

Research on the Technical Methods and Aesthetic Characteristics of Water Sleeve in Chinese Classical Dance—Taking the dance drama "Qing Yi" as an example

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ABSTRACT

Water sleeve, a pivotal movement in the realm of Chinese classical dance, embodies China's enduring aesthetic appreciation for femininity, elegance, and an ethereal, transcendent beauty. In Qingyi, a dance drama crafted by the esteemed dancer Wang Yabin in 2016, key water-sleeve movements such as the out, throw, fling, and close are seamlessly integrated, accentuating their exquisite aesthetic qualities. This essay delves into the evolution, techniques, and aesthetics of water sleeves within the context of Qingyi, examining their profound artistic merit. It seeks to elucidate the aesthetic emphasis of water sleeves in seminal works like Qingyi, and to unravel the cultural and artistic values that underpin them. By doing so, this analysis aims to enrich the practice and performance of water-sleeve routines, imparting a deeper sense of historical allure and aesthetic sensibility.

KEYWORDS

classical dance drama; water sleeves; aesthetic characteristics

1 Introduction

Water sleeve, a pivotal movement in Chinese classical dance, boasts a millennia-long history deeply rooted in the rich cultural soil of China. It embodies feminine grace, elegant poise, and a floating, ethereal aesthetic that captivates audiences. As an integral component of Chinese art and culture, the water sleeve encapsulates the aesthetic essence of ancient Chinese dance and serves as a powerful medium for communicating classical culture to modern audiences. "Qing Yi," a renowned dance piece, incorporates key water-sleeve movements such as swinging, throwing, rushing, and folding, accentuating these aesthetic features and showcasing the movement's versatility and expressiveness. This thesis examines "Qing Yi" closely to analyze the development and aesthetics of water sleeves in Chinese classical dance, discussing their artistic value within the broader dance repertoire and highlighting their enduring appeal.

2 The Development of Water Sleeve in Chinese Classical Dance

2.1 The birth and development of the water-sleeve

The water sleeve, originating from the wide robes and sleeves of ancient Chinese attire, was discovered to enhance body curves and dance aesthetics through sleeve waving, leading to the birth of water-sleeve dance. Historical records, such as "Xijing Miscellany," indicate its presence in the Western Han Dynasty, with possible earlier origins suggested by Zhou Dynasty artifacts. Over

the subsequent two millennia, water sleeves were widely utilized in folk and opera dances, evolving from wide-edged sleeves to their contemporary form after the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. Their usage surged during the Tang Dynasty and became integral to mainstream operas like Kunqu and Peking Opera during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. By the Republic of China era, water sleeves in Chinese opera had reached a refined state.

Contemporary scholars attribute the water sleeves in modern opera to Kunqu, with movements incorporated into Peking Opera. During the Qing Dynasty, water sleeves in both Kunqu and Peking Opera were diversified into numerous types, employed by performers to depict characters and express emotions. Thus, the water sleeve, refined over a long history, has become a vital component of Chinese dance.

2.2 The process of formation of water sleeves

In 1950, dance scholar Ouyang Yuqian coined the term "Classical Chinese Dance" for China's indigenous rhythmic dance, emphasizing its foundation in operatic movements. By then, water sleeves had matured within mainstream operas like Peking Opera and Kunqu. Subsequently, scholars Li Zhengyi and Tang Mancheng organized the water sleeves of classical Chinese dance, establishing a system dominated by Peking Opera's large, expressive water sleeves. Over the past six decades, various classical dance schools have innovated water-sleeve dances and dramas, such as "Cai Wei," "Tap Ge," and "Qing Yi." These works have diversified water-sleeve types and aesthetics, with "Cai Wei" and "Tap Song" introducing smaller, more agile water sleeves, while "Qing Yi" expands on Peking Opera's big water sleeves, enhancing their artistic expression and beauty in Chinese classical dance.

3 Aesthetic Characteristics of Water Sleeves in the Chinese Classical Dance Drama "Qing Yi"

3.1 Extension of the dancer's body curves

"Qing Yi," a masterpiece led by the talented Chinese dancer Wang Yabin, skillfully utilizes water sleeves as crucial props in pivotal passages like "Chang'e Runs to the Moon" and "Dreaming of Chang'e" to convey the work's unique aesthetic. In "Qing Yi," the water sleeves initially serve to extend the dancer's body curves, creating a mesmerizing visual effect. Specific techniques, such as rotating, rushing, and punching the sleeves, are executed with precision in "Chang'e Runs to the Moon" to elongate and soften the dancer's overall lines, adding depth to the performance. Similarly, in "Dreaming of Chang'e," the sleeves are dragged and thrown with grace, emphasizing the dancer's lonely and slender physique. Throughout the entire piece, the water sleeves expertly extend the dancer's arm lines, enhancing the portrayal of loneliness and isolation, and contributing to the overall artistic brilliance of "Qing Yi."

3.2 Expression of dynamic movements of "twisting and rounding"

The "twisting, tilting, and rounding" constitute a significant body rhyme aesthetic in classical Chinese dance, particularly evident in "Qing Yi" through the dynamic movement of water sleeves. "Twisting" involves displaying body angles via props and limbs, rather than having them face uniformly.

In "Chang'e Runs to the Moon," the dancer's water sleeves exhibit a 30-degree angle, aligning with the screwing characteristic of body rhyme. The dancer winds the sleeves, forming a complete

circle, emphasizing the preference for circular trajectories and compositions in classical Chinese dance.

In the final part of "Dreaming of Chang'e" in "Qing Yi," dancer Wang Yabin demonstrates the "curvilinear beauty" through spring-like water sleeve movements. Subsequently, the sleeves form staggered wavy lines, emphasizing the "curve" aesthetic. The dynamic movement of stacking sleeves underscores the "round" body rhyme standard, with the water sleeves extending semi-circular arcs, embodying the classical dance's "circle" aesthetic.

3.3 The overall performance is smooth and steady with free release

The ease of retraction and release, smoothness and steadiness are also important aesthetic characteristics of the water sleeve movement in classical Chinese dance, which reflects the ancient charm of classical dance and its subtle and smooth aesthetics. For example, in the passage "Dreaming of Chang'e" of Qing Yi, the dancer turns around to face the back of the stage after walking in a circle, and at the same time makes a sleeve raising movement to the back of the stage, that is, letting the water sleeve stretch softly, and finally forms a straight line with her arm. The dancer then drives the sleeve with both arms, creating two flowing lines of waves in the swinging motion, and then recovers the right arm with a quick force, stretching the sleeve over her right hand and dropping it downward. The dancer then grasps the sleeve with the right hand and retracts it, a move known as the "folded sleeve" in classical dance. In this series of water-sleeve movements, the dancers use their breath to make the force smooth and the arm movements flowing, so the movements of dropping, raising, swinging and stacking the sleeves are closely connected, and the sleeves are never completely static, which reflects the dancers' props control. This water-sleeve movement has the performance of free release, steady and smooth.

4 Classification and Technical Methods of Chinese Classical Dance Water Sleeves

4.1 Sleeve techniques can be categorized according to their performance characteristics

Expanding/contracting sleeve: This process involves sleeve movement via hand actions such as "grabbing, closing, throwing, releasing" to create expansion and contraction, producing varied visual effects through different rhythms and strengths. Techniques include "out of the sleeve" (repeatedly mentioned) and "out and in sleeve".

Full-sleeve: Dancing with the sleeve fully expanded, the palm resting on it without grip, utilizing body and arm momentum for morphological changes. Forms include straight lines, curves, spirals, etc. Techniques encompass "shaking sleeve", "raising sleeve", "winding sleeve", and "raising and matching sleeve".

Half-sleeve: Gripping the bottom half of the sleeve and performing with the other half, the primary technique is "katakana".

4.2 According to the type of sleeve techniques can be divided into

Raising the sleeve: Gently lifting the long sleeve with wrist and arm movements for a light, airy effect.

Throwing Sleeve: Rapid arm flinging creates sleeve arcs, adding strength and dynamism. (Note: Duplicate description removed.)

Coiling Sleeve: Wrapping the sleeve around the arm or body in various directions for a multi-layered visual.

Sleeve Stroking: Gently moving the sleeve over different body parts to express delicacy.

Sleeve Rolling: Rolling and unrolling the sleeve from the wrist to showcase movement consistency and layers.

Winding Sleeve: Wrapping the sleeve around the body or objects, rotating and winding to enhance three-dimensionality.

Dropping Sleeve: Naturally dropping the sleeve with gentle swings to convey serenity and elegance.

Mastery of these sleeve techniques necessitates solid basic skills, control, and expressive power to fully exhibit the allure of water sleeve dance.

(III) According to the aesthetic form of the sleeve technique can be divided into

There are three main categories: lines, spirals, and planes, each with distinct sleeve techniques explored in detail below.

The linear sleeve technique employs straight-line movements and shakes to exhibit smooth visuals, with sleeve shaking indicating fine motor control and expressing emotions like nervousness, while straight-line raising conveys strength and firmness for solemn or joyful displays. The spiral technique rotates and winds the sleeve for a 3D effect, symbolizing flexibility and spatial mastery, often used for complex emotions. The plane-type technique unfolds and swings the sleeve widely, embodying elegance and atmosphere for relaxed or magnificent expressions. These three techniques showcase dancer proficiency and emotional depth, contributing to water sleeve dance's significance in Chinese classical dance. Performers undergo rigorous training to master the diverse sleeve positions and movements, each with distinct meanings, ensuring aesthetic appeal.

5 The Artistic Value of Water Sleeves in the Chinese Classical Dance Drama Qing Yi

5.1 Highlighting the cultural background of "Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism"

The water sleeve in Chinese classical dance firstly emphasizes the cultural background of Chinese art, rooted in the philosophy of "Ru Shi Tao" (scholarly elegance and refinement).

"Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism" are the ideologies and cultures that the Chinese people have been adhering to for two thousand years, among which Confucianism emphasizes on mediocrity, neutrality and following the Great Way, Buddhism emphasizes on peace, reincarnation and extreme happiness, and Taoism emphasizes on floating and free flowing. In Chinese classical dance works such as "Qing Yi", the water-sleeve movement conforms to the aesthetic characteristics of "round curved screwing", which centrally reflects Confucianism's ideological views of mediocrity and neutrality, and the aesthetics of the water-sleeve movement's smooth and flowing movement embodies the Taoist ideology's emphasis on floating and free-flowing, and walking on winds and winds. The interlocking sleeve movements in the passage "Dreaming of Chang'e" in "Qing Yi" mimic the ancient Chinese imagination of a fairy flying in the sky with fluttering clothes, and the dancers use techniques to control the water sleeves to mimic the freedom of flight, a situation that also reflects the ancient Chinese Taoist cultural cognizance of floating and freedom. The dancers start the performance with hanging sleeves, and make complex movements such as folding sleeves, rushing sleeves, swinging sleeves, back sleeves, winding sleeves, etc., but at the end of the passage, they still make hanging sleeve movements and walk round to end the dance. This water-sleeve dance embodies the Shihist cultural idea of reincarnation and return in China.

In addition, in the passage of "Dreaming of Chang'e", the action of wrapping and folding the sleeves of both hands has certain similarity with the image of the flying sky on the murals of Dunhuang in China. For example, in the "Bouncing Pipa" mural at Dunhuang, the Buddhist figure stands on one leg, raises his hands upward and bounces the pipa, at which time the ribbon on the

shoulders of the Buddhist figure hangs down to the ground, and the two sides of the ribbon make a screw shape perpendicular to the ground, which is a manifestation of the belief that there is a world of bliss in the Buddha's belief that believers in Buddhism who do good deeds can enter the world of bliss to enjoy happiness and enjoyment. In the Buddhist belief, believers who do good deeds can enter the world of bliss and enjoy happiness and tranquility. In the passage "Dreaming of Chang'e" of "Qing Yi", the dancer makes a movement of turning the water sleeve with her right hand, and the right water sleeve rotates into the form of a screw that is perpendicular to the ground under the driving force of her hand, which is similar to the "rebound pipa" Buddhist frescoes. Therefore, the passage "Dreaming of Chang'e" in "Qing Yi" also reflects the Buddhist ideology of recognizing the world of bliss and expresses the Buddhist idea that the artistic characters hope to "run to the moon" and enter the perfect world in their own fantasies, which in turn reflects the cruelty of the real world in "Qing Yi".

5.2 Embodies the aesthetic personality of classical Chinese dance

Classical Chinese dance shows its own personality in the aesthetics of "twisting and rounding", and it also has its own personality in the subtle and classical aesthetics. The aesthetic preference of "twisting, tilting and rounding" in classical dance is closely related to the Chinese culture behind classical Chinese dance. This aesthetic permeates all fields of Chinese art, such as in literature, Lin Daiyu is sickly and weak, Chinese bonsai is usually tilted rather than straight, and many traditional Chinese costumes are slanted, that is, asymmetric, which is ultimately embodied in the aesthetic of classical dance "twisted and tilted". The Chinese aesthetic of "roundness" has been around for a long time, and is derived from Chinese philosophy. Ancient Chinese people believe that the most eternal things are rounded, and the mediocrity is an important rule for everyone to deal with the world, and the philosophy of dealing with the world in a rounded rather than a straight way is a higher realm. In the water sleeve of classical Chinese dance, it is easier for dancers to show a rounded composition, and they are able to show the twisting of all parts of the body and the twisting of the water sleeve on both sides at the same time. Moreover, when controlling the water sleeves, the dancers need to make rushing sleeves and swinging sleeves by means of slow force, instead of fast force, so the water sleeves can express the aesthetic characteristics of classical dance, which are subtle and classical, and have the aesthetic sense of subtle ancient rhyme.

6 Conclusion

It can be seen that the water sleeve in dance was first born before the Han Dynasty, and has been continuously improved in the development of history, and finally was incorporated into the system of Chinese classical dance body rhyme movement in the 1950s. The extension of the dancer's body curves, the expression of the dynamic movement of "twisting and rounding", the freedom of retraction and relaxation, smoothness and steadiness can be regarded as the aesthetic characteristics of the water sleeves in the classical dance drama "Qingyi". It highlights the cultural background of "Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism" in Chinese art and embodies the aesthetic personality of Chinese classical dance, which can be regarded as the artistic value of the water sleeve in the classical dance drama "Qing Yi". The water-sleeve dance in Chinese classical dance is the essence of Chinese classical dance. This dance movement system expresses Chinese people's reflection and realization of art and life for thousands of years, and also conveys the philosophical concepts and aesthetic views of the Chinese people, which are unique and profound at the same time. When performing the water sleeves of Chinese classical dances such as "Qing Yi", we who study dance need to really understand the cultural background of the water sleeves, feel the

aesthetic aesthetics of this kind of movement, and show the Chinese classical art flavor of this kind of movement through our own efforts. In the days to come, I personally will strengthen my practice of water-sleeve body rhythmic movements, and hope to be able to dance "Dreaming of Chang'e" and other dance passages in "Qing Yi" as soon as possible.

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