

# The Importance of Cultivating Talents in Chinese Musical Choreography

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**Abstract:** *Through the analysis of the market data of Chinese musicals from 2014 to 2021, it can be found that the Chinese musicals market is constantly improving in terms of performances and box office revenue, and the market potential is huge. Therefore, this study starts from the current situation of the development of Chinese musicals and adopts the main research methods of literature research and case analysis. The purpose of the research is to study the main problems in the current situation, and to demonstrate the importance of choreography talent training in the development of Chinese musicals at this stage. Through the research on the development of musicals in Europe and the United States and the analysis of representative works, the results of this research are as follows. First, the prominent problems in the development status of Chinese original musicals are the imperfect industrial chain and insufficient training of professional talents. Second, it is very necessary to train specialized talents in the choreography of Chinese musicals. The main reason is that the dances in musicals are different from individual dance works, and have the value of interpreting the script and strengthening the musical expression.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese Musical, Musical Choreography, Musical Creation*

In recent years, Chinese musicals have gradually formed, with imported musicals, Chinese musicals and Chinese original musicals each occupying a part of the market. According to the statistics of network data, there were 1,518 performances in 2014, with a box office income of 157 million (RMB, the same below), 2,112 performances in 2015, and 226 million in revenue, 2,113 performances in 2016, 174 million in revenue, and 2,288 in 2017. In 2018, 2,460 performances, with revenue of 428 million, 2,655 performances in 2019, with revenue of more than 600 million, 997 performances in 2020, revenue of more than 100 million, 15,300 performances in 2021, revenue of 1.002 billion. From 2014 to 2021, the number of performances and revenue of Chinese musicals "surge" 10 times. The main reason is that the imported version of musical is affected by the epidemic, and Chinese musical have new development opportunities. The overseas copyrighted Chinese version of musical and Chinese original musical have developed rapidly, and the small theater musical have developed rapidly. The annual performances of individual single-residence musical exceeded 300. The children's musical market has also shown steady development. In 2021, there will be 13,200 performances of children's musical, with box office revenue reaching 1.201 billion yuan.

Before 2020, Chinese audiences prefer musical imported from the original version. Its excellent production, superb performance and long-term reputation have become important conditions for attracting audiences. Among them, "Cats", which was introduced in 2018, became China's first musical with a box office of over 100 million. Under the dual pressure of the imported version and the Chinese version, the box office revenue of the original musicals did not rise but fell. It can be seen that the production of Chinese musicals still needs to be further improved, and it also shows the core problem of insufficient talent.

## 1. The Core lack of Chinese musicals

From the introduction of classic original musicals, to adaptations into Chinese versions, and then to original musicals, it constitutes the development of Chinese musicals. Chinese musicals and audiences hope to see representative works with strong national culture like South Korea's "The Last Empress". After all, musicals is imported products. The imported version of musicals has many advantages, such as high popularity, good reputation, excellent production, outstanding actor ability, and stable yield. These advantages improve the appreciation level of audiences, but they are far higher than the

production ability of China's original musical. From the perspective of the development history of Western musicals, a complete industrial chain and excellent professionals are the core of guaranteeing the development of musicals, and this is precisely the core lack of current Chinese original musicals.

### ***1.1 Incomplete Industrial Chain***

The musical industry chain mainly includes content creation, performance groups, theater operations, marketing, as well as capital, brokers, derivatives and other links<sup>[1]</sup>. Broadway musical have formed a stable and effective guarantee and industrial chain in terms of investment production, performance operation, coordination and division of labor, and contract guarantees<sup>[2]</sup>. Accurate and efficient market research and analysis ensure the healthy development of the industry<sup>[3]</sup>. British musicals have a complete industrial chain, and take market demand as the investment standard to form a complete operating mechanism in the production, consumption and performance links, so as to ensure the artistic and commercial nature of musicals<sup>[4]</sup>. European and American musicals adopt the producer-centered system<sup>[5]</sup>. The producer is the decision maker of the entire project. He must understand creation and management, and be able to package the work into a marketable commodity<sup>[6]</sup>. The musical theatre industry on Broadway and London's West End is mature and stable. The production team understands the market demand and is familiar with the functions of musicals from production to performance, so as to build a stable performance times and talent mechanism.

The research of relevant scholars shows that the production capacity of the Chinese musical industry is weak, the operation capacity is insufficient, the market positioning is inaccurate, and the industrial chain cannot be effectively integrated<sup>[7]</sup>. Lack of novel themes and ideas, insufficiency in story design, stage art, installation and choreography, ignoring the commercial and entertainment nature of the works, resulting in fewer excellent plays<sup>[8-9]</sup>. Fei Yuanhong emphasized in the research that the structure of China's musical theater industry is unreasonable<sup>[10]</sup>. There is a lack of a producer team capable of grasping market conditions and audience needs in Chinese original musicals. At the same time, the creative team, marketing team and business operation model are incomplete, resulting in inaccurate grasp of the market and lack of understanding of the needs of the audience. The production cost of some musicals is as high as tens of millions, and the actors and creative teams are even more "starry", but they "dies down" after a few performances. One of the root causes is that the audience is not interested in the works and is reluctant to buy tickets to enter the venue. The creative team, cast and crew without box office support will look for new opportunities, which not only makes it difficult to produce high-quality products, but also causes instability in the team.

If an industrial chain cannot be formed, it will be difficult to produce long-running works and stable box office revenue, and it will be even more difficult to attract outstanding talents. There is no large-scale market for Chinese musicals, and it is impossible to provide effective market assessment for original musicals. At the same time, there is no suitable space for musical talents to survive and cannot guarantee the sustainable development of talents. For example, if a musical choreographer cannot immerse himself in the dance creation of musicals for a long time, and cannot obtain a stable income in the musical market, this will inevitably lead to choreographers leaving the musical market. Stabilizing and cultivating talents is the key to the industrial development of China's musical theater industry.

### ***1.2 Insufficient Training of Professional Talents***

In many studies on the status quo of Chinese musicals, the issue of talent has almost become a consensus. Lack of professional talents, including producers, playwrights, composers, directors, actors, music producers, choreographers, marketing personnel, etc. <sup>[7,8,9,11]</sup>. The shortage of talents at this stage is mainly reflected in two aspects. On the one hand, it is the failure to gather excellent professional talents into a production team. Some teams have excellent composers, some team directors are excellent, and some team actors are excellent. But the overall capacity of the team is insufficient. On the other hand, there is a shortage of talent training. China has world-renowned music academies, dance academies and drama academies, and there are countless professionals in each single art category, but when it comes to musicals, it shows the lack of "crossover" ability. In terms of actors, musical actors need to have the ability to sing, dance and act. From the creative point of view, the composer needs to understand the drama of the script, to know what melodies are suitable for the dance, the choreographer needs to know what language to use to express the plot, to be able to create characters with different styles of dance, and the producer needs to know the needs of the audience and how to attract investors. In terms of the way classic musicals are produced, the overall ability of the production team is far greater than the individual ability of the specialized talents. The director, actors, composers,

choreographers and playwrights of rehearsals work in nimble collaboration. It's the constant polishing of the classics, as "Cats" Tours China, the Chinese elements on the "garbage Mountain" hope to connect with Chinese audiences.

The creation of a musicals needs to take into account both commercial and artistic aspects. The story is not touching, the music is not moving, the dancing is not wonderful and the stage is not novel, which will lead to the audience refusing to watch it. Without the box office, the team will not survive. Only from the perspective of choreography, the choreographer needs to read the script, master the plot development, and figure out the characters.

At the same time, he also needs to take into account the ability to control the music style and various dance styles. Whether it's a great dance scene or a dazzling personal technique, it's going to serve the story and the character. In the case of "Chicago", the overall style of the dance matches the music and the period setting, presenting the unique charm of the "Jazz Age". The choreographer combines life movements and stage movements, and the female group dance when Billy the lawyer appears just expresses Billy's character nature of getting rich by women. Musicals are a "grocery store" in that they are a variety of art forms, but they are not a "grocery store" in that they only need versatile talents who really understand musical. Therefore, talent is an important factor in the development of the industry.

## **2. The Importance of Cultivating Talents in Musical Choreography**

Through the study of "Chicago", "Romeo and Juliet" and other works, it is found that in the musical works with a large proportion of choreography, different styles of dance can be seen, and the choreography methods and dance structure adopted by choreographers are also different. "Dance is the part that best reflects the aesthetics of musical theater. The dance movements of actors and the body language conveyed by them can create a state of 'silence wins voice' on the stage<sup>[12]</sup>". The dance in the musicals can be because of the theme and the atmosphere of the play, or it can express the inner world of the character. However, the factors that determine the dance form can be the background of the era, the theme of the plot, and the characters. Stage space, stage installations and props determine the form and structure of the action. These require specialized personnel to rationalize the creation. Musical choreographers must not only have the ability to use different dance styles to create, but also have the ability to tap their own characteristics from the characters and actors.

Musical choreography requires communication and collaboration with directors, playwrights, composers, stage designers, lighting, costumes, actors and marketing. Team communication and operational collaboration in musicals are special, so it is very necessary to cultivate specialized talents in musical theater choreography.

### ***2.1 Dance in Musicals Differs From Existing Dance Productions***

In "On Dance in Broadway Musicals", Mu Yu divided the dances of Broadway musicals into four different periods: "Haiti Era", "Adolescence", "Youth Era" and "Prince Era"<sup>[13]</sup>. In addition to the "Haiti era" in which dance existed in the form of "Insert the dance", dance was integrated in other eras, and different styles of dance such as ballet, modern dance, jazz dance, and tap dance were presented to the audience as part of musical. Dance not only maintains the original artistic style characteristics, but also takes into account the characteristics of commercialization and popularization. With the cooperation of dance and music in Broadway musicals, it brings imagination to the audience<sup>[14]</sup>. Dance in musicals is a visual representation of images, as well as a dramatic narrative expression, such as the shaping of the "cat" image through dance in "Cats".

Musical choreography needs to rely on the script written by the playwright to create, which is different from the symbolic and abstract dance works. Musical choreography needs to rely on the script written by the playwright to create, which is different from the symbolic and abstract dance works, it needs to grasp the dramatic structure and characterization, and use a unique creative method.

### ***2.2 Musical Theatre Dance Serves the Plot***

Dance in musicals is an interpretation of the theme, which can promote the development of the plot and highlight the conflicts in the plot<sup>[15]</sup>. Dance is the carrier of the development of the plot of a musical, serving the plot, enhancing the drama, and at the same time portraying characters and showing

conflict<sup>[14]</sup>. Usually the plot is accompanied by the characteristics of the times. The research of Korean scholars believes that Korean choreographers should determine the dance style according to the characteristics of the times and the social atmosphere. For example, the background of the story of "Chicago" is in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, and the choreographer used jazz dance to show the characteristics of the times. In addition to the motives of the drama, dance creation should also take into account the audience's preferences, so as to inject freshness and intimacy into the work. For example, the Korean musical "The Last Empress" uses a lot of traditional dance and properly integrates taekwondo movements. Dance in musicals is sometimes an externalization of the inner world, and sometimes "subtext". Special training in musical choreography can improve the choreographer's ability to interpret musical works. Excellent choreographers can fully understand the script and set off the plot through dance. The "All That Jazz" dance in "Chicago" shows Velma's confidence in controlling her own life, and uses dance lifting skills to show Velma's leading role on the stage. The action design meets the needs of the characters and the plot.

### 2.3 Chinese Musical Choreography Needs Compound Talent

Musical choreography needs to rely on the script written by the playwright to create, which is different from the symbolic and abstract dance works, and highlights the grasp of the dramatic structure and characterization. Musical choreography also needs to have the ability to understand music, use unique creative methods, appropriate dance forms and movements to express the plot, which is a systematic and professional process.

Musical plays that integrate various artistic expressions such as drama, music, dance, etc., requires choreographers to possess the characteristics of compound. First of all, choreographers must have professional choreography skills, be familiar with various dance styles, and understand the relationship between dance and the times, and between dance and region. Secondly, choreographers must have knowledge reserves and application skills across art categories, and must be able to understand the way of expression in music, drama and stage art. Thirdly, choreographers must have a solid cultural reserve, be able to interpret the script, analyze the characteristics of the characters, understand the emotional expression, and be good at composition. Finally, choreographers must have good communication and cooperation skills, so that they can integrate into the team, and at the same time, they can effectively use dance to establish a connection with the audience. Korean choreographer Lee Hyun-jung believes that the musical choreographer is the "second director".

### 3. Conclusion

On the basis of previous research, this paper starts with the analysis of the current situation of the Chinese original musicals industry. Through literature research and analysis of representative works, as well as comparing the development of musicals in Europe and the United States and other countries, the importance of cultivating choreographers for Chinese musicals is demonstrated. The following research results are obtained. First, the outstanding problems in the development of Chinese original musicals are the imperfect industrial chain and insufficient training of professional talents. Second, it is very necessary to train specialized talents in the choreography of Chinese musicals. The main reason is that the dances in musicals are different from individual dance works, and have the value of interpreting the script and strengthening the musical expression. It is hoped that this research will draw attention to the choreography of musicals and provide support for the development of musicals.

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