

# Investigation on the Cultural Cultivation of Undergraduate Students Majoring in Dance

Yuwei Zhao  
Academy of Music  
Shanxi University  
Taiyuan, China 030006

**Abstract**—What deviates from the evaluation of the excellent professional skills for students majoring in dance is the evaluation of their cultural knowledge accomplishment. How do the masses evaluate the degree of cultural literacy of dance majors? In order to solve the question and constantly promote the discipline construction of dance major, this paper, based on 500 sample data, launched the "survey on the cultural literacy of undergraduate dance major students", to explore the specific content and development path of the cultural literacy of undergraduate dance majors.

**Keywords**—dancing culture; dance teaching for undergraduates; dance culture teaching; dance teaching

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dancing, known for its skills, is a performing art that conveys emotions with the body. It is a formal beauty with caper rhythm, and the carrier to inherit and develop the profound culture. When dancers touch the heaven of thought with their fingertips, they produce the memory of the era with their feet. The dance art directly perceived by the naked eyes is not only a sensory stimulation and visual feast, but also the presentation of the director's thoughts and the reproduction of historical memory. However, the cultural quality of the dance professional, the owner of the body that carries the art form of dance, has long been questioned. There's even such a discriminatory topic on the Internet as "why are there doctorates for dance majors?" So, is dancing really just a form of body art that does not need to be educated as a kind of culture or even merely requires the teaching of body technique and training of technical actions of dancing? What does the public think of the degree of cultural literacy of dance majors? Based on this, the author set up the "questionnaire on the cultural literacy of undergraduates majoring in dance", taking undergraduate dance majors as an example and taking 500 sample data as the basis, to explore the content, importance and development approaches of cultural cultivation of undergraduates majoring in dance.

## II. A SURVEY REPORT ON THE CULTURAL LITERACY OF UNDERGRADUATES MAJORING IN DANCE

Among the 500 sample data, the majority of respondents are female, accounting for 60.60%, and male account for 39.40%; the vast majority of them are young people, with

people under 18 accounting for 8.60%, between 19-30 accounting for 76.00%, between 19-30 accounting for 14.30% and over 51 accounting for 1.10%; 39.00% of respondents are engaged in matters related to dancing, among which 16.40% are students majoring in dance and 22.60% are dance professional practitioners. 61.00% of respondents were engaged in matters related to non-dance majors, among which 31.20% were dance lovers and 29.80% were others.

In the survey on the specific contents of cultural literacy of undergraduates majoring in dance, most of the respondents believe that the cultural literacy of undergraduates majoring in dance refers to the knowledge of dance culture, including dance culture, ecological background and learning of interdisciplinary subjects of dance, accounting for 78.20%. And 61.00% of respondents believed that the cultural training of undergraduate dance students should also include theoretical knowledge of dance. In addition, although this question offers multiple choices, some interviewees just choose the cultivation of general cultural knowledge, dance cultural knowledge or dance cultural knowledge and dance theory knowledge alone. Therefore, the ambiguity of respondents' definition of dance students' cultural literacy can be seen. However, most of the respondents still believe that the cultural literacy of undergraduate dance students should be a combination of the three (See "Fig. 1").

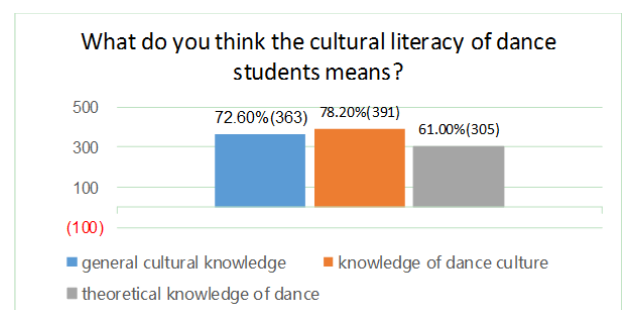


Fig. 1. Result of the question "What do you think the cultural literacy of dance students means?".

In the opinion of most interviewees, the cultural cultivation of undergraduate dance students is a necessary part of the teaching process, and the cultivation of cultural deposits and dance knowledge is of great help to the

development of dance majors. Among them, 44.00% think that the cultural cultivation of undergraduate dance students is very important; 32.60% think that the undergraduate dance professional culture training is relatively important. Among these people, 86.59% of students majoring in dance, 69.91% of dance practitioners, 76.92% of dance lovers and 76.51% of others believe that cultural cultivation is very important and relatively important for the undergraduate dance majors. It can be seen that students majoring in dance in education are more able to realize the importance of cultural training. However, not all respondents believe that cultural cultivation is necessary for dance majors. 3.00% and 0.80% of the respondents thought that cultural cultivation was not very important or not important (See "Fig. 2").

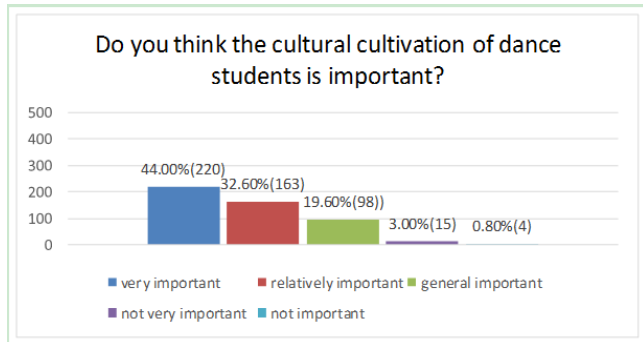


Fig. 2. Result of the question "Do you think the cultural cultivation of dance students is important?".

Compared with the overwhelming proportion of students who affirm the importance of cultural cultivation, the survey of the degree of cultural literacy of undergraduate dance majors is somewhat embarrassing. The respondents who think that the cultural attainment of undergraduate dance majors was relatively general account for the largest proportion, which is 46.00%. Those who think it was relatively high account for 36.60%, slightly lower. Among those who think the degree of cultural literacy of dance majors is general, low or very low, the highest proportion is held by the ones who choose the "other" category hold, accounting for 62.50%; what come next is students majoring in dance, accounting for 57.32%. It can be seen that the general public don't have too much recognition for the educational level of dance majors, while the students themselves attach more importance to the lack of their own education and are more eager for cultural knowledge (See "Fig. 3").

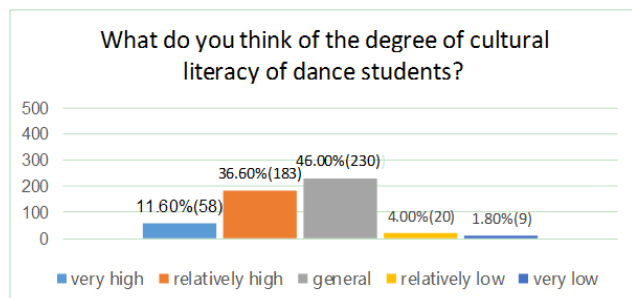


Fig. 3. Result of the question "What do you think of the degree of cultural literacy of dance students?".

Based on the above results, it can be found that the society has different definitions of cultural literacy for dance students. Some people think that the "cultural literacy" of dance majors only includes general cultural knowledge such as Chinese, mathematics and English. If so, the evaluation of dance students' cultural literacy may never be "overturned", because there is not as much time for dance majors to focus on cultural courses as normal students due to the necessary professional training. Some other people think that the cultural literacy of dance students refers to the knowledge of dance culture and related dance theories. If so, more attention needs to be paid to the teaching of dance cultural knowledge and dance theoretical knowledge, and strive to make achievements in the field of dance discipline, so as to promote the development of dance discipline in the form of thoughts and words. Therefore, the issue of "cultural literacy of dance students" cannot be judged by a one-size-fits-all standardization, because people's definitions of "cultural literacy" vary as their thoughts vary. However, in the survey, there is no doubt that students majoring in dance cannot completely avoid learning cultural knowledge and theories while studying their profession. Instead, they should spare no to achieve a balanced development in addition to professional training, so as to achieve the goal of cultivating high-quality talents with "equal emphasis on culture and skills, knowledge and specialty" and better promote the development of dance discipline.

### III. RESEARCH ON THE CULTURAL TRAINING CONTENT AND IMPORTANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE DANCE MAJORS

In Che Yanfen's article Uncovering "dance anthropology" — "reading anthropology and human movement: the study of dance", Che Yanfen points out that "dance is a socially constructed knowledge system, and its movement system is embedded in the social and cultural system" [1]. Alan p. Marriam, an American anthropologist, added that "dance is culture, and culture is dance". It can be seen that dance is not only a simple presentation of body movements, but also embodied in the culture, and fully reflects all aspects of culture. A dance contains the knowledge cultivation and value system composition of the dancers, while the dance of a nation even contains folk customs, reflecting the local national culture. Undoubtedly, dance itself is a cultural phenomenon. It is not only an artistic form that presents avant-garde consciousness or ancient culture, but also a profound reflection of social history and humanistic life Therefore, the author takes dance majors at undergraduate stage as the research object to explore the content, importance and development ways of promoting cultural cultivation of students at this stage.

#### A. The Exact Content of "Cultural Cultivation" of Dance Majors During Undergraduate Period

For dance art, the cultivation of cultural literacy is different from the general cultural cultivation of arts and sciences, aiming to help understand dance art and promote the better dissemination of dance culture. In the author's opinion, the cultural accomplishment of dance major should first establish a connection with dance major, and really

promote the development of dance art; in addition, it should also include the learning of general cultural knowledge like Chinese, math, and English etc. When students majoring in dance pay more attention to the practice of professional courses and less to learn cultural knowledge, what they lose is not just the scores in exam. They may leave behind the space for logical imagination in choreography, as well as the English competence for improving the construction of dance discipline in external exchanges.

As for the cultural knowledge related to dance majors, in the author's opinion, it mainly includes two aspects: dance culture and dance theory knowledge. Dance culture is the basis of dancer's understanding of the world and the pioneer of guiding students to understand dance. It can help students emancipate their minds and spread the wings of imagination. The learning content of dance culture includes macro and micro aspects. Macro learning refers to the understanding and mastery of the overall dance environment, including the development history of dance, the general situation of dance culture, and the learning of cross-disciplines of dance; micro-learning refers to the deep exploration and learning of the folk culture background behind a particular dance category, including but not limited to the mastery and learning of the origin and development of the dance category, ecological and social environment, dance form and costume props. The second aspect is the study of the theoretical knowledge of dance, which can help people to understand the body structure and better realize the art of dance. The study of dance anatomy help dancers not only better understand their own bodies and give full play to their potential, but also effectively avoid the physical injury caused by improper training, and practice and perform dance in a more scientific way. The study of stage lighting can help students master the realization basis of presenting visual beauty of dance art and complete stage art. The theoretical study of choreography techniques can enable dancers to present their own inspirations in appropriate ways, so as to turn them into brilliant dance art.

#### *B. The Importance of "Cultural Cultivation" of Dance Students in Undergraduate Stage*

"Put the dance into context and see it as a whole, not as a single dance," says Che Yanfen, a doctoral student at the Minzu University of China. "The context makes us pay more attention to the process of dance, the understanding of the panoramic style of dance and the role of individuals in the construction and reconstruction of dance" [1]. Therefore, it is very important to view dance as a whole. The generation of a dance or even a dance category is rooted in the social environment and historical development process at that time. Therefore, a "holistic" research approach to the art of dance is of great significance. And in the process of dance education, "integral" dance education is even more important.

For undergraduate students of dance major who have received higher education, the requirements can no longer be limited to exercises improving the body's flexibility and softness and coordination of the body. They are supposed to understand dance art at a higher level and interpret it from a broader perspective; learn the history of dance through the

study of interdisciplinary subjects; go deep into the folk and conduct field tour. Only by doing so can they gain multi-dimensional and multi-angle understanding of dance and promote the continuous development of dance art. Therefore, the cultural cultivation of students at this stage is necessary and very important. Whether it is through the study of historical knowledge to better understand classical dance, or through the field investigation in folk dance to feel the original ecological dance culture, dancers can place themselves in the cultural scene and integrate themselves into the dance cultural environment through the tangible experience of culture. Only when they experience life or history with their heart, can they enhance their ability to summarize life, stimulate creativity, create or interpret dance art that is in line with the times and close to life.

#### IV. MEASURES TO DEVELOP "DANCE CULTURAL LITERACY" OF UNDERGRADUATE DANCE STUDENTS

##### *A. Establishing the Concept of Dance Culture Cultivation*

As the saying goes, thought is the foundation of action. First of all, only when teachers attach importance to dance cultural knowledge from the ideological level can they set the goal of cultivating high-quality talents with "equal emphasis on culture and skills, knowledge and specialty"; introduce dance culture knowledge into dance majors, set up theoretical courses at a reasonable proportion of class hours corresponding to professional courses, and integrate dance culture knowledge into professional courses; develop and compile teaching materials on dance culture that are compatible with dance teaching content; develop their dance cultural level unceasingly and carries on the correct cultural guidance to the student; put importance on cultural awareness for students, broaden their discipline vision and urge students to improve the level of dance culture, so as to promote the future construction of dance discipline.

In general, it is the basis of all actions to establish the concept of cultural training for students majoring in dance. The "concept establishment" here includes not only students, but also teachers and leaders, who should pay attention to the cultivation of dance culture.

##### *B. Highlighting the Teaching Goal of Combining Dance Culture with Dance Teaching*

In China, since art was upgraded to the 13th discipline field in 2011, music and dance have become first-level disciplines, and dance has become a second-level discipline in another sense. At the undergraduate level, there are three major directions of dance: dance performance, choreography and dancology [2]. Therefore, the author will elaborate the teaching objectives in combination with dance culture and dance teaching from the three major directions of dance.

The major of dance performance mainly aims to cultivate high quality performing dance talents and set up corresponding curriculum system according to the training objectives. As a result, under the idea of combining dance culture with dance teaching, the teaching goal should be to establish the correctness of dance style through the training

of dance body, the imagination and feelings conveyed in the face of the situation and deepen the students' dancing performance ability, so as to prepare for the training of advanced and sophisticated performing dance talents. The focus of teaching should be to understand the process and development status of dance by mastering the knowledge of the historical origin of dance, and to have a clear and objective understanding of the types of dance to be learned; to understand the original form and development form of dance, define dance style, and truly understand the external and essence of dance, through immersive perception of dance; and to deepen students' dance performance ability and highlight the performance ability through the perception of dance origin and role image.

The major of dancology aims to train higher specialized talents to be engaged in the history, theoretical research, teaching and editing of Chinese and foreign dance. Students are required to systematically master the knowledge of dance history and culture and basic theories of dance, have preliminary scientific research ability, and master the methods of analyzing and studying dance works. Therefore, under the idea of combining dance culture and dance teaching, the teaching objective should be: through the guidance of dance culture, to combine theory with practice, deepen the relevance of dance knowledge, constantly update students' cognitive structure of dance, improve their knowledge system, and equip them with preliminary scientific research ability and teaching ability on the basis of mastering the knowledge of dance history and culture and basic theories of dance.

The major of choreography is a science to study the teaching theory of choreography and the skills of human movement creating, as well as a subject of scientific research and practice on the teaching, talent training, drama creation, stage director and scientific research innovation on choreography. This major requires students to systematically master the basic theory and professional skills of dance, have high cultural and artistic accomplishment, have the ability to observe, understand and summarize life, and be able to independently to complete the creation and rehearsal of dance works with choreography. When Liu Fengxue, a famous Taiwanese dance master, studied modern dance and dance creation method in Tokyo Gakugei University in Japan, she studied the music of Tang dynasty with Professor Shi Shounan in the royal court of Japan. She kept looking through the historical materials of ancient dance left in China, which laid a solid foundation for the establishment of neoclassical dance troupe and the development of classical dance in Han and tang dynasties later. Therefore, under the idea of combining dance culture with dance teaching, the teaching goal should be to inspire students to create repertory works by teaching dance elements and learning choreography techniques and give full play to imagination space and creation ability according to material and perception, and to create repertory works by use of dance elements on the basis of understanding dance culture, observing, perceiving and summarizing life.

### C. Making Reasonable Course Arrangement

As for the current dance theory courses in China, there are some problems in some universities, such as the disconnection between theoretical courses and professional courses or the lack of practical application of theoretical courses. For example, while students are learning minor dances in local folk dances, a large-scale folk dance culture course from the perspective of the whole country is provided as the supporting dance culture course, which lacks pertinence and applicability. For another example, the course of dance theory is about professional knowledge for stage lighting, but corresponding practical operation courses are in absence. All these break the relevance of knowledge and violate the way of knowledge construction, making it difficult for students to develop interest. And the lack of culture or practice accordingly leads to their inability to develop empathy for dance and the lack of enthusiasm.

But at the same time, there are also quite a few schools that can combine theory with practice, and flexibly set up curriculum structure, helping students better understand and learn dance. For example, students in South China Normal University are required to learn Lingnan dance culture, including relevant concepts of Lingnan dance, historical origin and development status as well as folk culture background of representative dances, before taking professional courses of Lingnan dance. In addition, "expert workshop" activities are carried out in their process of learning. That is, dance inheritors are invited into professional classes to teach original dance and dance culture experts are invited to give special lectures. This greatly expands students' vision of dance culture, enabling them to have a deeper and appropriate understanding of dance, know about dance, and finally integrate dance into their own bodies.

### D. Developing the Teaching Material System of Dance Culture

In professional courses, when teachers communicate dance culture to students in an introductory way, it is difficult for students to accept the optimal knowledge of dance culture due to the difference of teachers' cultural level. And in the process of study or review, students may have a wrong understanding due to the lack of scientific theoretical reference. Therefore, it is very important to establish a scientific system and a textbook system in line with the times. In the process of developing the teaching material of folk dance, not only should the professional combination of movements and beats in class be recorded, but the style of the dance, the origin and development of each movement and the folk custom of the birthplace of the dance should also be recorded. The teaching material of *Shanxi Folk Dance* is a good example since it introduces in detail the geographical location, climate, local customs of Shanxi region and the representative dance types in the general introduction. In the respective introduction of the dances, taking the kick drum yangko which was selected as the intangible cultural heritage of Shanxi Province in 2006, *Shanxi Folk Dance* expounds the Northern Shanxi kick drum yangko in four parts, that is, the Overview of Northern

Shanxi Kick Drum Yangko, the Basic Forms of Northern Shanxi Kick Drum Yangko, Northern Shanxi Kick Drum Yangko (training combination for male) and Northern Shanxi Kick Drum Yangko (training combination for female). The basic elements are described in detail in the textbook, accompanied by the changes of folk music and fields. Unique level of professionalism, the value of complete training process and the outstanding dance style in North Shanxi have all earned the classroom professional combinations of movement in the kick drum yangko part of *Shanxi Folk Dance* high authority. And in terms of the teaching material of cultural perception, the geographical environment, main schools, role classification, typical movements and style features of kick drum yangko are expounded in the Overview of Northern Shanxi Kick Drum Yangko. In the subdivision section, there is also a detailed introduction on the cause of action and combination tips. It can be seen that teaching contents of cultural perception are detailed and rich [3].

#### V. CONCLUSION

Through the "questionnaire on cultural cultivation of undergraduates majoring in dance", it can be seen that in the eyes of the public, the cultural cultivation of students majoring in dance is very important. However, the idea of cultural cultivation in the teaching process of dance majors is only the first step in a long journey. There is still a long way to go to deepen the thought until it is carried out. It is believed that in the near future, a scientific teaching concept can be established, a reasonable curriculum structure can be set up and modern teaching methods can be used to help students truly understand dance culture and integrate into each kind of dance so as to spread the art of dance. In doing so can they make more people understand dance, love dance and gradually reverse the public opinion on the cultural literacy of students majoring in dance.

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