

The Interplay of Dance and Cultural Identity: Preservation and Inheritance of Local Dance in the Context of Globalization

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Abstract: This article explores the interplay between dance and cultural identity, with a particular focus on the preservation and transmission of local dance forms in the context of globalization. It examines how globalization poses challenges to the survival of traditional dances and highlights the efforts made by various communities and institutions to protect these cultural practices. Case studies such as the documentation of African dance forms by the Smithsonian Institution and the digital archiving of Polynesian dance forms are discussed to demonstrate the role of technology in safeguarding endangered traditions. Furthermore, the article explores how dance festivals, training institutions, and digital platforms have contributed to maintaining the vitality of classical Indian dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathak. The analysis underscores the importance of cultural preservation in a rapidly globalizing world and suggests strategies for the future sustainability of local dance traditions.

Keywords: dance and cultural identity; globalization and dance; cultural preservation; traditional dance forms; digital archiving; cultural heritage

1. Introduction

Dance has long been a fundamental aspect of human culture, serving as a powerful medium for expressing identity, history, and values. It transcends mere performance, becoming an integral part of the cultural fabric that binds communities together. As societies evolve, dance remains a dynamic reflection of cultural identity, shaping and being shaped by the values and traditions of the people. However, in the age of globalization, the role of dance in preserving cultural identity faces significant challenges and opportunities. This paper explores the relationship between dance and cultural identity, examining how dance functions as both a reflection of and a vehicle for cultural expression. It also addresses the impact of globalization on traditional dance forms, considering how cultural exchanges and the commodification of art influence the preservation and evolution of cultural heritage.

2. The Relationship Between Dance and Cultural Identity

1.1. Defining Cultural Identity and Its Components

Cultural identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that refers to the sense of belonging to a particular group or community, often based on shared traditions, customs, language, and beliefs. It is shaped by both internal and external factors, including history, geography, and interactions with other cultures. Cultural identity is dynamic; it evolves as societies change, but remains deeply rooted in the practices and symbols that distinguish one group from another.

At the heart of cultural identity lies the concept of "cultural memory" — the collective knowledge passed down through generations that defines the values, aesthetics, and practices of a community. Dance, as one of the most embodied forms of expression, is often at

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1

the center of this cultural memory. Through movement, dance not only communicates shared histories and beliefs but also serves as a living representation of cultural continuity.

1.2. The Unique Role of Dance in Cultural Expression

Dance, as both an art form and a social practice, is uniquely positioned to embody and express cultural identity. Unlike other forms of cultural expression, dance relies on the body, which makes it an immediate, visceral experience for both performers and audiences. Dance is often intertwined with rituals, celebrations, and everyday life, playing a critical role in marking transitions, honoring ancestors, and defining social roles.

In many cultures, specific dance forms are not merely performed for entertainment; they are regarded as sacred or symbolic acts that carry deep meanings about the values and worldview of the community. For example, in many Indigenous cultures, dances are performed to honor the earth, the spirits, or important historical figures. These dances are deeply embedded in the fabric of cultural identity, reflecting the community's relationship to nature, history, and spiritual beliefs.

Furthermore, dance can act as a repository of cultural knowledge, transmitting wisdom, teachings, and stories from one generation to the next. The movements, gestures, and formations in a traditional dance often tell a story or convey a particular worldview, making dance a form of living history. As such, dance functions as both a means of preserving cultural identity and an active participant in its ongoing development.

1.3. The Impact of Globalization on Cultural Identity

The advent of globalization has significantly reshaped cultural identities worldwide, as the flow of people, ideas, and technology has intensified cross-cultural interactions. While globalization has fostered cultural exchange and the blending of different art forms, it has also posed challenges for the preservation of local and indigenous cultures. One of the most profound impacts of globalization is the commodification and standardization of cultural expressions, including dance.

Global dance forms, such as hip-hop, jazz, and contemporary dance, have spread rapidly across the world, often overshadowing local dance traditions. This influence can lead to the erosion of cultural specificity, as traditional dance practices are either adapted to fit global trends or replaced by more commercially viable forms. In some cases, local dances risk being relegated to the status of folklore, performed for tourists or at cultural festivals, rather than being integrated into the everyday life of the community.

However, globalization also presents opportunities for the revitalization of local dance practices. Digital technologies, social media, and international collaborations have provided platforms for local dances to reach a global audience, fostering new forms of cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. As such, globalization is a double-edged sword—it can either threaten or enhance the preservation of cultural identity through dance, depending on how these dynamics are managed.

2. Globalization and Local Dance

2.1. The Challenges of Preserving Local Dance Traditions

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the preservation of local dance traditions has become more challenging. The rapid spread of globalized culture, driven by the influence of the internet, media, and international mobility, often results in the dominance of certain global dance forms, such as hip-hop, contemporary dance, and commercial pop choreography. While these dance forms bring people together and create new cultural connections, they also pose a threat to the survival of local, traditional dance practices.

One of the main challenges in preserving local dance forms is the gradual loss of cultural context. Many traditional dances are deeply embedded in the customs, rituals,

and social structures of their communities. As globalization encourages more standardized forms of expression, local dances often lose their original meanings, becoming detached from their cultural and historical roots. For instance, a dance that was once a ritual for harvest celebrations may be performed purely for entertainment in a modern, commercialized context, losing its spiritual or communal significance.

Another significant challenge is the decline in the transmission of dance knowledge across generations. In many cultures, traditional dance was taught informally within families or local communities, with the elder generation passing on dance techniques and stories to the younger generation. However, urbanization, migration, and the increasing appeal of globalized media have led to a disconnection between younger generations and their cultural heritage. As a result, many traditional dances face the risk of being forgotten or completely abandoned.

2.2. The Influence of Global Dance Styles and Media

Global dance styles have become powerful vehicles of cultural influence in the 21st century. Through the rise of digital media and social platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, dance styles that were once confined to specific regions or subcultures can now be seen and imitated worldwide. For example, hip-hop, which originated in African American communities in the United States, has spread across the globe, influencing youth culture, commercial dance, and even political activism.

The widespread exposure of these global dance styles can lead to a homogenization of cultural expression, where local dances are either diluted or replaced by more popular forms. In some cases, the pressure to conform to global trends can undermine the authenticity of local dance practices, as dancers adapt traditional movements to fit contemporary aesthetics or commercial demands. For instance, a traditional Southeast Asian dance may be altered to fit the format of a global talent competition, thereby losing some of its cultural nuances.

However, it is important to acknowledge that globalization can also act as a catalyst for the revitalization of local dances. Platforms like YouTube have allowed dancers and choreographers from marginalized communities to share their cultural practices with a global audience, thereby creating new opportunities for the preservation and promotion of local dance forms. Moreover, some contemporary dance artists intentionally blend elements of local and global dance styles, creating hybrid forms that retain the essence of both cultures. This fusion not only helps to preserve local dance but also allows it to evolve in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences [1].

2.3. The Role of Technology in Dance Dissemination

Technology has played an increasingly pivotal role in both the dissemination and preservation of local dance forms. Digital platforms, such as online tutorials, dance blogs, and social media, have created new avenues for learning and sharing dance. This has made it possible for dancers from all over the world to access traditional dance forms that were previously geographically or culturally inaccessible.

For example, dance schools and cultural institutions are now able to upload instructional videos and archival footage of traditional dances, making them available to a global audience. This has been particularly important for endangered dance forms, as it allows them to reach new generations of practitioners who may not have had access to formal training. Moreover, digital archives and databases are helping to preserve rare and at-risk dance traditions by documenting them before they disappear.

Social media platforms have also enabled real-time cultural exchange, where dancers can collaborate and interact across borders. Global dance challenges on platforms like Tik-Tok, for instance, encourage users from diverse backgrounds to participate in viral trends that blend multiple dance traditions. This can create a sense of cultural exchange that

highlights the value of both local and global dance practices. However, it also raises questions about cultural appropriation and the commodification of traditional forms, as dances are often stripped of their cultural context when shared online.

Despite these challenges, the role of technology in the transmission of dance cannot be understated. Digital tools have democratized the learning process, making dance education and preservation more accessible to a global audience. As long as there is a balance between honoring the integrity of traditional forms and embracing the innovative potential of new technologies, dance can continue to serve as a powerful means of cultural expression in the globalized world [2].

3. Preservation and Transmission of Local Dance

3.1. Mechanisms of Dance Preservation: From Oral Tradition to Digital Archives

The preservation of local dance traditions has evolved significantly over time, particularly as global forces and modernization challenge traditional ways of safeguarding these practices. Historically, dance was transmitted through oral traditions, with movements passed down through generations within communities and families. However, with the rise of urbanization and globalization, these informal transmission methods face growing difficulties.

To address these challenges, various preservation mechanisms have been developed:

1) Ethnographic Documentation: As globalization and modernization increasingly threaten traditional cultural practices, the need to preserve endangered dance forms has become more urgent. Ethnographic documentation has emerged as a crucial method for safeguarding these traditions. By recording performances through video, photography, and written studies, the choreography, context, and cultural significance of dances are preserved for future generations. For instance, organizations like the Smithsonian Institution have documented African dance forms, providing valuable resources for future research and cultural preservation (Figure 1).



Figure1. African Dance Documented by the Smithsonian Institution: Visual Archives of Dancers.

2) Archival Projects: Institutions such as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage program have been instrumental in creating digital archives that document and

safeguard dance forms globally. These archives preserve not just the choreography but also oral histories, which provide context and cultural significance. For example, the traditional dances of the Polynesian Islands are now archived in digital formats, ensuring that even as the practice may decline in certain regions, it remains accessible for future generations.

- 3) Choreographic Notation: Systems like Labanotation, developed in the early 20th century, allow choreographers to notate movements in a standardized way. While these systems are widely used in the study of ballet and contemporary dance, many indigenous and folk dances lack such formalized documentation. Developing notation systems for these dance forms presents both a challenge and a priority for preservationists [3].
- 4) Digital and Virtual Platforms: With the growth of digital technologies, platforms like YouTube and social media have become powerful tools for the dissemination and preservation of traditional dance. Online databases, digital classes, and virtual reality (VR) experiences allow audiences to access performances and tutorials that may have once been geographically inaccessible. However, while these platforms expand the reach of dance traditions, they also introduce questions about how much can truly be captured in a digital format, especially when considering the communal aspects of traditional dance.

While these modern mechanisms of preservation have made significant strides, it is important to note that they do not always capture the full cultural and social context in which dance forms evolve. Many dances are not simply about movements, but are deeply connected to rituals, festivals, and the collective identity of a community. Without maintaining these communal and contextual aspects, even well-documented dance forms risk losing their true meaning [4].

3.2. Cultural Institutions and Dance Education

Cultural institutions and educational systems play a pivotal role in preserving local dance traditions, providing structured environments where young dancers can learn, practice, and further the preservation of their heritage. These institutions, ranging from state-sponsored organizations to grassroots cultural centers, facilitate both the formal and informal transmission of dance.

3.2.1. Formal Education and Dance Curricula

In some countries, dance traditions are formally incorporated into national education systems. This structured approach ensures that young people receive formal training in traditional dance, alongside contemporary subjects. For example:

- 1) South Korea: The integration of gugak (traditional performing arts) into the school curriculum ensures that students are exposed to Korean classical dance and music alongside modern academic subjects.
- 2) India: Institutions such as Kalakshetra provide structured courses in Bharatanatyam and other classical dance forms, offering students an opportunity to study both the theoretical and practical aspects of these art forms.
- Mexico and Peru: Dance is an integral part of national identity-building, with folk dances included in educational programs to instill pride in indigenous traditions.

3.2.2. Challenges in Formal Dance Education and Preservation

1) Standardization of Practice: While formal education can standardize certain aspects of dance, this can sometimes lead to the loss of the spontaneous and lived aspects of folk dance. Institutionalized training might emphasize technical precision over the community-based learning processes that characterize traditional practices.

2) Funding and Resources: In many regions, cultural programs are underfunded, leading to limited access to trained instructors, proper facilities, or dance materials. As a result, local dance traditions might not receive the attention they deserve in formal education settings.

3.2.3. Community-Based Education and Apprenticeship Models

In addition to formal institutions, many traditional dances are transmitted through informal methods. One of the most enduring ways to pass on dance is through mentorship and community-based education:

- 1) Master-Apprentice Systems: In many cultures, the transmission of dance occurs through a one-on-one mentorship model, where a young apprentice learns from an elder or a master dancer. This system is especially common in African, flamenco, and Indian classical dance traditions, where the emphasis is on embodied learning rather than theoretical instruction.
- 2) Cultural Festivals and Workshops: Festivals and community gatherings often provide both a platform for performance and a venue for learning. In countries like Brazil, where samba is an integral part of the culture, festivals such as Carnival are a time for dancers to not only perform but also teach younger generations.
- 3) Intergenerational Learning: In many rural areas, dance remains a communal activity, with elders passing on their knowledge to younger dancers in family and community settings. This transmission is often informal but rich in meaning, as it integrates not only the steps but also the cultural stories and historical contexts behind each movement [5].

3.3. Intergenerational Transmission of Dance Practices

The successful transmission of dance from one generation to the next is essential for the survival of any dance tradition. However, this transmission is not without its challenges. The pace of modernization, urbanization, and the appeal of globalized dance trends have made it difficult for some local traditions to sustain their intergenerational transmission.

3.3.1. Challenges in Intergenerational Transmission

Urbanization and Migration: As younger generations migrate to cities for education and work opportunities, they often become disconnected from their cultural roots, reducing the chances of intergenerational learning.

Social and Cultural Shifts: In many societies, traditional dance may be seen as irrelevant to contemporary life. Younger generations may be more attracted to globalized dance forms such as hip-hop or contemporary dance, leading to a decline in interest in local traditions.

Loss of Ritual Contexts: Many traditional dances are tied to specific religious or cultural rituals. As these rituals fade or evolve, the role of dance in these ceremonies can be diminished, contributing to the decline of the dance form itself [6].

3.3.2. Strategies for Strengthening Intergenerational Transmission

Efforts to strengthen the intergenerational transmission of dance include:

- 1) Integrating Contemporary and Traditional Elements: Some choreographers and educators are exploring ways to adapt traditional dances to modern contexts. In Indonesia, for example, traditional Balinese dance is being combined with contemporary performance art to engage younger audiences while preserving core cultural elements.
- 2) Youth Engagement Programs: Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have launched programs aimed at encouraging young people to

participate in traditional dance. These programs focus on the cultural value of dance, promoting it as an important aspect of identity and heritage.

3) Media and Popular Culture: By integrating traditional dance into popular media, including film, television, and social media, these dance forms are gaining new visibility. In Japan, for example, traditional Bon Odori dances have been featured in modern music videos, creating a bridge between the past and the present.

Through these methods, local dance traditions are being kept alive and adapted to modern times. However, balancing preservation with innovation is key to ensuring that these traditions continue to resonate with younger generations.

4. Case Studies of Local Dance in a Globalized World

4.1. Local Dance Forms Facing Extinction

The impact of globalization has led to the erosion of many traditional cultural practices, with local dances being particularly vulnerable. While some dance forms have managed to adapt and thrive, others face the risk of complete extinction. Several factors contribute to this decline:

- 1) Cultural Assimilation: In many cases, local dance forms are overshadowed by the global dominance of Westernized or commercial dance trends. As young people turn to mainstream media, local dances—often seen as outdated or irrelevant—are left behind. For example, traditional European folk dances in rural communities are increasingly performed only at festivals or as tourist attractions, rather than being a part of daily life.
- 2) Urbanization and Migration: As people migrate to cities or abroad, they often lose touch with their cultural heritage, and traditional practices such as dance can be abandoned. This is particularly common in remote or rural areas where dance once formed an integral part of communal identity. The African diaspora, for example, has seen a shift in traditional African dance forms as communities become disconnected from their ancestral lands.
- 3) Cultural Homogenization: The dominance of global dance forms such as hiphop and contemporary dance, facilitated by the internet and social media, leads to a form of cultural homogenization. As these dances gain global popularity, local forms that do not conform to contemporary tastes or commercial demands can be marginalized.

Despite these threats, several initiatives are working to protect and revitalize local dance forms. In India, efforts to safeguard classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathak have led to the establishment of training institutions and festivals that focus on keeping these practices alive in the face of globalization. Similarly, in the Pacific Islands, projects focused on the preservation of Hula and other indigenous dances are helping to pass on these traditions to younger generations. Figure 2 shows a performance of a traditional Pacific Island dance, where the dancers are dressed in native costumes, performing dances rich in cultural significance.



Figure 2. Traditional Pacific Island Dance Performance: The Cultural Transmission and Vitality of Hula.

4.2. Success Stories of Cultural Preservation

While many traditional dance forms face extinction, there are also numerous success stories where local dances have managed to thrive in a globalized world. These success stories highlight the resilience of cultural traditions and the innovative ways in which they have been preserved or revitalized.

Flamenco in Spain: Flamenco, a traditional Spanish dance form that blends elements of Gypsy, Jewish, and Moorish cultures, has managed to maintain its cultural integrity while adapting to modern contexts. The rise of international interest in Flamenco has led to the creation of schools and performance platforms where both local and international dancers can learn and perform. Despite the global spread of commercial dance, Flamenco remains a vital part of Spain's cultural identity and continues to evolve through fusion with other genres.

Indian Classical Dance in Global Contexts: Indian classical dances such as Bharatanatyam and Odissi have seen a resurgence in the modern world due to a combination of educational reforms, festivals, and international recognition. The establishment of organizations like the Sangeet Natak Akademi has provided support to classical dance forms, while global festivals like the Festival of India have introduced these dances to audiences worldwide. By engaging with contemporary audiences, Indian classical dance has ensured that it remains relevant while preserving its cultural and spiritual origins.

Tango in Argentina: Originating in the working-class neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, tango has become a symbol of Argentina's cultural identity. Over the years, tango has undergone both revival and reinvention. Today, it is not only celebrated in Argentina but also practiced globally, thanks to international dance festivals and competitions. The widespread popularity of tango has ensured its preservation as an art form while encouraging innovation through fusion with contemporary dance genres.

These success stories demonstrate that local dance forms can thrive in a globalized world when they are able to adapt without losing their cultural essence. The key to survival lies in finding a balance between innovation and tradition, and engaging with both local and global communities [7,8].

4.3. Fusion or Dilution: When Local and Global Styles Intersect

One of the most prominent features of globalization is the fusion of local and global dance styles. While this fusion often leads to exciting new forms of artistic expression, it can also raise concerns about the dilution of cultural authenticity.

Fusion Dance: Fusion dance occurs when elements from different cultural dance forms are blended to create something new. For instance, Bollywood dance, which incorporates traditional Indian dance with jazz, hip-hop, and contemporary dance styles, has gained immense global popularity. While fusion allows for creative expression and cultural exchange, it can also result in the loss of the unique cultural identity of the original dance forms.

Cultural Appropriation: Another concern related to the fusion of dance styles is cultural appropriation. When elements of traditional dance are taken out of their original context and re-contextualized without a proper understanding of their cultural significance, the result can be seen as disrespectful. For example, the commercialization of hiphop dance or the commodification of Hula in tourist resorts can be considered a form of cultural appropriation. These instances highlight the need for awareness and sensitivity when blending local and global dance practices.

Dance as Global Dialogue: However, fusion also has the potential to serve as a medium for cross-cultural dialogue. In many urban centers, local and global dance forms intersect to create innovative new styles that reflect the global interconnectedness of today's world. For example, K-pop combines elements of traditional Korean dance with hiphop, jazz, and contemporary styles, and has become a global phenomenon, introducing traditional Korean elements to audiences worldwide.

The intersection of local and global dance styles requires careful negotiation between preserving cultural identity and embracing innovation. When done thoughtfully, fusion can enhance cultural expression and broaden the reach of local dance forms.

5. Future Directions and Ethical Considerations

5.1. Balancing Globalization with Cultural Heritage

As globalization continues to shape the world of dance, finding a balance between embracing global influences and preserving cultural heritage becomes an essential task. On one hand, the global reach of media and digital platforms has enabled local dance forms to gain international recognition and foster cross-cultural exchange. On the other hand, the homogenizing effect of globalization threatens the distinctiveness of traditional dances.

The Role of Cultural Policy: Governments and cultural institutions must play an active role in supporting the preservation of local dance traditions. Policies that incentivize the documentation, teaching, and performance of traditional dances can help ensure that these practices are passed down to future generations.

Community-Led Initiatives: Communities themselves must take an active role in preserving and revitalizing their dance forms. Grassroots movements that focus on intergenerational transmission, community performances, and educational outreach can help ensure the continued relevance of traditional dance in the modern world.

A critical part of balancing these forces will be acknowledging the fluid nature of cultural practices. Cultures are not static, and dance traditions have always evolved over time. The key lies in ensuring that these transformations are respectful and grounded in the core values of the culture.

5.2. Ethical Dilemmas in Dance Appropriation

As global dance styles spread and influence local traditions, ethical dilemmas arise. The issue of cultural appropriation in dance—where elements of traditional dance are taken out of their cultural context and commercialized—has become a point of contention.

When popularized dance forms are stripped of their cultural and spiritual significance, it can lead to misrepresentation and disrespect.

For example, the commercialization of African-American dance forms like hip-hop and breakdancing by the entertainment industry, without proper recognition of their origins, has raised concerns within the communities that created them. Similarly, the adoption of indigenous dances in commercial performances can be seen as commodifying sacred cultural practices.

It is essential for dancers, choreographers, and audiences to approach dance with respect for its cultural roots. This includes understanding the historical and social context of dance forms and ensuring that they are practiced with awareness and sensitivity.

5.3. Future of Local Dance in a Global Context

Looking ahead, the future of local dance in a globalized world will be shaped by several factors:

- 1) Technology and Virtual Platforms: Digital technology will continue to play a major role in the transmission of dance. Virtual workshops, online tutorials, and live-streamed performances will provide more opportunities for local dance forms to reach global audiences while maintaining cultural authenticity.
- 2) Global Collaboration: As the world becomes more interconnected, the collaboration between dancers from different cultural backgrounds will lead to new forms of artistic expression. This exchange offers the potential for dance to transcend borders while still preserving the integrity of local traditions.
- 3) Cultural Tourism and Economic Sustainability: Cultural tourism, where traditional dances are performed for tourists, presents both opportunities and challenges. While it can provide economic support for communities, it also runs the risk of turning dances into commercialized spectacles, disconnected from their original meanings. Striking a balance between economic sustainability and cultural integrity will be essential for the future of local dance.

6. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, local dance forms face both significant challenges and opportunities. Globalization has brought about cultural homogenization, urbanization, and the loss of ritual contexts, all of which threaten the survival of traditional dances. However, the resilience of these dance forms has been demonstrated through their ability to adapt, innovate, and remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The preservation of local dance is essential not only for safeguarding cultural heritage but also for fostering intercultural dialogue. While digital technologies and cultural festivals offer new ways to share and preserve these traditions, it is vital to ensure that traditional dances are protected from cultural appropriation and misrepresentation.

For the future, it is important that communities, cultural institutions, and governments work together to support the transmission of local dance through education, funding, and documentation. The balance between preservation and innovation will be key in ensuring that traditional dances continue to thrive in a globalized world.

Ultimately, local dance traditions will survive if they remain dynamic, adaptable, and respected, ensuring that they continue to inspire and connect generations to come.

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