



# Research on the Exchange of Chinese and Foreign Dances during the Republic of China

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**Abstract.** During the period of the Republic of China, China was a period of intense change and continuous transition, and a period of unprecedented exchange and collision between Chinese and Western cultures, which provided a broad space for the exchange of Chinese and foreign dance arts.

The exchange of Chinese and foreign dances in this historical period includes dance education, performances by Chinese and foreign dance companies, and social and entertainment dance. This has had a profound impact and change on Chinese dance, innovated the form of dance expression, changed the concept of dance art, and helped the modernization of Chinese dance education. It not only promotes the progress and openness of Chinese social thought, but also is a bright spot in the history of the common development of Chinese culture and world culture, and provides inspiration for the exchange and development of contemporary dance.

**Keywords:** Republic of China period; Dance; Sino-foreign exchanges;

## 1 Introduction

The Republican period was an important historical stage in China's modern history, during which many social, political, and cultural changes took place. As an art form with strong cultural connotation, dance has also undergone a series of changes and development during this period, and gradually formed the characteristics of diversity, inclusiveness and openness.

During this period, China's dance education system was constantly improved and perfected. At the same time, Chinese dancers and dance educators have also actively studied and borrowed from foreign dances, enriching the forms of dance expression in China, opening up a new path for the development of dance art, and having a profound impact on dance creation and cultural exchanges in later generations.

Domestic research papers on dance in the Republic of China period, including Liu Qingyi's "*Chinese and Foreign Dance Cultural Exchange in the Republic of China*"<sup>1</sup>. In terms of dance education research, Zhou Xueting's "*Research on School Dance Education in the Republic of China*"<sup>2</sup> and Xiao Lu's "*Research on Dance Education in Jinling Women's University during the Republic of China*"<sup>3</sup>; Research related to Tianjin

includes Ma Xiaofei's *"Dance Venue Economy and Entertainment Space: A Study of Modern Tianjin Dance Venue"*<sup>4</sup>. Research monographs on dance in the Republic of China: Liu Qingyi's *"General History of Chinese Dance: Volume of the Republic of China"*<sup>5</sup> describes the development of dance in the Republic of China; Tong Yan's *Studies on Dance in the Republic of China*<sup>6</sup> reveals the important influence of dance in the Republic of China on contemporary dance art.

To sum up, this study is based on newspapers and archival materials, and studies the dance exchange in the region during the Republic of China, hoping to fill the research gap.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the main forms and ways of dance exchanges between China and foreign countries, including dance education, dance group performances, entertainment and social dance, etc., by combing the social, political and cultural background of the Republic of China. To explore the significance of the collision between dance art and history, and to explore its contribution and enlightenment to the development of Chinese dance. This paper summarizes the experience and enlightenment of Chinese and foreign dance exchanges, and puts forward suggestions for the development of modern Chinese dance.

## 2 The Background of Chinese and Foreign Dance Exchanges During the Republic of China

China during the Republican period marked the beginning of a period of historical transition, accompanied by a violent collision of many social ideas and cultures. After the Xinhai Revolution, Shanghai, Tianjin, and other coastal cities that were the first to open ports became the best windows to absorb world civilization, providing a broad space for the exchange of Chinese and foreign dance arts.

First of all, the political environment during the Republic of China period provided the possibility for the exchange of dance art. The change in the political system led China to actively absorb Western ideas and culture, including the art of dance. With the increase in overseas students and foreigners, Western dance forms such as ballet and modern dance began to enter China and interact with traditional Chinese dance.

Secondly, the economic transformation of the port city has promoted the exchange of Chinese and foreign dance arts. With the rapid development of industry and commerce during the Republic of China, the urbanization process accelerated, especially in large cities such as Shanghai and Tianjin, forming a certain scale of urban culture. The urban middle class is full of curiosity about new things, has strong consumption power and needs to appreciate foreign culture and art, which provides a broad social foundation for the spread of dance art. In addition, with the development of media, newspapers, magazines, films, etc. have become emerging communication channels, which have effectively promoted the dissemination and exchange of Chinese and foreign dance arts.

Thirdly, the opening up of culture and education has promoted the deepening of the exchange of dance art between China and foreign countries. During the Republican period, the education system began to adopt Western models and contents, and dance

education was gradually introduced into the school system. Some visionary educators and dancers began to devote themselves to the reform and development of dance education, and tried to combine traditional Chinese dance with Western dance to explore the path of dance education suitable for China.

### **3 The Forms and Ways of Dance Exchanges Between China and Foreign Countries During the Republic of China**

#### **3.1 School Dance Education**

With the emancipation of cultural thought and the broadening of international horizons during the Republic of China, advanced intellectuals represented by Cai Yuanpei advocated a more scientific and systematic education model, thus promoting the development of dance education. This change is not only a reform of the traditional education model, but also a positive response to international cultural exchanges.

In 1912, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China issued six school orders to set up gymnastics classes in schools, and stipulated that "girls' middle schools can be exempted from military gymnastics and can be replaced by dance games."<sup>7</sup> Shanghai Diligent Book Co., Ltd. published in 1923 as a physical education book series for primary and secondary school teachers and physical education schools. Three major categories are introduced, consisting of 38 dances. The first category is "fitness dance"; The second category is "folk dance"; The third category is "excellent dance", and the book also introduces about thirty steps.<sup>8</sup> Folk Dance refers to the folk dance of the local people in Europe and the United States, with simple movements and cultural characteristics of various ethnic groups in Europe. In 1934, he published "European and American Folk Dances" as a textbook for school dance classes.<sup>9</sup> Excellent dance was introduced from the United States, and the basic hand and foot positions of classical ballet were composed into a soothing and elegant rhythmic dance, with physical training as the main purpose. Following the folk dance and excellent dance, the Interpretative Dance was brought back to China by Chinese Gao Zi after studying in the United States. Xingyi Dance is an anthropomorphic performance that simulates the shapes and characteristics of animals and plants in the form of dance. Later, Xingyi Dance developed from a dance program to a dance drama, such as Li Jinhui's "Sparrow and Child" was choreographed and directed in the form of Xingyi Dance.

Whether it is the dance content in the school physical education curriculum or the dance school outside the school, a large number of Western dance forms and teaching methods have been introduced, and the exchange and integration of Chinese and foreign dance education models have greatly enriched the content of dance education and improved the quality of teaching. Many schools and dance institutions have hired foreign teachers or sent Chinese teachers to study overseas, learn and learn from the advanced dance education concepts and techniques of the West, and cultivate a group of dance talents with international vision and professional skills.

### 3.2 Performing arts by Chinese and Foreign Dance Companies

In exploring the historical context of Chinese and foreign dance exchanges during the Republic of China, visits and performances by dance groups are important ways to promote cultural mutual learning and artistic sharing.

The visits and exchanges between Chinese and foreign dance groups and artists became more and more frequent, reaching their peak in the 20s of the 20th century. During this period, foreign dance groups and individual artists from Russia, the United States, Japan and other countries were invited to China, and their performances not only showed the dance art of their respective countries, but also brought visual and spiritual enjoyment to the Chinese audience, and improved the public's artistic aesthetic ability and cultural quality.

In 1925, the American Dennis Sean Contemporary Dance Company toured Tianjin, Beijing, Shanghai and other countries. Similarly, Chinese dance artists have also participated in performances and competitions overseas, introducing the charm and beauty of traditional Chinese dance to the world. Many novel works that integrate Chinese and Western dance cultures are born in this kind of cultural collision and mixture, which not only enriches the connotation of world dance art, but also opens up a new path for the future development of dance art. This two-way exchange has greatly enhanced mutual understanding and respect between China and foreign countries, and promoted the common development of dance art.

### 3.3 Social Entertainment Dance

During the period of the Republic of China, Western-style entertainment and lifestyle gradually entered the cultural life of the open port city through the spread of the concession, providing an opportunity for the spread of ballroom dancing. Ballroom dance, also known as ballroom dance, is a ballroom dance performed in the form of a male and female dance, "which is a civic dance that was originally popular among the nobility and the folk dance among the peasants gradually merged with the gradual industrialization of European society after the 17th century, and adapted to urban life." Ballroom dance also includes a variety of standard dances, such as foxtrot, waltz, polka, tango, etc., as well as various popular dances, such as Charleston, Jitba, disco, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Balls were usually held at the banquets of celebrities and dignitaries, which became a ritual part of the social interaction of the upper class at that time. Some celebrities and dignitaries set up "dance halls" in their homes to hold balls and banquets for guests to socialize. The relationship between artistic performance and state power does not exist only in the impact of the state's will on the general population, but can also play out specifically between performers and the actors and dance companies that actively assert their national identity. Dance is used as a means of voice in these countries, with constant political negotiation and interaction that includes topics such as identity, status, hierarchy, and resistance.<sup>11</sup> Tianjin began to set up for-profit dance halls, such as the Ping An Hotel Ballroom and the National Hotel Ballroom. As of 1947, there were as many as 31 dance clubs registered by the Tianjin Dance Venue Association at that time. The market development direction of dance venues seeking independent operation

actually reflects the market trend of dance activities as an emerging entertainment activity, which has developed in the direction of popularity.<sup>12</sup>

In the press, you can see numerous advertisements for dance halls, as well as the spin-off of private ballroom dance classes. Dance venues and dance training institutions have played a role in the promotion of Western dance in China. The spread of social dance in China has liberated the masses from the ideological confinement of feudal society and directly participated in dance. Dance is no longer an object to be watched, but everyone can participate in it, and it has become a form of mass entertainment by expressing emotions through the body.

## **4 The Influence and Change of Chinese and Foreign Dance Exchanges During the Republic of China**

### **4.1 Standardize Dance Education**

The problem of localisation of dance culture in the process of transmission, or The phenomenon of "culturalisation" and modernity in the process of cross-ethnic, cross-regional and cross-cultural exchanges, collisions and cultural negotiation of a particular music and dance culture.<sup>13</sup> During the Republican period, the introduction of foreign dance culture promoted the construction of Chinese dance education and theoretical system. Dance education arose with the help of physical education in schools. American dance sports teachers, Chinese students studying in Japan and the United States, and dance sports teachers trained by China's normal physical education schools have played an important role in the development of dance education in schools. This process not only accelerated the development of Chinese dance art, but also provided theoretical support for the independence and self-innovation of Chinese dance art, and laid a solid foundation for later dance creation and teaching practice.

### **4.2 Innovative Dance Forms**

During the Republican period, the introduction of Western dances such as ballet and modern dance not only enriched the types of Chinese dances, but also gradually changed the creative concepts and expressions of Chinese dancers. Begin to dig deeper and reflect on the essence and value of traditional Chinese dance. They are no longer satisfied with simply imitating or introducing foreign dance forms, but strive to absorb the techniques and expressions of foreign dance art on the basis of retaining the essence of traditional Chinese dance, and create a new type of modern Chinese dance. These works not only broaden the boundaries of expression in dance art, but also make dance art itself a bridge between different cultures. The process of migration of dance as a cultural form or expression in a global context has led to significant shifts in the nature of community dance, cycling through time and space to create complex and distinctive local practices.<sup>14</sup>

### 4.3 Changing the Concept of Dance Art

In terms of artistic concepts, the Chinese dance world during the Republic of China began to abandon the strict hierarchical system and rigid traditional norms, and instead pursued individual expression and emotional expression. Influenced by Western modernism, Chinese dancers began to try to combine personal emotions with the destiny of the country and the nation, and reflected the social reality and the voice of the people through dance, which not only broadened the theme and connotation of dance, but also made dance an art form with a strong sense of social responsibility and the times. The dance works of this period can clearly see that the expression of personal emotions, the concern for social reality, and the theme of the exploration of human nature became increasingly apparent. This transformation has made Chinese dance art closer to real life, more able to touch the hearts of the audience, and improved the social participation and cultural value of dance art. Modern dance emphasizes the expression of individual emotions and the freedom of body language, a concept that contrasts sharply with the collective and normative nature of traditional Chinese dance. It is this contrast and difference that inspires innovative thinking in the Chinese dance world.

## 5 Conclusions

The exchange of Chinese and foreign dances during the Republic of China was not only the dissemination of dance art forms and concepts, but also a deeper reflection of the historical process of common progress and development of Chinese and Western cultures in the collision and integration. It promotes the emancipation of Chinese society, not only enriches the aesthetic experience and artistic expression of the Chinese people, but also stimulates people's reflection on the traditional constraints and the pursuit of individuality emancipation. At the same time, it has also contributed to the modernization process of Chinese dance education, which has begun to develop professionally and systematically, cultivated batches of professionals for the inheritance and innovation of Chinese dance art, and promoted the comprehensive development of Chinese dance art.

During the Republic of China, the phenomenon of "learning from the East to the West" in the dance world, that is, learning the concepts and techniques of modern dance from the West and localizing them, is of great significance to the development of contemporary dance. It enlightens us that in today's globalization, dance art still needs to keep an open mind and learn from foreign excellent cultures, but at the same time, it must also adhere to the characteristics and core values of its own culture, so as to realize the diversified and personalized development of dance art.

To sum up, the exchange of Chinese and foreign dances during the Republic of China period has provided us with rich inspiration. By drawing on historical experience and inspiration, we can promote the healthy development of the art of dance, make it an important bridge for cross-cultural communication, and contribute to the diversity and richness of human culture.

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