

Dance Presentation of Feather Men Figures in Han Paintings

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ABSTRACT

In the context of realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the related researchers and dancers should, for the realization of the inheritance and development of Chinese dance art, explore and reproduce dance language materials from traditional Chinese cultural resources, achieve the connection between ancient dance resources and contemporary art aesthetics, and then form excellent dance works with Chinese cultural connotations and aesthetics. Of course, the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture through dance is not simply a reconstruction of imagination, but an artistic creation based on respect for history, which requires "narrating history through literature", "proving history through pictures", and "practicing history through the body". This article takes the feather men figures in Han paintings as an example. Firstly, the author conducts research on ancient literature, unearthed cultural relics, and other aspects to verify their historical origins and image evolution; Secondly, based on the expression of Han painting images, the author elaborates on the cultural connotations of the Han painting feathered figure image; Finally, taking the experimental dance work "Feather Men" as an example, the author summarizes the content and process of its dance presentation.

Keywords: *Feather men in Han paintings, Culture, Dance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The smallest language unit in the ontology of dance body language is the action element, which belongs to the scope of linguistic morphemes and has no meaning; The further expanded language unit is action, which belongs to the scope of linguistic words and is called action discourse; Next is action combination, which belongs to the category of phrases and is a combination discourse; Afterwards, there are short action sentences, which belong to the scope of sentences and are part of the dance drama discourse; The subsequent language unit is the dance section, which belongs to the category of linguistic paragraphs and is the dance section discourse; Segments are connected to form a discourse, which belongs to the scope of linguistic discourse and refers to the discourse of plays or dance dramas. The experimental dance "Feather Men" conducts research on the historical origins and cultural connotations of feather men figures in Han paintings from the perspectives of literature and image studies. Subsequently, based on dance body linguistics, action elements and action

discourse are extracted from text and images to form morpheme ranges and word ranges. Through reasonable dance scheduling, combined discourse and short sentence discourse are formed to form phrase ranges and sentence ranges. Finally, from the perspective of narratology, dance segment discourse and drama discourse are formed to form the paragraph range and discourse range of the entire dance. The experimental dance "Feather Men" adopts the form of a duet dance, with a dance structure consisting of three major ABA sections: serving, playing, and serving. The introduction of the program "Feather Men" in the performance of the experimental works of Han painting dance is: "The Classic of Mountains and Seas records that the country of feather men is located in the southeast. They have human heads and feathers on their bodies. Some says that they are at the southeast of inseparable king birds, and they are human with long cheeks. In addition, in the "Chu Ci · Journey", it is said that 'the feather man still live in the old hometown of Danqiu, where they will never die.'" To the Han Dynasty, with the popularity of the worship of Queen Mother of the

West, feather men were endowed with the meaning of “attracting immortals to help longevity, serving gods to entertain people, and dispelling the not auspicious”. In the Han paintings unearthed from Han tombs in Xuzhou and other places, there are often feathered figures serving, playing and dancing, jumping and tumbling from heaven to earth. This program follows the structure of serving (the Queen Mother of the West) - playing (playing with divine beasts, Liubo, and fighting) - serving (the Queen Mother of the West), depicting the spirit of the Han Dynasty people's "climbing Mount Hua, riding the flying dragon" and "floating across the world, being the proud of the four seas" (Han Mirror Inscription)¹

2. “FEATHER MEN SERVING”

The ancient texts of the Western Queen Mother in the pre Qin period mostly recorded her as a half human, half animal figure with a human face, leopard tail, and tiger body, living in the Kunlun Mountains. Since entering the Han Dynasty, local Taoism has become increasingly prosperous, and the Queen Mother of the West has transformed from mythologization to the immortalization of Taoism, becoming a deity who takes the elixir of immortality and helps people live longer. In the ideological and social consciousness of the Han Dynasty, people had a consciousness of fantasy of immortals, and centered on the Queen Mother of the West to create the ideal divine space that the Han people longed for. In the sacrificial scene centered around the Queen Mother of the West, there are often feathered figures, cranes, trees, etc. surrounding it. Here, feathered figures are mostly in a posture of worship or sacrifice, and some even hold immortal grass, lingzhi, and other objects, standing sideways or kneeling sideways, presenting a solemn and solemn feeling throughout the scene. Every detail in this section displays the divine characteristics of the feathered figure and the Han people's yearning and pursuit for the immortal world.² (“Figure 1”, “Figure 2”)

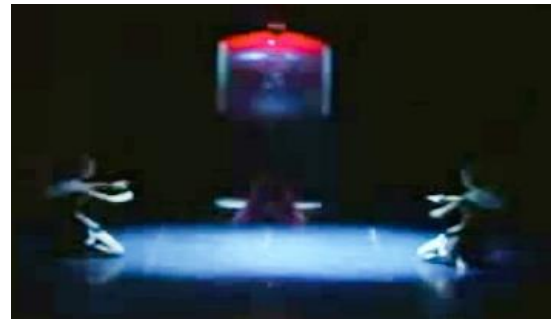


Figure 1 Still from "Feather Men" dance "feather men kneel and worship".



Figure 2 Still from "Feather Men" dance "feather men holding fairy grass".

2.1 Basic Forms

Heads: When feather men serving, their heads are generally in two states: looking up, with the neck relaxed and the chin lifted; bending down, that is relaxing the neck, pressing and retracting the chin. Among them, looking up expresses admiration for the Queen Mother of the West; Bending down indicates the humility of the feathered man himself.

Trunk: The bodies are slightly bent forward above the lumbar spine. The slightly bent posture of the torso comes from imitating the image of a bird, which is in line with the image of Featherman as a servant and the reverence he had when serving the Queen Mother of the West.

Hands: On the basis of loose palms, the index finger and middle finger are close together, the ring finger and middle finger are close together, and the thumb is interlocked. The hand shape is designed based on the shape of a bird's paw and the image of a feathered figure in Chinese painting.

Legs: When in one degree of space, dancers close both legs and kneel on both knees; In two-dimensional space, the knee is bent with an angle

1. Gao Zhong, The Concept and Practice of Reconstruction and Reproduction of Image Music and Dance -- Written on the Occasion of the First "the Belt and Road" Image Music and Dance Reconstruction and Reproduction Seminar. Dance, 2017.

2. Zheng Qi, Li Bei, Dancing Space of Han Painting "Feathered Man". Proceedings of the First "the Belt and Road" Image Music and Dance Reconstruction Seminar, 2017, p24.

greater than 160 degrees. The leg shape is the leg state of the feathered figure in Han painting.

Feet: The heel is fully raised at a 90 degree angle to the ground, and the toes and forefoot are on the ground, in a high half toe state. Standing with the feet half high and the toes pointing upwards, it represents the state of a feathered person ascending and rising upwards.

2.2 Basic Dance Moves

The "feather men kneeling worship" is the first static dance posture at the beginning of the dance work. Its shape takes a kneeling posture in one degree space, with the head and body facing the Queen Mother of the West, in a bent and bent state. Dancers lift their forearms naturally, with their left hands higher than their right hands in a prayer like posture. Their toes and forefoot are on the ground, in a high half toe state.

The "feather men holding fairy grass" takes a standing posture in the second dimension, with its head and body facing the Queen Mother of the West, in a tilted up and slightly bent down state, with one hand holding the fairy grass as a tribute to the Queen Mother of the West, and the other hand naturally drooping. Dancers close their legs together and slightly bend their knees. Their toes and forefoot are on the ground, in a high half toe state,

2.3 Dance Scheduling

Diagonal flow: In the section depicting "feather man serving", the choreography is mostly diagonal flow. There is a significant gap in the status of the feather men who serve the Queen Mother of the West on the Heavenly Court, so there will definitely be differences in front, back, and height when the feather men and Queen Mother of the West are in the same space. On stage, the flow of diagonal lines can stretch out a larger space, better showcasing the identity difference between the two.

In addition, during the exit scheduling after presenting gifts to the Queen Mother of the West, the feather men still leaned down and faced the Queen Mother of the West, retreating diagonally from the position where the Queen Mother of the West was located to his original position, showing his respect for the Queen Mother of the West.

3. "FEATHER MEN PLAYING WITH BEASTS"

In Han Dynasty stone carvings, the image of feathered figures often appears among various auspicious birds and beasts such as dragons, tigers, deer, birds, and bears, and feathered figures and these auspicious birds and beasts often appear in scenes of feeding, chasing, playing, and hunting. These images all convey the nimble yet vivid, solemn yet lively charm bestowed upon the feathered men by the Han people. And the origin of these rhymes is inseparable from the emotional characteristics that humans are born with. From this, people can feel that the life of feather men as immortals is full of worldly pleasures.³ ("Figure 3")



Figure 3 Still from the dance "Feather Men", "feather man playing with beasts".

3.1 Basic Forms

Heads: When feather men play with beasts, their heads are generally in two states: the first is extending the head, that is, their chins drive the neck to move forward or laterally forward; the second is twisting the head, that is, dancers stand the necks upright and turn the heads to the left or right. The process of extending and twisting the heads both reflects the head movement state of the feather men in judging the direction of the divine beasts when playing with them.

Trunk: The dancers' bodies are in a deep bent state, that is, bending forward above the coccyx. Divine beasts are generally in a non-upright walking state, with their trunks deeply bent down to depict the state of feather men playing with beasts.

Hands: With the index finger and middle finger together, the ring finger and little finger together,

3. Zheng Qi, Li Bei, Dancing Space of Han Painting "Feathered Man". Proceedings of the First "the Belt and Road" Image Music and Dance Reconstruction Seminar, 2017, p24.

and the thumb interlocked, dancers lift the wrist upwards, that is, hang the wrist. This gesture shows the state of the feather men's fingers pointing towards the divine beasts.

Leg: Dancers pull the leg sideways, with the virtual leg about 90 degrees off the ground and the knee slightly bent. They land with solid legs, slight bend, and outward point the toes; They show the pose of straight and slight leg suction, that is, lifting the knee of the virtual leg and keeping the lower leg perpendicular to the ground. Dancers lift the legs and knees slightly in front of the body, 45 degrees off the ground, with the knees lower than the hips, and the solid legs slightly bent. The above two leg types are the main leg states of feather men playing with beasts.

Feet: Dancers raise all heels at a 90 degree angle to the ground, with toes and forefoot touching the ground. During the process of the feather men playing with the beast, they remain in a high toed state throughout.

3.2 Basic Dance Moves

The "feather men playing with beasts" is a flowing dance segment, so there are fewer static movements and more dynamic movements. Throughout the process, the dancers' bodies are mostly in a standing or running chasing position, with a spatial orientation higher than the beasts being played.

"Feather men being the beasts": In dance works, the image of a beast is transformed from a standing feather man to a kneeling divine beast, holding a mask and covering its face. The hands of the beast, on the basis of scattered palms, are interlocked with the fingertips in a claw like shape; Dancers push their legs backwards and upwards, showing the tails of the beasts.

3.3 Dance Scheduling

Diagonal scheduling: "Feather man playing with beasts" begins to break free from the control of the Queen Mother of Heaven and descend from the immortal realm. Diagonal scheduling is also a way to open up space and depict the process of feathered individuals ascending from heaven to earth.

Straight line scheduling: The process of feather men playing with beasts adopts a horizontal line for straight line scheduling and movement. In the process of moving horizontally towards each other, it expresses the frontal conflict between feathered

humans and divine beasts, strengthening the process of "playing".

4. "FEATHER MEN LIUBO"

The Liubo images that appear in Han Dynasty stone carvings are mostly a combination of mythological stories and divination, and the feather men liubo is one of them. Here, the "feather men Liubo" not only has a secular folk entertainment color, but also embodies the Han people's desire to become immortal and live forever after death.⁴ ("Figure 4")



Figure 4 Experimental dance "Feather Men", "feather men Liubo" performance stills.

4.1 Basic Forms

Heads: During the process of feather men Liubo, dancers' heads are often raised or extended. Liubo is the state of contemplation and hesitation between two feather men playing chess with each other, with their heads raised to reflect on the game, while their heads extended to reflect on the state of sight and play during the game.

Trunk: There are mainly two types of body shapes. The first is twisting and tilting, which means twisting the waist while lifting the upper part of the lumbar spine; The second is the "bending and twisting", which means twisting the waist while bending the lumbar spine forward. The body shapes of twisting and tilting and bending and twisting are both in the body state of the Liubo process.

Hands: Dancers extend the index and middle fingers and hold the chess piece together, while the other three fingers are interlocked at the palms of

4. Zheng Qi, Li Bei, Dancing Space of Han Painting "Feathered Man". Proceedings of the First "the Belt and Road" Image Music and Dance Reconstruction Seminar, 2017, p24.

the hands. At this moment, their hands are in a state of playing chess, similar to the state of a person playing chess, representing the state of secular life.

Legs: Both legs are located in one degree space, usually kneeling on one knee.

Feet: The heels of the kneeling legs are all raised at a 90 degree angle to the ground, with the toes and forefoot on the ground, in a high half toe state. The other foot often lands with the heel of the foot and the sole off the ground, making it easier for both players to exchange positions and demonstrating the uncertainty of winning or losing during Liubo of the feather men.

4.2 Basic Dance Moves

“Twisting, tilting, and contemplating” is a representative dance move in the process of the feather men Liubo. The whole body is in a one degree space, kneeling on the ground next to the right leg, touching the ground next to the left leg, and landing on the heel of the foot; The dancers lie down on the upper body and twist to the left; The forearm is perpendicular to the upper arm at a 90 degree angle and raised, holding a chess piece in one hand, showing the process of thinking while playing chess, as shown in the left “Figure 4” of the feathered figure.

The move "single kneeling and falling chess" is a dance move corresponding to “twisting, tilting, and contemplating” in the process of the feather men Liubo, often appearing together. The dancers kneel on the left knee and lift the right leg in the front middle, twist the upper body to the right, raise their elbow diagonally with their left arm towards the back, and use their right arm to play and drop on the chessboard, showing a determined attitude towards playing.

4.3 Dance Scheduling

“Rectangular match”: "Feather men Liubo" is a state in which two feather men compete against each other, with strict rectangular scheduling rules, showing a tense and tense state during the match. During Liubo, the two feather men alternate their thoughts and move around a rectangular chessboard, showing a situation where it is difficult to determine the winner.

“The flow like the Bagua diagram”: The Taiji Bagua diagram is in the shape of a disc, with black and white representing one yin and one yang respectively. The disc rotates, and the yin and yang

poles alternate. The process of the "feather men Liubo" is also a process of yin and yang replacement. In the game between two feather men, there are ups and downs and changes in winning and losing, so the counterclockwise rotation method of the Bagua diagram pattern is adopted.

5. "FEATHER MEN FIGHTING"

The feather men fighting comes from the "acrobatics", and the "acrobatics" is also known as the "Jiaodi opera" in the Han Dynasty. The Jiaodi opera in Han portraits include forms such as human-to-human fighting, human-to-beast fighting, and beast-to-beast fighting. The Han people in the real world of the world, influenced by Taoist thought, grafted the scenes of real life in the world to the world of immortals, and the image of the feather people fighting was full of vitality and exaggerated and vivid. Feather men fighting is influenced by the fight between people. In the portrait stone of the hundred operas unearthed in Xigu Village, Binhu Town, Tengzhou City, there are two feather people fighting, one blow and one block, and the picture is extremely powerful.⁵(“Figure 5”)



Figure 5 Still from the dance "Feather Men", "feather man fighting".

5.1 Basic Forms

Heads: In feather men fighting, the purpose is to observe the opponent from different angles and then gain an opportunity to attack, either in an inverted or twisted head shape. Inverted head means facing straight forward and tilting the head to the side; Twisting the head means standing the neck upright and turning the head to the left or right.

5. Zheng Qi, Li Bei, Dancing Space of Han Painting "Feathered Man". Proceedings of the First "the Belt and Road" Image Music and Dance Reconstruction Seminar, 2017, p24.

Trunk: Dancers' bodies are in a state of great tilt or deep bending. Great tilt refers to the upward movement of the lumbar spine and backward tilt. Deep bending means to bend deeply forward above the coccyx. The posture of the great tilt is for defense during fighting; On the contrary, a deep bending posture is used for attacking during fighting. During feather men fighting, the range of body movements is relatively large.

Hands: When fighting, the feathered men hold sticks in their hands. Dancers use the shoulder as the source of force to draw a circle with the straight arm, reaching the point of the stick.

Legs: Dancers take forward and backward bow and arrow steps, also known as the super large T-shaped position, where one leg steps forward, bends deeply, and the other leg extends backwards; or they take squat crotch step, which refers to slightly or half bending the legs on the basis of the middle, large parallel position or figure eight position; Dancers take the back leg gesture, also known as the leg is in a deep curved shape, with the hips open and the lower leg at the flat end of the body, hooked on the foot. The above leg shapes are all in a fighting state.

Feet: During fighting, the feet remain in a high half toe position, with the heels fully raised at a 90 degree angle to the ground and the toes and forefoot touching the ground. At the same time, if the foot is off the ground, it is in a hooked foot state, that is, the heel is pressed, and the toes and ankle are hooked towards the calf direction.

5.2 Basic Dance Moves

The "offensive dance posture" is manifested as a top-down state, with the torso deeply bent down, one leg landing on the ground, and the other leg leaving the ground and elongating backwards. One hand holds a stick and swings it downwards, while the other arm points diagonally upwards. The upward force is used to transmit the flight of ascending to heaven, while the downward force is used to express the fighting dominance of who else can surpass me, as shown in the image of the feathered figure on the right in "Figure 5".

The "offensive dance posture" is manifested as a bottom-up state, with the torso tilted up, one knee kneeling, and the other leg elongated and landing on the ground. The hand holds the stick up to resist.

5.3 Dance Scheduling

Horizontal flow: In the section depicting "feather men fighting", the choreography is mostly horizontal flow. Two feather men chase and fight against each other on the horizontal line, giving both sides a sense of oppression.

6. CONCLUSION

The experimental dance work "Feather Men" takes the image of feather men figures in Han paintings as the starting point, and studies the dance corpus of feather men figures in Han paintings from the perspectives of literature, images, and dance body linguistics. It is committed to interpreting the historical origins, cultural manifestations, and essence of dance language of feather men figures in Han paintings through rigorous historical research and scientific methods, and providing a rational practical experience for the actual activation and performance of dance corpus of feather men figures in Han paintings and the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese cultural resources in current dance. This is the "action" of exploring and promoting the inheritance and development of Chinese dance in the theoretical "knowledge", and it is also the significance of implementing the experimental dance work "Feather Men" into practice.

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