A Brief Discussion on the Value Research of "Creative Imagination" in Michael Chekhov's Methodology for Building "Body Mind Unity" in Physical Theatre Creation

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Abstract. As one of the modern novel theatrical genres, body play is a new form of theatrical art in modern society, opening up new paths for the development of theatrical art. It emphasizes the "physicality" of drama, by exercising and developing the actors' bodies, exploring and exploring more possibilities for their physical abilities and the actors' bodies themselves. Michael Chekhov, as the greatest actor and performance trainer of the 21st century, boldly innovated and developed based on the Stanislavski system. It is proposed that actors should have "creative imagination" and liberate their physical training in performance creation, dedicated to helping actors discover their unique creative potential, in order to achieve an organic unity of "body psychology" on stage, and ultimately shape characters with independent vitality.

Keywords: Michael Chekhov, Physical Theatre, creative imagination

1 Introduction

Since the introduction of the Stanislavski system in the 1950s, the field of Chinese theatrical performance has ushered in a new chapter of development. Not only does it demonstrate vitality in both theory and practice, but it also plays a crucial role in stage practice and talent cultivation. With the development of the times, the forms of drama have become increasingly rich, and diverse forms of drama emerge one after another. The theory of drama performance should also keep up with the times, constantly update and develop. The Michael Chekhov Method, as an innovative development of the Stanislavski system, is committed to helping actors explore their own creative personality of "creative imagination" and make breakthrough developments based on it - proposing new concepts such as "psychological posture", "imaginary body", "imaginary center", and "atmosphere". These concepts also effectively address certain limitations in the Skoda system, such as helping actors overcome the negative effects of excessive reliance on emotional memory, and more effectively guiding actors to enter

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the creative state from the perspective of characters. The "creative imagination" in Michael Chekhov's methodology provides actors with a more scientific and innovative approach to character development. It not only inherits the advantages of the Skoda system, but also compensates for the shortcomings of actors in "imagination", providing a new path for helping actors achieve "physical and mental unity" in body drama creation.

2 The Origin and Development of Physical Drama

“Physical drama "is a form of performance that unfolds narration through" physical events ",in which actors use their bodies to transcend the limitations of language and express the content of the work intuitively to the audience. It takes "physical events" as the narrative core, covering multiple styles and genres through concise and precise body movements, creating intuitive and vivid dramatic imagery. Most researchers believe that 'body drama' originated from mime, a form of drama that relies on bodily language expression, and its history can be traced back to ancient Greece[1].

3 The Concept and Characteristics of Michael Chekhov Methodology Centered on “Creative Imagination”

The Michael Chekhov Method emphasizes giving actors great freedom, with the main intention of "inspiring" and cultivating actors into a state of "creativity". This state allows actors to enter joyfully and is full of strength, inspiring them to develop skills in order to meet their own demands. This ability to develop and create is exactly what Michael Chekhov called the "creative personality" of actors. The 'creative personality' allows actors to utilize a broader and more primitive part of their subconscious, rather than being limited to the mundane elements that make up daily life.

3.1 The Concept of "Creative Imagination" In Michael Chekhov's Methodology

What is imagination? The famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that "imagination, as an intuitive ability that exists even when an object is not present, is either created or replicated."[2] At the same time, he also emphasized the important position of imagination in epistemology, as a bridge connecting sensibility and intellect. That is to say, "imagination" is a thinking activity based on sensory materials to recreate existing images. Playwrights use this ability to shape characters with personality, emotions, and stories from abstract concepts, and integrate them into the script. Michael Chekhov believed that "a calm, rational analysis, and materialistic way of thinking can stifle imagination." [3] This means that performing arts require imagination, and if actors use only rational analysis like scientists, it will weaken the vividness of characters, and excessive analysis will lead to emotional dullness, weak willpower, and reduced inspiration. Imagination is crucial for actors because it helps them form a

"visual image" through internal psychological activities based on their experience of the character, and then concentrate their attention to perceive the character from an internal perspective.

What is' creative imagination '? In Michael Chekhov's training system, 'creative imagination' is crucial. It first refers to the ability of the brain to independently construct new images driven by goals. These images develop, transform, and refine unconsciously in a creative "gaze", gradually optimizing and ultimately shaping the external and internal life image of the character, thereby stimulating the emotions, feelings, and intuition required by the actor, and ultimately forming the "internal motivation" of the character. At the same time, Chekhov emphasized that actors must find the "center of imagination" of the character, which is the source of the character's impulses and actions, endowing the body with a coordinated appearance, and constructing an "imaginary body" that is closer to the character's "ideal body", thereby guiding the performance and stimulating energy. In addition, actors need to closely integrate their psychological activities with external actions, shaping their characters around specific psychological images, and presenting their inner world more realistically through "psychological postures" - a combination of imagination and emotional actions. Therefore, in Chekhov's view, "creative imagination" is not only the process of constructing images, but also the core driving force from images to actions, from the inside to the outside, and ultimately shaping vivid characters.

Therefore, Michael Chekhov believed that "creative imagination is one of the main channels through which artists provide unique, personal interpretations of the characters they shape[4]. Indeed, Michael Chekhov's "creative imagination" in the true sense refers to starting from the characters, seeing their images in the mind and asking them questions, discovering new things, displaying unique creative personalities, and embodying them.

3.2 The Characteristics of Michael Chekhov's Methodology Centered on "Creative Imagination"

Before delving into the application of Michael Chekhov's methodology centered around "creative imagination," it is necessary to have a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the characteristics of this concept. This section will systematically elaborate on the key characteristics of "creative imagination" and analyze its role in actors shaping roles, expressing emotions, and creating vivid character images, thereby revealing its importance as a performance tool and its significant position in theatrical performance.

3.2.1 Creative Imagination Has Freedom.

In Michael Chekhov's performance system, "creative imagination" allows actors to break free from the limitations of personal experience and create authentic and trustworthy characters. This imagination, which originates from the body, goes beyond simple associations, but instead uses a combination of body texture and concise yet strong "psychological posture" to penetrate the muscles of the whole body, even

changing "posture" at will in different situations, arousing unfamiliar emotions belonging to the character in the subconscious. Actors capture the most captivating moments of their characters by repeatedly reading the script, using their "concentration" to freeze them, and continuously improving and refining them through questioning, incorporating small actions and lines, until they form the "best image". This process covers a cycle from imagining characters, experiencing characters, exploring the depths of characters' hearts and being infected, to "rehearsing" and integrating new elements, ultimately presenting a unique and imaginative performance on stage. Chekhov believed that "creative imagination" is a direct manifestation of an actor's creative personality, allowing the actor to freely change and choose imagery until it meets the expectations of the performance and director, thus freeing themselves from erroneous limitations and unleashing the actor's creative expression.

Therefore, 'creative imagination' is free. But at the same time, this freedom is not a wild imagination, but rather the freedom of actors to start from the characters, use their "creative imagination" to generate images about the characters in their imagination, and engage in imaginative "gaze" and fusion with the "imaginary body" in their creation. This creative approach not only has a certain degree of arbitrariness and individuality, but also reflects the pure emotions and independent vitality of the characters.

3.2.2 Creative Imagination Has Poetic Qualities.

From a macro perspective, poeticity refers to the process in which the subject projects emotions to detach the object from everyday experience and imbue it with symbolic meaning[5].The painting "Fishing Alone in the Cold River" by the famous Southern Song Dynasty painter Ma Yuan depicts only a small boat and an old man fishing in the bottom right corner, with the rest of the picture being "blank space". Therefore, different viewers have different subjective experiences and unique meanings in their imagination when observing the entire painting due to the "blank space" part: tranquility, loneliness, and life, thus producing different inner experiences and changing their current state of mind - that is, the subjective reconstruction and happy expression of the objective world inspired by people's hearts. Therefore, at this point, it coincides with Michael Chekhov's "atmosphere theory", in which he referred to "atmosphere" as "objective feeling", opposite to the actor's personal emotions. After creating an infectious atmosphere on stage, as long as the actor actively accepts and fully immerses himself in it, he will unconsciously change his actions, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions.

So how is this atmosphere formed? Actors activate their "creative imagination" to create a specific atmosphere in the space outside their bodies, and maintain this atmosphere in their imagination, thus actively entering this objective atmosphere. This atmosphere can influence actors, stimulate new emotions and creative impulses, and thus motivate actors to coordinate with them during performances. Therefore, the "atmosphere" created by actors through imagination can actively lead them into the situation, forming a cyclic and smooth stage performance.

It can be seen that the essence of Michael Chekhov's "atmosphere theory" lies in its poetic quality, emphasizing that actors are not passive recipients, but actively use their "creative imagination" to create and immerse themselves in the stage atmosphere. This

fusion of subjectivity and objectivity drives the emotions and behaviors of actors, forming a cycle on stage: actors enter the objective atmosphere through "creative imagination", which affects their subjective perception, thereby inspiring inspiration, generating new emotions and actions, and constantly enriching character shaping.

3.2.3 Creative Imagination Has High Efficiency.

Nowadays, with the rapid development of society, modern theatrical art forms are also showing diversified upward development in this context. Undoubtedly, the improvement of actors' performance and creative skills is particularly important, requiring their creative skills to keep up with the times and adapt to the constantly evolving theatrical art genres. In traditional performance modes, actors often rely on their own personal experiences to find and recall emotional memories similar to their characters, in order to shape them. But in Michael Chekhov's view, 'performance should never be autobiographical, constantly relying on the actor's own experiences can lead to a' deterioration of talent ', and limited personal experience storage can quickly stagnate and stagnate.'. ”Because the quality of emotional memory varies from person to person, it may make it difficult for actors to perform in modern dramas that require rapid emotional transitions, or due to limited personal experiences, they may not be able to fully shape multifaceted characters. If true emotions cannot be smoothly conveyed, false and rigid performances will arise, causing actors' creativity to fall into a bottleneck. Therefore, actors need to seek more efficient and accurate techniques to ensure emotional coherence and authenticity.

In response to the limitations of emotional memory, Michael Chekhov emphasized the use of "creative imagination" to stimulate actors' ultimate emotions through the internal "energy body" starting from the "body mind". For example, by imagining the inner "body of energy" sinking to its limit and feeling the emotional impact of "great sadness" it brings. The advantage of this method is that it does not rely on preconceptions about the emotions of the characters, but guides the generation and development of emotions based on the physiological structure of the human body. It is efficient and can help actors flexibly adjust and transform their emotional states, freeing themselves from the constraints of emotional memory.

Therefore, this creative method that combines "creative imagination" with the actor's "body of energy" can help actors flexibly adjust and transform their emotional states in creation, without being limited by emotional memory, making the performance more realistic and coherent to meet the needs of theatrical performance, both easy to operate and more efficient.

4 The Role of Using Michael Chekhov's Method of "Creative Imagination" to Shape

The core of body language drama is to use "body language" to tell stories, and the "creative imagination" in Michael Chekhov's methodology provides actors with a way to enter the souls of characters. Actors use their "creative imagination" to delve into the hearts of characters, transforming emotions into "concrete" body movements. They are

no longer simply imitators, but rather imbue characters with souls by stimulating their own "body mind". This creative approach is highly compatible with the concept that body plays are the main form of performance in body plays. Therefore, I believe that the Michael Chekhov Method can not only effectively unify the "body mind" of body play actors, but also be more suitable for the creation of body plays. Its functions include the following:

4.1 Beyond Excessive Rationality, Inspire Physical Inspiration

Artists generally believe that reason has limitations because the essence of art is more derived from the combination of sensory intuition, emotional experience, inspiration, and creativity, rather than just a product of rational thinking. Body drama embodies this concept, as it relies on the actors' highly creative bodies to tell stories on an empty stage, which is full of imagination and requires not only the actors' imagination but also the audience's participation. The famous German philosopher Schelling once said, "Imagination is the core power of artistic creation, which achieves the unity of finite and infinite through 'internalization and shaping'. In addition, he also pointed out that "imagination is a 'creative intuition' that can integrate opposing elements into a whole, thereby creating works of art[6].

In the creative rehearsal of body language dramas, directors often emphasize "not to think too rationally, to do it" because excessive rational thinking can lead to rigid artistic creation. The Michael Chekhov Method emphasizes exploring bodily textures such as earth, water, fire, and air through "creative imagination," in order to help body actors open up inspiration for their bodies. This is a way to go beyond textual analysis and directly inspire inspiration through body psychology. For example, in the physical drama "Frog", the actors were initially confined to sad emotions and had hollow movements. The director guides the actors to use the physical texture of "earth" to imagine being deeply immersed in the soil, with each step heavy and difficult, thus revealing the inner powerlessness and struggle of the female protagonist. The texture of 'earth' becomes the key to unlocking the inner world of characters, transforming abstract emotions into real body movements and presenting more profound and tense performances. This method not only helps actors find suitable performance styles, but also stimulates a deep understanding of the characters, thereby creating more persuasive performances.

At the same time, we need to know that after understanding the script, actors need to go beyond excessive rationality, not completely abandon rationality, but focus on "creative imagination", starting from the characters, constructing character images and bodies, and integrating the imagined bodies with themselves. By using extreme attention, imagination, and "physical psychological" interaction, rigid rationality is squeezed out, thus liberating the creative personality of actors.

4.2 Breaking Through Traditional Barriers and Exploring Performance Possibilities

Michael Chekhov believed that traditional realism drama overly imitates reality and neglects the artistic aspect of drama. It should elevate and refine reality through artistic means to create more infectious theatrical experiences. Actors should use "creative imagination" to delve into the hearts of characters and transform emotions into body language. Body drama also opposes the stage becoming a "replica" of life, emphasizing the re creation of reality. Actors use their bodies as brushes to "Concretize" emotions, thoughts, and souls, showcasing the profound power and spiritual core hidden beneath the surface of reality. This exploration of the "reality of life" is precisely the unique charm that distinguishes physical drama from traditional drama.

Michael Chekhov believed that actors must break through the "fourth wall" of the stage, allowing the "energy field" to pass through it, allowing the audience to participate and feel the actor's soul and energy. This' energy field 'is not a simple physical field, but a flow that includes emotions, thoughts, and creativity. Breaking the 'fourth wall' is not only about breaking down physical spatial boundaries, but more importantly, about breaking down the spiritual barriers between actors and audiences, allowing their 'energy' to be transmitted and radiated to each other, and jointly completing artistic creation. This is consistent with the concept of telling stories to the audience through the "body" in body language dramas. Body drama does not exclude communication with the audience. By breaking down the "fourth wall" and creating a special performance context, actors act as guides, presenting symbolic symbols through their bodies to stimulate the audience's imagination. The audience decodes these symbols and feels the charm of body drama through interaction with the performance.

4.3 Endow Characters with Depth and Vitality

Michael Chekhov firmly believed that actors have two selves: one is their everyday self, and the other is their artistic self. The purpose of creative imagination is to transform the everyday self into the artistic self, change the energy of the actor, and bring the actor's energy into the character[7].Body language drama is an important branch of modern drama, which abandons the excessive dependence of traditional drama on language and presents the inner world of characters through exquisite body language. This art form condenses reality into imaginative and symbolic visual impacts, breaking through the limitations of natural realism and emphasizing the physical expression and spatial use of actors.

In the creative body drama "Frog", actors need to quickly switch between up to twenty characters, which requires them to be able to grasp the essence of the characters in an instant. At the same time, each character must have a unique vitality and must not be mediocre. In order to help actors quickly enter the scene, we use "creative imagination" to give the characters special adjectives, such as "a frog burning with desire in love" and "an old woman in a hurry; For the latter, it combines the attributes of "fire" and "balloon" to showcase its fiery and expanding power. Through this multidimensional attribute endowment, even in rapid role transitions, actors can accurately capture

the unique personality and vitality of characters, presenting vivid and lively images on stage. The core of this method is to make abstract attributes no longer just concepts, but become a part of the character's soul, thereby helping actors to understand and interpret characters more deeply.

The Michael Chekhov Method emphasizes the use of "creative imagination" by actors, breaking the limitations of traditional performance methods that overly rely on personal experience. Instead, it starts from the characters and delves into their pure emotions and souls. This method not only helps actors organically combine "creative imagination" with "physical psychological", but also inspires actors to deeply experience the inner world of characters and diversify the use and selection of creative methods.

5 Conclusion

This article explores the value of "creative imagination" in the performance of physical drama in Michael Chekhov's methodology. Its free, poetic, and efficient characteristics enable actors to shape characters beyond reason, endowing them with depth and vitality, and constructing a "unity of body and mind".

At the same time, as contemporary performing arts practitioners, we should also reflect on the current difficulties in professional physical training in performance: excessive reliance on dance patterns, emphasis on appearance over creativity, and a disconnect between teaching and performance.

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