

The Historical Influence of Modern Dance on the Development of Contemporary Dance in China

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Abstract: *From the 1930s to the present day, modern dance has had a profound impact on the construction of Chinese contemporary dance in different historical periods. Since the beginning of the new dance art initiated by Wu Xiaobang, the innovation and creative spirit of modern dance has enabled Chinese contemporary dance to continuously move towards a developmental orientation of the times, the nation, and the masses, and ultimately to become unique.*

Keywords: *modern dance; Chinese contemporary dance; influence; development*

1. Conceptualization

As far as modern dance is concerned, the basic consensus reached between China and the West is that around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, represented in Germany and the United States, an art form different from the redundancy of classical ballet, which advocates the liberation of the bound body, focusing on the innovation of movement vocabulary and the free expression of inner emotions, with the representative figures such as Isadora Duncan, Rudolph Laban, Ted Shawn, Mary Weigman, Martha Graham, Moss Cunningham and so on. Graeme, Moss Cunningham, and others. In China, the beginning of modern dance was influenced by Western modern dance, and included "the inherent needs of Chinese dance for its own cultural construction and cultural change"^[1]. Its occurrence and development had a profound impact on the development of Chinese dance art.

Contemporary dance, on the other hand, is perceived very differently in both Chinese and Western contexts. For contemporary dance in China, most people in the dance industry believe that the name "New Dance" was proposed at the first Lotus Prize for Chinese Dance in June 1998, which triggered a controversy, and was proposed and established to refer to a general identification of the dance developed since the May Fourth Movement. Among them, dance patterns with military or troop themes are predominant, and from this perspective, its history can be traced back to the timeline of the Red Dance that took place in the Red Revolutionary Base in 1927.

2. The 1930s and 1940s: renewal and enlightenment

Around the first three decades of the 20th century, Western modern dance was spreading around the world in a powerful trend that could be described as an artistic revolution. During this period, its affinity with Chinese dancers was realized by the Chinese dancers' gesture of "going out". Yu Yung-ling was the first person to learn dance from the West in modern times. In 1901, she studied with Isadora Duncan, the originator of modern dance in the West, and learned modern dance, which was recognized as a brand-new style of dance in the West at that time. For Yu Yung-ling personally, the study of modern dance was undoubtedly a new experience, "a complete spiritual liberation in which she resolutely left her family's training behind and bravely took the stage to play the lead role in a Greek mythological dance drama created by Duncan. Once in the world of dance, this Oriental woman in a tunic and bare feet and arms began to dance to her heart's content."^[2] In 1907, Yu Yung-ling returned to her native country, but this study of modern dance did not have much of an impact on the Chinese dance scene. Until a dancer who changed his name to Wu because he admired the famous musician Chopin came along. In the spring of 1929, 1932, and the fall of 1935, the dancer went east to Japan to study with great responsibility for the salvation of his country and the hope of serving it. The three times he pursued his studies served him differently. The first time he pursued his studies, it can be said that it changed the path of Wu's life. His two subsequent studies undoubtedly led him toward creating with modern dance expression methods, forming his own unique choreographic propositions and creative ideas. During these three periods of study, Wu studied Japanese modern dance (mainly in the German modern dance genre) at the Masao

Takada Dance Plaza Dance Study and the Takaya Eguchi Summer Dance Course, and was influenced by dancers such as Masami Bang, who familiarized him with Japanese dance-related artistic genres, as well as studying German modern dance.

Learning from the experience of others and studying abroad three times, after returning to China, Wu created a series of modern dance works reflecting the reality of China with the gesture of new dance art, such as “The Money Worshipers”, “Visions of Peace”, “The Puppet”, and “The Sadness of the Mediocre”. This is the earliest group of works in the history of Chinese modern dance. At this time, red dances or Soviet dances rooted in the red revolutionary bases were in full swing, playing a unique historical and epochal role together with the new dances represented by Wu Xiaobang and the dance forms choreographed from progressive songs. As we know, among Wu's new dance art works, such as the March of the Volunteers, which basically reflects the reality of the Chinese people and the Chinese Revolution, it has aroused the reaction of people in the literary and artistic circles as its influence continues to expand. According to the reality of the domestic revolution, as well as the related literary and artistic ideas in the country, the unique artistic propositions and ideas of Wu Xiaobang's new dance are similar in nature to the red dance of the revolutionary struggle to rise up. Therefore, Wu Xiaobang's new dance art not only laid the foundation for and the character and pursuit of Chinese dance development, but also stimulated the further development of red dance. For example, in 1948, Wu Xiaobang “organized and created the famous dance 'Marching Dance' with Hu Geogang and other organizations in the dance team of the Cultural and Industrial Troupe of the General Political Department of the Fourth Field Force.”^[2]

This is the first time modern dance landed in China. Wu Xiaobang, as a pioneer of Chinese modern dance and contemporary dance, combines the aesthetics and creative concepts of western modern dance with the actual situation of the Chinese revolution in the spirit of artistic self-awareness of his new dance art and enlightens Chinese dance to face the life of the society, which then gives birth to the embryo of the artistic outlook of Chinese contemporary dance. During this period, the pattern of Chinese contemporary dance creation gained a new development from character to spiritual pursuit.

3. The 1980s and 1990s: expansion and advancement

The arrival of reform and opening up also meant the beginning of the whole process of China's socialist modernization, and China's dance career also stepped into a brand new period. If Wu Xiaobang borrowed the new dance art in the 1930s, he realized the influence of German modern dance on the initial form of Chinese contemporary dance. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the pace of reform and opening up, a two-way exchange moment was opened when modern dance, mainly from the United States, entered the Chinese stage. At this time many Chinese dancers went abroad to study modern dance, and also invited modern dance troupes and modern dance masters from foreign countries and Hong Kong for exchanges. In 1980, the first formal modern dance program appeared on the Chinese stage, and there were successively modern dance troupes such as Hong Kong City Contemporary Dance Company and Guangdong Experimental Modern Dance Troupe. With this beginning, modern dance also began to exist in the domestic major dance competitions as an independent dance, the first modern dance competition was held in China in 1994, and the successive establishment of the modern dance class of Guangdong Dance School and the modern dance college class of Beijing Dance Academy at the educational level shows that this form of dance is gradually moving forward with a good momentum of development in China during this period.

Modern dance has gradually entered Chinese mainland step by step, from concepts and trends of thought to language and teaching systems. In this process, the complex relationship between the orthodox mainstream dance concepts and the newly arrived modern dance concepts has been full of temptation, detours, rivalry, and even resistance and penetration over a period of time.”^[3] Of course, in the early days of reform and opening up, the Chinese dance community did not know much about modern dance. In May 1980, the Chinese Dancers Association held a symposium on modern dance in Beijing to discuss the development of modern dance in China, and of course, there is no lack of modern dance to enter and land in China's dance industry and other issues with a questioning and skeptical mind. In 1980, in the First National Dance Competition, the duo dance work “Goodbye, Mom” was created and performed by the Frontline Song and Dance Troupe of Nanjing Army! Mom” was influenced by modern dance in its creative approach and way of thinking, opening up a new narrative style of Chinese contemporary dance and presenting a new state. “From the end of the 1970s to the 1980s, the whole of China was like a huge sponge, where Chinese and Western cultures, ancient and modern ideas collided and exchanged with each other, and the portals of culture and all kinds of art were open to each other, each creating its own

school of thought, each holding its own view, and it was as if the Spring and Autumn Period had reappeared. Guided by the theories of 'everything is for my use', 'transcending the boundaries of disciplines' and 'breaking the barriers of dance genres', I tried for the first time to implant the stream-of-consciousness approach of literature into the dance "Goodbye! Mom", breaking the boundaries of reality and psychological time and space, modern dance and multi-space boundaries, modern dance and multi-species language skills and life refining dance, expanding the characters' sense of clarity, and discovering the theme of the work."^[4]

This kind of creation draws on the creative techniques and experience of Western modern dance, and is undoubtedly a positive catalyst for the creative development of the troop dancers themselves. First of all the collision of thinking between modern dance and the army dance workers in this period has tapped into the consciousness inherent in Chinese contemporary dance, so that the contemporary dance of the type of military theme moves towards a kind of connotative creative path of digging into the heart of the characters and grasping the essence of the characters' roles. The dance work *Red Clouds in the Sky*, choreographed by Chen Huifen and Wang Yong in 1996, is based on a female perspective, with an added focus on the subject of life, i.e., a "human" connotation. Secondly, the contemporary dance themes and the angle of the themes show a kind of diversity, both about the life of the troops, the characters and the emotions, and begin to have the emotional themes of the people in the contemporary society. His representative works include "Stone-Woman" in the first Chinese Lotus Prize in 1998.

Indeed, the events organized and the works emerging are enough to show that this is a golden period for the development of contemporary dance. In June 1998, the first China Lotus Flower Award, there appeared the first military as the main theme of the dance "dark war" created and performed by Guangdong Experimental Modern Dance Troupe. During this period, the role played by Western modern dance and its direct influence on the concept of Chinese dance was like a timely rain. During this period, after the "Cultural Revolution", the whole dance world needed a new form to liberate the original solidified creative concepts and establish a new creative thinking concept.

Contemporary dance with realism based on the development of creative work, on the basis of the established creative tradition, under the influence of the tide of the whole era, the arrival of the Western modern dance is catering for the needs of the dance literature and art creation at that time, directly to the contemporary dance and other dances to bring a brand new language expression experience and a change in the creative thinking, China's contemporary dance to find a new way of expression of the narrative.

4. The twenty-first century: activation and integration

Since the birth of modern dance, every modern dancer has been moving forward, pioneering, breaking through, and desperately pursuing cutting-edge, pioneering, non-repetitive, distinctive, and personalized expressions. As modern dancer Cao Chengyuan puts it, "The essence of modern dance as an art form is the same in China as it is in the United States or anywhere else in the world, and that is to express an individual's point of view, not a country's or nation's point of view". Therefore, in this period, we see the manifestation of the subjective consciousness of modern dancers in the works of modern dance, in which personal experiences and reflections account for the majority of the works. At the national and governmental levels, cultural and artistic creativity is encouraged, so many outstanding modern dancers have been given some opportunities for development, as represented by the "Young Dance Talent Training Program" sponsored by the China Dancers' Association and the China Literature and Arts Foundation. Overall it "has gained its own path in terms of performance opportunities, funding systems, media coverage and audience development."^[5] However, this still can't hide the reality that it belongs to a kind of niche art and marginal status in the Chinese dance world.

And towards the first decade of the 21st century, as the mainstream of Chinese contemporary dance, from the presentation of works, its creation is still based on the principle of realism, the continuation of the style characteristics of the previous period, the subject matter of the tentacles are further towards the contemporary social crowd, digging into different industries, different groups of characteristics and spirit, such as the representative works: "Peer", "Female Soldiers", "Rainy Lane in a Small Town", "Red and Blue Army", "Into the City", "Deep Dive-Deep Dive", "China", etc.. Mom", etc. The main force of creativity has also begun to move away from military groups and toward institutions of higher learning. At this stage, the artistic exchanges between it and modern dance, under the premise of the path of their respective development and the clear division of labor between the dance genres, compared to the previous period the effect presents less obvious.

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, with the completion of the institutional reform of the

Army Civilian Corps, compared to the previous period of the military theme type of contemporary dance works significantly reduced, and its development began to be in a state of stagnation. Therefore, this reform of the cultural and industrial organization body undoubtedly provides an opportunity to open up the expressive field of contemporary dance. At the same time, the right to the development of contemporary dance has been handed over to all Chinese dancers from the original participants of troop dances, but it is the kind of dance that is based on the "fusion of various artistic styles into one, with the full expression of contemporary social life as the main task, and with the national collectivism, the spirit of historical progress and the advancement of human civilization as the main theme"^[6]. There will be no fundamental change in attitudes and approaches.

At this stage, Chinese modern dance is plowing its own unique path of development, and its exchanges and connections with Chinese contemporary dance are reflected in the following: firstly, the main force of this part of contemporary dance that originally created and performed dances with military or troop themes came out of this system, and every change they underwent, as well as their search for a way out of self-development in the face of a pluralistic era, became part of the development of Chinese contemporary dance that we are concerned about. This is a part of the development of contemporary dance in China that we are concerned with. From the current practice of the work, this group of dancers, with a sense of anxiety and open-mindedness, actively absorb the diverse elements of dance culture in contemporary society to develop and adhere to their own dance path, which is not lacking to see their cooperation and exchange with modern dance dancers, but also to see the elements of modern dance contained in the body they present. Secondly, a development path formed by modern dance in the past thirty years and the path of modern dancers seeking self-development, as a reference model and established experience, influences the development trajectory of Chinese contemporary dance. At the same time, along with the continuous promotion of modern dance education, when the baton of the development of Chinese contemporary dance is transferred to millions of Chinese dancers, we will see that its development influenced by modern dance will be more internalized into a kind of dancing power; thirdly, in the multicultural communication, modern dance and contemporary dance are often placed together in the discussion. Topics such as Chinese Modern Dance, Western Modern Dance, Chinese Contemporary Dance and Western Contemporary Dance frequently appear in academic journals and academic conference activities. And these discussions, it is with the conceptual standard of contemporary dance as a reference, we know that contemporary dance is an emerging name and concept in comparison, and the military dance will be titled as contemporary dance, although it is a kind of decision that has to be made, which gradually allows people to realize that contemporary dance is not completely stuck in the military theme type. Nowadays, every turn in the development of Chinese contemporary dance may make it present a new state of development, and in the process of this realization, modern dance, with its liberalized intervention, may be accompanied by the increasingly close communication of globalization, the convergence with the world dance, Chinese contemporary dance and Western contemporary dance, the information and conceptual connotations tend to converge and produce further dialogue.

There have been debates within the art world around the issues of inheritance and change, breakthrough, nationalization and globalization, cosmopolitanism, and pluralism. In 2001, scholar Liu Qingyi's article, "Analysis of Chinese Contemporary Creative Dance Types," argued that modern dance and new dance belong to the same type of Chinese modern dance, and that they belong to the two dimensions of modern dance development. It remains to be seen then whether the development of contemporary and modern dance will be the same as that presented after the exchange of Western modern dance and ballet on the world stage in the mid-20th century. What is certain is that if they are to influence each other in the field of modern dance, and then each of them is to shine, the construction of aesthetic systems and other aspects is essential.

The current "mixing of cultures, which is not a new trend, has gathered momentum and enlivened our field by integrating different cultures in dance."^[7] Nowadays, Chinese contemporary dance develops freely, and when facing the two dimensions of tradition and contemporaneity, any kind of cultural element may become a possibility for its development. Whether it is heading towards the state of breakthrough, or the state of inheritance, or claiming to be national and global, and picking up the responsibility of Chinese contemporary dance can only be left to the dreamy dancers and the time to decide.

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