

## THE PHYSICAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF CHINESE DANCE THEATER IN THE NEW ERA: A CASE STUDY OF TAO DANCE THEATER AND XIE XIN DANCE THEATER

Lan Wu

Student of Doctoral Degree in Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts,

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

E-mail: s66584947008@ssru.ac.th

Chutima Maneewattana

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

E-mail: chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th

Yi Zhu

Hunan Normal University

E-mail: 649416488@qq.com

### Abstract

Dance theatre originated in Germany in the late 1960s, represented by Pina Bausch and her Uppertal Dance Theatre founded in 1973. Dance Theatre, T a n z t h e a t e r in German and Dancetheatre in English, is a highly integrated form of theatre performance that incorporates elements of dance, music, and traditional theatre into a comprehensive art form that focuses on the richness and depth of human experience. Lloyd Clemenka (2021). The historical processes that have influenced the development of dance theatre in China in the new era are as follows: in the 1980s, when the wave of reform and opening up in China began, Western cultural forms were crowded into the country, and during this period new dances mixed with modern, classical Chinese and contemporary dance vocabularies appeared, all of which bore the early beginnings of dance theatre; from the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s, the economic, political and cultural development of China developed rapidly, and dancers of this period began to engage in a new form of performance, the dance theatre, which is a form of dance. In the 1990s and 2000s, China's economy, politics and culture developed rapidly, and dancers in this period began to explore the practice of "dance theatre", and Chinese dance theatre entered a period of enlightenment; after 2000, the marketization of diverse cultures strengthened international interoperability, and China entered the multimedia era, and artists launched a wide range of attempts to make dance theatre enter the period of the promotion of "artists' collective consciousness". "In 2010, the development of science and technology triggered the reconstruction of artists' identities, and their creations were impacted by consumerism and globalisation, which led to the development of individual dance troupes and the era of "individuality and autonomy" in China's dance theatre.

**Keywords:** Dance Theatre, Traditional Culture, Creative Development, Multicultural Integration, Intercultural Communication

### Introduction

The development of modern dance in the West has contributed to the emergence and development of dance theatre: dance theatre is a highly integrated art form, integrating other arts and dance in terms of performance; coexisting with theatricality and dance language in terms of movement; following post-modern aesthetics in terms of content; and having cultural connotations of critiquing the society, reflecting on the human nature, pursuing metaphors, and depressing or satirical meanings of styles. Dance theatre originated in Germany in the late

1960s, influenced by Mary Wegman, focusing on the nature of the body and pursuing "pure dance". Zhang Jian (2020). The originator of modern dance in Germany, Kurk Juss, laid the foundation of dance theatre with his work "Green Table" during World War II. Pina Bausch founded the Uppertal Dance Theatre in 1973 and named the form, which is known as one of the three major genres of contemporary dance, along with American post-modern dance and Japanese mai tai, and has been globally admired and imitated and innovated. 1970s, when the Western culture flowed into China, dance theatre entered into the vision of the Chinese people. The earliest theorist to promote dance theatre as an art form was Professor Ou Jianping, who first introduced the concept of dance theatre and Pina's video works in his teaching lectures in Guangzhou and Beijing in 1988. The first to create work in the form of dance theatre was Shen Wei in 1994, when he staged his first dance theatre production, Little Room, in Beijing. Ou, Jianping (2012).

Looking back to the 1980s, new dances fusing modern dance, classical Chinese dance and contemporary dance emerged. For example, Shen Wei's Little Room and Sleepless Night and Hua Chao's Hope and Goodbye! Mother", with the prototype of dance theatre. The 1990s and 2000s were the genesis of Chinese dance theatre, with Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang founding the Life Dance Studio (Beijing) in 1994, with the masterpiece Fertility Report; Jin Xing founding the Jin Xing Dance Troupe (Shanghai) in 1999, with the masterpiece Red and Black; and Cao Chengyuan founding Guangdong Modern Dance Troupe (Guangdong) in 1992, and then founding Beijing Lei Dong Tian Tian (Beijing) in 2005. Cao Chengyuan founded the Guangdong Modern Dance Company (Guangdong) in 1992, and in 2005 he founded the Beijing Thunder World (Beijing), with the work Bird Song; Gao Yanjinzi joined the Beijing Modern Dance Company in 1995, with the work Three Shifts of Rain. Wang Yuanyuan founded the Beijing Contemporary Ballet in 2008 with her work The Night Banquet, and in 2000, China's dance theatre entered a period of rapid growth, with two platforms, the Beijing Modern Dance Week and the Guangdong Modern Dance Exhibition, which led to the creation of Li Ning's "Lingyun Flame Physical Theatre", and the establishment of "Empty Dance Studio" by Liu Chun and Xiao Xiangrong in 1999. "Other creators include Hou Ying, Xing Liang, and Wang Yuanyuan, etc. After 2010, the era of individual dance companies has entered, with Hu Shenjian's Wanderings incorporating traditional elements and Li Xing's The Grand Hotel telling the story of a closed environment. Since 2014, the China Dancers' Association's Youth Training Programme and the National Arts Foundation have supported the creative growth of young choreographers, such as Chang Shawnee and Yin Fang, who are working on dance theatre projects. Tian (2022)

In this paper, Tao Body Dance Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre are selected as research objects. Tao Body Dance Theatre has toured more than forty countries around the world since its establishment, and is a pioneer of modern dance in China. It has appeared in the New York Times four times and received high praise. In 2014, it was selected as one of the ten best dance performance groups in the world. Cross-border collaborations include Paris Fashion Week with Yohji Yamamoto, creating works for Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Holland Dance Theatre 1, and appearing in Cui Jian's film. 2023 won the Silver Lion for Dance at the Venice Biennale. She has been touring mainly in Beijing and Shanghai. 2021, she established Tao Body Classroom to promote public teaching and provide a platform for learning and exchange. Xie Xin Dance Theatre was founded in 2014 by Xie Xin, who is an important representative of female young choreographers. Growing from a dancer to a choreographer, she has served in several modern dance groups, been invited to work as a choreographer for internationally renowned dance companies, and won numerous awards. She uses her brand influence to recruit new members, invites international choreographers to China, and builds an exchange platform.

The company operates in four sectors: performance creation, promotion and education, costume branding and cross-border collaboration. Zhang Mingmeng (2015). Xie Xin has set up modern dance courses since 2017, with many students. Won the overall champion of the second season of Dance Storm, danced "Flow Trace" to attract attention, and promoted "A Skimmer" tour attendance of more than 85%. 2022 opened a second space, implemented online and offline teaching and clothing brand operation. 2023 participated in "Ride the Wind 2023" to break the circle. She has become a successful case of modern dance creation, Chinese-foreign co-operation in choreography, dancers' self-management and merchandising.

### Research Objectives

1. To study the development and change of the cross-cultural choreographic technique and artistic mode of "Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre" since the new era.
2. To study the reasons for the changes in cross-cultural choreographic techniques and artistic models that have affected Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre since the new era.
3. To analyse the factors affecting the development and change of Chinese dance theatres in the new era, and to propose corresponding policies.

### Scope of the Research

#### 1. Population Scope

This study examines the historical reasons for the emergence of dance theatre in China, and describes the overall development of Chinese dance theatre in the new era (10 years). Using the case study method, we selected eight representative works from each of the two private modern dance companies in China, Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre, for example, for a total of 16 works. The demographic sample is divided into two groups: Tao Ye and Xie Xin, the founders of the dance theatres. The second is key informants, including scholars, performing artists, administrators and other choreographers.

#### 2. Time Scope

2023	2024	2025	2026
September-December 2023 1. Topic formulation and research direction determination.	Review literature and theoretical works to clarify research ideas and design the structural framework of the paper. 1. Review literature and theoretical works to clarify research ideas and design the structural framework of the paper. 2. Extensively collect literature related to the research topic and read theoretical books.	January-June 2025. 1. Revision of the first three chapters of the thesis, enriching research theories, refining research content, and improving research quality. 2. The second visit involved two dance troupes, where audio and video recordings, short video clips, and image collection were conducted in accordance with the research objectives,	January-May 2026. 1. The third visit to 2 dance troupes involved audio recording, video recording, short video and image collection for research purposes, conducting face-to-face interviews, and on-site observations. The third visit to 2 dance troupes involved audio recording, video recording, short

2023	2024	2025	2026
		<p>alongside face-to-face interviews and on-site observations. The second visit involved two dance troupes where audio and video recordings, short video clips, and image collection were conducted in accordance with the research objectives, alongside face-to-face interviews and on-site observations.</p>	<p>video and image collection for research purposes, conducting face-to-face interviews, and on-site observation.            2. Chapter 4 - Chapter 5 Revising the thesis writing, inserting research data information, and conducting in-depth research and analysis.</p>
	<p>Chapter 4 - Chapter 5 Revising the thesis writing, inserting research data information, and conducting in-depth research and analysis.            1. The preliminary writing of the research content for Chapters 1 to 3 has been completed.            2. For the first time, video and image data of the research subjects were collected through audio and video recording, conducting face-to-face interviews and on-site observations. Produce director interview forms, work on the research content for Chapters 1 to 3 has been completed.            3. Produce director interview forms, work data sheets, choreography observation forms, marketing strategy</p>	<p>July-August 2025. Complete the defence of the first three chapters.</p>	<p>June-August 2016. Finalize the full dissertation for doctoral defence.</p>

2023	2024	2025	2026
	forms, etc...		
		September-December 2025. 1. Collect performance videos, playbills, promotional videos of works, online promotions, etc. 2. Completed the first draft of Chapters 4-5 of the thesis.	

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research Methodology

This study, "The Cultural Landscape of Body Aesthetics in Chinese Dance Theatre in the New Era: Taking Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre as Examples", adopts a qualitative research methodology, by means of "face-to-face interviews and online interviews", and by using the research tools of "interview forms and observation forms", and by conducting on-site interviews and fieldwork. The research tools of "interview form and observation form" were used to conduct on-site interviews and field observations. Sampling data is collected by "video, photography and audio recording" to obtain first-hand information for the study, so as to propose innovative artistic techniques, creative methods and theoretical concepts for the Chinese dance theatre in the new era, and to promote cross-cultural dissemination and international exchanges of the Chinese dance theatre.

### 2. Research Steps

The first step is to determine the topic: "Research on the Body Cultural Landscape of Chinese Dance Theatre in the New Era - Taking Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre as Examples".

Step 2: Propose three research objectives

Step 3: Using two cultural theories: semiotic theory and embodied cognition theory, and body aesthetics theory, analyse the artistic characteristics, innovative development and evolutionary trajectory of the two dance theatres. Combine traditional Chinese aesthetic thought and contemporary aesthetic theory to study the artistic characteristics, innovative development and transformation reasons of the two dance theatres. The body aesthetics theory is chosen to explore the body culture landscape of the two dance theatres.

### 3. Data Collection

The demographic sample is divided into two main categories: Tao Ye, the founder of Tao Body Theatre, and Xie Xin, the creator of Xie Xin Dance Theatre. The second is key informants, including dance theatre scholars, performing artists, managers of dance companies and choreographers of other dance theatres.

Key informants: divided into four groups including performing artists, academics, company managers, and choreographers of today's dance theatre.

Research tools: The research tools used in this study are mainly interview form and observation form. The interview form was mainly used for the founders of the 2 dance theatres, company managers, scholars, and choreographers from other dance theatres. The observation

form was mainly used for the observation of dance theatre performing artists, dance theatre training system, and dance theatre works.

#### 4. Data analyses

Cultural change factors affecting Tao Body Theatre's creative concepts and artistic style: cross-cultural fusion under globalisation reflecting the localisation of Western modern dance, Eastern philosophical concepts. Body symbols translate spatial narratives. Aesthetic market changes in the new era promote niche to mass participation and practice international cross-border co-operation.

Cultural changes affecting Xie Xin's dance theatre choreographic technique and artistic style: the expression of Eastern aesthetics of body symbols, embodied in the deconstruction and restructuring of choreographic technique to form abstracted symbols. Multiple dance vocabularies originated from Xie Xin's experience in several dance companies, shaping his unique style. Accompanied by the transformation of short video body narratives, it promotes dance mass participation and feeds the growth of theatre box office.

### Discussion

The study aims to respond to Research Objective 1: The reason influencing the development and change of Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre's body choreography is the cultural transition from traditional Chinese culture to modern civilisation.

#### I. Tao Body Theatre: Contemporary Interpretation of Minimalism and Oriental Philosophy

1. Tao Body Theatre's works are known for their minimalist body language, repetitive movements and sense of ritual, reflecting the cosmic concept of "the unity of heaven and man". For example, the works "Heavy", "4" and "5" explore "qi", "momentum" and "circle", and incorporate Tai Chi and Qigong into modern dance.

2. Cross-cultural dialogue: their works do not rely on narrative, but break down cultural barriers through pure body language, enabling international audiences to understand Eastern aesthetics through physical perception rather than textual interpretation.

#### Xie Xin Dance Theatre: Pioneering Exploration of Body Experimentation and Female Perspective

1. Balance between technology and emotion: Xie Xin's works, such as "One Sketch, One Press" and "Return to Silence", explore the relationship between the body's gravity, breathing, and space, while incorporating the white space of Chinese ink painting to form a unique visual language.

2. International Influence: Xie Xin has collaborated with top international dance companies such as the Netherlands Dance Theatre (NDT) and Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, and has received wide acclaim on international stages such as the Avignon Theatre Festival in France and the Düsseldorf Dance Festival in Germany.

### Research Results

1. Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre represent two distinct paths in the process of localisation and internationalisation of Chinese contemporary dance: Tao Body Theatre challenges the physical boundaries of dance through its minimalist and abstract artistic explorations, incorporating the essence of oriental body philosophy into the language of the body, thus setting up an important standard of reference for the global dance community; while Xie Xin Dance Theatre, with its strong emotionally-driven and profound intervention in social issues, sets up an important standard of reference for the global dance community. Xie Xin Dance Theatre, on the other hand, focuses on strong emotional drive and profound involvement

in social issues, and by presenting a unique female perspective, it not only enriches the humanistic connotation of dance, but also significantly promotes the entry of Chinese modern dance into the international mainstream vision, and enhances its global influence.

2. Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre are both rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and with in-depth body language and artistic thinking - including the modern transformation of traditional Chinese dance elements and philosophical explorations of the body's expression - they use their own artistic practices, such as the creation of dance works that integrate the traditional with the modern and the development of systematic training programmes, to self-define Chinese dance theatre. In the context of globalisation, through participation in international art exchange platforms and cross-cultural co-operation projects, we will continue to dialogue, innovate, integrate and promote the unique value and development of Chinese dance art in the contemporary world.

3. Tao Body Theatre and Xie Xin Dance Theatre have not only significantly promoted the development of modern dance in China, stimulated the public's interest in the art form and nurtured a number of emerging dancers through the continuous creation of original dance works, touring performances and educational programmes at home; they have also shaped the modern image of Chinese culture with their superb performances on the international stage, e.g., participating in world-class occasions such as the Edinburgh International Festival and the Lincoln Center in New York. On the international stage, such as participating in the Edinburgh International Arts Festival, New York Lincoln Centre and other world-class occasions, they have shaped the modern image of Chinese culture with superb performances and won wide acclaim from international audiences. They have skillfully integrated the essence of oriental body philosophy, such as Tai Chi and Zen elements, into contemporary art practice, forming a profound dialogue and demonstrating the innovative vitality and depth of Chinese art. As an important force in the "going out" of Chinese culture, they have not only strengthened cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world, but also enhanced China's influence on the global art scene.

## Discussion

As an important form of performing arts, Chinese dance theatre is profoundly at the intersection of tradition and modernity, local and international, art and technology in the context of globalisation and digitalisation, which not only embodies the profound heritage of Chinese culture, but also promotes the innovation and evolution of art forms. With the in-depth promotion of the national strategy of cultural power, as well as the growing and diversified spiritual and cultural needs of the people, dance theatre is faced with unprecedented development opportunities, such as strengthened policy support, expanding market space, increased international exchanges, etc.; but also faces serious challenges, such as insufficient innovative power, shortage of talent reserves, lagging behind in the application of technology and other issues.

In this paper, we start from the three core dimensions of digital transformation and technological integration, creative concept and artistic expression, international communication and cultural dialogue, and systematically explore the main direction and development path of the future research of Chinese dance theatre. Specifically, in terms of digital transformation and technological integration, the paper examines how to make use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and big data technology to enhance creative efficiency and audience experience; in terms of creative concept and artistic expression, the paper explores the innovative approach of integrating traditional elements with modern aesthetics, and strengthens the depth of theme and emotional resonance; in terms of international

communication and cultural dialogue, the paper analyzes how to enhance the international influence and cultural dialogue of Chinese dance through cross-cultural cooperation and digital platform dissemination, and so on. In terms of international communication and cultural dialogue, it analyses how to enhance the international influence and cultural soft power of Chinese dance through cross-cultural cooperation and digital platform dissemination. Through this comprehensive framework, we aim to provide scientific guidance for the theoretical deepening and practical development of Chinese dance theatre.

## References

- Liu, Y., & Guo, S. (2021). The role of TV programmes in popularizing and promoting dance theatre: An example of *Dance Storm*. *Shang Dance*, (12), 97–98. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:SAWU.0.2021-12-035>
- Lu, J. Y. (2022). The rise and transmutation of German-language dance theatre. *Journal of Guizhou University (Art Edition)*, (2), 93–99. <https://doi.org/10.15958/j.cnki.gdxbyzb.2022.02.010>
- Muyu. (2019). The intertextual expression of “drama”, “theatre” and “physicality”: From dance drama to dance theatre. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (4), 48–57. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:BJWD.0.2019-04-008>
- Ou, J. P. (2012). Dance theatre: From Germany to China. *Art Review*, (2), 51–55. <https://doi.org/10.16364/j.cnki.cn11-4907/j.2012.02.014>
- Tian, P. (2022). The Chinese journey of dance theatre: Characteristics, styles and forms. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (4), 68–77. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:BJWD.0.2022-04-011>
- Wang, H. (2012). Generation, flow, and smooth space: The “nomadic art” of Pina Bausch dance theatre. *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (10), 28–32. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:ZNZS.0.2012-10-005>
- Wang, M. (2023). The truth of innovation: Viewing Tao’s physical theatre works 13 and 14. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (4), 94–97.
- Wang, X. (2019). The future of world modern dance: A dialogue with dance artist Xie Xin. *Shanghai Art Review*, (5), 22–26. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:SHYS.0.2019-05-010>
- Xie, X., & Pan, K. L. (2020). Endless exploration of the body: Interview with young dancer Xie Xin. *Contemporary Dance Art Research*, (Z1), 107–111. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:WDYS.0.2020-Z1-021>
- Yuan, Y. (2018). It’s about movement, starting and stopping in the heart: An essay on the artistic characteristics of Xie Xin’s dance theatre work *One Sketch, One Press*. *Art Review*, (20), 82–83. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:YSPN.0.2018-20-039>