

Dance Props: Studying Silk Dance English Translation

Xi Zhi 习之, 'Silk Dance Study Process' (Chouwuw de xuexi guocheng 绸舞的学习过程), *Dance News* (Wudao tongxun 舞蹈通讯), no. 1, (July 1951): 7.

Translated by Emily Wilcox

'While the Changchun City Cultural Work Troupe was launching its study of national and folk art, we regarded "silk dance" as a national artistic inheritance and adopted it. We confirmed that it had a strong national flavor and color and that it was also very fresh and new. This type of dance has the following characteristics: it uses very long brightly colored ribbons of silk that match with the colors of the costumes; it uses the silk to dance soft winding lines that coordinate with the dancers' movements; and it expresses a kind of beautiful, light-hearted, and happy mood. Thus, we decided to extricate it from Peking opera to make it into an independent form of dance art. After remolding it we wanted to express new content, with the goal of reflecting the mood of contemporary real people's lives. So, we boldly began studying. First, we apprenticed ourselves humbly to traditional folk performers. We learned their original system of foundational dance technique and then used that as the basis for our creation. From a technical perspective, we gained a preliminary grasp of the movement patterns of the silk. Then, when we were creating, we clarified which parts of the dance contained feudal poison and should be criticized. We expelled those weak and unhealthy parts and in this way reformed the heavy and stiff basic dance techniques.

We invited folk artists from the villages and studied the great *yangge* of the Northeast, incorporating the powerful bounding footwork and linking it with silk dance. In this way, we made the original dance technique take on a new appearance. In terms of choreography, we took what was originally a solo performance and turned it into a group performance. We made the patterns presented on stage relatively complex, elevating the energy to express a lively and jubilant mood, very different from the silk dance found in Peking opera. After creating this, we then inserted it into the new *yangge*, performed it many times, and again received lots of feedback. Mainly, after seeing the dance audiences said they felt it was too rushed and there was not enough interaction between the performers. They also said there were not enough technical tricks and that the performance was too ordinary. The form was not unified, the silk dance was influenced too much by other forms and wasn't itself developed, and this made the silk dancing fragmented and incomplete. With these astute suggestions, we carried out another period of long-term revision. We travelled around the Northeast seeking out famous folk artists known for their silk dancing. From them, we learned and adopted agile movements, continuously improving our technique and creating diverse content. We also studied the good parts of how men and women interact in bengbeng drama (also known as erren zhuan [a type of local comedic folk performance]). We came up with patterns in which two people dance with one silk and three people dance with two silks. We basically resolved the above-mentioned problems, opening up and extending the entire silk dance section. The contrast between high

and low moods also became more layered. After a few more revisions, we made the silk dance part again more plentiful and the form more unified, until it came to the current form.'

TITLE

Silk Dance Study Process (Chouwuw de xuexi guocheng 绸舞的学习过程)

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DESCRIPTION

This is the English translation of an article describing the creation process for the modern Han folk dance 'Red Silk Dance' first choreographed and performed by the Changchun City Cultural Work Troupe in 1951. The article originally appeared in the dance publication *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通讯 [*Dance News*] in 1951.