in the process of adapting and transforming their respective ecological environments, such as the Tibetan people in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Dai people in the sub-tropical areas of Yunnan. Of course, the relationship between ecological environment and national culture is also affected by other historical factors and ethnic relations, so the relationship between the two is not absolute.

The same is true of the relationship between forest ecosystems and traditional cultures. The Hinganling forest area in Hulunbuir League of Inner Mongolia accounts for about 48% of the land area of the allied countries and 10% of the national forest area. In the early 20th century, the Russian Empire and Japanese invaders carried out predatory logging in the 1930s and 1940s (Sokolsky, 2016), causing great damage to the forest area. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the state instituted a policy of "simultaneous logging and renewal", which improved the situation somewhat, but many problems remained. In the long struggle with nature and human beings, the Mongolian people have shown their courage and tenacious vitality. Today, with their redoubled efforts, with the support of the government, with the support of brotherly countries, they are also on the road to prosperity and strength with other countries. The problem is that when the ecological environment they live in changes, some cultural concepts gradually fade away. How to solve the contradiction between modernization and traditional culture? To maintain the beauty of grassland Mongolian dance and highlight its aesthetic characteristics is our common appeal and needs to be protected.

### **Which are shaped significantly by the region's natural and cultural milieu.**

#### **1) The Aesthetic Characteristics of Mongolian Nationality**

Mongolian dance is often associated with rough and bold stylistic features. However, it also possesses a distinctive sense of softness, contrary to the common perception of its predominantly vigorous nature (Xiongyan, 2001). This duality is evident in movements such as arm and shoulder friction, as well as the gentle "soft hand" motions. These movements contrast with the harder, more brittle gestures seen in other dance forms. Thus, while Mongolian dance may outwardly appear bold and uninhibited, it also encapsulates a delicate and refined aspect. This nuanced portrayal is intrinsic to the folk dances of the Mongolian people. An illustrative example is Jia Zuoguang's "Cup Dance," (Wilcox, 2020) which is adapted from traditional Mongolian folk dances like the "Top Bowl Dance" and the "Chopstick Dance." (Keerlun, 2021) First performed by Modegma in 1960, this dance involves the use of props, showcasing the intricate and graceful elements of Mongolian dance within a structured performance.

#### **2) The Primitive Beauty of Mongolian Dance**

Mongolian dance, deeply rooted in the life and natural environment of the Mongolian people, reflects the influence of their nomadic and hunting lifestyles. The dance embodies the raw beauty of nature, a characteristic that is vividly portrayed in various performances. For instance, "All Dressed Up Dance," directed by He Yanmin in 2006 (Mroz, 2011), draws inspiration from the unique living habits of western Inner Mongolia and the distinctive

temperament of Mongolian women. Similarly, in the dance "Grassland Wine Song," the large, swift movements of the feet and the rapid shifting of the center of gravity require synchrony between the upper and lower body movements. The strict rhythm requirements in speed and amplitude highlight the passionate beauty of Mongolian dance, enhancing its artistic charm. These examples underscore how the ecological environment and traditional lifestyles of the Mongolian people influence the aesthetic qualities of their dance. The interplay of boldness and delicacy, along with the embodiment of natural and cultural elements, makes Mongolian dance a unique expression of the Mongolian people's identity and spirit.

## 6. Conclusion

Human modes of production and ways of life are intricately connected to the natural geographical environment, which, in turn, shapes national cultures closely tied to these surroundings. The physical geographical environment encompasses factors such as climate, terrain, landforms, vegetation, and the distribution of land and sea. The unique natural geographical environment of the Mongolian plateau is not only the foundation for the survival and development of the Mongolian people but also the material basis for the formation of their traditional harmonious culture. Therefore, understanding the natural geographical environment is essential when studying Mongolian traditional harmonious culture, as it allows for a comprehensive appreciation of its essence. Ultimately, the "collective memory" of a nation, carried by its intangible culture, stems from the production and daily life of its people. If the ecological environment of a region is compromised, the normal production and lifestyle of the nation are impacted and potentially destroyed. Thus, protecting the ecological environment and maintaining ecological balance are crucial not only for development but also for preserving the outstanding traditional culture and art of the nation.

Mongolian dance embodies a unique regional culture and showcases the diversity of the nation. It reflects Mongolian ideals, national beliefs, aesthetic psychology, customs, and habits. The beauty of Mongolian dance is characterized by softness, simplicity, unrestrained energy, resoluteness, and profound meaning. We hope that these aesthetic characteristics can be sustained and further developed in a healthy ecological environment.

## 7. Suggestion

First, it is essential to explore how the unique climate, terrain, and vegetation of the Mongolian plateau influence the aesthetic aspects of Mongolian dance. This research can provide insights into how the environment shapes the dance's origins and evolution, offering a deeper understanding of its artistic expressions. Second, there is a need to examine the relationship between ecological preservation and the continuity of Mongolian dance traditions. Environmental degradation can significantly impact cultural practices, so it is vital to propose strategies for conservation that maintain both the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the dance. Incorporating ecological education into cultural and dance studies curricula is another important suggestion. Educating students about the ecological foundations of Mongolian dance can foster a deeper appreciation and commitment to preserving both the environment and the dance form.

Comprehensive documentation of traditional Mongolian dance practices in their natural settings is also crucial. This should include video recordings, choreographic notes, and

ethnographic studies, creating a valuable archive for future research and preservation efforts. Engaging local Mongolian communities in participatory research is essential to ensure that the research reflects the lived experiences and practices of the people. This approach provides a more authentic and holistic understanding of the dance. Developing sustainable cultural tourism initiatives can highlight the ecological and cultural significance of Mongolian dance. These initiatives can raise awareness, generate economic benefits for local communities, and promote the preservation of both the dance and the environment. Research should also explore the impact of modernization and ecological changes on the traditional practices and aesthetics of Mongolian dance. Understanding how modern influences alter these practices can inform measures to safeguard traditional forms. Utilizing modern technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), can create immersive experiences of Mongolian dance within its ecological context. These technologies can aid in education, preservation, and the global dissemination of the dance.

Finally, encouraging interdisciplinary research that combines anthropology, environmental science, and dance studies can provide a comprehensive understanding of how the natural environment influences cultural practices. This integrated approach can lead to more effective preservation strategies. By addressing these areas, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian dance and the critical role of the ecological environment in shaping and sustaining this cultural heritage. This holistic approach ensures that both cultural and environmental preservation efforts are aligned, promoting a sustainable future for Mongolian dance.

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