

The Functions of Montage as a Means to Facilitate the Poetic Expression of Dance in the Film *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land*

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Abstract

The film medium enhances the essential “emotion” of dance, and the poetic beauty and value in the film, a *Tapestry of a Legendary Land*, are highlighted through the unique presentation of dance aesthetics that this art form offers. This not only enriches the audience’s sensory experience but also evokes emotional resonance, creating a unique emotional connection. If the “crossover” and “breakthrough” acclaim of the dance drama *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* is rooted in the high degree of cultural identification between painting and dance, and represents the ultimate embodiment of the poetic gene of traditional Chinese culture, then the film elevates the poetic expression of dance through its visual medium. The poetic resonance between painting and dance also stimulates the potential for poetic expression in film, achieving an excellent pursuit of poetic cinema. The homogeneity between dance poetics and the “montage” technique in film allows dance to be presented on screen in a way that creates imagery and achieves the ultimate expression of poetic genes, thus creating a romantic aesthetic space that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. Integrated into the art of film, a *Tapestry of a Legendary Land* uses the screen and camera as mediums to bring the dynamic body expression of dance to a broader audience, pursuing an aesthetic work that matches contemporary sensibilities with traditional art.

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1.Introduction

A Tapestry of A Legendary Land the dance-poetry drama is translated as *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, and in this article the movie translations are used to avoid other interpretations. Since its release on October 1, 2024, the film has garnered significant attention and acclaim. During the National Day holiday alone, the film achieved a total box office revenue of over 36 million yuan, with a Douban rating exceeding 8.0. It has become a hot topic and focal point in the dance, film, and cultural circles. Using light and shadow as the medium, the film reinterprets the mysteries of the famous painting *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*. The original dance drama, which once topped the box office, now makes impact on the film market. The film successfully integrates the poetic expressiveness of dance with the realistic

narrative of cinema. By employing cinematic montage techniques, it transcends the traditional perception of dance as “good at expressing emotions but weak in storytelling”.

Both film and dance share the principle of using body imagery for self-metaphor. From the construction of aesthetic imagery to the creation of artistic images, the creative psychology of artists and the reception psychology of audiences always undergo montage-like deduction and computation. Montage, originally a term in architecture meaning “assembly” or “construction”, has been extended to the realm of film art as a method of editing and combining shots. It has since been widely used in visual and theatrical arts to refer to the intentional and artificial splicing and editing of time and space. In film, montage combines and matches shots to create logically coherent and smoothly transitioning narratives, generating new meanings. The success of the film at the box office is attributed to the director’s integration of dance’s expressive strengths with the unique characteristics of film lenses. The film presents the painting *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* to the audience through montage techniques to unify the characters of Ximeng, the viewer of the painting, and the “Qinglv” imagery on the screen. The interweaving of ancient and modern, real and imaginary, not only depicts the hardships of Ximeng’s creation on the painting but also innovatively presents Song Dynasty culture. In terms of dance expression, the widely accepted characteristic of dance in the art world is its “strength in expressing emotions but weakness in storytelling.” In contrast, film, through its lens transitions and editing techniques, excels at recording and presenting narrative content.

Many scholars believe that dance employs montage techniques for creation and presentation, arguing that the “transition” in dance language is essentially the same as the “editing” in montage, or that the “transition” in dance language originates from montage techniques (Zhang X., 2023). However, dance, as an art form mediated by the body, inherently combines both explicit and implicit expressions. The interpretation of its meaning is similarly characterized by ambiguity and polysemy, which are important traits of dance as a form of body expression.

The integration of dance and montage techniques is fully utilized and expanded in dance films. “The reason why dance can significantly enhance the artistic charm of a film is that film also possesses a bodily dimension in its composition.” It is evident that the interaction between montage techniques and dance can broaden the expressive space of dance itself. Dance employs the rich language of camera shots to achieve transitions across multiple scenes and timespaces, while film leverages the bodily nature of dance to expand its spatial and temporal dimensions. In the film, the technique of “parallel montage” is used to interweave the modern timespace of the viewer of the painting with the Song Dynasty timespace of Ximeng, creating a sense of tension and rhythm. The opening scene, with a panoramic sweep of the long scroll of the “Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains,” shifts from the viewer observing the painting to Ximeng painting inside the room, immersing the audience in Ximeng’s world of creation. The film replaces the spatial-temporal dialogue created by the rotating stage in the original dance drama with long tracking shots, achieving a more intuitive and natural connection between scenes that better meets the audience’s viewing needs.

1. The Creative Expression of Imagery in *A Tapestry of A Legendary Land* under the Montage Mindset

The Aesthetic Conceptions of Landscape, Space, and Time... Chinese literati have placed their emotions in landscapes, integrating their feelings into artistic expressions through poetry, painting,

and music, which have become eternal cultural imprints in history. The author of the painting *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*, Ximeng, with his keen perception, infused his love for landscapes into his brushwork, creating a vast and dynamic world within the limited space of his painting (LYU, 2022). As Professor Lv Yisheng emphasized in his interpretation of the film, *A Tapestry of A Legendary Land*, the deep cultural connotations of the painting and the film stem from the mountains and waters, the plants and boats in the painting, and the movements in the dance. This is a process of “extracting meaning from imagery.” The “meaning” and “imagery” pursued in landscape painting are created through lines and ink, evoking imaginative spaces. The dance drama captures the poetic trait of “dance expressing aspirations,” using the multidimensional forms of the body in space to interweave the present with the past and the painting with craftsmanship, achieving a transformation between painting and dance.

The imagery in film art, under the influence of montage thinking, is created by overlaying empty spaces with narrative and emotional shots to produce a unique aesthetic effect. This layering is not random or disorderly; rather, it is logical and structured, serving the aesthetic needs of film art and contributing to the thematic and imagistic development of the film. As the renowned director Sergei Eisenstein observed, montage is more than just a film technique, it is a mode of artistic thinking. He believed that “montage is not unique to film art, it is widely used in painting, sculpture, performance, music, and literature.” Montage, as an editing technique, is extensively employed in film art. By combining and juxtaposing different shots, it not only accurately reproduces the audiences’ psychological rhythm but also interweaves time, space, and environment. In the film, this approach has led to creative development, presenting a profound beauty that is intuitively felt.

In the dance drama, the imagery of “mountains,” “waters,” “yin and yang,” and “time and space” is constructed through various structural strategies of dance, creating a virtual space on the stage. In the film, these are presented on the screen through the overlay and editing of real scenes captured by the camera, achieving the creation of artistic conception. The “Qinglv” in the dance drama uses the dynamic of the body bent at a 90-degree angle, known as the “Qinglv waist,” combined with changes in space and rhythm, to create a sense of steep mountains. In the film, the use of panning and close-up shots aims to showcase the expressive space created by the integration of dance and film. When the camera shifts from a solo dance to a group dance, the corresponding zooming in or out highlights the transformation from one to many, presenting the grandeur of the mountains and the “liveliness” of “Qinglv.” “Qinglv,” originally a traditional Chinese landscape painting technique using azurite and malachite as primary colors, in the film, it creates a deep and majestic mountain range through clean and precise movements. At the end of the film segment, the editing also shows a sense of space: the intercutting of “Qinglv” with scenes of brush-making and Ximeng’s painting breaks the spatial limitations between the painting and Ximeng’s world, prompting the audience to reflect on “Qinglv.” In the film, the mountains, waters, and paintings are all presented through real shots, achieving a harmonious balance between the virtual and the real.



Figure 1 “Qinglv”

The relationship between “Ximeng,” “the viewer of the painting,” and “Qinglv” is constructed through common montage techniques such as close-up and wide shots, horizontal tracking shots, and the use of long takes and editing techniques. These methods create a virtual space where the three elements exist in harmony. The flowing sand symbolizes the ever-changing time and space, and there will eventually be a moment and a place where they meet. This kind of time-space-breaking treatment has already been presented in the stage version of *A Tapestry of A Legendary Land* through stage settings and the handling of duet dance segments. When the dance form encounters the cutting and transformation of the camera, the effect of time-space transition is enhanced, making it easier to immerse the audience in the artistic space.

2. The Ultimate Poetic Expression of Dance’s Expressive Space through Film

Montage Techniques

Dance, which primarily uses body language as its expressive form, combines functionality and conciseness in its expression. This form of expression is driven by human emotions and life experiences, possessing a unique internal dynamic. It is precisely this unique linguistic characteristic that enables dance to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, embodying a poetic nature that speaks directly from the heart. It can be said that poetic expression is deeply integrated into the DNA of dance, becoming one of its essential attributes. In the film, the character “Ximeng” spins rapidly and runs alone on stage. These large-scale bodily movements vividly convey his inner passion and burst of inspiration during the creative process, breaking through the limitations of real space and time. This poetic meaning constructed through body rhythm and spatial dynamics is one of the reasons why the work *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land* has “broken through the circle” and received high attention in the field of literary and artistic creation.

The poetic nature of film is achieved through the aesthetic effects of estrangement and heterogeneity created by camera language, highlighting a sense of “vagueness,” “polysemy,” and “ambiguity” (Wang & Yang, 2019). If montage, as an editing technique, “breaks through the limitations of time and space and expands the space for expression and imagination,” then the artistic characteristics of film are thereby presented. In the film, the opening sequence’s transition between “real and virtual” and “ancient and modern” time-space is realized through the integration of the horizontal scroll painting’s unrolling and the camera’s horizontal movement. This guides the audience’s gaze along the scroll, creating a poetic visual effect through the camera’s movement. This effect enables free movement in the temporal dimension and arbitrary extension in the spatial concept, achieving a poetic mode of expression where “expressing aspirations” and “evoking emotions” are intertwined. The film uses montage techniques to interweave emotional and narrative shots, expanding the expressive space of dance’s poetic nature.

3.1 Emotional shots enhance the interplay between lyricism and narrative, stimulating the audience’s associations and empathy

The montage effect presented by emotional shots is achieved by stacking or connecting individual shots, thereby creating a formal interplay between scenes and lenses to produce a lyrical effect. The poetic nature of film encompasses the functions of “expressing aspirations” and “evoking emotions,” which trace back to the historical lineage of ancient Chinese poetry. The connection of body movements and spatial transitions can present relationships across different

times, stages, and even historical periods. This is the fundamental means by which dance expresses emotions and ideas, and it is clearly homologous with “montage.” Some researchers have proposed that the origins of “montage” techniques may come from dance art. Whether this view is accurate is not important. What matters is that this perspective links the artistic essence of film and dance through “montage,” revealing the root cause of the dance drama, *The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting* emergence in the film market.

The film builds on the foundation of dance and uses montage editing techniques to fully express Ximeng’s obsession with traditional Chinese painting and his dedication to art. In the dance drama segment *Listening to the Rain*, the multimedia stage effects of mountains (water lines and droplets) combined with extreme body movements such as running, jumping, gliding, turning, and flipping create a scene of “mountains and waters in the rain” and convey the sentiment of “delighting in mountains and waters.” In the film, actions that express admiration and love for nature, such as “embracing,” “caressing water,” and “embracing the sky,” are captured through overhead shots, wide-angle shots, and rotating shots. These techniques break the distance between the audience and the stage performance, allowing the audience to deeply feel the aura and complex emotions of the literati and artists like Ximeng. Every movement and expression of Ximeng on screen can be closely observed and savored by the audience, stimulating their associations and empathy.



Figure 2 Clip: *Listen to the Rain*

The intertextuality of dance and film in terms of emotion and sentiment breaks through the constraints of real time and space, creating an artistic space-time filled with infinite possibilities. This expands the space for expression and unleashes imagination, ultimately generating a poetic structure. In the film, “Qinglv” is endowed with life, drawing the audience into a landscape of mountains and waters to experience a cultural spiritual force. Under the interplay of 360° panoramic shots and close-up and wide-angle shots, the audience is immersed in the long river of time and space. This corresponds to the line on the screen: “I have been waiting in the painting for a thousand years, wishing to fulfill the connection of time and space with my brilliant self.” This is the value of “Qinglv” in the painting, and also the moment when “Qinglv” represents Ximeng to achieve a dialogue across time and space during the exhibition of *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*.

3.2 Narrative transitions strengthen the interweaving of structure and plot, creating a tense atmosphere

Constructing easily understandable paragraphs and scenes through the decomposition and combination of shots is the primary function of narrative montage. This technique complements emotional shots, serving the coherence and structuring of the film’s content. The intrinsic nature of dance as “expressive of emotions” determines the virtuality and ambiguity of its body language.

Dance often uses bodily spatial shaping and shifts in center of gravity to present a resilient and tenacious life state. It employs spatial resonance and choreographic changes among duets, trios, and group dances to create an atmosphere of leisurely elegance, forming a narrative structure that advances the plot and develops conflicts. In film, the portrayal of states, emotions, and atmospheres is achieved through the combination and connection of individual shots, forming a relatively complete temporal and spatial structure to express and present the film's content. The tense atmosphere in the film is created through the interplay of dance's lyricism and montage techniques, achieving the ultimate expression of the space for meaning.

The viewer of the painting observes and appreciates the scroll, thereby dreaming into Ximeng's painting space. The film is different from the presentation method of the dance drama. In the dance drama, the multidimensional forms of the body in space interweave the present with the past and the painting with craftsmanship, achieving a transformation between painting and dance. The two characters express the viewer's pursuit of Ximeng through the same actions but at different frequencies. The transitions in lighting colors and stage settings indicate the different spaces they occupy, laying the foundation for the creation of *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*. In contrast, the film employs panning shots and cross-cutting techniques. Through the alternating appearances of Ximeng's illusions and double images, the audience is immersed in Ximeng's psychological environment, which is characterized by intense passion and deep contemplation, as well as persistence and anxiety. This allows the audience to feel and understand Ximeng's complex emotions.

"In the second year of the Zhenghe, Ximeng was eighteen years old and had repeatedly presented his paintings, yet they were not yet of high quality." The segment *Hard Thinking* repeatedly emphasizes scenes of Ximeng starting to paint, discarding his work, and pondering deeply. Through movements such as flipping, leaping, and throwing, it expresses his inner conflicts and frustration. States like leaning, reclining, and collapsing reveal Ximeng's complex and melancholic emotions. In the film, a dissolve technique is used to show Ximeng repeatedly appearing on the palace stairs to present his paintings. This repetitive and layered approach naturally immerses the audience in Ximeng's predicament of repeatedly offering his paintings without success, allowing them to experience his pursuit of artistic excellence.

The inherent montage mindset of dance combined with film montage techniques brings new inspiration to the rhythm and dynamic design of dance through the editing strategies of time and space in film montage. Meanwhile, the delicate body language of dance compensates for the abstractness in emotional expression of film montage. Dance conveys complex relationships and emotions through interactions such as clinging, pulling, and lifting between people, immersing the audience in intense feelings and allowing them to truly experience emotions that are either passionate or profound. This is the poetic nature of dance expressed through the most vital of human bodies. The combination of these two allows dancers to clearly present complex content through body, greatly expanding the expressive boundaries of dance and enriching its creative methods and forms of expression. This has also become one of the important factors for the film to achieve both high box office success and critical acclaim. The deconstruction and reassembly of dance movements by film lenses guide the audience to understand the imagery of green and blue landscapes from different perspectives, and to deeply explore the cultural connotations behind the painting *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*, experiencing the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture. While appreciating beauty, the audience can also profoundly grasp the spiritual core of artistic creation, achieving a sublimation from sensory enjoyment to cultural contemplation.

4. Montage Expands the Poetic Aesthetic Space Where History and Reality

Romantically Intersect in the Film *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land*

“Poetry” is the “romance” of traditional Chinese culture, a kind of “romantic gene” embedded in the bones of the Chinese people. The “poetry” that film pursues is created through the construction of space, while the “poetry” of dance is determined by its body language characteristics. Dance art presented on the stage arouses the audience’s perception of bodily “kinesthesia” and allows them to appreciate the poetic charm of dance (Kou, 2022). The “poetry” constituted by the interweaving of dance and film is a more profound and intuitive artistic conception.

The poetic expression in the dance drama has been widely recognized. The intersection of historical culture and contemporary reality in the drama has ignited the “romantic gene” embedded in the Chinese spirit. The film successfully creates this poetic and romantic space. Through the enhancement of montage techniques, the poetic qualities of dance’s body language freely link history and reality. The charm of the Song Dynasty and contemporary emotions are romantically intertwined in the film’s lens, excavating a unique aesthetic space.



Figure 3 Clip: *Singing about Silk*

The famous Song Dynasty painting, *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*, contains hidden implications. In this landscape scroll, there are no prominent figures, leaving endless room for imagination. “Because he does not make human figures the main subject of his painting, if you look closely, there are many tiny white figures in *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*. They are actually in the mountains, embodying the concept of harmony between man and nature,” as described by the director Han Zhen in an interview. It is evident that the creation of the film is inspired by the interpretation of the Song Dynasty culture and aesthetics hidden behind *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*. Seal carving, silk weaving, stone grinding, brush making, and ink making are all the crafts behind the presentation of landscape painting in the Song Dynasty. Both the dance drama and the film use these as connecting threads to weave together the complete expression of the work. The film makes up for the limitations of stage art expression by shifting between landscape shots, scroll shots, and close-ups of characters. In what appears to be disorderly editing, it explores the interweaving of history and reality, pursuing an extremely romantic aesthetic expression. The viewer of the painting explores the entire scroll but does not find Ximeng’s mark among the more than 30 seals, leading to the creation of the seal carving scene *asking the Seal*. In the film, the camera constantly switches between the seal carver’s hands and tools, with special effects shots inserted to present the actions with a sense of rhythm and strength more clearly to the audience.

Compared to the profound and imaginative virtual space created by dance, the landscape scenes in the film evoke a tranquil and serene atmosphere, which aligns with the inner peace pursued by Song Dynasty literati. In the film, Ximeng stands on the mountaintop, overlooking the continuous mountain ranges and flowing rivers. The mountains rise and fall in various shapes; some soar like towering pen holders, while others lie horizontally like dragons. Mist swirls in the mountains, resembling gently floating veils, giving a sense of ethereal mystery. The entire scene is devoid of excessive noise and splendor, featuring only the tranquility and harmony of nature. This arrangement of scenes conveys the sentiment of Song Dynasty literati seeking spiritual solace in the mountains and waters.

The integration of characters and real landscapes presents a wealth of scenery inspired by famous Song Dynasty paintings, aligning with Song aesthetics and serving as the primary means of conveying Song cultural charm in the film. The film's set design is characterized by low saturation, natural lighting, and minimalist lines, with most of the scenery derived from well-known Song paintings. For example, the scene of playing the zither under a tree in the Imperial Academy of Painting is inspired by the Song Dynasty painting *Listening to the Zither*; the view outside Ximeng's window is taken from Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song Dynasty's *Crane Picture*; the stone bridge and waterfall that the stone collector walks over, as well as the silk weaving workshop in Jiangnan, are all recreated based on the shapes found in these paintings. These settings naturally prompt the audience to "slow down" their pace, immerse themselves in the film, and step into the scroll to experience the beautiful integration of the dancers' bodies with the rivers and mountains.

The historical scroll of the film unfolds slowly, naturally drawing the audience's gaze as they follow the camera to witness the dancers' agile figures constructing a majestic green and blue landscape, fully displaying the unique aesthetic interest and elegant temperament of Song Dynasty culture. "Ximeng," "Qinglv," and several craftsmen are all the foundations for the survival of *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* to this day. Isn't the boundless imagination stirred up by the viewer of the painting while perusing the scroll precisely a "compensation" for the regrets of ancient times? Isn't it an idealized and romantic expression? Just as at the end of the film, the viewer of the painting stands at the end of the display case, waving to Ximeng in a dialogue across time and space, which is like a fusion of souls. The film ultimately breaks through the temporal and spatial boundaries between the stage and reality, creating an illusory and dreamlike artistic space-time intertwined with reality and illusion. The audience seems to travel through a thousand years, immersing themselves in the prosperous cultural scene of the Northern Song Dynasty and profoundly experiencing the profound heritage of Song Dynasty culture.

5. Discussion

Within the theoretical framework of film semiotics and narratology, montage techniques can be regarded as the core mechanism for constructing the expressive system in film art, playing a decisive role in the generation and transmission of cinematic meaning. In terms of the grammatical rules of shot sequencing, continuous montage adheres to the linear logic of time, arranging shots in a sequential order to achieve coherent narrative exposition. This is particularly typical in many realist documentaries, where the continuous recording of characters' daily lives is used to construct a complete and authentic narrative text, with the natural flow of time serving as the connecting thread.

Dance uses movement vocabulary, rhythmic patterns, and postural shaping as its fundamental

expressive symbols. It organically arranges and combines these elements within the linear flow of time and the multidimensional structure of space, thereby constructing an artistic expression system with distinct subjectivity and expressiveness. The transitions between different movement modes and the shifts in rhythmic levels are akin to the syntactic rules and semantic logic of shot sequencing in film montage theory. The unique rhythm and tempo of dance movements, combined with the free manipulation of time and space in film montage, can create entirely new artistic effects.

The integration of dance and film montage has also completely shattered traditional modes of expression. Dance, empowered by the language of film lenses, breaks free from the limitations of the stage space, allowing it to showcase its charm in a much broader realm. Meanwhile, film incorporates the artistic expressiveness of dance, moving away from the singular mode of traditional storytelling and creating a unique audiovisual language. The film through the fusion of dance and film montage thinking, not only brings Song Dynasty culture into the public eye in a novel form but also resonates deeply with audiences on the level of artistic reception. It is a bold innovation in the field of art, providing highly valuable new ideas for artistic creation. It encourages creators to break conventions and continuously explore the infinite potential of artistic expression, propelling art towards a more diverse and rich direction.

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