

## Gender Studies in Traditional Dance

### -- Analysis of Female Worship in Hakka Intangible Cultural Heritage Dance “Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance”

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#### Abstract

As a representative intangible cultural heritage dance in the unique “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual”, “Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance” is popular in the Hakka area of Meizhou City, Guangdong Province. Based on the perspective of gender, this paper analyzed and explained forms of “Lotus Pond Dance”, and the roles of females, and interpreted causes of female worship in “Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance” from the aspects of historical remains of the ancient She nationality, folk custom of Lingnan indigenous culture and status of Hakka females, revealing the deep cultural connotation, and intending to provide a reference for the study of Hakka traditional folk culture.

#### Keywords

Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance, Gender Studies, Female Worship, Hakka Intangible Cultural Heritage.

#### 1. Introduction

“Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance”, also known as “Beating Lotus Pond” (hereinafter referred to as “Lotus Pond Dance”), was listed in the third batch of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection List of Guangdong Province in 2009. As a kind of Buddhist dance, it is derived from the story of “Mu Lian Saving His Mother” in the Buddhist Sutra, dedicated to releasing the souls of the deceased female from suffering and comforting the living, which is also an important part of the “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” in the Hakka area. The performance venue is usually set in front of a nunnery temple or funeral hall. The deep and mournful vocal music and gentle dance steps form a unique style of folk culture in the Jiaoling Hakka area. “Lotus Pond Dance” shows the Hakka spirit of filial piety, reflects the Hakka people’s pursuit of benevolence, righteousness, filial piety, worship of gods, and valuing the customs of life rites, and embodies the filial piety of children to their mothers and the respect of the living for female elders.

The phenomenon of male worship and discrimination against females was widespread in ancient feudal society, and feudal ethical codes are the spiritual shackles of females in feudal society in China. The feudal society with a rigid and distinct hierarchy formulated the rules of feudal ethical codes and moral standards based on the feudal patriarchal clan relationship, and advocated the principle of “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” and “Husband Guides Wife”. The long-term erosion of feudal ethical codes derived from “Foot-binding”, “Breast-wrapping” and other traditional customs to persecute females, which is sufficient to show the low status of females in ancient society. In ancient times, the Hakka females in Jiaying Prefecture, South of the Lingnan Mountains, showed their uniqueness: they advocated and admired nature, abandoned the corrupt customs of “Foot-binding”, and “Breast-wrapping”. Moreover, in the investigation and research of scholars at home and abroad, Hakka females are often highly

evaluated as virtuous, diligent, and frugal, standing as a unique cultural phenomenon in the traditional feudal society where females are often discriminated against.

Although "Lotus Pond Dance" has been listed in the provincial intangible cultural heritage protection list, the number of relevant research is rarely seen. Based on the review of the current research status of "Lotus Pond Dance", there are four books, three newspaper reports and eight journal articles related to "Lotus Pond dance". Only four journal papers took "Lotus Pond Dance" as the research object: two papers are similar in content and explain "Lotus Pond Dance" from three aspects of historical origin, the form of expression, way of protection and inheritance. The other two papers explored the cultural connotation of "Beating Lotus Pond" from the perspective of folk culture and cultural anthropology. The rest papers were mainly introductory, focusing on the historical origin, basic form, inheritance status and other aspects. Therefore, there is still plenty of research space for "Lotus Pond Dance". Only 10 domestic journal papers and 23 foreign journal papers about gender studies of dance were found. There are only two papers examining traditional dance from a female perspective: one is published in China, *Society, Gender and Body - Study on Female Body in Jiangsu Folk Dance*, and the other is published in a foreign country, *Women in Folk Dances from the Gender Aspects*. In terms of existing research results, there are few papers on traditional dance from a female perspective. The innovation of this paper lies in exploring the unique cultural phenomenon of "Female Worship" inherent in the form of the external manifestation of "Lotus Pond Dance".

## **2. Field Exploration of Hakka Intangible Cultural Heritage Dance "Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance"**

"Lotus Pond Dance" originated from the "Sand Altar" to release the souls of the deceased from suffering. According to the record in *Annals of Xingning County in the Chongzhen Period of the Ming Dynasty*: "...People beat the 'Hell Wheel' for those on the path to Hell, and kill animals for those on the path to become animals; men and females are the same. There is also someone who beat the sand altar, which is specially designed for the deceased female." The ritual was centered on a sand altar and was set up for females. Later in the late Ming Dynasty, He Nanfeng (Monk Muyuan), the founder of the "Xiang Hua" School of Hakka Buddhism, combined Hakka culture with Buddhist culture to create the "Lotus Pond Dance", integrating Buddhist music, lyrics, rituals and dances. This dance retains the cultural mark of the ancient "Sand Altar" ritual and expands the dimension of its expression. It still takes the story of "Mu Lian Saving His Mother" as the background. This story is a Buddhist story, derived from Buddhist classics such as *Jing Lv Yi Xiang* and *Ullambana-sutra*, and tells the story of Mu Lian, a disciple of the Buddha, saving his deceased mother from hell. With the development and change of the times, the Buddhist doctrine of "Lotus Pond Dance" has become more and more intense, hence the solemn Hakka "Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual". In order to further study the "Lotus Pond Dance", the author visited Meijiang District and Jiaoling County of Meizhou many times to conduct field research on the "Xianghua" Buddhist Ritual and "Lotus Pond Dance", so as to understand the connotation of "Lotus Pond Dance" in the ritual process. Through literature review, observing the ritual activities and conducting in-depth interviews, the author has established more in-depth thinking about the ritual performance of "Lotus Pond Dance".

### **2.1. "Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual" - "Lotus Pond Dance"**

#### **2.1.1. Overview of "Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual"**

"Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual" of the Meizhou Hakka area is a special Buddhist ritual of releasing the souls of the deceased from suffering in the masters' houses or temples. The ritual is run by religious professionals who have tended to secularize their lives and keep simple Buddhist discipline. They call men who participated in the ritual activities "Xiang Hua Monks" and

“Priests”, and women “Nun”. These kind-hearted participants fulfill the duty of encouraging goodness and educating people, so as to comfort the living and the deceased. “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” of the Meizhou Hakka area can be divided into Shang Shui School (upstream area) and Xia Shui School (downstream area), expanding to the Meijiang River that flows through Meizhou and taking Bingcun Village of Meixian County as the dividing line. Shang Shui School is in the south part of Bingcun Village (including Meijiang District and villages and towns of Mei County), and Xia Shui School is in the north part of Bingcun Village (including villages and towns of Mei County north of Binggun, Jiaoling, Dafu and other counties).

“Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” is rich in forms, mainly including “singing”, “chanting”, “dance performance”, and “skill performance”. Performers chant the Hakka Xiang Hua Scriptures, and sing songs of praise, blessing, and prayer for the alleviation of mankind’s suffering. “Dance performance” and “skill performance” means performers perform dance and martial art and convey connotations. The ritual varies depending on the length of time, including “one-day-and-one-night ritual”, “One-day ritual”, and “One-day-and-two-nights ritual”, etc. “One-day-and-two-nights ritual” lasts from 3:00 pm on the first day to 12:00 pm on the third day, and this kind of ritual can be divided into three parts according to the purpose. The first part of the ritual includes building the altar, initiating, bathing, drinking, saving the deceased three times, and temporary stop, with the purpose of inviting all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to release the souls of the deceased from suffering and pray for forgiveness of their sins so that they can ascend to heaven as soon as possible. “Temporary Stop” procedure stands for the end of the first part, that is, thanking the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to return to the throne. Later, the ritual “starts” again, followed by “receive Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas” and other procedures, so as to recite sutras and pray for the deceased, complete the ritual of releasing souls of the deceased from suffering, and comfort the living. Family members of the deceased need to participate in the pharmacist phase of the second part. The third part of the ritual involves turning off the lights, blood basin, wandering in the hell, lotus pond, sending off the gods, and other procedures, with the purpose of sending off all the Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas.

The Buddhist ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance” is specially set for the deceased females, and family members can watch this ritual instead of participating in this ritual. The whole ritual lasts about an hour and a half, including “pray for Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas”, “transformation of three paths”, “beating four doors” and other 14 procedures. Moreover, the performance content and form of each link in this ritual have their own characteristics, highlighting the aesthetic characteristics of “harmony but difference” compared with other ritual procedures of “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual”. In the next section, this paper will elaborate on the specific process of the Buddhist ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance” in detail.

“Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” of the Meizhou Hakka area has strong Hakka folk culture characteristics and integrates static chanting of scriptures, music, dynamic dance performance and skill display. With the help of chanting scriptures for the deceased, people hope to release the souls of the deceased from suffering, express their feelings, and promote filial piety culture, and the Hakka spirit. Through the movement and postures in the dance, they can praise Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas, bless the deceased, and comfort the living to convey the meaning of folk custom and Buddhist philosophy, thus realizing the spiritual purpose of “Kneel in front of the Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas to pray for their forgiveness” [1]. “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” of the Meizhou Hakka area has its unique function and cultural connotation infiltrates into the daily life of the Hakka people, which have been passed down until today.

### **2.1.2. Buddhist Ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance”**

As a part of the “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” related to life etiquette, the Buddhist ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance” is dedicated to releasing the souls of the deceased elderly females from suffering in hell. Its special social function provides a sustainable development space for the survival of

“Lotus Pond Dance”. As a combination of ritual, music, dance performance, praise poetry and other diversified forms of expression, it integrates the beauty of content, emotion, structure, and form, showing the traditional Hakka humanistic thought in Meizhou, and its unique cultural connotation and artistic appeal. In order to more accurately understand the research object, the author visited Meijiang District, Meizhou City, to carry out the on-the-spot investigation of the Buddhist ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance”. The ritual procedures include Buddhas Worship, Building the Altar, Transformation of Three Paths, Transformation of Three Paths, Beating Four Doors, Namó Qīng Shì Fāng, Pū-an’s Incantation, Beating Four Hierarch, Praising Mu Lian, Hua Yan Scriptures, Splashing Divine Water, Buddhist Song, Sending Off Buddhist Dharma, and Praising Lotus Pond. The following parts present the typical performance of the Buddhist ritual of “Lotus Pond Dance” with the purpose to highlight its functional significance and layout.

Venue: Jingshen Hall, Meixin Road, Meijiang District, Meizhou City

Time: 2:00 pm on May 7, 2019, to 5:00 am on May 8, 2019. This ritual is a “One-day-one-night Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual”, and the “Lotus Pond Dance” was performed from 11:00 pm to 12:30 pm.

Participants: Eight nuns from Ciyun Temple: Four “performer” nuns (Dancers) - Liu Xiuping (MingPing) (The name in parentheses is the nun’s Buddhist name), Liu Qiaoying (Dao Ya), Liu Lili (De Na), and Liang Yanfen (De Fen); four “Guides” (Accompanists) - Hou Yanfang (De Fang), Zhang Yanlan (De Yan), and Xie Yanzhen (De Zhen).

Main Props: Lotus Pond basin, tin wand, pearl cup, bamboo, gong, drum, Xian, divine bowl, big cymbals, and small cymbals

Clothes: Black coat, black pleated skirt, and black cloth shoes with a round mouth

Identity of the Deceased: Her name is Liang Julan. As she is an older woman, participants won’t call her name directly, but call her “Ye Mu Liang Tai Ru Ren (叶母梁太孺人)”. “Ye” is the family name of her husband, “Liang” is the family name of the deceased, and “Ru Ren (孺人)” is a respectful title for the deceased elderly females.

Husband: Ye Junfei

Sons: Zeng Shan, Wen Zhang, Si Xian, Jin Ming, Li Kun





Daughters: Li Qing, Li Yu, Yi Fang, Bao Yun, Gui Jun

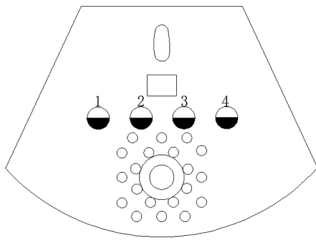
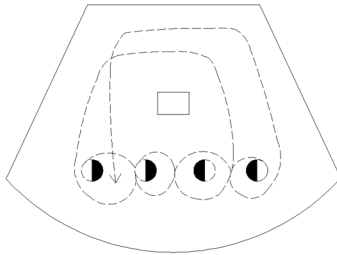


Grandchildren: Jin Qiang, Piao Qiang, Zeng Lei, Dong Lin, Ye Fang, Li Mei

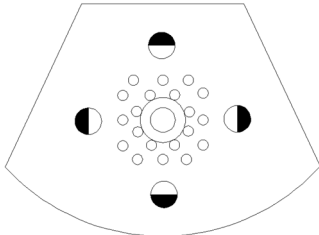
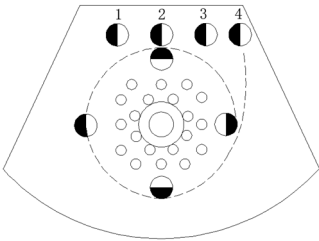




Sisters-in-law of Family Ye: Cui Hua, cui Jujube, Jin Yun, zi Yin, Xing Bao

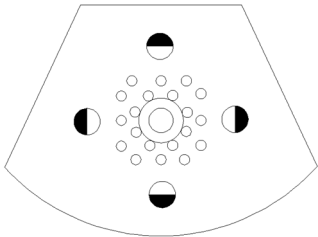
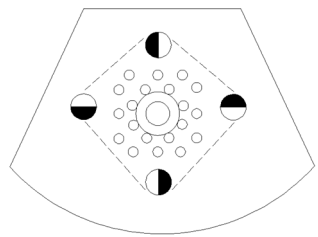

#### Performance Flow of “Lotus Pond Dance”

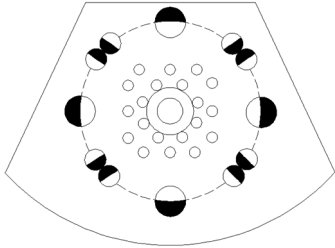
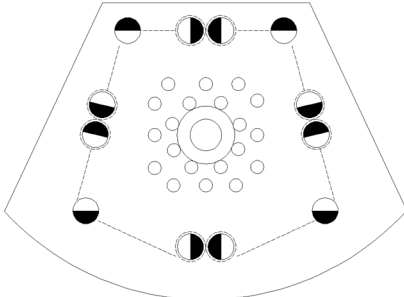
Icons in the following tables:

1.  - Lotus Pond Basin
2.  - Nuns submit to Buddhist discipline while still wearing one’s hair (The front is the white semicircle, and the back is the black semicircle)
3.  - Major Altar
4.  - Back Meditation Room




The First Part Buddhas Worship & Transformation of Three Paths			
Time	About eight minutes	Form	Sing, chant
Props	Xian, Qing, woodblock, drum, gong, cymbal, tin wand, pearl cup	Form of Vocal Music	Cold beat (Leng Ban), flowing beat (Liu Shui Ban)
Content of the Performance	<p>“Buddhas Worship” is the salute ritual to mainly chant the scriptures, showing the solemnity of the ritual. “Transformation of Three Paths” is performed by changes of the team layout to show the deceased females transform from three evil paths (hungry ghost path, animal path, and hell path) to ideal practice places.</p>		
Movement and Layout	<p>In the “Buddhas Worship” (Figure 1-1), nuns stand in a line in front of the Major Altar, with incense in their hands to worship the Buddhas. In the “Transformation of Three Paths” (Figure 1-2), nuns move at a constant speed in front of the Major Altar, holding the tin wand in their hand and shaking the pearly cup. Then, they walk counterclockwise (Figure 1-3), and nuns stand back to back in pairs and return to the original position.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-1)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-2)</p> </div> </div>		
Classical Movement	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;">   </div> <p>(Figure 1-3) [2] Hand Gesture: Hao Guang Zhi</p>		
Function & Significance	<p>The purpose of “Buddhas Worship” is to show respect to Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas. The purpose of “Transformation of Three Paths” is to show that the deceased female conquers various difficulties and finally realizes the transformation from the three paths to the ideal realm of Buddhism.</p>		

The Second Part Beating Three Treasures & Beating Four Doors			
Time	About six minutes	Form	Dance, sing
Props	Xian, Qing, tin wand, pearl cup	Form of Vocal Music	Dialogue, Liang Xia Xian (两下钹)
Content of the Performance	<p>“Beating Three Treasures” is to realize the role transformation of nuns by chanting the songs to praise Buddhas and dancing. “Beating Four Doors” has more dancing movement than the “Lotus Pond Dance”, and nuns dance around the lotus pond.</p>		
Movement and Layout	<p>In the “Beating Three Treasures” (Figure 1-4), the guides chant the songs to praise Buddhas, and the performers shake the tin wands and pearl cups and walk with Hao Guang Zhi. After song chanting, the performers face the lotus pond, lighten the bamboo, and chant scriptures. In the “Beating Four Doors” (Figure 1-5), the performers shoulder tin wands and walk clockwise around the lotus pond, and then walk anticlockwise. When the guides start to chant, the performers hit the door to hell with the movement shown in Figure 1-6 (“brandishing the tin wand”) and Figure 1-7 (“swinging the tin wand with fingers”). After this, the performers go back to the original position, ending with the movement shown in Figure 1-8 (“holding the tin wand and turning it around the back”) and Figure 1-9 (“placing the tin stick wand parallel and bowing down to Buddha”).</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-4)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-5)</p> </div> </div>		
Classical Movement	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-6)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-7)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-8)</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <p>(Figure 1-9)</p> </div>		
Function & Significance	<p>The purpose of “Beating Three Treasures” is to release the souls of the deceased from suffering in hell. The purpose of “Beating Four Doors” is to hope Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas can help the deceased females make up for their sins and show their divine power and endless merits.</p>		

The Third Part Namu Qing Shi Fang, Pu-an’s Incantation, & Beating Four Hierarch			
Time	About six minutes	Form	Sing, chant, dance
Props	Woodblock, Xian, Qing, tin wand, pearl cup, gong, drum	Form of Vocal Music	“Qing Shi Fang”, Sing with Woodblock, Liang Xia Xian (两下钹)
Content of the Performance	In the “Namu Qing Shi Fang”, the nuns chant the paragraph of “Qing Si Fang”. In “Pu-an’s Incantation”, the nuns chant Pu-an’s Incantation. In the “Beating Four Hierarch”, the nuns chant and dance, and the dancing movement and layout in this section are the same as in “Beating Four Doors”.		
Movement and Layout	<p>In the “Namu Qing Shi Fang” (Figure 1-11), the performers, facing the lotus pond and hitting it, hold the tin wand and chant “Qing Si Fang”. In the “Pu-an’s Incantation” (Figure 1-12), the nuns walk clockwise in “five positions and eight directions”, chanting Pu-an’s Incantation. In the “Beating Four Hierarch” (Figure 1-12), the performers “shoulder the tin wands”, move right, then squat to worship, facing the lotus pond with “Hao Guang Zhi”; later the performers stand up and “lift the staff and shake the pearl cup” (Figure 1-13). The main performers stand up and walk around the lotus pond clockwise to the position of the last performer, till the end of the fourth chanting.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-11)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-12)</p> </div> </div>		
Classical Movement	 <p>(Figure 1-13)</p>		
Function & Significance	The purpose of “Namu Qing Shi Fang” is to save the deceased females. The purpose of “Pu-an’s Incantation” is to drive away disasters and ask for good luck. The Purpose of “Beating Four Hierarch” is to hope Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas can release decreased females from hell.		

The Fourth Part Praising Mu Lian, Splashing Divine Water & Sending Off Buddhist Dharma			
Time	About seven minutes	Form	Sing, dance
Props	Xian, Qing, pearl cup, incense, candle	Gesture / Form of Vocal Music	Hao Guang Zhi, Ding Zhi/ Leng Ban, Liang Xia Xian, Yi Xia Ban Ban
Content of the Performance	<p>“Praising Mu Lian” is about a story in that Mu Lian looked for his mother in hell and hoped Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas could save his mother. “Splashing Divine Water”, also known as “Distribute Divine Food”, tells a story that Mu Lian feeds many Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas to help him to save his mother. “Sending Off Buddhist Dharma” expresses the reverence for Buddhist Dharma by dancing.</p>		
Movement and Layout	<p>In the “Praising Mu Lian” (Figure 1-14), the performers bow down and worship on bended knees around the lotus pond. In the “Splashing Divine Water” (Figure 1-15), the performers hold incenses and pearl cups in two hands, with the movement shown in Figure 1-16. After offering incenses to all Buddhas, gods and Bodhisattvas, the nuns walk around the lotus pond to “distribute divine food”. In the “Sending Off Buddhist Dharma” (Figure 1-15), the performers walk around the lotus pond clockwise in four directions, with the divine bowl in the left hand (Figure 1-17) and the pearl cup in the right hand. The two performers stay back to back (Figure 1-18), lift the left foot, then return to the original position, lift the pleated skirt with the right hand and spin around; bow in front of the lotus pond basin when the pleated skirt becomes circular, with the divine bowl stack one by one; repeat the whole process till the performer holds seven divine bowls.</p>		
	 <p>(Figure 1-14)</p>	 <p>(Figure 1-15)</p>	



<p>Classical Movement</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-16)</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>(Figure 1-17)</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <p>(Figure 1-18)</p> </div>
<p>Function &amp; Significance</p>	<p>The purpose of “Praising Mu Lian” is to demonstrate the filial piety of Mu Lian. The purpose of “Splashing Divine Water” is to release the souls of the deceased elderly female from suffering in hell. The purpose of “Sending Off Buddhist Dharma” is to pray for the protection of Buddhist Dharma.</p>

## 2.2. Dance Forms of “Lotus Pond Dance”

“Lotus Pond Dance” has unique dancing movement and meaningful connotation, a combination of artistry, comprehensiveness, and emotional expression. During its development, “Lotus Pond Dance” has integrated with other forms of Hakka traditional folk art, and grown into a unique folk dance bearing the mark of Meizhou Hakka folk culture. It also carries its own ethnic ideology, highlights the dignified and implicit dance movement in ancient times, expresses emotions with a round dance layout, and conveys the meaning of the theme. By understanding the body language of the “Lotus Pond Dance” ritual, this paper explored its essential nature behind the external performance.

### 2.2.1. Smooth Dance Forms to Express Emotions

Based on individual movement and team position adjustment, “Lotus Pond Dance” presents diverse aesthetic features in the layout, specific cultural implications and Buddhist connotations. In the ritual performance of “Lotus Pond Dance”, the layout of the performance team is mainly circles and S-shaped curves, with corresponding changes in a special order. In the ritual performance of “Beating Four Doors”, nuns walk clockwise or anticlockwise in “five positions and eight directions” around the lotus pond, take east as the main direction, and complete the movement in circles and S-shaped curves. In the performance of the “Lotus Pond Dance”, the nuns still walk in an S-shaped curve for both round steps and quick steps. In the stylized movement, such as “brandishing the tin wand”, “swinging the tin wand with fingers”,

and “holding the tin wand and swinging the cup”, the movement of their hands is still in an arc, showing the circular change.

“Lotus Pond Dance” carries the mission of sacrifice and has the social function of transcending the deceased and comforting the living. The circular change of the performance team expresses the inheritance of traditional Chinese dance, the emphasis on Confucian thought of “Be sophisticated”, the inheritance of the Taoist culture of “One produced two, two produced three, and three produced all things” and Buddhism thought of “Samsara of six times”. Life comes and goes, like the roundabout of the circle, which goes round and round in the six paths and highlights the cultural essence of stronger ethnic cohesion.

### 2.2.2. Devout and Graceful Postures

“Devout and graceful postures” are special dance postures in “Lotus Pond Dance” that which the participants use unique gestures, props and bodies to show feminine postures. These postures conform to the narrative plots and reflect the devout belief of the Hakka people in Buddhism. The participants internalize solemn and sincere prayers in their hearts and move their bodies with spirit in the dance, presenting a graceful and restrained feeling. Sometimes they move fast, and sometimes slowly, showing the solemnity of the ritual. The most representative gesture in “Lotus Pond Dance” is “Hao Guang Zhi”, where the hands turn outward around the wrist from the position close to the chest, showing the sincere prayer from the bottom of the heart. While reflecting the aesthetic feeling of the ritual, the dance also pursues the solemnness presented by the prop tin wand. “Tin wand”, also known as lotus pond wand, was originally a divine instrument by Buddhist monks to beg for food and defend themselves. However, it was given the connotation of highlighting Buddhist merit in the “Lotus Pond Dance”. In the performance of “Beating Four Doors”, the nuns use a tin wand to perform many movements such as “brandishing the tin wand” and “swinging the tin wand with fingers”. Their bodies move along with the movement of the tin wand in the dance, showing the ancient and dignified features of “Lotus Pond Dance”.

Although the movements of “Lotus Pond Dance” are simple and plain, the dance focuses more on “internal meaning” rather than “external performance”. Its movement reflects the fact that “Dance is a way of expressing people’s inner voice”, expressing the Hakka folk worship belief and respect for the deceased elderly females through “singing”, “dancing”, “chanting”, and “dance performance”.

## 2.3. Female Roles of “Lotus Pond Dance”

### 2.3.1. Disciplined and Pious Nuns

“Nuns” refers to religious priests with hair and ordains in nunneries. In Hakka culture, nuns are easy-going and sincere, thus they are recognized as models of “devotion” and “moderation” by society. During the research in the Taiping Palace in Jiaoling County, the author watched the “Lotus Pond Dance” performance and fully understood that the nuns sincerely prayed for the deceased during the ritual, conveying profound filial piety and Buddhist spirit.

Nuns are a special group, rooted in a diverse culture of Buddhist belief, virtue ethics and traditional morality. Since the Republic of China, the nuns have been living in nunneries and following the Buddhist disciplines, and there were still signs of the “Three Conversions of Buddhism”. They are tough, self-disciplined, and sincere, and strictly abide by moral norms for females. The inheritance and development of “Lotus Pond Dance” and the characteristics of female worship revealed are also closely related to this. Liang Bocong recorded in 200 Local Customs and Practices of Mei County that “Recently, monks have been replaced by nuns to perform Buddhist rituals. Come and see these beautiful nuns. They will also perform a new show called Beating Eight-square Lotus Pond.” [3] Obviously, the nuns played an important role in the inheritance of “Lotus Pond Dance”, and created a new form of “Lotus Pond Dance”, the

Eight-square Lotus Pond. Nuns are closely related to the Hakka people and have made indelible contributions to the inheritance and development of "Lotus Pond Dance", and also embodied the firmness and fortitude of the Hakka spirit.

### **2.3.2. Virtuous, Diligent and Frugal Deceased Female**

In the folklife of the Meizhou Hakka people, the ethnic group often organizes Buddhist rituals for the deceased Hakka females, who were highly respected, to remember them and pray for their souls to be free from the sufferings they experienced while alive. "Lotus Pond Dance", one of the "Xiang Hua Buddhist Rituals", tells the story of Mu Lian trying his best to save his mother, showing the special feelings of the ethnic group toward the elderly females. They bear the heavy burden of family daily life and social life before they die. They are virtuous, diligent, and frugal and have won praise from the Hakka ethnic group and even overseas scholars. Therefore, it is quite desirable to set up special rituals for them.

A British scholar Aidel recorded in *The Hakka Species* that "Hakka females are described as the most beautiful models of working females in China." In ancient times, the place where the Hakka ancestors lived was barren mountains and barren land, so males had to go out to make a living. Many of them rarely returned home for eight or ten years after going south overseas, and some even never returned. When their husbands were "going out to pursue their dreams", Hakka females raised their children and showed filial piety to the elders of the family. They can be seen as the typical representatives of virtue, diligence and frugality. Hakka females maintain the tradition of chastity and modesty, and serve as the backbone of the family and social life. In Hakka folk customs, "Four Aspects" are often used to depict the hard work of Hakka females. "Household Duties and Education" mean that they clean houses, serve the elderly of the family, raise the young children, and keep an orderly family environment. "Kitchen Range and Works" mean that they cook, cut grass and collect firewood. "Field Works" means that they sow and transplant rice seedlings, drive cows to plow the fields, weed and fertilize. "Needle and Wires" mean that they sew, embroider and weave themselves. Hakka females "work at dawn and rest at midnight", live a frugal life and keep a simple lifestyle, bearing the burden of supporting their families. Their descendants also "organize special rituals for them to repay their mothers". "Lotus Pond Dance" is a unique and powerful form to show the descendants' admiration and filial piety to their mothers, which also reflects the virtues of Hakka females.

## **3. Causes of Female Worship in Hakka Intangible Cultural Heritage Dance "Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance"**

Gender is one of the natural attributes of human beings. On this basis, in human society, different genders have different social functions and are endowed with different social identities, thus forming different gender communities. Different gender communities are in different survival and development conditions, so they have different social statuses. [4] Gender plays a significant role in the historical process of culture formation and development. Gender comparative study can confirm the particularity of survival and development of a gender community, and highlight the unique influence of a gender community in society and culture. From the perspective of gender, Hakka females belong to a kind of gender existence, and this social group has a higher family status, economic status and cultural status in the traditional Hakka society than females of other ethnic groups. "Lotus Pond Dance" in the Meizhou Hakka area contains this cultural characteristic, and its ritual content highlights the praise for Hakka females. This paper aims to reveal the causes of Hakka female worship behind the "Lotus Pond Dance" from the aspects of historical remains of the ancient She nationality from the matriarchal society, the "Working Females and Relaxing Males" Hakka folk customs of Lingnan indigenous culture, and the pivotal status of Hakka females.

### 3.1. Historical Remains of Fertility Worship from the Matriarchal Society of Ancient She Nationality

The ancestors of the Meizhou Hakka people originated from the Central Plains. Before their migration, Meizhou was the place where the Baiyue nationality lived, and the She nationality also lived there. "When ethnic groups of different cultures live together, their cultures are bound to absorb, integrate and assimilate each other, change in content and form, and gradually integrate into a new cultural system". [5] Therefore, Hakka culture retains the mainstream characteristics of the culture of Central Plains on the one hand, and influences and blends with the culture of the ancient She nationality on the other hand. She nationality has a profound influence on Hakka culture in its way of life, customs and religious beliefs. The cultural connotation of female worship carried by the Meizhou Hakka funeral ritual "Lotus Pond Dance" and the special role positioning of Hakka females are not immune to the "Fertility Worship" of the Matriarchal Society of the Ancient She Nationality.

She nationality still keeps the festival custom of worshipping Emperor Panhu, the ancestor and supreme god worshiped by ancient people. The essence of Panhu worship of ancient She nationality is fertility worship. In ancient times, She nationality was a nationality long-term "exile" migration, with low productivity, so they hoped to have more children to grow their community. Panhu Fruit was very similar to the abdomen of a pregnant woman when it is full and mature, so it became the symbol of vitality pursued by the ancestors of the She nationality. In the long history of development, females of the She nationality have always occupied the highland of life and culture of the She nationality. They weren't bound by feudal ethical codes, enjoyed the marriage custom of "the bridegroom has to bow and kneel, while the bride does not need to", and did not wrap their feet. They mainly managed major affairs of their families. Many of these special cultural phenomena all show the existence of female worship and fertility worship in the matriarchal society. Qi Bai Shi Lei Chao recorded that "Hakka females never wrapped their feet. They had strong bodies, and didn't wear makeup or jewelry". Obviously, the custom of "not wrapping feet" of Meizhou Hakka females is also a continuation of the traditional female culture of the She nationality. There is no doubt that the phenomenon of Hakka female worship embodied in "Lotus Pond Dance" is closely connected with the concept of fertility worship still existing in the ancient She nationality, forming and developing the unique style of "Lotus Pond Dance".

### 3.2. Influence of "Working Females and Relaxing Males" Folk Custom of Lingnan Indigenous Culture

The unique ritual of "Lotus Pond Dance" reflects the female worship culture of the Meizhou Hakka area, and the image of the deceased females is inherited from the "Working Females and Relaxing Male" custom of Lingnan indigenous culture in ancient Jiaying Prefecture. Influenced by this unique custom, Hakka females "work tirelessly throughout their life" and would like to do everything they can, plow, collect firewood, weave, carry things on their shoulders, and hire workers. [6] Therefore, later generations specially set up the funeral ritual "Lotus Pond Dance" to praise these females' contributions to the Hakka ethnic group.

After the Song Dynasty, the Hakka ancestors worked and lived together with the Lingnan aborigines for a long time in Meizhou, and their cultural customs were gradually assimilated with each other. They are deeply influenced by the "Working Females and Relaxing Male" custom of Lingnan indigenous culture. In the traditional Meizhou Hakka society, Hakka males generally despised farming and family labor and advocated reading and going out to make a living, while Hakka females took on the burden of life and maintained the family ritual such as the sacrifice activities at "four seasons and eight solar terms", which brought up their spirit of perseverance, hard-working, independence, and diligence. The "Working Females and Relaxing Male" custom of Lingnan Hakka culture has a long history. Zhou Qufei of the Song Dynasty

recorded in “The gate of the Wild Custom” that “I have met many females in the city. Females here have black skin, and strong and healthy bodies. They are seldom ill. Most of the traders in the city are females...Males there often spend their days wandering around carrying their babies around, and those who don’t have a child would enjoy a relaxing and easy life.” When this custom concept developed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, most Hakka females followed the “Working Females and Relaxing Male” custom of Lingnan indigenous culture, which had become a normal gender division of labor between males and females. With the deepening of the custom of “Working Females and Relaxing Male”, Hakka females have won high respect in the ethnic group for their strong vitality and unadorned devotion to household chores in family household work. This concept has permeated into the thought of the Meizhou Hakka funeral ritual, endowing the “Lotus Pond Dance” in the Buddhist ritual with characteristics of female worship.

### 3.3. Pivotal Status of Virtuous Hakka Females

“Lotus Pond Dance” embodies the thought of female worship both in its performance form and expression of internal emotions, and its origin is closely related to the status of Hakka females. Because of the influence of this thought, the Hakka ethnic group highlights the status of Hakka females in the unique form of “Lotus Pond Dance”. Hakka females are known for their wisdom, virtue and diligence. They hold a relatively high status in the family and play a greater role in promoting the production and development of the Hakka society.

Hakka females are virtuous, diligent and frugal, well-educated, and versatile, making great contributions to society. For example, of the Three Female Poets of Lingdong, Ye Bihua opened “Yi De Girls’ School”, Li Yuzhen published one collected work Bai Xiang Lou and two collections of poems, and Fan Tixiang wrote Becoming Green Poems and Tixiang Poems. The social status of Hakka females is also reflected in the form of funeral customs. The funeral scale of Hakka females is similar to that of males, and after the death of Hakka females, they will be given the posthumous title of “Ru Ren (孺人)”. It is a particular cultural symbol of the Hakka people, strengthening the collective consciousness of the Hakka people through historical memory, and is one of the foundations to build the history of the collective memory of the Hakka ethnic group. In ancient times, “Ru Ren” is the name of the spouse of the Grand Master (a senior official in feudal China). The Book of Rites · Qu Li Xia recorded that “The consort of an Emperor (天子之妃) is Queen (后), the spouse of a Seignior (诸侯) is Fu Ren (夫人), the spouse of Grand Master (大夫) is Ru Ren (孺人), the spouse of a Scholar-officials (士) is Fu Ren (妇人), and the spouse of a common people (庶人) is called wife (妻).” In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Ru Ren generally referred to the mother and wife of the Seventh Rank Official. However, no matter what the social status of the Hakka female is, after their death, their inscriptions will all be engraved with “Husband’s family name + name of place of origin of the famous family + Ru Ren + generation number ...”. It is because of the integration of various factors that the social status of Hakka females is particularly prominent and unique. Their pivotal status makes the ritual of “Beating Lotus Pond” and “Worshipping Blood Basin” in the “Xiang Hua Buddhist Ritual” be created. When the Hakka people are in the performance venue together, the ritual arouses their emotional resonance, transmits the identity of the ethnic group and strengthens the cohesive forces of the ethnic group.

## 4. Cultural Connotation of Hakka Intangible Cultural Heritage Dance “Jiaoling Lotus Pond Dance”

“Lotus Pond Dance” is a traditional dance related to life etiquette peculiar to the Hakka area. As a precious and living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, this ritual is to remember the deceased females and pray for their souls to be free from suffering. “Lotus Pond Dance” has

been spreading in Hakka folklore for hundreds of years, with its ideas being deeply rooted in people's hearts. It embodies the traditional Confucianism and strong Hakka traditional folk culture, and its cultural implication of multicultural coexistence also drives the development of Hakka culture.

#### **4.1. Female Culture of Firmness, Fortitude, Self-restraint and Dedication**

The characters of Hakka females reflected in the "Lotus Pond Dance" show the other side of the ancient domestic working females. They are not only the main players of family life, but also the defenders of society and country. Under the established social system, they fully explore their potential, carry the female culture of firmness, fortitude, self-restraint and dedication, and create strong synergy in society.

The Hakka ethnic group is an optimistic, brave and upright nation of the Han nationality. Since the end of the Southern Song Dynasty, the Hakka people have made their presence on the political stage. From the end of the Song Dynasty to the end of the Ming Dynasty, and then to the end of the Qing Dynasty, thousands of loyal Hakka people have made great contributions and sacrifice to defend the nation. Among them, there are Hakka females, who can not only dance and write, but are also brave enough to fight against the enemies. For example, Huang Ganying, a native of Meizhou, Guangdong Province, devoted her life to women's cause and serving the people, and she was also a fearless revolutionary fighter who devoted her life to the Party and the revolution. Xiao Yuehua, a soldier of the Chinese Central Red Army in the Long March, was born in Da Pu, Guangdong Province. She conquered numerous hardships with her firm faith in the cause of communism, indomitable spirit, courageous spirit, and females' unique flexibility. She walked thousands of miles in the Long March and wrote a solemn and stirring chapter in the Chinese revolution. In addition, the outstanding deeds of many brave and resolute Meizhou Hakka females also reflect the cultural connotation of firm faith and fearless spirit. We need to inherit and carry forward the spirit of firmness, fortitude, self-restraint and dedication, so as to unite common values and beliefs and promote the great social revolution in the new era. The religious dance, "Lotus Pond Dance", infiltrates into the daily life of the Meizhou Hakka people and speaks directly to their hearts. The female culture contained in this dance exerts a subtle influence on people's ideology, values and concepts, advances the development of the Hakka spiritual culture, and facilitates the harmonious development of society.

#### **4.2. Filial Piety Culture of Respecting Female Elders**

"Articles are used to carry ideas and morals, while enlightenment can cultivate people's noble moral sentiment". The filial piety culture is static, and it can stay vivid and survive through the practice and worship of common people in order to achieve the enlightenment of virtue and filial piety. The ancestors of the Meizhou Hakka people were Han people who moved south from the Central Plains, so they always valued the Confucian culture and the folk culture of the Han people in the Central Plains. The core idea of Confucian ethics is "filial piety culture", which is most respected and valued by the Hakka people, and during the migration process of Hakka ancestors, this strong family concept was constantly strengthened and eventually became the spiritual pillar of the Hakka people. "Lotus Pond Dance" is the product of the integration of the traditional culture of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism and local folk culture, with the aim of building a model of filial piety based on the story of "Mu Lian Saving His Mother" to regulate and guide the behaviors of the Meizhou Hakka people. The folk culture contained in this dance has penetrated into the customs and daily life of the Hakka people. The behavior of the Hakka people holding the "Lotus Pond Dance" ritual for their deceased mothers also embodies a strong filial piety culture, and the ritual activities show the Hakka people's filial piety toward their deceased mothers as well as their view of life and death. Meizhou Hakka people firmly believe that "filial piety" is the measure of Hakka's life value. Only the Hakka people who honor their

elders can be respected in the ethnic group. The Hakka people also expect to maintain the order of the ethnic group and its survival and development through filial piety culture. "Filial piety is the foundation of all virtues." As a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, filial piety culture has the function of maintaining family harmony and social stability, and is also the spiritual pillar of national prosperity. "Lotus Pond Dance" carries forward the value and significance of traditional Chinese filial piety culture through chanting scripture and performing dance. Its value and significance play an important role in the building of a culturally advanced socialist country, and are conducive to strengthening national identity, improving the moral quality of the people, and promoting the unity of the Chinese nation.

### 4.3. Harmonious Culture of Coexistence and Inclusiveness

"Lotus Pond Dance" is a representative folk activity of Meizhou Hakka intangible cultural heritage. It manages to survive on the edge of the dominant social culture, but takes root in the folk history of the Hakka group and generates extensive influence. Its form and content have the function of preaching, embodying the character and spirit of the Hakka nation and carrying forward the national culture and ideology. "Lotus Pond Dance", with its prominent circular movement and special dance steps, shows the characteristics of the harmonious culture of coexistence and inclusiveness. The Hakka people express their emotions and accumulate power through such a multicultural ritual activity that combines literature, music, dance, religion, sacrifice and other rituals related to the praise of Buddha.

The dance movement of "Lotus Pond Dance" still has a relatively stable movement system through long-term accumulation in history, and embodies the profound cultural meaning of the Hakka ethnic group. The movement of the nuns in the dance, such as "brandishing the tin wand", "swinging the tin wand with fingers", and "holding the tin wand and shaking the cup", indicates the signs of a circle, an abstract symbol. The nuns mainly use "circle steps" individually and dance in circles around the lotus pond as a team. The circular dance layout and the emotional expression of the religious ritual manifest the harmonious culture of coexistence and inclusiveness, which accords with the aesthetic pursuit of "harmony" of the Chinese nation. "Lotus Pond Dance" contains the "Harmony Culture" of the Chinese tradition, and embodies the cultural deposits of benevolence and generosity. It is the ideological source of the Chinese nation's inclusiveness, self-discipline and social commitment, and showcases the aesthetic characteristics of beauty and harmony through interweaving and integrating with different artistic elements and diversified cultures.

## 5. Conclusion

"The true nature of things is not in the things themselves, but in the relations we constructed and felt between them". The performance form of "Lotus Pond Dance" is behind the abstract artistic symbols, which implies the close relationship between dance and culture, and embodies rich cultural connotation and emotional implications. It is rooted in the traditional culture and social life of the Meizhou Hakka people and has multiple cultural functions such as uniting the group, and educating and cultivating the people. The innovative inheritance of "Lotus Pond Dance" has always been closely related to "females", as the dancers, the deceased females, or the presentation of the dance movement and posture, all highlight the females' characteristics. This paper analyzed "Lotus Pond Dance" from the perspective of females, reflecting the psychology of the Hakka people to worship females and the cultural connotation of respecting mothers and promoting filial piety culture.

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