

# A Study of Nine Lotus Lanterns in Gaoping, Shanxi Province from the Perspective of Dance Anthropology

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**Abstract:** This comprehensive study delves into the Gaoping Nine Lotus Lanterns, a rich traditional folk dance from Shanxi Province, analyzed through the perspective of dance anthropology. The research traces the dance's historical evolution, unravels its cultural significance, and elucidates its social functions, emphasizing its vital role in local celebrations spanning over three centuries. The methodology integrates meticulous field observations with interdisciplinary analytical approaches, considering various elements such as choreography, musical accompaniment, and the dance's integral role in rituals and festivals. The findings illuminate the profound impact of the Nine Lotus Lanterns on cultural transmission, highlighting how it fosters social interaction and shapes community identity. The study underscores the intricate balance between preserving tradition and embracing innovation, demonstrating the dance's remarkable adaptability and continued relevance in contemporary society. It reveals the lanterns as a vibrant medium for social commentary and cultural expression, contributing significantly to community cohesion. By positioning the Gaoping Nine Lotus Lanterns within broader anthropological and cultural contexts, this research enriches the understanding of dance not only as an artistic expression but also as a crucial component of social and cultural dynamics. It offers valuable insights into how traditional dances can evolve while maintaining their core essence, serving as a testament to the enduring power of cultural heritage in fostering community bonds and continuity amidst changing times.

**Keywords:** Gaoping, dance anthropology, nine lotus lanterns, Shanxi Province

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main research goal of dance anthropology is to explore the role of dance in society and understand social culture through the unique perspective of dance. Dance can not only reveal the content of personal experience and social life that is difficult to express in words, but also provide social commentary and criticism through its performance and symbolic means. For example, dance can express views on social phenomena through parody, gender interchange, or social scenes, and can even predict and respond to political events. As research continues, there is growing recognition of dance's potential to drive social change. Some scholars believe that dance can serve as a kind of "safety valve", providing a temporary outlet for people to adjust social order and relieve social pressure through dance.

This comprehensive study delves into the Gaoping Nine Lotus Lanterns, a rich traditional folk dance from Shanxi Province, analyzed through the perspective of dance anthropology. The research traces the dance's historical evolution, unravels its cultural significance, and elucidates its social functions, emphasizing its vital role in local celebrations spanning over three centuries. The methodology integrates meticulous field observations with interdisciplinary analytical approaches, considering various elements such as choreography, musical accompaniment, and the dance's integral role in rituals and festivals.

The findings illuminate the profound impact of the Nine Lotus Lanterns on cultural transmission, highlighting how it fosters social interaction and shapes community identity. The study underscores the intricate balance between preserving tradition and embracing innovation, demonstrating the dance's remarkable adaptability and continued relevance in contemporary society. It reveals the lanterns as a vibrant medium for social commentary and cultural expression, contributing significantly to community cohesion.

Through dance, people can better understand and appreciate the content of the different cultures, and promote the cultural diversity and social inclusion. The 1980s was a crucial period for the vigorous development of dance anthropology. During this period, a new generation of young dance anthropologists emerged, creating many new research areas and methodologies guided by interdisciplinary dance studies. These young scholars use feminist, gender, and body-critical theories, as well as many theories from literary and cultural studies, to bring the study of dance to a new level. These dance anthropologists focus not only on the expression of dance as an art form, but also on the relationship between dance and many aspects of society, culture, and politics. Their research perspectives are broader and more diverse, ranging from the redefinition of gender roles to the interpretation of the body as a cultural symbol, providing a new theoretical framework for understanding the multiple functions of dance in society. At the same time, researchers in this period continue to enrich the empirical base of dance anthropology through fieldwork and field studies. They reach out to communities, ethnic groups, and countries to gather a wealth of first-hand information through participatory observation and interviews. This material helps to reveal not only the unique forms of dance in different cultural contexts, but also the important role of dance in cultural transmission and social interaction. The increase in the number of researchers in dance anthropology in the 1980s played an important role in increasing the recognition of the field. With the continuous publication of research results, dance anthropology gradually gained more attention and recognition in the academic community. During this period, dance anthropology's research results not only had a profound impact on the academic community, but also gradually influenced dance practitioners and public policy makers, so that dance as an important social and cultural phenomenon was more widely understood and appreciated.

In the Figure 1, the samples of the nine lotus lanterns in Gaoping is illustrated.



**Figure 1. The Samples of the Nine Lotus Lanterns in Gaoping (Image from Google)**

## 2. THE PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 The Anthropology of Dance

Dance is a rapidly changing art form, and its steps and movements are difficult to accurately record and preserve. However, recording and preserving dance has been essential to the revival of dance performance. Dance works are not only an expression of their time and society, with profound historical significance, but also provide researchers with rich cultural and social information. Dance anthropology has played an active role in this process, participating in the study of many theoretical issues in the humanities and social sciences, and making important intellectual contributions to cultural processes and diversity. Dance and movement not only reflect society, but also influence it. As dance forms continue to change and evolve, this influence also occurs in a variety of different ways. This dynamic change provides new research opportunities for dance anthropology, allowing researchers to explore the development and influence of dance in different cultural contexts. In the field of education, there is also a new exploration of curriculum construction. For example, the teaching reform and innovation based on the two courses of "Chinese Folk Dance Culture" and "Cultural Anthropology" not only enriches the curriculum system, but also provides an important way to protect and develop the regional culture. These courses improve the students' understanding of folk dance and cultural anthropology by introducing modern teaching methods and theories, while laying a solid foundation for cultural inheritance and innovation. This curriculum reform is not only a concrete measure to enrich the educational content, but also an important way to protect and develop regional culture.

Through systematic course design and teaching practice, students can deeply understand and experience the diversity and profound connotation of dance culture, so as to better inherit and innovate the regional culture.



**Figure 2. The Anthropology of Dance (Image from Google)**

At present, the anthropological study of dance in China mainly focuses on the relationship between the movement form, structure and style of dance and its cultural symbolic meaning. Researchers pay special attention to the interaction of these characteristics in specific cultural contexts, such as social history, folklore, religion, politics, and language. Through this multi-dimensional research, scholars not only discuss the ontological structure and form of dance, but also pay attention to the analysis, thinking and interpretation of dance in terms of folklore, religion, aesthetics and ritual.

Through fieldwork, researchers can observe and record the performance of dance in its natural environment. For example, they can study the traditional dance of a certain ethnic group and analyze its choreography, musical accompaniment, costumes and props, and how these elements reflect the culture, history and social structure of the ethnic group. At the same time, they can also study the role of dance in specific rituals or festivals to understand its religious and folk significance.

Fieldwork is one of the important methods for studying dance. Through this method, researchers can directly contact the original form of dance and obtain first-hand information. Studying traditional dance not only helps to protect and inherit national culture, but also reveals how dance as a form of expression develops and evolves in different cultural contexts. For example, in some traditional societies, dance is not only an entertainment activity, but also an important part of religious rituals with profound symbolic significance.

In field research, researchers usually establish connections with local communities and gain their trust and support. This not only helps the smooth progress of the research, but also helps researchers to have a deeper understanding of the cultural background and social function of dance. Through interaction with local dancers, musicians and cultural inheritors, researchers can obtain rich oral history and personal experience, which is essential for a comprehensive understanding of dance culture.

In addition, researchers can also reveal the aesthetic characteristics and technical details of dance by recording and analyzing dance performances. For example, the choreography of dance, the fluidity of movements, the change of rhythm, and the coordination of music are all important

contents of dance research. These details not only show the dancer's skill level, but also reflect the cultural connotation and artistic value behind the dance.

When analyzing the choreography of dance, researchers can focus on the combination and choreography of dance movements. Different nationalities and cultures have different understandings and traditions of dance choreography. For example, the dance choreography of some nationalities emphasizes symmetry and repetition, showing a sense of harmony and order, while the dance of other nationalities emphasizes freedom and improvisation, showing a sense of dynamics and balance. By analyzing these choreographic characteristics, researchers can reveal the deep connection between dance and culture.

Musical accompaniment is an indispensable part of dance performance, and different music styles and rhythms will have different effects on the performance of dance. Researchers can understand the interactive relationship between music and dance movements by analyzing the melody, rhythm, and instrument configuration of dance music. For example, the music of some dances has a strong sense of rhythm, which inspires the speed and power of the dancers' movements, while the music of other dances is softer and gentler, showing a sense of elegance and fluidity.

Dance costumes and props are also one of the important contents of studying traditional dance. Different nationalities and cultures have different designs and uses for dance costumes and props. These elements have not only aesthetic value but also symbolic meaning. For example, the costumes of some dances are complex and colorful, showing a sense of magnificence and solemnity, while the costumes of other dances are more simple and practical, showing a sense of nature and simplicity. The use of props can also enhance the expressiveness and drama of dance. For example, props such as fans, handkerchiefs, and masks can enrich dance movements and performance effects. The role of dance in specific rituals and festivals is also one of the important contents of research. In many traditional societies, dance is an important part of religious rituals and festivals, and has profound religious and social significance. For example, some dances are used in religious ceremonies to pray for a good harvest, drive away evil spirits and avoid disasters, and show respect and awe for nature and gods; while in some festivals, dance is used for celebration and entertainment, showing an atmosphere of joy and unity. By studying the dances in these rituals and festivals, researchers can have a more comprehensive understanding of the social functions and cultural significance of dance.

In addition to field investigations, researchers can also use documentary materials and video records to study traditional dance. Documentary materials include historical documents, dance notations, folk legends, etc., which can provide the historical background and development context of dance. Video records include videos and photos of dance performances, etc., which can intuitively show the movement details and performance style of the dance. By combining field investigations and documentary materials, researchers can conduct a comprehensive and in-depth study of traditional dance.

The study of traditional dance not only helps to protect and inherit national culture, but also provides inspiration and reference for contemporary dance creation. In the context of globalization and modernization, many traditional dances are facing the threat of inheritance crisis and cultural fault. By

studying and recording traditional dances, researchers can provide scientific basis and practical methods for protecting these precious cultural heritages. In addition, elements such as choreography, music, and costumes in traditional dances can also provide rich materials and inspiration for contemporary dance creation, and promote the development and innovation of dance art. Through field investigations and comprehensive research, researchers can fully and deeply understand the cultural background, social function and artistic value of traditional dance. Traditional dance is not only a valuable heritage of national culture, but also a manifestation of human cultural diversity. Protecting and inheriting traditional dance is not only a respect for history and culture, but also a responsibility and commitment to the future. Through continuous research and practice, we can better understand and cherish traditional dance and promote the sustainable development of dance art.

This interdisciplinary research method enables dance anthropology to comprehensively analyze dance culture from multiple perspectives. For example, a linguistic perspective can help researchers understand body language and symbol systems in dance. The historical perspective can reveal the historical evolution and social background of dance. The function and significance of dance in religious ceremony can be clarified from the perspective of religious teaching. From the perspective of geography, we can explore the influence of different regional environments on dance forms and styles.

In these studies, scholars have also paid special attention to the social function and impact of dance. They believe that dance is not only a form of artistic expression, but also an important means of social interaction, cultural inheritance and identity. Through dance, people can express emotions, convey information, celebrate festivals, commemorate historical events, perform religious ceremonies, and even engage in social criticism and protest.

For example, in some traditional societies, dance may have had important religious and ritual functions, being an important part of sacrificial and blessing activities. In modern society, dance may reflect more individual creativity and self-expression, and become a unique cultural symbol and social phenomenon. Studying dance forms and functions in these different social contexts can help us better understand the complexity and diversity of dance as a cultural phenomenon.

## 2.2 The Origin and Development of Gaoping Nine Lotus Lamp

Gaoping Jiulian Lantern is a popular folk dance form in Gaoping area, and there are temporary Jiulian lantern performance teams in many places in Gaoping. Since its inheritance, the nine consecutive lamps have gradually formed the following main characteristics:

### 1. It has a long history and a profound mass foundation

The popularity of Jiulian Lanterns in the local area can be traced back to the Shunzhi and Kangxi periods of the Qing Dynasty. According to written records, it has a history of more than 300 years. During the Lantern Festival every year, each village and town will organize performance teams to perform Jiulian Lanterns, which has become an important traditional cultural activity in the local area. This traditional activity is deeply loved by local residents and has a good mass base and wide recognition. Jiulian Lanterns, also known as the "Nine Lanterns Festival", has a unique performance form that integrates multiple art forms such as dance, music, and drama. The performance team usually consists of dozens of people.

They hold Jiulian Lanterns and dance to the sound of drums and music, forming a beautiful picture of flowing light and color. The performance of Jiulian Lanterns is not only an entertainment activity, but also a respect for the wisdom of ancestors and a wish for a better life. The production process of Jiulian Lanterns is complicated, including the production, painting, and decoration of lanterns. Each lantern is a handmade work of art. The frame of the lantern is mostly made of bamboo, covered with silk cloth or paper, and the surface of the lantern is painted with patterns of flowers, birds, figures, myths, etc., which are colorful and lifelike. It takes a lot of time and energy to make Jiulian Lanterns. Therefore, every year on the eve of the Lantern Festival, the villagers will start preparing several months in advance and work together to complete this huge art project. During the performance of Jiulian Lanterns, the dancers perform in specific steps and formations, and the lanterns fly up and down in their hands, changing in many ways. The performance content is rich and colorful, with imitations of animal movements, scenes of historical stories, and fragments of daily life. Each movement and formation has a specific meaning, such as the "rice ear lantern" symbolizing a good harvest, the "full moon lantern" symbolizing reunion, and the "dragon and phoenix lantern" symbolizing auspiciousness. Through these performances, the dancers express their reverence for nature, their love for life, and their good wishes for the future. The performance of Jiulian Lanterns is not only a visual enjoyment, but also a spiritual baptism. During the performance, the audience will be infected by the beauty of the lanterns and the exquisite skills of the dancers, and immersed in a strong festive atmosphere. At the same time, Jiulian Lanterns also provides a platform for interaction and communication for community residents, enhancing the cohesion and sense of identity of the community. Every year during the Lantern Festival, villagers will spontaneously participate in the performance and preparation of Jiulian Lanterns to celebrate this traditional festival together. In addition to the Lantern Festival, Jiulian Lanterns are also performed in other important festivals and ceremonies, such as the Spring Festival, temple fairs, weddings, etc. These performances not only enrich people's cultural life, but also convey deep emotions and cultural values. As an intangible cultural heritage, Jiulian Lanterns carry rich historical and cultural information and are important materials for studying Chinese folk art and folk culture. In recent years, with the development of society and the changes in culture, Jiulian Lanterns are also facing the challenges of inheritance and protection. On the one hand, traditional handicrafts are gradually lost, and the younger generation's understanding and interest in Jiulian Lanterns has declined; on the other hand, modern lifestyles and the diversification of cultural and entertainment forms have made the performance and production of Jiulian Lanterns gradually fade out of people's vision. In order to protect and inherit this precious cultural heritage, the local government and cultural departments have taken a series of measures, such as setting up a Jiulian Lantern inheritance base, inviting old artists to teach production skills, organizing Jiulian Lantern Cultural Festivals, and promoting the cultural value of Jiulian Lanterns. At the same time, the production process and performance form of Jiuliandeng are recorded and preserved by digital means, and modern scientific and technological means are used to publicize and promote it, so that more people can understand and love Jiuliandeng. Jiuliandeng is not only a local traditional cultural activity, but also a part of Chinese culture. It reflects the Chinese people's pursuit of a better life and their love for traditional culture. In the context of globalization, protecting

and inheriting Jiuliandeng is not only a respect for history, but also a maintenance of cultural diversity. Through continuous efforts and innovation, we can make Jiuliandeng, an ancient art form, glow with new vitality and contribute to the richness and diversity of world culture. Protecting and inheriting Jiuliandeng requires the joint efforts of the whole society. We must not only respect and learn traditional skills, but also innovate and develop them so that they can continue to play a role in modern society. Through education and publicity, more young people can understand Jiuliandeng, participate in the production and performance of Jiuliandeng, and let this traditional culture shine with new brilliance in the new era. At the same time, we can also learn from the successful experience of other cultural heritage protection and explore new paths and methods for the protection and inheritance of Jiuliandeng. In future development, Jiuliandeng can be combined with tourism and cultural and creative industries to expand its cultural and economic value. For example, we can develop cultural products and tourist routes related to Jiulian Lanterns, so that tourists can understand the production process and cultural connotation of Jiulian Lanterns and experience the fun of handmade production while watching the performance. In this way, we can not only increase the influence and appeal of Jiulian Lanterns, but also bring economic benefits to the local community and promote the development of the local cultural industry.

## 2. The performances are varied and varied

The performance of the Nine Lanterns is known for its varied dance steps and unique lighting effects. The performer dances with the lamp in both hands, his eyes move with the lamp, and the lamp follows the pedestrian, ensuring that the two lights remain stable and that one lamp connects to the other. The artists summarized the performance characteristics of the lamp as "fast as the wind, stable as the clock". In the light of candlelight, the colorful lanterns appear bright and dazzling, reflecting the face of the performers, and the performers' figure is hidden in the night, hidden and appearing, elegant as fairy, very poetic.

## 3. Dance and singing complement each other, and the soundtrack is harmonious and unified

The music accompaniment of Gao Ping Jiulian lamp mainly adopts the folk blowing percussion music of "Shangdang Eighth Yin Club". These music have a strong local flavor, hot and fierce, and cooperate with the dance seamlessly and seamlessly. The singing part is mostly local folk songs, with beautiful melody and sincere emotion, and the expression form of dance complement each other, making the whole performance more vivid and harmonious.

## 4. Pay equal attention to cultural inheritance and innovation

Nine lamps are not only a continuation of the historical tradition, but also continuous development and innovation in modern times. While inheriting traditional skills, performers and artists continue to incorporate new elements to make Jiulian lanterns more colorful and attract more young people to participate in them. Through the cultural activities of the school and the community, the nine lanterns are passed on and carried forward among the new generation, becoming an important cultural link between the past and the future.

## 5. Profound social significance

Nine lanterns are not only a form of entertainment, but also a social and cultural activity. It provides a platform for community residents to communicate and collaborate with

each other, enhancing community cohesion and cultural identity. At the same time, the performance of Jiulian lanterns has also attracted many tourists, promoted the development of local tourism, and contributed to the local economy.

#### 6. Cultural identity and regional characteristics

As a unique cultural symbol of the Gaoping area, its dance movements and musical styles are deeply rooted in the local history and culture. Through this traditional dance, residents not only show their artistic talents, but also express their love for their hometown and pride in cultural heritage. As one of the important symbols of this area, the Nine Lanterns not only represents the creativity and cohesion of the local people, but also reflects their respect and inheritance of traditional culture. At important festivals and celebrations every year, the Nine Lanterns dance will become the highlight of the celebrations, attracting a large number of audiences to watch. The dancers are dressed in gorgeous costumes, accompanied by rhythmic music, and tell ancient legends and stories with graceful dance moves. This dance is not only a form of entertainment, but also an important way for Gaoping people to communicate emotionally and unite the community. Through the Nine Lanterns dance, the older generation passes on the cultural essence to the younger generation, allowing this precious cultural heritage to continue and develop. The Nine Lanterns dance is not only popular locally, but also gradually attracts the attention of the outside world, becoming a bright business card to showcase Gaoping culture.

### 2.3 The Cultural and Ecological Characteristics of Nine Lotus Lanterns

The production and development of Gaoping Jiulian lamp is not only affected by the geographical environment, but also plays a vital role in the social and cultural environment. Dance ecology is concerned with the interaction between human dance and the social and cultural environment. Different social and cultural forms, such as Yan Emperor culture, farming culture, folk culture and Jin Shang culture, through the influence and restriction of the dance style, determine the source, function and form of the nine lotus lantern.

The basic formation of the nine lotus lamp is based on the "circle" shape. Known as "the oldest and most mysterious dance circle," the ring dance is not only an object of awe or worship, but also a symbol of prayer, giving or blessing. The earliest traces of folk dance can be traced back to ancient sacrificial ceremonies. In the caves dating back to 18,000 years ago, the stone beads and animal teeth of the caveman showed the characteristics of "round". Circles or wavy lines are carved on these objects in simple lines, from which the relationship between art and nature can be seen.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Gaoping Jiulian Lantern demonstrates the complex relationship between dance and society, highlighting the ability of traditional forms to adapt and develop in a modern context. The study found that Jiulian Lantern has profound social significance as a link between community participation, cultural preservation and economic stimulation. The adaptability of Jiulian Lantern reflects the ongoing dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary expression, demonstrating the resilience and vitality of traditional dance forms. This study enriches the field of dance anthropology by providing a nuanced perspective on the role of dance in shaping and reflecting social values, history and identity. Gaoping Jiulian Lantern bears witness to the enduring power

of dance to unite communities, promote cultural understanding and inspire innovation, while also respecting history. Gaoping Jiulian Lantern is not only a performing art form, but also an important part of local cultural and social life. Jiulian Lantern performances are usually performed during important festivals such as the Lantern Festival. The performance team is spontaneously organized by the villagers, and members include people of all ages, from children to the elderly, who participate in it together. This participatory approach not only enhances the cohesion of the community, but also provides a platform for villagers to showcase their talents and communicate with each other. The performance of Jiulian Lantern is rich and diverse, with both the re-enactment of historical stories, the depiction of daily life, and the imitation of natural scenes. For example, the movements of Jiulian Lantern are flexible and varied, with movements imitating animals, such as "dragons and tigers leaping" and "phoenixes dancing in the sky", as well as movements that express daily labor, such as "weaving and spinning" and "farming and harvesting". These movements not only demonstrate the dancers' skill level, but also reflect the performers' love for life and their expectations for a better future. The musical accompaniment of Jiulian Lantern also has unique local characteristics, using traditional instruments such as gongs, drums, flutes, etc. The music has a brisk rhythm, pleasant melody and is very contagious. The music and dance movements are closely combined to form a beautiful picture of movement and stillness. The music not only adds color to the dance, but also brings auditory enjoyment to the audience, allowing them to feel the strong festive atmosphere while watching the performance. The costumes and props design of Jiulian Lantern are also full of artistry and symbolic meaning. The performers wear colorful traditional costumes and hold a variety of lanterns and props. The lanterns are painted with various patterns, such as flowers, birds, fish, insects, mountains and rivers, etc., which symbolize auspiciousness and happiness. These costumes and props not only increase the visual effect of the performance, but also convey the yearning and wishes for a better life. In addition to traditional performance forms, Jiulian Lantern has continued to innovate and develop, incorporating modern elements. For example, some places have added modern music and dance moves to Jiulian Lantern performances, increasing the fun and viewing value of the performances. In addition, some young dancers have combined Jiulian Lantern with modern dance forms to create new dance works, giving Jiulian Lantern new vitality. The cultural value of Jiulian Lantern is not only reflected in its performing arts, but also in its role in promoting the local economy. Every year during the Lantern Festival, a large number of tourists are attracted to watch the Jiulian Lantern performance, which has driven the development of local tourism and related industries. The local government and cultural departments have also promoted the protection and inheritance of Jiulian Lantern by holding the Jiulian Lantern Cultural Festival and establishing a Jiulian Lantern inheritance base, while also promoting the development of the local economy. The study of Jiulian Lantern is of great significance to the fields of dance anthropology and cultural research. Through field investigations and in-depth analysis of Jiulian Lantern, researchers can reveal the evolution of Jiulian Lantern in different historical periods and social backgrounds, as well as its role and function in contemporary society. This not only helps us better understand the cultural value of Jiulian Lantern, but also provides reference and reference for the study of other traditional dance forms.

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