

Formal Interpretation of the Choreographic Composition in the Three Major Yangko Dances from Hebei, China

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Abstract

Choreographic composition in dance refers to the patterns formed by the performers through the arrangement of points, lines, and planes within a specific space. This composition enhances the aesthetic appeal of the dance and plays a vital role in expressing the mood, shaping character images, and other aspects. The myriad of choreographic compositions found in China's rich folk Yangko embodies traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, infusing the Yangko with a unique charm.

Keywords: Hebei Yangko; Choreographic Composition; Aesthetic Thought.

Introduction

Yangko is a folk dance genre, originating from China's agricultural society. It is a comprehensive performance art form that integrates various artistic elements such as music, dance, poetry, Chinese opera, and acrobatics. With a diverse range of dance styles, a rich rhythm, and graceful movements, Yangko dance expresses people's love for life, celebrates bountiful harvests, aspires for happiness, and petitions to deities. Hebei Yangko, primarily popular in Hebei Province and surrounding areas, originated from ancient farmers' production and life activities. It comprises diverse performance styles, typically integrating dance, singing, and instrumental music. Its dance formats encompass solo or group dances, choral dances, and duet dances, etc. Predominantly featuring human dance, the dance troupe usually consists of young men and women, or a combination of different age groups. They adopt line or circular performance styles, with performers either holding hands or standing shoulder-to-shoulder in the line, completing the entire dance with fixed steps and movements. The dance movements are standardized and robust, characterized by

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a lively rhythm, and encompass a variety of actions such as jumping, spinning, kicking, lifting, and twisting.

Hebei is home to a vast array of Yangko dance forms, with almost every region boasting its unique style. Among these, three Yangko types stand out as the most representative: Changli District Yangko, Cangzhou Laozi, and Jingxing Lahua. In 2006 and 2008, these Yangko types were inscribed on the national list of intangible cultural heritage, and they constitute the primary focus of this study. Other regional Yangko forms include Zhangjiakou East Road Duet, Hengshui Anle Yangko, Xingtai East Temple Yangko, and Chengde Fengning Little Yangko. The forms of choreographic composition in Hebei Yangko are varied and ingeniously designed. Cao Ping and Fu Dequan (1999) suggested that the composition is an abstraction of life and nature, crafted and embellished according to people's aesthetic psychology. It contains certain connotations and reflects decorative aesthetic forms. The varied field layouts are a distinctive feature of folk dances, serving to set the atmosphere, portray the plot, and depict character images. The most common choreographic compositions in Hebei Yangko, such as the Two Dragons Spitting Beads, the Straight Dragon, the Cross Formation, and the Four-sided Door, allow for fluid formation changes, offering diverse scenic representations. They constantly adjust the performance direction and relationship, presenting a harmonious aesthetic and holding high aesthetic value.

1. The Living Space of Hebei Yangko

Hebei, historically known as Jizhou, has always been a contested region for military strategists. Especially for dynasties that established Beijing as their capital, Hebei was an important metropolitan hinterland. Straddling North China and Northeast China, Hebei boasts diverse geographical features such as plateaus, mountains, hills, basins, and plains. The region is rich in hydrological resources with rivers like the Zhangweinan Canal, Daqing River, Yongding River, Chaobai River, and Luan River. The favorable geographic location and temperate climate at the foot of the Taihang Mountains in the North China Plain have provided the space for the generation, formation, and development of outstanding local culture in Hebei. It also fostered the character of the Yan Zhao people. The Hebei Yangko, primarily expressed through "Yan Zhao" culture, showcases the main features of Han Chinese culture, while also blending with the cultures of ethnic minorities, establishing the typical historical and cultural background of Hebei's folk dance. The movements of Hebei Yangko originate from farming practices, and the props, costumes, and music of Yangko all reflect labor characteristics, expressing the laborers' desire and pursuit of a better life.

With its long-standing historical culture, lofty spirit of sages, exquisite metropolitan culture, majestic Great Wall culture, and vibrant Bohai

culture, the culture of generous lament and heroic chivalry has become a cultural characteristic in the Yan Zhao region. This form of cultural expression has been widely inherited and promoted in Hebei, constituting an essential part of traditional Chinese culture.

Changli City is located in the eastern part of Hebei Province, at the junction of Hebei, Liaoning, and Inner Mongolia. Owing to its strategic location, the region has historically been a battleground, with control over this crucial choke point offering access to Northeast China. Moreover, Changli City is situated on the cultural divide between agrarian societies and nomadic tribes, becoming a region where traditional cultures from around the world collide and blend. The bravery, openness, and enthusiasm of the nomadic tribes, through historical shifts and ethnic integration, have fused with the Han people of Changli, forming the "cultural genes" of Changli locals and influencing their emotional traits. The people of Changli today are known for their warmth, optimism, cheerfulness, and humor. Changli District Yangko is an expressive activity for the laboring people, reflecting the essence of survival instincts. Individuals unconsciously exhibit their instinctual side in dance expression while also deriving pleasure from self-entertainment. This most passionate expression demonstrates Yangko's strong vitality and artistic allure. The origin of Yangko lies in individuals expressing the essence of living systems through self-recognition, self-affirmation, and self-expression.

Jingxing, located in the southwestern part of Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, is a mountainous county town. Due to its harsh geographical environment and underdeveloped economic conditions, many characteristic folk cultures have emerged. Besides the traditional "greeting the gods" competition, there are numerous other local folk activities. These folk activities are the cultural wealth accumulated by the local people in their daily lives. They not only reflect the beliefs and living habits of the locals but also serve as important means to pass down and promote regional culture.

Jingxing, situated in a mountainous area, features rugged terrain with most houses built on hillsides. The steep and muddy roads in front of the houses make it easy for people to slip, so they thought to pave the roads with stones to increase friction and facilitate walking. This unique topographical condition and architectural style contributed to the formation of the artistically distinctive Jingxing Lahua dance. Due to the living environment, dancers need to face various natural challenges during their performance, such as walking uphill and climbing steep slopes. In the process of climbing, the dancer needs to lift their legs high, lean forward, and while going downhill, they need to keep their knees tense and body slightly leaning backward. This necessitates male dancers to focus on the stability of their steps, which require conspicuous knee movements. The female dancers, on the

other hand, place more emphasis on the stability of their footwork. They need to constantly be mindful of the direction and angle of their steps, which must bend inward when advancing and be straight when retreating. The outward turn of their feet is highly similar to walking in the rain or climbing a mountain, further highlighting the dancers' courage and perseverance. The crux of the dance movements lies in the bending of the knees. Both male and female dancers need to incorporate this as a basic part of their dance steps. Even when straightening the knee, the action is fleeting, demanding the dancers to execute each movement to its fullest. Their leg movements sway back and forth in sync with the dance rhythm, ensuring the stability and harmony of the dance at all times. During the dance, the dancers continuously alternate leg movements. They rely on the power of their supporting leg, applying force against the ground in an instant to complete the movement. This is a critical point that dancers need to particularly pay attention to during the performance. Especially for female dancers, their steps mimic climbing a mountain on a rainy day. They face the harsh environment of steep and slippery slopes and need to maintain a higher level of foot stability and body balance. In the performance, the female dancers showcase unique poses, with side bends, forward and backward leans, and their steps are robust and agile, earning them widespread admiration.

Cangzhou is located north of the Qinling Huaihe Line in China and has a typical temperate continental climate. The area experiences distinct four seasons, with frequent droughts in spring. Cangzhou is located on coastal saline-alkali land and often encounters torrential rain in summer. The flat terrain is not conducive to the drainage and infiltration of rainfall, causing frequent flood disasters year-round. In years of major disasters and droughts, the harvest is almost non-existent. Under such circumstances, the development of agricultural civilization is constrained, and most common people have to turn to agriculture for commerce, with private salt being the main commodity. However, after the government severely cracked down on the sale of private salt, many people had to struggle to make a living in the face of hunger.

Looking at the broader picture, harsh regions often give birth to a variety of cultures. In the Cangzhou region, due to tough farming conditions, most people live below the subsistence level. Over a long period, the people of Cangzhou had to struggle against hunger, forming resilient, staunch character traits. These traits are reflected in their dance style, which is lively and uninhibited. Due to the large area of saline-alkali land that is unsuitable for growing crops, weeds abound, trees are sparse, and plants are stunted. Shrubs and weeds flutter in the wind, akin to dancing, a characteristic captured by the inheritors of the Laozi Dance and incorporated into their dance

movements, known as "three curves". The flat terrain and open views in Cangzhou have cultivated an open and broad mindset. In the Laozi Dance, this mindset is reflected in its smooth and graceful characteristics. The people of Cangzhou, often wandering in the Bohai Sea, took inspiration from the curves of the waves, with the movements of the Laozi Dance also borrowing the graceful form of waves, recreating the beauty of nature. Hence, the development of the Cangzhou Laozi Dance originates from nature, deeply imprinted in the culture, and the art produced from life transcends life itself.

In summary, due to different geographical environments, the development, direction, and expression of emotion and expression methods of the Yangko in each region are different. The Jingxing Lahua, due to its unique geographical environment, is stylistically distinct, with dance movements full of local characteristics. The Changli Yangko is relatively gentle, due to its environmental conditions; the Cangzhou Laozi Dance has a rather uninhibited unique dance posture, formed under its unique geographical environment and cultural influences.

2. Characteristics of Hebei's Three Major Yangko Dances

Hebei Yangko is representative of agricultural culture, nurturing characters with distinct personalities and myriad forms. Its cultural and artistic heritage is appreciated by both the refined and the popular, embodying the tenacious and positive attitude of the people of Hebei, and also highlighting the plain and unadorned spiritual core of Hebei folk dance. Different cultural backgrounds and geographical regions have produced folk dances with distinct features, showing individuality within commonality.

The Changli District Yangko is mainly prevalent in Changli County, Qinhuangdao City. The northern part of Changli County leans against the Jieshi Mountain, and the eastern part is close to the Bohai Sea. Since ancient times, it has been a land of fruit, fish, and rice. The excellent environment has given rise to the witty and humorous artistic mood of the District Yangko, and the characters are full-bodied, "embodying emotion in form." Changli District Yangko is one of the representatives of Hebei folk dance. The performance forms include street Yangko and field Yangko. Street Yangko is performed while walking on the street, with the Chou role leading the way and other performers following. The number of performers can vary, up to hundreds, with various characters twisting and moving in unison. When the Yangko team reaches a wide area, they perform field Yangko, with various characters improvising, focusing on humor, the performers showing their unique skills, causing the audience to burst into laughter. There is also a special performance form called "Chuzi," a type of performance featuring combinations of two, three, or four people performing in a "small field."

The dance movements of Changli District Yangko mainly consist of four parts: the shoulders, wrists, hips, and knees, emphasizing the coordination of each part to form a unique style of movement. The hip movements are very rich, including sitting, twisting, circling, lifting, etc. The hip movements emphasize the power of confrontation, twisting is often the body rhythm performed by female characters. In the "lifting hips" movement, the left and right hips are alternately lifted and pressed down, with the legs following suit. In the "twisting hips" movement, with the waist as the axis, the right leg supports, the left foot touches the ground, and the hips rotate left and right. The bouncing sensation presented by the bending and stretching of the knees is the basic rhythm of the Changli District Yangko, which runs through the whole dance. The flexible and variable movements of the wrist are mainly reflected in the fan performance, with a unique three-finger pinch fan (thumb, index finger, middle finger), common actions include shaking the fan, flipping the fan, back fan, stacking fan, dividing fan, etc., combined with the wrist's flipping, turning, and buckling, displaying a dazzling array of fan flowers. The shoulder movements in Changli District Yangko are the most prominent feature, such as shaking shoulders, shrugging shoulders, circling shoulders, etc. In the performance of male characters, the flexible and variable shoulder movements express a humorous meaning.

In the Changli District Yangko, there are four roles: Niu (young girl), Kuai (old woman), Chou (old man), and Gongzi (young master). Each role cooperates with each other, and each has distinctive movements. Niu is divided into Wen Niu and Wu Niu. The movements of "Wu Niu" are larger and the performance is bold. The traditional Niu role is mainly performed by men in female roles, but now it is performed by women. Niu's characteristics are beauty, charm, elegance, cuteness, shyness, spiciness, and steadiness, moving the waist without moving the hips, moving the hips without moving the buttocks, which includes hand-eye-body-step techniques, embodying the essence of local opera art. The body's graceful S-curve shape also fully displays the soft beauty of Chinese women. The Kuai role is divided into "Wen Kuai" and "Wu Kuai". "Wen Kuai" mainly plays humorous Kuai and older women's images, and "Wu Kuai" plays bold, uninhibited old woman images. The movements of Wen Kuai and Wu Kuai have commonalities, but their performance styles are markedly different. "Wen Kuai" holds a smoking pipe in the left hand and a round fan in the right hand. The performance features lively fan movements and smooth transitions of the smoking pipe, incorrect shrugging of shoulders, extending neck, slow steps, and expressive eyes, achieving a relaxed demeanor without confusion in footwork. The "Wu Kuai" holds "clubs" in both hands, and the main feature is that the face must be expressive. The Chou role in Changli District Yangko is the core

character of the performance. It has its unique style characteristics, such as bending knees, crouching, padding feet, and shrugging shoulders. The main movements of the Chou role include "small waist shaking", "shoulder shaking", and "hat shaking", the movements require flexible shoulders, bent legs, chest out, belly in, hips straight, light steps, slow appearances, and natural humorous mood.

The roles in Changli District Yangko are divided into Niu, Chou, Kuai, and Gongzi, and each role's costumes and props are distinctive. Traditional Changli District Yangko costumes are common in opera performances. The Chou wears exaggerated clothing and colored pants, wears a fur hat, and holds a colored fan and handkerchief. The facial makeup of Chou is the same as the role of Chou in opera, with a small white block painted on the bridge of the nose between the two eyes, also known as the "little flower face". The Niu wears the costume of a Qingyi or Huadan in opera, has a large headgear, and holds a colored fan and handkerchief. The Kuai wears colorful dan clothes and colorful dan pants, wears a wind-proof cover on the head, and holds a smoking pipe, round fan, or club. The Gongzi role is similar to the Xiaosheng or young master in the opera and holds a colored fan.

Figure 1 Traditional Changli District Yangko Chou, Niu, Sheng, and Kuai (Costumes and Props)



Source: Collection of Chinese National Folk Dances • Hebei Volume

Nowadays, the costumes of each role in the Changli District Yangko performance have basically deviated from the opera costumes and mostly wear brightly colored Yangko costumes. Except for the cross-dressing costumes of the Niu role, they are still roughly consistent with the costumes of Qingyi and Huadan in the opera, emphasizing elegance and beauty. The movements also come from the opera, with the most common being the sleeping fish and cloud steps. The dancing posture is graceful, the eyes are silent, the steps are brisk, the waist is like the wind swaying the willow, and the posture is soft and reserved. There is basically no change in the use of props. The makeup of the Chou role retains a tofu block painted in the middle of the nose, adds a red round face on each cheek, and a white lip shape in the middle

third of the two lips. The makeup is more likable. The makeup of other roles is more beautiful, conforming to the current popular aesthetics.

Figure 2 Current Changli District Yangko Performance Costumes
(from left to right: Chou, Kuai, Niu)



Source: Changli County Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center

Jingxing Lahua is popular in Jingxing County, Shijiazhuang City. It is located in the Taihang Mountain area. Jingxing got its name because of its geographical environment. The terrain is like a well, describing the place where the mountain collapses as deep as a well, and it is one of the eight paths of the Taihang Mountains. Jingxing Lahua generally has two forms of performance. One is "crossing the street", which is a form of performing while walking. The characteristic of this form is to mainly change the simple formation, and the movements are required to be uniform. The other is "playing the field", which is a performance in a square or on the street, and it is the main form of Lahua performance. There is also a special form of performance called "Chuzi", which is a form of performance in the program, performed by combinations of two, three, or four people.

Jingxing Lahua combines the characteristics of Zhuangwang Lahua, Dongnan Zheng Lahua, Nangudi Lahua, and Nanpingwang Lahua, with the movements of Dongnan Zheng as the main body. Jingxing Lahua mainly uses twisting shoulders, flipping wrists, kicking feet, twisting hips, and knee lift as the main vocabulary.

Jingxing Lahua dance pays attention to toughness and crispness, and has a strong internal tension. This tension forms the movements of bending, leaning, looking down, and flicking. These characteristics are reflected in every role of Lahua, but due to their identity and age, there will be differences in treatment. The main roles of Jingxing Lahua include: Gong Umbrella, Huolang, Choupou, young men and women,

male and female vases, etc. The male role's leg movements have larger ups and downs, with the knees deeply bent and the crotch squatting. The knees maintain a rhythm of bending and stretching, with slow squats and quick rises, and the lower parts is relatively stable, reflecting the man's rough and bold, masculine spirit. The female role also has a rhythm of bending and stretching at the knee, with the foot flicking and grinding, the knee bending and stretching, the waist twisting and shaking, the shoulder rolling, and the arm pointing and pushing. Flick and grind, with the heel as the axis and the toes outward. Shoulder roll, the shoulder is relaxed, and the speed is fast and crisp. Wrist pointing is generally done in conjunction with shoulder rolling. The dance style emphasizes downward toughness, foot flicking and grinding, and shoulder twisting, reflecting the woman's firmness and toughness amidst softness. Bent knees, crotch squatting, foot flicking, and shoulder twisting, these characteristics are a portrayal of the survival environment in the difficult life scene of mountain roads.

The costumes and props of each role in Jingxing Lahua are mostly the clothing and life tools worn in the daily life of villagers. In the past, traditional Lahua drew "five poisons" (scorpions, centipedes, geckos, snakes, toads) patterns on the faces of male characters, symbolizing "exorcism, poison avoidance, and eternal peace." Later, in order to cater to the aesthetic characteristics of the new era, the "five poisons" were discarded, and instead, a pink lotus was painted on the forehead of the male characters, and plum blossoms were painted on both cheeks. Plum blossoms symbolize "wealth, longevity, peace, Yu Ru De, and the end of life", expressing a good vision of good luck. The costumes and makeup of Gong Umbrella and Huolang are basically the same, wearing a melon skin hat, wearing a blue gown, and waistcoat, painting a pink lotus on the forehead, painting plum blossoms on both cheeks and painting a vase on the nose. Gong Umbrella holds props umbrella, fan, Huolang holds props Huolang rack, Huolang drum, and shoulder money bag. The backpack is for female characters, carrying a burden on her body, holding a fan and handkerchief. Wearing a windproof cover on the head, wearing a blue long jacket, and colored pants. The face makeup draws a "scar". This makeup has two meanings. One is, inadvertently scratched on the way to escape; the second is, it means "killing evil and avoiding evil" in order to exorcise evil and peace. Taiping board, for male characters, the clothing style is the same as Gong Umbrella and Huolang, but the color is different. Hold Taiping board, dance while playing the board. Bawang whip, performed by female characters, combing long braids, wearing red flowers. Wearing a pink top, colored pants, and a colorful silk waistband. Hold the Bawang whip in right hand, and knock up and down with left hand. Men and women pick up vases, performed by

boys and girls respectively. The boy has plum blossoms painted on both cheeks and wears a green gown and yellow waistcoat. The girl has chrysanthemums painted on both cheeks, wears a red forbidden jacket, and colorful trousers. They hold vases in their hands.

Cangzhou Laozi is popular in the Cangzhou area, which is next to the Bohai Sea and is a water transportation hub. In ancient times, there were constant wars in Cangzhou, and the local people learned martial arts for defense, so Cangzhou Laozi has a strong martial arts style. Cangzhou Laozi is divided into two schools: Wen Laozi and Wu Laozi. Wen Laozi is mostly light songs and graceful dances, with smooth rhythms, emphasizing uniform formation and the beauty of body curves. Women pay attention to the "three curves" shape. The props are usually "whip", "board", "fan" in alternation, especially when the female characters perform, they often use "fan" to perform alone. Wu Laozi's action features emphasize "walking like floating on water, running like flying on grass, jumping like a swan in the air, turning like a swallow flipping", such features are particularly prominent in the "Wu Laozi" of Niguan Village. The male characters emphasize the "style frame", that is, the frame in martial arts, which has specifications for the movements. The steps of the male characters in Cangzhou Laozi are mainly "empty steps". The movement trajectory of the "empty steps" on the ground presents a triangular shape. The physical structure of the triangle is stable, so no matter how variable the upper limb movements of the male character are, the footsteps are still as steady as a pine. The whip movement of Cangzhou Laozi male characters is almost the same as the use form of martial arts knives, especially the body shape and movement trajectory of movements such as "stroking whip", "wrapping head whip", "wrapping brain whip" in Cangzhou Laozi are identical to martial arts knives, but the inner strength is still somewhat different.

Cangzhou Laozi mainly has whips, boards, and fans in three types of roles, each role regardless of men and women, the movements all have a strong martial style. The female character's characteristics of bending knees, twisting waist, and bulging cheeks form the "three curves" posture, which has also become the action feature of the female character in Cangzhou Laozi. And the combination of the "sourness" of the "three curves" and the martial style has become the beauty of the female movements in Cangzhou Laozi, which is different from the female beauty in other Yangko. The male character's "stroking whip", "wrapping head" and other movements are based on the martial art's "single knife style", with large movements and emphasis on skill. The female character's "board" has a large range of movements, presenting movements with edges and corners, and strong power; "stepping", the power of the feet pressing against the ground is clean and neat, all of which embody the martial style.

Cangzhou Laozi is the fusion of "dance in martial arts" and "dance and martial arts combined".

The costumes of Cangzhou Laozi were initially everyday clothes, but later, influenced by the opera, the current costumes mostly retain the costumes of Wusheng, Wudan, and Huadan in the opera. The male character is generally dressed as a Wusheng short lean, which is a modified soldier image. He wears a hero's scarf, with a "forehead", and a pompom in the middle. He wears rough clothes with patterns printed on them and ties a belt. In the author's field investigation, it is found that in the Niguan Village "Soul of Dance" Laozi team, there was a male character dressed like "Wusong". The male character wore a black hexagonal Luo hat and pure black rough clothes. The upper garment was double-breasted with a small collar white, with rows of white buttons on the chest and bottom side of the sleeves, and a Luan belt around the waist. According to team leader Meng Fanzhen, there were no male characters with this costume before, but now this costume was added to enrich the male characters' costumes. The female character Wudan wears a "seven-star forehead" with a large pompom, in bright and dazzling colors such as red, pink, and yellow, and wears long colored silk on both sides of the ears. They wear rough clothes and pants, the upper garment is double-breasted with a button, they wear trousers, tie an light armour around their waist, also called "battle dress", the costume is embroidered with patterns, and sometimes they wear cloud shoulders. The Huadan female character's costume is not much different from the Wudan's, the head decoration is slightly different. The Huadan wears a rhinestone headband, a bright silk cloth head wrap, and flowers on both temples.

3. Performance Forms and Stylistic Features of the Three Major Yangko Dances in Hebei

Hebei Yangko reflects the living environment and conditions of the people of Hebei in the process of historical and cultural development. Under the same background of agricultural culture, different regions have formed different styles of Yangko performance characteristics.

Changli, relying on mountains and rivers, with a mild climate and rich products, provides a relatively comfortable living environment for its people, creating an optimistic and humorous character among Changli people. Changli's local Yangko was formed in such a "relaxed and cheerful" social environment, gradually developing a "teasing" feature. Each character communicates and interacts with others through a "teasing" emotional expression, enjoying a beautiful life.

Changli Yangko can be divided into street Yangko and field Yangko in terms of form. Field Yangko is divided into large field Yangko and small field Yangko. The large field Yangko performances involve as many as hundreds of people or as few as dozens of people, led by one person,

with the rest "running the set". The performance pays attention to composition and changes in formation, with a large lineup and strong momentum. Field Yangko is generally divided into a "trilogy". The "first act" involves marking out the performance space by walking through the field, bringing the onlooking crowd to the periphery of the performance area; the "second act" is a flat Yangko, usually performed by two, three, or four people, mainly through mutual "teasing", and is often an improvised performance. Nowadays, the form of three-person group performance is the main one, with relatively fixed role allocation. The form of a three-person group is known as the "Iron Triangle". The "Iron Triangle" has two different role combination configurations, one is Chou, Niu, and Wu Kuai, and the other is Gongzi, Niu, and Wen Kuai. In the performance of Chou, Niu, and Wu Kuai, Chou's actions are wide-ranging, with exaggerated expressions, not focusing on the story, but mainly on teasing; the Niu's actions are delicate and shy; Chou wants to approach the Girl, and the Wu Kuai sometimes blocks and sometimes lets go, the three of them tease each other, with the "Wu Kuai" playing an important role in leading the teasing. The combination of Gongzi, Niu, and Wen Kuai emphasizes a suave, steady, and delicate performance. The Gongzi is suave and tidy; the Niu mainly plays the role of a girl or a young wife, showing the image of a gentle, beautiful, and emotional young woman, with small steps, hip twist, and a dynamic like the wind swaying the willow; the Wen Kuai has small steps, twirls a fan, and intersperses between the Gongzi and the Niu. The performance of the Iron Triangle has no fixed pattern, and performers improvise. The "third act" is the performance of a small Yangko drama, also known as small field Yangko, often performing "Chuzi Yangko". The "Chuzi" is a "highlight" in the performance form of Changli local Yangko. The small field Yangko in Changli local Yangko has gradually developed into a "Chuzi" form with a strong dramatic nature. Other Yangko performances cannot constitute a complete "Chuzi", which is a feature that distinguishes it from other Yangko performances. The formation of the "Chuzi" can be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty. The Yuan zaju opera had a profound influence on various folk arts, and Changli local Yangko, under its influence, gradually transformed from song and dance form to dance drama form, highlighting the drama of the performance content. In the past, they were mostly performing drama excerpts, and nowadays they are mostly arranging interesting stories from life into small plays, emphasizing the highlighting of story plots and character portrayal, with "Chou" being the core of teasing. During the performance, one act follows another, and all are plays. The iconic Iron Triangle combination (Niu, Chou, and Kuai) is similar to the aria in the opera, and is the final performance form of the field Yangko. Nowadays, the Changli local Yangko programs that we see are mostly developed from the "Chuzi".

Jingxing Lahua originated in the Taihang Mountain area, and its innate "depth" and "sturdiness" are the emotional connotations of Lahua's performance. "Toughness" and "crispness" are the rhythmic movements of Lahua, presenting various dance forms such as bending, reclining, flicking, and rolling in the continuous stretching and contracting, fully showing the internal tension of the movement rhythm. The visualization of dance movements is a unique feature of Jingxing Lahua. "Wild Goose Flying South" is a typical example of the visualization of dance movements in Lahua, with arms opened on both sides during the performance to simulate the shape of a wild goose in flight. "Pulling Trees Up the Mountain" is the basic step of Lahua, the long-term mountainous walking has formed the rhythmic movements of bending the knees, leaning forward and leaning back. Over time, bending the knees, flicking the foot, twisting the waist, and rolling the shoulders have become characteristic movements of Lahua, which reflect the mountainous lifestyle of the people in Jingxing and embody their sorrowful but unshed tears and heroic optimism.

Since the Northern Wei Dynasty, music and dance from the Western Regions have been introduced to the Central Plains area through trade and religious propagation along the ancient post road of Jingxing, which has had a profound impact on the development of music and dance in the Central Plains area. The movements of shaking shoulders, shrugging shoulders, pulling bows, and squatting in Jingxing Lahua can also be seen to be similar to the wrestling and archery of northern minorities. Jingxing Lahua not only carries a profound lifestyle but also absorbs the stylistic features of different ethnic groups, presenting a beauty that encompasses both form and spirit.

Cangzhou has revered martial arts since ancient times and is a well-known hometown of martial arts. Cangzhou Laozi has a distinct martial arts feature, requiring performers to have a martial arts foundation and emphasizing that they "walk as if floating on water, run as if flying on grass, jump like a sky-lark, and spin like a swallow flipping in the air". Cangzhou Laozi is divided into Wen Laozi and Wu Laozi. Wen Laozi is mainly singing, performing classic songs such as "Jasmine", "Flying Kites", and "Embroidering Handkerchiefs". Wen Laozi's movements focus on "handsomeness", with women's movements being neat and tidy, and stylish, colloquially known as "charming". Wu Laozi has absorbed techniques such as tumbling and jumping from opera and martial arts, and the dance posture and rhythm have truly become martial arts in the true sense, emphasizing the foundation of each move. Men's movements are heroic and strong, stable and agile, while women's movements are neat and tidy, with softness in toughness.

4. Diverse Composition of the Three Major Yangko Dances in Hebei

(1) A Wide Variety of Compositions

Since ancient times, China has been good at using metaphors to express symbolic meanings, so the naming of the Yangko dance formation often implies auspiciousness, safety, and satisfaction, such as the single-line long snake, two dragons emerging from the water, three goats heralding prosperity, four seasons of peace, and so on. Folk dance expresses people's love for life and their aspiration and hopes for a happy life. Therefore, the composition of the three major Yangko dances in Hebei absorbs the essence of social life and nature, incorporating elements such as living things, animals, plants, and constellations into the dance formation, assigning them special meanings, and carrying high aesthetic value. After analysis and verification, the sources of the dance formations of the three major Yangko dances in Hebei are classified as follows:

Social life is the most direct source of the Yangko dance formation in Hebei. Common items in life such as scissors, fences, etc., are all the prototypes of the formation design. For instance, the Cangzhou Laozi formation (Figure 3) includes "Different Fences", "Clipping Fences", "Scissors' Legs", "Rolling Embroidery Ball"; Jingxing Lahua formation (Figure 4) features "Single Whip", "Date Fence", "Weaving Fence", "Pushing Mill"; Changli Local Yangko formation (Figure 5) comprises "Gourd Vine", "Cucumber Rack", etc. These are dance formations made up of lines that mimic the outlines of life tools, vivid in an image, and they are one of the basic forms of Yangko formation. Elements derived from battle formation diagrams, such as the "Heavenly Gate Formation" in the Cangzhou Laozi dance formation, enhance the aesthetics of the dance through continuously changing queues while weakening the connotation of war. Social life is the fertile soil from which dance art draws nourishment, designing various objects into dance formations and assigning them symbolic meanings, showcasing the charm of national art from different angles.

Figure 3 Cangzhou Laozi Formation

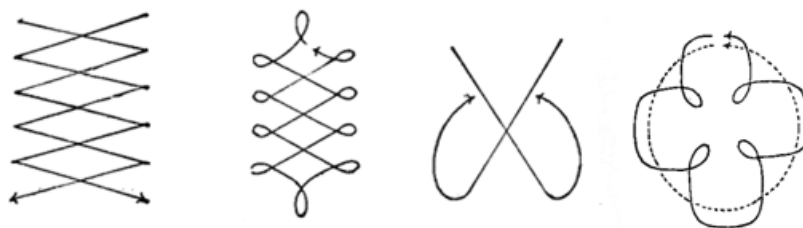


Figure 4 Jingxing Lahua Formation

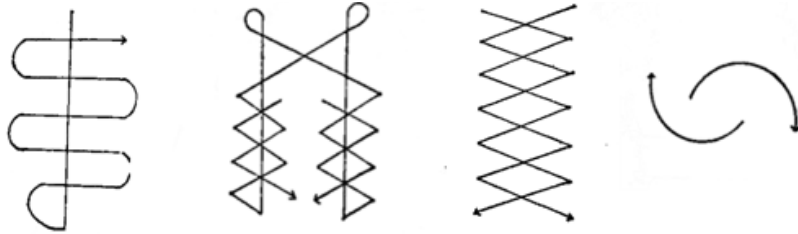
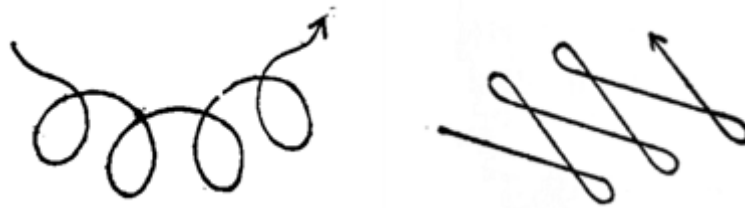
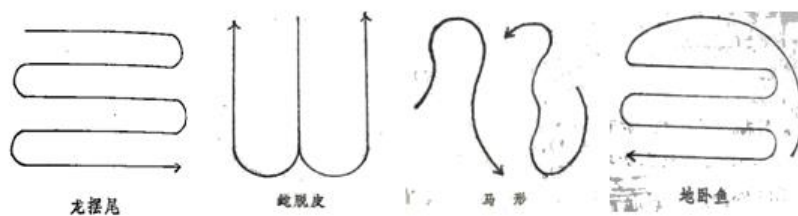


Figure 5 Changli Local Yangko Formation



Source: Collection of Chinese National Folk Dances • Hebei Volume
Elements of animals and plants also frequently appear in the Yangko formation. For example, (Figure 6) the Jingxing Lahua "Dragon Swinging Tail", Cangzhou Laozi "Snake Shedding Skin", Embroidery Ball Dragon Lantern "Horse Shape", and Character-Forming Dragon Lantern "Fish Lying on the Ground" etc., the vitality of animals is the intrinsic basis for the flow and change of the formation, and the constantly changing lines form a series of visible images.

Figure 6 Examples of Animal Elements



The Cangzhou Laozi formation (Figure 7) "Single Gourd", and the Jingxing Lahua formation (Figure 8) "Plum Blossom Petals", "Plum Blossom Formation", etc., are all compositions based on plants. The gourd is a vine plant, the vine grows long and bears abundant fruit, symbolizing the continuation of offspring. The gourd is also a magical treasure used by Daoists to eliminate disasters and bring blessings. Therefore, patterns in the shape of gourds often have the symbolic meanings of having many children and blessings and dispelling evil and disasters. Plum blossoms have been symbolized by people since ancient times. A plum blossom has five petals, symbolizing happiness, joy, smoothness, longevity, and peace. The plum blossom, with its

tenacious, upright, and resilient spirit and character, has been praised by people, which is also a spiritual symbol of the Jingxing people.

Figure 7 Cangzhou Laozi "Single Gourd"

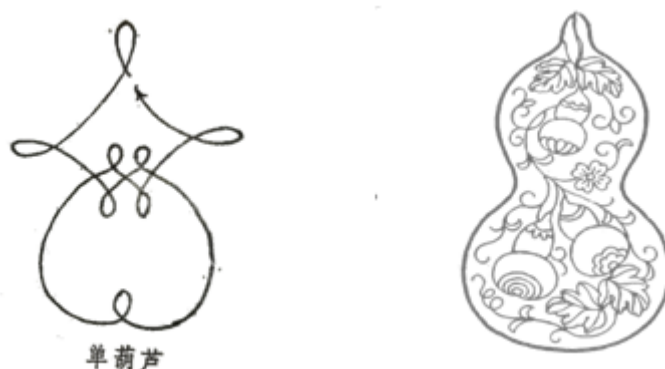
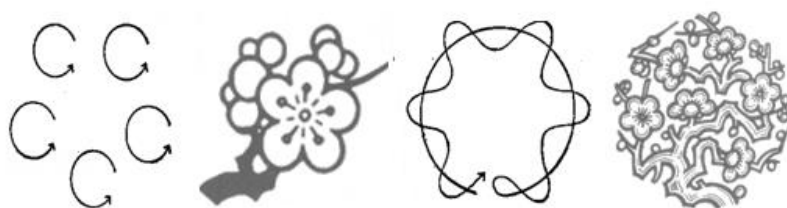


Figure 8 Jingxing Lahua Formation "Plum Blossom Petals""Plum Blossom Formation"



Source: Gourd, Plum Blossom Patterns, Qian Zhengsheng, Qian Zhengkun (2006)

(2) Presentation of the Composition's Vision

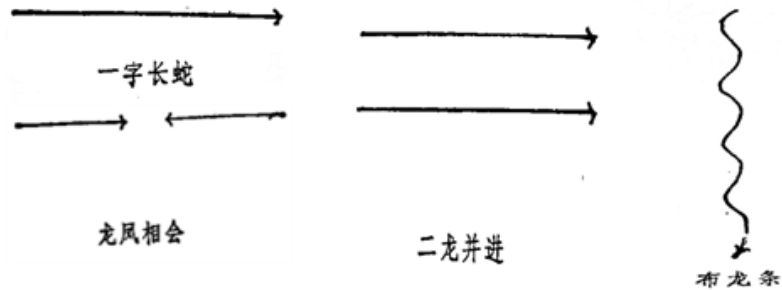
The sense of the picture in dance composition starts from the point and line, which then forms a surface. In the two-dimensional surface, the dynamic sense of the picture is presented through the variable position adjustments, providing visual satisfaction for the audience.

The three major Yangko dances in Hebei commonly use the performance forms of "crossing the street" and "playing the field" or "large field" and "small field". Each Yangko dance is called slightly differently, but the forms are generally similar. During the "street Yangko" performance, a respected folk artist in the Yangko team, the "Yangko lead", leads the way. They are followed by dozens, or even hundreds of people, each role occupying their position according to the prescribed procedures. The formation changes are all under the command of the "Yangko lead", mainly using simple single-line structures, curved structures, and double-line structures. The field diagrams at this time emphasize neatness and uniformity. For example, the Jingxing Lahua "Straight Line", "Dragon and Phoenix Meeting", "Two Dragons Advancing", and the Cangzhou Laozi "Dragon

Cloth Line" (Figure 9). The single line gives people a sense of simplicity and clarity. It can change in any direction, extend visual space, and give people a sense of stability. It allows performers to enter new spaces, adding a sense of flow to the performance. The S curve has a sense of unlimited space with twists and turns, and a sense of continuity of life rhythm, so it is often used to reflect the life form of animals and plants when they are performed. The double curve mostly presents the symmetry of the picture, moving in two spaces at the same time, bringing people a sense of overall beauty. When the performing team progresses to a spacious area, they perform "field playing". Generally, a round queue field diagram is performed first. The round composition gives people a sense of fullness and safety, and it is also a commonly used composition of the three major Yangko dances. On the basis of the circle, various more complex compositions are varied, such as Ding character field, bottle button, Eight Diagrams formation, worship in all directions, etc. The constantly changing formations and field diagrams present a lively and warm atmosphere, forming a grand scene that gives people an inspiring feeling. After "field playing" is over, the onlookers are separated to circle out the performance area of the "small field". The number of performers in the "small field" is relatively small, with typical character images, generally performed by fixed role combinations, accompanied by singing. The performance content is close to real life, and the actions are roughly the same as the "crossing the street" performance. There are also scenes of high-difficulty skills and mutual discussions. The fixed combination emphasizes role shaping, most of which are male and female combinations, showing scenes of love and humor. Some are improvised performances, such as Anle Yangko, when performing in a small field, the Kuai will "name a character", and the pointed role performs improvisationally. In the "small field" performance, the position adjustment of the actors can be freely adjusted according to the performance situation at that time, without restrictions.

The field diagram of Hebei Yangko is mainly based on linear structure, which has rich expressiveness. Through the continuous flow of performers, changing positions and spaces, it creates a contrast between movement and stillness. It brings a sense of balance in the viewer's field of vision and has the beauty of stability and harmony.

Figure 9 Examples of "Straight Line", "Dragon and Phoenix Meeting", "Two Dragons Advancing", "Dragon Cloth Line"



5. Aesthetic Thoughts on the Composition of the Three Major Yangko Dances in Hebei

The field composition of Yangko also carries traditional Chinese aesthetic thoughts. The ancients believed that "the heaven is round and the earth is square", with the round belonging to the heaven and the square to the earth. The "circle" also reflects infinity, going around and coming back again, implying the cycle of life. The "circle" also reflects the characteristics of folk ceremonies, namely, the natural laws of motion formed in labor are demonstrated through changes in movements and queues, bringing visual impact. The Cangzhou Laozi field diagram "Big Circle""Roll""Pull Four Doors""Three-Person Flower" and so on are all variations based on the circle, among which the movement form with the circle as the axis (Figure 10) is also one of the styles of Hebei Yangko field composition. The composition with the center as the axis continuously gathers towards the center, extends outwards, and returns to the movement, producing a force confrontation, thereby enhancing the sense of motion and tension in the composition, and pushing the performance to its climax. The "Cross Formation""Four-Sided Fight""Eight-Sided Wind" (Figure 11) of Changli District Yangko are the best representation of the agricultural culture "square belongs to the earth". The horizontal and vertical line movements in the field diagram cycle, presenting the scene of working in the fields, and the use of diagonals, giving people a sense of freedom and longing. Under the image of "the heaven is round and the earth is square", the symmetrical beauty and axial movement system presented by the Hebei Yangko field diagram are to feel stability in symmetry and balance, and to appreciate the psychological satisfaction brought by the sense of balance. This kind of satisfaction is a kind of completeness, the pursuit of perfection, and a symbol of the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.

Figure 10 Example of Cangzhou Laozi Field Diagram

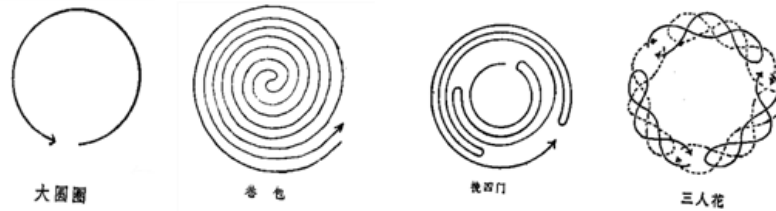
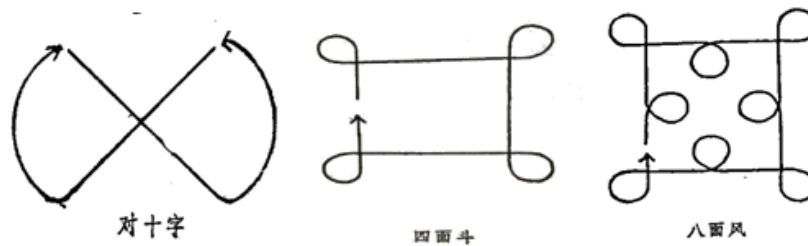


Figure 11 Example of Changli District Yangko Field Diagram



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