



Exploring the Fusion of Eastern and Western Cultures in Dance Drama Creation—A Case Study of the Children's Ballet Drama “Grassland Hero Sisters”

Man Zhang^a, Chang You^{b*}

^aNational Ballet of China, Beijing 100050, China

^bSchool of Ethnology and sociology, Minzu University of China, Beijing 100081, China

*Correspondence: changyou1119@163.com

Abstract. Ballet dance education is a crucial component in realizing quality education and enriching students' classroom experiences. It serves as a vital channel for young students to deeply engage with and comprehend diverse ethnic cultures, showcasing the most direct and vivid manifestations of Chinese culture. Through the choreography, creation, and rehearsal of the ballet drama "Grassland Hero Sisters", teachers initiate teaching from fundamental dance elements, organically integrating dance with culture. This enables students to effectively inherit ethnic dance culture, enhance their understanding of different cultural characteristics, and simultaneously satisfy their desire for performance. Under the guidance of teachers, students develop a strong interest in dance, unleash their imagination, and strengthen their cognitive abilities, enabling them to discover beauty from a life perspective and experience the allure of dance drama within its rhythm.

Keywords: cultural fusion, ballet drama; "Grassland Hero Sisters"; dance creation

1 Introduction

Ballet drama, as a sophisticated theatrical art form, seamlessly blends music, visual arts, and dance into a single, unified performance on stage¹. This integration not only enhances the aesthetic appeal but also deepens the narrative complexity, making ballet drama a rich and engaging form of cultural expression. The unique time-space coherence and the harmonious audio-visual effects create an immersive experience that captivates audiences, showcasing the distinctive charm of this art form². The stage performance of ballet drama is meticulously crafted, involving two primary components: mime and dance. The mime element serves to narratively bridge the dance sequences, providing context and emotional depth³. The dance segments themselves are categorized into two distinct types: those that propel the plot forward and those that focus on a singular emotional theme, often characterized by their strong performance elements and aesthetic appeal⁴. These dance sequences are not only crucial for advancing the

narrative but also for expressing the intricate emotions and nuances of the characters and the storyline⁵. Ballet dramas often incorporate a rich tapestry of dance styles, including "character dances" which are folk dances derived from various countries and ethnic groups, each with its own unique characteristics⁶. This diversity not only enriches the visual and cultural aspects of the performance but also enhances the educational value of ballet drama, providing insights into different cultures and traditions⁷.

Choreographing a ballet drama is a complex and demanding process that requires a profound understanding of the script and storyline⁸. It involves translating the narrative and emotional subtleties into physical movements, thereby enabling the audience to connect more deeply with the storyline and characters⁹. This process necessitates careful consideration of numerous elements, including the portrayal of the storyline, the selection of music and choreography styles, the technical demands of ballet dance, costume and prop design, the management and scheduling of dance teams, venue and stage design, and the incorporation of audience feedback and expectations¹⁰. The creation, choreography, and rehearsal of ballet drama are not only artistic endeavors but also serve as vital educational tools¹¹. They enrich students' learning experiences, providing them with opportunities to explore and understand different cultures, artistic expressions, and historical contexts¹². Through the study and performance of ballet drama, students can enhance their self-knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and deepen their appreciation of the arts, all while engaging with mainstream academic subjects. This holistic approach to education through ballet drama fosters a well-rounded development of students, preparing them for a diverse and interconnected world.

2 Characteristics of the Children's Ballet Drama 'Grassland Hero Sisters'

2.1 The Story is Rich and Highly Engaging

The story of the children's ballet drama 'Grassland Hero Sisters' is relatively simple yet holds significant educational value. It revolves around two Mongolian sisters, Longmei and Yurong, who, while herding, suddenly encounter a fierce snowstorm. Despite their young age, they show no fear and bravely protect the herd of 384 sheep, disregarding their own safety. This courageous act earns them admiration, and they are hailed as 'little heroes' in the narrative. They are revered as the 'Grassland Hero Sisters' and recognized as one of the 'Ten Cultural Symbols of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region' and among the '100 Figures Who Moved China Since the Establishment of New China'. To captivate young audiences, the ballet incorporates elements of puppetry, depicting endearing characters such as the clumsy 'wolf', the dreamy and ethereal 'snow spirits', the gentle and graceful 'grass', and the playful and adorable 'candies', each vividly portrayed in their respective roles (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Dance drama 'Sisters of the Grassland Heroes' still photo

2.2 The Choreography is Innovative and Aligns with Audience Aesthetic Preferences

In 'Grassland Hero Sisters', both the scenes depicted and the choreographed dance movements are closely tied to traditional grassland arts and culture, showcasing a distinct ethnic style. The portrayal of various characters, such as the innocent and adorable young pioneers and the tender, sweet lambs, fully embodies their respective identities and personality traits in every gesture and movement (Figure 2). While ballet originated in the West, it has become one of the important dance forms in China's dance practice under the influence of modern civilization. The evolution of ballet towards Chinese characteristics is fully demonstrated in this dance drama. The organic fusion of ballet and ethnic dance in this production seamlessly integrates into different cultural backgrounds, presenting dance sequences that are natural, fluid, and concise. Each dance segment is compact and rhythmic, progressing the storyline smoothly and logically, catering to the attention span and preferences of young audiences.



Fig. 2. Stage play character showcase

2.3 Tailored to Age Characteristics, the Performance Yields a Unique

The children's ballet drama 'Grassland Hero Sisters' is a collaborative effort featuring over 130 outstanding performers from the China Central Ballet School, Caoqiao Primary School in Fengtai District of Beijing, the Children's Ballet Troupe of Baotou Grand Theater, and Baotou Normal College. Among them, the youngest participant from the Baotou Grand Theater's Children's Ballet Troupe is only 5 years old, contributing to the preparation and performance of the ballet drama alongside professional dancers from the China Central Ballet. This experience becomes invaluable for the children in their dance training. Despite the young performers' still developing stage presence, their genuine childlike charm contributes to the natural appeal of the production. Consequently, upon its official premiere, the drama sparked widespread enthusiasm throughout China, leading Baotou Grand Theater to invite representatives from domestic industry associations and theaters to jointly sign a nationwide touring agreement for the children's ballet drama 'Grassland Hero Sisters', marking the beginning of its national tour.

3 Starting from an Innovative Perspective, Showcasing the Spirit of the Times

3.1 Pioneering Diverse Artistic Forms to Fulfill the Educational Function

The high acclaim received by 'Grassland Hero Sisters' is primarily attributed to its effective innovation on the foundation of traditional dance drama, demonstrating the function of 'art education and ballet nurturing the heart'. For instance, the China Central Ballet School actively participates in the 'Bringing Elegant Arts into Campus' project, jointly organized by the Chinese Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Finance. They have established the well-known cultural brand 'Approaching Ballet', which consists of ballet appreciation lectures, classroom teaching demonstrations, 5-minute ballet classes, and ballet gala performances. This initiative has reached over 30 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, staging more than 300 performances for over 600,000 college students and faculty in over 200 universities. Furthermore, since 2014, the China Central Ballet School has been involved in the Beijing Municipal Education Commission's 'High Participation in Primary Schools' project, which aims to enhance physical and aesthetic education in primary schools. They have successfully established and implemented a 'Primary School Ballet Art Education System', exploring an effective mechanism for collaborative arts education involving schools, families, and society.

3.2 Choreographic Reinvention based on Accumulated Experience

When creating 'Grassland Hero Sisters', the main focus was to draw upon accumulated choreographic experience, continuously rehearsing and refining while embracing both innovation and familiarity to craft dance drama content that resonates with audience

aesthetics. As scholars have noted, 'adolescence is a sensitive period for physical development. Flexibility, agility, speed, and strength all experience their fastest natural growth rates during this time, making it a 'golden period' for physical training'. Hence, it's essential to adhere to students' growth patterns, employing scientifically proven training methods from ballet and modern dance techniques during physical training to ensure students' physical development is healthy, proportionate, and upright, enhancing their posture, demeanor, and elegance.

3.3 Enhance the Sense of Responsibility for Creation and Support for Innovation Motivation

In the creative process, the China Central Ballet School demonstrates its sense of responsibility as the country's sole national-level ballet troupe by continuously positioning its social mission and development goals towards producing original ballet works that promote Chinese and ethnic cultural elements. 'Grassland Hero Sisters' narrative, with its intricate and fantastical storyline, especially its sunny and positive thematic essence, aligns perfectly with the development philosophy of wholeheartedly serving young children, guiding the adjustments made during the creative process. Drawing from hardware, software, and their own choreographic experiences, they develop and rehearse dance drama content that embodies distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics. The China Central Ballet School's accumulation of practices in performing for different audience groups and disseminating ballet culture, as well as its talent reserve and training through 'Group-School' initiatives, have laid the foundation for the birth of 'Grassland Hero Sisters'. This work not only aligns with the national policy of promoting excellent cultural arts but also exemplifies the keen professional instincts of the China Central Ballet School in integrating the dissemination of ideological education, character shaping for young children, and the inheritance of traditional Chinese morality.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, 'Grassland Hero Sisters' marks another achievement in the China Central Ballet School's creative journey and represents a new exploration of ballet creation with Chinese characteristics. It is hoped that this work can serve as a demonstration for peers and related institutions dedicated to promoting ballet for young people, contributing to China's quality education efforts.

Reference

1. Bench, H., Elswit, K., 2020. Dance History and Digital Humanities Meet at the Archives: An Interim Project Report on Dunham's Data. *Dance Res.* 38, 289-295. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2020.0314>
2. Forbes, L., 2018. CHOREOGRAPHED PASTS: A HISTORIOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIAN AND INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN CONCERT DANCE. *Australas. Drama Stud.*, 237-275.

3. Gutsche-Miller, S., 2021. Madame Mariquita, Greek Dance, and French Ballet Modernism. *Dance Res. J.* 53, 46-68. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s014976772100036x>
4. Jones, S., 2022. Samuel Beckett's Brush with Ballet. *Dance Res.* 40, 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2022.0365>
5. Kaplun, M.V., 2020. On the West European Sources of the First Russian Comedies (Based on the Materials of the Ambassadorial Order of the Second Half of the 17th Century). *Tomsk State Univ. J.*, 28-33. <https://doi.org/10.17223/15617793/451/4>
6. Ma, T., 2021. The narrative expression of installation art (plastic art) in drama space. *Res. Danc. Educ.* 22, 228-243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2020.1808607>
7. Marcus, K.H., 2014. Dance Moves: An African American Ballet Company in Postwar Los Angeles. *Pac. Hist. Rev.* 83, 487-527. <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2014.83.3.487>
8. Maximova, A.E., 2021. On the History of P. Chevalier de Brissol's Ballet "The Village Heroine" (1800). *Vestn. St.-Petersbg. Univ.-Iskusstv.* 11, 4-20. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu15.2021.101>
9. Pender, A., 2022. Australia and China at 50: The New Wave Theatre and the Drama of Cultural Exchange. *J. Aust. Stud.* 46, 482-495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2022.2099951>
10. Rubinstein, A., Sokolova, E., Dudkina, E., 2022. Civil society, social networks and cultural activity in digital environment. *Terra Econ.* 20, 111-131. <https://doi.org/10.18522/2073-6606-2022-20-2-111-131>
11. Suzukey, V.Y., 2019. The role of Russian specialists in the establishment of professional music in 20th century Tuva. *Novye Issled. Tuvy*, 121-132. <https://doi.org/10.25178/nit.2019.1.9>
12. Zhuwawo, A., Sibanda, N., 2021. Productive docile bodies in Zimbabwean dance training: the African body in classical ballet training at Afriker Arts Trust. *Res. Danc. Educ.* 22, 159-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2020.1746257>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

