

Folk Dance and the Quest for Cultural Sustainability



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Abstract In the context of sustainability, culture is a core area for addressing development issues. Based on the importance of culture and significant inheritance challenges in contemporary society, many scholars have researched and debated cultural sustainability by examining different aspects such as tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Within this discourse, folk dance plays a crucial role in cultural transmission through presentation of customs, costume, and music. These features that capture the aspects of folk dance, present crucial value in discussions of cultural sustainability. However, the exposition of folk dance and the concept of cultural sustainability continues to require contextual clarity and scrutiny. Therefore, this study adopted Arksey and O'Malley's scoping review protocol to explore the definition and nexus between knowledge of folk dance and cultural sustainability. The research drew data from Scopus, ProQuest platform, Web of Science, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) in English and Chinese. Out of 12,797 articles, 72 articles were identified as relevant to the research question. A thematic analysis resulted in three main themes: (1) digitalization, (2) education and reform, and (3) inheritance, protection, and development. The results demonstrate differentiation in the positioning of cultural sustainability and folk dance and of the connections with similar terminologies such as "folkloric dance" and "cultural continuity." Hence, this paper makes valuable contributions by unraveling the interplay of stakeholders in cultural sustainability and folk dance. Further, the paper suggests four sustainable directions for future studies, especially in developing evaluation and monitoring indicators.

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1 Introduction

The emergence of humankind to the formation of communities and migrations laid the foundation for the development of culture. Culture encompasses many aspects of human society [1]. However, rapid transformation has placed people and their culture in diverse and interconnected environments in the context of modernization and globalization. Folk dance, as one of the most representative cultural carriers, embodies and presents a large amount of knowledge in culture, social life, economy, politics, and spiritual beliefs [2]. In the late twentieth century, Buckland [3] identified industrialization and urbanization as forces disrupting the continuity of folk dance. These statements demonstrate that folk dance is changing and even disappearing as it adapts to modern societal shifts. The dispersion of this cultural complex may result in lack of cultural identity and confidence as well as expressions of history [4]. Therefore, the sustainable development of folk dance is essential in the midst of continuous change. Since the concept of sustainability was introduced, environmental, economic, and social sustainability, as three dimensions or pillars, have been discussed widely [5]. However, many scholars have proposed additional pillars to supplement or challenge it [6]. Also, the three pillars of sustainability are not suitable for a focused and targeted exploration into the sustainable development of folk dance in the cultural context. More recently, cultural sustainability has been recognized as a crucial field by many researchers [5, 7]. This shift acknowledges the vital role that culture plays in shaping identity, community cohesion, and long-term resilience, and emphasizes the need for more targeted research in this domain. Although numerous studies have explored topics related to either folk dance or cultural sustainability, the long-term development quest of folk dance in the cultural sustainability context remains unexplored. To respond to this gap, the aim of this study is to review and synthesize existing research on the cultural sustainability of folk dance, to assess what has been achieved, and to identify future directions.

2 Methodology

A scoping review was selected as it allows for the identification of specific thematic coverage and a broad overview of research focus [8]. These features make the method appropriate for wide topics—folk dance and cultural sustainability. By adopting Arksey and O'Malley's [9] protocol, this study presents findings from a scoping review under the searching criteria of "folk dance" and "cultural sustainability." It (1) clarifies folk dance, cultural sustainability, and their related terms, and (2) categorizes three major research themes: digitalization; education and reform; inheritance, and development, protection and preservation; in the findings section (from 66 of the 72 included studies).

The first step in the protocol of Arksey and O'Malley [8, 10] is to propose a research question, to achieve the research purpose and identify a sufficient number

of articles. For this study, the research question was the following: How is folk dance being pursued in the context of cultural sustainability? To answer this research question, three keyword combinations were determined (Step 2), namely, “folk dance”; “cultural sustainability”; and “folk dance” AND “cultural sustainability.” In Step 3, these combinations were typed into representative three English (Scopus, ProQuest, and WoS) and one Chinese (CNKI) database to conduct the study search. To obtain bilingual resources to the greatest extent, there is no limitation on time range and data types. The only exception is that the result was limited in the “under peer review” function on the ProQuest platform. The export restriction of article numbers above 20,000 in that database caused the data under the “All fields” to be undiscoverable [11]. Highly relevant articles refer to those that research both keywords of “folk dance” and “cultural sustainability.” During the screening in Step 4, moderately relevant keywords are also included due to (1) the connections in similar word meaning, and subsets, and (2) they are able to answer the question and reflect its core essence “the quest.” These keywords are of two parts: (1) folkloric dance (minsu wudao), ethnic folk dance (minzu minjian wudao), traditional folk dance (chuantong minjian wudao), folk ritual dance (minjian yishi wudao), traditional dance (chuantong wudao), and ethnic/minority dance (minzu/shaoshuminzu wudao) on the folk dance side, and (2) cultural continuity (wenhua yanxuxing), protection (baohu), creation (chuangzao/chuangzhuo), preservation (baocun/baoliu), conservation (baohu/baocun), development (fazhan), promotion (tuiguang/xuanchuan), inheritance (jicheng/chuancheng), innovation (chuangxin), education (jiaoyu), and choreography (bianwu) on the cultural sustainability side. To explore key works in Step 4, the screening criteria for “include” are (1) concrete actions, methods, and/or results in the keyword combinations (such as folk dance and development) and (2) requiring a full reading to confirm their eligibility. After duplications and irrelevances were removed, 12,797 works were identified (CNKI 1861, Scopus 1595, ProQuest platform 8276, and WoS 1065). In Step 5, 281 studies were examined under the full article review. Ultimately, 72 articles that provide substantive suggestions and more pertinent information in the content to answer the research question were included (Step 6). Papers that lacked analytical depth, limited to descriptive accounts, provided less relevant content (only few sentences), or did not address keyword combinations, were excluded.

3 Findings

3.1 The Identification of Folk Dance and Cultural Sustainability

Definitions and terminologies of subfields in research are often used interchangeably, which leads to confusion. Table 1 summarizes the basic knowledge and contextual connections of folk dance and its related terms. However, only a few studies

Table 1 Basic connections of folk dance and its moderately related terms

Terms	Definition	Features and connections
Folk dance (Minjian wudao)	A dance format was created, inherited, and spread during the development of material and spiritual civilization by people [12]	Making “folk dance” more specific, the minority name should be added in the front, like Han folk dance [12]. It covers all ethnic dances [12]
Folkloric dance (Minsu wudao)	It exists in specific folkloric activities and connects folk cultural space with the dance itself [13]	It covers all types of folk dances of Chinese minorities [12]
Ritual dance (Yishi wudao)	It is an expression of religious consciousness and the admiration of nature and life in ancient times [14]	It is a combination of various ceremonies and dances [14]
Traditional dance (Chuantong wudao)	“Folk dance (FD) is a type of traditional dance that has been handed down through a culture or group from generation to generation” [15], p. 445	Philippine folk dance has also been called traditional dance, ethnic dance, or folk choreography [16]

provided clear definitions and explanations. Nevertheless, three connections can be identified based on the table. First, all terms can be divided into two expansive fields (folk and traditional dances) and three sub-fields (folkloric, ethnic folk, and ritual dances). Although the terms are distinguished here roughly, they overlap in clarifications and coverage, such as the religious function in ritual dance is one part of folkloric culture. Second, the fluidity of folk dance can be seen in historical development. For example, Zhang and Pu [12] outline that the connection among dances is that the primitive dance is subdivided into court, ritual, and folk dances based on their respective functions in the slave society. Third, these dances are all rooted in their cultural and geographical spaces. To illustrate, Naxi folk dance displays its ethnic cultural and geographic features in China [12]. These inner and outer connections have shaped dance movements, costumes, stories, and music. Therefore, the development of folk dance requires two key components: the internal culture and external performance.

Cultural sustainability and its related terms are deeply connected and entangled (Table 2). Meanwhile, the connection among these terms constructs the path of folk dance to achieve the goal of cultural sustainability, from its historical beginnings to the future. So, the first step includes protecting, preserving, and conserving folk dance. Meanwhile, cultural excavation, collation, and classification are organized by the government. Thereafter, the inheritance of folk dance is facilitated through methods like education and promotion. This is mainly demonstrated by inviting dance inheritors to display in schools [16] and share through media platforms [14]. Once learners and instructors master specific folk dances, the phase of dance creation and innovation can begin. These stages represent important steps for folk dance toward sustainable development.

Table 2 Cultural sustainability and its related terms in the context of folk dance

Terms	Contextual connections among terms
Cultural sustainability	“Cultural sustainability advocates for the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage across generations” [17], p. 121
Cultural continuity	The preservation of Qi Lin Lantern Dance in schools contributes to students’ understanding of cultural identity and continuity of students [17]
Protection	The fading of ethnic folk dance may cause negative effects on society and culture for offspring [18]. Thus, protection is the foundation of inheritance
Creation	Digital animation is the creation movement of folk dance in the new era and offers the opportunity for inheritance and development [19]
Preservation	The combination of cultural participation and education promotes students’ preservation and sustainability awareness [17]
Conservation	Integrating basic cultural elements of Chinese folk dance into education promotes the young generation’s understanding of preservation methods, especially how to develop intangible cultural heritage continuously [12]
Development	
Promotion	
Inheritance	Folk dance education enhances cultural and creative innovation and promotes the inheritance of traditional culture [20]
Innovation	
Education	As an important way of inheritance and promotion, teaching ethnic folk dance in schools helps to build cultural awareness [21]

3.2 Three Main Research Themes

Digitalization Approaches Scholars from 17 articles studied folk dance and its related terms from the digitalization aspect, among which the most discussed is motion capture and virtual reality. These technologies bring creative approaches in conservation and inheritance, because they allow massive data storage and export without the limitation of time and space [22]. Digital preservation provides chances of cultural sharing and regeneration, immersive learning, and virtual display [22]. Also, it allows students to study and protect culture thoroughly compared to the traditional model. These emerging digital experiences and preservation practices illustrate the shifting trend of folk dance from elemental teaching and Labanotation (a method for recording and analyzing human movements) to modern technology. Furthermore, the combination of Labanotation and motion capture solves the inefficiency of manual recording, while combining dance notation and video documentation, and opens an interactive direction for the development of folk dance [23].

Education and Reform Under this theme, 10 papers discussed the situation and problems of choosing schools as major venues for the inheritance and development of folk dance, such as enhancing teaching effectiveness, teacher’s ability, and education reforms. In examining protection and reform, inviting inheritors to teach in schools, building dance schools, developing local-featured teaching materials, and integrating innovation with current trends are key focus areas [24]. Thus, investigating student interest and participation in Philippine traditional dances is the foundational steps in learning, preserving, and developing [16]. However, the feasibility of many unimplemented initiatives requires further exploration, particularly in terms

of building schools and developing teaching materials, which need substantial resources and efforts.

Inheritance, Protection, and Sustainable Development Thirty-nine articles highlighted the (cultural) sustainable development, protection, and inheritance fields of folk dance. Table 3 summarizes general problems and suggestions faced by different fields and groups in this category. In fact, many suggestions are being implemented by the Chinese government, such as establishing the Intangible Cultural Heritage List and special funds [25]. Although the government provides support, many folk dances are still at risk of extinction. All measures and problems in folk dance indicate the necessity of seeking cultural sustainability, while also reflecting (1) the importance of public attention and the preservation of cultural and geographical spaces, (2) the protection, inheritance, and development of folk dance are long-term processes, and (3) creating economic value attracts young learners, affords stagecraft elements, and supports future innovation. Of these 39 articles, 31 of them cover investigations of folk, ethnic folk, and traditional dances in different areas of China, but situations, problems, and solutions are basically similar. This is because these dances are under the same national framework and socio-economic environment. However, most suggestions lack empirical exploration and expanding perspectives.

Table 3 Summarized problems and suggestions of folk dance in the Chinese context

General dilemmas in roles or fields	Future suggestions for sustainable development
Cultural and geographical environment (changing and disappearing)	(1) Establishing eco-cultural villages, (2) keeping the cultural roots of folk dance, and (3) creating business and cultural tourism models
The impacts of modern life (aesthetic changes, the Internet, and living pressure)	(1) Promoting self-learning, heritage awareness, and cultural confidence and identity, and (2) building promotion bases
Inheritor (unchanged inheritance model, a lack of young learners, and elders' ageing and health issues)	(1) Enhancing the current heritage system, (2) recruiting talents from the public, (3) promoting folk dance at schools, (4) offering job opportunities, and (5) providing regular healthcare
Folk dance itself (uniform performances and lack of cultural content and timeliness)	(1) Domestic and international communication, (2) adding modern elements, (3) establishing online platforms and databases, and (4) folk dance census
Specialist (lack of creation awareness and unqualified teaching staff)	(1) Creating based on the current society, (2) using new media technologies, (3) lecturer training, and (4) cultivating diverse and interdisciplinary talents
Economy (over-commercialization, low value, and short of audience and finance)	(1) Understanding the core of culture, (2) no fabricating traditions, and (3) developing market management and strategies
Awareness and understanding (weak and insufficient understanding across participants)	(1) Media dissemination and creating cultural IP, (2) marketing and promotion (online and offline), and (3) education in schools and the society

4 Discussion

The review results of folk dance and the quest for cultural sustainability establish that the current research focuses on the exploration of their subfields and relevant areas and they indicate the implicit roles of stakeholders within research themes. Although there are only two highly relevant papers, many others are moderately relevant and closely associated. These findings indicate that (1) the joint research topic continues to attract substantial scholarly interest, and (2) three core themes—centered around the interrelation of the keywords folk dance and cultural sustainability, and their associated areas such as preservation and folkloric dance—provide answers to the research question. These themes involve both innovative (e.g., digitalization and education reform) and traditional practices (e.g., education and promotion), and are all aimed at preserving, protecting, inheriting, and reimagining folk dance to support cultural sustainability.

Also, it was found that six stakeholders are the main carriers of folk dance and implementers of cultural sustainability approaches. As a leader, the government is significant and takes financial and policy measures. Inheritors serve as the live “carrier” of folk dance and bear responsibility for promoting, displaying, and teaching. The public, especially the local residents, is a large cultural receiving and dissemination group. Also, students who start to develop an interest at an early age will be a key to sustainable development and inheritor recruitment. Experts play a leading role in creation and innovation. For enterprises, the integration of culture with business creates commercial and job opportunities. Thus, identifying research themes, clarifying interrelations of terms, and understanding the roles and collaborations among stakeholders are vital for the understanding of sustainable practices of folk dance within a cultural framework.

5 Conclusion, Limitation, and Future Suggestions

Due to the decline and challenges in the continuation of folk dance, this scoping review explores current research on how folk dance is being pursued in the context of cultural sustainability. Based on the findings section, this research (1) is able to guide the understanding of folk dance and cultural sustainability concepts, (2) confirms three main research themes, and (3) identifies that stakeholders’ cooperation is the key to any discussions relating to folk dance as a way to promote cultural sustainability.

This scoping review paper examined extensive data extracted from four comprehensive databases in a bilingual environment. However, three limitations remain: (1) research in other languages and databases are worth exploring, (2) with the exception of data from ProQuest platform which contained peer-reviewed articles, no quality evaluation was conducted from the other three databases, and (3)

non-academic sources like news and annual reports were not incorporated into the final analysis.

This research outlines three prospective directions. First, the topic remains insufficiently examined in countries with rich cultural traditions and extensive historical legacies. Second, significant opportunities persist for investigating the phenomena, challenges, and stakeholder dynamics associated with folk dance and other cultural forms within the broader framework of cultural sustainability. Lastly, there is potential for developing evaluation indicators, monitoring systems, and empirical investigations to assess the outcomes and impacts of folk dance within the cultural sustainability domain.

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