



**DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HERITAGE
MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE**



Field: Intangible Heritage

Subject: Performing Art

Type: Dance

Heritage Object: Lion Dance

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BACKGROUND:

Lion Dance is a traditional performance and dance in Chinese culture. The Chinese community believes that the Lion Dance brings good fortune and can ward off evil spirits. The Lion Dance is usually performed during festive seasons, inauguration events, opening ceremony of a company, etc.

Lion Dance is acrobatic, and its movements mimic those of a lion using a lion props and costumes. There are two types of Lion Dance: the Southern Lion Dance and the Northern Lion Dance. The Northern Lion Dance originates from Northern China and was historically performed as entertainment for the royal family. The Southern Lion Dance, on the other hand, originates from Southern China and was performed for the public as entertainment. The Southern Lion Dance and the Northern Lion Dance differ significantly in terms of the lion costume.

In Malaysia, Lion Dance is opened to all and plays the role in fostering national unity with all communities of multi-faith and multi-cultural, besides ushering auspicious events and ceremonies.

JUSTIFICATION:

- It is a traditional performing art full of symbolism and cultural diversity.
- It combines acrobatic elements, traditional music, and colourful costumes in its performance.
- Despite modern elements such as more attractive costume designs and more energetic movements, this dance still retains its traditional characteristics.

HISTORY OF THE LION DANCE:

Lion Dance was brought to Malaysia in the 19th century. This custom was brought by Chinese immigrants during a time when the socio-economic activities of the community were very active, especially when Malacca became an entrepot city for the Malays. In the 19th century, Malaysia also experienced a cultural revolution, where various cultures were brought and integrated by different ethnic groups, shaping the Malaysia we know today. The Lion Dance has survived amidst waves of modern and

contemporary culture. The Lion Dance has been a common ritual in China since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912).

Immigrants from China, especially from Southern China such as the Guangdong and Hokkien ethnic groups, migrated to Malaysia and brought this culture with them. Chinese communists, masters, and teachers from China also migrated to Malaysia and spread the culture of the Lion Dance.

Two popular types of lion dance movements in Malaysia are the Southern Lion Dance and the Northern Lion Dance. Both types of movements carry the same meaning but have differences in various aspects, especially the costume. The Southern Lion Dance is further divided into two, namely the Foshan Lion Dance and the Heshan Lion Dance. Both categories are regions in China. It is well known that the Lion Dance associations established in Malaysia only practice one type of dance, which is the Southern Lion Dance, while the Northern Lion Dance continues to be a legacy in China in Beijing and Shanghai.

GROUP ORGANIZATION

The number of people involved in a lion dance performance depends on the type and scale of the performance. Usually, it ranges from seven to ten people. Two people are inside the lion costume. One dancer plays the role at the front, moving the head of the costume. The front dancer also needs to move the mouth, eyes, and body of the lion costume, while the other dancer at the back of the lion costume needs to bend over, moving the back and tail of the lion. A drummer will lead the rhythm, accompanied by a gong player and two to four cymbal players who strengthen the rhythm and atmosphere of the performance.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The musical instruments used are the drum, cymbals, and gong. The large drum, or in Chinese called “gu or shi gu”, is barrel-shaped with a single skin face on the top. The gong, or in Chinese called “luo”, is struck with a wooden mallet. This instrument is hung, and the player places one hand on the back of the gong to control the sound produced while playing. The cymbals are made of bronze. They are held and struck together by the player. Two types of sounds are produced: one that rings and one that is muted.

PERFORMANCE

The performance usually begins with a common dance form where the lion "wakes up from sleep." At this moment, the lion will be on the ground, rolling and staggering, mimicking the movements of a lion cub learning to walk. This symbolizes a new beginning and the awakening of the spirit. After a while, the lion becomes stable and continues the performance by walking. The lion then moves slowly, carefully, and cautiously. Its movements are attentive to the surroundings and often interact with the audience, showing awareness and respect. These movements are often performed in public shows, where the lion tries to attract the audience's attention while showcasing its abilities.

One of the important elements in the Lion Dance is "eating green vegetables". In this scene, the dancer controlling the lion will receive payment in the form of a red envelope tied with green vegetables. The lion will approach the vegetables cautiously, take them, and then chew them. After that, the vegetables are spat out as a symbol of bringing luck and prosperity to those watching.

Lion Dance also involves "table tricks," where the lion first plays with the visitors. If there are obstacles in front of it, the lion will use tricks or creative ways to get the hidden red envelope. The performance usually ends with paying respects. Upon reaching the place of worship, the lion will kneel and bow as a sign of respect. This place of worship is usually decorated with oranges, symbolizing good luck and prosperity.

RHYTHM

The music for the Lion Dance has several basic rhythms, namely the three-star rhythm, the five-star rhythm, and the seven-star rhythm. The three-star beat is essentially two beats, but the first beat is simultaneously divided into two shorter beats. The five-star rhythm is three beats, but the first two beats are simultaneously divided into four shorter beats, and the seven-star rhythm is four beats, but the first three beats are all simultaneously divided into six shorter beats.

To match these rhythms, there are three basic steps called the three-star step, the five-star step, and the seven-star step. The three-star step is used when the lion is inspecting, waking up, and doing things around its original place. The seven-star step is used when the lion is walking a long distance. The five-star step is the most commonly used in the Lion Dance and is used in all other events.

CONCLUSION

The Lion Dance is a symbol of Chinese tradition. The Lion Dance performance is not only performed by the Chinese community but also participated in by the Malay and Indian communities. This dance is also often watched by all ethnic groups. This shows that this traditional cultural art has become part of the shared heritage enjoyed by all layers of society.

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