

## REVIEW ARTICLE

## RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DANCE EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DANCE DIPLOMACY IN THE EARLY PERIOD OF THE FOUNDING OF NEW CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

During the early stages of New China's establishment, the focal point of diplomatic efforts centered on economic and cultural avenues. However, the fledgling economy, still recovering from pre-liberation conditions, struggled to promptly meet the demands of diplomacy. In this context, literature and art emerged as vital catalysts propelling the progress of New China's diplomatic endeavors. Notably, within the realm of cultural diplomacy, dance emerged as a powerful form of non-verbal communication. Its unique attributes, such as cost-effectiveness and rapid conveyance of intended impact, rendered it a versatile tool on diplomatic platforms. Dance, functioning as a dynamic form of expression, became a captivating medium for fostering connections and tightening bonds between New China and other nations. It became a radiant gem in the crown of New China's cultural diplomacy, serving as an instrument to bring countries closer together. The mesmerizing allure of dance on diplomatic stages gradually facilitated enhanced relationships and collaborations. As a result, this emphasis on cultural diplomacy through dance catalyzed the evolution of dance education within China. In essence, during a period marked by economic constraints and the imperative to establish diplomatic ties, dance's intrinsic ability to bridge gaps and convey emotions without language barriers allowed it to shine as an integral component of New China's cultural diplomacy. Its role in forging connections and enhancing international relationships also played a pivotal role in the unfolding narrative of dance education's growth within China.

## KEYWORDS

New China, dance, diplomacy, education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employing the keyword "dance vocational education" for a comprehensive search on CNKI yielded a collection of around 30 pertinent articles. A preliminary examination of these articles revealed a predominant focus on diverse domains such as model research, talent training, and curriculum development within the realm of dance vocational education. However, notably absent was any scholarly exploration into the historical roots that underpin the evolution of dance vocational education. Consequently, the current landscape of dance academia lacks comprehensive historical investigations in this pivotal facet of education.

This evident gap in existing literature underscores the significance of embarking on an inquiry into the historical origins of dance vocational education. By delving into the past, we stand to uncover the foundational factors, developmental trajectories, and pivotal milestones that have contributed to the establishment and growth of dance vocational education. This research seeks to address this scholarly void by navigating through historical archives, primary documents, and relevant scholarly resources, with the aim of shedding light on the transformative journey of dance vocational education from its nascent stages to its contemporary form. Through this endeavor, we aspire to provide valuable insights that enrich our understanding of the intricate interplay between historical context and the establishment of educational frameworks within the realm of dance.

## 2. METHOD

This research employs a historical analysis approach to examine the remarkable role of dance in advancing cultural diplomacy during the inception of New China. Through an investigation of primary sources, archival records, and scholarly literature, the paper aims to establish the substantial contributions of dance to cultural diplomacy. By tracing the contextual factors and diplomatic engagements where dance played a pivotal role, the study seeks to highlight the intrinsic link between dance and the promotion of international relations.

Furthermore, the research employs a comparative analysis of historical events and policy shifts to identify the underlying historical inevitability that led to the development of dance vocational education in New China. This involves examining how dance's impactful presence in cultural diplomacy created a demand for formalized training and education in the field. By delving into the socio-political climate and policy initiatives, the study aims to unravel the cause-and-effect relationship between dance's diplomatic role and the subsequent growth of dance vocational education within the broader context of New China's cultural development.

## 3. RESULTS

## 3.1 Dance as an essential part of cultural diplomacy

In the early period of the founding of New China, the promotion of

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diplomatic work was mainly depending on economy and culture. With the economy staggering from the pre-liberation state at a scale hardly capable of meeting the needs of diplomacy in the short term, the role of literature and art became an essential force for driving the advancement of New China's diplomacy. In cultural diplomacy, dance, as a body language, especially due to its characteristics of lower communication cost and faster demonstration of expected effect, found its unlimited playground on diplomatic occasions and inevitably became the "shining pearl" in New China's cultural diplomacy for bringing together or a closer relationship between New China and other countries.

In July 1949, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) was planning to organize the 2nd World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship ("World Youth Festival") in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. To be hosted by the World Democratic Youth Union and co-hosted by the International Union of Students (IUS), the Festival was aimed at opposing aggression and war and appealing for peace and friendship. Before that, the 1st World Youth Festival was held in July 1947 in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia (Hu, 2021). New China decided to seize this opportunity to conduct some publicity and, to do so, a Chinese Delegation of Democratic Youth was formed and sent to Budapest to introduce and make known to the world that the New China was about to be born. Xiao Hua, the then Political Commissar of the 13th Corps of the 4th Field Army and formerly elected as a member of WFDY, was appointed as head of the Chinese Delegation of Democratic Youth to participate in the World Youth Festival (Guo, 2023). The Chinese Delegation was instructed by Commissar Xiao to give full play to the lively characteristics of young people and introduce the real situation of Chinese nationalities and all walks of life to people of the world.

This activity caused great attention by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou, and these words were told by Chairman Mao to Commissar Xiao: "Right now, the outside world knows very little about the Chinese revolution, the propaganda machine of Kuomintang has been badmouthing about us, as if we were monsters with fangs. Now that you are going to Eastern Europe to show the world what New China really is like, sure this visit will not be easy for you" (Hu, 2021).

In August 1949, the China Youth Art Troupe went to Budapest, Hungary to participate in the 2nd World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, during which the Troupe performed the Yangge opera "Twelve Sickles"; Jia Zuoguang, Siqintariha and other dancers performed the Chinese folk dances such as "Horse Dance", "Hope", "Mongolian Dance", "Waist Drum Dance" and "Grand Yangge". In the end, both "Waist Drum Dance" and "Grand Yangge" won the special award, which was the first time for Chinese national folk dance to win such award on the international stage with its debut performance.

In the summer of 1951, New China sent a delegation of 332 representatives to Berlin to participate in the 3rd World Youth Festival. Feng Wenbin, head of the delegation, with Wu Han and Rong Gaotang as the deputies, went to Europe again with the outstanding youth representatives from all walks of life as well as the China Youth Art Troupe and a team of athletes (Liu, 2021). With a strong sense of national honor and historical mission, the Art Troupe gave excellent performances; the "Red Silk Dance" and "Tibetan Dance", with distinctive Chinese characteristics, won two gold medals for China at the 3rd World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, and the great success of the Art Troupe left foreign audiences with an impressive understanding of Chinese dance. After participating in the World Youth Festival in East Germany, the Chinese Youth Art Troupe started a series of tours to all cities in East Germany and the then many countries in Europe, including the Democratic Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, Austria, Romania, and Hungary, giving performances with non-stop while exchanging ideas with the European peers. At that time, whenever the foreigners were watching the performance by Chinese female dancers, their attention would be focused on their feet, and our female dancers would deliberately take big strides to show that women in New China didn't have to keep small feet at all. The foreign audiences who were watching the "Red Silk Dance" had to admit that New China was already on its road to prosperity (Ruan, 2021).

Reading about this history, it's understood that before the founding of New China, dance had already become an important part of diplomacy, showing its prominence on the international stage and winning awards; however, systematic dance vocational education had not yet been carried out in New China at that time. Nevertheless, in the cultural diplomacy of New China after its founding, dance art and relevant activities, especially the dance art presented during the World Youth Festivals, played an important role in shaping the national image of New China. During the competition and the tours of performance, the China Youth Art Troupe made a great voice in

introducing Chinese traditional folk songs and dances to the audiences at home and abroad; back to China, they brought foreign folk songs and dances to the Chinese audiences. Dance diplomacy contributed to the building of national image and the establishment of benign diplomatic relationship between China and countries around the world. Soon after, the foreign dance troupes began to learn and perform Chinese dances and received warm response from Chinese audiences, contributing to the strengthened vision and persistence in China's dance diplomacy. The cultural thoughts and practices advocated by China in dance diplomacy fully showed China's respect for other nations' cultures, such as the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and reflected the positive response to China's consolidation of political alliances with these countries through dance communication (Ruan, 2021; Shen, 2022; Wei and Diao, 2019).

### 3.2 "Lotus Dance" and "Asia-Pacific Regional Peace Conference" and "World Youth Festival"

With peace and security in the Asian and Pacific region seriously endangered by the United States' invasion of Korean in sabotaging the armistice negotiations, in October 1952, Song Qingling and Guo Moruo, two of the famous Chinese peace-makers jointly initiated the Asia and Pacific Regional Peace Conference, which was attended by 400 delegates from 37 countries. This was the first major international conference organized and held by New China.

It's a tradition that the people of Asia love lotus and regard it as a symbol of peace and happiness, and it was the wish of Premier Zhou that the Dance Troupe of the Central Academy of Drama perform a dance to display the beautiful image of lotus during the Peace Conference, therefore a creative group led by the famous dramatist and dancer Li Bozhao was formed, with music composed by Liu Chi, Liu Xing and Qiao Gu; lyrics by Cheng Ru; choreography by Ma Xianglin, Liu Chi and Dai Ailian; and art design by Yu Feng and Zhang Zhengyu. In 1949, the Great Song&Dance "Long Live the People's Victory" came on to stage, and one of the episodes was named "Flowers for Celebration", which was a children's song&dance choreographed according to the Gansu Longzhong Yangge dance "Walking Lanterns", with dancers wearing lotus lamps and singing and dancing in a lively and light mood -- truly a beautiful and cheerful image presented in front of the audience. After discussions and reporting for approval, it was decided to use this form of song&dance to develop a dance with the theme of peace and love, therefore the "Walking Lanterns" was turned into the "Lotus Dance".

In order to participate in the 4th World Youth Festival in 1953, Dai Ailian decided to re-adapt the "Lotus Dance". During the Spring Festival, she went to northern Shaanxi to watch "Lotus Lanterns" and "Walking Lanterns" performed by farmers at the festival -- the 15th day of the first lunar month, and re-studied the theme and artistic treatment of "Lotus Dance", which was later performed at the 4th World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, with great success achieved. Since then, "Lotus Dance" has been recognized as the "classic of Chinese dances in the 20th century" and has been repeatedly performed.

In August 1953, at the 4th World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship held in Bucharest, Romania, the China Youth Art Troupe achieved a great success in its performance, and the list of winning dances and dancers was as follows: Group dance -- first prize winners: "Uproar in Heaven", "War of Water" (selected from "Yandang Mountain"), and "Lion Dance". Second prize winners: "Lotus Lanterns", "Tea Picking and Butterfly Dancing"; Solo folk dance -- first prize winner: Huang Yuhua in "Autumn River"; Triple dance -- second prize winners: Yun Yingshi, Wang Xixian and Yang Zhaozhong in "Running Donkey".

### 3.3 The 1st National Folk music&dance Performance Conference -- a driving force for the development of dance education in New China

In order to select the perfect dance works for attending the 4th World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, after the 1st National Folk music&dance Performance Conference was held in Beijing in April 1953, the China Youth Art Troupe gave more than a dozen music&dance performances, and conducted a careful study of each piece. The list of dances being studied was as follows: North China folk dance "Lion Dance" and "Running Donkey", Northeast folk dance "Single Drum", Anhui folk dance "Flower Drum Lanterns", Fujian folk dance "Tea Picking Dance", as well as "Tibet Dance", "Red Silk Dance", and "Lotus dance"; Classical songs&dances "Uproar in Heaven", "Fork Road", "Yandang Mountain", "Autumn River", and so on (Li, 2012).

From April 1 to 14, 1953, with the approval of the Central Government and

hosted by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, the "1st National Folk Music & Dance Performance" was held in Beijing, which was a large-scale folk music & dance performance sponsored by the government in the history of New China. The performance had a profound impact on the development of music & dance in New China. First, more than 100 varieties of folk music & dance were discovered and explored during the National Performance; Second, most of the folk musicians and dancers who participated in the National Performance were already great masters of music & dance art with a unique position in certain circles. After giving performances, a considerable number of these musicians and dancers were absorbed into professional performance troupes and professional art colleges, where the scattered forms of self-entertainment music & dance art were transformed into well-organized stage performance art. With the injection of these outstanding folk musicians and dancers into professional troupes and colleges, the original structure and composition of literary and art teams had been changed, further enriching the content of teaching materials, and opening up a road for students in professional colleges and universities to directly learn from folk artists, which had become an important feature of the development of dance education in New China; And third, it provided new and enriched resources for professional music & dance performance and education. After the National Performance, a number of excellent masterpieces were selected and put on the professional performance stage, forming a long-running repertoire of classic stage performance programs in a certain period of time (Peng, 2007). A large number of works such as "Red Silk Dance", "Lotus Dance", "Dragon Dance", "Lion Dance" and "Tea Picking and Butterfly Dancing" had not only become popular pieces among the people, but also had won international awards. These classic dances not only reflected the spirit of an entire era in a profound way, they were also telling the stories of New China by giving performances at the World Youth Festival for repeated times, which was a way of enhancing the cultural confidence and strengthening the cultural soft power and literary influence of New China while presenting a positive, confident and hopeful image of New China to the world.

### 3.4 The evolution path of dance education in New China

As a means of art dissemination and publicity, dance had played an important value-leading role together with drama, fine arts and music. Art serving the whole nation had become the spiritual identity and value orientation in dance education. At the beginning of the founding of New China, more than a hundred missions were to be accomplished, and literature and education ushered in a spring for greater development, for which China started to learn from the former Soviet Union for its unique mode of art development and talent training.

On July 2, 1949, the National Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers was held in Beijing, and six representative from the dance circle attended the Congress, namely Dai Ailian, Wu Xiaobang, Chen Jinqing, Sheng Jie, Liang Lun, and Hu Guogang. On July 21, 1949, the predecessor of the China Dancers Association, the All-China Dancers Association, was established with Dai Ailian as the Chairman and Wu Xiaobang as the Deputy, signifying the beginning of a new era of dance in China. At the Council meeting, the associates gathered together to review the role of China's new dance work in the era of Revolutionary War, and the outlook for the development of new dance after the founding of New China. One key point in discussion was that in order to improve the level of dance art on the basis of popularization, it was necessary to establish professional dance education institutions. According to the national layout of artistic undertakings, representatives from the dance circle started to plan how to cultivate a group of backbone dance teachers for the development of New China's dance undertakings. In the discussion on which institution should be selected for affiliating the department of dance education, it was officially decided that the task of establishing the first dance department in New China should fall on the Central Academy of Drama (CAD), with the famous drama master Ouyang Yuqian as the then President.

In December 1949, Guang Weiran, former Deputy Director of the Third Department of North China University, presided over the preparation work to establish the Central Academy of Drama, and was appointed as the Director of Education. In April 1950, the Central Academy of Drama was officially established. At the same time, New China's first professional Song and Dance Troupe was established as a division of the Central Academy of Drama, with Dai Ailian as the Captain and Chen Jinqing as the Deputy (Qiu, 2008; Che 2006; Yang, 2017). During the campaign to resist American aggression and aid North Korea, the dance drama "Dove of Peace" choreographed by CAD President Ouyang Yuqian, directed by Dai Ailian and Chen Jinqing and starred by Dai Ailian and Ding Ning, was a milestone in the development history of New China's dance art as a large-scale dance drama collectively created by Chinese playwrights and dance artists. The dance movements of "Dove of Peace" were mainly in the form of ballet, and

this dance signified the official start of the art cause of dance drama in New China.

In August 1950, invited by CAD President Ouyang Yuqian, Wu Xiaobang returned to Beijing for discussion: in order to further push forward the development of dance campaign in each province after liberation, and for improvement and popularization of dance art, it was decided to set up a dance training class with students coming from local art troupes across China. In December 1950, Wu Xiaobang started the preparation work to build the class, which was named the "Dance Campaign Cadre Training Class" under the Dance Department of the Central Academy of Drama, or simply referred to as the "Dance Campaign Class", with Wu Xiaobang as the Director of the Dance Department. On January 15, 1951, with the approval of the Ministry of Culture of the Central Committee, the recruiting rules were issued to 25 art troupes in provinces, cities and armed forces in China. On March 12, 1951, the "Dance Campaign Class" held the opening ceremony in the auditorium of CAD, a total of 68 students were recruited to study at CAD for one and a half years, with Wu Xiaobang as the head teacher and Ye Ning as the instructor; Luo Zhang, Peng Song and Gao Lianjia were responsible for the routine work to organize the students to learn basic dance skills as well as Beijing Opera, Kunqu Opera, etc.

Under the leadership of the Academy, especially the attention from the President Ouyang Yuqian and the supervision by Wu Xiaobang, based on discussions with the teaching group, it was decided to cultivate dance professionals and future cadres with excellent mastering of both political theory and professional knowledge and skills, so that they would be able to independently carry out dance activities in the future after they graduated with comprehensive artistic accomplishment. After two semesters, the students of the "Dance Campaign Class" had learned a total of 12 courses: political theory, dance theory, basic dance techniques, creative practice, Chinese opera dance, ballet, foreign folk dance, dance notation, music, literature, stage art, and special lectures. The "Dance Campaign Cadre Training Class" trained the first group of professional dancers and future cadres in New China. After graduation, they went to different provinces and cities in China and became the backbone of dance education and creation, good at both theoretical research and practical activities.

At the same time, under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Culture and the Central Academy of Drama, the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Class" was established on March 15, 1951, with Cui Chengxi as the head teacher. As an affiliate to the Central Academy of Drama, the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Class" was a special utility led by the Korean dancer Cui Chengxi, and the courses were: Chinese classical dance, Korean dance, Southern dance, new dance, ballet, foreign national dance, rhythm class, as well as political theory, art theory, music, creation theory, introduction to dance history, etc. This class was established with the task to teach and create: on the one hand to train Chinese and Korean dancers and cadres, on the other hand to create and perform, with the two closely combined (Che, 2006). In March 1952, diplomas were issued to the graduates. In July 1952, as officially approved by the leadership of the Central Academy of Drama, the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Class" was upgraded into the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Institute" of the Central Academy of Drama. In October 1952, due to the repatriation of Korean comrades, the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Institute" was revoked.

It was only a few years of operation of the short-term training classes, however, this form had played an irreplaceable role in the construction of dance theaters in New China with its extensive coverage and flexible mobility. During these couple of years, dance education in New China started flourishing (Zhang, 2020). The "Dance Campaign Cadre Training Class" and the "Cui Chengxi Dance Research Class" trained the first group of comprehensive and versatile dance talents for New China. These dancers were not only performance talents, they were also talented in dance education, dance choreography and dance theory. Through guidance and teaching, together with the students they had gradually formed a trend of "single sparks that might start a fire across the prairie", a trend that had laid a solid foundation for the initial development of dance vocational education in New China.

### 3.5 Beijing Dance School -- a new chapter in dance education in New China

As early as in 1952, the "Cultural and Art Development Plan" was developed by the Ministry of Culture according to Wu Xiaobang's suggestion to establish a professional dance school. On February 12, 1953, the Ministry of Culture decided to start preparations for the first professional dance school in New China, for which Vice Minister Liu Zhiming had sent a letter to Zhou Yang and Shen Yanbing to require for reporting on the progress of the preparatory work made by the



Preparatory Committee for establishing the Beijing Dance School (today's BDA, Beijing Dance Academy). After the meeting and discussions, the following three important decisions were made: First, to form the Preparatory Committee of Beijing Dance School composed of Wu Xiaobang, Chen Jinqing, Ye Ning, Sheng Jie, Dai Ailian, Hu Guogang, Zhou Weizhi and Zhou Jialuo, with Wu as the Director and Chen as the Deputy; Second, to open the dance teacher training class with Wu as the head teacher and Chen as the deputy; And third, to name the first dance school since the founding of New China as "Beijing Dance School".

In the first half of 1953, under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, two groups of experts on textbook preparation were organized at the Central Academy of Drama. Group 1 was led by Ye Ning with Li Zhengyi, Tang Mancheng and Sun Guangyan as members to compile textbooks on opera and dance; Group 2 was led by Sheng Jie with Xu Shuying, Zhu Ping and Wang Liancheng as members to compile textbooks on folk dance. In July 1953, according to the national guidance on internal circulation and development of dance art and relevant resources, the Ministry of Culture started to restructure the network of art schools, departments and leadership in China. To emphasize the status of Beijing Dance School as the number 1 dance school in New China directly under the Ministry of Culture, it was renamed the "MOC Beijing Dance School".

At the end of 1953, by adopting the opinions of the Soviet ballet expert Olger Alexandrovna Irina, based on ballet norms and aiming at cultivating top talents for stage performance, the Ministry of Culture decided to establish a six-year secondary school of dance as a trial operation before adopting the Soviet norm of nine-year secondary school, thus came the founding of the Beijing Dance School, for which a decision was made at the end of 1953 to organize a dance teacher training class first. On February 25, 1954, a dance teacher training class was successfully set up in Xiang'er Hutong in Beijing under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Culture, with Wu Xiaobang as the Director, and Chen Jinqing as the Deputy for presiding over the daily work. On July 22, the dance teacher training class organized by the Ministry of Culture finished its courses, and the future name of the school was determined: Beijing Dance School (Lu, 1994).

On September 6, 1954, altogether 198 students and 106 faculty members of Beijing Dance School gathered in the auditorium to attend the opening ceremony held at Baijiazhuang campus in the eastern suburb of Beijing. The first team of leaders of Beijing Dance School were: President Dai Ailian, Vice President Chen Jinqing, Vice Presidents Nini and Zhou Jialuo. During this period, the Soviet Union gave considerable support to China to facilitate the development of dance education and, under such support and direct influence, the Chinese dance which was still in the initial stage was inspired and started to flourish in both creative ideas and artistic expressions. In the two choreographer training classes held in 1955 and 1958, with direct instruction from Soviet experts including the two ballet masters Chaplin and Gushev, a number of Chinese choreographers were trained and started to play a prominent role in dance education in New China. The establishment of Beijing Dance School laid a solid foundation for dance education and opened a new chapter in dance development in New China (Lu, 1994; Jiang, 2019).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This paper mainly discusses the development of dance education from the perspective of dance diplomacy in the early period of the founding of New China. After the founding of New China, dance, as a means of art dissemination and publicity, played an important value-leading role together with drama, fine arts and music. Art serving the whole nation had become the spiritual identity and value orientation in dance education. Under this background, New China's dance education experienced a journey of continuous exploration and development. During this period, the Soviet Union gave considerable support to China to facilitate the development of dance education and, under such support and direct influence, the Chinese dance was inspired and started to flourish in both creative ideas and artistic expressions. The establishment of Beijing Dance School had laid a solid foundation for dance education in New China and played an important role in training a group of comprehensive and versatile dance talents. The flourishing development of dance education in New China in this period laid a solid foundation for the prosperity and development of dance art.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Dance has significantly contributed to New China's cultural diplomacy and the advancement of dance vocational education. It served as a powerful

tool for showcasing Chinese culture globally. Through dance performances, New China effectively conveyed its traditional values, fostering mutual understanding and friendship between nations. Diverse dance forms from various ethnic groups highlighted China's multicultural identity on the international stage. Participating in global art festivals and cultural exchanges bolstered China's visibility and influence in the worldwide cultural landscape.

Furthermore, dance facilitated people-to-people connections, conveying universal emotions and ideas. This enriched cultural exchanges, fostering a shared sense of identity across borders. Importantly, international cultural interactions provided opportunities for enhancing Chinese dance education. Collaboration with renowned foreign dance institutions led to the adoption of advanced teaching methods, continually elevating the quality of dance training in New China. In essence, dance played a vital role in New China's cultural diplomacy by showcasing its unique cultural charisma, enhancing international influence, and contributing to the growth of dance vocational education.

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