

## THE “ACHIMU GUA” DANCE OF THE LISU ETHNIC GROUP IN THE CONTEXT OF DANCE ECOLOGY

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### Article History

Received: 01-12-2023; Revised: 12-09-2024; Accepted: 14-09-2024

<https://doi.org/10.14456/issc.2024.54>

### ABSTRACT

This study the “Achimua Gua” dance of the Lisu ethnic group from the perspective of dance ecology. Qualitative analysis results were obtained through interviews, observational research, and literature review with research subjects including dance inheritors, expert scholars, and performers of the Lisu ethnic group.

#### The research findings reveal that:

The “Achimua Gua” dance of the Lisu ethnic group has gradually evolved from their long history of production and has been deeply influenced by the cultural and social environment of Weixi. This dance originates from the daily lives of the Lisu people and serves as a form of self-entertainment. The “Achimua Gua” dance encompasses a variety of dance movements, each reflecting the optimism and resilience of the Lisu people in the face of challenging living conditions. The Lisu people incorporate elements of goat sounds and appearance into their dance, expressing reverence for nature and reflecting their traditional customs. The simple and authentic dance movements in the “Achimua Gua” dance, as well as the imitation of the goat’s way of life, convey a profound and beautiful emotional connection between the Lisu people and their natural surroundings.

By studying the Lisu ethnic group’s “Achimua Guo” dance within the framework of dance ecology, this research provides valuable insights for delving deeper into the diversity of ecological dances and promoting sustainable ecological education. This study enhances our understanding of the intricate relationship between the Lusu ethnic group’s “Achimua Guo” dance and its ecological environment, offering robust support for the

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development, preservation, and protection of this dance. Furthermore, it ignites further in-depth research and discussions about Lisu culture.

**Keywords:** Dance Ecology; Lisu Ethnic Dance; Achimu Gua

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dance ecology focuses on the intricate relationship between the natural and social environment and dance, placing dance within a multidimensional integrated system. It dynamically examines regional cultures, revealing how natural and social factors influence and shape the development of dance, leading us to recognize dance as a social art form that conveys emotions through the human body and movement.

Weixi Lisu Autonomous County is located in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, at the confluence of the Jinsha River, Lancang River, and Nu River. It features rugged terrain and limited transportation access. Historically, this region has seen limited visits from external scholars, resulting in a scarcity of Han Chinese-language literature and documentation about the area. The ecological environment of the Lisu people in Weixi County has a close connection to the formation of their “Achimu Gua” dance. The “Achimu Gua” dance of the Lisu people is deeply influenced by the highland environment and their intimate connection with nature. The dance movements and performance styles often reflect the characteristics of highland life, such as climbing, jumping, and running, as well as symbols of mountain culture and traditions. Over time, the ecological environment of Weixi County has undergone changes. The rise of mountain agriculture and tourism may lead to different land uses, while climate change and disruptions to the ecosystem can impact the original ecological environment. These changes may affect the way of life and cultural traditions of the Lisu people, including their dance form “Achimu Gua”. The present “Achimu Gua” dance may have already undergone some transformations to adapt to the new ecological and social conditions. These changes might be reflected in alterations in dance movements, the evolution of themes or symbolic meanings expressed in the dance, and the performance styles and occasions within the modern context. Considering the influence of modern technology, increased cultural exchange, and global trends, dance forms may undergo varying degrees of adaptation. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of these changes, detailed observation and research of the Lisu “Achimu Gua” dance are necessary to comprehend how it adapts to the modern ecological and cultural environment.

The operational concept of natural dance form analysis proposed by Mr. Zhi Huayun in the field of dance ecology provides us with a clearer and more powerful tool for observing and analyzing the characteristics of ethnic dance styles (Zhi Huayun & Wang Ning, 2012). American writer Kyle Yousef, by integrating dance with the field of ecology, explores how dance as a physical art form interacts with the natural world. This interdisciplinary research helps us understand how human activities are interconnected with the natural environment and how dance serves as an expression of this relationship (Kyle Yousef, 2015).

In conclusion, within the context of researching the Lisu ethnic group's "Achimua Gua" dance from the perspective of dance ecology, the concept of dance ecology has been explored, emphasizing the intricate interplay between dance and the natural and social environment. The "Achimua Gua" dance reflects the resilience, optimism, and cultural traditions of the Lisu people, originating from their everyday life and heritage, while incorporating ecological elements. The research reveals that the "Achimua Gua" dance is the product of various ecological factors, endowing it with unique characteristics. Through this study, we gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Lisu ethnic group's "Achimua Gua" dance and its ecological environment, providing support for its development, transmission, and preservation.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

To study the Lisu ethnic group's "Achimua Gua" dance within the context of dance ecology

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The natural and social environment in Weixi County has had a profound influence on the Lisu people, determining the origin, function, and form of the "Achimua Gua" dance. In fact, the Lisu "Achimua Gua" dance can be viewed as the result of what Professor Zi Huajun referred to as "the mutual selection between the environment and dance form."

3.1 Dance ecology research suggests that dance originates from nature.

Chinese scholar Zi Huajun's concept of natural dance form analysis in the field of dance ecology provides a practical framework for observing and analyzing the distinctive features of ethnic dance styles (Zi Huajun & Wang Ning, 2012). American writer Kyle Yusuf's exploration of the intersection of dance and ecology discusses how dance, as a form of bodily artistic expression, interacts with the natural world. This interdisciplinary research aids in understanding how human activities are interconnected with the natural environment and how dance serves as an expression of this relationship (Kyle Yusuf, 2015).

3.2 Research on the "Achimua Gua" dance reveals its profound historical roots.

Regarding the Lisu "Achimua Gua" dance, the "Chinese Ethnic and Folk Dance Compilation - Yunnan Volume II", published in December 1999, serves as China's first comprehensive compilation of ethnic and folk dance arts. It extensively documents relevant information about the "Goat's Song and Dance" (Achimua Gua / Achimu Gua), including the dance's name origin, performance style, costumes, musical compositions, explanations of movements and steps, as well as the dance's composition. However, it is important to note that this compilation recorded extensive information within the context of its time but did not provide in-depth research. Furthermore, because dance is an evolving art form, the dance names and explanations of steps described in the book may differ from contemporary village performances. In December 2010, the Weixi Lisu Autonomous County Cultural and Sports Bureau published the "Weixi County Lisu Autonomous County Intangible Cultural Heritage Catalog", which meticulously records various aspects of Lisu culture,

including their production and daily life, dance, craftsmanship, architecture, oral traditions, legends, stories, customs, drama, attire, and musical instruments. Through this catalog, one can gain a deep understanding of the historical roots of the Lisu people and their traditions in various cultural domains. In the book “Lisu” by Professor Lu Jianbiao, it is documented that the Lisu people have experienced multiple migrations in Chinese history. These migrations have been triggered by various factors, including wars, ethnic conflicts, the search for economic resources, religious beliefs, and government policies. As a result of these influences, the Lisu people have long inhabited the southwestern border regions of China, located in the Nujiang and Lancang River basins.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Interview Method: In order to gain a deeper understanding of the ecological context of the Lisu ethnic group’s “Achim Guo” dance, we conducted in-depth interviews with inheritors, experts, scholars, and performers of Lisu dance in the region, both in face-to-face interactions and remote phone conversations. We aimed to listen to their insights, learn from their experiences, and interviewed individuals from various social strata. We asked them about the current status of the Lisu “Achim Guo” dance, how it has evolved over time, and the role of dance within their society, as well as the changes brought about by their contemporary living environment.

4.2 Observation Method: Through on-site observations, we meticulously documented various aspects of the performances, including the requirements of the performance venue, specific arrangements, music, costumes, accessories, props, and the physical characteristics of the performers. These observations provided tangible data that helped capture the actual presentation of the dance in different environments, thus enriching our research with valuable information.

4.3 Literature Review: We extensively reviewed academic journals, research papers, and relevant books to obtain literature related to the “Achim Guo” dance, covering its historical, cultural, and dance ecology aspects. These sources provided the theoretical framework and background knowledge for our research.

The integrated application of these research methods contributes to a comprehensive exploration of “dance ecology” and provides a solid theoretical foundation for its development and preservation. Moreover, it aids in gaining a deeper understanding of the multifaceted characteristics and cultural context of the Lisu ethnic group’s “Achim Guo” dance.

#### 5. RESULT

This study delves into the Lisu ethnic group’s “Achim Gua” dance within the context of dance ecology, offering insights into the dance’s formation and its connection with the ecological environment, as well as its unique presentation characteristics. Employing methods including interviews, observations, and literature review, the study yields the following research findings.

### 5.1 The Dance of Harmony between Nature and Culture

Through the study of dance ecology, the concept of the “dance body” is revealed, which refers to a group of dancers who share the same dance tradition and live within a common social and cultural environment (Zhi Huayun & Wang Ning, 2012). The Lisu ethnic group’s “Achimua Gua” dance has gradually evolved from their long history of production and has been deeply influenced by the cultural and social environment of Weixi, often classified as “natural dance.” The focus of the article is on the ecological environment of the Lisu “Achimua Gua” dance. Weixi Lisu Autonomous County is situated in the northwest of Yunnan Province and is the core area of the Three Parallel Rivers, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This region features diverse landscapes, including high mountains, valleys, mountain basins, highland fault zones, various rivers and lakes. It boasts spectacular features such as the Lancang River Gorge, pristine forests, snow-capped peaks, rich wildlife, beautiful lakes, meadows, and pastoral scenery (Lu Jianbiao & Ou Guangming, 2014) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

*The Dance of Harmony between Nature and Culture*



Weixi County is a region of diverse ethnicities, each with its own unique historical and cultural traditions, which have been preserved through generations. Due to its remote and isolated geographical location, the Lisu people have long inhabited this mountainous area. They have lived in harmony with the songs and have naturally developed the “Achimua Gua” dance in this environment. This dance embodies not only the exuberance and ruggedness of mountain dances but also incorporates the delicacy and unique melodies akin to the calls of goats. This can be traced back to the Lisu people’s shared experiences of coexisting with goats, where they are intimately familiar with the habits, sounds, movements, and physical attributes of these animals. Therefore, the Lisu people integrate the imitation of goats’ sounds and appearances into their dance to express reverence for nature and reflect various aspects of their lives and traditional customs.

Over many years of accumulation, refinement, and artistic development, the Lisu people's "Achimua Gua" dance has gradually evolved into the distinctive expression we witness and appreciate today. This dance represents the profound cultural heritage of the Lisu people, reflecting their close-knit way of life intertwined with the natural environment. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationship between the Lisu ethnic group's "Achimua Gua" dance and its ecological surroundings, providing a theoretical foundation for its development, transmission, and preservation. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of this unique cultural expression in modern society, sparking further in-depth research and exploration of Lisu culture.

## 5.2 Presentation of Ecological Features in "Achimua Gua" Dance Movements

### 5.2.1 Dance as the Source of Life

The "Achimua Gua" dance originates from the daily life of the Lisu people and serves as a form of self-entertainment. In the performance, the dancers typically form a large circle, and their movements include foot stomping, swaying from side to side, hip thrusting, bending, and looking up. These actions exude a robust, powerful, athletic, and distinct rhythm. The inspiration for these dance movements is drawn from the life of goats, and the dancers express their inner emotions, thoughts, and personalities by imitating the actions of goats.

### 5.2.2 Embodiment of Optimism and Open-mindedness

The "Achimua Gua" dance encompasses various jumping styles, each reflecting the optimism and open-mindedness of the Lisu people. These styles include "Jump and Swing", "Foot Stamping", "Forward Stamping", "Backward Stamping", "Goat Raising Head", "Feet Parallel", "Heel Striking", "Foot Tapping", "Shoulder Bumping", "Hip Bumping", and more (Weixi Lisu Autonomous County Bureau of Culture and Sports, 2010). These jumping styles are adjusted in the dance performance based on the content, conveying specific emotions and scenarios.

### 5.2.3 The Art of Goat Imitation

In the "Achimua Gua" dance, the dancers' movements and forms mimic the characteristics of goats. Unlike typical Lisu dances, this dance emphasizes leaping and jumping, placing a strong emphasis on interaction between male and female dancers. The dance has a broader range of movement and exudes a rugged and entertaining quality. The entire dance comprehensively imitates the various emotional expressions of goats while they jump, run, and experience joy through sound, formation, and movements. For example, "Sarto Closure" (three-step foot stomping) conveys the spirit of overcoming difficulties and moving forward courageously; "Cuo Mading" (feet parallel) expresses kind-heartedness and joyful dancing; "Zuo Luo Deng", or the dance in a circular formation, emphasizes the idea of unity and progress; "Qie Lewei Zhi Po" (grinding plate rotation) showcases a whirlwind-like rotation; "Alai Ji" (dragon spiraling) conveys bravery in the face of challenges; "La La Deng" (forward and backward dance steps) symbolizes learning to adapt in life; "Achi Deng" (goat jumping) presents a joyful goat-like life; "Ma Duo Tan" (seeking a mate) conveys messages of love (China Folk Dance Integration Editorial Committee, 2000).

The simple and authentic dance movements in the “Achimua Gua” dance, inspired by the lifestyle of goats, exude a sense of simplicity and beauty. Lisu dancers do not prioritize complex technical skills or formalized dance postures; rather, they pursue immersion and passion. Those who participate in it are infected by this enthusiasm, and regardless of any previous worries, the dancers feel extremely joyful when performing “Achimua Gua”. This infectious spirit reflects the optimism and open-mindedness of the Lisu people.

## 6. DISCUSSIONS

Through the research on the relationship between the Lisu people’s “Achimua Gua” dance and the ecological environment, this article reveals the origin and movement characteristics of this dance, reflecting the optimism and open-mindedness of the Lisu people. Specific details are as follows:

### 6.1 Enriching the concept of ecological dance

Dance ecology helps us understand the interaction between culture and the environment. Studying the connection between dance and the ecological environment is conducive to a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, the complex relationship between nature and culture, and how physical expressions reflect social and environmental changes.

### 6.2 Further understanding the ecological environment and cultural inheritance

The “Achimua Gua” dance is influenced by the environment, geographical location, and ethnic culture. It is a symbol of the interaction between the Lisu people and the ecological environment, reflecting their close connection with nature. Understanding the interaction between this dance and the ecological environment is helpful for understanding the cultural traditions and dance form evolution of the Lisu people.

### 6.3 Ecological characteristics of dance movements

The movements of the “Achimua Gua” dance imitate goats and show the lifestyle in mountainous areas, reflecting the connection between the Lisu people and nature and their respect for the ecological environment. As a cultural heritage of the Lisu people, it conveys national culture, values, and lifestyles, representing the ecological concept of the Lisu people.

## 7. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

### 7.1 Dance Ecology

The concept of “dance ecology” is put forward as a scientific method for studying the interrelationship between dance and the natural and social environments. It emphasizes that dance is the product of the interaction between culture and the ecological environment and explores this relationship through multi-dimensional comprehensive investigation.

### 7.2 Dance and the Natural Environment

Thoroughly analyze the relationship between the Lisu people’s “Achimua Gua” dance and the ecological environment, which is reflected in elements such as dance movements, music, themes, and imitation of goats.



Emphasize that dance is influenced by the natural environment and at the same time reflects human's awe and respect for the ecological environment.

### 7.3 Cultural Inheritance and Ecological Protection of Dance

Explore the expression and inheritance of the "Achimua" dance in modern society, and the role of cultural inheritance in ecological environmental protection and sustainable development. Reflect the interaction between culture and natural resources and convey ecological values through traditional dances.

These new knowledge systems provide a brand-new theoretical framework for the relationship between dance and the natural environment, emphasizing the important connection between culture, environment, and sustainable development, and are of great significance for understanding and protecting cultural heritage and the ecological environment.

## 8. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Implication of the Study

1. Enriching the concept of dance ecology: It provides a new perspective for studying the relationship between human culture and nature and helps to deeply analyze the relationship between cultural diversity, nature and culture, and the connection between physical expression and social environmental changes. For example, through the study of the Lisu people's "Achimua" dance, we can see how dance draws inspiration from the natural environment and cultural traditions to form a unique style and expression form. This provides specific cases and empirical support for the research of dance ecology and enriches the theoretical system of this discipline. (Zihua Yun, Wang Ning. 2012)

2. Helping to understand the relationship between the ecological environment and cultural inheritance: It clarifies the important role of the "Achimua" dance in the Lisu cultural tradition and the evolution of dance forms. The "Achimua" dance of the Lisu people is gradually formed in the long-term production and life, and is deeply influenced by the social and cultural environment of Weixi. It is not only an artistic expression form, but also a manifestation of the Lisu people's cognition and perception of the natural environment. For example, the goat imitation movements in the dance reflect the experience of the Lisu people living with goats and their awe and respect for nature. (Lu Jianbiao, Ou Guangming. 2010)

3. Revealing the ecological characteristics of the "Achimua" dance movements: It shows its reflection of the connection between the Lisu people and nature and respect for the ecological environment, as well as the important significance as a cultural heritage. The movements of the "Achimua" dance imitate goats and show the lifestyle in mountainous areas, reflecting the close connection between the Lisu people and nature. At the same time, as a cultural heritage of the Lisu people, it carries national culture, values and lifestyles, and is of great significance for protecting and inheriting Lisu culture. (Anthology of Chinese Folk Dances · Yunnan Volume II. 1999)



## 2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. further expand the research scope and no longer be limited to the relationship between the dances of specific ethnic groups and the ecological environment. On the one hand, conduct extensive comparative studies on dances from different regions and cultural backgrounds to more comprehensively reveal the universal laws and unique manifestations of dance and ecology. On the other hand, deeply explore the connections between dance forms that have not received sufficient attention and the ecological environment, adding new colors to the research territory of dance ecology.

2. actively combine modern technological means such as big data analysis and virtual reality to conduct more accurate measurement and analysis of the ecological characteristics of dance. Through the collection and analysis of big data, we can understand the dissemination and evolution trends of different dances in different ecological environments, providing more scientific data support for dance ecology. Virtual reality technology can enable researchers and audiences to more intuitively feel the integration of dance and the ecological environment, providing new ways for the research and inheritance of dance.

3. vigorously strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation. Deeply integrate with disciplines such as ecology, sociology, and anthropology, and deeply discuss the complex interaction relationship between dance, ecological environment, and social culture from multiple angles. In particular, the combination with dance anthropology will help us understand more deeply the meaning and value of dance in different cultures, and how dance reflects human lifestyles, values, and beliefs. By combining with anthropological fieldwork methods, we can deeply understand the inheritance and evolution of dance in specific communities, providing richer empirical materials for the research of dance ecology.

4. attach great importance to the applied research of dance ecology. Apply research results to fields such as cultural protection, ecological protection, and education, and make greater contributions to promoting the sustainable development of society. In terms of cultural protection, by studying the relationship between dance and the ecological environment, we can better protect and inherit dance cultures that are closely connected to specific ecological environments. In terms of ecological protection, dance can be used as a medium to spread ecological protection consciousness. Through dance performances and educational activities, people's awareness of paying attention to and protecting the ecological environment can be improved. In the field of education, dance ecology can provide new teaching contents and methods for art education and environmental education and cultivate students' aesthetic ability and environmental protection consciousness.

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