DIS-Mirrors-China-Lion and Grapes.

Since the Chinese for lion, 獅子*shīzi* , is derived from the Indo-Iranian *ser* and not from Sanskrit [सिंह](https://glosbe.com/sa/en/सिंह) (*siṃhá*) of India, the origin of the "lion dance" derives from Persia where "Lions" were symbolized by whirling Dervishes who were expert in ecstatic dance routines similar to the Lion Dance routines of Xinjiang Province (Gimm 1966:134, 213).

In Xinjiang, the Lion Dance originated in Kucha, under the Salars. The Salars are a Turkic-speaking people who lived in Xinjiang prior to their Islamicization (Anonymous 1987a). They are one of China's fifty-six officially acknowledged "minorities". Although lions had once roamed from Anatolia to Central and South Asia, they were extinct from the areas of China when the dance was performed so the lion was regarded as a metaphor of power for the different powerful Salar tribal groups who lived in harmony with each other in Xinjiang. Our proof that the Five Lions Dance originated in Kucha comes from the *Tang-ch 'i chronicle* that describes a Kucha musical dance scene: "a zither, a harp, a lute, a flute, a mouth organ, several drums and four dancers participate. The lions appear in five different colors and they are taller than one jo [approximately three meters]. Twelve men lead one [live] lion..." (Harich-Schneider 1973:166). The Lion Dance was comprised of eight men enclosed in four masked wicker lion costumes. Each of the male performers was expert in whirling dancing like the Dervishes in Persia. Initially, in the center of the troupe was a real lion around which the dancers whirled in ecstatic possession. Hence the name, Five Lions Dance. Later this arrangement was modified when a fifth wicker lion costume with two men in the replaced the live lion in the center. When the dance of the Five Lions was first enacted in the Sui dynasty (581-681 CE) it comprised three movements and later in the T'ang dynasty, it was given the epithet, Jiù táng shū舊唐書, the "Old Tang Dance".

The Lion Dance was meant to celebrate the social harmony among the five Salar tribal groups. This is reflected in the iconography of the Lion and Grapes mirrors. The birds are orioles singing sweet notes to those beneath the luxuriant Xinjiang grape vines. All is enclosed within a veil of harmony. Yet the Lion Dance did not remain in Xinjiang, for its people were on the Silk Road and like others of the Sui and Tang periods they were enticed to see the world. And so, as the Salars migrated from Xinjiang Province to eastern Qinghai Province so too did their dance of harmony and peace, which was recorded by the famous Chinese Muslim general, Ma Fu-hsiang (1876-1932, WG) who, having enlisted many Salars in his troops, noted that upon completion of their military service, they migrated along the Silk Road as early as the T'ang dynasty (618-907 CE) (Schram 1954: 23) to what would become Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, an the agricultural area in eastern Qinghai Province (Schram 1954, 23). The Salars preserved their old customs and traditions by marrying only within their own groups, and in this way preserved the authentic Salar Lion Dance from their original Xinjiang homeland. Simultaneously inauthentic versions of a popularized Lion Dance were later transmitted to southern China and Korea and finally to Japan by popularizing troupes. For instance, an eighth-century wooden lion mask is still retained in the Shoso-in Treasure at Nara, which was a type of lion mask worn in Gigaku dances (Hayashi 1975, 103, fig. 117.)

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