

# A Brief Discussion on the Training Value and Cultural Artistic Inheritance of Tibetan “Reba” Dance

Bo Hui

Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu610225, China

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**Abstract:** The Tibetan “Reba” dance is a multifaceted performing art that integrates dance, music, and acrobatics, deeply rooted in religious and cultural contexts. This paper examines the origins, historical evolution, and cultural significance of the Reba dance in Tibetan society. It highlights the dance’s role in enhancing dancers’ physical flexibility and overall abilities. By detailing specific movements and artistic expressions, the study showcases the practical and artistic value of the Reba dance in training. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of preserving the Reba dance as intangible cultural heritage, advocating for its protection and integration with modern art to ensure its continued legacy.

**Keywords:** Tibetan “Reba” Dance; Artistic Value; Dancer Training; Traditional Performing Arts

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## 1. Introduction

The Tibetan “Reba” dance is one of China’s outstanding traditional minority cultures, prevalent in Tibetan regions of Tibet, Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai. It is a comprehensive performing art that combines storytelling, singing, dancing, acrobatics, qigong, and short dramas. In Tibetan, “Reba” has two meanings: it refers to the comprehensive art form itself and to wandering performers with long braided hair, symbolizing itinerant dancers<sup>[1]</sup>.

According to folklore, “Reba” dance originated from religious beliefs and was a shamanistic dance performed to suppress demons. Its rise is linked to the construction of the Samye Monastery, where the successful completion of each floor coincided with the performance of the “nine drum points”<sup>[2]</sup>. Hence, the modern “Reba” drum dance typically features one, three, six, and nine drum points. As an important component of Tibetan dance, “Reba” dance also represents a significant artistic form. The “Reba” drum, a round, flat drum with a handle, is a crucial prop in the performances of this artistic form. The primary function of the “Reba” drum is to emphasize the rhythm and enhance the performance atmosphere.

## 2. The Training Value of Tibetan “Reba” Dance

### 2.1 Enhancing dancers’ physical flexibility

The “Reba” drum dance, a significant representation of Tibetan dance style and spiritual essence, also carries the religious connotation of exorcism. Different “Reba” drum troupes have their unique acrobatic movements and techniques<sup>[3]</sup>, which are technically demanding and require high levels of physical flexibility and strength from dancers. Thus, the dance holds substantial training value.

In performances, the “Reba” drum plays a crucial role, unifying the dance’s style and spirit while retaining its exorcism roots. Various regional troupes incorporate unique acrobatic movements and techniques that demand exceptional flexibility and physical strength. For example, the “drum spin” technique involves the dancer holding the drum with a relaxed yet firm grip, using wrist flexibility and strength to spin the drum. This technique, often used in transitions or finales, showcases the dancer’s agility and artistic impact. Another complex technique is the “drum flip,” which requires advanced control and coordination. Movements like “drum spin and flip” necessitate precise body control to avoid instability and awkwardness. The drum flip also involves intricate footwork, demanding stable mental rhythm and precise hand-foot coordination.

Examining the “Reba” drum dance’s technical features reveals its complex coordination training value<sup>[1]</sup>. Dancers must balance rapid drumming and step changes, enhancing their flexibility and overall physical fitness. Through continuous practice, dancers develop refined muscle control and strength distribution, achieving precise and aesthetically pleasing movements<sup>[4]</sup>. Especially in high-difficulty performanc-

es, such as combining “drum spin” and “drum flip,” dancers need excellent physical condition and extensive stage experience, making “Reba” dance an ideal training method for comprehensive skill development.

## **2.2 Enhancing Dancers’ Comprehensive Abilities**

“Reba” dance includes characteristic movements such as “bowing,” “relaxed hips,” and “leaning forward,” with all actions performed in a “knee-trembling” rhythm. The dance involves nine specific hand positions for holding the drum, various leg movements like standing, semi-squatting, and kneeling, and trunk movements such as bending and twisting, along with upper limb movements like raising, spreading, lowering, and folding the arms. During performance and practice, dancers must constantly switch dance postures, coordinating hand and foot movements, which enhances their physical coordination and muscle utilization while deepening their understanding of Tibetan dance style.

The “Reba” drum extends beyond a prop for visual effect and technical mastery, serving as an extension of the dancer’s inner emotions and consciousness. Training with the “Reba” drum allows dancers to master various prop techniques, enhancing their emotional expression and stage presence, fostering interaction and emotional resonance with the audience.

Moreover, the diverse training methods and techniques of Tibetan “Reba” dance significantly enhance dancers’ overall abilities. From mastering basic movements to refining complex techniques, each step requires significant effort and time. During “Reba” dance performances, dancers must continually adjust and optimize their movements for the best performance effect. Through extensive training and practice, dancers improve their physical fitness and technical skills, enabling more expressive and articulate performances.

## **3. The Cultural and Artistic Heritage Value of Tibetan “Reba” Dance**

The Tibetan “Reba” dance is a traditional form of dance within Tibetan culture, holding profound historical and cultural value. As an intangible cultural heritage, it carries the historical memory of the Tibetan people and reflects the wisdom and lifestyle of their ancestors.

### **3.1 The artistic value of “Reba” dance**

The movements and techniques of the “Reba” dance are diverse and complex, showcasing its unique dance style and aesthetic characteristics. According to “Knowledge Compendium” by Gongzhu Yundan Gyatso, the dancer’s upper body movements should be as fierce as a lion, the waist movements seductive, the limbs as coordinated as machinery, and the muscles relaxed. The entire body should move slowly and solemnly, with trembling knees, agile footwork, and an overall vigorous posture.

In “Reba” dance performances, male dancers’ upper body movements resemble a lion’s ferocity, demonstrating a robust, agile, and swift dance style, fully displaying masculinity and strength. The seductive waist movements and nimble footwork require dancers to maintain grace and elegance even under tense rhythms. Techniques in “Reba” drum artistry, such as various drum flips and high-low strikes, demand high levels of skill and bodily control from the dancers.

“Reba” dance not only possesses unique drum techniques and strong artistic appeal but also incorporates elements from other performance forms such as Xianzi, Guozhuang, and Tap dance. It blends singing, dancing, acrobatics, and Qigong, creating a distinctive stage effect and audiovisual enjoyment. While “Reba” dance rarely includes high-difficulty movements from Guozhuang and Xianzi, it features many humorous segments, highlighting the dance’s diversity and artistic comprehensiveness.

### **3.2 The Ethnic Cultural Significance of “Reba” Dance**

“Reba” dance has a long history, and its performance forms and content largely reflect the religious beliefs and life attitudes of the Tibetan people, making it a crucial medium for understanding Tibetan culture. In the Tibetan “Reba” drum solo “Between Heaven and Earth,” the dancer’s frequent drum beating, walking, accelerating, running, and jumping movements portray the strong and graceful demeanor of female “Reba” artists and their strong desire to escape life’s difficulties and pursue a better life. These dance movements are not just artistic expressions but also vivid interpretations of the Tibetan people’s life attitudes and religious beliefs, demonstrating their longing for a better life and devout faith.

In this performance, dancers coordinate high-pitched singing and chanting with a series of devout prayer movements while holding the

drum, illustrating the philosophy of “oneness with the drum” and “oneness with the universe.” This reflects the “Reba” artists’ celebration of life and their exuberant life spirit. This artistic form not only reflects the aesthetic concepts and life attitudes of the Tibetan people but also embodies their hopes and emotional pursuits, making “Reba” dance an important vehicle for expressing the emotions and aspirations of the Tibetan people. Widely spread in Tibetan regions, “Reba” dance has become a national intangible cultural heritage, with profound historical and cultural roots. This not only affirms the importance of “Reba” dance in Tibetan culture but also highlights its unique value within the multicultural system of the Chinese nation.

### 3.3 The Social-Cultural Value of “Reba” Dance

“Reba” dance holds significant social cultural value in addition to its ethnic-cultural significance. During the nomadic journeys of Tibetan families, “Reba” performances were closely linked with commercial activities, serving as a means of sustaining the survival and development of tribes, small groups, and families. The “Reba” art holds special meaning for nomadic groups, bearing the value of cultural identity. Through “Reba” dance performances, wandering Tibetans find cultural support and spiritual solace in foreign lands, thereby enhancing their sense of ethnic identity and belonging.

As part of the Tibetan dance system, “Reba” dance facilitated ethnic unity in an era of limited information, bringing together Tibetans of different ages, genders, and social statuses to dance “Reba.” This unity and sense of identity strengthened the connections among the Tibetan people and showcased the vitality and diversity of Tibetan culture to the outside world. The unique form of “Reba” dance attracted people from various ethnic groups to dance together, promoting ethnic solidarity and contributing to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. “Reba” dance is not only a symbol of Tibetan culture but also an important bridge for ethnic unity and cultural integration, promoting social harmony.

Furthermore, the performance form and content of “Reba” dance continue to evolve and innovate to meet modern societal needs and aesthetic preferences. By integrating modern dance elements into traditional “Reba” dance, its performance forms are enriched, its artistic appeal enhanced, making it more enjoyable and attractive. This innovation not only preserves traditional culture but also revitalizes “Reba” dance in the new era, continuing to play a crucial role in Tibetan culture.

## 4. Conclusion

The Tibetan “Reba” dance, an integral part of Tibetan culture, embodies a unique combination of sports, dance, poetry, and music. It holds significant value for dancer training and cultural preservation, promoting physical fitness and artistic appreciation, and contributing to social harmony.

However, rapid societal changes pose a threat to its preservation. Future research should focus on developing strategies to protect and promote the “Reba” dance in modern society.

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