

Costume and Body Language of Ethnic Dance Drama under Semiotics: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Dance drama is a dramatic form with dance as its main means of expression, which has been developed in China for less than a century. In recent years, the development of Chinese dance drama, especially ethnic dance drama, has shown an obvious upward trend. Several excellent dance drama works have appeared, forming some distinctive dance drama styles, among which The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting, The Peacock, and The Railway to Tibet are quite representative. This study will investigate the above three dance dramas based on semiotics. An analysis of costume and body language is carried out in this study based on the semiotics, from the morphological characteristics of dance and costume. In addition, the author makes a comprehensive exploration of the integration of the external form, fabric, structure and pattern of costume and body language, tries to reveal the way of interaction between costume symbols and body symbols in dance drama, and summarises the artistic connotation of the integration of dance costumes and body language. Then, it provides ideas for the role creation and education of dance drama.

Keywords: *Semiotics; Costume, Body Language, Dance Drama.*

Introduction

In China, an increasing number of dance dramas, including ethnic dance dramas, Chinese ballets, and Chinese modern dance dramas, are being staged in theatres with a social emphasis on stage art. The development of dance drama promotes the growth of dance costumes, the innovation of dance vocabularies and the integration of diversification. Dance costumes and body language, as an important part of the visual symbol system of dance drama, play a crucial role in dance drama, as they contribute to the storytelling, character portrayal and overall aesthetics of the performance, and can contribute to the audience's understanding of the dance theatre work. Marshall McLuhan said clothing is an extension of the skin, and medium is an extension of the man (1964). Dance costume as a medium is an extension of the person and the dancer's body. There is a close relationship between dance costumes and body language in the character creation of dance drama.

In past studies, costume designers, dancers and related scholars have expounded the relationship between costume and dance performance, the role and characteristics of costume in dance performance, and the aesthetic principles between the two from different perspectives. Most studies have examined costume and body language as separate entities and not many have addressed both costume and dance vocabulary. Costume designers are typically engrossed in the creation of costume designs, materials, and colours and do not understand the meaning of body language, even if they interact with directors, performers, and other creators when designing costumes. Similarly, the actors have no understanding of the background, culture, and connotation of costume, and they only use it as a tool for performance. As an illustration, in the visual reconstruction of contemporary dance drama in the Dance Forum of Beijing Dance Academy (2023), it is proposed that directors and actors do not understand the historical background and cultural connotation of costumes. The organic combination of costume and body language will enhance the effect of dramatic character creation to a certain extent, but this part has not been fully studied. It must be pointed out that the present study is the starting point of this field, aiming at exploring a new way of character creation in dance drama.

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Among numerous dance dramas, in recent years, *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock*, and *The Railway to Tibet* can be said to be excellent plays. Both the choreography and the performance have promoted the development and progress of Chinese dance dramas, especially ethnic dance dramas. The common feature of these dance dramas is “visualisation”, All visual symbols, including body language, costumes, props, make-up, scenes, etc., serve the theme of the work, showing and extending the meaning of the script. The core of its dance image is formed by combining the subject of dance movements with costumes, makeup, and hand-held props (Yuan, 2007, p. 3-11). This study attempts to explore the interactive relationship between costume and body language in the portrayal of characters in dance drama and the method of combination by analysing three representative ethnic dance drama works.

Background of the Study

Dance has been an art form to express human emotions since its emergence. The creators use symbolic and anthropomorphic techniques combined with dance language to express the emotions of plants and animals in the natural world in order to convey the inner ideal and desire. In addition, the dancer will also carry out the pictographic design of the dance costume, select the shape and pattern of nature, so that the characters and nature can be integrated, sketch a beautiful artistic conception, and let the audience experience the realm of scene integration. The same is true of dance drama.

Dance drama is part of theatre and performance in the broadest sense (Kennedy, 2011, p.155). It refers to a dramatic form where dance serves as the primary medium for expression or a dance form where the content is a particular drama narrative (Dance Institute, Chinese National Academy of Arts, 1990, p. 1). Chinese dance drama is a performing art developed on the basis of the theoretical and aesthetic of Russian classical ballet (Zhang, 2019, p. 14). The origins and evolution of Chinese dance drama are expounded upon in the book *Outline of the History of Chinese Dance Drama*:

Dance drama was formed in 1939 and went through five phases of development from 1989, including the initial practice stage (1939-1948), the multiple attempts period (1949-1956), the construction and forming period (1957-1966), the abnormal development period (1967-1976), the multiple development period (1976-1989). (1990)

Then, Chinese dance drama entered a period of climax (1992-2001), during which the level of creative productivity of dance drama was rapidly improved under the influence of choreography techniques (Yu, 2004). An increasing number of dance dramas, including ethnic dance dramas, Chinese ballets, and Chinese modern dance dramas, are being staged in theatres with a social emphasis on stage art. Chinese dance drama has become one of the mainstream performing arts in China. According to the annual report on China's performance Market in 2022, the box office revenue of dance dramas reached 531 million yuan, of which ethnic dance accounted for 56 per cent (China Association of Performing Art, 2023). Among all types of theatrical performances, dance dramas “The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting” and “The Eternal Wave” ranked first and third respectively. This type of dance-drama has aroused the interest of dramatists, dancers and scholars.

The dance dramas *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock*, and *The Railway to Tibet* are representative ethnic dance drama works in recent years. The analysis of this study will be based on these three works. *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* is an ancient-themed dance drama co-directed by Zhou Liya and Han Zhen, and premiered in August 2021. This play takes a young researcher of the Palace Museum “crossing” back to the Northern Song Dynasty as a clue, and “peek” into the story of painter Wang Ximeng's creation of *A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains* from the perspective of the exhibitor. The whole drama is divided into seven chapters: scroll unfolding, seal Tracing, silk reeling, minerals exploring, brush making, ink grinding, and painting alive. The play has made a great breakthrough in the aesthetic conception of the construction method (Feng, 2022). *The Peacock* is an animal-themed work directed by Terpsichorean Yang Liping and premiered in 2012. This study analyses works that were revised in 2022. This play explores the themes of life and love, telling a story about nature, life, growth, humanity and love, as well as how life and nature are intertwined. The work is divided into four chapters: spring, summer, autumn and winter. The narrative does not use action vocabulary to translate the meaning

of language or text but reveals the “ineffable” action thinking through the dynamic image of the action motive (Yu, 2012). The Railway to Tibet, is an ethnic dance drama jointly created by the National Centre for the Performing Arts and Beijing Dance Drama and Opera Theatre in 2018. This play, with the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway construction serving as the main line and the three generations of people who never forgot their original intention and stuck to the road construction as the clue, tells the moving story of the railway builders and the people of Tibetan areas in the process of railway construction in the late 1970s. The friendship between the army and the people of Han and Tibet is expressed in this drama, which is a realistic theme (Liu, 2019). Although the themes of the dance dramas *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock* and *The Railway to Tibet* are different which are located in different time and space environments, they have a common feature in costume and body language, that is symbolization.

Augustine, the philosopher from Hippocrates (354–430 AD), is frequently seen as the originator of semiotics, having proposed the theory of semiotics initially (Chandler, 2017). The fathers of modern semiotics are usually referred to as Saussure and Peirce, who created the linguistic model and the logico-rhetorical model respectively. Semiotics is the knowledge of the signage process, which explains what a sign is and what it does. There are numerous applications of semiotics in the arts, literature, drama, costume, linguistics, and other disciplines. It affects information interchange and dissemination in any sector since it is a tool for communication and information dissemination (Deely, 1990, p.105). Drama performance is a complex system of symbols that includes acting, costume, lighting, props, makeup, etc. These symbols can be divided into surface or deep symbols, carrying rich meanings and symbolism in theatre performances. By applying semiotic principles to the study of dance drama, scholars can illuminate the rich complexity of dance theatre as a mode of expression, communication, and cultural production. Costumes and body language in dance drama act as visual signifiers, conveying meaning through their symbolic representation, cultural significance, narrative relevance, and interaction with other semiotic elements. They engage the audience in the process of visual interpretation and contribute to the overall aesthetic and communicative effect of the performance. The symbols of Costume and body language are fundamental to character-shaping in dance drama, and their interaction, including style versus body language, fabric versus body language, pattern versus body language, and costume structure versus body language, has a great impact on the shaping of character images.

Objectives

This study uses semiotics to analyse the interactive relationship between costume and body language in Chinese dance drama, as well as the methods and paths of their integration. The specific objectives of the research are as follows: (i) to analyse the symbolic characteristics of costumes and body language in dance drama performances, (ii) to analyse the connection between dance body movements and costumes, (iii) to expound the method and performance image of combining costumes and body language, (iv) to inspire performer, designer and director of Chinese ethnic dance drama creations.

Methodology

This analytical study on “costume and body language” provides a new perspective on the creation of Chinese ethnic dance dramas. This study investigates and analyses the costumes and body language in the dance dramas *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock* and *The Railway to Tibet*, which share the common characteristics of “nationality” and “symbolisation”, and serve as clear examples of symbolic expression in Chinese dance drama. After watching these plays, the semiotics of costume and body language are classified and summarised. These are all based on the portrayal and narrative of the dance drama. Semiotics is the study of symbols and their meanings, applied in content analysis frequently (Babbie, 2020). It involves image symbols, indexical symbols, and symbolic symbols. Semiotic analysis theory offers several instruments for the examination of narrative discourse dimensions, among other theories and methodologies for analysing various kinds of texts (Kiran & Kiran, 2011). Symbols exist in various elements in a dance drama, and these elements interact to form a complete dramatic image and story. Semiotic analysis is employed to

analyse the character creation methods of Chinese dance dramas based on costumes and body language. Through the understanding of semiotics, costume and body language with signals through processes that contain the meaning of the script.

Body Language in Dance

Dance and dance drama are the performing arts that attend movement, and the movement itself is a medium that can transfer aesthetic and emotional concepts from one person's consciousness to another. Dancers are able to convey the most intangible emotional experiences through movement, thereby making the audience resonate with them (Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 22). The movement of the actors in the dance constructs the body language in the dance, which is provided by the creators of the dance and by the individual performers of the dance. Comprehending the intention and emotion behind this body language is an effective method of understanding the meaning of the play itself.

Dance body language is a silent language composed of facial expressions, gestures, postures and movements. It was produced earlier than language and has a longer history. In addition, the dancer's body contours and appearance are also potential expressions of body language. Dance body language is the refinement and sublimation of daily body language, which is more aesthetic and cultural than daily body language. (Liu, 2001)

The carrier and intermediary of dance is the human body (Wigman, 1966), in which the hands, feet, torso, facial features and head are crucial media for the expression of dance body language, and the movement of these media constitutes the material of dance.

Hand dance: i.e. hand dance form consisting of fingers, palm and wrist, at the same time, contains movements made by the forearm, elbow, upper arm and even shoulder (Liu, 2016, p. 7). It is a kind of symbol that uses the shape of the hands to express meaning, and it is a dynamic image. Dance is an imitation of nature, and the gestural movements in dance are a faithful transmission of inner activity (Noverre, 1966, p. 9-20). Hand dance as a representation of art can be divided into stereotypical representation and emotional representation. Stereotypical representation can be called artistic sign language, they have obvious real meaning. Emotional representation is a kind of hand dance expression that is more in-depth than the stereotypical representation. The shape and motive force are usually to evoke some emotion, rather than simply to reproduce objects or phenomena in daily life. For example, the dance drama *The Peacock* created by dancer Yang Liping uses hand dance to express the happy state of the peacock, and this symbolic expression is often reflected in dance and dance dramas.

Foot dance: refers to the dance postures performed by the lower limbs including the hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, toes and toe tips, and is divided into expressive dance steps, illustrative dance steps and decorative dance steps (Liu, 2000). Expressive dance steps are mainly used to express the character's emotions, personality, thoughts, etc. For example, in the dance drama *Peacock*, in order to show the peacock's courtship, the leg movements of the Dai dance are used: kicking the leg back, crouching with the knee bent when the footfalls to the ground, and crotch swinging; explanatory dance steps are usually used to show the outward objective objects faced by the characters; decorative dance steps are two different types of dance steps: conversion and transition.

Torso Action: the somatic, since it views human beings and all living things not only from the point of view of the structure of the body but also from the function of the body, which is movement (Hanna, 1993). The human torso is the essential area of expression because it can guide and control the movement of other parts of the body. The primary forms of expression are: straight and upright, curling up and bending, ups and downs and twisting, contact, back leaning and flapping.

Facial features and head: as a micro body language in body language that is irreplaceable in expressive expression, and they allow viewers to read micro-expressions, immerse themselves in them, and empathise with them. Charles Darwin argued that facial expressions were a beneficial product of evolution and that many species therefore have emotions (1955). The essence of emotion is the sum of changes in physical

state, so dancers can convey emotions such as joy, sadness, indifference, friendliness, etc. through facial expressions. The head potential language mostly presents as neutral static and rotation to change, forward and backwards, up and down, skew and side twist. Synced movements convey the character's personality, circumstances, etc.

All types of body language in dance and dance drama contain semantics and have symbolic characteristics. In *Reading Dance* (1986), Susan Leigh Foster reveals how the meaning of movement is created through detailed semiotic analysis.

There are a variety of ways in which dance movements create meaning based on the study of index signs, image signs and symbolic signs. The choreographer transforms mundane events into symbolic actions, and the audience seeks allegorical meaning from the actions. The body, as a carrier of meaning, provides the best version of the subject, expressing dramatic content. Here the movement of the body acts as an act of writing, which removes the body from the status of a physical object and gives it the capacity for intelligence and passion (Foster, 1986).

A system of symbols in which finite characters can represent observable body parts in motion or at rest (Zelinger, 1979). These characters (symbolized gestures and movements) can be seen as phonemes in language. A signify gesture allows the audience to fully identify the text or category of the dance performance, and even accurately understand the specific time, place and connotation embodied. Because each type of dance (or dance drama), such as Chinese ballet, Chinese national dance drama, and modern dance drama, has its own unique symbolic gesture and movement. These codes interact with the costume codes to form a complete dance (or dance drama) character.

Costume for Dance

Dance, in addition to movement, covers its surroundings, including the environment in which it takes place and develops, the objects used in the performance, and even the costumes of the dancers (Filippou et al., 2003). Costume is one of the vital elements of dance performance, which is the extension of body language and emotion of dancers, and even laid the foundation for the narrative of dance.

Dance costumes are the clothing that performers wear in dance and dance drama: costumes, shoes, hats, and other accessories, comprising hand-held props as well (Han, 2004, p5). The functions and characteristics of dance costumes start from the essence and characteristics of dance and use different creation methods to convey the content and meaning of dance. It is an essential medium for creating the external characteristics of the characters in the play. As a part of stage art, dance costumes should exist under the constraints and control of the corresponding dance form and body language. They must conform to the characteristics of the characters. In addition, they ought to express the characteristics of dance art, and the connotation of dance is highlighted and emphasized.

Dance costume needs to allow for the dancer's body, as well as trained technical skills, and it is freer than everyday dress (Cargill, 2010). Meanwhile, dance costumes are also characterised by formal beauty, which is mainly reflected in the decorative and patterned nature of the costumes (Hu, 2021, p. 176). Furthermore, the concrete embodiment of the shape characteristics of dance costumes is abstract and exaggerated. The exaggeration of dance costumes primarily refers to the change of costume styles and the exaggeration of iconic images, while the high abstraction and exaggeration of dance costumes are determined by the environment of the characters, the emotional rendering, the conflict of dramatic structure and other elements in the dance works.

There are five primary functions for dance costumes: practical roles, reproduction, organizational, symbolic, and associative. The practical functions of dance costumes are embodied in changing the body and helping to find the stage image, in addition to the comfort of wearing life clothes and paying attention to the craft. The reproduction function primarily refers to the reproduction of the environment, identity, and personality of the character, and changes in the relationship between the characters. The organizational function of dance costumes is major reflected in the distinction between characters: highlighting the

protagonist, and displaying the identities or personalities of other characters in discrete chunks. The symbolic function of dance costumes is reflected in the ability to render the atmosphere, reveal style, and highlight the theme. The associative function includes the recollection of past experiences and the identification of the era, history, and character. For example, “Lingzi” will be associated with opera by the audience, and the tube skirt will be associated with Dai ethnic costumes.

As an indispensable medium for shaping the image of characters, dance costumes cannot be separated from the symbolic expression of costume, whether it is the embodiment of costume style or function. A costume sign is a symbol unit composed of multiple costume codes, which is determined by the uniqueness of its signifying relation rather than the uniqueness of its signifier or the signified (Barthes, 1983, p.213). The costume sign, which is composed of a syntax of components, is a full syntagm. Through the signifying process of the signifier and signified of costume signs, dance drama characters and even narratives will be understood. The costume symbol system includes but is not limited to the style, fabric, pattern and structure of the costume. These symbols will be combined with body symbols to form complete character symbols, laying the foundation for the embodiment of the dance drama.

Results and Discussion

The Connection Between Costume and Body Language

Dance has long used costumes as a stimulus and setting element in the choreographic process, to shape characters and to support a particular artistic aesthetic or style (Dean, 2011). The interaction between costume and body language is crucial in the presentation of theatrical works, especially dance dramas. Fully understanding the relationship between costume and body language can provide a solid foundation for actors' performances, and understanding the body as just the support of costume, or just the tool of the body, is obviously too one-sided. Additionally, there is the idea of looking at costumes as a tool to help performers create gestures for their characters (Imparato, 2019). The visual effects and symbolism of costume are often more popular than the physical experience and feel. Many costume designers continue to view their work as objects that contain instructions for meaning and predefined movements to determine the performer's movements (Imparato, 2021). However, this view is insufficiently broad. It is best to approach the connection between costume and body language dialectically.

Costume is an element of performance, and also a material object that an actor may use to express their intentions. It can not only appear in the production process of a performance but also become a generator of performance and transmission through design (Bugg, 2013). Costume exists in every process of preparation, presentation and reception of a performance. It carefully completes the dramatic performance with the performer, revealing the relationship between costume, body and human beings. As a form of performance, costume records history, states of being, and previously unimaginable futures in the temporary space of performance (Barbieri, 2017). It can guide movement, define the location and structural relationships, and of course reveal characters.

Body language is the medium for the survival of costume. Only through the expression of actors' body language can costume show its inherent meaning. The costume will only exist as a display and will cease to be functional value when the human body (body language) is absent. The interaction between costume and body language can provide the spectator with a direct, visual and concrete connection with the character, which is largely based on the principle of semiotics.

The study of semiotics in a dance context necessitates analysing symbols such as themes, body language, costumes, props, lighting etc. in relation to dance (Backer, 2007). Kinesthetic codes (the time and space of body movement) are the main way of generating meaning in dance, but costume symbols also play an important role in dance performance (Bennett, 2008). Costume codes are essential elements in performance (Kwakye-Opong & Salifu, 2015). Study costume and body language through semiotic methods, study the interlocking structure of meaning in costume and body language, and how costumes make sense through the actors' bodies and movements. Semiotics connect an actor's performance, costume and audience together to form a complete communication chain of character image. Costumes and body language can

convey decoded messages. At the same time, costumes help shape the character by affecting the movement of the body, and body language can express the character's emotions by changing the shape of the costume. It can be said that the symbolic interaction between them constitutes the dynamic image of dance, which directly affects the character shaping and dramatic narration of dance drama.

The relationship between dance costumes and body language means that the structure and style of dance costumes must pay full attention to the range of dance movements; the combination of the external form of dance costumes and dance postures; and the restrictive relationship between dance costume materials and dance postures. The existing forms of dance and dance costumes are complementary and indispensable. The dance body improves the expression effect through the dance costume, and the dance costume adds lustre after the interpretation of the dance body language. The two integrate with each other to form a complete artistic image.

The Integration of Costume and Body Language

This part will analyse the interaction and integration between costumes and body language in dance drama. Through the investigation of the dance dramas *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock*, and *The Railway to Tibet*, semiotics, including the index, the icon, and the symbol, will be employed. The index relations are based on the causal relationship, and the index relation is used to analyse the reasons for the formation of costume modelling and body language in the creation of dance drama characters. Iconic relations on shared common similarities, and can be used to analyse the similarities of costume and body language in character creation, as well as the ways and methods to form similarities. Symbolic relations on account of common essence will be used to analyse how the dynamic intention of dance is jointly expressed through costume and body language.

In theatre performances, the semiotic code of costume styles, fabrics, and patterns can accurately express the image of the character (Aronson, 2018). These costume signs and body language integration mainly include costume style and body language, fabric and body language.

Style and Body Language

The style of costume, also known as costume modelling, consists of two parts: the external shape and the internal structure (Zhu, 2015). The external shape factor of the costume refers to the external contour of the costume also known as a silhouette (Chen et al., 2018), which can provide people with a very intuitive visual experience and has symbolic characteristics. When integrated with the dance body language, it can better reflect the modelling of dance imagery. As an illustration, The Qinglv's costume style in *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* is based on the traditional Chinese dress "Qu Ju Shen Yi", which combines the shape symbol of mountains and rivers. The combination of the costume style and the actor's "squat" movement reflects the dance image of the mountain. In addition, the combination of sleeve shape and the action of "sleeve-swinging", "sleeve-throwing" and "sleeve-raising" in the costume express the magnificent momentum of the mountain (see Fig. 1). The costume styles and body postures in *The Railway to Tibet* are clearly distinguished, and the symbols of ethnic and professionalism reflect the characters of the Tibetan people and railway soldiers in the national purpose language of the play (see Fig. 2).



Figure 1. The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting (Zhou & Han, 2021).



Figure 2. The Railway to Tibet (Wang, 2018).

In addition, the combination of costume style and body language can better reflect the anthropomorphic dance form. For example, in *The Peacock*, the costume design integrates the natural image of the peacock. At the same time, the dancers showed their longing and cherishing of love by imitating the living habits and gestures of peacocks, such as frolicking, jumping, flaunting their tails, shaking their wings and dragging the wings. The integration of dance costumes and actors' body language restores the shape of the peacock, enhances the artistic expression of dance, and gives people endless space for reverie (see Fig. 3). This type of integration has the characteristics of symbolic index relations. Through the costume style and body language, the dance image can be effectively understood to contain the meaning, including time, identity and surroundings.



Figure 3. The Peacock (Yang, 2022).

Opposite to the external silhouette is the internal structure of the costume, which is the specific method to realise the style modelling, to solve the attachment relationship and the space setting between the fabric and the human body (Wan, 2009, p. 9). Dance drama is a movement art that uses the human body as a tool for artistic expression and fully uses every part of the dancer's body to perform. Therefore, the costumes should adapt to the extreme movement of the human body in the structural design of the costumes (Adams, 2023). In addition, as far as geography is concerned, Chinese dance culture has differences from north to south, with the northern dance having the artistic characteristics of boldness, while the southern dance is mostly the expression of tenderness (Shang, 2023). Dance with different characteristics have different requirements on the structure of dance costumes.

Limbs and waist are one of the most important media in dance performance. In order to improve the dance effect, the shape of dance costumes must be reasonably designed according to the ergonomics and the amplitude of dance movements. For example, the use of side vent/split, sleeveless, baggy sleeves, billowing skirts and other design methods to adapt to the amplitude of body movements. For example, the Shu Sheng (student) dress in *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* incorporates a slit design on two sides of the costume, which is designed to allow dancers to complete large leg movements: Duan-tui, Gong-bu step (bow stance), Duo-bu (stamping step), etc., as well as the movement of Dian-bu Fan-shen (rolling initiated from Dian-bu posture) (see Fig. 4). It can be seen that the dance body language and the structure of dance costumes complement each other and integrate with each other. Dance is rhythmic, and the dance costumes should match the rhythm.



Figure 4. The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting (Zhou & Han, 2021).

Fabric and Body Language

The concept that there is an interaction between body and fabric is extraordinarily crucial, the body is not a static, independent, closed unit, nor costume is an independent, inanimate material projecting specific symbolic meanings (Grew, 2019).

Fabric is the basic vehicle that makes up a costume (Lu et al., 2004), the interaction with body language can be explored by looking at both the material and pattern of the fabric. For dance costumes, the fabric of dance costumes and dance body language are closely related. They are interacting and interrelated in terms of meaning, shape, movement, etc. Dutch textile artist Maria Blaisse utilises the potential of materials in movement and develops performances more directly within this relationship, creating forms that interact with the dancer's body (Bugg, 2016). The body is then transformed from an identity-less substance into a deeply meaningful dance image that incorporates costume into the process of formation. Fabrics have a great impact on the shaping of dance body language, especially the selection of fabrics for the neck, chest, waist and sleeves can influence the style of dance body language (Fu, 2023). And different types of dances (dance dramas), and different dance postures on the costume fabric requirements are different, only the fabric and body language, dance art style match, in order to better reflect the theme of the dance and dance imagery. Such as, the image of the peacock in *The Peacock* uses the yarn fabric to reflect the feathers of the peacock, while the dancer's rotation, back kicking and other movements to show the image of the peacock playing and flaunting its tail (see Fig. 5). This reflects the indexical character of the fabric and body language signs.



Figure 5. The Peacock (Yang, 2022).

In addition to their indexical semiotic qualities, fabric and body language are also reflected symbolically. Fabric embodies the gender, status and other symbolic symbols of the character through the texture and type of fabric, and the same goes for body language. When the symbolic meanings of the two symbols match, the expression of the character image is considered successful. For example, the Qingly's clothing fabric in the dance drama *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* selects the traditional Chinese "ramie" that itself has the deep and shallow lines of the thousands-miles of furrow. Combined with the sleeve dance movements of the dancers, it shows the magnificent dance image of the mountain in the picture. *The Railway to Tibet* combines fur-made Tibetan clothing with slow dance steps to represent the cold winter (see Fig. 2).

In addition to the integration of fabric material and body language, the interaction between fabric pattern and body language also plays a very crucial role in dance drama performance. Fabric pattern design (surface design for fabric) refers to the decorative pattern shown on the fabric (Zhang, 2012, p. 2), that are expressed on fabrics mainly through colour release and the use of resists, printing and transfer, fibre manipulation, fabric manipulation, embroidery, and embellishment (Irwin, 2015). Its biggest feature is closely around its bearer which is the human body, the same pattern distribution in different parts of the human body has a very different effect (Wang, 2015, p. 7).

Costume is understood through visual communication (Schumm et al., 2012), as is fabric. It is an important part of dance costume design, which can directly attack the theme of dance (dance drama). When the costume pattern is combined with the dance movement, it can present a dynamic artistic image to the audience. The costume patterns follow the changing body language of the dance, presenting different visual symbols. For instance, in the dance drama *The Peacock*, the dancer's costume is painted with a pattern of peacock feathers. Through the rhythm of the dancer's body, the audience is reminded of the scene of a dancing peacock, which enhances the artistic appeal (see Fig. 5). At the same time, the interaction between the pattern and the body language forms the signification of the symbol. Moreover, the meaning of the pattern is not fixed (Wang, 2016), and the meaning changes when the pattern interacts with the body language. In addition, clothing patterns can also guide the actor's body language, thus designing novel character symbols.

Conclusion

This study is based on the concept of costume and body language as an interactive symbolic creation process, emphasizing that costume is an extension of the body, and the perception of the relationship

between the body and costume is itself a creative act. The costume is the activator of dance body language, and the body language created by the body in a dance drama performance is influenced by the relationship established between the body and the costume. In addition, body language is the medium through which a costume transforms from a static substance to a dynamic image. The interaction of body language and costume is an activity, not just a static state.

Exploring the relationship between costume and body language in dance drama made me notice that costume is not only the decoration of the body, and body language is also not only support to costumes. The interaction between them promotes the narrative and emotional expression of dance drama. In order to achieve this understanding, I investigated dance drama *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, *The Peacock*, *The Railway to Tibet*, and observed how costume and body language combine to create a character using symbolic images. This study led me to conclude that the relationship between body and costume is unique, relying on dance drama themes and script images to provide them with creative codes. Costumes and body language use the principles of symbolism to create codes that match the meaning of the play and express them to the audience. In this creative process, costume and body language are an inseparable whole. No matter how much meaning or intention is contained in the costume, what fabrics, styles, patterns and structures are used, all dance images displayed on stage are guided by the unique relationship established between the body and the costume. Similarly, if a dance drama is interpreted solely through body language, it will not be enough. It will remove the extension of the movements and the meaning of the expression through costumes. While the various bodies and costumes explored in this question have meaning in themselves, through the processes by which they interact and transform each other, we can trace the development of these meanings and make a more complex and comprehensive evaluation of the body in costume (Grew, 2019).

Each character image is generated from the relationship between costume and body language. As discussed in this study, semiotics can help understand the relationship between costume and body language. Although dance costumes and dance body language belong to different research categories, there are some words that can be transformed into each other between them. Only the close combination of dance costume modelling and body language can sublimate the artistic image in dance drama performances. Dance costumes cannot exist alone without dance body language. The two complement each other and are indispensable. Only by merging with each other can a complete dance artwork be formed. To introduce and support the method of combining costume and body language in dance drama creation and practical teaching in dance drama education, including in the future development of the field of costume design and dance drama practice research.

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