

# Exploration on the Effective Shaping of Characters in Folk Dance Performances

## -- Taking the Dance Drama "A Handful of Sour Jujube" For Example

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**Abstract:** Taking the dance drama "A handful of sour jujube" as an example, this paper discusses the effective shaping of characters in folk dance performance. Firstly, the characteristics of characters in folk dance performance are summarized. Secondly, it discusses the significance of the effective shaping of characters in folk dance performance. Then the major figures in the dance drama "A handful of sour jujube" were introduced and the channels to effectively shape the figures were illustrated from the perspective of practice.

Dance is a kind of stage art using body languages for the narration and expressing one's emotions, and the narration is achieved by shaping the images. As the development of dancing art and the changes of people in art psychology in different ages, dance is gradually characterized with diversity in dance performances. Human factors are essential in the shaping of dance art no matter how it develops. Therefore, the image is the most core components in many types of dance image.

Our country is endowed with diverse folk genre with rich themes and profound connotation, which fully reflects the strong regional style and aesthetic pursuit of the life of people. "A handful of sour jujube" that was wrote and directed by Zhang Jigang, was a national dance drama reflective of the culture of Shanxi merchants and it was performed by Huajin dance drama troupe in Shanxi Art Vocational College. Various art forms of folk dance were applied in this dance drama to show the characters with strong personalities by exquisite plot structure. This paper discusses the effective shaping of character image in combination with the characteristics of folk dance in the drama.

### 1. Characteristics of Characters in Folk Dance Performance

China enjoys a very profound culture in folk dance, especially the diversity of regional and national cultures promoted the diversity of folk dance performance styles. Therefore, in folk dance performance, the characteristics of figures can be summarized from the following two aspects: Firstly, it reflects the characteristics of production and life of regional people. As influenced by the natural and geographical factors such as landform and physiognomy and the social factors, folk dance embodies the regional characteristics of people's living around both in form and theme. It is the fundamental factor to develop the figures in folk dance performance, such as Yangko in the folk dance in the north. It is closely connected with dryland farming civilization in northern area. By contrast, the most representative folk dance in south is tea-picking dance, which is associated with the humid environment, soil conditions and the selection of agricultural production crops. As a result, there are big differences in character shaping in Yangko and tea-picking dance, which also reflects the characteristics of regional production and life.

Secondly, it presents people's inner emotions. Folk dance, as an important dance art form, is endowed with the most essential characteristic of dance, that is, folk dance is full of lyricism in the process of performance. In dance performance, every character is endowed with emotional soul, which is not only the demonstration of value of dance art, but also the unity of the purposiveness and regularity of the development of dance art. From the dancers' point of view, the performance of any kind of body language on the stage is not "aimless", but implies certain meaning. Most of the

performance movements by dancers are given emotional significance. For the dancers themselves, it is actually a process of emotional communication in shaping the figures in the dance, that is, the communication of such emotions is virtual and abstract, but in order to truly interpret the connotation of dance and interpret the figures in dance, emotional expression is always the key point of folk dance performance.

## **2. The Significance of Effective Characterization in Folk Dance Performance**

In interpretation of the same dance works, different dancers have different concepts on art creation in the shaping of the same character, which correlate the actor's proficiency in dance technology, stage control ability, the understanding of dance works and characters and many other factors. Based on the above factors, the effective shaping of the characters serves as the key element. In folk dance performance, the significance of effective characterization can be expressed from the following three aspects:

Firstly, the ideological depth of the dance works is fully demonstrated. A good dance works must be based on a certain concept in the process of creation for a time, namely, what the dance work is intended to show in themes. As frequently quoted that "art comes from life but higher than life", which demotes that it should present both the characteristics of the times and spirituality in the main ideas of art works. Folk dance is not "art in paintings" and not the "art in imagination" and it has strong vitality of the times, so the effective shaping of characters in the second creation can fully demonstrate the ideology in the works.

The second is the concentrated embodiment of the aesthetic pursuit of dance works. With the enrichment of folk dance creation concept works, also has the personalized characteristic in aesthetic pursuit, it can be a traditional, modern, can also be realistic and romantic, aesthetic pursuit, no matter what kind of is through specific characters to represent a specific era of social life and ideal, so effective shaping of the characters can not only reflect the aesthetic pursuit of dance works, dance and works about aesthetic meaning is reflected in the characters, but also the fundamental way to dance works of aesthetic value to realize.

Thirdly, it can deeply express the cultural connotation of dance works. The biggest difference between folk dance and classical dance, modern dance and other dance genres lies in its regionalism and nationality in the sense of culture, which in the final analysis is its traditionality. In the process of creation and performance of the contemporary folk, although the richness of alternative ideas, the traditionality always serves as the core element. Looking through the contemporary excellent folk dance works on the stage with originality, or new folk works, there is no exception that all the works were created based on a certain region or national culture tradition, which indicate that in order to express the cultural connotation of dance works, effective shaping of the characters must be well conducted.

## **3. Introduction and Features of Main Characters in the Dance Drama "A Handful of Sour Jujube"**

Although the dance drama "A handful of sour jujube" reflects the content of Jin Merchant culture in theme, it actually shows the chivalric tenderness of the sons and daughters of the Sanjin. It is a drama about affection and love combining regional culture and everlasting love of boys and girls. The main characters in the play are the boy hero and the girl heroine Suansao. The young man used to work as a small figure in the family of a Shanxi merchants of Yin, and he finally became a successful man after hard work and painstaking efforts. Suansao was a maid servant in Yin family and she was clever and kind. They pledged to marry without the permission of parents and the Suansao offers the man a bag of sour jujube as the token hoping the man could master all kind of skills in other places and married her after returning back. The man eventually became a famous merchant, but the girl was framed up and became a silly woman. Then the man eat the poisonous sour jujube by mistake. To this end, they made a poignant love story.

From the character of the figures, the man was industrious, capable and straightforward with

characteristics in pragmatism, honesty and good at business of Shanxi merchants. However, Suansao was not well educated, but she was kind and she could do all for pursuit of her true love. With the story of these two people as the main line of narration, the drama deeply show their love in the dance language full of high artistry and emotion. From the perspective of the adoption of dance genre, the solo dance, pas de deux were the major two kind of dances used. In the dance drama, in addition to the depiction of the young man and Suansao, the figure of sons and daughters of Sanjin struggling and fighting for ideals was depicted. In terms of the form of group dance, it shows the characteristics of the folk dance culture of Sanjin. Among them, the application of group dance forms such as group fan dance, dish drum dance, camel team dance and Yangko dance is also the highlight of the dance drama.

#### **4. Channels of Effective Shaping of Characters in Dance Drama “A Handful of Sour Jujube”**

The dance drama "A handful of sour jujube" is a work that fully demonstrates the folk dance style and the distinctive character performance. In the dance performance, how to effectively shape the character image is the key to reflect the artistic value of the work. The author believes that attention should be paid from the following three aspects in the ways to effectively shape the characters:

Firstly, the actors should create characters from the perspective of the connotation of performance consciousness. The so-called performance consciousness means that actors should give full play to their subjective initiative and artistic creativity in the process of shaping the character image, and they should understand the character characteristics and shaping techniques of the character image in an all-round and multi-level way, and constantly refine their performance ability in the process of practice.

In the works, the personal characters of the young man and maidservant are very distinct, and behind their personalities is a manifestation of the national spirit. Therefore, when shaping the characters, the actors should first understand the connotation of the Shanxi culture, and grasp the characteristics of the personalities under the background of the Jin culture from a macro perspective. The second is to give full play to the imagination, to have deep understanding of the layout and the narrative plot in the background in the narrative of a specific plot and how to show the image, such as in the second act "Xikouwai" the young man had a passionate dance with the girl in the dream as miss the girl. The dance embodied the excited emotion of the them after long time separation.

Although the narrative background of this dance is dreamy, it is really the expression of the authenticity of love. Therefore, as an actor, he should consider the emotional expression in shaping the characters through imagination and how to express the missing of both sides from the dance movement language.

Secondly, actors are good at making full use of dance elements to shape characters. In dance performance, it is difficult to perfect the image by simply relying on the dance movements of the actors, which requires the actors to make full use of the dance elements, such as music, costumes, props and so on. First of all, from the perspective of musical elements, although dance and music belong to different genres, they are inseparable in dance performance. If there is no music as background, dance performance will lose rhythm and atmosphere.

As in the first act, there was "Tuanshan dance" the background music was characterized with the styles of accompaniment of Shanxi Taigu Yangko embodied by 2/4 taken strong rhythm rhythm, and it was conjuncted with shock interval of melody flowing type. By using the national musical instrument suona, drum and other musical instrument, the bold characteristics were fully displayed. Therefore, the atmosphere of this musical style is consistent with the simple and generous characteristics of Shanxi women. In shaping the characters in group dance, the actors should pay attention to understand the personality characteristics from the perspective of musical style, and perfect the coordination with dance language.

Thirdly, actors should create characters from the perspective of the integration of emotion and action. Although the characters in dance are virtual, their images are derived from life. The

difference between them and life images is that they have been treated artistically. The purpose of actors in stage performance is to shape the characters in the works, which involves a problem of "creation". We generally call dance performance as second creation, and works as first creation, both of which are different from and related to each other.

First of all, the foundation and basis of performance in the creation. In the performance of the character, the image in the works should be re-presented authentically. The second is to add the actor's personal thinking and understanding in the second creation, which is largely based on the unity of emotion and action. As in dance drama, there are a lot of pas de deux performed by the men and Suansao. From the perspective of emotion, the sweet love between the man and Suansao should be deliberately presented with deep understanding. In terms of the movements, it is hard to perform, that is, actors should complete the movements with high difficulties and display the devotion of them in emotion, so that to shape characters perfectly.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, in folk dance performance, an actor should make clear the significance of effective characterization from the perspective of the character images in performance, that is, to reflect the value of dance performance in terms of ideological depth, aesthetic pursuit and cultural connotation. From the perspective of character image building in the folk dance drama "A handful of sour Jujube", dancers need various abilities to be effective in character building, which fully demonstrates that actors should attach great importance to their own artistic accomplishment.

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