



MONGOLIAN CONTORTION



One of the precious and rare cultural heritages of the nomadic Mongolians is contortion. Apparently, contortion is a form of traditional art created to display the beauty of the human body. It is based on the flexibility of Mongolian girls and women going through various breathtakingly dramatic bending, folding and flexing positions, all of which involve Mongolian traditional dance elements. Contortion training techniques mainly focus on spinal flexibility, from the neck to the pelvis, bending the backbone back and forth in standing, sitting and lying positions. One important characteristic of the Mongolian contortion appears to be special talents and flexibility which cannot be performed and mastered by any amateurs and display various complicated positions. These positions include the human knot, head-sit, splits, dislocations etc. These techniques are shown in a variety of positions.

The contortion is divided into two classes of back-bending and front-bending, which are also subdivided into certain classes. These include solo performance, which is the preliminary form of Mongolian contortion, but also include performances by two, three, four or more performers. In recent times, the contortion is choreographed as a masterpiece with the use of aerial acts and special equipment borrowed from international circus performances. The contortion is included in the circus performances of many countries, which proves that contortion is a cultural heritage and a type of art.

The main characteristic of Mongolian contortion is to describe and imitate the pattern and ornaments of Mongolian fine arts through one's natural flexibility and physical elastic-

ity. The patterns of Mongol nations are not only an element of the decorative arts, but also an expression of people's aspiration and wishes and the symbol of Mongolian way of life. The characteristic of Mongolian contortion is to enact flexible movements showing the serene nature of Mongolian women and calm tranquil movement accompanied by the *morin khuur* (horse-headed fiddle). Mongolian contortion creates and displays the beauty of Mongolian women, their motherly nature, and their bright aspirations in an artistic manner.

Historical manuscripts reveal facts that contortion was performed and entertained at royal palaces as court dances in and after 12th-13th centuries. Contortionist girls and women have a naturally flexible body and are able to learn and perform techniques and skills perfectly, in accordance with trainers' instructions. Historically, Mongolian bearers were contortion performers and contortionists themselves so that they were able to transmit this heritage through physical performance display coupled with verbal instructions when teaching techniques.

Although the Mongolian contortion heritage has been maintained up to date, contortion itself is limited to only few talented masters who can only perform such extraordinary flexibility to perfection. Thus, the coverage of teaching and practicing of this heritage is limited among the general public. Currently, the tradition bearers are becoming older and fewer in Mongolia. Due to these factors, Mongolian contortion appears to be a threatened heritage element, so that it is necessary to take urgent actions to safeguard and transmit this rare and precious heritage.

