

## Growth in the Faith: an Anthropological Study on Excavation, Protection and Inheritance of Qiang Dragon Dance

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**Key words:** Qiang, Totemism, Dragon dance, Protection, Inheritance.

**Abstract.** Dragon dance of Qiang, deeply involved with primitive religious beliefs, especially the "dragon" totemism of the Qiang people, is the essence of the sacrificial culture of Qiang. It is the traditional art based on the high artistic and realistic nature, and combining music, dance, gymnastics, acrobatics, martial arts and others. This paper mainly uses the anthropology methods, such as field investigation, and participant observation, shows the "body symbol" of Qiang sacrificial dance and sports original ecology, and studies Qiang "dragon dance" and its cultural foundation and human environment, to explore its cultural origin and inheritance path, and provide a reference for the rescue, protection and inheritance of Qiang sports culture to meet the needs of contemporary social development.

### Introduction

"Dragon dance" is listed in the first batch of non-material heritage of Aba prefecture, spread in Jiaochang area in Maoxian and Jizhou Longxi in Sichuan. Professor Chen Xinglong, the research expert of Qiang science, called on in *Study on Shibi Culture of Qiang*, dragon dance is one of the most ancient dances of the Qiang people, and is one of culture treasures of the Chinese nation. But it has been on the verge of extinction. It is rarely seen in nearly 30 years, and it should be rescued. In the works, Professor Chen Xinglong used about 2000 words for introduction of "dragon dance", which is so far the most detailed description on the dance, mainly focusing on props, action structure and characteristics and functions. Apart from this, in the past decade, there was no deep research on the dragon dance of Qiang, let alone study from the perspective of anthropology.

With the developing situation and deepening investigation, the academic community realized that the use of physiological and biochemical mechanics and other natural sciences for research on the traditional sports and dance has exposed the limitations in terms of research methods. Domestic experts, such as Hu Xiaoming, Tan Hua, Chen Zhenyong, Tan Guangxin, have provided a good basis and direction for the anthropology research on national traditional sports culture. "Dragon dance" is a traditional art based on high-degree artistry and reality, and the artistic essence integrating music, dance, gymnastics, acrobatics, martial arts and others. It is the unity of dance and sports, natural beauty and social beauty. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply study "dragon dance" of Qiang from the perspective of anthropology, such as field investigation, in-depth interview, participant observation, cultural whole, historical archeology, and so on, and adopt multi-discipline research to fully explore the origin, structural features, cultural phenomena and social roles of the "dragon dance" of Qiang.

## **Relationship between dragon dance and primitive religious faith**

### **Religious faith of Qiang**

In the whole world, there are still many sports linked together with sacred beliefs, and still spread actively today. It can be said endless life and forever movement. These sports are wrapped in many occasions, such as religious festivals, marriage, funeral, adult ceremony, welcome ceremony, gracefully, and colorfully. Shibi religion of Qiang has relatively strict divine lineages.

### **Totemism of Qiang**

Totem, meaning "its kinship", stemmed from the Indian language. The emergence of totemism, is closely related to illusory and supernatural power concept at the end of the primitive society, and also ex-clan marriage system and the clan organization. Totem faith generally means that the particular plant or animal most closely related to the material life of this nation is taken as the object of worship, and other natural objects such as stone can be also regarded as the object of worship. People think that there is a close relationship between these animals and plants or natural things have with their clan origin, rise and fall.

Ancient Qiang people think all kinds of natural phenomena happen as per the will of the gods, so all things shall be worshiped as God, to restrain their own behaviors, in order to get harmonious balance between people, people and society, people and nature. This kind of understanding still exists today, therefore, Qiang still retains the belief of "all things have spirit" with totemism nature.

### **Dragon totemism of Qiang**

Qiang ancestor, Yan Emperor, created the dragon clan. In the long history, the dragon clan gradually evolved into many Chinese nations. In the sixth year of the Yuanding reign, in Minshan county, there were six Yi, seven Qiang, and nine Di, each having clans. Minshan county at that time is the area of Minshan Mountain in Yangtze river basin. It was insidious and enigmatic, because there were high mountains and deep valleys, complex environment and changing climate, and there were springs, lakes and ponds in the mountains with clear water. In the case of backward production conditions and underdeveloped science, the Qiang people who live here would gradually take these alpine lakes and ponds as "tokens" of the belief in dragon gods. In *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*, It was said that on the whole Minshan Road, from the Nvji mountain to Jiachao mountain, there are totally sixteen mountains, thousand five hundred miles, and each has the shape of horse body and dragon head. This shows that the Qiang people living in the upper reaches of Minjiang River has the god induction and worship of "horse body and dragon head" early before Qin dynasty.

Qiang District has the custom of "praying for rain in the dragon pond". In every July in lunar year, the crop is about to harvest, and each cottage would hold a grand festival to welcome the autumn harvest, but also pray for God and ancestors to give good weather, bumper grain, and thriving animal. One of the activities is "praying for rain in the dragon pond". The rain prayer will say or cry at the mouth of dragon pond. Due to the special geographical environment, Qiang people generally "live at the mercy of weather". In ancient times, the upper reach of the Minjiang River is sparsely populated, and the ecological environment of mountains is very good. People use alpine activities to shake the air for rain, so that it seems that the dragon pond has "spirituality" and the power of gods is also improved.

### **Modern Qiang people worship dragon and respect fire**

In festival days, Qiang people will have ceremonious dragon dance. In the Qiang language, the dragon dance light is called "Xi Wu Ri Na". Modern Qiang people worship dragon and respect fire. On the occasion, every cottage will meticulously make the dragon light, pick the best percussion players, choose experienced, bold and vigorous dragon dancers, and make the dragon dance team, to show the glory of the cottage. When the activity begins, the dragon dance team first plays for its own cottage and gives auspicious wishes. At the same time, cottages play for each other, give blessings to each other and congratulate the New Year to each other. When the dragon congratulates, the owner

will set off firecrackers. The dragon dance comes together with percussion music and dance. There are happy songs, laugh and talking. When leaving, the "dragon" must go back to a certain distance. At this time, the owner will stand at the door to see it off and give wine, meat, hanging red cloth. Dragon team will shout, "good luck and auspicious!" This dragon light is very unique, indicating the long history of dragon totemism of Qiang.

## **Morphological structure and features of dragon dance of Qiang**

### **Culture type of dragon dance of Qiang**

Dragon dance of Qiang is closely related to dragon totemism. And dragon dance is the liberal meaning of the Qiang language. It plays when Shibi prays for rain or sun in case of the long-time drought or rain. Usually it proceeds at the white stone tower next to the sacred forest. Shibi recite sutras, burns cypress to the tower, chants and dances. The movements and rhythms of dance vary according to the content of the sutras. Dancing for sun is quite and elegant, the sound is small and the action is relatively slow; dancing for rain is noisy and grand, the sound is large and the action is rough and bold, sometimes accompanied by horn sound, and also gun shot sound at the end. Dragon dance also appears in the collective dance (Salang) for celebration. Qiang Salang is kind of collective dance, dozens of men and women hand in hand to form the circle. Combining Salang and dragon dance, it is spectacular, and also warm and cheerful, singing laughter echoed in the valley.

### **Action structure and features of dragon dance**

Dragon is the prop used in the sacrificial dance, composed of a wooden stick and a hemp rope. One end of the stick is the carved dragon head, which contributes the name of dragon dance.

Dragon dance action can be divided into three basic groups, swing, surround, and throw. These actions are basically done on the positive plane, the front and back planes, and the side planes. "Swing" is mainly to form rainbow-like movement trajectory; "surround" has big one and small one based on the size. The small one is the most distinctive. Small surrounding action can be single and separate, also can be snake-like and spiral with multiple actions, combining with the action of the hand and wrist.

Throwing action has a series of independent features, such as the shape of the hemp rope can be unfolded or folded, holding the dragon head or stick body, forward in front, side front or rear, the holding height generally to the waist. Dragon dance footsteps are divided into two basic groups, typical Shibi dance steps, including knees bent and single leg jumping, knees bent and two legs squat jumping, bow step, horse step, quick short step, running step, hop step; and typical Shalang footsteps. In the dance, hip step and footsteps opening and closing are one of forms for emotional exchange between men and women. In dragon dance, the movement of crotch and footsteps remain charming yet rough character and the original aesthetic concept of ancient Qiang people living on hunting and poultry in the primitive ages.

### **Action skill requirement of dragon dance of Qiang**

As the old man said, according to high skill requirements, the rope should keep moving in the hands of dancers, which is not a general but pure technical dance requirements. The rope keeps moving and constantly changes the form of movement. Moderate grasp of the rope movement speed is the key for the shape formation of rope. In addition, the movement of the rope must also be subject to the general pattern of wavy motion, which is caused by the mechanical impulse generated by the movement of the dancer transferring from one end of dragon head to the other end of the hemp rope. The initial impulse is generated when the dragon head is swung, and the size of the initial impulse determines the frequency of the swing and the mass distribution of the entire rope. Therefore, it is necessary to use the entire length of the rope to maintain fluctuations and stable fluctuation speed. The hemp rope specifications and quality requirements are relatively high, which is also critical. The correct grip method is one of the important conditions to complete the action of dragon dance.

## **Protection and inheritance measures of dragon dance culture**

### **Inheritance and innovation of dragon dance**

Dragon dance is one of the most ancient dance of Qiang. In recent years, the dance has been improved and perfected, but the essential and routine actions are retained, including playing with flower sticks, meeting of dragon and phoenix, God stick playing with the dragon, jumping God stick, dragon chasing chime. A string of bells is fastened on performer's waist. The woman holds a flower stick with colorful ball and ribbon, iron hoops and and bells; one end of the flower stick in the man's hand is exquisite dragon head made of hemp, and the other end is the dragon body made of 7 meters of long hemp beard. With gongs and drums sounding, the dragon head raises or lowers, the dragon flies and dances, flower stick rotates, dragon hits the stick, and the ball plays with the dragon. The "papa" sound during the dragon body switching, interweaves with tinkle of bells on the waist, sound of iron hoop on the stick, the song, sound of drums, and cries, which makes the dance unique and distinctive. Innovated dragon dance is very good for aesthetic education, and also helps serve for the construction of spiritual civilization. Dance and music occupy an important position in the dragon dance, and innovated music accompaniment can cultivate sense of music, rhythm of people who are involved in the practice, to realize coordination of action and music. The current development of Qiang sports culture should be based on satisfying needs of contemporary social development, maintain the original ecological national culture, and serve the community.

### **Strengthen anthropological studies on dragon dance of Qiang**

Dragon dance is one of culture treasures of the Chinese nation. It is on the verge of extinction, and should be rescued, to make the old dance to become a new one integrating sacrifice, music, fitness, mass entertainment in one for serving physical and mental health of people. Qiang dragon dance is mainly passed on through oral or mental instruction, because there are no related books or records. Now, less and less Shibi is familiar with this dance, and performer and expert of Qiang dragon dance, Chen Xinglong, is about to retire. At the same time, there exist many limitations, including difficulties in field investigation, insufficient participation and observation, lack of depth of situation and narrow research areas. Therefore, it is necessary and urgent to study, rescue, protect and inherit Qiang dragon dance. To really deeply and comprehensively understand "dragon dance", the anthropological perspective and methods are required. Therefore, it is very important to strengthen the study on the cultural value of Qiang dragon dance for the protection of Chinese civilization.

### **Qiang sports integrated national fitness and school education**

School education and national fitness is the only way for the traditional sports and dance culture of ethnic minorities to become standardized, scientific and popular. The basic characteristics and functions of Qiang "dragon dance" have certain stability, and are closely related to people's life and production. Integration into the national fitness make people more likely to understand, accept and participate. In recent years, Qiang "dragon dance" is integrated into primary and secondary physical education, inter-class gymnastics, college public education, tourism, folk music and dance, sports professional construction, which creates authentic national culture feast of Qiang, not only realizing active inheritance of non-material culture, but also attracting and infecting tourists through the culture, to promote long-term positive development of scenic spots.

### **Research conclusion and suggestion**

1. To really deeply and comprehensively understand "dragon dance" of Qiang, the anthropological perspective and methods are required. Seeking an interdisciplinary perspective and theoretical support has been a consensus of scholars studying on national traditional sports, and anthropology is one of interdisciplinary perspectives.

2. Integration of "dragon dance" into the national fitness and school education, is an effective way to pass on the Qiang culture and promote non-material cultural protection and modern heritage of the "dragon dance" of Qiang.

3. It is the traditional art based on the high artistic and realistic nature, combining music, dance, gymnastics, acrobatics, martial arts and others, and unifying the dance and sports, natural beauty and social beauty. At the same time, as a human cultural phenomenon, due to its complex social factors and cultural background, research on dragon dance becomes more complicated. Organize technical aspects from various perspectives, including physiological anatomy, biomechanics and other natural subjects, and also use folklore, science of religion, ethnology, sociology, science of history and even archeology to study the deep culture of Qiang "dragon dance".

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