

Gau Shan Ching (Taiwan)

Gau Shan Ching or Gao Shan Qing (gow shahn chihn) is a non-partner dance with a complex history. The lyrics are about the beauty of Ali Mountain inhabited by the Tzou tribe of aboriginal Taiwanese (see lyrics below). The name means “high mountain green” or “the high green mountain” or “the high mountain is green.” The song after which the dance is named, was written in 1949 by the famous poet Yu-ping Deng in collaboration with the lyricist Lan-Ping Jou. It is also the theme song of the movie “The Magnificent Happenings on Mt. Ali,” directed by Cheh Chang. The song is now popular throughout Taiwan, and has even spread around the world as a representative of Taiwanese culture.

The dance was first choreographed by Professor Chang-Shong Yang in 1973. The steps are based on general aboriginal styles, and are not specific to the Tzou tribe. In fact Professor Yang reports that although the Tzou tribe members are excellent singers, they are not such accomplished dancers. The music for the dance has gone through several revisions. The version used by Yang in the original choreography was maintained until about 2007 or 2008. Then Yang switched to the music accompanying the song as it was sung by Teresa Deng, and the dance was revised slightly to fit this new music. About 2009, a third musical accompaniment was adopted allowing a return to the original choreography. Fang-Chich Chen taught this dance, with a recently added coda, at the 2010 Stockton Folk Dance Camp. It was re-taught by May Wang at the Heritage Festival Institute in San Carlos, Calif., on January 15, 2011.

We are indebted to Wen-Li Chiang for extensive historical notes on this dance, to Tom Sha for discussion of the intricacies of Mandarin pronunciation and transliteration, and to May Wang for information on the symbolism of various figures in the dance.

CD: *Folk Dances of Taiwan*, Stockton Folk Dance Camp, Band 2;
Heritage Festival (San Carlos, CA), 2011, Band 5. 4/4 meter

Formation: Closed circle of mixed-sex dancers, or open circle, or even short lines (7 or 8 dancers per line is ideal). Separate lines for men and women are also appropriate. Where relevant, the lead is to the R. Initially hands are joined in V-position.

Steps & Styling: Schottish: This 4 meas motif only resembles the Euro-American schottische step in that there are 3 steps followed by a lift. Reportedly, in earlier versions of this dance, the dancers stood upright, facing ctr, and did 3 steps (R,L,R) with a lift on L to the R, and then to the L (opp.ftwk). The figure then evolved into the bent over motif described here. According to May Wang, the curve of the head, neck, and back when dancers are bent fwd at the waist symbolizes a cascading mountain stream. Bend fwd at the waist (upper body can be as low as parallel with the floor), hands are held with neighbors, and move bkwd in LOD with 3 steps starting on the R (cts 1,2,3); on ct 4 hop on the R while turning to face LOD and swing L ft fwd. In the dance, this meas is repeated moving bkwd in RLOD with opp ftwk (meas 2), and then both measures are repeated (meas 3,4).

Claps and Flicks: Facing ctr, step on R across in front of L bending upper body fwd and to the L, clap hands (ct 1); step on L ft in place, and clap again (ct 2); straighten body and turn abruptly to face LOD while stepping on R ft in LOD and raising hands high while flicking both hands upward and outward (ct 3); step on L ft in LOD while flicking hands again (ct 4). The flicking movements show off bracelets or ring bells worn on the wrists.

Grapevine (4 meas): Moving in RLOD while facing ctr, step on R across in front of L (ct 1), step on L to L (ct 2), step on R behind L (ct 3), step on L to L (ct 4); repeat cts 1-3, and on ct 4 turn to face to R of ctr, hop on R in place while lifting L ft fwd (meas 2). Repeat meas

1-2 in LOD with opp ftwk (meas 3,4). Movements are smooth and flowing.

Rock Forward and Back: Facing ctr and moving slowly to R, rock fwd (twd ctr) on R ft, bending upper body fwd and with joined hands in W-pos moving fwd as well (ct 1); hop on R while lifting L ft up behind, and swinging joined hands down and back (ct 2); bringing body to upright pos, step on L, starting to bring arms up (ct 3); hop on L bring arms to fully up W-pos and lift R ft in front (ct 4).

Measures	4/4 meter	PATTERN
----------	-----------	---------

1-8 INTRODUCTION. No action, but on last ct (meas 8) bring hands sharply up to W-pos.

I. STEP-CLOSE WITH “HEY”

1-4 Facing ctr, step to R on R ft with emphasis (no stamp) (ct 1); close L to R (ct 2); repeat ct 1 and ct 2 (cts 3-4). On each step on R, shout “hey” while hands swing down and slightly bkwd; on each close with the L, hands swing back up. Repeat meas 1, 3 times more.

II. SLAPPING THIGHS

1 With ft about shoulder-width apart and knees bent, swing both hands from L to R slapping both thighs in passage, and shifting wt to R ft (ct 1); swing both hands from R to L again slapping both thighs, and shifting wt to L ft (ct 2); swing both hands from L to R but pause momentarily with hands on thighs (ct 3); continue movement of arms to R with more force and flicking hands R at end of swing (ct 4). As wt is shifted to R, L, R, the head is inclined slightly in the same direction.

2 Repeat meas 1 in opp directions.

3-4 Repeat meas 1-2.

III. SCHOTTISH WITH CLAPS AND FLICKS

1-4 Dance Schottish step 4 times: first backing in LOD, then backing in RLOD, LOD, and RLOD in turn.

5-9 Dance Claps and Flicks step 5 times, moving gradually in LOD.

IV. GRAPEVINE WITH CLAPS AND FLICKS

1-4 Facing R, dance Grapevine sequence in RLOD and then in LOD.

5-9 Dance Claps and Flicks step 5 times, moving gradually in LOD.

V. SCHOTTISH AND ROCK FORWARD AND BACK

1-4 Dance Schottish step 4 times as in Fig. III.

5-9 Dance Rock Forward and Back step 5 times, moving gradually in LOD.

VI. SLAPPING THIGHS

1-6 Repeat Fig II (meas 1-4), but add 2 additional meas (repeat meas 1-2).

Repeat Figs III, IV, and V.

VII. STEP-CLOSE WITH HAND FLICK

1-4 Step to R on R ft (ct 1), close L to R (ct 2) 8 times. Hands are held high with palms facing; twist hands bringing palms twd dancer, then bring fingers fwd and down (ct 1); continue twisting hands to bring palms facing away with a flick (ct 2). The hand flicks show off bracelets or ring bells worn on the wrists.

VIII. FINALE

There is a 1-measure pause in the music during which dancers bring hands into V-pos with hands joined.

- 1+ Drop bkwd onto R ft while twisting body 1/4 to R to face LOD and bring bent L leg sharply up high, so that R shoulder dips down, hands come up abruptly to W-pos (ct 1); step on L ft fwd in LOD, bringing body up straight and joined hands down (ct 2). Repeat cts 1 and 2 (cts 3-4). Repeat meas 1 to end of music. The leader leads the line of dancers in any direction, even off the floor, but should not continue dancing in the circle. According to May Wang, this figure serves to show off a woman's left hip (when the L leg is lifted abruptly) which is viewed in the aboriginal culture as a measure of a woman's potential for bearing children successfully, and of overall strength.

Gau Shan Ching lyrics:

Gao shan qing; jian shui lan
A-li shan de gu niang mei ru shui ya
A-li shan de shao nian zhuang ru shan

The high mountain is green; the brook's water is blue
The girl on Ali Mountain is as beautiful as the water
The boy on Ali Mountain is as strong as the mountain

Ah, ah, ah

repeat lines 2 and 3

Gao shan chang qing, jian shui chang lan
Gu niang han na shao nian shi yong bu fen ya
Bi shui chang wei zhe qing shan zhuan

The high mountain is always green; the brook is always blue
The girl and boy will never part
Clean (blue) water will always flow down the
green mountain

The song in the music presented at the Stockton Folk Dance Camp includes some nonsense syllables added to the original song as follows:

na lu wan duo yi ya na ya hei, yi ya hei, na lu wan, an duo yi ya na ya hou hai ya, hou yi na lu wan duo yi ya
na ya hou ha ya

A Note on *Gau Shan Ching*

Fang-Chich Chen¹ presented *Gau Shan Ching* to Stockton Folk Dance Camp 2010. The syllabus can be found in “Syllabus of Dance Descriptions,” *Stockton folk Dance Camp – 2010 – Final*, pp.8-9A or <http://folkdancecamp.org/10syllabus/Gau%20Shan%20Ching%20%282010SFDC%29.pdf>. This short article provides some additional information regarding the dance.

The original Chinese name of the Taiwanese dance *Gau Shan Ching* is 高山青, which is pronounced as “Gao Shan Qing” in the Hanyu Pinyin system of Romanizing Chinese characters. “Gau” means high; “Shan”, mountain; and “Ching” indicates a kind of blue color when describing the sky or a kind of green when describing hills or mountains. The name can be translated into “The High Mountain is Green.”

This Taiwanese aboriginal dance² was choreographed by YANG Chang Shong³ in 1973⁴. The music, with the famous song *Gau Shan Ching* or *Gao Shan Qing*, has three versions over all these years. The first version used by the choreographer, Prof. Yang, lasted for a long time. In 2007 or 2008, Yang felt the original music was unsatisfactory and adopted the music with the song sang by late Teresa Deng⁵. The dance sequence was slightly revised to fit the new music. Then, probably in 2009, he used the third version of the music, which can be fit with the original dance steps. This third version has a tag added for dancers to leave the stage during dance performances. This version was used in Stockton Folk Dance Camp 2010, as the dance was introduced to the campers by Fang-Chich Chen.

The formation can be in circle, open circle, or short lines, with men and women either mixed or separated. Hand holding is in V-position. That for the ending part could either in V-position or front basket position. Even for the whole dance, the choreographer, Prof. Yang, prefers using the front basket holding to have the intimate feeling.

The schottish step used in Figures I and III⁶ was originally choreographed as having dancers facing the center and do side-way schottish steps. After many stage performances, mostly by female dancers, many dancers adopt the way as shown in Stockton Folk Dance Camp 2010: facing either the reverse line of direction or the line of direction, make three steps backward, and then hop and turn to the reverse direction. This kind of step is called “backward schottish” by some dancers in Taiwan. The original choreographer said⁷ that this way is too much femininity and male dancers have better doing the original side-way schottish steps facing the center of the circle.

In the second half of Figures I and II, hands are flicked upward twice. The original choreographed steps are, after clapping hands twice, having hands touched shoulders and the flicked upwards once.

The lyrics, transliteration, and their translation are given in the following table.

(Continue)

¹ 陳芳枝.

² The lyrics talk about people in Ali Mountain (阿里山), where northern Tsou (鄒族 or 曹族, also transliterated as Zou) tribe reside.

³ 楊昌雄.

⁴ Not 1989.

⁵ 鄧麗君.

⁶ The way of figure arrangements is referred to that in the syllabus published by Stockton Folk Dance Camp 2010.

⁷ Personal communication.

Gau Shan Ching

Lyrics, Transliteration, and Translation

<p>高山青, Gao shan qing, 澗水藍; Jian shui lan; 阿里山的姑娘美如水呀, A li shan de gu niang mei ru shui ya, 阿里山的少年壯如山. A li shan de shao nian zhuang ru shan.</p> <p>啊 - - - 啊 - - - 啊, A - - - A - - - A, 啊 - 啊 - - - 啊; A - A - - - A. 阿里山的姑娘美如水呀, A li shan de gu niang mei ru shui ya, 阿里山的少年壯如山. A li shan de shao nian zhuang ru shan.</p> <p>高山常青, Gao shan chang qing, 澗水常藍; Jian shui chang lan; 姑娘和那少年是永不分呀, Gu niang han na shao nian shi yong bu fen ya, 碧水常圍著青山轉. Bi shui chang wei zhe qing shan zhuan.</p>	<p>The high mountain is green, The gully water clean; The girl on Ali Mountain is as beautiful as the water, The boy on Ali Mountain is as strong as the mountain.</p> <p>Ah - - - Ah. - - - Ah, Ah - Ah. - - - Ah; The girl on Ali Mountain is as beautiful as the water, The boy on Ali Mountain is as strong as the mountain.</p> <p>The high mountain is always green, The gully water always clean, The girl and the boy will never part; The clean water will flow around the green mountain forever.</p>
--	--

Note: The verse has three sections. The second half of Section two is identical to that of Section one. The first half of Section three is almost the same as that of Section one. The verse in the table is the original song of *Gau shan Ching* (or *Gao Shan Qing*). The music for *Gau Shan Ching* presented in Stockton Folk Dance Camp 2010 has the following sounds added to the original song. The original dance of *Gau Shan Ching* does not have this tag.

Na Lu Wan Duo Yi Ya Na Ya Hei,
Yi Ya Hei, Na Lu Wan,
An Duo Yi Ya Na Ya Hou Hai Ya,
Hou Yi Na Lu Wan Duo Yi Ya Na Ya Hou Ha Ya.

Note: The dance notes are written by Wen-Li Chiang⁸. Copyright ©2010. Anyone is welcome to make copies for references or for non-commercial teaching or studying purposes.

⁸ 江文里.