

A Case Study on the Integration of Jiangnan Culture into the Choreography of Jiangnan Dance Works--Taking the Dance Drama "Century Of The Fan" as an Example

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Abstract

This Relying on its unique geographical location and long historical precipitation, Jiangnan culture has formed a very distinctive "near business, near water" humanistic style, which has become an important source of inspiration and choreographic elements for Jiangnan dance to condense and carry forward the regional culture. Jiangnan dance is a part of Jiangnan culture, in order to better show the cultural landscape of the Jiangnan region, dance choreographers in-depth regional picking, digging danceable elements at the same time, launched a bold imagination, creating a vivid and real dance masterpieces in Jiangnan. This paper focuses on the main line of "research on the integration of Jiangnan culture and spirit into the choreography of regional dance works", and takes the dance drama "Century Of The Fan" as the object of analysis, and analyses it from various dimensions such as "excavation and application of materials", "selection of materials and expression of the dance drama", etc. It also focuses on the development of the dance drama "Century Of The Fan". From the dimensions of "excavation and use of materials" and "selection and expression of dance drama", it clarifies that Jiangnan culture and spirit, after being organically integrated into the choreography of the dance drama through craftsmanship inheritance, philosophy of life, and the pursuit of Chinese national values, reflect the beautiful virtues of Jiangnan people's simplicity, kindness, gentleness and resilience, and provide references to the ideas and reference value of the choreography of regional dance works.

In recent years, with its deep cultural heritage and unique flavour, Jiangnan dance has gradually become a craze in the dance world and popular culture. Firstly, the Jiangnan dance represented by "Remembering Jiangnan" and "Roadstead Bridge" has made a big splash on the stage of Spring Festival Gala, and then there are many excellent works such as "Jiangnan" and "Lanxu", etc., and the audience's imitation on social media has triggered a heat of "Jiangnan Dance". Jiangnan Dance refers to the dance with typical Jiangnan cultural attributes, regional characteristics and poetic aesthetics, which is nurtured and grown up within the Jiangnan region to reflect the folk customs, social customs, history, culture and life of Jiangnan (Yuan, 2022). Since ancient times,

the Jiangnan region has been known for its ability to sing and dance: the White Dry Dance, which originated in the Wu region of Jiangnan (present-day Jiangsu province), was popular during the Six Dynasties period, and Xishi, who was famous for her clog dance, was also a dancer from the south of the Yangtze River. (Ma,2022).In addition, many unique dance forms have been passed down in the folklore. Nowadays, Jiangnan dance has once again attracted public attention and formed a craze, which cannot be separated from the revival of traditional culture and the enhancement of cultural self-confidence under the national policy of cultural and artistic empowerment. The focus of Jiangnan dance creation lies in the integration of Jiangnan culture, thus, this paper takes the dance drama "Century Of The Fan" as an example, focusing on the importance and role of regional culture into the choreography of regional dance works.

1.Overview of the regional culture of Jiangnan

Jiangnan culture is a regional cultural concept which, after a long period of historical precipitation and the collision of many cultures, eventually formed a unique cultural form with Wu-Yue culture as the main body. The Wu culture region is an area with Taihu Lake as the main area, Shanghai and Nanjing as one end and Hangzhou, Wuxi, Suzhou, Jiaxing, Changzhou and Huzhou as the branches, while the Yue culture is based on part of Fujian as well as Ningshao area as the main birthplace.(Lü, 2022).Thus, the Jiangnan culture is a collection of cultures encompassing a wide range of cultures, with the regional cultures of the Taihu Lake basin and the Yangtze River Delta basin as the main body.(Liu,2009). As people living in the same area share similar living customs, religious beliefs and aesthetic character, the Jiangnan region, under the influence of other regional cultures, has also formed the regional cultural characteristics of "close to business" and "close to water" internally and externally.In terms of "near water", Jiangnan and water symbiosis, most of the towns built on water, with a unique subtropical climate, for the development of agriculture in the area provides superior natural conditions, which also gained the "Jiangnan Water Town" " Fish and Rice Country". On to clothing, food, housing and transport, down to the folk customs, all aspects of life in Jiangnan have a close connection with the water, thus generating a distinctive Jiangnan "water culture". The main connotation of Jiangnan water culture refers to the synthesis of various cultures created by water as a carrier in Jiangnan, which not only contains the spiritual and cultural heritage of the people in Jiangnan related to water, but also reflects the relationship between water and the people in Jiangnan in the political, economic and cultural aspects, and is the crystallization of the labour wisdom of the people in Jiangnan. (Zheng & Li,2023).Under the nourishment of "water culture", the people of Jiangnan have gradually formed a gentle and delicate character like water, which influences the generation of dance style in Jiangnan.

In the aspect of "near business", the superior geographical environment of Jiangnan has produced rich natural resources, which has laid a certain material foundation for the development of commercial cities in Jiangnan, while the growing population and the convenience of water transport also stimulate the development of the commodity economy in the region to a certain extent. Jiangnan region, the water system is constant, developed transport, the city with the benefit of water transport gradually rise, and increasingly prosperous. For example, located in the

Yangtze River system on the Jiangling, Ezhou, Anqing, Jiujiang, Xuancheng, Jinling, Yangzhou, Jiangyin and other cities, around the East China Sea, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Taizhou, Mingzhou, and so on, as well as the East China Sea, the Yangtze River, the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal and the Qiantang River at the confluence of the Yangtze River, Yangzhou, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Changzhou, Shanghai, Shaoxing and other Jiangnan city groups, its developed commercial economy are all benefited by the convenience of the rapid water transport.(Peng, 2022).Commercial trade was thus carried out frequently.

Regional choreography is deeply influenced by the local humanities and geography, and carries strong regional cultural characteristics, which is the key to differentiate regional dance from other dances, and also one of the keys to promote the role of regional culture. (Tan, 2022).

Choreography is rooted in folk culture. The geographical and cultural characteristics of Jiangnan, close to business and water, have profoundly influenced all aspects of dance creation in Jiangnan. The dance drama *Century Of The Fan* was produced by Zhejiang Conservatory of Music and premiered from 4 to 6 December 2024 at the Grand Theatre of Zhejiang Conservatory of Music. The chief director Li Jiawen led the teachers and students of Zhejiang Conservatory of Music to take the 100-year history of the famous Wang Xingji Fan Village as the background for the creation of the dance drama, which is based on the softness and beauty of water, and the wisdom and goodness of the people of the south of the Yangtze River, so that some of the clips in the dance drama present the gentle and subtle, light and agile style of the characteristics of the south of the Yangtze River. At the same time, through the creative method of blending feelings with scenery and people with scenery, the dynamic beauty of "people, painting and scenery" in the Jiangnan water town is shown to the extreme, realising the social role of art works in solidifying the regional culture, preserving, inheriting and promoting the regional culture.



Figure1 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

2.From Figuration to Work: Material Selection and Creative Expression

The key to the success of dance creation lies in the selection of materials, and the important basis for the selection of materials lies in whether the dance subject matter is danceable or not. In the process of creation, choreographers should give full play to their own imagination and bring the danceable elements of the material into full play, so as to realise the artistic creation of the material and make it a part of the dance drama. Dance theatre, as a large and comprehensive

genre in the art of dance, determines that the choice of materials should be more diversified and comprehensive, so as to express the choreographer's creative ideas. The creation of regional dance theatre should take the display of regional culture as the premise of creation. After the choreographer understands the local cultural characteristics in depth, he or she can enrich the content and form of the work by comprehensively excavating the representative materials in the region and constructing the narrative language of "ethnicity",((Yu & Huang,2024). so as to finally form a fine dance drama with the attributes of regional culture.

2.1 Selection of material for dance theatre originating from Jiangnan culture

Under the nourishment of Jiangnan culture, Hangzhou as a geographical area has nurtured many art forms and crafts, and "Hangzhou fan" is one of them. It became famous in the Southern Song Dynasty, and entered its heyday in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and with its exquisite craftsmanship, it has a long history, witnessing the prosperity and changes of the Jiangnan region. (Rong, 2024).

The dance drama "A Fan for a Hundred Years" takes "Hangzhou fan" as the theme of creation, not only because of the rich cultural connotation of Jiangnan behind it, but also because the prop "Hangzhou fan" itself has a great dancability. First of all, as a common prop in dance, the fan has long broken the single functional role of utility and has been endowed with aesthetic value, and because of its strong plasticity and easy to dance, it is favoured by dance choreographers. There are nearly 20 kinds of fans in the dance drama "A Fan for 100 Years", and different shapes, forms and functions of the fans can often bring different performance effects through opening and closing, flipping, waving and other actions. For example, the "Wheat Stick Fan", which is woven from wheat and rice stalks, is characterised by its lightness and breathability. In the theatre, it is used in conjunction with clean dance movements, and the movement and lightness of the body is interpreted in the waving of the fan. For example, when the court fan is used, the dancers' posture becomes light and delicate, subtly creating the elegance and charm of the Hangzhou fan. When using the folding fan, which opens and closes freely, the dancers' moves speak of the rich cultural heritage and poetic beauty of Jiangnan. In addition, the fan in the dance drama is not only used as a prop, but also a symbol of the region. Behind the fan is the excellent traditional Chinese culture, condensing the aesthetics of the dance with a distinctive Jiangnan flavour. The choreographer of the dance drama takes the national non-legacy "fan-making technique" as the entry point, and builds up the narrative language of the whole dance drama. The story takes place in the "West Lake Fan Village", which extends the fan from a material carrier to a spatial carrier, linking up multiple dramatic conflicts. The first layer is the love story of the hero and heroine who travelled through time and space, and the "West Lake Fan Village" at different time points is placed in the same space, which contrasts the emotional entanglement of the two men in a more obvious and deeper way. The second layer is the rise and fall of the "West Lake Fan Village", which sells fans to make a living, and the "commercial war" between the two fan villages in the middle of the story expresses the family and national feelings beyond personal emotions, and at the same time, the "close to business" of Jiangnan culture is also expressed. At the same time, it also perfectly presents the quality of "close to business" in Jiangnan culture, and realises the regional cultural expression of the art work in the process of creation. It can be seen that choreographers and

directors in the process of regional dance works should closely combine with the local culture, excavation of danceable elements and materials, and cleverly transformed and developed, in order to create a unique regional cultural attributes of the dance theatre masterpieces.



Figure2, Figure3 Century Of The Fan 《一扇百年》

2.2 Use and Expression of Jiangnan Cultural Elements in Dance

When mentioning Jiangnan, people always think of the Jiangnan water town, small bridges and flowing water, the beauty of the West Lake, the lotus pond, as well as lush forests and bamboos and other scenery, as if the people of the water countryside appeared in their minds the hard work of the people, the beautiful scene of endless life. These scenes provide a rich source of material for choreographers to create their works. Dance is an art form derived from life, and naturally, it will inevitably be influenced by the natural environment and human factors. (Li, (2015). Therefore, regional dance creation should make full use of the local characteristics of the material, the daily life of the scene to be artistic re-creation, so that the viewers have a sense of immersion when enjoying the work.

The dance drama *A Fan for a Hundred Years* incorporates rich and colourful elements of the regional culture of Jiangnan, the most obvious of which is the dance language with typical folk dance rhythms of Jiangnan. In the dance section "*Fragrant Fan Hiding Spring*", the dancers' small tiptoe steps and backward steps, together with the opening and closing of the fan, in the rapid movement and feminine posture, highlight the beauty of Jiangnan's lively, meaningful and elegant rhythm. At the same time, through the movement of shoulders and hips to drive the body twisting, turning, twisting and tilting, so that the dancers' physique is presented as an s-curve. This series of movements transforms the women's bodies into fans, bridges, and the water of the West Lake, peeping into the humanities of Jiangnan while presenting the unique natural scenery of Jiangnan. In the dance section "*Boat Song*", the use of Jiangnan cultural elements is more direct, male actors wearing straw raincoats, hats, holding bamboo poles, using the fan as the body of the boat, and bamboo poles as paddles, simulating the beautiful scene of leisurely rowing on the West Lake. At this time the fan has more imagery, sometimes it represents the water waves with layers of ripples, sometimes it is a lotus flower in full bloom, sometimes it becomes a fluttering butterfly... The reproduction of each of these objects together weaves a vivid picture of the Jiangnan water town, bringing the audience infinite reverie and at the same time bringing the regional quality of the Jiangnan culture near water to its fullest potential.



Figure4, Figure5 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

2.3 A vivid reproduction of the poetic culture of Jiangnan

Jiangnan culture is a poetic culture, which is naturally connected with the poetic aesthetic character of the southern people themselves. The 'aesthetic-poetic' function in the life nature of the Chinese nation has gained a healthy ecological environment for growth in Jiangnan. In addition to their own pursuit of beauty, the people of Jiangnan also instinctively enjoy a transcendent life: playing the qin and singing, and spending their days in leisure. (Liu, 2008). his kind of material and spiritual abundance has naturally given birth to the people of Jiangnan with the character traits of warmth and delicacy, industriousness and simplicity, and formed the poetic character of "transcending utilitarianism and following nature". (Liu, 2010). The dance drama "*Century Of The Fan* of Fan" has the shadow of Jiangnan poetic culture everywhere, which is expressed in the choreography design. The choreographer and director of the dance drama use the counter-type device to reconstruct the scenes of the West Lake Fan Village and Fan Alley, and combined with the arched bridge modeling to create the beautiful mood of the bridge and the mountain scenery as a whole, and the West Lake under the moon, so that the audience can appreciate the natural scenery of the beautiful South of Jiangnan, but also feel the warmth and emotion of the people of the South of Jiangnan, and stage a moving story one after another. Stories. In terms of characterisation, the perseverance and tenacity of the heroine Sun Yue'er is particularly valuable in the portrayal of women's image, as she has the desire for a beautiful love, the responsibility for the mission of inheritance, and the boldness and courage in the midst of the national crisis. The three-dimensional portrayal of the characters shows the free and unrestrained pursuit of life of the people of Jiangnan in an all-round way. In addition to the attention to detail in the choreography and characterisation, the poetic nature of the play is also reflected in the narrative expression of the dance movement vocabulary, most notably in the segment "Deep Lotus Root Flower", where the love between the male and female protagonists is unfolded, and the emotions are pushed to a climax in a duet dance. Though facing the obstacle of time, the two of them still hold on to their inner feelings, reflecting the romantic pursuit of love and persistent perseverance in the poetic culture of Jiangnan. Thus, the dance drama "*Century Of The Fan*" is created against the background of regional culture, combined with the delicate emotional lines of the characters, showing the joys and sorrows of the people of Jiangnan in the historical changes, while at the same time breaking away from the narrative of tragedy, and curing and healing the hearts of every audience with the warmth of humanity.

To sum up, as a typical representative of contemporary Jiangnan dance theatre, *Century Of The Fan* is a vivid interpretation and inheritance innovation of Jiangnan culture. It is not only a breakthrough in the precipitation, condensation and perseverance of regional culture, but also an excellent embodiment of integrating the flexibility of regional culture into artistic creation and retaining its historicity. A fan builds the aesthetic expression of Jiangnan culture and conveys the uniqueness of Zhejiang non-heritage culture.



Figure 6, Figure 7 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

3. From Works to Imagery: Multiple Presentations of the Spirit of Jiangnan

Dance is a vivid carrier of regional culture, and the dances of different regions show the unique cultural appearance of the region in many ways through unique body movements, typical cultural symbols and deep emotional expressions. However, with the development of the times and the impact of multiculturalism, regional dance creation cannot be confined to a single cultural expression, but should be more broad-minded to see the common issues of all mankind. Nowadays, choreographers and directors of dance dramas have begun to integrate regional cultural symbols into their cultural imagination, creating contemporary dance dramas that carry forward the spirit of the times, unite the will of the nation, and reflect the common values of the contemporary Chinese nation. (Yu & Huang, 2024). The Jiangnan region has formed a unique regional cultural spirit and values in the long-term historical and cultural accumulation. The dance drama "*Century Of The Fan*" shows the spirit of Jiangnan in multiple ways through the creative technique of seeing the big in the small, which makes the dance drama glow with the spiritual expression beyond the regional culture.

3.1 A New Interpretation of Beautiful Love

The expression of the spirit of Jiangnan in the dance theatre "*Century Of The Fan*" is multi-layered, of which the first layer is the touching love story of the hero and heroine. Different from the simple male-female love of previous dance dramas, this dance drama adds two dimensions of time and space to the emotions of the two, staging a love story that travels through time and space. The play breaks the traditional linear narrative of time and space, allowing characters from different eras to intersect through a symbolic door. Sun Yue'er, a female worker in the West Lake Fan Factory, travels through the centuries because of an ancient black paper fan with gold sprinkles, and meets Wang Xing, a young shopkeeper of the West Lake Fan Factory at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and the two of them are sympathetic to each other because of their bond with the fan, and there is a "time" contradiction that they can't cross in a relationship that doesn't seem to have any conflict. In the seemingly conflict-free relationship, there is an unbridgeable contradiction of "time". Frequent time and space transitions bring their emotional

experience into different stages of heartfelt feelings when they first meet, bonding when they get along with each other, pain when they are separated, and joy when they are reunited. The unsuccessful ending of the show makes the audience re-examine the relationship with anticipation and regret, which in turn triggers new thoughts and realisations. At the end of the play, he and she are separated by two spaces and apertures, but with the "black paper fan" as the link of the wheel of the year, they keep the same behaviour in the "real time" on the stage. They are "separated", but also "co-temporal"; seemingly "distant", but even more "tacit". It seems to be "distant", but it is a "tacit understanding".(Fan, 2024).The dance drama *"Century Of The Fan"* is a new interpretation of beautiful love from a unique perspective of space and time, building a model of love that transcends space and time and connects artisans' hearts, and making the connotation of the spirit of Jiangnan more three-dimensional while displaying the vitality of traditional culture in the present day.



Figure 8 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

3.2 Inheriting the century-old spirit of ingenuity

"Choose a fan, decide a life." The dance drama *"Century Of The Fan"* is based on Zhejiang's traditional non-heritage fan-making techniques, captures the danceable characteristics of the fan, and focuses on the 100-year rise and change of Wang Xingji's Fan Village, with a wonderful national cultural duel - "Fan Fight" inserted in the middle. The national friendship is poured into the story, making ordinary people no longer ordinary, and in front of the nation and the country, everyone has a responsibility. The power of countless small people has already transcended the regionality of culture and has begun to have universal value. The perseverance of two generations, what has changed is the people, what has remained unchanged is the love. The process of fan making, such as "breaking material", "opening material", "cutting gold", "sprinkling gold", etc., reflects the persistence of craftsmen for decades. The "black paper fan" is the result of decades of perseverance by the craftsmen. The introduction of "black paper fan" is the embodiment of the spirit of contemporary innovation. What has been passed down for a hundred years is not only the skill of fan-making, but also a spirit, which represents the national spirit of perseverance and rising to the challenge that has been engraved in the genes of the Chinese people for many years. With the development of society and the improvement of productivity, some old crafts and artisans that are not compatible with modern life are gradually replaced by mechanised production methods, but the spirit of craftsmanship will never go out of fashion. In the creation of

dance dramas based on regional cultural symbols, choreographers and directors should not only stay in the figurative expression of a certain culture, but also go beyond the region and the times to explore the deeper and more reflective meanings and values of regional cultures, and to find the spiritual codes in dance dramas that are not limited by the times and can be passed on from generation to generation.



Figure 9, Figure 10 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

3.3 Individual expression of the fan as life

Throughout the development of the times produced such as "*Only This Green*", "*Jinggang - Jinggang*" and other influential art masterpieces, they are no lack of people and life in-depth excavation, vivid portrayal and true portrayal. In particular, some of the art works that focus on the direction of ordinary people's lives and the status quo of their existence are often more touching to the audience. The dance drama "*Century Of The Fan*" seems to tell the story of an artisan, but in fact it tells the life story of every ordinary person. The opening and closing of the fan is just like the ups and downs of life. The opening of the fan is just like everyone's life is always exploring and transcending to the outside, and the closing of the fan to the inside represents our continuous introspection in the journey of life. Life is moving forward in such a struggle and reflection. The whole process is full of laughter, sadness, regret and touching. The dance drama "*Century Of The Fan*" breaks the routine and shows the hardship and difficulty of the creation of literary and art workers in a witty and humorous way, so that every audience can find their own shadow in the dance drama, and the determination to keep striving for the achievement of their goals. The dance theatre is a small but big drama that rises from the "small self" to the "big self". The first half of the dance theatre shows the traditional craftsmen's perseverance and inheritance of the non-heritage culture, while the second half expresses the sense of mission of the nation and the country. The first half shows the traditional craftsmen's perseverance and inheritance of the non-heritage culture, while the second half shows the sense of mission of the nation and the country. Because of this, the connotation of the dance drama can directly hit the audience's heart, and the choreographer's creative thinking can be passed on to everyone who appreciates it. From this, we learnt that when creating dance works based on

regional culture, it is necessary to jump out of the personal emotion of the nation and use a larger perspective to express the common emotion of all human beings, in order to push the local culture to a larger and farther platform.



Figure 11 *Century Of The Fan* 《一扇百年》

4. Summary:

"Hangzhou fan ancient rhyme, Jiangnan elegance endless". Dance is the artistic reproduction of life, which means that the creation of regional dance theatre is deeply influenced by the local humanities and geographical environment. The dance drama "*Century Of The Fan*" is based on the culture of Jiangnan, and in the process of giving full play to regional cultural resources, choreographer Li Jiawen starts from the perspective of danceability, chooses to create a regional cultural symbol of Zhejiang's traditional non-heritage technology "Hang Fan", and upholds the concept of fan as the beauty of the creation of the traditional culture combined with contemporary aesthetic ideals, injecting a new era of traditional Jiangnan dance. It combines traditional culture with contemporary aesthetic ideals, injecting new vitality into the traditional Jiangnan dance. From this, we can see that "the breakthrough of regional dance needs to go beyond mere imitation of forms, and be based on the refinement of the cultural core and contemporary aesthetic transformation, so that regional themes can have a cultural value beyond the region. This creative path of "from the local to the global" provides a methodology for the diversified development of Chinese dance - encouraging each region to form an ecological ecology of "harmony and difference" based on its own cultural genes and through the creative transformation of dance language. encourage all regions to base on their own cultural genes, through creative transformation of dance language, to form an ecological pattern of "harmony and difference", and to jointly build a rich picture of Chinese culture. (Yu, 2017).

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