
Research on the Modern Inheritance of Traditional Aesthetics in the Chinese Classical Dance Course of Vocational Undergraduate Education

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Abstract: Vocational undergraduate education focuses on cultivating technical and skilled talents. As the core content of dance performance majors, Chinese classical dance courses not only undertake the teaching tasks of physical training, technical skills, and stage performance, but also bear the mission of inheriting excellent traditional Chinese aesthetics. This paper takes the positioning of vocational undergraduate talent cultivation as the starting point, analyzes the core connotation and contemporary value of traditional aesthetics in Chinese classical dance courses, and sorts out the practical problems, such as the weakening of traditional aesthetics, superficial cultural inheritance, and rigid teaching models, in current teaching. From four aspects—curriculum system reconstruction, teaching method innovation, aesthetic literacy cultivation, and practical path expansion—it explores the modern inheritance path of traditional aesthetics in vocational undergraduate classical dance courses, aiming to achieve the teaching goal of “integration of technique and philosophy” and cultivate high-quality dance professionals with professional skills, aesthetic literacy, and cultural confidence.

Keywords: Vocational undergraduate; Chinese classical dance; Traditional aesthetics; Modern inheritance; Dance education

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1. Introduction

Under the dual background of high-quality development in vocational undergraduate education and the revival of excellent traditional Chinese culture, the cultivation of vocational undergraduate talents in dance is no longer limited to the training of motor skills, but emphasizes the comprehensive improvement of artistic literacy, cultural depth, and innovative ability. Chinese classical dance is rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetic thought, embodying core aesthetic concepts such as “vibrant energy,” “harmony of form and spirit,” “balance of strength and flexibility,” and “the beauty of moderation,” serving as a physical expression of the national cultural spirit^[1].

Currently, some vocational undergraduate institutions tend to emphasize technique over aesthetics, imitation over culture, and standardization over artistic connotation in their classical dance courses. The traditional aesthetic spirit is simplified and weakened in teaching, resulting in students having excessive technical proficiency but lacking artistic charm, solid skills but insufficient cultural understanding, and artistic expression. Therefore, achieving the creative

transformation and modern inheritance of traditional aesthetics in China's vocational undergraduate classical dance courses is not only necessary for deepening the reform of aesthetic education but also an inevitable requirement for cultivating high-quality dance professionals^[2].

This paper is based on the orientation of vocational undergraduate education and focuses on the integration of classical dance courses and traditional aesthetics, which provides theoretical reference and practical ideas for the reform of dance curriculum.

2. The core connotation of traditional aesthetics in Chinese classical dance

The aesthetic system of Chinese classical dance originates from traditional Chinese philosophy, calligraphy and painting, opera, martial arts, and poetry culture, forming a unique national aesthetic paradigm. Its core connotations can be summarized as the following four points:

2.1. Dynamic rhythm: The aesthetics of life in classical dance

“Qi” refers to the inner spirit and vitality, while “Yun” denotes the external demeanor and charm. The concept of “vibrant qi and rhythm” requires dance to be driven by inner breath to external movements, emphasizing the unity of breathing and action, as well as the fusion of emotion and body. This is the core aesthetic hallmark that distinguishes Chinese classical dance from other dance forms.

2.2. Form and spirit combined: The aesthetic of classical dance

“Form” refers to the physical posture, movement trajectory, and technical specifications, while “spirit” denotes the gaze, emotions, artistic conception, and spiritual essence. Classical dance strives to convey spirit through form, achieving both spiritual and physical expression. It opposes mechanical imitation of movements and emphasizes the principle of “leading the spirit before the form,” endowing movements with emotional depth and artistic conception^[3].

2.3. Combination of rigidity and flexibility: Dialectics of aesthetics in classical dance

Classical dance movements combine rigidity and flexibility, blending the robustness of martial arts with the graceful elegance of opera. They integrate motion and stillness, balance speed and slowness, and achieve effortless control, embodying the aesthetic philosophy of Yin-Yang harmony in traditional Chinese culture.

2.4. The beauty of neutralization: The aesthetic of classical dance

“Zhonghe” is the highest realm of China's traditional aesthetics, emphasizing subtlety, restraint, elegance, and dignity, rejecting exaggeration and flamboyance, pursuing a stage temperament with profound artistic conception and gentle grandeur, reflecting the reserved and restrained cultural character of the Chinese nation.

3. The realistic dilemma of inheriting traditional aesthetics in the classical dance course of vocational undergraduate education

3.1. Teaching objectives: Emphasizing skills over aesthetic education, with vague aesthetic orientation

The vocational undergraduate education emphasizes vocational skills and employment orientation. Some colleges simplify the classical dance curriculum into basic skills, technical techniques, and body rhythm combinations, neglecting the teaching of traditional aesthetics and cultural connotations. This leads to utilitarian teaching objectives, where students only understand “how to do it” but not “why to do it.”

3.2. Fragmented course content and incomplete aesthetic system

The current courses are mainly based on combination training, lacking a systematic explanation of traditional aesthetic thought, history, and culture, and aesthetic concepts. The aesthetic elements are scattered in the action teaching, and the curriculum system from shallow to deep and from skill to way is not formed, so it is difficult for students to establish a complete classical aesthetic cognition ^[4].

3.3. The teaching methods are monotonous and rigid, and the inheritance approach is superficial

The class is mainly based on “teacher’s demonstration and students’ imitation,” which lacks guidance on aesthetic conception, interpretation of breath and charm, and explanation of cultural background. Students mechanically copy the action form, and it is difficult to understand the deep connotation of “Qi, Yun, Yi, Shen,” and the inheritance is only on the surface.

3.4. The evaluation system overemphasizes technical skills at the expense of literacy, with a lack of aesthetic education orientation

The course assessment is mainly based on the technical completion, the action standardization and the skill difficulty, but lacks the quantitative evaluation of the aesthetic accomplishment such as the spirit, the artistic conception, the emotion expression and the cultural understanding, which leads to the students’ emphasis on the technique and neglect of the art, and thus it is difficult to meet the comprehensive accomplishment requirement of the vocational undergraduate.

3.5. The cultural literacy of faculty members requires improvement, with insufficient capacity for knowledge inheritance

Some teachers themselves are not deep enough in the study of traditional aesthetics, classical philosophy, and opera culture, and it is difficult to integrate the aesthetic concept into the action training in teaching, and lack the ability to transform traditional culture into modern teaching content, which affects the inheritance effect.

4. The value of modern inheritance of traditional aesthetics in the classical dance course of vocational undergraduate

4.1. Enhancing students’ comprehensive artistic literacy

The traditional aesthetics can help students to change from “practice the action” to “realize the dance,” improve the aesthetic appreciation, artistic expression, and stage creativity, and meet the demand of professional stages for performance, creative, and teaching talents.

4.2. Strengthening national cultural confidence and identity

Through the inheritance of classical dance aesthetics, students can understand the spiritual core of China’s excellent traditional culture, establish national cultural confidence, and cultivate new-era dance practitioners who can spread China’s culture and tell China’s stories well.

4.3. Alignment with vocational undergraduate talent development objectives

Vocational undergraduate programs cultivate high-caliber professionals who excel in both moral integrity and technical proficiency, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills. By harmonizing traditional aesthetics with skill development, these programs achieve the unification of “educating through beauty, nurturing through culture, and establishing oneself through expertise,” thereby elevating the quality of talent cultivation. The modern reinterpretation of traditional aesthetics transcends mere imitation; it involves creative transformation and innovative advancement, enabling classical dance to regain vitality in contemporary stages, aesthetic education, and cultural tourism performances ^[5].

5. The modern inheritance path of traditional aesthetics in the classical dance course of vocational undergraduate

5.1. Reconstructing the curriculum system: Constructing a “technology-art-dao” trinity teaching framework

With traditional aesthetics as the core, the hierarchical system of basic courses, body rhythm courses, repertoire courses, and aesthetic theory courses is reconstructed. The beauty of “breath, lines, and moderation” is integrated into basic training; the aesthetic of “lifting, sinking, thrusting, leaning, containing, yielding, moving, and lifting” is emphasized in body rhythm courses; classic works such as “The Goddess of the Luo River,” “Dian Jiang Chun,” and “Only This Green and Blue” are selected for repertoire courses to interpret artistic conception and cultural significance. Theoretical courses such as “China Traditional Aesthetics,” “History of Classical Dance Culture,” and “Opera and Classical Dance” are added to form a complete system of “skill training + aesthetic cultivation + cultural understanding.”

5.2. Innovative teaching methods: From “skill” to “way,” achieving aesthetic immersion teaching

Moving beyond rigid imitation, we implement contextualized teaching, imagery-based instruction, and breath-guided techniques. By exploring dance’s historical narratives, poetic imagery, and philosophical underpinnings, students grasp the essence of movements. The “qi-leading force, eye-guiding form” training cultivates dynamic performance with vitality. Through video comparisons, masterwork analysis, and improvisation, students internalize classical dance’s subtle elegance and expressive artistry.

5.3. Deepening the teaching of dramatic works: Carrying the spirit of traditional aesthetics with classic works

Classical dance repertoire serves as the core vehicle for aesthetic heritage transmission. In pedagogical practice, we systematically analyze the works’ aesthetic characteristics: interpreting the form beauty of “roundness, curvature, twist, and tilt” through movements; deciphering the rhythmic beauty of “slow yet continuous, fast yet unconfused” through tempo; and exploring the temperament beauty of “subtle restraint and profound artistic conception” through performance. Simultaneously, we introduce modern masterpieces like Only This Verdant Green and Tang Palace Night Banquet, enabling students to grasp contemporary expressions of traditional aesthetics and achieve harmonious integration of inheritance and innovation.

5.4. Reforming the evaluation system: Establishing a diversified assessment mechanism with equal emphasis on skills and competencies

Breaking away from the “technique-centric” approach, we establish an integrated evaluation system encompassing five dimensions: skill proficiency, artistic expression, cultural comprehension, aesthetic literacy, and innovative capability. The assessment criteria include breath control, eye contact, emotional delivery, artistic conception, and cultural interpretation. A comprehensive evaluation method is adopted, combining classroom performance, group presentations, theatrical performances, theoretical examinations, and creative practice to guide students’ holistic development.

5.5. Strengthening the construction of teachers: Enhancing teachers’ ability to transform traditional aesthetics into teaching

The school regularly conducts specialized training programs in traditional aesthetics, classical culture, opera art, and classical dance choreography, encouraging teachers to explore ways to integrate traditional aesthetic concepts with dance education. It invites renowned opera artists, classical dance experts, and aesthetic scholars to deliver lectures and workshops, enhancing teachers’ cultural literacy and pedagogical skills. This initiative aims to cultivate a dual-qualified faculty team that is “technically proficient, aesthetically knowledgeable, culturally enriched, and skilled in teaching.” The school also expands practical platforms to revitalize traditional aesthetics in professional settings. Aligning with career-

oriented undergraduate education, it combines classical dance aesthetics with stage performances, aesthetic education, cultural tourism performances, and creative projects. Students participate in classical dance exhibitions, cultural festivals, intangible cultural heritage promotion activities, and classical aesthetics-themed performances, enabling them to apply classical aesthetics and convey national spirit in real professional contexts, thereby achieving an integrated approach of “learning, practicing, performing, and creating.”

6. Safeguard measures

Institutional safeguards integrate traditional aesthetics into talent development programs and curriculum standards, defining aesthetic education objectives and teaching requirements while establishing course review and quality monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation. Resource support involves building a classical dance aesthetics repository, featuring teaching materials such as classic plays, poetry culture, traditional aesthetic literature, and opera videos to create an immersive classical aesthetics learning environment. Cultural support fosters a campus tradition by organizing events like classical culture festivals, Hanfu (traditional Chinese attire) gatherings, classical dance salons, and poetry recitals, allowing traditional aesthetics to permeate students’ daily studies and lives.

7. Conclusion

The vocational undergraduate Chinese classical dance curriculum is not only a vehicle for skill training but also an important platform for the modern inheritance of traditional Chinese aesthetics. Current issues in teaching, such as overemphasizing technique at the expense of artistry, cultural weakening, and superficial inheritance, have constrained the quality of talent cultivation and the effectiveness of cultural transmission. Only through curriculum system restructuring, innovative teaching methods, in-depth analysis of repertoire, reform of evaluation systems, enhancement of faculty capabilities, and expansion of practical scenarios can the essence of traditional aesthetics—such as “vibrant energy, harmony of form and spirit, balance of strength and flexibility, and the beauty of moderation”—be integrated into the entire teaching process. This will achieve a transformation from “teaching movements” to “cultivating aesthetics” and from “practicing skills” to “transmitting culture.”

Under the background of vocational undergraduate education in the new era, classical dance courses can only cultivate high-quality professional dance talents with exquisite skills, elegant aesthetics, and cultural confidence by adhering to the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional aesthetics, allowing China’s classical dance to shine with even more brilliant national brilliance on the contemporary stage.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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