
Analysis of Dance Composition Based on Historical Cultural Themes: Taking the Dance “Fuchun” as an Example

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Abstract: Since the dance drama “Only This Verdant Green”, inspired by one of China’s ten most famous paintings, “A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains”, appeared in the public eye, contemporary Chinese classical dance creation has shown a trend of exploring the historical context of China, revealing more explorations related to “ancient”, “history”, and “cultural relics.” Choreographers have adopted the creative concept of “bringing cultural relics to life” to seek inspiration from various relics. Taking the dance “Fuchun” as an example, this article discusses the integration of “painting—Fuchun”, “poetry—Fuchun”, and “dance—Fuchun” to reflect on the creation of historical and cultural relic themes.

Keywords: Historical relics; Fuchun; Dance choreography; Artistic conception

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1. Introduction

Historical relics, as precious cultural heritage, carry rich historical culture and unique artistic value. Dance, as a form of performing art, has its own unique language and expression methods. Using dance to recreate historical relics and presenting the profound humanistic atmosphere contained within the relics, not only can it present an artistic and culturally rich work to the audience, but also promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the research on the creative development path of dance works based on historical relics has important theoretical and practical significance.

2. The creation background of “Fuchun”

2.1. Poem: The language description of “Fuchun”

The dance “Fuchun” was created in 2021. Initially, it was created to participate in the dance competition “Jiangnan Dance Rhythm” held in Zhejiang Province in October. The competition theme required a Zhejiang-style and Jiangnan dance rhythm as the basis. Therefore, the director chose the poem “Fuchun” by the Tang Dynasty poet Wu Rong for the initial

selection of materials. Through Wu Rong's language description, the poem "Fuchun" depicts the beautiful scenery of the Fuchun River as if it were a painting, and showcases the poet's own ideals and aspirations.

The poem "Fuchun" uses vivid image descriptions and delicate sensory narration. With a heroic touch, it depicts the vastness and momentum of the river water. Through language description, we can feel the unique spirit and meaning of the Jiangnan water town. The river water in the poem is not only a natural landscape, but also the symbolic meanings of the continuous flow of life, the passage of time, and many others, making the poem "Fuchun" not only a work depicting the beauty of the river water, but also a reflection on life and nature ^[1].

Its poem reads: "Water carries mountains into Fuchun, a river valley like a painting in the late morning. The clouds lower and the sails come back again, the tide recedes, and the birds fly down frequently. It may not be that there is no guest of Xie in the willow alley, but it should also be that there are people of Qin in the flowers. The clear and pure wind of Yan Guang has been there for thousands of years, and I dare not stop the oar and ask for directions again." These poems' "natural objects" eventually all became the images constantly presented by the director in the dance segments, showcasing the staggered mountains and the gentle beauty of the Fuchun River. The beginning of the dance work uses many static postures to create the unique scenery of the Fuchun River, presenting the scene entering the river slowly. In the handling of the movement rhythm, the focus is on the peaceful feeling given by "late morning" in the poem, which is gentle and full of a distant meaning.

2.2. Painting: The white sketch of "Fuchun Mountain Abode"

After establishing the tone of the dance work, the director chose the painting "Fuchun Mountain Abode" with the local regional attributes as the dance theme, relying on the historical relic scroll paintings with regional attributes to unfold, thereby establishing an aesthetic image that conforms to the style of the times. "Fuchun Mountain Abode" is a scroll painting by the famous ancient Chinese painter Huang Gongwang in 1350. The painting presents precise perspective and transparency through painting techniques, creating a layered and flowing sense of space in the mountains and water, forming a broad and open landscape atmosphere.

When the lights slowly brighten in the dance "Fuchun", the picture in the scroll is presented before the public's eyes. Dancers in different colored clothes stand gracefully on the "mountain landscape." Therefore, in the image setting of the work, the first half shows the scenery in the mountains: the gentle breeze blows, scattering the mist in the mountains, causing ripples in the water; it moves the plants and flowers in the mountain body; the second half can see "mountain abode" people: girls picking wild flowers; walking along the mountain stream; the work returns to the painting at the end, elegant and traceless, seemingly light but actually rich.

2.3. The poetic and artistic connotation of the elegant and refined art

Although the poems and paintings do not have specific characters, from the identities of the poets and painters, they all have a scholarly air and elegant expression. This elegant atmosphere and the cultural style of the literati have an influence on the portrayal of characters and the construction of the plot during the choreography process.

In poems and paintings, the authors often create works in the guise of literati, expressing their emotions and thoughts through poetry and painting. This literati atmosphere and elegant expression have influenced the selection and shaping of character images in the choreography. Since there are no specific character images to refer to, the choreographer has greater creative flexibility when creating and can express the emotions and meanings conveyed by the poetry and paintings through abstract movements, postures, and emotions in the dance ^[2]. In choreography, the use of stage space, formation arrangement, imagery of movements, and choreographic techniques can create rich plots and emotional layers.

3. The form innovation in "Fuchun"

3.1. The composition innovation of "Fuchun"

The "form" of a dance work is not only the most distinctive aspect that sets it apart from other dance art forms, but also an

important criterion for judging whether a dance work can touch the hearts of the audience. The image of the dance work “Fuchun” was established as “vague” from the very beginning. It abandoned the simple portrayal of natural landscapes and human figures, and instead extracted the imagery from the rich scenery of the Fuchun mountains. It shifted from simply replicating the scenes to grasping the artistic conception. The “mountain body” at the back of the stage is a very good stage prop. On the stage, the knees, hips, wrists, etc. of the 15 female dancers were placed on the uneven mountain body to construct a scroll painting^[3]. The movements slowly began, creating the distance and height of the mountain body. At the beginning of the creation of the work, the director proposed to use different small mountain tops of different heights as stage decorations, highlighting the blank spaces, gullies, and mountain tops in the painting, as well as the spatial interlacing of “water flowing towards the mountain and mountain welcoming the water”^[4]. As soon as the work was presented, a “horizontal line” was laid out behind the stage in space for contrast, expressing the long history of the cultural relics, and at the same time, the director’s arrangement on the horizontal line created a quiet and peaceful state, representing the first half of the “Remaining Mountain Picture” in the “Along the River During the Qingming Festival” scroll, starting from a towering and solid mountain, in line with the “beginning” of the story’s expression. The movements constantly changed from long lines to concentrated squares, as if the mountains in the painting had undergone a turning point in development and change, and as the work gradually entered the climax, the movement scheduling through the continuous changes and interweaving of round stages, heights, left and right, transformed the dance into the climax of the grand dance segment, with ups and downs, leaps and turns. This also echoed the richest images in the painting. The final dance of the work echoed the beginning of the work, as if the continuous blank space in the scroll was continued, serving as the conclusion.

From this, it can be seen that in the process of dance creation, for poems and paintings without specific characters, the dance director can create through seeking innovative forms. From “Fuchun”, starting from presenting the vague artistic conception and real scenes in poems and paintings, creating an overall artistic conception. The dance director can draw on and interpret the abstract elements in poems and paintings to think about how to express and convey this abstract artistic conception through dance. This means that the director can present an abstract and dreamlike dance form through scheduling, space, props, etc., allowing the poems and paintings to be presented in the form of dance in the audience’s view. Although there are no specific characters in the poems and paintings, the real scenes of natural landscapes and architectural landscapes in them can serve as the starting point for the dance director to create characters^[5]. The dance director can refer to some natural elements in the paintings, such as mountains, water, trees, etc., to give the director unlimited imagination, extracting certain emotions or images from the poetry, to create dance images, making them “come alive.”

3.2. Language innovation of “Fuchun”

The dance director of “Fuchun” used the objects in poems and paintings to shape the characters and postures. In the body design, the slightly lowered hands “bending the hips and lowering the head” expressed the lines of the mountain body, while the hands and body being parallel “body twisting and head leaning” showed the state of the wind blowing through the trees. These movements were designed based on the understanding of the poems, and at the same time, the director also studied the forms of natural elements in the paintings. Although the paintings were static, the images were vivid and lifelike; this strong contrast touched the body design of the dance^[6].

The dance “Fuchun” transformed from static cultural relics to a dynamic presentation. The director needed to carefully observe and think about how to “move” the static cultural relics onto the stage for presentation. The dancers were not only dancers but also mountains, rivers... Through the ups and downs and scheduling of the body, they became both mountains and water. The dancers merged with the mountains and water, presenting the beauty of nature itself. This enables the process of transforming objects into forms to not only help choreographers create specific and unique characters, but also to give the dance works more symbolic meanings and artistic connotations. Transforming real scenes into dance characters with dance characteristics makes the dance works more individual and charming. Through dance movements and spatial elevation, formation scheduling, natural objects are personified to shape characters with postures and image characteristics^[7].

The selection and design of dance language is the first issue that needs to be considered in the creation of historical

relics themes. Generally speaking, the language design of this theme mostly tends to use peaceful and beautiful movement forms. However, under this typical macro dynamic imagination, each work needs to extract core movements that are in line with the theme's temperament and innovative, and incorporate them throughout the entire work to become an important clue of the content.

4. Three, “Fuchun”: The dialogue between the past and the present

4.1. Historical time travel from ancient to modern

The “Fuchun” on the stage is the re-interpretation and dialogue of the “Fuchun” from history in the present. This is a “communication” that lasts for more than 600 years. “Fuchun”, as an ancient relic, has rich historical and cultural significance. On the stage, the choreographer can transform the ancient “Fuchun” into a contemporary dance work, presenting a historical time travel across time and space.

Historical time travel refers to bringing ancient relics, concepts, situations, etc., into contemporary stage creation. Dance works can draw on the symbols, images, and social background of ancient relics, and re-interpret and reproduce this ancient image through the form of dance expression. This re-interpretation and dialogue is a current aesthetic perspective and emotional understanding of ancient times, allowing audiences to understand and experience ancient stories and emotions from today's perspective^[8]. In the stage “Fuchun”, there is a dialogue. This dialogue is not only the communication and exchange between the creator and the ancient relics, but also the emotional resonance and information transmission between the actors and the audience. The stage “Fuchun” presents a historical time travel and the re-interpretation of ancient times by the present^[9]. Through the re-understanding and reproduction of ancient relics, the dance work conveys new aesthetic perspectives and emotional experiences, allowing audiences to have a dialogue with ancient culture from a contemporary perspective.

4.2. The coexistence of multiple “Images” of the “Fuchun” symbol

The “Fuchun” symbol is presented through multiple media, including pictures, words, bodies, the stage, etc. There is a common logic behind this multimedia expression, namely the maintenance and expression of the “Fuchun” symbol and image, as well as the unity of aesthetic style and identity.

Paintings and texts serve as the most common modes of expression in traditional art, where imagery can be depicted through artworks and poetic descriptions. Choreographers may draw inspiration from visual elements, line characteristics, and color schemes in paintings, or utilize poetic descriptions and artistic conceptions to transform the “Fuchun” imagery from visual and textual sources into dance movements and stage imagery. As the medium of dance performance, the body directly embodies the “Fuchun” imagery. Dance works express emotions, characteristics, and connotations through dancers' body language, movements, and postures. Stage settings, props, and scenic designs create environments and atmospheres imbued with “Fuchun” characteristics, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in its cultural background and emotional world. Through the combined presentation of visual, textual, bodily, and stage media, dance works sustain and convey this imagery and symbolism. These media expressions maintain aesthetic consistency and identity, presenting “Fuchun” beauty and essence through harmonious artistic forms and styles, enabling audiences to understand, identify with, and resonate with the concept.

4.3. Dance in painting: Man-made scenery

The dance of “Fuchun” on stage activates the poetic and pictorial works by integrating dance into painting and creating artificial scenery. The dynamic nature of the dance and human movement can contrast with the static elements in poetry and paintings, thereby revitalizing them.

In artistic creations, human movement breathes life into static imagery through performers' upper body dynamics, fluid footwork, rhythmic body undulations, and expressive facial gestures. The dancers' movements create striking

contrasts with the static visuals, transforming poetic and pictorial works into rhythmic performances. This dynamic vitality allows audiences to intuitively grasp the artistic conception and emotions embedded in these works. Through the art of “dance as painting”, performers activate poetic and pictorial works by converting static imagery into dynamic performances. Elements like a gentle breeze rustling through swaying branches or pebbles splashing into mountain streams are reinterpreted through dancers’ movements, offering audiences vivid depictions distinct from static images^[10]. By leveraging this concept, performers transform static poetic and pictorial works into powerful stage performances through dynamic artistry, further enhancing audience perception and understanding of these artworks.

5. Conclusion

At the opening ceremony of the 11th National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 10th National Conference on China Cooperation, it was mentioned: “We should explore the ideological concepts, humanistic spirit, and moral norms of China’s excellent traditional culture, integrate artistic creativity with the values of Chinese culture, combine the aesthetic spirit of Chinese culture with contemporary aesthetic pursuits, and revitalize the vitality of Chinese culture. Let China’s excellent traditional culture become an important source of artistic innovation. Just as today, historical and cultural relics have sparked a wave of enthusiasm.” Taking the dance “Fuchun” as an example, when creating such themes, it is necessary to deeply understand the historical “weight” of cultural relics and grasp their unique aesthetic style. Through anthropomorphic techniques, people can engage in a “dialogue between past and present” with history, allowing cultural relics to “step out” of museums and present themselves to the public, recreating the rich scenes depicted in historical relics. The goal is to “bring cultural relics to life”, enabling domestic and international audiences to gain a deeper understanding of the profound heritage of China’s excellent traditional culture, and ensuring that the historical lineage of China continues unbroken.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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