DANCING CHINESE NATIONALISM: AN EXAMINATION INTO THE HYBRIDITY AND POLITICS OF CHINESE CLASSICAL DANCE AND BALLET

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the hybrid training and performance of Chinese classical dance (*gudianwu*) and ballet in China’s elite dance conservatory, Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), in post-socialist China (1980 - the present). Since the establishment of BDA in 1954, the hybridity of ballet and Chinese dance has been first institutionalized in training professional Chinese dancers and has had a profound influence on the development of dance in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in the 1980s, many *gudianwu* practitioners and dance critics in PRC criticized the failure of the hybrid training and performance in promoting a unique Chinese national character. In contrast, hybrid performance practices as a means to Sinicize the Western dance form of ballet have been celebrated. To create a unique Chinese national body aesthetic, *gudianwu* practitioners have attempted to revive Chinese traditional culture in dance through minimizing the influence of ballet, while Chinese ballet practitioners have created ballet works incorporating Chinese stories and Chinese arts, such as *gudianwu*, Chinese opera, local music, and traditional costumes.

Instead of considering the promotion of unique Chinese characteristics in dance as a fixed and essentialized cultural practice, this dissertation argues that the hybrid dancing bodies of *gudianwu* and ballet have become important sites for negotiating Chinese nationalism, modernism, and individualism within the context of globalization. In keeping hybridity and Chineseness as the two central concepts in this study, I examine three research issues: first, how ballet has shaped *gudianwu* classes and *gudianwu* dancing bodies; second, how Chinese forms, such as martial arts, Chinese opera, and
Chinese folk dance, have influenced ballet training and performance; and third, how the tension and interrelationship between these two hybrid dance practices complicates the concept of Chineseness. My methodology is informed by an interdisciplinary lens that includes postcolonial cultural studies (Bhabha 1994), Chinese cultural studies (Chow 1998), and anthropological Chinese dance studies (Wilcox 2011). I apply ethnography as my primary mode of collecting data while taking the meanings, functions, and historical and cultural contexts of dance into account. As the first dissertation that foregrounds the operation of hybridity in Chinese dance and ballet, this dissertation aims to enrich the theoretical framework of postcolonial and Chinese cultural studies and contribute to a mutual understanding between Chinese and Western cultures.
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“Is that Chinese classical dance or [Western] ballet?” I encountered this question from my teacher and colleagues in the United States during a class presentation at Temple University when showing an excerpt of a duet from the Chinese classical dance drama, *Goddess of the River Luo* (*Shui Yue Luo Shen* 2009). Indeed, the heroine’s effortless *grand jeté* was adopted from European classical ballet; the hero’s deep abdominal contraction was a signature movement created by American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham; and the emotional moment when a man lifts a woman is often seen in contemporary dance choreography on commercial television shows. My twenty-five years’ ballet and Chinese dance training in China and three years’ study of American modern dance in the United States gives me some insight into this issue of hybridity in a Chinese classical form. However, at first, I did not know how to address this question of genre. While I tried to find an explanation for my teacher and my classmates, more questions arose in my mind: if it is a classical dance form derived from China, why does it use so much ballet vocabulary; do the dancers have ballet training; why do Chinese dance practitioners call this hybrid dance style classical; to what extent does so-called “Chinese classical dance” incorporate traditional Chinese movements; is the combination of Chinese and Western forms unique in Chinese classical dance; and how do hybrid dance practices relate to cultural trends in contemporary China? All these questions became the starting point of this dissertation.
The creation of a national dance form, Chinese classical dance, at Beijing Dance School in the 1950s was associated with the new establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The phrase Zhongguo gudianwu, which translates to Chinese classical dance, consists of two adjectives, Zhongguo (Chinese) and gudian (classical), and a noun, wu (dance). Collectively these terms indicate a dance category that is culturally and aesthetically unique to China. The term gudian, which is a compound word that connects two individual characters, gu (old) and dian (classics), further implies that the aesthetic standard of gudianwu is rooted in China’s traditional culture. By adopting movement sequences from Chinese opera (xiqu) and training methods of ballet, Chinese classical dance pioneers intended to promote a Chinese counterpart to European classical ballet. However, the aesthetic and technique of ballet influenced every aspect of Chinese classical dance, including movements, training methods, evaluation standards, and choreography. In other words, Chinese classical dance as a hybrid form neither reflects a purely Chinese traditional culture, nor exists as a homogenous entity. Thus, in this dissertation, I apply the Chinese term gudianwu to distinguish it from other classical dance forms that evolved in their own contexts and I interrogate the historical and cultural specificity of Chinese classical dance.²

The promotion of uniquely Chinese characteristics in dance to reflect Chinese cultural imagery is also significant to Chinese ballet choreography. From the revolutionary ballet Red Detachment of Women (1964) in socialist China to the new project Dream of the Red Chamber at the National Ballet of China in 2023, Chinese ballet practitioners have worked on transforming this cultural “other” into an emblem of Chinese identity. These Chinese-themed ballets were based on Chinese stories and
incorporated ballet movements alongside Chinese elements, such as *gudianwu* movements, local music, and traditional costumes. Chinese ballet that re-hybridizes the already hybrid *gudianwu* further represents a fluid transcultural encounter and problematizes the embodiment of uniquely Chinese characteristics. Given their hybrid nature and the contested representation of Chinese identity, I suggest that Chinese ballet and *gudianwu* are two precarious concepts. The hybridized dancing bodies of *gudianwu* and ballet practitioners, therefore, have become important sites for negotiating Chinese nationalism and sociocultural changes.

In this dissertation, I explore the notion of hybridity in *gudianwu* and ballet practices in China’s elite dance conservatory, Beijing Dance Academy (BDA). Within this broader topic, I examine three key research questions: first, how have *gudianwu* and ballet drawn upon the mix of Western models and Chinese traditional cultures within dance training at BDA; second, how have the two dance forms drawn upon each other in the creation of dance works; and third, how has the tension and interrelationship between these two hybrid dance practices complicated the concept of Chineseness? Hybridity and Chineseness, therefore, are the central themes explored in this dissertation. I interrogate the concepts of hybridity and Chineseness through the lens of postcolonial theory (Acheraïou 2011; Bhabha 1994; Dirlik 1996; Young 1995; Said 1978) and Chinese cultural studies (Ang 2001; Che 1995; Chow 1998; Chun 1996; Lo 2000) to explore their relationship with Anglophone Chinese dance studies (Kwan 2003, 2013; McLelland 2018; Wilcox 2011, 2018a). While I will elaborate on the two concepts in the Methodology section below, it is necessary to explain the definition of each term first.
The concept of hybridity, originally coined by biologists to refer to the cross-breeding of two species, has been employed within linguistic studies (Bakhtin 1981), racial theory (Acheraïou 2011; Isaac 2004; Young 1995), and postcolonial theory (Bhabha 1994; Dirlik 1996; Hall 1992) to examine the mixture between two cultures and the subsequent creation of new transcultural forms. In his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), critical theorist Homi Bhabha first outlines the idea of hybridity from the perspective of colonized minorities to challenge any “essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures” and to undermine the power hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha 1994, 83). Cultural hybridity, therefore, has become a theoretical and practical tool for many Chinese studies scholars to question the ambiguous notion of “the Chinese” and Chineseness. For instance, when criticizing Chineseness as a Han-ethnocentrism, Shu-mei Shih (2013) develops the theory of the Sinophone that focuses on the Sinitic-language communities to emphasize the hybridity and complexity of the Chinese diaspora and ethnicity. Ien Ang (2003) also applies the postcolonial discourse of hybridity to alert an impossible Chinese cultural essentialism. Cultural critic Rey Chow theorizes the concept of Chineseness as the “distinguishing trait” of the Chinese within international practices and the habitual obsession with Chineseness by Chinese people in the PRC reflects a sinochauvinism (Chow 1998, 3-6). While I do not deny the existing cultural essentialist impulse, I suggest that the mobilization of Chineseness in mainland China cannot be downplayed as a monolithic sinocentrism and should be examined within PRC’s political, historical, and cultural contexts. The discourse of hybridity and Chineseness, thus, supplement each other in my investigation of *gudianwu* and Chinese ballet.
In the Introduction, I first tease out the historical entanglement of ballet and gudianwu since the early twentieth century. Given that it is impossible to talk about gudianwu without discussing the development of ballet in China, and vice versa, the following analysis provides the historical context that triggers the hybrid process of Chinese dance. I then review the Chinese dance studies literature that focuses on gudianwu and ballet to articulate how the existing scholarship contributes to my thinking and how my dissertation might build on the critical literature. Next, I explain my research rationale and dissertation methodology. In the final section, I provide a chapter outline along with the research questions that guide each chapter. Ultimately, my examination of hybrid dance practices within both ballet and gudianwu will shed light on the ongoing negotiation between China and the West in the context of China’s modernization and globalization.

1.1 The Historical Entanglement between Ballet and Zhongguo Gudianwu

Ballet, a theatrical art form that has historical roots in the royal courts of Europe, was first introduced to China’s eastern urban cities by Russian émigrés in the 1920s during the era of the Republic of China (1911-1949; hereafter the Republican era). After the Bolshevik October Revolution in 1917, a large group of Russian refugees fled to China and lived in the foreign concessions of the east coast cities such as Harbin, Tianjin, and Shanghai (Lee 1999). In these cities, many musicians and dancers of the refugee community continued their careers and brought Western music and dance culture to Chinese urban elite audiences (Kraus 1989). Zhang Xueliang, the leader of the Northeast Army of the Republic, recalled that he saw Swan Lake in Harbin which was performed by
white Russian dancers (Feng 2019). The first generation of Chinese people who studied ballet with Russian teachers were all from wealthy urban families, such as Hu Rongrong in Shanghai and Zi Huayun in Tianjin (Huang 2014; Wilcox 2018a). The association of ballet with Chinese urban upper classes set up the intellectual and practical foundation for the socialist dance investment, while planting an entrenched ambiguity between the capitalist elite art and communist ideology (Ma 2016; Wilcox 2018a).

The introduction of classical ballet occurred alongside the New Culture Movement (the 1910s–1920s) and the May Fourth Movement in 1919, wherein Chinese avant-garde intellectuals criticized traditional Chinese Confucianism and promoted a new Chinese culture based on Western ideals such as democracy, science, and feminism. Scholars who received both traditional Confucian education and Western doctrines, such as Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, Bing Xin, Liang Qichao, and Yin Zizhong, initiated a reform in Chinese traditional literature, theater, music, and many other art forms (Chen 2002; Kraus 1989). Inspired by the movement in literature and art, Chinese dance practitioners who trained in ballet and modern dance overseas, such as Dai Ailian in London (Glasstone 2007; Wilcox 2018a) and Wu Xiaobang in Tokyo (Ma 2016; Wilcox 2018a), went back to China in the 1940s to promote new Chinese dances. By learning local folk and ethnic dances, Dai created *Frontier Music and Dance Plenary* in the Nationalist Party-controlled Chongqing in Southwest China. In Shanghai, Wu integrated modern dance with theatrical narrative in his choreography of China’s New Dance to promote Chinese national salvation during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945; Ma 2016). In the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-controlled Yan’an in Northern China, the party leader Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” in 1942 set an ideological
foundation for the New Yangge Movement, in which communist artists modernized Han Chinese folk dance yangge and adapted it to perform revolutionary stories (Wilcox 2018a). During the wartime, none of these dance practices amounted to a major influence throughout China, however, they provided some early experimentation with promoting Chinese national dance forms through a strategy of hybridity.

A turning point came with the establishment of the PRC in 1949, wherein ballet became significant to international diplomacy and conceptions of Chinese dance modernization. As a result of a close Sino-Soviet relationship, China’s Ministry of Culture invited Soviet ballet experts to help Chinese dance pioneers establish the first state-sponsored dance conservatory, Beijing Dance School (BDS), the predecessor of BDA, in 1954. At this institution, ballet was systematized and standardized as an elite mode of professional training for Chinese dancers. While the priority of ballet training for cultivating Chinese dancers at BDS linked to the cultural-political context, it also corresponded with many dance practitioners’ understanding of ballet. Dai recalled that the introduction of ballet training to Chinese dancers in the 1940s was not to produce ballet dancers but to improve their physical ability (Dai 1986).

BDS gudianwu teachers, Li Zhengyi, Tang Mancheng, and Ye Ning also explained the reason for adopting ballet to classify xiqu movements. They state in the prelude of The Pedagogy of Chinese Classical Dance (Zhongguo gudianwu jiaoxuefa 1960) that

[We] should recognize that the training method of ballet is effective and scientific for dancers (broadly speaking), which is worthy of serious study and endorsement ... to train Chinese dancers, the dance school should treat traditional xiqu [movement] as a basis, study the advanced experience of ballet for the needs of dancers’ professionalism and bodily technique, and establish a new form of
classroom teaching through creating [a new method] and developing [\textit{xiqu} and ballet]. (Li, Tang, and Ye 1960, 2)\textsuperscript{10}

By considering ballet as “effective” and “scientific,” they imply that ballet technique separates dance movements into categories, clarifies “what kind of movements trains which muscles for what purpose,” and defines “the proportion of each movement in a class” (Yu 2016a). The \textit{gudianwu} pioneers also treated ballet technique as a systematic bodily training that fits dancers’ natural anatomy and movement kinesiology, which could prevent injury. By integrating ballet training method with \textit{xiqu} movements, Li and Tang created the pedagogical method of \textit{gudianwu} (to be discussed further in Chapter 1).

During the period when Li and Tang established the \textit{gudianwu} curriculum, another group of Chinese dance practitioners, including Li Zhonglin and Huang Boshou, focused on creating a narrative-oriented genre, national dance drama.\textsuperscript{11} While emphasizing the use of movements and contents from \textit{xiqu} and Chinese folk/ethnic dance in choreography, Chinese dance choreographers borrowed theatrical elements from Soviet \textit{drambalet}, such as the dramatic narrative, the division of performances into acts, and the use of theatrical language and dramatic music, to enhance the integrity and theatricality of dance dramas (Wilcox 2018a). Chinese dance creations, therefore, were also hybrid products of Chinese traditions and foreign models as they combined local Chinese content, the narrative technique and structure of Soviet ballet, as well as socialist realism.\textsuperscript{12} In 1959, BDS teachers choreographed a dance drama \textit{Fish Beauty} (\textit{Yu meiren}) under the direction of Soviet ballet expert Petr Gusev. With its fusion of ballet pointe technique and Chinese dance movements, the dance was considered the first Chinese
ballet by Chinese ballet practitioners and a successful product of *gudianwu* pedagogy by BDS *gudianwu* practitioners.

The adoption of ballet in creating Chinese dance, however, was not accepted by Chinese dance practitioners without criticism. On the one hand, ballet’s association with capitalist elite culture during the Republic era engendered skepticism and debate by cultural critics in socialist China. On the other hand, Chinese dance practitioners’ self-reflexive activities intertwined with the heightened class struggle initiated by the CCP leaders and condemned the emphasis on ballet in the development of Chinese dance. In 1957 and 1961 respectively, Chinese dance pioneers at BDS carried out curricular revisions that separated the ballet and Chinese dance programs and promoted an equal position of Chinese dance to ballet (Wilcox 2018a). *Gudianwu* training in socialist China focused on absorbing *xiqu* movements and aesthetics, while studying ballet as supplemental training.

The radical political campaign of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) disrupted the two independent tracks of ballet and Chinese dance at BDS. Whilst banning historical and romantic-themed dance works, revolutionary leaders Mao and his wife Jiang Qing celebrated the revolutionary-themed ballets, *Red Detachment of Women* (1964) and *The White-Haired Girl* (1965). These two ballets were named “model ballets” by Jiang and became the dominant dance performances on China’s dance stages until the end of the Cultural Revolution (Clark 2008; Wilcox 2018a). By adopting the choreographic structure of classical ballet repertoire, these two revolutionary ballets applied pointe technique for female dancers, used ballet turns (*pirouette* and *chaîne*) and jumps (*sissonne* and *grand jeté*) to enhance dancers’ physical expression, and borrowed *xiqu-*
styled tumbling and acrobatic movements to heighten the spectacle. Additionally, in
order to emphasize the revolutionary force and spirit of the ballets’ main characters,
classical ballet gestures were often reinvented to incorporate martial arts movements. For
instance, Jiang replaced the classical fifth position of the arms and its delicate stretched
fingers with bold inward fists, but retained the *attitude derrière* leg position, which
became the motif for the heroine Wu Qinghua in *Red Detachment of Women*. While the
Cultural Revolution disrupted the development of both ballet and *gudianwu* in the 1950s,
the revolutionary ballet turned out to be a successful experiment that inherited the hybrid
dance choreography of *Fish Beauty*.

After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in the 1980s, the revolutionary ballet
lost its official support, and the revival of Western culture in light of increasing Sino-
American interactions impacted the reform of *gudianwu* and ballet at BDA. *Gudianwu*
pioneers Li and Tang abandoned the pedagogy they created in the 1950s and created a
new *gudianwu* curriculum by adopting not only the technique and aesthetic of ballet but
also dance tricks from acrobatics and gymnastics. While maintaining *xiqu*’s hand
positions, eye movements, and “flash poses” (*liangxiang* 亮相), *gudianwu* students’
everyday technique class absorbed the barre exercises, turnout aesthetic, pointed feet, and
effortless movement quality from ballet.¹⁵ Many dance scholars have noted that
*gudianwu* dancing bodies are a combination of *xiqu*’s upper body and ballet’s leg work
(Liu 2019; Su 2004; Zhou 2020). In addition, *gudianwu* dancers’ classroom attire, such as
ballet slippers, leotards, and ballet tights, and the bodily standards for admission resemble
the Russian Vaganova Academy. The idea of “three long and one small” (*sanchang*
yixiao 三长一小), meaning long arms, long legs, long neck, and small head, is the first and foremost requirement for the admission of students (Wilcox 2011).

While gudianwu teachers meant to draw on ballet to improve the technical level of gudianwu dancers, they might not have anticipated how the inclusion of ballet technique would have a profound influence on the alignment and aesthetic of gudianwu bodies. By realizing the balletic training in challenging the authenticity and Chineseness of gudianwu, gudianwu practitioners Li and Tang experimented with a Shenyun (身韵, literally “body-rhythm”) curriculum to revive the essential elements of Chinese culture since the 1980s. Through the hybridization of xiqu and martial arts movements, Shenyun technique focuses on the coordination between dancers’ breath and the circular movement trajectory. BDA’s Shenyun-gudianwu style (also called Li-Tang style) has become the mainstream gudianwu training throughout China’s dance conservatories. Sun Ying, part of the first teaching generation of gudianwu, however, criticized the Shenyun curriculum as an abstracted variety of multi-layered traditional cultures that lacks a complete aesthetic system. To challenge the hybrid Shenyun-gudianwu style, Sun created the Han-Tang gudianwu style in the late 1980s by researching the performances and aesthetics of the Han (202-2220 CE), Wei-Jin (220-420 CE), and Tang Dynasties (618-907 CE) (Deng 2011; Sun 2006; Wilcox 2012a).

In addition to the flourishing of gudianwu styles, Chinese ballet schools and ensembles have endeavored to stage European classical ballet repertoire since the late 1970s. For instance, BDA ballet students staged Coppélia (1979) and La Bayadere (1980); and the National Ballet of China (NBC) staged Sylvia (1980), Giselle (1984), Don Quixote (1985), and Sleeping Beauty (1994). Meanwhile, the creation of ballets with
distinctive Chinese national characteristics has increasingly become a new strategy for Chinese ballet companies in postsocialist China. By fusing styles of classical ballet, modern dance, and Chinese dance, ballet practitioners have created new works based on modern Chinese literature set in “old” China, such as NBC’s Zhufu (*The New Year’s Sacrifices* 1980) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (2001). This promotion of uniquely Chinese characteristics in both *gudianwu* and ballet reflects contemporary Chinese cultural imagery, which has become an essential part of Chinese nationalism within the context of globalization. Thus, in this dissertation, I focus on hybrid dancing bodies of *gudianwu* and ballet to explore their negotiation of Chinese nationalism and sociocultural changes in postsocialist China from 1980 to the present.

### 1.2 Literature Review

Until the 2010s, Anglophone scholarship of Chinese dance and ballet was underdeveloped, with the exception of revolutionary ballet studies (Bai 2010; Brown 1978; Chen 1994; Chen 2002, 2017; Cheng 2000; Christopher 1979; Chung 1972; Clark 2008; Davis 1973; Desmond 1997; Harris 2010; Roberts 2004, 2008, 2010; Strauss 1975; Wilkinson 1974). In the past decade, Anglophone dance scholars have shifted their focus from the revolutionary ballet of the Cultural Revolution to include a broader spectrum of Chinese dance practices. For example, Emily Wilcox (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022) is a forerunner of Chinese dance studies whose research focuses on national dance practices in mainland China; Rowan McLelland (2018, 2019) researches ballet practices in PRC; Nan Ma (2015, 2016, 2020, and 2023) explores modern dance practices in the early twentieth century China; Jingqiu Guan

Within this relatively new scholarship, both Wilcox and McLelland have conducted ethnographic studies that explore dance training and performances in PRC dance conservatories. In the former’s ethnographic research at BDA, Wilcox sheds light on the relationship between the corporeal dancing labor and socialist ideology in China. She observes that the physical pain, boredom, and potential injuries that accompany the quest for virtuosity in Chinese dance training reflect the socialist ideology of “eating bitterness and enduring hardship” (chiku nailao 吃苦耐劳), which in turn enhances dancers’ moral strength and demonstrates a larger valorization of physical labor in socialist societies (Wilcox 2011). Wilcox also theorizes how ethnic and national identity, especially the concept of Chineseness, are constructed through classroom training in gudianwu and Chinese ethnic and folk dance. Similarly, McLelland’s research on ballet bodies at Shanghai Theatre Academy (STA) and the affiliated Shanghai Dance Secondary School (SDS) suggests that highly refined and skilled Chinese ballet bodies
align with Maoist thinking and espouse the development of physical virtuosity (McLelland 2018).

In her monograph, *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (2018), Wilcox conducts original Anglophone historical research on Chinese dance. By focusing on the development of Chinese dance, which spans more than seven decades of PRC history, Wilcox raises three core commitments that undergird her discussion of the evolving and diverse form: kinesthetic nationalism, ethnic and spatial inclusiveness, and dynamic inheritance. Kinesthetic nationalism emphasizes Chinese dance as a national dance form, rooted in local Chinese performance practices; ethnic and spatial inclusiveness explains the multiplicity of Chinese dance forms that developed from the diverse ethnic communities and geographic regions across China; and dynamic inheritance stresses innovations in Chinese dance and dance practitioners’ individual interpretations of existing performance forms. Through Chinese historical narratives and case studies in dance, Wilcox articulates these three principles to conceptualize Chinese dance as a complex cultural phenomenon rather than a monolithic political production.

Wilcox’s theory of three commitments of Chinese dance informs my interpretation and critical discussion of the hybrid *gudianwu* and ballet. While she does not use the word “hybrid” to describe the complexity of Chinese dance, the “inclusive” and “dynamic” traits of Chinese dance defined by Wilcox indicate the amalgamation of dichotomies such as traditional and modern, folk and theatrical, and Chinese and Western dance forms. However, the bewildering temporal, spatial, and racial hybridity of Chinese dance cannot be idealized as an unproblematic and equal mutuality. On the one hand, Chinese dance as an umbrella term that includes Chinese *gudianwu*, ethnic, and folk
dance is a precarious and hierarchical concept. At BDA, the educational system separates gudianwu and Chinese ethnic and folk dance into two programs. While gudianwu practitioners focus on constructing the ethnic majority (Han Chinese traditional culture), they ignore the classical culture of ethnic minorities, such as Uyghur, Mongolian, and Tibetan by generalizing them into the broader category of ethnic dance. In other words, the promotion of Han Chinese culture in gudianwu blurs the cultural differences of ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the intracultural and transcultural hybridity of Chinese dance evokes questions of authenticity and cultural identity, which challenges the promotion of cultural nationalism. While this dissertation focuses on the practice of gudianwu and Chinese ballet, my critique of hybridity and Chineseness will also shed light on the precarious concept of Chinese dance and the ambivalence of Chinese cultural identity.

In contrast to Wilcox’s scholarship that primarily examines Chinese dance, McLelland’s anthropological research focuses on a comprehensive understanding of Chinese ballet in terms of its historical evolution, training, competition, choreography, and its relation to China’s sociocultural transformation. Notably, McLelland not only analyzes Chinese ballet bodies by applying Western concepts of the body, such as philosopher Michel Foucault’s notion of the docile body (1975) and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (1985), she also investigates how the body has been constructed in Chinese philosophy, such as the Confucianist concept of Li (morality, etiquette) and mind-body consistency in Buddhism. This cross-cultural study of Chinese and Western theories of the body becomes the framework for her inquiry into the indigenization of ballet in China. I similarly employ this framework to examine the image
of female figures in ballet and the Chinese male imagination of women in Chapter 3. By arguing that Western ballet has been successfully indigenized in China, McLelland recognizes the hybridity of Chinese ballet choreography and disciplined ballet bodies. However, the tension between Chinese and Western cultures in hybrid Chinese ballet warrants more scholarly attention. My analysis of hybrid ballet practices thus builds upon McLelland’s study of “indigenous Chinese ballet” and furthers discussions of the entanglement of Chinese cultural identity and hybridity.

By viewing hybrid dance choreography as inseparable from dance training, this dissertation emphasizes the aesthetic and institutional consistency of dancers’ training, performance, and choreography. While Wilcox (2011) describes her experience of Chinese cultural flavor in BDA’s Shenyun class, I focus on the daily technique class of Gudianwu Basic Training for undergraduate gudianwu students at BDA (in Chapter 2), to examine its fundamental impact on hybrid gudianwu bodies and choreography.19 Dance critic Andrè Levinson argues that “The technique of a dancer is not like workings of a disjointed doll; it is physical effort constantly informed by beauty… It is the very soul of the dance, it is the dance itself” (Levinson 1991, 44). While Levinson’s description of “oriental dance” reflects his Eurocentric bias, his analysis of the evolution of classical ballet technique reveals the important role dance technique plays in physical and artistic expression. Therefore, I view dancers’ daily technique class as an integral part that informs dance performance and choreography.

In addition to the connection between dance training and choreography, I acknowledge the institutional consistency between dance schools and local dance companies, as well as their nuances in terms of dance style, cast scale, artistic expression,
and propaganda, especially in the field of ballet. Although McLelland (2018) explores ballet training at STA in depth, she does not focus on the choreography of Shanghai Ballet Company (SBC) and instead analyzes a full-length Chinese ballet produced by Liaoning Ballet Company, *Eight Heroines* (2015). Similar to the tightly knit employment relationship between ballet students at BDA and NBC in Beijing, SBC’s artistic director and most of the dancers studied at STA. In other words, discussion of the school’s training should be read in relation to SBC’s ballet repertoires and the specific colonial/global context of Shanghai. The unique colonial history of the city from 1842 to 1945 has shaped Shanghai’s openness to Western influence and influenced its cosmopolitan dance practices and aesthetics, which necessitates further research outside the scope of this project (Lee 1999).

By committing to examining the training-choreography connection, I focus on *gudianwu* and ballet technique class at BDA, the first and most prestigious dance school in PRC, and choreographic works by BDA *gudianwu* teachers and NBC ballet choreographers. I illuminate dance practices and discourses that speak to state politics of contemporary China both culturally and ideologically, bridge the gap between existing Anglophone research on Chinese dance and ballet, and offer insight on scholarship about Chinese modernization and nationalism. Both the practices and scholarship of *gudianwu* and ballet have been developed in two independent tracks in postsocialist China. Some *gudianwu* scholars have even argued that the training and choreography of ballet should focus only on presenting Western aesthetics without intervening into the field of Chinese dance (Liu and Wu 2019), which contrasts with the Sinicization of ballet at the state level. By investigating ballet and *gudianwu* equally within the discourse on hybridity and
Chineseness, I shed light on the complexity of Chinese cultural identity to enrich the scholarship of postcolonial cultural studies and Chinese cultural studies.

1.3 Research Rationale

My interest in researching ballet and gudianwu is rooted in my twenty-five years of dance training and experience. When I was three years old, I began to watch my father teach dance classes to his students at a local art school in the city of Shijiazhuang. At the age of five, I started to take Chinese dance classes with him and his colleagues. Yet my actual interest in dance was not sparked until I saw a performance of Swan Lake by a Russian ballet company. I remember I was fascinated by the exotic and beautiful costumes, the romantic love story, the dancers’ virtuosity, and the orderliness of the corps de ballet. This world-celebrated classical ballet was my impetus to focus on ballet studies. When studying ballet at the local dance school in my hometown from age five to eighteen, pain and happiness were always intertwined. While I hated it when teachers stood on my leg and forced me to turn out during warm-up, I enjoyed practicing ballet technique in class. During my long ballet training, the repetition of the basic technique, such as tendus and développées, has resulted in a robust and slim body shape; and the achievement of virtuosic movements, such as turning a double pirouette with a perfect landing, has given me a sense of control over my body. In addition, I have also experienced a feeling of superiority because of my ballet training and performance experience: in the eyes of many Chinese people, only those talented dancers can learn ballet and dance en pointe. Therefore, the technique and discipline of ballet have brought about feelings of pleasure, determination, and achievement.
Beyond my classical ballet training, I also learned some \textit{gudianwu} and Chinese folk/ethnic dances. Before I went to study at BDA in 2008, I occasionally took Chinese dance classes in which I learned some movements and dance pieces of \textit{gudianwu} and Chinese folk/ethnic dances. My major in Dance History and Theory provided me a diverse dance training that included Chinese folk dances, \textit{Shenyun-gudianwu}, ballet, modern dance, choreography, and repertory, along with lecture-based classes. During my sophomore year at BDA, I received a year-long systematic training in \textit{Shenyun}. While ballet training has provided me with the strength and flexibility to do the leg work in \textit{gudianwu}, I still could not master the form’s flowing sense of the upper body movements and the artificial facial expressions. My \textit{gudianwu} teacher commented that my dancing was “too balletic” or “close, but not quite right.” The difficulties of embodying the \textit{gudianwu} aesthetics along with the teachers’ criticism cooled my enthusiasm towards \textit{gudianwu} and drove me to focus more on ballet practice.

Unexpectedly, it was one of my professors, Dr. Kariamu Welsh, at Temple University whose attitude towards \textit{gudianwu} encouraged me to refocus on \textit{gudianwu} practice. I had taken it for granted that \textit{gudianwu} is a Chinese dance form, and so I was struck by the comments from Dr. Welsh that \textit{gudianwu} performances seemed like ballet. This challenge to the authenticity of \textit{gudianwu} as a Chinese dance form has inspired me to refocus on \textit{gudianwu} training and performance. In tracing the history of \textit{gudianwu}, I have noticed that many Chinese dance practitioners have had a fascination with what they perceive to be the beauty and virtuosity of ballet. The hybrid training of ballet and \textit{xiqu} in \textit{gudianwu} seems to produce bodies that correspond to Western ballet aesthetics. Therefore, increasing numbers of \textit{gudianwu} dancers have shifted from their \textit{gudianwu}
careers to become ballet or modern dancers, and many of them have utilized their versatile bodies to seek careers in modern dance companies. This phenomenon, along with my own experience of ballet and Chinese dance training, has prompted me to uncover the logic of hybridity in both gudianwu and Chinese ballet.

1.4 Methodology

My methodology is interdisciplinary and draws upon postcolonial cultural studies, Chinese cultural studies, gender theory, and dance anthropology. As a methodology to explore the interrelationship between dance and society, dance anthropology analyzes social and cultural meanings through observing, documenting, and interpreting moving bodies (Buckland 2007; Wulff 2001). Although I intended to do ethnographic research, the COVID-19 pandemic (ongoing since 2020) affected my original schedule of conducting fieldwork in Beijing. However, the replacement of in-person classes with online dance classes during some semesters at BDA from 2020 to 2023 enabled me to virtually engage in gudianwu and ballet classes as a participant observer. While I acknowledge that anthropological study requires ethnographers to immerse themselves in the field (Spradley 1980), remote fieldwork at BDA is made possible by advanced communication technology, my shared identity and language (Mandarin), and my having graduated from BDA with connections to the community (Burrell 2016; Finney, et al 2015; Teaiwa 2004; Visweswaran 1994). Therefore, I combine ethnography with research methods of oral history, archival research, textual analysis of articles, and choreographic analysis to illuminate hybrid gudianwu and ballet practices. In the
following paragraphs, I elaborate on my ethnographic process and explicate my theoretical framework.

My fieldwork spans from September 2020 to August 2022. In September 2020, I began my fieldwork remotely in the US by contacting my former teachers at BDA and BDA alumni through the Chinese social media WeChat. During the process of selecting and connecting potential interviewees, I am also in debt to my father who works as an outside teacher and examiner for BDA’s School of Graded Examination. Through my father, I was able to conduct phone interviews with two senior dance practitioners who were students in socialist China at BDS.23 These existing connections at BDA became my first group of research subjects through whom I developed a larger network of interviewees and obtained permission to observe their classes (McGarry and Mannik 2017; Russell 2006).

During my first time onsite in China from October 2020 to January 2021, the lockdown in China due to the pandemic prevented visitation to Beijing. However, I was able to physically conduct interviews with four ballet and gudianwu teachers who are BDA graduates and work in local dance schools in my hometown, Shijiazhuang.24 The two gudianwu teachers were my father’s students in the 1990s and became teachers at Hebei Art School after graduating from BDA. I also had a tight relationship with them when I was a child playing around at my father’s dance classes where I called them “sisters.” The two ballet teachers were my BDA schoolmates. Although we belonged to different departments at BDA, we shared memories of being students at BDA in 2008 and taking ballet and lecture classes with the same teachers. With these existing relationships, I was able to observe one interviewee’s daily ballet classes for pre-
professional dancers at Hebei Art School in the semester of Fall 2020. In 2020, I also interviewed two visiting BDA ballet teachers who were on business errands in my city respectively in November and December. I applied the software, iFlyrec (讯飞), to transcribe the interview audio recordings and then reviewed the transcriptions to correct any errors. I used different colors to highlight and code themes, issues, or patterns, such as pink for “Chineseness/Chinese identity,” blue for “hybridity,” and green for “dance class/movement.” Throughout my two-year fieldwork, I constantly reviewed the early notes and codes to identify the frequency and comparison between key concepts, added sub-codes, and typed my comments in the margins of the paper. This method of open, selective, and focused coding allowed me to easily cross-reference my fragmented notes in class observations and link the notes to my research questions during dissertation writing (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Hay 2005; Lederman 1990; Light 2010; Sanjek 1990; Vivanco 2017; Woods 2006).

During my second fieldwork outing in China from August 2021 to August 2022, I continued to expand my network of participants and conducted more interviews with four senior dance practitioners who studied at BDS in socialist China, four current BDA teachers, three gudianwu graduates who dance and teach in dance companies and universities in Beijing, as well as seven younger dancers currently studying at BDA and ASS. BDA vice president Xu Rui and the chair of BDA Humanities College Wang Xin authorized my access to the class schedules for all dance majors at BDA and gain access to the online classroom. Beginning in February 2022, I regularly engaged in participant observation in online gudianwu and ballet classes. During this stage of fieldwork, I gradually built my involvement from “passive participation” (observation only), to
“active participation” (participant observer), in order to embody dance movements/aesthetics (Spradley 1980; Daniel 1995). Although I learned gudianwu at BDA and in my early life in Shijiazhuang, my separated pubic symphysis after pregnancy and the lack of my lower back’s flexibility limited my physical ability to reach the instructor’s demands, such as “folding your body [torso and a leg] into a U shape” and “kicking your leg front in 180-degree and simultaneously bend your torso back.” While I was able to follow most of the exercises that resembled ballet, such as plié, frappé, and pirouette turns, I could not extend my legs or bend my lower back to the required degree as the students in the class did. This physical limitation allowed me to realize that gudianwu technique requires extreme flexibility, explosive physical power and the cultivation of dancing bodies that share similarity to but surpass ballet.

The active participation and remote interviews with the BDA students helped me build rapport with the classroom community. After I returned to the United States in August 2022, my contacts at BDA sent me their class videos or shared their video blogs on social media. As an ethnographer who finds a sense of belonging in the field and directly engages with research issues and identities “at home,” my fieldwork became “homework” that necessitates the use of shared language and cultural identity (Rabinow 2007; Finney, et al 2015; Teaiwa 2004; Visweswaran 1994). However, I acknowledge that the ethnographic method inherently imposes a certain vulnerability on both interviewees and the interviewer, which culminates in empowering the researcher to represent their subjects. Thus, I engaged in self-critical introspection throughout the fieldwork and reflected on my relationship with the field and research participants (Behar
While I did not experience any unfamiliar environments or social embarrassment during my fieldwork, I carefully dealt with the existing hierarchy between authoritative teachers/school leaders and compliant students. In the eyes of many BDA teachers, I am a lifelong student due to my alumni status. The hierarchy between teachers and students is conceptualized as a mode of Confucian filial piety in the Chinese traditional proverb, “a day as a teacher, a lifetime as a father.”\textsuperscript{26} As a former BDA student and a citizen who was born and raised in China, I was able to recognize the hierarchies and navigate the sensitivities when communicating with teachers, leaders, and senior informants. I often began to approach them in a less intimidating way: I first sent text messages on WeChat to remind them of who I am and ask about the possibility of interviewing them. During communications, I politely and respectfully asked questions and showed my great appreciation and enthusiasm for learning from them. I intentionally positioned myself as a learner/student than a researcher to ease the nerve of my informants who might feel they were under scrutiny. This strategy not only allowed me to receive polite and sometimes warm responses from BDA teachers but also increased my accessibility to watch classes and receive class materials.

While I tried not to adopt this unequal communication mode when approaching and interviewing current BDA students or graduates who are younger than me, I noticed the consistently polite words and careful and respectful language they used. For example, they would call me “senior sister classmate” (学姐) instead of my name and some of them carefully asked me about ways of applying to schools in the United States.
Although I anticipated this kind of reaction, the education that I received and the relatively liberal lifestyle that I experienced in the United States allowed me to problematize the school and social hierarchy in China and BDA. As the most elite dance school in China, BDA created a niche for students who pursue dance careers. Yet the school hierarchy, which resembles the social hierarchy of China, has prevented many students from independently expressing themselves and potentially homogenized them as art laborers who serve the need of the school and the CCP.

In addition to my anthropological research method, my methodology draws upon postcolonial notions of hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Acheraïou 2011; Bhabha 1994; Dirlik 1996; Young 1995; Said 1978; Lo 2000) and Chinese cultural studies (Chow 1998; Dirlik 1996; Liu 2004) to illuminate the mechanism and logic of hybrid dance practices within the cultural and political contexts of contemporary China. My examination of gudianwu and ballet as hybrid dance forms is also informed by dance scholar Alexandra Kolb’s perception of BDA’s hybrid modern dance practices (2017) and Joann Kealiinohomoku’s seminal article about “ballet as an ethnic dance” (2001). Bhabha’s framework of hybridity provides a useful mode for undermining the cultural essentialism and imperialism of gudianwu and ballet. However, this postcolonial discourse has its limitations in recognizing the power hierarchies between the West and the Rest (Hall 1996) and describing the cultural condition in modern China. Therefore, I critically adopt Bhabha’s theory and frame the concept of hybridity within the historical and political context of modern China.

My critical view of postcolonial theory is informed by scholars such as Robert Young (1995), Jacqueline Lo (2000), and Amar Acheriou (2011) who have critiqued
Bhabha’s idealization of hybridity. They argue that Bhabha has failed to recognize the continuing power imbalance and cultural differences in intercultural exchanges. For instance, Lo names such eclectic hybridity as “happy hybridity,” which ignores the “tension, conflict or contradiction involved in this understanding of inter- and/or cross-cultural encounters” (Lo 2000, 153). She also links her idea of happy hybridity with Mikhail Bakhtin’s “organic/unintentional hybridity” (1981). As the pioneer of the hybrid theory, Bakhtin differentiates two types of linguistic hybridization: unintentional hybridity and intentional hybridity (Bakhtin 1981). While Bakhtin’s concept of unintentional hybridization stresses the mute and unconscious mixture of languages, Lo likens this linguistic model to her idea of happy hybridity in discussing her Aisan-Australian identities. Lo suggests that unintentional or happy hybridity is the most pernicious hybrid form that neglects cultural practitioners’ self-reflexivity and masks cultural inequities. Bakhtin’s concept of intentional hybridity, on the contrary, illuminates a conscious practice of cultural hybridization, which aligns with Osterhammel’s acknowledgment of Chinese cultural preservation during intercultural encounters in the context of semi-colonialism. The ongoing assertion of cultural authenticity, classicism, and Chineseness in gudianwu and Chinese ballet in socialist and postsocialist China also reveals the intentional and contestative hybridization. The Chinese dancing body, therefore, becomes a site that embodies oppositional forces: Western imperialism and Chinese nationalism, Chinese globalization and localization, and capitalist individualism and socialist collectivism.

In arguing the limitations of Bhabha’s hybridity, I also take a close reading of China’s semi-colonialism. Unlike the colonies of European imperialism, such as British
India, most of the territory of modern China in the twentieth century was never subjected to foreign domination. Even in the largest foreign settlement of Shanghai, European, Japanese, and American imperialism kept negotiating their dominance and none of the countries experienced full colonialization. This partial and incomplete colonial structure of modern China was first framed as “semi-colonialism” by Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin in 1915 (Connor 1968). Historian Jürgen Osterhammel defines semi-colonialism as a “somewhat deficient colonialism, short of overt political domination but, under certain circumstances, opening outlets for metropolitan capital which might exceed those provided by straightforward colonies” (1986, 296). According to Osterhammel, semi-colonial China was a fundamental co-operative venture that allowed diverse imperialist power to coexist and share benefits.

Inspired by Lenin, the CCP in the 1930s adopted the notion of semi-colonialism and combined it with the idea of “semi-feudalism” to frame modern China as a “semi-colonial semi-feudal society” (Mao 1960). The idea indicates that China’s feudalism still penetrated China’s society after the fall of the imperial Qing Dynasty in 1911. In the historical turn, neither colonialism nor capitalism replaced feudalism but gave rise to a “hybrid social formation,” which was “semi-colonial and semi-feudal” China. While this Chinese Marxist theory was deployed by the CCP to legitimatize its political and ideological agenda, it did distinguish China’s colonialism and its hybrid social structure. Within such unstable imperial powers, Osterhammel argues that

the overwhelming majority of the Chinese held on to their time-honoured little traditions, while the ‘modern’ élites, however eagerly they embraced Western
ways of life and thought, never abandoned their native language and a cultural frame of reference which remained genuinely Chinese. (Osterhammel 1986, 291)

The phenomenon of Chinese cultural preservation in the process of Westernization echoed the emergence of Chinese national characteristics or Chineseness at the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, when examining the cultural outcomes of semi-colonial and post-semi-colonial China, I consider the tension between Western imperial power, the self-reflexive Chinese identities, as well as China-centered imperialism.

As I noted at the beginning, Chineseness as an identity label has been theorized and problematized by many scholars with postcolonial heritage who live in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and other locations (Ang 2001; Chen 2006; Chow 1998; Chun 2017; Shi 2013). By focusing on the Chinese diaspora, these scholars point out the ambiguity of Chineseness in terms of language, culture, and ethnicity. Shi (2013), in particular, argues that the term “ethnic Chinese” (Zhonghua minzu) is a misnomer and the reduction of Chineseness to Han ethnicity reflects the hegemonic Han culture. Chow (1998) also recognizes the “ethnic supplement” of the term Chinese as a reaction towards the Western invasions to promote a unified China and Chineseness. While Anthropologist Allen Chun (1996) emphasizes the politicization of ethnic consciousness in cultural practices, Ang’s concept of fluid Chineseness (1998) maintains the existence and negotiation of Chineseness in the subjective experiences of the diaspora. Although these scholars focus on decentralizing the idea of Chineseness from mainland China, they all trace the rise of a united Chinese imaginary back to the semi-colonial history of the late Qing Dynasty and Republican China. Their historical narrative of Chineseness informs
my understanding of the self-reflexive practice of the Han Chinese intellectuals as well as the complicity between Westerners and the Chinese self in producing Chineseness.

When examining Chinese dancing bodies or dances of the Chinese diaspora, dance scholars also contribute to framing the concept of Chineseness. Chinese American performance scholar Sansan Kwan (2003) applies the methodology of kinesthetic experience to explore the acceptance and disavowal of Chineseness in relation to corporeal motion in Chinese urban cities such as Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, and Chinatown in New York. Wilcox defines the concept of Chineseness as a “Chinese national character” (minzuxing 民族性) and recognizes that “Chineseness serves as an inherent part of the creative logic of all dance forms in China” (Wilcox 2012a, 213). She also points out that the continuous controversy between Shenyun and Han-Tang gudianwu is due to dancer practitioners’ different interpretations of the value of Chineseness (Wilcox 2012).

My conceptualization of Chineseness in gudianwu and Chinese ballet at BDA involves two layers of discussion. On one hand, I endorse Shi’s argument that Chineseness as an umbrella term was operated “through contacts with other peoples outside China as well as confrontations with their internal others” (Shi 2013, 27). The construction of Chineseness in socialist and postsocialist dance practices, therefore, could be seen as a continuation of the self-reflexive practices of Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. However, Chinese dancers’ preoccupation of creating uniquely Chinese dances and the obsession with presenting Chineseness in transnational practices easily fall into a self-Orientalism and self-exoticism. In this sense, the construction of Chineseness in dance becomes self-Orientalist (Dirlik 1996) and Occidentalist (Chen
1995) practices to unconsciously perpetuate a stereotypical Chineseness and reinforce the Euro-American-centered global order. On the other hand, I argue that the essentialist impulse in creating Chinese dances is prone to political abuse that highlights authoritarianism and nationalism. As Chow notes, “past victimization under West imperialism and the need for national ‘self-strengthening’ in an early era, likewise, flip over and turn into fascistic arrogance and self-aggrandizement” (Chow 1998, 6). While I do not equate the practice of Chineseness with nationalism, I recognize the authoritarianist exploitation of gudianwu and ballet in constructing a united Chinese nation and even asserting its China-centered imperialism.

My theorization of Chineseness, thus, goes hand in hand with my critical view of hybridity. I consider that Chinese dance practitioners’ search for Chineseness through different kinds of cultural hybridity confirms the existing postcolonial forces. The worldwide migration and adaptation of European ballet in non-Western countries, for instance, reflects the ongoing impact of hegemonic Western culture. In the process of resisting against such power imbalance, however, the emphasis of Han-centered Chineseness is undermined by the cultural hybridity between China and the West, the Han-Chinese and the ethnic minorities, as well as China and other East Asian countries. Therefore, to better understand the process and tensions of hybrid gudianwu and Chinese ballet, I discuss the theory of hybridity and the concept of Chineseness together to overcome the idealization and essentialism of either side of discourse.

1.5 Research Focus and Chapter Outlines
The dissertation consists of five chapters that focus on gudianwu and Chinese ballet within two realms of dance practices: dance training and dance choreography. These two research realms align with my first two research questions which ask how gudianwu and ballet draw upon the mix of Western models and Chinese traditional cultures within dance training and creative works. My third research question that investigates how the two hybrid dance forms complicate the concept of Chineseness will be discussed in case studies in each chapter and becomes a research thread throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 1, “The Evolution of Hybrid Dance Practices in Socialist China,” provides contextualization for the entire dissertation and addresses my three research questions in socialist gudianwu and ballet practices. I explore the development of gudianwu and ballet from the establishment of BDS in 1954 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. Rather than narrating a comprehensive dance history of socialist China, I focus on the hybridization of gudianwu and ballet and the entanglement between socialism and Chineseness. I reveal the early influence of ballet in gudianwu classroom training, the controversial status of ballet in Chinese dance creation, and the rationale foregrounding the revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution. In doing so, I draw upon sources from BDS textbooks, early dance videos, and articles and interviews by dance practitioners who studied or taught classes at BDS. This exploration will contextualize the aesthetic and technical transformation of gudianwu and ballet in postsocialist China and will shed light on the promotion of Chineseness through gudianwu and ballet that is called upon by the state in the twenty-first century.
Chapters 2 and 3 respond to my first research question: how gudianwu and ballet training draw on a mix of Western models and Chinese traditional cultures. In Chapter 2, “Inventing the Tradition: Hybrid Gudianwu Training and the Cultivation of Virtuoso Chineseness,” I use the evidence gathered during my fieldwork to evaluate the gudianwu curriculum at BDA. I focus on Gudianwu Basic Skills Training class to examine the invention process of the Shenyun-gudianwu training and explore how the hybrid gudianwu training cultivates virtuoso Chinese dancing bodies that embody mixed concepts of nationalism and transnationalism. I also conduct case studies of Sun’s Han-Tang Gudianwu Basic Skills Training class and Shenyun-gudianwu teacher Hu Yan’s Fan Dance class to explore how individual experimentation becomes a site for negotiating alternative ideas of tradition and Chineseness.

Chapter 3, “Inventing the Ideal: The Aesthetic and Politics of The Chinese Female Ballet Body,” examines how ballet trained female bodies inform and are shaped by a hybrid gaze between macho chauvinist Chineseness and elite Eurocentrism in postsocialist China. Unlike the hybridity between Western and Chinese culture of gudianwu, BDA’s ballet training pursues Western ballet styles, such as the Russian Vaganova pedagogy, the French School of ballet, England’s Royal Academy of Dance, and the Danish Bournonville style. However, the aesthetics and politics of cultivating the Chinese ballet body are by no means universal or simply influenced by the West. In this chapter, I utilize my fieldwork at BDA and its Affiliated Secondary School (ASS) to explore how the physical comportment and aesthetic of the female ballet body correspond with idealized female beauty in Chinese traditional philosophy. I also apply the method of textual and choreographic analysis to explore the representation of female ballet bodies.
in official reports and documentaries and their negotiations with imagined nationalism and Chineseness.

Chapters 4 and 5 address my second research question: how gudianwu and ballet draw upon each other in creative works. In Chapter 4, “Dancing Ambivalent Chineseness: The Revival of Chinese Traditional Culture in Gudianwu,” I focus on gudianwu choreography inspired by the Shenyun and Han-Tang styles to explore how dancing bodies negotiate concepts of Chineseness through embodying Chinese traditional culture. I compare the movement vocabulary and choreographic methods of the Shenyun-gudianwu piece Fan Dance and Chinese Painting (2000) by Tong Ruirui with Han-Tang gudianwu Dancers of The Tongque Stage (2008) by Sun Ying. I produce case studies of Hu Yan’s Young Scholar with Paper fan (2017) and Tian Tian’s Tomb Figures I (2017) to investigate how gudianwu choreography can function as propaganda for promoting CCP’s cultural policy and an anti-nationalist practice of asserting an autonomous artistic creation.

Finally, in Chapter 5: “Dancing Otherness: Chinese Ballet Choreography in Postsocialist China,” I analyze Chinese ballet choreography of the National Ballet of China in postsocialist China to explore the ways in which ballet bodies interrogate Chinese identity through hybrid Chinese ballet practices. Through archival research and choreographic analysis, I situate Jiang Zuhui’s New Year’s Sacrifices (1980) as a representation of Chinese ballet choreography in the 1980s and argue that it inherits socialist ballet legacies and transcends the propagandistic aesthetic of revolutionary ballets. By examining the company’s production of Raise the Red Lantern (2001), I reveal the controversy and deficiency of Chinese ballet in embodying Chineseness in
twenty-first century China and explore how hybridized Chinese ballet reinforces the dichotomy of the hegemonic Western other and the localized Chinese self in global cultural communication.
CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF HYBRID DANCE PRACTICES IN SOCIALIST CHINA

With the help of Soviet experts and experienced xiqu teachers, our scientific research method of Chinese classical dance draws upon the principle of movement codification in ballet training.

Wu Qinghua wears a red peasant outfit and a pair of pointe shoes. She stretches her legs into a lunge position with both feet on pointe, lifts her clenched fist in front of her chest, and looks back with her watchful eyes.
-From the first scene of Red Detachment of Women.

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the construction of uniquely Chinese dance became a significant cultural and ideological practice of socialism. Simultaneously, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) followed the ideological construction of the Soviet Union to promote Soviet ballet as a socialist practice, while abandoning Western modern dance in light of its association with capitalist formalism. Ballet, therefore, played an important role in establishing Chinese national dance forms and training professional Chinese dancers in socialist China (1949-1979). In this chapter, I examine how the hybridity of ballet and Chinese dance was first institutionalized at Beijing Dance School (BDS). This investigation sheds light on how the socialist hybrid dance practices connected with Chinese cultural modernization in Republican China (1912-1949) and contextualizes gudianwu and Chinese ballet practices in postsocialist China (1979-present).

When analyzing the development of dance in socialist China during the pre-Cultural Revolution period (1949-1966), Chinese dance scholar Emily Wilcox argues that
Chinese dance, including gudianwu and Chinese folk/ethnic dance, was “the main national project of socialist cultural development” and “ballet became the foil against which to construct a new, revolutionary genre of Chinese dance” (Wilcox 2018a, 132-133). She continues to argue that it was the Cultural Revolution that disrupted the “existing power hierarchies” and offered an opportunity for the nondominant ballet to gain “long desired recognition” (153). I endorse Wilcox’s statement that Chinese dance practitioners in the pre-Cultural Revolution period (1954-1966) focused on promoting a unique Chinese national dance form through developing China’s local and traditional dances. By connecting hybrid dance practices in socialist and postsocialist China, however, I take up a different reading of the power hierarchy between Chinese dance and ballet during socialist China. I argue that the adoption of ballet training methods and movements in gudianwu practices in the 1950s provided a technical and aesthetic foundation for promoting the hybrid revolutionary ballet in the 1960s. While the socialist gudianwu class primarily drew upon movement vocabulary from xiqu, ballet’s turnout and pointe technique began to impact the aesthetic of gudianwu. Meanwhile, dance practitioners who had xiqu background were also involved in choreographing short ballet pieces. Through these hybrid dance practices, I reveal the interaction between Chinese and Western culture in socialist China and interpret revolutionary ballet as a distorted continuation of socialist cultural hybridization.

By taking into account the impact of cultural and political policies in socialist China, I divide the socialist dance practices into two historical stages: the period of the Sino-Soviet alliance (1954-1960) and the period before and during the Cultural Revolution (1960-1976). In the first section, I elucidate the impact of Soviet ballet on the
development of *gudianwu* training and choreography in the 1950s. This discussion sheds light on my first two research questions: how did *gudianwu* and ballet draw upon each other in dance training and creative works in socialist China? In the second section, I investigate the intense criticism of Chinese dance critics towards ballet in 1950 and 1964 and discuss the rationale of the continuing hybridity between ballet and Chinese dance despite the ongoing skepticism. The contradictory activity of adopting Western ballet to create Chinese national dance complicates the concept of Chineseness in dance practices, which reflects upon the inquiry of my third research question. In the third section, I examine three political and cultural forces that led to the privileging of revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution: ballet bodies functioned as both international diplomats and female ideals for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders’ male desire; Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing’s artistic and political ambitions; and the contributions of the hybrid dance creation that occurred in both *gudianwu* and ballet before the Cultural Revolution.

### 2.1 The Introduction of Soviet Ballet and the Development of *Gudianwu*

In 1952, Chinese dance pioneer Wu Xiaobang went to the Chinese Ministry of Culture and proposed to build a professional Chinese dance conservatory. A year later in February, Wu and other Chinese dance pioneers, including Chen Jinqing, Ye Ning, Dai Ailian, and Sheng Jie, decided to run a five-month workshop to train dance teachers and to prepare teaching syllabi for the forthcoming school (Wilcox 2018a; Zou 2008). In February 1954, the Ministry of Culture invited Soviet ballet expert, Ol’ga Il’ina of the Moscow Choreographic Institute, to serve as the artistic director and the primary advisor.
in charge of ballet classes for teachers and the course design of the entire dance school. Forty-six teachers at the workshop were separated into four distinct dance groups focused respectively on Chinese classical dance, Chinese folk dance, ballet, and European folk dance. While Il’ina helped Chinese ballet teachers design six-year syllabi, Ye Ning, the leader of the gudianwu group invited Beijing Opera and Kun Opera experts such as Liu Yufang, Ma Xianglin, Hou Yongkui, and Li Chenglian to develop a gudianwu training system based on movements and gestures of xiqu. Under the urgency of the school’s opening in September 1954, Ye decided to adopt the structural methodology of ballet to organize xiqu movements under the instruction of Il’ina. At the end of the workshop in July 1954, gudianwu teachers developed three-year syllabi for the courses of gudianwu (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Wilcox 2011). On September 6, 1954, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Chinese dance pioneers established BDS, the first state-sponsored professional dance conservatory in PRC.28

2.1.1 Dance Training through the Soviet Method

The first group of students at BDS in 1954 was separated into four grades. While students of the second to fourth grades were dancers from local dance troupes, the first-grade students were selected by BDS faculty from elementary schools all over the country (interview with Xu Dazhi; Wilcox 2018a; Zou 2003).29 In the first three years of BDS, there was only one program for the dance major: students were required to study ballet, gudianwu, Chinese folk dance, and European folk dance as well as middle and high school-level academic classes (Zou 2003 and 2008; Wang and Long 1999; Wilcox 2018a). Among these dance classes, ballet comprised a large proportion of the dance
curriculum, including ballet technique for boys and girls every day and *pas de deux* and ballet repertoire for all the students every other day (Zou 2003). In contrast, students only took Chinese folk dance and *gudianwu* twice a week (Zou 2003). This emphasis on ballet was due to the sophisticated training system of Russian ballet introduced by Il’ina and the six-year syllabi that had been created by the ballet group during the workshop.

In contrast to the well-developed ballet training, *gudianwu* was an emergent dance form and the teaching workshop in 1954 only created a basic framework of *gudianwu* training based on *xiqu* movements. During the first two years of *gudianwu* teaching at BDS, *gudianwu* teachers such as Li Zhengyi and Tang Mancheng continued to experiment with the development of *gudianwu* syllabus. By recognizing their lack of systematic and standardized *gudianwu* classroom training, these pioneers further learned dance methodology and syllabus with BDS ballet teachers as well as human anatomy with invited doctors to codify traditional *xiqu* movements. Based on the progressive educational principles, which is “from easy to difficult, from simple to complex” *(由浅入深，由简到繁)*, *gudianwu* pioneers in the Spring semester of 1956 systematized *gudianwu* training from seven aspects:

1) Standardize seven basic *gudianwu* poses: *zhengtui* (正腿  *battement devant*), *pangtui* (旁腿  *battement à la seconde*), *houtui* (后腿  *battement derrière*), *xie tanhai* (斜探海), *sheyan* (射雁), *shangyangtui* (商羊腿), and *xianshen tanhai* (掀身探海);
2) Standardize five methods of jumps: jump from two feet to two feet, jump from two feet to one foot; jump from one foot to two feet, jump from one foot to one foot, and jump from one foot to one foot with changing the foot;
3) Standardize that all leg lifts must be practiced gradually through the training steps of 25°, 45°, 90° and over 90°;
4) Standardize that the seven basic poses should be developed into turns and jumps;
5) Standardize that every technique and movement have to be practiced from both left and right side;
6) Standardize connecting movements between jumps and other supplementary movements;
7) Add barre work, such as tendu, demi plié, grand plié, fondu, etc. (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Tang 2004; Yu 2016a)

According to gudianwu pioneers, the movement standardization allowed teachers to find similarities between ballet and Chinese dance and draw upon the codification of ballet to develop gudianwu (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). They also considered the study of Western anatomy increased gudianwu teachers’ understanding of the human body’s muscular function, which reinforced the “systematic and scientific” gudianwu training method (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 14). Under the guidance of such “scientific” dance education, a gudianwu class comprised two parts: barre work and center exercise; and within an academic year, students learned individual movements first and gradually practiced combinations on the left and right sides along with musical accompaniment (Tang 2004).

While the adoption of ballet into gudianwu training accelerated the process of organizing, refining, and developing xiqu movements, gudianwu pioneers have introspected the limitation of this hybrid method as it led to a loss of authentic Chinese character (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Yu 2006). For instance, Yu Ping, who served as vice-president of Beijing Dance Academy in the 1990s, summarizes three disadvantages of applying ballet in gudianwu training based on Li and Tang’s reflections. First, “cutting the feet to fit the shoes” (削足适履), which means gudianwu pioneers had to discard many important xiqu movement skills, such as saotang (扫堂 “sweeping”), xuanzi (旋子 “twisting”), feijiao (飞脚 “flying feet”), and diaoyao (吊腰 “hanging waist”), because there was no category where these movements could belong. Second, “blindly imitate
others’ steps and lose one’s own ability” (学步失行), which means when gudianwu teachers focused on learning from ballet, there was insufficient attention to the special abilities required for gudianwu movements and technique, such as xuanning (旋拧 “twisting”), duota (跺蹋 “stomping”), and piangaitui (蹁盖腿 “swinging the legs”).

Finally, “emphasizing the form and forgetting the image” (得形忘意), which means the emphasis on systematic training to improve dancers’ virtuosity ignored the style and the aesthetic of traditional dances, such as the coordination of “hands, eyes, body, and steps” and the unique style of xing (bodily shape and articulation), shen (spirit), jin (dynamics), and lü (rhythm and pattern) (Yu 2016a, 5). Yu concludes that it was the overemphasis on systematic training in gudianwu that led to the sacrifice of traditional Chinese aesthetics (Yu 2016a). Li Zhengyi argues, however, that “within the context of the inexperienced [gudianwu practitioners] and the urgent circumstance [of constructing a Chinese national dance], it was natural to have these issues” (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 17).

Overall, Li considers the “scientific and systematic” training had a positive function for the subsequent development of gudianwu training and choreography (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004).

While gudianwu teachers were exploring the training method for gudianwu class, ballet at BDS also underwent an intensive development. By committing to the strict classroom discipline of the Russian ballet style, BDS ballet education was effective and precise, which allowed a rapid improvement of students’ ballet technique and physical skills (Zou 2008). After only two years of study, the students at BDS staged their first full-length work of the European ballet repertoire in 1956, La Fille Mal Gardée, under
the direction of Soviet instructor Viktor Ivanovich Tsaplin. When reflecting on the development of Chinese ballet in socialist China, however, BDS’ first president Dai criticized the school’s complete commitment to Russian ballet. Dai said that “the Soviet expert [Il’ina] has a problem, [she] only taught for five months, but left a series of problems, which directly led to an unscientific teaching syllabus for the dance school” (Dai 1999, 36). By connecting the urgent construction of gudianwu training with BDS ballet practices, I argue that the problem of BDS ballet training in the 1950s was not so much related to the commitment to the Russian ballet method than the eagerness for a quick success of ballet in China. Chinese dancers’ training and staging of European classical ballet echoed the CCP’s political ambition for socialist nationalism in increasing its status in international diplomacy. Under the instruction of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, BDS students staged Swan Lake in 1959 in spite of their limited external rotation and pointe technique (discussed in Chapter 3). Similarly, the emergent gudianwu at BDS also served to the socialist nationalism and the adoption of ballet method functioned as a shortcut for its quick establishment.

After three years’ development, in 1957, the BDS leaders divided students’ dance training into two different disciplinary tracks: one was the National Dance Department, which included gudianwu and Chinese folk/ethnic dance, and the other was the European Dance Department, which included ballet and European folk dance. As a new educational mission of BDS, this “disciplinary division” (fenke 分科) was based on the teachers’ recognition of students’ workload in the past three years as well as the development of the teaching materials and faculty’s increased experience of teaching Chinese dances (Li and Lü 1987; Wang and Long 1999; Zou 2008). While many dance teachers celebrated
this disciplinary division due to its emphasis on each dance form as an individual
discipline, it did not stop the hybridity between ballet and Chinese dance in BDS’ dance
practices (Zou 2008).

2.1.2 Choreographing National Dance Drama in the 1950s

Along with the development of dance training materials and accrual of classroom
teaching experience, BDS dance pioneers began to work on creating Chinese dance
repertoire. In the first Choreographer Training Class, launched by the Ministry of
Culture, from 1955 to 1957, Tsaplin introduced the structure of Soviet drambalet
(dramatized ballet) that emphasized socialist realism and dramatic narrative (Ma 2015;
Wilcox 2021b). Additionally, Tsaplin also taught other choreographic skills, including
libretto writing, dramatic acting, and psychological analysis of stage characters, and
encouraged Chinese choreographers to use theatrical language and dramatic music of
drambalet to experiment with xiqu dance (Ma 2015; Wilcox 2018a). At the end of the
course, two graduates, Li Zhonglin and Huang Boshou, jointly created a large-scale
national dance drama, Magic Lotus Lantern (Baolian deng 1957), which was performed
by dancers at the Central Experimental Opera Theater (CEOT, the later China National
Opera and Dance Drama Theater). From December 1957 to December 1959, the Soviet
ballet expert Petr Gusev taught the second Choreographer Training Class and
successively directed two European ballet repertoire pieces Swan Lake (1958), Le
Corsaire (1959), as well as a Chinese dance drama Fish Beauty (Yu meiren 1959) for
BDS students.34
While both *Magic Lotus Lantern* and *Fish Beauty* were national dance dramas based on traditional Chinese legends, they approached the adoption of Chinese traditional vocabularies and foreign elements differently. By borrowing methods of dance creation from Soviet ballet, CEOT’s *Magic Lotus Lantern* emphasized using *xiqu* movements and costumes and combined them with *drambalet*’s narrative to shape the dance characters. For example, the choreographer applied hand and body gestures and footwork of *qingyi* (a main female role in *xiqu*) to create movements for the heroine of the dance, Third Scared Mother. When commenting on the choreography of *Magic Lotus Lantern*, dance critic Long Yinpei notes,

> the choreographers did not limit [the choreography] within the narrow concept of ‘national dance drama.’ In order to expand the expressiveness and content of the dance, [they] adopted some foreign elements beyond the foundation of national dance. Although it seems a bit blunt in some places, they were overall coordinated throughout the dance. (Long 1958)

The “expressiveness” Long mentioned was the acting skills and the narrative structure of *drambalet* learned from Tsaplin. The dramatic narrative was also a value of socialist realism that had a great impact on Chinese dance choreography in socialist as well as postsocialist China, which I will return to in Chapter 4. Ultimately, Long proclaims that the first large-scale national dance drama was a successful creation (Long 1958; Wilcox 2018a).

When commenting on the choreographic method of *Magic Lotus Lantern*, Yu argues that “the [creation of] *Magic Lotus Lantern* was based on traditional *xiqu*. From the perspective of characterization, it seemed close to the role type of *xiqu*. Our [BDS’]
idea of organizing teaching materials of Chinese classical dance did not seem to affect it” (Yu 2016a, 7). In other words, the dance troupe CEOT emphasized the staging of gudianwu dramas based on existing xiqu performances; this decision did not correspond to the hybrid gudianwu training and aesthetics at BDS. “From [CEOT’s Magic Lotus Lantern] then on,” notes Yu, “the curriculum construction of Chinese classical dance (at dance schools) and the repertoire creation [of Chinese classical dance] (in dance troupes) carried on their own tracks” (Yu 2016a, 7).

In contrast to the evident xiqu-style of Magic Lotus Lantern, the choreography of Fish Beauty, which combined gudianwu and ballet movements, reflected the hybrid dance training at BDS. At the end of the second course of the Choreographer Training Class in 1959, Gusev and choreographers on the course, including Li Chenglian, Li Chengxiang, and Wang Shiqi, co-choreographed a large-scale dance drama, Fish Beauty, which was performed by BDS students from both ballet and Chinese dance programs (Wilcox 2018a; Yu 2022; Zou 2008). While the leading roles cast senior students of the Chinese dance program, such as Chen Ailian, they received ballet training throughout their studies at BDS and were able to dance en pointe (Wilcox 2018a). According to archival photos of the original production, female characters adopted pointe technique, pas de deux lifts, and movements from ballet, such as attitude derrière, arabesque, penché, and sissonne fermé en attitude. In addition to adopting movements and theatrical structure from ballet, the choreography also included movements, frozen poses, and acrobatic technique from xiqu, such as lanhua zhi (Orchid finger) for females and big lunges and tumbles for male characters. While Chinese ballet practitioners considered Fish Beauty as a valuable experimentation of Sinicizing ballet (Li 2000; Li 2005; Yu
2021), *gudianwu* pioneer Li Zhengyi suggests that it also reflected the hybrid pedagogical method of *gudianwu*. She says, “the high level [performance and skills] of the leading and group dancers in each [dance] section fully demonstrated the efficiency and professionalism of our training method” (Yu 2016a, 9). By emphasizing the connection between *gudianwu* training and choreography, Li and many *gudianwu* pioneers consider *Fish Beauty* a successful creation, which brought the development of BDS *gudianwu* to a new stage (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004).

When commenting on the two different choreographic styles of *Magic Lotus Lantern* and *Fish Beauty*, Yu recognizes that the structure of *Fish Beauty* was close to Gusev’s *Swan Lake*, and all the assistant choreographers of *Fish Beauty* later became celebrated ballet choreographers in China (Yu 2016a). On the contrary, the choreographers of *Magic Lotus Lantern*, Bai Shui, Li Zhonglin, and Li Qun, all learned from Tsaplin, and their understanding of the structure of dance drama was close to Tsaplin’s *La Fille Mal Gardée* (Yu 2016a). While these two dance creations embodied different conceptions of national dance drama by the two choreographic groups, they initiated the hybrid choreography of *gudianwu* and Chinese ballet in socialist China.

### 2.2 The Criticism of Ballet and the Rationale of Hybridity

Before Soviet ballet experts withdrew from China in 1960 on account of political differences between the two countries, Soviet ballet experts had helped BDS dance practitioners standardize professional dance training and introduced choreographic methods based on ballet repertoire. However, the adoption of ballet in creating Chinese dance and training Chinese dancers was not fully embraced by Chinese dance
practitioners without criticism. Therefore, in this section, I examine Chinese dance practitioners’ and critics’ debates about ballet before the Cultural Revolution and explore the rationale for continuing the hybrid dance practices at BDS under such criticism. I argue that the hybridity of Western and Chinese dance styles to create Chinese national dance has developed out of Chinese dancers’ cultural reflexivity since the early 1910s and was further influenced by China’s sociopolitical context in the 1950s. This diachronic investigation will reveal an irreversible amalgamation of gudianwu and ballet and will shed light on the promotion of the revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution, which I attend to in the third section.

2.2.1 The Intense Criticism towards Ballet in 1950 and 1964

Before the establishment of BDS, Dai Ailian co-choreographed a seven-act dance drama, Peace Dove, in 1950, with other five choreographers at the Central Academy of Drama (CAD) and danced the leading dove character with the Dance Ensemble of CAD. The creation of Peace Dove was to celebrate the World Peace Council and China’s National Day in October 1950 to oppose US imperialism and to promote world peace. As one of the earliest experiments of Chinese dance drama, the dance adopted the narration method of European ballet d’action and movement from classical ballet and Western modern dance (Wilcox 2018a). According to the photo archives of Peace Dove, dancers who performed as doves wore white short bell-styled tutus and flamboyant white headbands and stood in ballet arabesque position with one leg stretching out backward. Among these dancers, only Dai wore pointe shoes and one photo shows her dancing the
movement of attitude derrière en pointe with an inadequate external rotation on her standing leg.\textsuperscript{37}

While \textit{Peace Dove} received large affirming responses among dance practitioners, film critic Zhong Dianfei criticized the dancers’ short tutus as “a stage filled with thighs; workers, peasants, and soldiers cannot stand it” (Wilcox 2018a; Zhong 1950).\textsuperscript{38} This comment towards the ballet costume became a famous quote when Chinese dancers recall audiences’ reaction of ballet performances during socialist China. I suggest that it also reveals a mixed socialist ideology between patriarchal Confucianism and anti-capitalist communism, which impacted the gaze toward female bodies. Since the late imperialist China of the Ming and Qing Dynasty, conservative Confucianism considered the exposure of women’s bodies as improper and relevant to risqué business (Man 2016).

While ballet as an elite high art was introduced to middle and upper class Chinese in the 1920s, the working class Chinese, such as workers, peasants, and soldiers, were not able to get access to watch ballet performances until the establishment of the PRC. Therefore, Zhong’s quote reflected the impact of the Confucian conceptualization of female bodies on mass audiences, which was utilized by many CCP leftists to condemn ballet’s association with Western bourgeois culture. Many cultural critics, such as Zhong, poet Guang Weiran, and composer Su Xia, criticized the employment of Western ballet aesthetics in \textit{Peace Dove} as not advanced, not revolutionary, and not socialist, which could not serve the need of contemporary Chinese audiences (Guang 1952; Su 1951; Wilcox 2018a; Zhong 1950). As a result of such criticism towards ballet, dance practitioners at CAD turned to \textit{xiqu} movements to find “authentic” Chinese dance traditions and to express unique Chinese characters in \textit{gudianwu}.
The research of *xiqu* dance and the experimentation of the national dance training curriculum was led by Korean dancer Choe Seung-hui since 1951 in her Dance Research Course at CAD. According to Choe, the synthetic art of *xiqu*, especially Beijing Opera and Kun Opera, contains valuable classical dance movements which require significant developing, reworking, and creating to make an independent art form, Chinese classical dance (Choe 1951; Wilcox 2018a). Choe’s Dance Research Course included a large amount of studio training, such as Chinese dance, Korean dance, Soviet ballet, European folk dance, South Asian dance, and Wu Xiaobang’s New dance (modern dance). Choe’s dance training curriculum and her research of *xiqu* dance at CAD laid the practical and theoretical foundation for the hybrid *gudianwu* curriculum at BDS (Wilcox 2019 and 2018d). Many CAD dance practitioners, such as Ye Ning and Li Zhengyi, later served as dance cadres who helped establish *gudianwu* programs at BDS (Li, Tang, and Ye 1960; Wilcox 2019 and 2018d).

The intense criticism towards ballet in the early 1950s did not stop the adoption of ballet in developing *gudianwu* curriculum at BDS. As I explained in the first section, *gudianwu* practitioners at BDS considered ballet a systematic and scientific training method to support the reworking of *xiqu* movements. Given that many *gudianwu* pioneers have trained to dance at CAD, the BDS hybrid *gudianwu* training could be seen as an experiment that inherited Choe’s idea of developing *xiqu* dance to create independent Chinese classical dance. The creation of *Fish Beauty* in 1959, was the first national dance drama that reflected the hybrid *gudianwu* training method and largely combined ballet movements with Chinese dance and story. Many dancers and critics celebrated this hybridization of different dance styles because it enriched the movement.
technique of Chinese dance and expanded the expressive method of national dance drama (Huang 1960; Jia 1960; Ma 1960). Critics, such as Ma Shaobo, also suggested that the movement, posture, and costume in some dance sections are insufficiently hybridized and need to be fused more smoothly (Ma 1960).

While some critics questioned the somewhat blunt hybridization and the lack of Chinese national characterization in Fish Beauty in the early 1960s, the intensive criticism towards the adoption of ballet was not heightened until 1964, the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Since 1964, many gudianwu practitioners carried out a self-criticism for applying ballet in gudianwu training and creation. For instance, the co-choreographer Wang Shiqi of Fish Beauty criticized himself,

On the problem of integrating Chinese classical dance and ballet, we only saw their commonalities, not their differences. In this way, we rigidly and mechanically used pointe technique and other ballet movements. We treated this method as a purely technical problem and did not consider the fundamental issue that any artistic expressive medium bears the marks of its nationality and, thus, necessarily involves the question of national form and national style. (Wang 1964, as cited in Wilcox 2018a, 130)39

Gudianwu pioneer Li also problematized the introduction of ballet movements into gudianwu training, such as including ballet’s turnout technique and arabesque movement. Li summarized that “the reason for these mistakes, in the final analysis, is being distanced from politics, distanced from the masses, and distanced from traditions” (Li 1964). When quoting these self-criticisms by gudianwu practitioners in 1964, Wilcox suggests that ballet as an art form long associated with “colonial modernity, urban bourgeois culture, and pre-twentieth-century works” is an “unlikely choice” for a socialist
political campaign that “espoused anticolonial values, proletarian culture, and现代化ation” (Wilcox 2018a, 133). Wilcox’s interpretation of gudianwu practitioners’ self-criticism towards ballet reveals the impossibility of hybrid dance practice to becoming a neutral site of “congruity between cultures” (Acheriou 2011). The ongoing skepticism of adopting ballet in the case of Peace Dove and Fish Beauty signifies the contestative potential of this in-between dance culture, where Chinese critics’ reflexivity of promoting Chineseness in dance continuously challenges the penetration of Western ballet aesthetics (Wilcox 2018a).

The essentialist cultural impulse in national dance choreography, however, was promoted and utilized by the CCP to assert its socialist nationalism and revolutionism. As many critical cultural scholars have recognized, the cultural hybridity, or intercultural translation, has often been harnessed by political and nationalist aims (Acheriou 2011; Ang 2001). Thus, I argue that the examination of gudianwu practitioners’ self-criticism in 1964 should take into account the CCP’s political campaign of “three transformations” for artistic works in the pre-Cultural Revolution. In late 1963, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai instructed music and dance practitioners to implement the idea of the “three transformations,” which were “nationalization,” “revolutionization,” and “massification,” into their artistic creations (Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years 2009). The emphasis on “nationalization” created a trend of cultural essentialism in dance and music productions. Whilst musicians abandoned the performance of Western orchestral music and began to learn Chinese traditional instruments, dancers, such as Li and Wang, criticized the use of ballet in Chinese dance works (Deng 2012). To exert Zhou’s instruction of “revolutionization” and “massification,” dance practitioners focused on revolutionizing
dance works and emphasizing the class struggle between proletariat heroes and capitalist villains. This political campaign led to the emergence of the first revolutionary ballet, Red Detachment of Women, in 1964 (Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years 2009).

Returning to the interpretation of gudianwu practitioners’ criticism towards ballet in 1964, I suggest that this self-criticism likely occurred under political pressure within the context of heightened class struggle between grassroots proletarian and capitalist intellectuals. Li and Wang’s self-reflexive articles on gudianwu training showed their disassociation with capitalist bourgeois culture, which was a strategy to survive within the CCP’s political campaign (Li 1964; Wang 1964). My argument is further confirmed by Li’s articles in postsocialist China, where Li has more than once endorsed the training method of ballet and the success of Fish Beauty in communicating gudianwu classroom training and stage performance (Li 2007; Li and Lü 1987; Li et al. 2004). As Li states, since 1963, [gudianwu] had undergone multiple times of reforms: sometimes [the CCP] did “three transformations,” which emphasized “revolutionization,” [and so] imposed political education in classes; sometimes [the CCP] carried on “contemporaneity.” The [teaching] syllabus was changed every year [based on the CCP’s policy], which impacted the teaching agenda. However, the overall [gudianwu training] did not change, the basis [of gudianwu] did not change. (Li and Lü 1987)

In short, the political campaign launched by the CCP leaders provoked the trend of self-criticism by gudianwu practitioners as a way of self-defense. As the criticism towards ballet in 1950, the controversial ballet status in 1964 did not prevent the hybridization of ballet and Chinese dance. From 1964 to 1966, the gudianwu pedagogy created by Li, Tang, and Ye continued to exist at China Dance School, an institute divided from BDS.
that focused on Chinese dance training (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board. 1997; Li and Lü 1987). In the meantime, BDS’s ballet program became an independent institute as Beijing Ballet School and ballet practitioners adopted the hybrid method to create Chinese revolutionary ballets, such as BDS’ *Red Detachment of Women* (1964) and Shanghai Ballet School’s *The White-Haired Girl* (1965) (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board 1997; Wilcox 2018a).

### 2.2.2 The Rationale of Hybridizing Ballet and Gudianwu

The hybridization between Chinese and Western culture, in spite of ongoing criticism, reflects a contradictory practice of China’s modernization: Chinese intellectuals attempted to modernize Chinese culture through learning from the West, while asserting Chinese national subjectivity and identity. In the following paragraphs, I analyze the unique characteristic of China’s cultural modernization to illuminate three key factors of the cultural hybridity in Chinese dance.

First, the idea of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application” (*Zhongti xiyong* 中体西用) was promoted by scholars during the late Qing Dynasty (1616-1912). After the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the late Qing government and scholars began to interrogate a way to deal with the threat of Western invasion and to strengthen the Qing’s military forces and industries. The approach of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application” was first proposed by scholar Feng Yufen and was later elaborated by the Qing official Zhang Zhidong in his book *Quanxue Pian* in 1898.41 According to Zhang, the idea means that while learning from the West, Chinese people should keep orthodox Confucianism as the principal
ideology and only study the West in terms of its method, equipment, and product. This slogan became the guiding concept of the late Qing’s “Self-Strengthen Movement” and remained influential in the modern China-West cultural relationship from the 1900s onward.

The idea of Zhongti xiyong also influenced the establishment of the BDS gudianwu curriculum. Li, Tang, and Ye suggested that

Xiqu dance not only inherits an excellent tradition of Chinese dance, but also develops into a highly artistic stage art form under persistent organization, refinement, and creation by outstanding artists from the past generations … On the other hand, xiqu art has accumulated an experienced training system for a long time. Therefore, we committed to xiqu dance at the beginning of organizing [gudianwu movement] and inheriting gudianwu [traditions]. (Li, Tang, and Ye 1960, 2)

By taking xiqu movement as the “substance” in gudianwu training, gudianwu pioneers also recognized the limitation of the xiqu training system. They noticed that the professional skills required for gudianwu dancers and xiqu actors are different and it is impossible to replace gudianwu dance training with the xiqu training system (Li, Tang, and Ye 1960, 2). Within the context of Sino-Soviet relationship, gudianwu pioneers borrowed the classification method, the class structure, barre work, and the research of human anatomy from Soviet ballet training. This process of establishing the gudianwu curriculum coincided with the concept of Zhongti xiyong in which the Western ballet was applied as an advanced method but xiqu dance was maintained as the movement bases.

Second, Chinese intellectuals have attempted to employ Western culture to modernize China since the 1910s. During the era of the May Fourth Movement and the
New Culture Movement in the late 1910s, Chinese intellectuals criticized what they saw as the influence of “corrupted” traditional Chinese culture on Chinese people and in turn, attempted to promote a new Chinese culture based on Western ideals. One of the movement’s leaders, Chen Duxiu, who was also one of the founders of the CCP, called for using “Mr. Democracy” (德先生) and “Mr. Science” (赛先生) to replace “Mr. Confucius” in *New Youth* journal (Chen 1919). As I briefly explained in the Introduction, these cultural-political movements in the early twentieth century promoted a series of reforms in Chinese written language and literature as well as in performing arts (Chen 2002). Therefore, as representatives of “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” in the dance field, Western ballet and modern dance were perceived by many Chinese dancers as scientific and advanced models, which could be adopted to modernize Chinese dance. The trend of Chinese cultural Westernization in Republican China also lasted by Choe in her dance program at CAD in the early 1950s as well as the hybrid *gudianwu* training at BDS. Li, Tang, and Ye’s conception of ballet as “effective” and “scientific” in socialist China revealed the ideological inheritance and reflected Chinese intellectuals’ aspiration of modernizing Chinese traditional culture by adopting Western culture.

Third, the hybridization of ballet and *xiqu* in *gudianwu* reflected Mao’s political strategy in creating socialist art forms since his “Yan’an Talk” in 1942, especially during the Sino-Soviet alliance period throughout the 1950s. The adaptation of foreign culture to support Chinese socialist culture was one of the fundamental ideas of Mao’s socialist strategy (Wilcox 2018a). In his talk at the “Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” (*Yan’an Wen Yi Zuotanhui* 延安文艺座谈会), Mao not only advocated art’s propagandist function for politics and class struggle, but also suggested the following:
[W]e must on no account reject the legacies of the ancients and the foreigners or refuse to learn from them . . . But taking over legacies and using them as examples must never replace your own creative work; nothing can do that. Uncritical translation or copying from the ancients and the foreigners is the most sterile and harmful dogmatism in literature and art. (Mao 1942, 470)

This exploitation of foreign “advanced” culture and repurposing it for the Chinese socialist revolution and Chinese people formed a core value of Mao’s strategy for Chinese art and literature. Mao later summarized this strategy as “yang wei Zhong yong, gu wei jin yong” (洋为中用, 古为今用) in 1964, which means using foreign things to serve Chinese needs and using the past to serve the present. This idea also laid the foundation for the reconstruction of BDA’s gudianwu in postsocialist China (discussed in Chapter 2).

In order to get international recognition of its newly established socialist regime, PRC leaders sought support from the Soviet Union, the leader of the Communist bloc, in their opposition to the capitalist United States during the Cold War (1947-1991). The conclusion of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Alliance and Friendship in 1950 fostered comprehensive cooperation between the two large socialist regimes in military, economy, and culture. As the “big brother,” the USSR sent a large number of Soviet experts to assist the development of Chinese industry in different fields from building railways to teaching dance lessons (Whiting 1955). When Soviet ballet experts introduced ballet to BDS teachers, they not only brought a practical and scientific training method, but also “produced a sense of appreciation for the aesthetic of ballet,” such as the straightness of legs, pointed feet, and effortless movement quality (Wilcox 2011, 167). In the meantime,
PRC leaders followed the Soviet cultural project and saw ballet as a socialist art form which could be accessed by mass audiences and adapted to the needs of the new socialist China.

When summarizing the “first stage” development of gudianwu at BDS from 1954 to 1963, Li states, the emergence and formation of Zhongguo gudianwu was not an arbitrary action by a few people, nor it was a fabrication of the dance school that was made up from nowhere. It was a product of the era, a valuable practice by a generation of dance workers who were inspired by the call of the era and followed the trend of the era. (Li and Lü 1987)

Here, I interpret the “era” beyond the period of socialist China and consider the hybridity of gudianwu and ballet in relation to China’s modern history and cultural consciousness since the late nineteenth century. The acceptance of the cultural hybridity in dance by BDS dance practitioners was a continuation of the idea of Zhongtì xiyong and Mao’s idea of gu wei jin yong and yang wei Zhong yong. In socialist China, the CCP alternatively harnessed the discourse of cultural hybridity and essentialism to serve its cultural policies in different periods. While the Sino-Soviet friendship in the 1950s reduced the influence of cultural critics’ criticisms of ballet, the Sino-Soviet split after 1959 led to a heightened class struggle campaign and impacted a trend of self-criticism towards ballet by gudianwu practitioners. At the dawn of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP’s instruction of “three transformations” and the Great Leap Forward campaign promoted an emergence of revolutionary and military-themed dances, including the ballet Red Detachment of Women (Wilcox 2018a). Although functioned as propaganda, these ballet works inherited the trend of hybridity between Chinese and Western culture since modern China.
2.3 Revolutionary Ballet during the Cultural Revolution

Soon after the premier of *Fish Beauty* in 1959, the political relationship between China and the Soviet Union was broken, and the USSR withdrew all the Soviet experts from China. Meanwhile, Mao’s Great Leap Forward movement (1958-1962) was criticized by many CCP cadres and was widely considered a failure. In the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet split and the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Mao took the criticism from the CCP as a personal attack on his leadership (Longley 1996). As a result, he launched the Socialist Education Movement (also known as the Four Cleanups Movement) in 1963 to remove reactionary and “capitalist revisionists.” By centering class struggle in Chinese politics, this movement went hand in hand with Zhou Enlai’s promotion of “three transformations” in music and dance to foreground revolutionary-themed works.

In this section, I examine the development of ballet and *gudianwu* at BDS in the pre-Cultural Revolution period from 1960 to 1965 and the sociopolitical factors of privileging the revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. While recognizing the distinctive artistic practices between these two periods, I also consider these two periods as interrelated in terms of the hybridity in dance training and creation. I argue that the creation of revolutionary ballet carried on the hybrid dance practice at BDS and crystalized dance practitioners’ efforts in developing unique Chinese dance. Moreover, the revolutionary ballet was propagandized by the revolutionary leaders to serve their own political and personal ambitions. In the following sections, I connect the development of ballet and *gudianwu* with the context of Mao’s political movements.
in the early 1960s and provide a close reading of the hybrid dance practice in the Cultural Revolution.

2.3.1. The Development of Gudianwu and Ballet from 1960 to 1964

The political break between China and the Soviet Union impacted a further program division between gudianwu and ballet at BDS. In 1961, BDS leaders enacted a curricular revision that separated gudianwu and ballet programs into two administrative sectors: the Chinese dance sector and the Foreign dance sector. Meanwhile, ballet class was removed from the Chinese dance program, whereas Chinese dance class was added to the curriculum of the ballet program (Wilcox 2018a). While this curricula revision reflected the heightened class struggle in light of the CCP’s state policies, I suggest that it was also an outcome of the maturity of gudianwu curriculum. In 1960, Li, Tang, and Ye published the first gudianwu textbook, The Pedagogy of Chinese Classical Dance, which features a seven-year gudianwu training syllabus. This book not only provided a specific gudianwu classroom teaching and training method, but also prepared a theoretical foundation for the curricular revision at BDS in 1961.48

While Soviet ballet experts withdrew from China in 1960, Chinese dancers and choreographers who studied in the Soviet Union in the 1950s graduated and came back to China. For instance, choreographer Jiang Zuhui, who studied at BDS for a year and gained a Chinese national scholarship to study at Moscow State Theatre Arts, returned to China and staged her graduate project, Spanish Daughter (1960), for Tianjin People’s Song and Dance Theater in 1961 (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018; Wilcox 2018a; Zou 2008).49 While it was an adaption from the Soviet ballet repertoire, its
revolutionary theme corresponded to the “revolutionization” slogan that was promoted by the CCP. This ballet was subsequently designated by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai as one of the performances foreign guests would view while being hosted by the Chinese government (Zou 2008). In 1962, Wang Xixian, another graduate of Moscow State Theatre Arts, staged *Fountain of Tears* (1962), an adaption of Soviet ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1934), for BDS Attached Experimental Ballet Ensemble.\(^{50}\)

Although Chinese dance choreographers no longer combined *gudianwu* with ballet pointe technique, as in *Fish Beauty*, ballet choreographers such as Jiang and Hu incorporated their expertise in *xiqu, gudianwu*, and Chinese folk/ethnic dances in their ballet productions. For example, Jiang replaced many ballet vocabularies with Chinese folk dance movements when restaging the Western repertoire, *Notre Dame de Paris* (1963), an adaption of *La Esmeralda* (1844), for BDS Ballet Ensemble (Zou 2008).\(^{51}\)

After watching *Notre Dame de Paris* in 1963, Prime Minister Zhou proposed,

> [we] have been studying them [the Soviet ballet] for ten years, it is time to create our own thing. You could choreograph some revolutionary-themed ballet that draws upon historical movements such as the Paris Commune and the October Revolution, while learning Western classical ballet repertoire. (Zou 2008, 36)

Under Zhou’s instruction, the creative team of BDS, Li Chengxiang, Jiang Zuhui, and Wang Xixian, choreographed *Red Detachment of Women* in 1964. In the following year, Shanghai Dance School created *White Haired Girl* (1965). Meanwhile, local dance troupes also endeavored to create revolutionary dance works, such as *Female Civilian Soldiers* (1964) by Shenyang Army Cultural Work Troupe and *Eight Women Ode* (1964) by CEOT (Wilcox 2018a). Echoing the “revolutionization” of music and dance, these
dance works signified a shift of subject matters from the 1950s’ staging of traditional legends and mythology to emphasizing revolutionary themes in the pre-Cultural Revolution (Wilcox 2018a).

When distinguishing socialist cultural practices, Wilcox suggests that the PRC policies before the Cultural Revolution allowed heterogenous dance activity and competing voices to coexist, while the Cultural Revolution “fundamentally altered the way dance was practiced in the PRC until the mid-1970s” (Wilcox 2018a, 151).

Admittedly, before 1966, dance creation in China was still diverse in style and method. However, the emphasis on class struggle and socialist revolution in dance and other cultural practices increased a homogenous idea in artistic creation, which can be seen as a prelude to the Cultural Revolution. With the series of political movements since the late 1950s, such as the Great Leap Forward, the Socialist Education Movement, and the promotion of the “three transformations,” Mao gradually reinforced his authoritarian governing and exploited artistic works as political propaganda. The revolutionary literature and art created in this period, therefore, became the prototype of the far-left Model Plays during the Cultural Revolution.

2.3.2 Revolutionizing Ballet – a Distorted Continuation

As a radical and dehumanizing political movement, the Cultural Revolution fundamentally changed the way dance was practiced in the PRC and influenced every aspect of Chinese people’s life. On May 16, 1966, the Central Committee of the CCP published the *May Sixteen Notification*, which signified the official initiation of the Cultural Revolution. This radical political campaign began in the field of higher
education; the revolution occurred first in universities and schools in Beijing, and subsequently spread to all areas of China’s society (Zou 2008). Students and Red Guards carried out “struggle sessions” (批斗会 a form of public humiliation and torture) under the direction of the revolutionary team in which they criticized, humiliated, and tortured their teachers and school leaders. Consequently, many intellectuals and artists, who were denounced as “bourgeois reactionaries,” were persecuted to death or sent by the revolutionary work team to the countryside to do manual work which featured constant struggle sessions.

On February 17, 1967, the Central Committee of the CCP ordered all the literature and art groups to stop their activities: BDS stopped recruiting new students and the existing students ceased taking dance classes; the Association of Chinese Dancers was attacked by the Red Guard; and dance journals stopped publishing (Wilcox 2018a; Zou 2008). While there were no dance classes held for students at BDS, dancers at the BDS Ballet Ensemble were able to continue their daily training and rehearsals of revolutionary ballet because of Mao’s wife Jiang Qing’s instruction (Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years 2009). In December 1966, Jiang named two ballets, Red Detachment of Women and White Haired Girl, as part of the “eight models plays” on account of their typical revolutionary theme (Zou 2003). From 1966 to 1970, Jiang Qing forbade the performance of any dance works aside from these two. While the Cultural Revolution plunged China into a catastrophe, the revolutionary ballet has its cultural and social value and should not be simply dismissed as a meaningless disruption of the existing dance practices. Therefore, I situate the revolutionary ballet within a chronological historical
context and elucidate three political and ideological forces that drove the promotion of the hybrid Chinese ballet.

First, ballet has functioned as a soft power in the CCP’s international diplomacy (Wilcox 2018a) and the beautiful and disciplined ballet bodies fulfilled the CCP leaders’ male desire for female bodies. The CCP leaders’ appreciation of ballet began amidst the cultural exchange of the Sino-Soviet friendship in the late 1940s. When Mao first visited Moscow in 1949, the Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin hosted him with a performance of classical Russian ballet, *Swan Lake* (Chao 2017; Chou 2018). In 1958, the CCP leaders, including Zhou and Chen, watched BDS students’ performance in the premiere of Gusev’s *Swan Lake* in China (Zou 2008). After the premiere of *Red Detachment of Women* on September 23, 1964, BDS Ballet Ensemble performed the ballet exclusively for the CCP leaders on the next day and Mao confirmed the success of its choreography and performance. In the following month, the ballet was also performed at the gala of the Canton Fair (or China Import and Export Fair; Su 2008).

In addition to using ballet as an instrument for promoting cultural exchange and hosting foreign guests, the CCP leaders’ political and patriarchal preferences for ballet allowed ballet dancers to become a privileged group among dancers at BDS and stabilized the performance opportunities of ballet during the Cultural Revolution. According to Zhao Ruheng, the then-director of the National Ballet of China, on almost every Saturday, the BDS leader would designate some ballet dancers to perform for the CCP leaders. Zhao recalls that these leaders, which included Zhou, Chen, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, and Li Xiannian, “would talk to us during breaks. [They] cared about our lives and told us to drink more soy milk to keep our body shape. They were kind and
unassuming. Later, [they] all knew us and could call our names” (Huang 2011).

Moreover, the labor of the ballet body, especially the female ballet body, became the CCP’s patriarchal propaganda in official documentaries and reports (to be elaborated in Chapter 3).

Secondly, Jiang Qing’s ambition to make use of the “eight model plays” signaled her own interests in art and politics. Significantly, Jiang, Mao’s fourth wife, had been a stage and film actress in Shanghai during the 1930s. This cosmopolitan background impacted her perception and appreciation of Western culture. When examining the development of piano and Western music in socialist China, Chinese studies scholar Richard Kraus states,

Even the Cultural Revolution continued the Westernizing trend; despite its ban on European composers, political leaders such as Jiang Qing promoted Western instruments, harmony, and choral singing … Jiang had a soft spot in her heart for pianos, which she helped save from Red Guard destruction, although she felt no affection for the music written for the piano by European composers. (Kraus 1989, vii and x)

Similarly, Jiang also had a “soft spot” for another Western art form, ballet. With her ambition to be involved in political affairs, Jiang gained a few political appointments within the Ministry of Culture in the 1950s and began to intervene in the performing arts, a visible cultural field, and assert her expertise and power (Gu 2015; Longley 1996).

After successfully revolutionizing a number of Chinese operas, she shifted her attention to ballet, which was the first Western form to be reformed as part of the Cultural Revolution. While watching a rehearsal for Red Detachment of Women, Jiang suggested that the heroine should dance a specific allegro step, which she neither knew the name of,
had the language to describe the step, nor possessed the ability to dance herself. In order to change the choreography, she had the principal dancers demonstrate every allegro step. Furthermore, seeing the French terminology of classical ballet as “counter-revolutionary,” she renamed some classical ballet movements by replacing them with Chinese words (Glasstone 2007; Zhao Ruheng’s interview in McLelland 2018). For instance, the quick traveling ballet step, *pas de bourée*, was replaced by “transplanting seed step” (*Chayang Bu* 插秧步).

As Jiang gained more power through her politicization of art works during the Cultural Revolution, her influence also extended beyond the sphere of arts to a broader political arena. In November 1966, Jiang became a cultural advisor to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which gave her “censorship control of the arts and the enforcement authority of PLA” (Longley 1996, 40). Her leadership position in the military, along with her idea of merging culture and politics, legitimatized her violence toward classical art forms as well as toward those artists who had supported or practiced them. The process of taking control via the “eight model plays” in order to convey her political thoughts allowed Jiang to shift her role from the wife of Mao to that of a powerful dictator (Longley 1996).

Finally, the revolutionary ballet carried on the efforts of both *gudianwu* and ballet practitioners who had worked to create unique Chinese dance prior to the Cultural Revolution. Admittedly, the political forces of the CCP during the Cultural Revolution set the groundwork for creating and promoting revolutionary ballet. The choreography of the two revolutionary ballet works, *Red Detachment of Women* and *White-Haired Girl*, inherited the hybrid dance training and dance creation before the Cultural Revolution. For
example, the choreographers of *Red Detachment of Women*, Li Chengxiang, Jiang Zuhui, and Wang Xixian, studied both Chinese dance and ballet and experimented with hybrid dance choreography before the Cultural Revolution. While Li Chengxiang participated in the choreography of BDS’ *Fish Beauty* in 1959, Jiang Zuhui created Chinese-styled ballet during her study at Moscow State Theatre Arts (to be elaborated in Chapter 5).

When collectively creating *Red Detachment of Women*, Li, Jiang, and Wang combined the realist narrative of *drambalet*, ballet pointe technique for female dancers, and movements from *gudianwu* and Chinese folk dance. For instance, one of the stylistic poses of the heroine, Wu Qinghua, is her lunge forward *en pointe*, an uncommon position in Western classical ballet, and a resentful look back towards the villain, Nan Batian. Wu’s solo also features *gudianwu* technique, such as *xiao bengzi* (or *chuan fanshen*, a succession of pinwheel-like turns that move in a straight line) and *dian fanshen* (a succession of pinwheel-like turns in place). The scene of fighting between the hero, Hong Changqing, and the villain applies tumbles, tackles, and falls from *xiqu* technique. In a section of *Knife Dance* for *corps de ballet*, female dancers stand one leg *en pointe* and raise the other leg up into a *passé* position. However, unlike the traditional turned-out *passé* of classical ballet, they use a parallel *passé*, a commonly seen movement in Chinese folk dances; and their right hands wield big knives while their left hands stretch out sharply to their sides.

In addition to the hybrid dance choreography, the dancers’ costumes and music featured Chinese military and ethnic styles. Instead of tutus women characters wore simple shirts and pants, and soldier characters wore tidy military uniforms and carried weapons. In a *corps de ballet* section, the composer Du Mingxin, who also composed
music for *Fish Beauty*, used Western symphonic technique to adapt a chorus of *Wanquan River*, a folk song of the Li ethnic group (黎族) in Hainan province. The chorus and the group dance jointly expressed the tight connection between soldiers and civilians. Together, the hybrid choreography, costuming, and music distinguished the revolutionary ballet from European classical ballet.

As I explore in this section, the political forces and personal preferences of the CCP leaders played a significant role in promoting the revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution. In terms of artistic aesthetics and choreographic method, however, I argue that it was also a distorted continuation of the hybrid dance practices in the 1950s. The urgent impulse of creating a unique national dance form of *gudianwu* and Sinicizing ballet after the establishment of the PRC in 1949 motivated Chinese dance practitioners to experiment with the hybridization between Chinese traditional dance and Western ballet. This early effort in developing dance training and choreography in China contributed to the successful hybridization between ballet, *gudianwu*, and Chinese folk/ethnic dances in revolutionary ballets. While the socialist state foregrounded the ballets as its revolutionary propaganda, it also popularized this Western art form to Chinese mass audiences (*Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years* 2009). The BDS dancers’ consistent performance of *Red Detachment of Women* to audiences in remote villages and the publication of the film version of the ballet inscribed the image of the heroine dancing *en pointe* in an *arabesque* position onto the cultural memory of the audiences in the 1960s and 1970s (*Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years* 2009). Thus, I reiterate that the revolutionary ballets have their artistic and cultural value, which necessitates attention in
terms of their interrelation with hybrid dance practices in socialist China as well as the subsequent dance training and creation in postsocialist China.

2.3.3 “Combination Dance Class” from 1973 to 1976

By focusing solely on revolutionary-themed dance production, the Cultural Revolution waged attacks on the development of Chinese dance and Western ballet repertoire as well as the regular dance training at BDS. From 1966 through the early 1970s, the party leaders shut down almost all the dance conservatories in China. In 1973, the CCP combined BDS with nine other art conservatories in Beijing and formed the Central Wuqi Art University (CWAU), which signaled a slow recovery of dance training, albeit under the close censorship of the revolutionary committees. Meanwhile, local art schools, such as Zhejiang Wuqi Art School, Chengdu Wuqi Art School, and military-affiliated art troupes, started to recruit dance students. After a six-year break, dance education was resumed in China.

The focus on revolutionary ballet performance, however, demanded that the students in both ballet and Chinese dance programs at CWAU take the same technique class, a so-called “combination dance class” (jiehe ke 结合课). While students in different majors focused on ballet and Chinese dance separately, the “combination dance class” mandated from 1973 to 1976 was highly hybridized, which combined ballet technique, especially the pointe technique for all the female dancers, and movements from gudianwu. When recalling his experience of studying ballet at CWAU, a retired professor at BDA said, “While my major was ballet, we learned everything, such as arm positions, shanbang, tuoshou, anzhang, and acrobatic movements, feijiao and xuanzi.
He also proudly speaks that “our ballet students did feijiao [a leg kick and jump technique trick for man] better than the students of Chinese dance. We danced beautifully in the air because ballet emphasizes effortless and elegant [movement qualities].” According to the professor, the combination dance class allowed students to develop different dancing skills with which the students of the later generations in postsocialist China cannot compare.

For many Chinese ballet practitioners, the performance of revolutionary ballet spared them from severe political struggle and the “combination dance class” cultivated versatile dancing bodies that could perform both ballet pointe technique and Chinese acrobatic movements (Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years 2009; Huang 1964). For gudianwu practitioners, however, the combination class was a style of “tu-balei” (rube-ballet 土芭蕾), which featured incomplete ballet techniques and added a few movements from Chinese dance. When commenting on this style of dance training, Li Zhengyi and Lü Yisheng stress, “it emphasized ‘revolutionization,’ reduced [dance] expression, and turned [dance] training into purely technical training for human bodily function” (Li and Lü 1987, 4). According to Li and Lü, while the “combination class” only lasted three years, it had a profound influence on gudianwu training in postsocialist China (Li and Lü 1987).

The recovery of dance education throughout China prompted choreography of new dance dramas. In 1974, the Chinese Dance Ensemble (later the National Ballet of China) adapted BDS’ Red Sister-in-Law (1965) into a new revolutionary ballet, Ode to Yimeng (yimeng song 沂蒙颂); later that year, the ensemble created another ballet, Children of the Grassland (caoyuan ernü 草原儿女). Besides the new creation of the
revolutionary ballet, dance troupes, such as China Railroad Song and Dance Ensemble and Changchun City Song and Dance Company, also choreographed revolutionary Chinese dances that incorporated local songs and movements of ethnic dances and *gudianwu* during the period of 1970 to 1976 (Clark 2008). However, the intense political censorship on cultural practices continuously suppressed the free creation of heterogenous dance works even after the Cultural Revolution in 1976. It was the economic and political reform by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s that promoted a revival of Chinese traditional culture and a trend of cultural Westernization.

### 2.4 Conclusion: A Discourse of Hybridity

In this chapter, I explore my three research questions by analyzing socialist *gudianwu* and ballet practices. I investigate the first two research questions of how Western ballet and Chinese traditional dance drew upon each other in dance training and choreography in socialist China. It is evident from this chapter that the hybridity between *xiqu* and ballet has become a significant characteristic of *gudianwu* and revolutionary ballet during Maoist China. As I explained in the second section, the trend of adopting Western culture to develop modern Chinese industry, literature, and art could be traced back to reflexive responses to foreign invasions since the late nineteenth century. Consequently, since the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals called upon applying Western advanced culture to promote modern Chinese culture and to awaken Chinese national identity. From the 1920s to 1940s, both ballet and modern dance influenced Chinese dance creation. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, ballet was foregrounded by many Chinese dancers and CCP leaders due to the Sino-Soviet
friendship and Mao’s socialist cultural strategy, whereas modern dance was criticized for its association with American imperialist culture (Wilcox 2017; Xia 1958). While some Chinese dance practitioners also questioned the adoption of ballet in Chinese dance creation as its historical connection with Western bourgeois culture, gudianwu pioneers at BDS treated ballet as a useful instrument to systematize gudianwu training and choreography. The hybrid dance practices at BDS, therefore, laid the foundation for promoting revolutionary ballet during the Cultural Revolution and reviving gudianwu in postsocialist China.

When reflecting upon my third research question in this chapter, which is how hybrid dance forms complicate the concept of Chineseness, I argue that the hybrid dance practices of gudianwu and revolutionary ballet are not neutral sites of intercultural translation. The debate, skepticism, and self-criticism of adopting ballet in Chinese dance training and choreography indicate the tension and ongoing power negotiation between Western bourgeois culture and Chinese socialist culture. While the revolutionary ballet seemed to reconcile this tension, the intercultural harmony was harnessed by the CCP’s political and nationalist aims. Moreover, not only the revolutionary ballet but also the hybridity of gudianwu had been propagandized by CCP leaders as a way to cultivate revolutionary Chineseness, which corresponded with Mao’s instruction of exploiting foreign “advanced” culture and making it to serve the needs of Chinese socialist revolution.

Interestingly, the concept of hybridity, as I discussed in the Introduction, stresses the impossibility of any essentialism (Bhabha 1994; Young 1995), which means that hybrid dance practices have the potential to subvert, displace, and renegotiate the
inscribed cultural hierarchies and political aims. While ballet was only applied as a device to gear up *gudianwu* classroom training, it has subtly affected the aesthetics of *gudianwu*, from dancers’ selection to the shape of dancers’ bodily alignment (to be discussed in Chapter 3). This appreciation for the aesthetic of ballet not only led to the sacrifice of Chinese dance aesthetics and movements (Yu 2016a), but also undermined the Chinese socialist cultural identity which Chinese dance pioneers sought to build in *gudianwu*. Similarly, the application of ballet technique, symphonic music, and European theatrical structure in narrating revolutionary stories also exoticized the radical socialist Cultural Revolution and unintentionally challenged the cultural hierarchies between Chinese socialism and Western imperialism. In conclusion, the socialist Chineseness constructed in *gudianwu* and revolutionary ballet was unstable in terms of political intervention and fluid intercultural translation.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, dance conservatories and ensembles were re-established, and various dance practices were revived including Chinese dance and Western ballet repertoire. In 1978, the Ministry of Culture renamed BDS as Beijing Dance Academy, and the school refocused on separating Chinese dance and ballet training. Deng Xiaoping’s Reform and Open Policy (*gaige kaifang*) since 1979 provided a relatively liberal but complex political and cultural environment that is different from the Cold War socialism for the dance development in postsocialist China. While contemporary China’s dance practitioners have focused on developing Chinese traditional culture in *gudianwu* and promoting Sinicized ballet repertoire, China’s full integration into capitalist globalization, which was a key strategy of Deng’s reform, further complicated the concept of hybridity and Chineseness in *gudianwu* and Chinese
ballet. In the remaining chapters, I explore the hybrid dance training and choreography in contemporary, postsocialist China and the ways in which they embody the paradoxical concept of Chineseness.
CHAPTER 3

INVENTING THE TRADITION: HYBRID GUDIANWU TRAINING AND THE CULTIVATION OF VIRTUOSO CHINESENESS

We should cultivate versatile and high-quality national dancers who have world-class [performance], international influence, Chinese spirit, and Chinese style.

In 1978, Beijing Dance School (BDS) was renamed the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) by China’s Ministry of Culture and now focused on developing higher education in dance. Accordingly, the original middle school education was designated as the Affiliated Secondary School of BDA (ASS). Simultaneously, to revive Chinese classical dance (gudianwu) from the ten-year suppression during the Cultural Revolution, gedianwu pioneers Li Zhengyi, Gao Dakun, and Tang Mancheng proposed a project of rehabilitating the training of gedianwu to BDA leaders (1978). As shown in the epigraph, the cultivation of versatile and virtuoso gedianwu dancers carries the burden of promoting both Chinese cultural identity as well as China’s international influence. This national and global strategy of gedianwu training corresponded with Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening Up” policy, in which the revival of Chinese traditional culture went hand in hand with China’s integration into capitalist globalization in the postsocialist era.

With the institutional and financial support of BDA leaders and the Ministry of Culture, the gedianwu pedagogical team, led by Li, learned diverse styles of Chinese operas (xiqu) and martial arts (wushu) from local artists in Shanxi, Sichuan, Zhejiang, and
Yunnan provinces. From September to December of 1979, Li hosted thirty-six meetings with the faculty of *gudianwu* and experts from local dance troupes to establish China’s first undergraduate *gudianwu* educational system. The “thirty-six meetings” reaffirmed the primary role of *xiqu* and *wushu* in *gudianwu* training, “continued to draw upon the scientific aspect of ballet training,” and recognized the usefulness of dance steps in Chinese folk dance, bodily liberation in American modern dance, and technical feats in gymnastics and acrobatics (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 86). According to *gudianwu* faculty, this hybridity between Chinese and Western forms in developing postsocialist *gudianwu* training inherited Mao Zedong’s concepts of *yang wei Zhong yong* (洋为中用), which means using foreign things to serve Chinese needs. While BDA *gudianwu* practitioners decided to not use *Chinese Classical Dance Pedagogy* (1960) created in socialist China and move forward from a “new starting point” (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 63), the hybrid strategy in cultivating *gudianwu* dancers and choreographing national dance repertoire persists in postsocialist China.

The hybrid features of the *gudianwu* curriculum become apparent in the technique courses established during the thirty-six meetings: Chinese Classical Dance Basic Skills Training (中国古典舞基训课), Chinese Classical Dance *Shenduan* (中国古典舞身段课), Chinese Classical Dance Combination (中国古典舞组合课), Chinese Folk Dance (中国民间舞课), and Ballet (芭蕾基训课). To reinforce the flavor of Chineseness within the hybrid *gudianwu* curriculum, the faculty designed a *Shenduan* class, the predecessor of the *Shenyn* (Body-Rhythm) class, and characterized the training and aesthetics of *Shenyn-gudianwu* style. In addition to reconstructing
Chinese traditional dance culture, *Shenyun-gudianwu* practitioners carried on the concept of “using the past to serve the present” (*gu wei jin yong* 古为今用), an idea that dovetails with *yang wei Zhong yong* in Mao’s “Yan’an Talk” (1942). By stressing contemporaneity and innovation in *gudianwu*, *gu wei jin yong* requires *gudianwu* to conform with the ideology and national character of contemporary China. Thus, “making the past to serve the present and using the foreign to serve China’s needs” became the premises of *Shenyun-gudianwu* training in postsocialist China, from which new generations of *Shenyun-gudianwu* educators, choreographers, and versatile professional dancers emerged.

However, not all *gudianwu* practitioners at BDA recognized the hybrid style of *Shenyun-gudianwu*. Sun Ying (1929–2009), one of the *gudianwu* pioneers at BDA, intensely criticized the adoption of Western ballet and modern dance in training Chinese *gudianwu* dancers (Sun 2006; Wilcox 2012a). He harshly points out that the emergence of the *Shenyun* class was to supplement the lack of Chineseness in *gudianwu* technique and the Westernized and comprehensive *gudianwu* training is a de facto “self-colonization” (Sun 2006, 76). As a result of his opposition against the mainstream *Shenyun-gudianwu* style, Sun was marginalized at BDA and worked alone in the early 1980s. Sun researched historical materials that focused on the court and folk dances of ancient Han (202 BCE-220 CE), Wei-Jin (220-589 CE), and Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) and choreographed the dance drama, *Dancers of the Tongque Stage* (铜雀伎1985), for dancers at the Central Opera and Dance Drama Theater (CODDT) (Sun 2006; Wilcox 2012a). In contrast to the collective work in establishing the *Shenyun-gudianwu* curriculum, *Dancers of the Tongque Stage* became Sun’s first experimentation for
creating the Han-Tang \textit{gudianwu} curriculum. With more than a decade of development to his \textit{gudianwu} curriculum elsewhere in Chongqing and Hebei, Sun’s Han-Tang \textit{gudianwu} style eventually received recognition by BDA leaders who allowed him to recruit his first Han-Tang \textit{gudianwu} major in 2001.

In this chapter, I probe my first research question of how the \textit{gudianwu} class and dancing bodies have drawn upon a mix of Western models and Chinese traditional cultures in the context of postsocialist China. I comparatively examine the technique class of \textit{Shenyun} and Han-Tang \textit{gudianwu} at BDA. While I view both \textit{gudianwu} styles as hybrid dance forms, I argue that they represent different approaches to hybridity and Chineseness. On one hand, \textit{Shenyun-gudianwu} practitioners applied Western performances in \textit{gudianwu} to modernize and globalize traditional Chinese culture, which reflects the idea of \textit{yang wei Zhong yong} and \textit{gu wei jin yong} that I outlined above. On the other hand, Sun’s Han-Tang style foregrounded the reconstruction of ancient Chinese dance through fresco, sculpture, and historical relics. Although Sun’s \textit{gudianwu} experimentation challenges the adoption of Western ballet and modern dance, it is a creative activity that employed his modern/contemporary values to interpret static ancient dance figures in constructing a Chinese classical dance. Thus, Sun’s Han-Tan \textit{gudianwu} style is also a practice of \textit{gu wei jin yong} that demonstrates a different kind of hybridity. By focusing on these two hybrid \textit{gudianwu} training methods, I suggest that \textit{Shenyun-gudianwu} cultivates versatile dancing bodies that highlight dancers’ exceptional physical virtuosity, while Han-Tang \textit{gudianwu} experiments with Chinese cultural essentialism and provides an alternative representation of Chineseness.
Keeping identity discourse in the foreground, this chapter employs Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity (1994), historian Eric Hobsbawn’s idea of invented tradition (1983), and discourses of virtuosity by anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce (2004) and American dance scholar Ariel Osterweis (2001, 2013). Notably, Osterweis’ definition of dancers’ “exceptional execution and stylistic hybridity” as “a virtuosity of versatility” (2013, 57) inspires my interpretation of the virtuoso and versatile Chinese gudianwu dancing bodies. While she explores the virtuoso black dancing body of Desmond Richardson, Osterweis’ analysis of Richardson’s “virtuosity of versatility” in relation to her discussion of racial and gender identity reveals the contestative potential of virtuoso hybrid dancing bodies in identity discourses. Therefore, I argue that the hybrid gudianwu training as an invented tradition facilitates gudianwu dancers’ virtuosity of versatility which empowers them to traverse a temporal dimension from tradition to modern and a cultural landscape from China to the West; and it is through this technical and aesthetic versatility that gudianwu bodies undermine an essentialist Chineseness. The embodiment of a fluid Chinese national and cultural identity by virtuoso and hybrid gudianwu dancing bodies provides an answer to my third research question, in which cultural hybridity in dance practices complicates the concept of Chineseness.

This chapter includes three sections. In the first section, I examine the inventive process and the transformation of the Shenyun-gudianwu technique class in early postsocialist and twenty-first century China. I explore how the establishment of Shenyun technique worked with the revival of Chinese traditional culture in promoting an aesthetic of Chineseness and Chinese dancing bodies. In the second section, I investigate the rationale of the hybrid Shenyun-gudianwu training in postsocialist China. Through
analyzing the virtuosity of jumping, turning, and tumbling skills of BDA gudianwu dancers, I probe technical and aesthetic functions of inventing virtuoso gudianwu bodies. I also explore the potential of this virtuosity in empowering Chinese dancers to move across cultural and national borders, and its potential to challenge a unified Chinese cultural identity. In the last section, I conduct case studies of Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu technique class and Shenyun-gudianwu teacher Hu Yan’s Fan Dance class to explore how individual practitioners play significant roles in inventing the tradition of gudianwu and how individual experimentation becomes a site for negotiating alternative ideas of tradition and Chineseness.

3.1 Inventing a Hybrid Chineseness: the Creative Process of Hybrid Gudianwu Training in Postsocialist China

When defining the idea of “invented tradition,” Hobsbawm notes,

The term ‘Invented tradition’… includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally constituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and debatable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity … [It] is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tactically accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm 1983, 1)

In other words, the idea of invented tradition is not simply about traditions’ renewal or reconstruction. It emphasizes what and how the invented tradition indoctrinates values by referring to a fictitious or untraceable past. Thus, I consider gudianwu as an invented tradition for its cultivation of a Chinese national body aesthetic and its promotion of
Chineseness through its positioning as an inherited Chinese traditional culture. In addition, by comparing the idea of invented tradition with “convention” and “routine,” Hobsbawm (1983) suggests that traditions function at an ideological level, while conventional and routine social practices, such as work in factories, operate technically in the most efficient and invariant way. In the case of gudianwu training, I suggest that the repeated technical practice of gudianwu dancers facilitates as well as complicates ideological functions. Through examining the invention of Shenyun-gudianwu technique class at BDA, I reveal the representation of Chineseness by postsocialist gudianwu dancing bodies.

3.1.1 The Hybrid Gudianwu Technique Class

After the thirty-six meetings in 1979, gudianwu practitioners established a new training system that covered a variety of exercises to cultivate versatile gudianwu dancers for concert dance stages. In the first and second year of gudianwu undergraduate education, a Gudianwu Basic-Skills Training Class (hereafter gudianwu technique class) consisted of four stages: flexibility training (软开度训练), capacity training (能力训练), technique tricks training (技术技巧训练), and dance combinations training (舞蹈组合训练; Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Zhu 1994). The pedagogical system and strategy of the 1980s’ gudianwu training also formed the basis of today’s gudianwu technique class. The flexibility training encompassed exercises on the floor and in the center, which aimed at enhancing the elasticity of dancers’ ligaments and muscles and the mobility of bodily joints, such as spine and hip sockets. For instance, in a textbook record of a sample male gudianwu class for sophomore students in the 1980s (Zhu 1994), students
began with floor exercises of pointing and flexing their feet. Throughout the floor work, students would sit or lay on their backs, sides, or stomach to lift (développé or relevé lent), stretch (split), or do grand battement and rond de jambe of their legs, which resembles the exercises of a beginner ballet class.

The second stage of gudianwu training in the 1980s, which included barre work and center exercises, is designed for increasing students’ muscular strength and rapid reactivity to music as well as preparing them for accomplishing difficult tricks of the third stage. By borrowing barre exercises from ballet, gudianwu barre work in the 1980s featured tendu (擦地), plié (蹲), jeté/degagé (小踢腿), fondu (单腿蹲), frappé (小弹腿), da tantui (大弹腿 big leg beats), waist exercise (腰), leg stretch on the barre (压腿), swing and hold the leg (悠腿和搬腿), grand battement (大踢腿), and développé (控制). In the beginning three exercises, tendu, plié, and degagé, dancers’ feet are placed either in ballet first, second, or fifth position with both feet fully turned out to 180-degrees. Along with the accompaniment of piano music, the dancer practiced demi and grand plié, port de bras to the front, side, and back, and tendu or degagé with pointed feet. While dancers’ leg movements primarily drew upon ballet technique, their hand positions, such as hukou zhang (widened thumb and index 虎口掌) for male dancers and lanhua zhi (orchid finger 兰花指) for female dancers, and arm gesture, shanbang (mountain shoulder 山膀) were adoptions from xiqu. In addition to employing ballet leg works and xiqu arm gestures, gudianwu pioneers also drew on movements of xiqu and wushu in the invention of gudianwu training. For example, in fondu (单腿蹲) exercise, the turnout passé movement was
altered to *xiqu’s shangyang tui* (商羊腿) in which the working leg bends and lifts in front of the body with a sickled foot (Zhu 1994). By emphasizing the speed, strength, and flexibility of dancers’ leg movements, the *grand battement* exercise combined *bantui* (搬腿) technique from *xiqu* and *wushu*, which not only requires *gudianwu* students to kick their legs to a full 180 degrees, but also trained them to promptly catch the kicking leg and hold it in the air while retaining a firm balance with the supporting leg. The center exercises of *gudianwu* further increased the proportion of movements adopted from *xiqu*. For instance, the choreography of the Dance Posture Exercise (舞姿练习) for female dancers adopted *sheyan* (shot swallow 射燕), *da yebu* (big tucking step 大掖步), *duantui* (horizontal leg lift 端腿), *yunshou* (cloud hands 云手), and *woyun* (lying cloud 卧云) from *xiqu* and integrated them with *rond de jambe* and *promenade* from ballet and cross step (十字步) from Chinese folk dance (Gao, Zhang, and Han 1991). Throughout these hybrid exercises, dancers’ bodies constantly shifted from standing, rising, and going down to the floor, while maintaining balance on one leg and coordinating the upper and lower bodies to maintain fluidity.

There are two traits of bodily training that relate *Shenyun-gudianwu* technique to postsocialist ideologies of globalism and nationalism: the extreme emphasis on flexibility in every part of the body and the aesthetic division between female and male dancers’ training. First and foremost, every stage of exercise includes specific training for the hyper mobility of dancers’ upper and lower bodies. For both male and female dancers, waist circles or *shuanyao* (涮腰) and the split leg hold (*bantui*) are classic exercises for lowerback and leg flexibility in *gudianwu* training. While resembling the circular *port de*
bras of ballet, shuanyao requires the dancer’s body to bend deeper toward the side and back and to stay in the horizontal plane during circling. In the video demonstration of the waist exercise at the barre, a dancer executes a deep backbend with her torso forming a narrow U shape with her legs and her jawline and muscles of her neck are fully revealed due to the extreme stretch of her chest and head. Later, in a deep lunge position, she sharply throws her torso backwards with her bun nearly touching her hips. This style of deep backbend is also combined with leg kicks and extensions. For instance, in a difficult ruan chuaiyan (soft kick swallow 软踹燕) movement, female dancers first extend one leg in front of the body at 180 degrees and exert a deep arch backward while keeping the extension of the leg. When I was observing a first-year undergraduate gudianwu technique class, the teacher asked her students to execute the movement without the help of the barre. She instructed her students to “instantly position [the backbend],” “hold your balance,” as well as “find the full range movement of your bodies.” Although the students’ faces already looked flushed due to repeated practice of this upside-down position, the teacher asked them to maintain the U shape of their backbend and “pick up their chests.” The high leg extension combined with the deep backbend of the torso and the upside down of the head compares gudianwu dancers’ extreme flexibility and virtuosity with elite gymnastics.

The second trait of Shenyun-gudianwu training emphasizes the gendered division between male and female dancing bodies. To cultivate the desired feminine qualities, the exercises designed for female dancers, such as the deep backbend, require more flexibility and softness than that of male dancers. For instance, when lifting the legs high into the air in ruan chuaiyan, the female dancers adopted the orchid fingers and executed
a series of intricate arm spirals above their heads as well as in front of their chests. Their smooth and graceful arm movements along with the impeccable control of their back bend and leg extension created a patriarchal ideal of the delicate and modest female bodies. Male dancers in gudianwu training, however, do not learn movements that require a flexible lowerback. In contrast to the soft and balletic beauty of female dancers, the training for male dancers cultivates robust and powerful dancing bodies. In the waist exercise for male dancers, for instance, the teacher only asked male students to exert mid- and upperback bends. The adoption of big ranges of movements from xiqu and wushu, such as the deep side lunge (pubu 扑步) and the rapid wind-fire wheels (fenghuolun 风火轮) combined with the widened thumb and index hand gesture to train explosive muscular power and masculinity for male dancers.

The hybrid gudianwu training class cultivated virtuosic gudianwu dancing bodies that had extreme flexibility and muscular strength for balancing, turning, jumping, and acrobatics. Within the complex hybridization of xiqu, wushu, and ballet, gudianwu training in the 1980s and 1990s emphasized dancers’ turnout (kai 开), point (beng 绷), and straight (zhi 直) leg technique and incorporated the aesthetic of turned-in (guan 关), flexed (gou 勾), and bent (qu 曲) positions as secondary training (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). Moreover, the strengthening of lower limbs without “bulking thighs and hips” to maintain slim bodies and the espousal of apparent effortlessness in executing steps are values inherited from ballet by BDA gudianwu teachers (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 105). What makes gudianwu different from ballet training is the emphasis on bodily hyper flexibility, which promoted virtuoso dancing bodies whose physical capacities both
resemble and surpass ballet dancers and can be likened to elite gymnasts. The value of flexibility as both a technical virtuosity and a corporeal tactic become a factor that allowed gudianwu dancers to acquire dance careers across national borders (to be discussed in section 2.1.2).

Since the 2000s, the establishment of the Han-Tang gudianwu program at BDA and the increasing criticism towards the adoption of ballet by Chinese dance critics facilitated BDA’s Sinicization of Shenyun-gudianwu training. However, the concentration on training dancers’ flexibility and the division between masculinity and femininity carried over to the Shenyun-gudianwu classroom at contemporary BDA. From the 1990s to the 2020s, BDA gudianwu teachers reformed and updated the syllabus of gudianwu training through adopting Shenyun technique and minimizing the influence of ballet.

3.1.2 Rehabilitating a Chineseness through Shenyun Class.

In a capacious studio, a class of female dancers stand in preparation at the far corner with one leg crossed behind the other as they await a cue from their teacher. They wear lightweight purple V-neck tops with mid-length flared sleeves and extremely wide-leg black pants that look like skirts. The teacher Wei says “go.” The dancers first inhale deeply and lift their arms, and after a moment of holding their breath, they rush quietly to the opposite corner, across the floor along with their steady and continuous exhalation. Their lifted arms are like falling leaves calmly and softly dropping and their flowing clothes trail behind them in the air. “Stop!” Wei calls off the beautiful sequence, spontaneously stands up from her seat and walks toward her students. A formidable vision, she wears an entirely black outfit with her hair tightly pulled back in a ponytail. She tells her students that “the breath [inhalation] is first a dot (点) then a line (线); [you] should perform the difference.” Whilst giving this instruction, she points her hand to her chest and exaggerates her breath with her lifted torso and chest. Then, she walks closer to a student in the front row. By using the student’s body to
demonstrate the flow of the breath from the core of the body to the head, she continues to ask the other students “where does [the breath] transmit after it goes here [the head]?” A moment later, she taps twice on the student’s back and says “the back.”

When I observed this Shenyun class in 2021, I could not stop myself from following the teacher’s instruction to find the “dot” and the “line” of my inhalation and the way in which the exhalation transmitted from my nose to my neck, then my back and finally ended in my core. Then, another circulation of breath began. This breathing technique is essential training in Shenyun class. By emphasizing the bodily breath and the impetus of the core/lower belly, Shenyun technique features four movement patterns, which are ning (twist 拧), qing (lean 倾), yuan (circle 圆), and qu (bend 曲); seven momentum elements (动律元素), which are ti (lift 提), chen (sink 沉), chong (rush to outward 冲), kao (lean backward 靠), han (inward 含), tian (outward and forward 腾), and yi (shift 移); and three movement trajectories in “horizontal,” “vertical,” and “figure 8” circles (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Jin 2016). These momentum elements, movement patterns, and trajectories along with the breathing technique form the foundation of Shenyun technique that meshed balletic gudianwu bodies with Chinese aesthetics.71

The establishment of Shenyun (Body-rhythm 身韵) class at BDA went hand in hand with experimentation in gudianwu training in the early 1980s. While based on the Shenduan (body shape 身段) class in the pre-Cultural Revolutionary period at BDS, where students learned original choreographies from xiqu repertoire, the Shenyun class in postsocialist China condensed and hybridized movements and characteristics of xiqu and wushu to supplement Chineseness in gudianwu training. With the help of xiqu and wushu
experts such as Wang Ping and Zhang Qiang, *gudianwu* pioneers divided *Shenyun* training into two categories: *tushou* (bare-hand 徒手) *Shenyun* and *daoju* (props) *Shenyun* (including the sleeve dance for females and sword dance for both females and males).

BDA *gudianwu* teachers such as Li Zhengyi and Tang Mancheng, worked with local artists to research traditional movements from *wushu*, such as *yunjian zhuanyao* (waist turning in cloud 云间转腰), *yanzi chuanlin* (swallow flies across the forest 燕子穿林), and *fenghuolun* (wind-fire wheel 风火轮).72 Through re-learning from *xiqu* and *wushu* in postsocialist China, *Shenyun-gudianwu* pioneers refined, standardized, and classified the movements into patterns, momentum elements, and movement trajectories, while experimenting with innovating *Shenyun* technique.

For many *gudianwu* practitioners, the establishment of *Shenyun* class at BDA rehabilitated Chinese national subjectivity in the balletic *gudianwu* training and enabled *gudianwu* to disengage from *xiqu* and *wushu* and establish itself as an independent dance form (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004; Pang 2014). Since the 1990s, *gudianwu* teachers at BDA adopted elements and movements of *Shenyun* technique to *gudianwu* technique class to enhance the Chineseness of *gudianwu* dancing bodies. In the twenty-first century, BDA teachers continued to minimize the influence of ballet by dismissing ballet feet positions and incorporating *Shenyun* technique. For instance, when I observed BDA *gudianwu* technique classes, students prepared their exercises by positioning their feet in a T shape (*dingzi wei* 丁字位); similarly, when preparing for a *pirouette* turn, students began with *tabu* feet (the back foot steps across the front foot 踏步) instead of ballet’s fourth position. The combination of *Shenyun*’s upper body movement and dance poses also
enhances the complexity of each exercise. When Wang Wei taught a back leg lift movement (tanhai 探海) in a développé (控制) exercise, she instructed the students that the circle of the working leg should echo the “order of the body” (shenfa 身法), in which the torso and arms also moved in a circular trajectory. Wang told the students that “I am not only looking at your leg’s range [height], [your whole body] is [making] an integral circle.”73 The emphasis on using both leg and upper bodies to “draw a circle” put into use the principles of Shenyun technique and enhanced the flow of the body.

To further strengthen a sense of Chineseness in gudianwu training, gudianwu teachers designed exercises based on Chinese traditional philosophical concepts. Ziwu xiang (子午相) for instance, is a body position adopted from xiqu that emphasizes a slightly twisted relationship between head, torso, and legs.74 When the legs are facing the right diagonal, the torso twists to face the center and the head further turns to the left and faces the left diagonal. These opposing forces between the upper and lower body embody the Chinese traditional yin and yang in which dualities such as dark and light, winter and summer confront and interconnect with each other. During a gudianwu class, students regularly initiate and finish an exercise with a ziwu xiang in cooperating with different foot positions. Furthermore, contemporary gudianwu training focuses more on the coordination between dancers’ breath and the circularity of movements. For example, in a dun (plié 蹲) exercise for female students, before dancers bend their knees in a tabu position (a tabu plié 踏步蹲) they gently inhale and lift (ti 提) their upper bodies, softly raise their arms to the top of their heads, and straighten their legs (a heshou 合手 movement); along with a smooth and invisible transition to exhalation, they slowly sink
(chen 沉) their bodies and fully bend their knees into tabu plié. This bodily momentum of lifting before bending (欲抑先扬) and turning to the right before turning to the left (欲左先右) is one of the most significant characteristics of Shenyun technique that draws upon wushu and informs the circular movement patterns and aesthetics of contemporary gudianwu training.

Besides the cooperation with Shenyun technique, the musical accompaniment and dancers’ attire in the twenty-first century gudianwu class also added Chinese elements and changed over time. While today’s gudianwu class still works with pianists for musical accompaniment, the music for each exercise is a piano arrangement of Chinese traditional songs or music. Instead of copying the ballet attire of leotards and pink tights, contemporary female gudianwu students wear a V-neck chiffon top with mid-long flared sleeves over their leotard (a style inspired by a Chinese traditional Han costume), and they replace the previous pink tights with black tights and shorts. Female dancers in Shenyun class have changed their attire from slim black exercise pants to wide-legged black pants.

Gudianwu training as an invented tradition varies throughout postsocialist China. Shenyun technique, which has been adopted by gudianwu training in contemporary China, had already undergone intentional hybridization with xiqu and wushu by gudianwu practitioners in the 1980s. Notably, gudianwu training that rehybridizes the already hybrid Shenyun technique is still criticized by many dance critics and practitioners as impure (Su 2016). Scholars contend that Shenyun and gudianwu technique classes are “two separate skins” (两张皮) that cannot be mixed together, thus
questioning *Shenyun-gudianwu*’s production of homogenous and virtuosic balletic bodies (Su 2016). In the next section, I delve into the jumping, turning, and tumbling training to examine how the virtuoso and versatile *gudianwu* bodies negotiate Chineseness.

### 3.2 Inventing Virtuosity: Honing Hybrid *Gudianwu* Bodies in the Context of Globalization

The concept of virtuosity has been theorized by anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce as “great technical skill; mastery of technique; [and] incorporation of such extra-technical elements” (Royce 2004, 24). The extra elements that promote virtuosity, although varied in different art forms, are musicality, the quality of simplicity, and the appearance of effortlessness (Royce 2004). In *gudianwu* training, the ability to execute difficult dance tricks echoes Royce’s definition of virtuosity. According to *gudianwu* pioneer Tang Mancheng, dance tricks (*jiqiao* 技巧) include the human body’s flexibility, the height of jump and control ability in the air, quality of dance poses, the speed and quantity of turns, and rotations and somersaults in the air (Tang 1993). The training of these highly professional, difficult, and remarkably spectatorial human movements hones dancers’ virtuosity (Tang 1993; Jin 2001). In the eyes of *gudianwu* practitioners, dance technique and tricks are separate notions in which technique (such as basic flexibility and barre exercises), serves as the basis of *gudianwu* training while dance tricks are the ultimate stage of training and epitome of *gudianwu*.

When comparing the difference between virtuosity and artistry, Royce argues that “virtuosity only stands at midpoint between technical competence and artistry,” whereas artistry represents the highest level of performance and achieves great harmony between
the audience and the dance (Royce 2004, 22). However, gudianwu teacher Jin Hao theorizes five stages of honing virtuosity and considers the final stage of virtuosity as a representation of dancers’ artistry. Jin says that the training of dance tricks is a process of “hui [knowing 会], dui [correcting 对], jing [virtuosity 精], miao [exquisite 妙], and jue [unique 绝]” for gudianwu dancers and it is through high standards and strict training that their dance becomes sublime (Jin 2001, 41). Jin further explains that knowing the movement does not mean the dancer can do it correctly; even if the method is correct, it does not mean the dancer’s skill is virtuosic; also, it is not enough to simply achieve virtuosity, the dancer has to continue to pursue excellence and uniqueness (Jin 2001). The five stages of dance tricks training show gudianwu practitioners’ integral understanding of technical and artistic virtuosity.

In her ethnographic research in Chinese dance at BDA, Wilcox (2011) also applies Royce’s notion of virtuosity and questions the dichotomic conceptualization between technical ability and artistry. Wilcox (2011) considers that the cultivation of a virtuoso Chinese dancing body in socialist China aligned with a moral devotion to socialist values. In the reform era, however, the cultivation of dancers’ virtuosity, especially for “dancers who practice dance forms coded as ‘Chinese’,” became an instrument to pursue a Chinese cultural identity (Wilcox 2011, 57). In this section, I build on Wilcox’s argument and explore how the hybrid gudianwu training in contemporary PRC hones dancers’ “virtuosity of versatility” and fosters a sense of Chineseness.

The notion of “virtuosity of versatility” is theorized by Osterweis (2001, 2013) when she analyzes the exceptional physical ability and stylistic hybridity of African American dancer Desmond Richardson. She recognizes that Richardson’s hybrid
movement style integrates his ballet and modern dance training at conservatories and black vernacular forms such as popping and voguing (Osterweis 2013). The hybrid styles and virtuoso execution of Richardson’s performance not only create a black embodied spectacle for white consumption, but also offer a representation of Richardson’s queer and distinctive individual identity, which challenges Royce’s binary statement between virtuosity and artistry (Osterweis 2013). Jin Hao’s conceptualization of “uniqueness” as the final stage of gudianwu dancers’ virtuosity also corresponds to Osterweis’ example. While studying the black body’s virtuosity, Osterweis’ research inspires my examination of the virtuoso and versatile gudianwu bodies and their potential in negotiating cultural and national identities. I consider that Chinese gudianwu bodies that trained with the hybrid gudianwu style also embody a virtuosity of versatility. The fusion of ballet, xiqu, wushu, Chinese folk dances, and acrobatics in gudianwu training allows gudianwu bodies to embrace as well as transcend ballet and Chinese dance styles.

By viewing virtuosic gudianwu bodies in the context of postsocialist intercultural exchanges, I argue that the stylistic versatility and technical virtuosity of gudianwu training operate as a kinesthetic response to the opportunity and risk of globalization. As I explore in the first section, BDA gudianwu training in postsocialist China hybridizes Chinese and Western movement styles to globalize Chinese national dance and dancing bodies. In facing the study and work opportunities brought by economic globalization, dancers’ who are able to perform versatile dance styles, especially ballet and modern dance, tend to have more chances to migrate and immigrate to foreign countries. Indian dance scholar and practitioner Anusha Kedhar has connected South Asian dancers’ physical ability and flexibility with their “flexible” transnational laboring identities in
navigating a valid working visa in the United Kingdom (2014). Kedhar notices that Asian dancers have to become both physically and stylistically flexible as well as maintain their cultural and ethnic uniqueness to be hired by global choreographers (Kedhar 2014). Chinese dance scholar Ellen Gerdes (2021) particularly explores the well-rounded East Asian dancing bodies at Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA). She argues that by adapting the Chinese dance curriculum at BDA, HKAPA cultivates neoliberal globally hirable bodies that can shift easily between genres and cultures (Gerdes 2021). While BDA’s gudianwu training is not originally designed for Chinese dancers’ international employment, its trained hybrid gudianwu bodies become competitive national and global dance workers who fulfill the dual choreographic demand of diversity and exotic ethnicity. Although I am not discussing the navigation of Chinese dancers in international dance employment, Kedhar and Gerdes’ research provides an analytical tool to examine the rationale and consequences of hybrid gudianwu training. Through my case studies of gudianwu dancers’ transnational practices, I also reveal how the virtuoso and versatile dancing bodies impact their embodiment and negotiation of Chineseness.

3.2.1 Dancing Beyond Virtuosity

The stage is dark and gloomy, like a stormy night. To a rumbling drum beat, a man jumps onto the empty stage with a sideward handspring and an elegant backflip. He wears a tight blue T-shirt and black tights. Instantly, another man and three women successively jump onto the stage with their individual flips and leaps. To distinguish themselves from male dancers, women wear red long-sleeve tops and black tights. Each of them freezes in a gudianwu pose with wide and determined eyes, as if proud of their gymnastic feats. With a crescendo of percussive music, other dancers run, fly, and spin onto the stage, one at a time. While men throw themselves into the air with high-energy and difficult aerial
series, women execute turns and flips with extended arms to create windmill images on stage. The combination of orchestral and percussive music exaggerates the dancers’ movements with loud beat drops. Although the rhythm is intense and fast, their dance appears effortless and elegant. They often lift their arms as if flying like birds while entering or exiting the stage. The dazzling leaps and turns provoke the audience to cheer and cry. At the end, all the dancers come back to the stage and freeze in unified gudianwu poses.

The above description is of a Gudianwu Technique Tricks Exhibition performed by senior BDA gudianwu students in 2018. At the beginning of their senior year, gudianwu students at BDA prepare a gudianwu exhibition, or “technique trick routine” (Wilcox 2011), as part of their thesis concert. The concert usually lasts two hours and includes two sections of performance: the respective displays of female and male gudianwu technique class and the performance of gudianwu dance pieces including groups dances, solos, duets and trios. The technique tricks exhibition is the last segment of the technique class display where female and male students collectively perform choreographed sequences of jumps, turns, and flips, which brings the concert to a climax. According to Jin, the performance of virtuoso gudianwu tricks is both a necessary strategy and endpoint for creating a spectacle for the audiences, for showing the dramatic and emotional capabilities of dancers, and for portraying diverse characters (Jin 2000). I suggest that the exhibition also crystalizes the long-term physical training of gudianwu dancing bodies (Wilcox 2011) from six years at ASS and four years at BDA which characterizes the technical and aesthetic hybridity of gudianwu training.

While the technique tricks exhibition is often executed by senior gudianwu students, the training and practice of tricks are embedded in students’ daily technique classes. During the last five or ten minutes of morning technique classes for first-year
gudianwu students, the teacher Guo Jie asked them to practice single turns and jumps multiple times. For instance, when the students practiced xitui fanshen (parallel passé and turn over the torso 吸腿翻身), Guo frowned and carefully scanned each of them. “Keep your pelvis rolling around your spine,” she reminded the students when she found some of them making similar mistakes. For the last exercise in Guo’s class, she alternated different types of jumps for the students throughout the week. For example, twenty pitui tiao (jump and split legs in the air 劈腿跳) on Monday and Tuesday and yanshi tiao (jump with one leg bent and the other leg stretched, like a flying swallow 燕式跳) on Wednesday and Thursday. Occasionally, she would ask a student to demonstrate the trick and tell the other student to “look at her quality of suspension in the air.” When I asked Guo why the students have to learn technique tricks that they already learned at their secondary schools, she told me that the students came from different schools and places, and the re-learning of single turns and jumps was to unify their technique based on BDA conventions.

Besides the dance tricks that students practiced at the end of the class, the first two stages of gudianwu training, flexibility and capacity, at barre and center, comprehensively prepared dancers physically for exceptional execution of complex technique tricks. For example, in plié exercises for female dancers at the barre, dancers do not simply practice plié in the tabu position, but also transform their positions to sheyan, xie tanhai (斜探海 similar to penché in ballet), and woyun that lay the foundation for articulating the dance gestures in the center. In addition, the bending and stretching of the knees with rhythmic and dynamic changes enhance the muscular strength of the legs
and the physical ability of shifting between explosiveness and softness. The *titui* (*grand battement*) exercise also trains the power and speed of dancers’ leg movements. According to my *gudianwu* interviewees, during evening drills many of them would wear sandbags on their legs and practice *titui* or other jumps to gain muscular strength and explosive power for accomplishing a set of complex dance tricks.

*Gudianwu* teachers have in fact recognized the constraints of separating female and male *gudianwu* training and attempted to design exercises to break the gendered aesthetic divide. The emphasis of flexibility training for male *gudianwu* dancers was to overcome bodily stiffness, alter the “martial temperament” (武气), and enhance the “lyrical, gentle, nimble, and grandiose” aesthetic during performance (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 103). Meanwhile, female dancers worked on improving their waist and lower body strength, their range of motion, and cardiovascular function. Occasionally, a female class would invite male teachers as major instructors to experience the intensity and speed of male *gudianwu* training. Sometimes, male and female students would imitate each other’s dance movements or tricks for amusement. These guest teaching opportunities and lighthearted practice challenge the gendered dualities set by the *gudianwu* program. For instance, in the students’ 2022 thesis concert, a female *gudianwu* student completed a series of *manzi* (sideward somersault) circumnavigating half of the stage, which used to be a movement danced exclusively by men.

While rigorous *gudianwu* training enabled dancers to acquire technical precision and bodily virtuosity for executing difficult technique tricks, their virtuosity further promotes an aesthetic of hybridity and individuality in their *gudianwu* performances. The cooperation of *Shenyun* technique in *gudianwu* embellishes virtuoso bodies by adding
Chinese cultural markers to their repeated jumps and turns. By incorporating bodily breath and the ning (twist), qing (lean), yuan (circle), and qu (bend) principles from *Shenyun*, *gudianwu* practitioners execute a fluent beginning and a firm and compelling frozen pose (adopted from *xiqu*) to conclude a complex technique trick; and the *Shenyun* momentum of moving slightly towards the opposite direction to initiate movement into another, also invests complexity and artistry for jumping and turning.

The technique tricks, however, are not fixed but varied in each performance and for each dancer. During their senior year, *gudianwu* students are encouraged to develop their own technique tricks as their signature movements. For example, Tang Shiyi, who graduated from BDA and become a principal dancer with CODDT, developed her own set of technique tricks.80 She can spring high in the air while swiftly swinging her leg front and back to an exceptional split and, without even noticing her landing, she connects a forward somersault by neatly balancing on relevé, like a gymnast performs on a balance beam.81 While executing the same dance trick, dancers distinguish between different choreography and characters. For instance, in *Kong Yiji* (2006), Sun Ke played a pedantic and pathetic Chinese scholar, Kong Yiji, in Lu Xun’s short story of the same name (1919). Rather than doing the jump *shuangfeiyan* (double flying swallow, a hyper leg splits in the air) with extended legs in a vertical way as in class, Sun did the jump-split with loosened legs and off-kilter torso, connected with a tilted swirl. These disengaged motions echoed the insanity of Kong Yiji who was sloppy and poisoned by the Chinese feudal system. In *Bishang Liangshan (Be Driven to Revolt in Liang Mountain)* 2009), however, Sun employs *shuangfeiyan* with a swift bodily bounce up and down and eventually lower to the floor, which indicates the oppressed soldier Lin Chong
of the North Song Dynasty (960-1127). Thus, I reiterate that the versatile and virtuosic
*gudianwu* training allows *gudianwu* dancers to hone their individual artistry through
mastery of their bodies.

### 3.2.2 Dancing Beyond Chineseness

In September of 1995, a group of Chinese dancers from Guangzhou Modern
Dance Company performed three dances at an international dance festival in Korea. After
the performance, teachers from the Art Department of Korean Chung-Ang University
were intrigued by the virtuoso technique of the Chinese dancers and invited them to teach
and demonstrate a training class for their dance students. According to Wang Kefen, a
Chinese dance historian who observed the class, the Korean dancers were well-educated
in terms of their disciplinary literacy and technical skills. However, it was difficult for
them to accomplish the exact technical tricks (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). Wang says, “the
[Guangzhou] company director Yang Meiqi who sat beside me whispered that ‘our
dancers have more than ten years *gudianwu* foundation, how can [the Korean students]
learn it in one class!’” (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004, 1-2). This story is widely known by
dancers, teachers, and scholars within the Chinese dance field and demonstrates the pride
of *gudianwu* practitioners toward their hybrid dance training.

*Gudianwu* practitioners’ self-satisfaction also echoes their goal of cultivating
virtuoso national dancers who have global influence since the late 1970s (Li, Gao, and
Tang 1978). By locating the transnationality of *gudianwu* practice in postsocialist China
within the history of modern China, I argue that *gudianwu* practitioners’ desire for global
influence also reflects their revolt against the shutdown of *gudianwu* during the Cultural
Revolution and their desire to regain agency through dance. By probing the development of gudianwu through a diachronic perspective, I suggest that the hybrid dance practices of the post-Cultural Revolution since the 1980s are comparable to that of the early twentieth century. As I explained in Chapter 1, Chinese intellectuals in the 1910s criticized the “corrupted” traditional Chinese culture left by the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and attempted to promote a modern Chinese culture based on Western ideals. Enlightened by the import of Western culture and the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s, Chinese intellectuals adopted the idea of “Chinese learning as substance, Western learning for application” (Zhongti xiyong) to reform and modernize Chinese literature, theater, music, and dance. Chinese dance pioneers then choreographed innovative Chinese-themed dances based on ballet and modern dance to promote Chinese national identity during World War II (Wilcox 2019b and 2020c).

Similarly, gudianwu practitioners in the late 1970s who survived the cultural and political restrictions of the Cultural Revolution were eager to rehabilitate the status of gudianwu as a national dance form and to challenge the dominance of revolutionary ballet (Wilcox 2018a). Although Li and many other gudianwu practitioners acknowledged the historical achievement of the xiqu-based gudianwu curriculum in early socialist China, they refused to return to the xiqu-gudianwu aesthetic they designed in 1960. Instead, gudianwu practitioners situated Mao’s instruction of “making the past serve the present” (古为今用) and “making the Western serve the Chinese” (洋为中用) in the context of postsocialist opening up policy; they mixed movements and aesthetics of ballet, xiqu, wushu, acrobatics, and gymnastics to promote gudianwu and gudianwu dancers to the international stage. Within the increasing cultural exchange between China
and Western countries, especially the United States in postsocialist China, the floor work
and techniques of modern dance also influenced gudianwu choreography in the late
1990s. As the self-conscious Chinese dance creation of the early twentieth century in
opposition to Western dances (Wilcox 2018e), this hybridity of gudianwu in postsocialist
China also operates as Chinese dancers’ reflexive reaction towards the globalized
Western culture. While promoting Chinese cultural identity through Chinese traditional
dance, gudianwu practitioners adopted Western dance techniques and aesthetics to
modernize and globalize Chinese traditional culture.

When discussing cultural interactions or migration, T.S Eliot and Bhabha notice
that “people have taken with them only part of the total culture” and this partial culture
creates a “culture’s ‘in-between,’ bafflingly both alike and different” (Bhabha 1996). By
citing T. S Eliot, Bhabha’s idea of “culture’s in-between” emphasizes both the “alike” or
contamination and the “different” or estranged aspects of the partial culture during
cultural encounters. As a product of Chinese and Western cultural interactions, I argue
that hybrid gudianwu bodies, especially in terms of their virtuosity of versatility,
demonstrate Bhabha’s notion of “in-betweenness.” Rather than reducing the Chinese
dancing body to a migration or transplantation to a new culture, the hybridity of
gudianwu fuses ingredients of tradition and modern, Chinese and Western cultures into
Chinese dancing bodies and stirs the bodily “hot-pot” through daily training. As a result,
both Chinese and Western audiences, as well as gudianwu practitioners themselves could
find ingredients that resemble and differ from their parent cultures. The hybrid gudianwu
bodies, therefore, undermine the notions of a self-contained Western culture and
uncontaminated Chineseness.
When criticizing the narcissism of gudianwu practitioners during the Sino-Korean interaction, Chinese dance scholar Liu Jian denounces that

the mixed ‘versatile’ technique of ballet, basic [skills] training, martial arts, gymnastics, [and] modern dance makes it difficult to learn for any country’s students; except for Shenyun, those are not copyrighted techniques of Chinese classical dance. (Liu 2016, 28)

Indeed, the hybridity of gudianwu technique weakens the authenticity of gudianwu as an inheritance of Chinese traditional culture and a representation of a fixed Chinese national identity. However, I contend that the privilege of hybridity in gudianwu training has promoted liberty for gudianwu dancers to challenge their limitations by locating their identity in different contexts, and pursue a fluid and individualized Chineseness. For instance, Xinyi who is a current student in the dance program at New York University, studied gudianwu at ASS and BDA and graduated in 2015. With her gudianwu background, she immediately found a teaching job at a dance studio in Texas after graduation and later became a dancer at the Addeum Dance Company. She admitted that the hybrid and extreme gudianwu training allowed her to have a “stable bottom,” which means the ability to maintain balance while executing diverse movements. Although Xinyi said she is not interested in learning ballet, she admitted that the balletic footwork in gudianwu helped her develop a stable lower body. However, she told me that what benefited her the most from gudianwu training was the study of Shenyun technique. She said that “Shenyun emphasizes the coordination between breath and body, between body parts and the whole body; when I perform modern and contemporary dance, I feel a kind of similarity [between the Western dances and Shenyun].” While bridging the
connection between Shenyun and modern dance, Xinyi also stressed that the training of gudianwu offered her a sense of Chineseness that distinguished her bodily movement from her American dance colleagues. Another gudianwu graduate Wangbo, who is currently a dancer at CODDT, also experienced his embodied Chineseness similar to Xinyi’s description. Wangbo recalled that despite his exceptional jumping and flipping skills, his weakness in Shenyun technique made him feel his body lacked an essential element of Chineseness. However, when he danced with a modern dance company during his study in the United States, he told me that a strong Chinese and Eastern bodily identity emerged through his dancing.

In my interviews with gudianwu dancers, many of them confirmed that the intense and versatile Shenyun-gudianwu training provides advantages for them to dance in a variety of contexts. Yet, when encountering the question of the relationship between gudianwu and Chineseness, most gudianwu dancers who study and work in China could not articulate a clear answer because they have never doubted gudianwu’s Chinese cultural identity. They admitted that with six years of training at ASS or local professional dance schools and four years of training at BDA, they committed to pursuing a career in dance; and their lives as dancers who perform diverse dance styles for the need of their company are inherently a representation of Chineseness. However, for transnational gudianwu dancers, such as Xinyi and Wangbo, they could articulate a sensation and negotiation of Chineseness through their transnational dance practices.

Returning to Kedhar’s study on the flexible, transnational South Asian dancing bodies, the cultural capital of stylistic diversity and physical flexibility of artists enabled them to move across national borders to perform in a global context. Through balancing
the dual demands of ethnic difference and modern experimentation in staging and choreography, South Asian dancers deployed their corporeal tactics to navigate British immigration and to perform their Asian British identities. Similarly, Chinese gudianwu dancers also employed their hybrid and virtuoso dancing bodies as cultural capital to work as global performers, which provide opportunities to transcend their parent culture and to negotiate with their identities. Moreover, transnational dance practices also bring gudianwu dancers a sense of belonging to their home country. Osterweis’ study of Richardson’s black dancing body offers another example of how technical and aesthetic versatility empowers dancers to explore their individual identities. According to Osterweis (2013), Richardson negotiates his black, queer identity through the hybridity of ballet, hip-hop, and voguing movements; such virtuosity of versatility allows the talented body to express emotional vulnerabilities, which reveals a sense of individualism. The ability to execute difficult technique tricks of gudianwu dancers, such as Tang Shiyi and Sun Ke, also enabled them to generate a self-conscious individualism by exploring their signature movements and unique expression in performing various characters. The virtuosity of dancing bodies merges the identity of the performer with the performance/character, which disrupts Royce’s differentiation between virtuosity and artistry.

3.3 Individualizing the Tradition: Alternative Chineseness in the Invention of Gudianwu Training

The rapid sociocultural Westernization in postsocialist China facilitated the emergence of hybrid Shenyun-gudianwu training. This new dance tradition has produced
virtuosic Chinese dancing bodies that speak to the increasing transnational cultural practices. While *Shenyun-gudianwu* practitioners celebrated the versatile Chinese dancing bodies, Sun Ying (1929-2009), the mid-century *gudianwu* pioneer, challenged Chinese cultural Westernization and promoted a nationalist movement through his Han-Tang *gudianwu* style in the 1980s (Sun 2006; Wilcox 2012a). Sun (2006, 26) argues that “the artistic principle, style, and aesthetic” of Chinese classical dance should be built on ancient court dance and ritual dance. By emphasizing extensive research into the sculptures and frescos of ancient Chinese dynasties, Sun intended to reconstruct an antiquated Chinese dance form while refusing to champion or even evaluate Chinese classical dance based on Western ballet and modern dance.

While admiring his effort in challenging both imperialist Western culture and mainstream *Shenyun-gudianwu*, I suggest that Sun’s reconstruction efforts also operated as invented tradition, which hybridized static gestures of Chinese ancient images with his individual aesthetic and contemporary perspective. Wilcox has specifically examined Sun’s Han-Tang *gudianwu* work in contributing to different interpretations of Chineseness (2012a) and recognizes the significant role individual artists played in Chinese dance creation (2019). She theorizes the creative method of “inheriting and promoting” (*jicheng yu fazhan*) in Chinese texts as the idea of “dynamic inheritance” (Wilcox 2019). While Wilcox claims that the framework of dynamic inheritance offers a way to challenge the Western notion of the traditional/modern dichotomy (2019), I suggest that it also idealizes the hybridity between past and present, tradition and modern in creating Chinese dances and downplays the specificity of each dance form under the umbrella term of Chinese dance. In fact, Sun has criticized the slogan of “based on
tradition, emphasis on development” (lizu chuantong, zhongzai fazhan) as an “excuse for upholding the coexistence of Chinese and Western cultures” (Sun 2006, 107). I suggest that dynamic inheritance could be seen as a rhetoric of Shenyun-gudianwu’s cultural hybridity that underestimates the complex power relationship between the imperial Western culture and localized Chinese culture, the dominant Shenyun-gudianwu major and the marginalized Han-Tang gudianwu program, as well as the supremacy of BDA as the curator of dance training in China and the secondary status of individual dance practitioners or dance programs in local schools.

In this section, I focus on BDA gudianwu practitioners’ individual contributions in promoting Chineseness in dance through the process of finding Chinese traditions. I conduct case studies of Sun’s Han-Tang Gudianwu Basic Skills Training class (hereafter Han-Tang technique class) and Shenyun-gudianwu teacher Hu Yan’s Fan Dance class in contemporary China to explore how they each offer a unique gudianwu training to minimize the impact of Western culture and pluralize the interpretation of gudianwu.84 Sun and Hu’s dance classes reflect Wilcox’s idea of “authoring traditions” (2019) that helps to recognize individual commitment and contributions in gudianwu pedagogy from postsocialist collectivism. Given the dominance of BDA in Chinese dance, however, it is worth noting that many local artists and dance practitioners’ efforts in developing gudianwu and Chinese folk/ethnic dance are still underrepresented. For instance, individual xiqu, wushu, and gudianwu practitioners, such as Fang Chuanyun, Zhang Qiang, and Ma Jiaqin, have impacted the creation of gudianwu by hybridizing their personal aesthetics into dance training. Their varied interpretation of the concept of tradition and Chineseness also caused variations in the form.
3.3.1 Alternative Training and Aesthetics of Sun Ying’s Chinese Classical Dance

Before the final exam of a sophomore Han-Tang gudianwu technique class at BDA in 2002, the instructor Sun told the present teachers and leaders that “what I am doing is Chinese classical dance. The reason why it is called Han-Tang is to adapt to an objective situation. [I] don’t wish that everybody sees the class in the concept of Han-Tang gudianwu” (Sun 2006). The “objective situation” in his statement implies a long-term suppression and skepticism towards Sun’s Chinese classical dance experimentation by hegemonic Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners at BDA. After Sun returned to Beijing following political persecution in Northeast China during the Cultural Revolution in 1979, unlike many other gudianwu practitioners he was not permitted to resume teaching at BDA and instead became an editor of the Dance journal. Although BDA rehired Sun in 1981 as a librarian and later the Chair of the Dance History and Theory Department, he had to experiment with his Chinese classical dance choreography elsewhere. After two decades of research and choreography for historical teleplays and dancers at local universities and ensembles, Sun’s Chinese classical dance finally achieved recognition by BDA in 2000 with the support of Ming Wenjun, the Chair of Chinese Folk and Ethnic Dance Department and Yu Ping, the Vice President of BDA. To acknowledge Sun’s accomplishments, in this section I refer to Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu style as Chinese classical dance to distinguish it from mainstream Shenyun-gudianwu (gudianwu) at BDA.

Sun’s Han-Tang technique class discarded the barre work in ballet and Shenyun-gudianwu and began all the exercises with dancers standing at the center or along a diagonal across the floor. Sun divided the exercises into seven training strategies,
including warm-up or initiation (起式 qishi), static body shape and balance, strength and speed, dynamic balance, body shape in the air, technique of turns and flips, and cool down (收式 shoushi) (Deng 2011). While including the training of flexibility, balance, and technique tricks, Sun’s Chinese classical dance deviated from the delicate and effortless movement qualities of Shenyun-gudianwu. Rather than simply using the orchid figure for female dancers, Sun’s Chinese classical dance applied pedestrian hand shapes, such as the natural palm (自然掌 ziran zhang) with five fingers loosely stretched out and dropped down. In bingchi (并翅 side by side wings) pose, dancers leisurely lift their forearms to one side of their bodies; they slightly raise their inner wrists and drop their fingers downward. In addition, the curved aesthetic was also applied to the technique and style of Chinese classical dance. To distinguish from the uplifted ballet body, Sun adopted a side-bend (also called 半月式 or half-moon shape) and a downward body aesthetic from ancient dance images. Furthermore, he places emphasis on employing loosened arms, shoulders, and hips, an upright torso with a concave chest, and a sinking breath down to the lower belly. For instance, in an exercise called xiao chuishou (little hand drop 小垂手), the dancers’ arms separately drop in front and at the back of the body while slightly bending their elbows and flexing their wrists; their hips are pushed to one side and legs also slightly bent with feet standing in an opened T shape. The position of the little hand drop creates a relaxed and curved dancing body. As ziwu xiang in Shenyun-gudianwu, little hand drop is constantly used as an initiation for Chinese classical dance combinations.
Besides the half-moon shape and downward bodily aesthetic, Sun’s classical dance also trained dancers to work off-balance through the position and dynamic movement of *xieta* (斜塔 leaning tower), which employed a full-body leaning position, both in static and dynamic movements such as leg kicks, knee bends, jumps, and turns. For example, in both female and male leg kick exercises, dancers lean their bodies forward and rush to the floor; while sharply kicking one of their legs, they simultaneously pivot their bodies and lean forward to the other side, and stretch their arms to each side in a *changhong* (长虹 long rainbow) position. This leg kick could also be extended to a kick and jump with dancers’ whole bodies forming a dynamic forward tilt in the air. The off-balance leaning tower, along with the side-tilt half-moon shape and the loose little hand drop, incorporate Chinese traditional poetic phrases as their names and trained a uniquely Chinese aesthetic that emphasizes the downward and loosened bodily shape.

Chinese classical dance, according to Sun, should reflect an earthy (朴拙) and grandiose (宏放) Chineseness (Deng 2011; Sun 2006) with its foundation in the Han Dynasty. Chinese aesthetician Li Zehou states,

> The artistic image of Han looks so clumsy and antique, the posture does not correspond to the usual [body] situation, the disproportionate length [of the body], right-angles, edges, and squares are so prominent and lack of softness… but all of these add to the beauty of movement, power, and vigor, rather than weakening it. The antique simplicity therefore constructs an indispensable and necessary element of this imposing beauty. (Li 1981, 85)

By citing Li’s description, Sun adopted the disproportionate length and bodily angles from Han Dynasty’s sculptures into the bending and leaning movements of his Chinese
classical dance. In addition, the powerful and unconstrained aesthetics also inspired Sun to demand gender equality in choreography and training (Sun 2006). Although Chinese classical dance trains male and female dancers separately, the technique and requirements between male and female classes are alike. As a male teacher and choreographer, Sun was criticized by some dance practitioners as masculinizing female bodies during the rehearsal of his first dance drama, Dancers of the Tongque Stage (1985; Sun 2006). However, he insists on promoting equality between male and female movements that correspond with the unconstrained social status and unself-conscious expression of female ideals in the Han Dynasty (Sun 2006; to be discussed in Chapter 3). This correspondence between the characteristics of the dance form and its associated human mental disposition, which Sun calls qiyun (气韵 literally temperament rhythm), is an essential part of Chinese classical dance training. Similar to the principle of Shenyun, Sun’s qiyun does not simply indicate the training of breath-body cohesion. Rather, the qi (breath) is a spiritual state of Chineseness and the training of qiyun in Chinese classical dance is meant to visualize and objectify the unpalpable Chinese national character in dancing bodies (Sun 2006).

Sun’s pursuit of a unique Chinese dancing body through investigating ancient Chinese dance and culture derived from his early studies of Chinese traditional literature and Chinese classical music. While Sun worked as a dance teacher and choreographer at BDA since the 1950s, he also studied singing and Chinese traditional instruments at Chinese Art College in Beijing during the 1940s (Deng 2011). When he studied with Wu Xiaobang at the Central Academy of Drama in 1950, he did not like to dance and wanted to be a singer and musician (Deng 2011). While skipping dance classes, he visited the
library and became interested in reading Chinese historiography and literature, such as *Zizhi Tongjian* (1084 AD; a pioneering work in Chinese historiography), and Western literature such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866). When he worked as one of the editors of the *Dance* journal, he also published articles that criticized *Shenyun-gudianwu*, questioned the aesthetics of *xiqu* dance, and proposed his alternative ideas of Chinese classical dance. This early experience allowed Sun to combine his knowledge of Chinese literature and music in the development of a unique Chinese classical dance that deviates from and challenges the hegemonic *Shenyun-gudianwu.*

During his career as a dance teacher at BDA, he repeatedly criticized the Westernization of Chinese dance practitioners and their lack of knowledge on Chinese traditional culture (Sun 2006; Wilcox 2012a). To overcome the issue, the required courses of Sun’s Han-Tang *gudianwu* major included the Han-Tang technique class and Classical Dance Repertory, Ancient Dance Studies, Chinese Ancient Dance History, Chinese Dance Criticism History, Chinese Ancient Ideological History, Dance History of the Modern Era and Analysis of Contemporary Dance Aesthetic. He also designed a colloquium, “Basic Knowledge of Archeology and Fieldwork,” for investigating ancient dance sources for future Chinese classical dance practitioners. In his Han-Tang *Gudianwu* Pedagogy class, he encouraged students to choreograph their own Chinese classical dance combinations and pieces and taught them to write class syllabi and teaching diaries.

Since 2016, Han-Tang *gudianwu* no longer exists as an independent dance major at BDA and was downgraded from a pedagogical system to a training course and repertory. However, Sun’s students who have become *Han-Tang gudianwu* educators and
choreographers at BDA and local universities told me that they still work on developing Chinese classical dance in their idiom. Ann, a BDA Han-Tang gudianwu graduate, shared her experience of dancing Sun’s dance piece Tage (Stamp the Song 1997), during her study in the United States. She recalled in a proud and excited tone that “the stage was narrow, you know, it was just a small celebration for Chinese New Year. But after I danced Tage, an American professor came to me and asked me everything about the dance.” She continued that “at that moment, I felt that Han-Tang [style] is the real Chinese classical dance.” Ann’s experience was not unique. Dance critic Liu Jian also mentioned the great achievement of Tage by BDA dancers in an international performance (Liu 2016). Admittedly, Sun’s experience as a dancer, dance critic, choreographer, musician, writer, educator, and radical gudianwu revolutionary is highly individualized. Yet, his efforts in the development of Chinese classical dance through a deep dive into Chinese traditional culture impart a legacy on the field of Chinese dance, which promotes an alternative representation of Chineseness.

3.3.2 Hu Yan’s Fan Dance Technique: an Extension of Shenyun-gudianwu

BDA’s Shenyun class consists of two sections: barehand Shenyun as the basic training, and costume and prop Shenyun as the advanced training. To highlight a comparative training between force and softness in prop Shenyun, gudianwu practitioners in the 1980s invited wushu master Zhang Qiang to create a sword dance curriculum. They also collaborated with xiqu experts Li Defu and Feng Yunying to design a sleeve dance for female dancers (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). In the early 1980s, Zhang not only refined thirty sword movements from the “sixteen swordsmanships” in wushu, but he also helped
Li and Feng standardize the length of sleeves to 167 cm (66 inches) and create ten sleeve dance technique combinations (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). By building upon the technique of barehand *Shenyun*, both the sword dance and sleeve dances emphasize the principle of using bodily movements to advance the movements of sleeves and sword. The principle of “using the body to lead sleeves/sword and using sleeves/sword to train the body” (以身带袖/剑, 以袖/剑练身) furthered the training of *Shenyun* technique and integrated props/costumes into dancers’ bodily movements. The hybridity between the twisting, leaning, circling, and bending movement aesthetics of *Shenyun* and Chinese traditional props/costumes enriched the training and choreography of *Shenyun-gudianwu* in postsocialist China.

In 2017, a seven-minute all-male dance called *Young Scholar with Paper Fan* (*Zhishan Shusheng*) by BDA gudianwu teacher Hu Yan, circulated beyond professional dance conservatories and became popularized nationwide. The success of *Young Scholar* not only follows a trend of reviving Chinese traditional culture through gudianwu, but also brought the emerging prop *Shenyun* technique of fan dance to gudianwu training at BDA. In contrast to the representation of masculine force by the sword dance and femininity by the sleeve dance, the folding paper fan embodies a gentle, literary, and romantic male image of Confucianism. Originating from Japan around 670 AD, the folding fan (折扇 *zheshan*) is made of wood, bamboo, or even animal bone strips that thread a paper panel and is secured by a rivet or pivot. After its introduction to China during North Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD), the paper fan not only functioned as a tool for cooling down, but also symbolized the owner’s social class and identity through the calligraphy or hand-painting on the panel and the materials used for the fan ribs.
Therefore, paper fans in ancient China were a popular subject amongst writers, painters, and scholars as an embodiment of literacy and artistry.

Hu’s fan dance training and choreography are inspired by xiaosheng (小生 little “gentle” man), a male archetype in xiqu that portrays young Confucian scholars or young soldiers. Hu recalled in an interview that his choreography of Young Scholar dated back to an advanced class of xiaosheng’s fan technique with Chuan Opera actor (a local xiqu style in Sichuan 川剧) Xiao Demei, for BDA gudianwu teachers in 2006. Since then, Hu experimented with hybridizing the fan technique in xiqu and gudianwu for his gudianwu students at BDA. Across a decade of experimentation with the fan dance technique, Hu’s choreographic ideas transformed from creating a male group dance that highlights the characteristic of xiaosheng in xiqu to images of traditional young Chinese scholars. He emphasized that what he created is not an archetype of xiqu, but a kind of Chinese people called shusheng (Chinese scholars 书生). According to Hu, most themes in gudianwu choreography of contemporary China feature martial characters that amplify powerful and authoritative male images. Yet, there are few group dances for men to portray a colorful image of Chinese scholars who are well-mannered, full of vigor and vitality, humorous, and dance with a folding paper fan. After almost ten years of conceptualization and experimentation, he eventually choreographed Young Scholar for the gudianwu class of 2015.

Although the fad of Hu’s Young Scholar has declined, Hu continues working on the standardization of gudianwu fan dance technique. In 2021 and 2022, I attended and observed his fan dance class for his graduate students at BDA. During the class, Hu gently held a folding paper fan and led students to review the previous class material
through his verbal and physical demonstrations. He classified the fan dance technique by distinguishing the subtle dynamics of the fan’s movements. For instance, a *dot fan* (*dianshan*) is a tiny movement in which a dancer holds the sticks of a folding fan and lightly uses the top of the fan to make a dot in the air. In a fan-holding combination (*chishan zuhe*), Hu articulated different fan movements, such as *dot fan*, *jiashan* (support fan), *panshan* (dish fan), *yaoshan* (wave fan), *dangshan* (block fan), *ningshan* (twist fan), *zhanshan* (open fan), and *fanwei hukou chishan* (a reversed fan-holding between thumb and index finger), with simple footsteps and smooth twists and circles of the upper body. The entire fan-holding combination was executed with calm and confidence, and trained the coordination between fan movements, the technique of cloud hands, horizontal leg lift, and circle steps from *gudianwu*, as well as the principle of integrating binary dynamics from *Shenyun* technique. While teaching and demonstrating each movement, Hu kept commenting and reminding students that no brute force is needed in the fan dance and students should control their energy to display a free and easy, literate and elegant, valiant and spontaneous movement quality.

Hu’s individual preference and conceptualization of *gudianwu* can be revealed through his comments and instructions for students during class. After watching a movement sequence by the students, he offered criticism that “each of you forms a school of your own and contains respective characteristics.” Instead of encouraging students to develop individual styles, Hu, like many dance teachers in China tended to standardize the movement and technique through indoctrinating a homogenous aesthetic of *gudianwu*. In addition, he conceptualized *gudianwu* as an elite and high-brow Chinese dance form that should be differentiated from pedestrian movements. For instance, he
identified a student’s arm shape as holding a washbasin that brings the aesthetic of gudianwu down to earth in a negative way. By correcting the students during class, Hu often vividly conveyed his gudianwu aesthetic through a metaphoric connection between body movement and everyday images. He said that “when you do shuanghuangshou [a double hand circulation 双晃手], you should break [your] breath into four parts: inhale, spin, exhale, and spin; like you are taking a roller coaster at the Universal Studio.” He explained that the most exciting moment of taking the roller coaster was when the ride is about to go down a steep hill; similarly, the beauty of a breath should be expressed through the transition between inhalation and exhalation. From my understanding, Hu’s analysis and demonstration of the “connecting part” or “spin” of a breath are similar to Wei’s instruction of the “dot” and the “line” in her Shenyun class, which I illustrated in the first section. These teachers’ explanation of the breathing technique further clarifies the principle of merging and integrating binary dynamics of Shenyun-gudianwu.90

As a former gudianwu student at BDA from 1999 to 2003, Hu’s gudianwu teaching and choreography inherited a homogenous technique and aesthetic of Shenyun-gudianwu style. However, the sum of my observations of his class, our conversations during interviews, and my choreographic analysis reveal his subtle and unique identity. As a celebrated choreographer and teacher for male dancers, Hu explored a preoccupation with the image of the Chinese scholar since he began his career as a gudianwu teacher in the 2000s. For instance, in 2006 he took for inspiration the previously described pedantic Chinese scholar Kong Yiji (孔乙己) from Lu Xu’s story and choreographed a solo for Sun Ke; in the same year, he also choreographed a male solo Shuchi (书痴 Bookworm 2006) for BDA student Wu Shuai, who portrays a
humorous, crazy, and devoted Chinese scholar with an ink brush in his hand. In his few choreographic works for female dancers, such as *Yingtai Chuzhuang* (Yingtai’s First Makeup 2007) and *Mingyue Jishi You* (When Will the Moon be Bright 2019), he also disguised female dancers as male scholars. Hu’s creation of *Young Scholar* and fan dance training correspond with his own identity and personality as a humorous and gentle gudianwu teacher, choreographer, and scholar who contributes himself to the development of gudianwu at BDA.

By analyzing Hu’s fan dance of *Shenyun-gudianwu* with Sun’s Chinese classical dance, I reiterate that both gudianwu practitioners have integrated their individual styles in their respective methods of gudianwu training and choreography. Sun’s Han-Tang technique class promotes a Chinese dancing body that reflects the earthy and unconstrained culture of ancient China. Hu’s fan dance enriches Shenyun-gudianwu training by exploring the colorful image of a Chinese male scholar who uses a folding paper fan instead of a martial sword. In addition to Sun and Hu, it is also important to recognize the role that wushu and xiqu experts, such as Zhang, Li, Feng, and Xiao, played in the formal establishment of gudianwu training. Rather than simply defining gudianwu as a fused dance form between Chinese traditional arts and Western dance styles, I suggest that gudianwu is also a hybrid product of individual representations of Chinese traditional culture. The individual experimentation I described by Sun and Hu can be seen as a process of inventing the tradition of gudianwu which has become a site for negotiating alternative ideas of Chineseness and diverse identities.

3.4 Conclusion
Since the first gudianwu class at BDS in 1954, gudianwu practitioners have never stopped the process of updating and reforming the training for gudianwu dancing bodies. While gudianwu curriculum in Maoist China focused on codifying xiqu movements with the help of ballet training methods, gudianwu training after the Cultural Revolution deepened the hybridization between Chinese and Western performance forms, including ballet, xiqu, wushu, modern dance, and gymnastics. When examining Shenyun-gudianwu training, I analyzed my first research question concerning how the mixture of Western and Chinese performances has shaped gudianwu dancing bodies. The hybrid gudianwu training in the 1980s and 1990s adopted the exercises and aesthetics of turnout, pointed feet, and linearity from ballet and cultivated balletic dancing bodies whose physical capacities resembled gymnasts. To enhance the aesthetic of Chineseness, gudianwu practitioners established Shenyun class in the 1980s and worked to minimize the influence of ballet during the twenty-first century.

Gudianwu bodies in postsocialist China carry the mission of reviving Chinese traditional culture and embodying a unique Chinese national character. In examining the training and performance of gudianwu technique tricks, I reveal that the idea of virtuosity in gudianwu is a manifestation of dancers’ physical ability, artistry, and national pride, rather than a simple mastery of technical skills. By comparing the context of postsocialist China with China’s Westernization in the early twentieth century, I consider the virtuosity of gudianwu dancing bodies as born out of Chinese nationalism in facing the opportunity and risk of globalization. The hybrid and virtuoso gudianwu bodies embody intertwined national, transnational, as well as individual identities in transcultural practices, which problematizes Chinese cultural essentialism. Moreover, the alternative
invention and interpretation of Chinese classical dance by Sun and Hu also challenge the promotion of a unique Chineseness in gudianwu training. The invention of the Shenyun-gudianwu training system is portrayed by BDA as a collective project that overshadows the effort of individual contributions since its emergence in the 1950s at BDS. Thus, I highlight Sun and Hu’s gudianwu training and choreography to exemplify how individual experience, personality, and identity have impacted the inventive process of gudianwu. Overall, my investigation of the virtuoso and versatile gudianwu bodies and the alternative concepts of Chineseness in Shenyun and Han-Tang gudianwu styles provides an answer to my third research question which inquires about how cultural hybridity speaks to cultural identity.
CHAPTER 4

INVENTING THE IDEAL: THE AESTHETIC AND POLITICS OF THE CHINESE FEMALE BALLET BODY

China’s postsocialist reforms and globalization produces a trend for Western learning within the Chinese cultural industries, affecting both professional dance training and performance practices. In the field of ballet, the increasing cultural exchanges between Chinese and European/American ballet dancers and choreographers, such as Ben Stevenson and Anton Dolin, allowed Chinese ballet practitioners to learn ballet styles beyond the Russian technique. The further exposure of French and Italian ballet literature and technique in postsocialist China led BDA ballet practitioners to establish a classical ballet training that was “difficult” and “versatile” in technique and “homogenous” in aesthetic (Meng 2004; Li 2004). According to BDA ballet teacher Meng Guangcheng, classical ballet training is a “scientific and practical course” that presents a “common, unified, monistic” character and has been applied to train performers of modern dance, ballroom dance, rhythmic gymnastics, and figure skating (Meng 2004, 2). The technique and aesthetic of ballet were embraced by Chinese dance practitioners and influenced the training and choreography of gudianwu and ballet in contemporary China.

While classical ballet training has been conceptualized by Chinese dancers and scholars as a homogenous and universal language, the pursuit and achievement of the highest technical and artistic ballet body through a ruthless training regime has been regularly portrayed by Chinese mass media as a “Chinese dream.” A dance documentary, Dancing into the National Center for the Performing Art of China (NCPA 2013), by the
Beside & Chinese Dream (身边·中国梦) program from Beijing Media Network, traces the rehearsal and performance of a group of senior ballet students from Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy (ASS). While the performance casts both male and female students, the documentary generalizes the ASS students as “fairies who dance on tiptoe” (BTV 2013). The voiceover at the end of the documentary also indicates that the experience of dancing on the stage of NCPA, as a “dream come true,” transforms them from students to professional dancers. The image of ethereal ballerinas who wear tutu skirts and dance en pointe is foregrounded in the documentary and demonstrates the connection between the success of Chinese female ballet dancers and the aspiration for China’s globalization. Such demonstration of applying a Western form to upgrade the Chinese self embodies China’s desire to “join the international track” (与国际接轨), a Chinese idiom that reflects the action of China’s globalization.

To join globalization by practicing international standards and art forms, many Chinese intellectuals and dance practitioners position themselves as “world citizens,” a key concept and constitution of cosmopolitanism. While rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, the modern idea of cosmopolitanism is characterized by a transnational concern in which individuals from all over the world share a cohesive and universal community with mutual respect for otherness (Appiah 2002, 2006; Beck 2000, 2006; Nussbaum 2002). When examining Chinese print culture in semi-colonial Shanghai in the early twentieth century, Chinese cultural scholar Shuang Shen (2009) defines Western-educated Chinese intellectuals as Chinese “cosmopolitans” who became cultural translators to promote cultural hybridity and Chinese modernity. In this sense, Dai Ailian, Wu Xiaobang, and many other dance pioneers who received Western dance training and
contributed to the development of Chinese dance were also cosmopolitans with their roots in China. In other words, the enactment of cosmopolitanism inevitably deals with the issue of identity. In contemporary China, Chinese ballet practitioners’ pursuit of cosmopolitanism and self-recognition as “citizens” of the ballet world is a way to negotiate the self with the national and the transnational identity. While capitalist globalization has provided a stage for cosmopolitan activities, Chinese cosmopolitanism shares contradictions, opportunities, and risks with globalization.

Globalization, an intrinsically hybrid and contradictory notion, possesses divergent cultural and ideological positions. Chinese cultural and literature scholar, Liu Kang, theorizes that

globalization constitutes a fundamental paradox in the sphere of culture – a tension between the trend toward cultural homogenization through global cultural production and disruption (media, popular culture, and entertainment industry), and the opposite trend toward cultural diversification in terms of local, ethnic, and national cultural projects and agendas. (Liu 2003, 3)

Classical ballet, a “global physical culture” constructed in the West, has attracted Chinese dancers, and their admiration for and study of ballet can be seen as participation in the larger cultural trend towards globalization. As I introduced in Chapter 2 and above, ballet technique has been employed by gudianwu practitioners, as well as other dance and sports coaches to train dancers and athletes, which has led to the valuing of an ethereal, linear, and sinewy ballet body. Given that the hybrid postsocialist dance practice embodies the fundamental tensions and contradictions of globalization, the concept of an idealized cosmopolitanism and universalized Western culture is easily unsettled and
subverted during its interventions with national discourses and gender politics in contemporary China.

While ballet training in China draws heavily upon Russian and European ballet techniques without integrating Chinese dance forms, the discourse of gender and national identity has impacted the formation and conceptualization of the Chinese ballet body. I argue that the desirability and privileging of a disciplined, elegant, and ethereal ballet body by Chinese dance practitioners cannot be merely viewed as a product of capitalist globalization and Western cultural imperialism. Rather, I propose that the image of a docile and ideal female ballet body corresponds to a vision of female beauty created through the traditional male imagination in Chinese philosophy and the patriarchal nationalist forces of contemporary China. In other words, the Chinese endorsement towards the training and aesthetic of the Western ballet body reflects a hybrid postsocialist culture that entangles cultural globalization, cosmopolitanism, and Chinese nationalism. My concentration on analyzing the female ballet body derives from my training in ballet as a female and my acknowledgment of the vulnerability of ballerina as an object of male desire (Daly 1987) as well as her agency as a subject of self-empowerment (Banes 1998; Fisher 2007; McRobbie 1991).

To explore my first research question of how the mix of Western models and Chinese conceptions of the body have influenced ballet training, I draw upon studies of the Chinese ballet body (Liu 2004; McLelland 2018; Wilcox 2011), gender studies of the Chinese female body (Man 2016; Rofel 2007; Yue 1993), and Chinese cultural studies (Liu 2004). I engage both my fieldwork at BDA and my personal experiences learning and teaching ballet in China to analyze the construction of female ballet bodies in
training, in commercial advertisements, and in televisual programs. I first investigate the discipline of ballet at BDA to explore how the physical comportment and aesthetic of the female ballet body correspond to idealized female beauty in Chinese traditional philosophy. Then, I analyze an excerpt of Swan Lake performed by BDA ballet students during the eleventh G20 summit in 2016 to show how ballet bodies become instruments of a visual spectacle that asserts China’s desire for globalization and cosmopolitanism. Lastly, I explore how the laboring female ballet body negotiates an imagined nationalism in twenty-first century China. By analyzing the image of the female ballet body across different contexts, I complicate the association between ballet and Western cultural imperialism. This research will also reflect upon my third research question of the relationship between hybrid dance practices and Chineseness and reveal that Chinese ballet bodies have the agency to embody and negotiate ideals of social, gender, and national identities.

4.1 Hybridizing the Western and the Chinese: Selection, Training, and Aesthetic of the Female Ballet Body

As soft as clouds,  
as light as wind,  
brighter than moonlight,  
more serene than night,  
her body moves through space.

Not an immortal from heaven,  
but a goddess from among men,  
more beautiful than a dream,  
more expressive than can be imagined,  
this is the crystal produced by labor.⁹⁴

-Presented to Ulanova by Ai Qing (1952)
After he saw the ballet *Nocturne* (1909) in 1952, Ai Qing (1910-1999), one of the pioneers of Chinese modern poetry, wrote a poem in praise of the celebrated Soviet ballerina Galina Ulanova for her performance in *Les Sylphides* (1909). Ai’s observation and description of Ulanova as a “cloud,” “wind,” “moonlight,” and a “goddess” visualizes the ethereal, delicate, exalted, and feminine ballet body and frames the ballerina within his desiring male gaze. This act of portraying women as objects through a masculine and heterosexual perspective has been theorized by art and film critics (Berger 1997; Kaplan 1983; Mulvey 1975) and has been deployed by dance scholars (Adair 1992; Alderson 1997; Hanna 1988; Manning 1997; Rainer 2006; Thomas 1993). While feminist scholars criticize the male gaze as privileging the aesthetic pleasure of the male observer and imposing a sexual inequality (Mulvey 1975), some scholars recognize that women could also unconsciously or intentionally partake in the male gaze under patriarchy (Daly 1987; Kaplan 1983). In the context of Ai’s poem, the male gaze mixed Chinese traditional patriarchal desire for innocent and virtuous women and socialist values of bodily labor and commitment. The examination of female dancing bodies in China, therefore, should take into account the relationship between a Chinese patriarchal male gaze and the national agenda.

When examining the tight connection between female body images and Chinese national discourses, gender studies scholar Eva Kit Wah Man (2016) divides the transformation of Chinese female beauty into three periods: the “enlightening period” (1919-1949) in Republican China, the “degraded period” in socialist China (1949-1978), and the “awakening period” (1978-2000). According to Man, women’s liberation and the
value of gender equality were first promoted by the introduction of Western culture during the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Within this context, women trained in sports and dance to build a “healthy beauty” (jianmei 健美), which also paralleled the national need for strong physiques in the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). In the early People’s Republic of China (PRC), as shown in Ai’s poem, the feminine ballet fairy in socialist China was celebrated by Chinese intellectuals. It was the Sino-Soviet break and the heightened class struggle since the early 1960s that brought the image of proletarian, short-haired, and sexually neutral “iron women,” such as the female soldiers in revolutionary ballet. During the “sexual awakening” period, Western globalization and consumerism intensified the heterosexual masculine desire for female bodies and facilitated the reappreciation of princess and fairy characters on ballet stage who wear tutu skirts and white tights.\footnote{In this section, I draw upon Man’s study of Chinese female beauty transformation to examine how the hybrid force of Chinese traditional bodily concepts and Western capitalist globalization work together in building Chinese female ballet bodies in postsocialist China.}

4.1.1 The Ideal Female Ballet Body and the Aesthetic of Thinness

I started to learn ballet from my father at age five. Throughout the 1990s, I witnessed the increasing enthusiasm of Chinese parents who wanted to send their daughters to receive pre-professional ballet training at ASS or other secondary dance schools.\footnote{My father once said, “if my daughter has the [physical] condition, I will definitely send her to ASS.”} The physical condition (xiaojian 条件) is the first and foremost qualification of becoming a professional dancer in China. Tiaojian emphasizes
the ideal physique of “three long and one small,” which is a basic requirement of both Chinese dance and ballet programs at ASS. Every year in December, tens of thousands of children around age nine to twelve travel to Beijing and compete for less than a hundred places to study at the school. In the first round of the ASS audition, teachers would use a tape measure to screen applicants’ body proportions: the legs (from the hip line to heel) have to be at least five inches longer than the torso (from the seventh vertebra to the hip line) and the length of arms spread out to the sides should be longer than the student’s height. A mother, who quit her full-time job to accompany her daughter to study at ASS in Beijing, told me that, “It is not like you thought that learning ballet will make you have long and slender limbs, but the ballet dancers you see are one in a million, the bad [bodily] proportion has been eliminated or has no chance to be known to the public.”

The physical measurement is only the starting point of evaluating an ideal ballet body at ASS. The preliminary audition also includes a series of examinations of students’ physical quality (suzhi 素质), such as assessing their foot arches by asking students to point and flex feet, leg extension in splits, external rotation by opening the legs into a diamond shape (xiaoku 牛) and a frog pose (dakua 大胯), and jumping ability. Compared to the admission process before the 1990s, where the ASS admission committee went to local elementary schools to select students to study dance in Beijing, students nowadays train intensively for at least a year in local dance studios to prepare for the audition at ASS. One of my informants, who runs a private dance studio in a small city in Hebei, told me that she trains more than a hundred children each year and tries to send most of them to local secondary dance schools if not ASS. Since 2020, ASS has moved the preliminary audition online. On an assigned day and time, applicants record
their audition videos based on a video pattern provided by ASS mobile application and upload them immediately. During the online audition, students are required to wear a simple sleeveless leotard with bare legs and feet, and comb back their hair into a clean bun. They are instructed to follow the simple and robotic instructions in the video to show their face, the front and side of their bodies, and their physical qualities. My informant, the studio owner, also indicated that with a year or multiple years of intense training, many students’ physical qualities could reach the requirement of ASS, but “they only select the best.”

At ASS and BDA, teachers enact a particular set of criteria that evaluates “the best.” While the applicants’ natural physical condition of a long neck and long legs as well as an attractive face and small head are traits that cannot be easily trained, they have become important qualifications for admission to the ASS ballet program. Liya, one of my informants who studied at ASS Chinese dance program in the 1990s and was also one of my classmates in my father’s ballet class, recalled, “I auditioned for both [Chinese dance and ballet programs]; I wanted to get into the ballet program. But they [the ballet program] turned me down because of my big cheeks.” Before our interview in a café, I had not seen Liya for more than twenty years. I arrived before she did and as I sat in front of the entrance, I noticed a tall, slim woman, who wore a camel coat and skinny jeans, walk into the shop and that was Liya. She definitively did not have big cheeks. The black turtle neck sweater she wore that day made her face seem even smaller. However, she said, “the ballet program [at ASS] always chooses the best.” As many of my informants who studied or applied to ASS have mentioned, the priority of ASS ballet program to select “better” qualified students who have small heads and attractive faces is an

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unwritten rule. While the Chinese dance program recruits about fifty students each year, only thirty students (fifteen girls and fifteen boys) are selected for the ballet program. The result of this admission process produces an elite group of dancers. The uniqueness of ballet students at ASS is also revealed in their career trajectories. Many students who graduate from the ballet program apply for jobs as professional dancers in domestic and international ballet companies. In contrast, students who graduated from the Chinese dance program at ASS pursue bachelor’s degrees in Chinese Classical Dance or Chinese Folk/Ethnic Dance Department at BDA and apply for dance companies after their undergraduate studies. In the *Dancing into the NCPA* documentary (2013), a senior ballet student, Qiu Yunting, who is currently a principal dancer at the National Ballet of China, says that only those “[ballet students] with bad professional skills” would apply for college study.

To maintain the aesthetic of slenderness and ideal bodily proportions, dieting is also part of the discipline of ASS ballet training, which Chinese dance scholar Emily Wilcox defines as “the discipline of hunger” (2011, 14). Students keep a desirably thin body through dieting, intensive cardio training (running and jumping rope), and sometimes even through unhealthy dehydration techniques. A former ASS ballet student said,

I would wear slimming clothes [减肥衣polyester warm up pants and jacket] and run circles in the playground to sweat out the weight of water in my body. It was very useful to immediately lose scale. We [my classmates] all did that. Sometimes we would use plastic wrap [to enhance the effect].

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Throughout their seven years of study, students were made to stand on weighing scales every Monday morning and listen to their teacher report the number of their weight under the gaze of their classmates. If a student’s weight was higher than the teacher’s restriction, she would be punished by having to do extra exercises. A current sophomore ballet student at BDA told me that although teachers no longer measure their weight at college, students continue to diet to control their weight in order to execute jumps more effortlessly and to ease the pressure on their partners during lifts. She cheerfully said, “I just weighed [myself] today. [I am] forty-four kilograms [ninety-seven pounds]. I have not seen this number for a long time. My diet works!”

Standing at only 5’5 tall, her prominent clavicle and bony upper arms reveal her as underweight.

While the demands to be both highly disciplined and underweight in accordance with dominant ballet aesthetics are shared across global ballet cultures, the pursuit of the excessively thin body is widely displayed and openly discussed among Chinese dancers. According to dance scholar Rowan McLelland (2018), both Chinese dancers and non-dancer adults seem thinner than their equivalents in the West. Throughout my own experience of living and being schooled in China, the discussion of body weight and diet has become an acceptable and even expected social topic among Chinese women. The phrase “you seem to have lost weight” is considered generous praise between friends. Moreover, the increasing advertisement of weight-reduction products and the hype of smaller-size clothes that target young and middle-aged Chinese women have standardized the ideal slim body (Baudrillard 1998; Man 2016; Zhuang 2020). According to Man (2016), economic globalization brought about an ongoing trend of slimness and idealization of a homogenous standard of beauty. While she locates the beginning of this
idealization in the 1990s, this trend continues into the contemporary moment. Within the contestations and hybridization of cultures inherent to globalization, aestheticized female bodies have become sites of mimicry and competition with the West (Man 2016). The aesthetic of the slender Chinese ballet body corresponds to the slim aesthetic prioritized by the Western fashion industry, which in turn promotes the ideal female ballet body as an embodiment of modern, fashionable, and cosmopolitan physical culture.

4.1.2 Idealizing Ballet Body through Traditional Chinese Female Beauty

As I argue above, the idealization of the slender, attractive, and ethereal female ballet body embedded in the hybrid postsocialist culture aligns with China’s Westernization, as well as corresponds to a revival of the traditional patriarchy and the male desire for a certain ideal of female beauty. In contemporary China, Confucianism has made a resurgence. As a result of the abandonment of Mao’s revolutionary ideology and deployment of Deng Xiaoping’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics” strategy in the late 1970s, critics have suggested there was an “ideological vacuum” that Confucianism filled (Liu 2003). In other words, the return of Confucianism in postsocialist China was facilitated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a representation of Chineseness and a legitimation of its ruling in the context of reopening China to the world. Amidst a revival of Chinese traditional ideology, a Confucianist male gaze has returned to reinforce the idealization and appreciation of the female ballet body.

In ancient Confucian literature, such as The Book of Songs (11<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> BCE 诗经), Liezi (450 - 375 BCE 列子), Zhuzi (1270 朱子), and Huainanzi (179 - 122 BCE 淮南子), Man summarizes the following attributes of female beauty:
young; small; slim but fleshly; soft bones; drooping shoulders; smooth, white skin under colorful and tight silk underwear; clean, slender fingers; long neck; broad and white forehead; long ears; dark and thick hair with stylish hairpin; thick and bluish black eyebrows; clear and sentimental eyes; charming smile; tall and straight nose; red lips exposing small, seashell-white teeth; relaxed and elegant bodily gestures; and, finally, gentle behavior. (Man 2016, 115)

Many of the criteria regarding the idealized female body in ancient Chinese literature and philosophical texts, which praise femininity, youth, white skin, slim body shape, and long neck, coincide with the standard of “three long and one small” in selecting the ballet body at BDA. In addition to the similarities shared by the idealized Chinese female beauty and the female ballet body, the ballerina’s physical devotion and passion towards a lifelong career in ballet mirrors the integrity of a graceful body and a moral mind in the traditional Chinese framework of female beauty. According to Man, the beautiful appearance of women in traditional Chinese texts correlates with their morality and merit. For example, Chinese women’s loyalty and passion for their husbands and nation, as well as their boldness in striving for fairness and justice were evident in the poetry of The Book of Songs, which further describes the attractive attributes of female subjects (Man 2016).

When exploring the ballet body in China, McLelland (2018) analyzes the absence of a mind and body dichotomy in the Chinese traditional philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. She notes that idea of li (literally etiquette 礼) in the Confucian tradition that refers to rituals and etiquette imposed by a strict feudal social hierarchy corresponds to the Foucauldian notion of “docility” in disciplining bodies in social performance, which might explain the successful migration and residence of Western ballet in China (McLelland 2018). However, I suggest that Confucianism is not a fixed
philosophical framework and the subtle discourse of ideal female beauty in Confucianism also varies in different historical periods. The contemporary ideal ballet body, therefore, manifests a hybrid Confucian value of female beauty across Chinese history, which I will tease out in the following paragraphs.

In the Confucian classic and oldest collection of Chinese poetry, *The Book of Songs* (476 – 221 BCE, the pre-Qin period), female beauty is consistently described through natural and supernatural metaphors. For instance, in the poem “Sun in the East” (东方之日) in part of *The Airs of Qi* (齐风), a beautiful bride is likened to the sun and the moon. Other favored metaphors in ancient literature, such as flowers, peach trees, blades of white grass, gems, and water, reflected the beauty, slenderness, whiteness, and purity of women’s bodily shape and desirable virtues. Man analyzes the primal relationship between water and femininity in *The Book of Songs*, in which the soft, tender, and fluid qualities of water contributed to the idealized lyrical sensibility of femininity. The idea of water and rivers as a barrier to or across the land was also employed to describe an “aesthetic distance” necessary for the male fantasy to imagine female beauty (Man 2016, 53). When likening the female figure to the moon, the sun, and water, ancient poetry created images of an inaccessible beauty and an illusory and eternal quality that was mapped onto the ideal female (Man 2016). In poetry written in later dynasties, unattainable and desirable female beauty continued to be represented by supernatural beings, such as a goddess. For instance, since the Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 9 CE), “a wandering woman,” younü (游女), beside the Han River in the poem “Han Guang” (汉广) in *The Book of Songs* came to be interpreted as the goddess of the Han River (Cowhig 2022; Liu 2017). These supernatural metaphors mark Ai’s ode to
Ulanova, where he likens her to cloud and moonlight, and an other-worldly goddess to describe these desirable feminine qualities. His depiction of Ulanova projected a traditional male fantasy of female beauty onto the dancing body of the ballerina, which in turn emphasized the ethereal and divine image of the unattainable ballet dancer.

The emphasis on whiteness in *The Book of Songs* as a symbol of female elegance and purity also resonated with the aesthetic of *ballet blanc*, or white ballet, in classical ballet repertoire, wherein non-human female figures wear white tutus, such as the nymph in *La Sylphide* (1832), the white swan in *Swan Lake* (1877/1895), shades in *La Bayadere* (1977), and snowflakes in *The Nutcracker* (1892). In addition to referencing white plants, such as white grass (春荑) and creamy balm (凝脂), to illustrate the brightness and softness of ideal female skin, *The Book of Songs* also described a white-colored dress as a representation of the elite social class, refined aesthetics, elegant behavior, and chaste morality of women.\(^{108}\) As depicted in the poem “Outside the Eastern Gate” (出其东门), a woman in a white dress was more outstanding and unforgettable amidst a group of women who dressed like a bunch of colorful flowers. This value of the color white in characterizing the purity, simplicity, and refinement of women is not unique to a traditional Chinese concept of female beauty as it can also be found in traditions of many other cultures. For instance, in the West, white as a symbol of purity and innocence derives from Christianity, where priests would wear white cassocks in important religious ceremonies (Akbar 1996; Dyer 1997; Heller 2000). The dualism between white (the light) and black (the dark) in Christian ideology was later associated with European nationalism during the period of Western expansionism and colonialism and has promoted global White supremacy (Blay 2011). Thus, within the context of hybrid
postsocialist culture, traditional Chinese and Western conceptualizations of whiteness as symbolizing female chastity idealizes the image of a ballerina in a white tutu.

Although a slender body shape, an elegant white tutu, and an ethereal ballerina mirror the aesthetic of ideal female beauty in the pre-Qin (before 221 BCE) Confucianism, the sexual innuendo and erotic descriptions of women’s physical appearance in *The Book of Songs* are lacking within contemporary Chinese ballet training, which is characterized by a kind of sexual repression. In contemporary China, the aestheticization and training of the female ballet body emphasize the elimination of female secondary sexual characteristics, which echoes the image of the ascetic female in orthodox neo-Confucianism during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1912). Dance critic Liu Qingyi argues in her article, “Super Body under the Discipline of the Nation,” that female ballet dancers are fairies who have “thin breasts, narrow pelvis, and a flat belly” (Liu 2004, 11). Liu suggests that a fleshy breast “visually renders a sense of bulk and unwieldiness” and affects the ethereality of the ballerina’s aerial work, while a “thin breast” that reveals the ribs offers audiences an appreciation of beauty (Liu 2004, 10). My own experience and fieldwork research at BDA reaffirms this repression of female body parts that signal women’s sexual maturity and fertility. Many ASS female students and their mothers were worried about the fast development of their sexual characteristics during adolescence. A mother informant anxiously spoke to me when we were watching a performance by her daughter at BDA. “She [the daughter in fourth grade at ASS] grows so fast,” the mother said: “look at her breast and big thigh. She has to lose more weight.” Another informant who graduated from ASS in 2003 also told me that one of
her classmates Chen Xiaoyun, who is a little-known actress in China, was the curviest girl in her class and had to give up ballet because of her large size and heavy breast.

In addition to a thin chest, a narrow pelvis and a small backside are also necessary qualities for female ballet dancers. When observing ballet classes, I constantly heard teachers asking their students to squeeze their buttocks. Once in a pas de duet class at ASS, the teacher stopped the students in a duet pose where male students held their female partners’ waists in a penché position. She quickly walked close to a couple in front of her and suddenly slapped the girl’s rear and said, “big buttock, tuck it in!” As the girl was wearing a simple black leotard and white tights, the shape of her body was revealed clearly. As she reacted to the teacher’s slap, the girl attempted to make her backside less visible by tucking her pelvis in. However, this action only reduced her leg turnout and caused more corrections by the teacher. This kind of vocal and physical correction by Chinese teachers is common in everyday class at ASS; students often experience embarrassment during their early training. Liu explains that the purpose of rejecting the fleshy buttocks in ballet is to “prevent the shortening of legs caused by loosened hip muscles” and to “get rid of vulgar posture” (Liu 2004, 11). She also states that

the 180-degree external rotation from the hip allows [dancers] to hide the buttock between the legs and to flatten the curved back, to eliminate sexual fantasies, and to keep a ‘pure and noble’ image of the female … all the protruding things that bulge out of the human body must be eliminated, canceled, closed, and softened. The human body is pressed into a straight thin and flat plate. (Liu 2004, 11)
In Liu’s illustration, the sexual repression of female bodies in ballet training aims at promoting a “pure and noble” (冰清玉洁) image of women, whose bodily abstinence mirrors their virtues of chastity and nobility. This parallel between the dancers’ physical constraint and spiritual transcendence also reaffirms the mind and body coherence in Confucian philosophy and the male gaze engendered by the late Confucian patriarchy.

The conservative Confucianist repression of female bodies’ exposure also provides an explanation of the criticism towards ballet during socialist China. As I discussed in Chapter 1, socialist cultural critics condemned the exposure of female bodies in the dance drama *Peace Dove* (1950; Zhong 1950). This critique towards the ballerinas who revealed their legs by wearing tutu skirts reflected the patriarchal demand towards female abstinence and was harnessed by the socialist CCP to resist Western bourgeois culture. Although economic and cultural reform in postsocialist China liberated women’s bodies from the severe constraint in the Maoist era, the sexual repression in ballet training demonstrates the existing neo-Confucian male desire for “pure and noble” female bodies. Many Confucian scholars have noted that, unlike the asceticism of the neo-Confucianism, the pre-Qin Confucian conception of sexuality was relatively open and confirmed the expression of human desire rather than forbidding it (Pang White 2016; Wu 2007; Xu 2006). Man (2016) also designates the spontaneous, elegant, and varied female ideals in *The Book of Songs* as a “lost horizon,” or lost heritage that differs from the homogenous “artificial” and “calculating” women in contemporary China. Man (2016) explains that young women’s approach to ideal bodies is attainable through cosmetics, fashion, and anti-aging products, which were brought by the re-legitimated male gaze and the capitalist consumer culture (Man 2016).
As I argued in this section, however, the contemporary idealization of Chinese ballerinas embodies Confucianist conceptions of the female body across different historical periods. While the removal of female sexual traits echoes the bodily abstinence in late imperial China, many qualities of the female ideal in classical Confucianism still exist in Chinese female ballet bodies, such as their slenderness, physical and facial appearance, vitality, and devotion. I reiterate that the elitism of the Chinese ballet body is not only shaped by its origination in Western court culture but is also shaped by traditional Chinese aesthetics. In addition, the slender, pure, and asexual female ballet body also serves as a refraction and projection of the supreme aesthetic ideal that conforms to a national and political agenda, which I will examine in the following section.

4.2 Negotiating Chinese Nationalism: Female Ballet Body and the State

The pure and devoted white swan figure in the classical ballet *Swan Lake* (1877/1895) resonates with the female ideal in Chinese thought. The image of the white swan has been celebrated by Chinese intellectuals, mass audiences, and politicians. The documentary *Ballet* (2010) by China’s Central Television states that “for people in the 1950s, ballet was *Swan Lake*, and *Swan Lake* was myth and happiness” (CCTV). This preference for this repertoire led to the premiere of *Swan Lake* by BDS students in 1958, which was directed by Soviet ballet expert Petr Gusev. The BDS production attracted vast audiences, including the then-CCP leaders Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi. Bai Shuxiang, the dancer who played Odette/Odile (the white and black swan), was known as China’s first “white swan.” Although the heightened class struggle prevented the
performance of Western ballet repertoire at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution, British ballerina Beryl Grey toured China and staged *Swan Lake* for the Affiliated Ballet Company of BDS in 1965 (Chou 2018). In postsocialist China, the reform policy initiated by Deng revitalized Western ballet repertoire in both Chinese and touring Western companies. *Swan Lake* has since become the bestselling ballet in China (Zeng 2016).  

In this section, I first examine the BDA female ballet students’ performance of *Swan Lake* (2016) during the gala for the eleventh meeting of the Group of Twenty (G20 summit) in Hangzhou. I explore how female ballet bodies are manipulated as objects of nationalist spectacle in China’s assertion of its desire for cosmopolitanism and ambition for globalization. I then investigate how the dichotomy of pointe shoes, perceived as pristine and glorious yet often experienced as painful and bruising, has been employed by official media to express Chinese historical struggle and build contemporary support for Chinese nationalism. As I explained in Chapter 1, the performance of ballet has been endorsed by CCP leaders in private, national, and diplomatic events.  

I propound that ballet performance in postsocialist China continues to operate as a soft power in global cultural exchanges and young female ballet dancers embodied the government’s aspiration of joining the world culture and economy.

According to American anthropologist Lisa Rofel (2007), the concept of cosmopolitanism is constructed and enacted under Deng’s contradictory philosophy of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Rofel 2007). China’s cosmopolitan practices, such as participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and hosting the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and 2022, manifest such intrinsic contradictions: while joining the Western order to transcend economic and cultural locality, cultural
practitioners and politicians also design China’s image based on the international imagination of Chinese beauty. For instance, the image of “Olympic girls,” who were tailor-made volunteers for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, wearing cheongsam, walking in steady and light steps, and smiling at a certain angle to control the number of teeth revealed became the embodiment of a new Chinese self to promote national pride (Man 2016). Such female bodily construction is theorized by Rofel and Man as a “domestication of cosmopolitanism” that reflects the state’s desire for global recognition and negotiation of China’s place in the world (Man 2016; Rofel 2007). I suggest that this idea also shares the paradox with China’s globalization, wherein cultural localization keeps competing with cultural homogenization. The cosmopolitan discourse on Chinese ballet bodies, therefore, reflects and disturbs the tension between Chinese Confucianism and Western modernism, as well as the individual and the state.

4.2.1 Swan Lake and “Cosmopolitanism with Chinese Characteristics”

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, on the evening of the first-day conference on September 4th, 2016, leaders of the G20 Summit were welcomed in the gala, “Impression of West Lake,” which included a six-minute excerpt from the ballet Swan Lake. Zhang Yimou, who had previously been the director of the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and 2022, was the chief director of the gala. Zhang built the whole performance on the surface of West Lake and presented a spectacular hybrid performance that featured Chinese folk and classical dance, Chinese opera, Tai Chi performance, Western ballet, a live Western symphony and traditional Chinese music, and a chorus of Chinese patriotic songs and Ludwig van Beethoven’s Ode to Joy at the end.116 Zhang
highlights in his interview for CCTV that “this might be the first time Swan Lake has
been staged on a lake since its creation” and the application of the virtual “hologram
white swans” reveals “the interaction between technology and human beings” (Zhang
2016).117 Performed by twenty-six female ballet students from BDA, the G20 Swan Lake
excerpted the “Swan theme” and “Dance of the Little Swans” from Act II of the classical
repertoire.

To examine how female ballet bodies were employed to create visual effects, I
analyze the live broadcast of Swan Lake by CCTV in 2016.118 In the first section of the
performance, the character Odette is played by a soloist wearing a white tutu and shining
crown. The lone ballerina delicately dances on a stage placed on the West Lake. She is
illuminated and appears to float on the dark lake underneath an opulent bright arch. Her
graceful arms and expanded white tutu skirt, along with the luminous bridge above, are
harmoniously reflected in the water. When the camera zooms in and the music becomes
stronger, virtual ballerinas magically appear in pairs beside Odette, as if multiple
doppelgängers had emerged from her body. The one live dancer and three virtual dancers
line up symmetrically on the stage and simultaneously move their arms like delicate
wings. By removing the original plot of Swan Lake and the prince character, the
choreography of the excerpt only highlights the beauty of female ballet bodies through
the synchronous arabesque, tiny and rapid bourrée en pointe, and delicate flying arms.
However, both real and virtual ballet bodies in the G20 Swan Lake are manipulated as
elements of the overall spectacle of the performance. In the vast outdoor environment on
the water, the illuminated arch bridge and its inverted reflection in the water brings to
mind the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang harmony. This unique stage setting also
echoes the bridge landmark of the city of Hangzhou and the bridge-styled logo of the 
G20 summit, which symbolizes the twenty countries’ interconnection in “global 
economic growth, international cooperation and a win-win future.”

The elegant and 
identical ballerinas, both live and virtual, are lined up below the arch of the bridge; their 
sparkling reflections on the lake enhance the scene’s visual fantasy and obscure Odette’s 
corporeality. Together, the plotless choreography, the beautiful and synchronous ballet 
body, and the illuminated bridge all create a visual spectacle that theatrical performance 
cannot accomplish.

At the end of the first section, hundreds of virtual Odettes emerge beneath the 
light arch and rapidly glide through en pointe. In unison formation, a group of live white 
swan dancers appears from each side of the arch, as if they are floating out from the 
holographic images. To the playful music of “Dance of the Little Swans,” twenty-four 
dancers hold each other’s hands and restage the original “Little Swans” choreography on 
an immense platform that is just over an inch below the lake surface. The dancers appear 
to be dancing on the water. Their spatial changes are carefully orchestrated and 
movements are extremely cohesive: when holding hands, they resemble a long chain of 
paper dolls moving across the water. Close-ups on the ballerinas’ feet showcase and 
sound out the splashing water and emphasize their slim legs and synchronous ballet steps. 
Although divided into symmetrical groups during the middle phrases, they smoothly 
follow the choreography and dance back to one chain. The dancers’ virtuoso, disciplined 
body, give them the strength and skill to perform entrechat jumps and leg beats in the 
water seemingly as effortlessly as on dry ground. Their synchronous steps and uniform 
coupé and arabesque leg lifts make them appear indistinguishable. The performance ends
with a return to the “Swan Theme” music and two soloists come back to the water stage alongside the virtual dancers projected beneath the light bridge. The visual fantasy finishes in a beautiful symmetrical formation, with the live dancers gracefully stretching their legs and lifting their arms in mimicry of swans’ long necks.

The lake performance of *Swan Lake*, seen as the highlight of the entire G20 gala, signals the Chinese state’s desire to transcend local culture and domesticate cosmopolitanism. When introducing the G20 performance in the interview for CCTV, Zhang said he considered Western symphonic music and ballet to be elegant and elite “universal languages” (Zhang 2016). He viewed the G20 as a meeting for the inclusive development of the world. From the perspective of this meeting, the repertoire we choose must be classic, and it must be recognized by everyone, and the emotion [emerged from the play] is in common, so when we were selecting, we said, if it is not a famous repertoire, then [we] don’t want it. (Zhang 2016).

Zhang argued that “the world-famous repertoire” and “Chinese repertoire” could convey themes of love, unity, power, beauty, and nature that resonate with all human beings (Zhang 2016). In order to express his concept of universalism, Zhang incorporated Western and Chinese classical performance within visual spectacles, as seen in the interaction between real and virtual dancers in the *Swan Lake* ballet, the successive performance of the Chinese opera version of *Butterfly Lovers* and the *gudianwu* version accompanied with symphonized music, the instrumental ensemble between Chinese *guqin* (a traditional zither 古琴) and Western cello, and Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* with the dazzling fountain show created by dancers. This hybrid performance embodied the
director’s desire for the inclusion of Chinese culture in a united global community. The celebratory reports about this performance by China’s official media signified an embrace of the cosmopolitan strategy of China’s globalization.

The hybrid G20 gala, however, revealed the fundamental tension between cultural localization and homogenization in promoting cosmopolitanism, globalization, and nationalism. By implying that Western classical music and dance are interchangeable with the so-called “world-famous repertoire,” Zhang’s assertion of cultural universalism falls into the trap of a postcolonial discourse of Western cultural imperialism and reflects China’s postcolonial conditions. Despite this, I suggest that the hybridity between Western and Chinese, modern and traditional culture in the performance also signifies three layers of nationalist desire and ambition by enacting cosmopolitanism. First, the amalgamation between Western/“world-famous” and Chinese art forms suggests a sense of self-colonialization with Western ideals and promotes the connection between Chinese cultural identity and universalism. As Zhang said, the hybridity between Chinese elements with Western art forms “is to let everyone understand … The very ethnic, very distinctive, and very Chinese [forms] that you [the Chinese people] recognize, but are completely lost to others [foreigners]” (Zhang 2016). Thus, the hybridized performance at the G20 global summit aimed to promote an image of inclusive, versatile, and transcendent Chineseness to globalize Chinese culture.

The performance also revealed the Chinese nationalist desire to domesticate and transcend cosmopolitanism. In an interview for China’s Youth website, Guan Yu, the leader of BDA Ballet Department, says that “the choreographic team especially wanted to come up with [a show] that would make foreigners feel dazzled and [to render] a
beautiful and [high] level performance that they[the foreigner/the West] have never achieved” (Guan 2016).\textsuperscript{120} Echoing Zhang’s boast that Swan Lake has never been staged on a lake, Guan’s interview reveals a national ambition for domesticating as well as rewriting a Western-centric cosmopolitan culture in a Chinese manner. Zhang’s approach to this domestication was to incorporate the Chinese ballet bodies and Chinese landmarks, the West Lake and the bridge image, as the essence of Chineseness and add the dazzling technology and stage setting to create a visual spectacle.\textsuperscript{121} The docile and virtuoso female ballet bodies, therefore, incarnated the double meaning of Chinese cosmopolitanism by dancing the world-famous ballet repertoire as domestication and accomplishing a seemingly impossible mission of dancing en pointe on the water as transcendence. Given China’s ambition to play a leadership role in the current international agenda, such cosmopolitan rewriting through Chinese ballet bodies also reveals a form of Chinese supremacy and even China-centered imperialism.

Reflecting Rofel’s concept of “cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics,” Chinese cosmopolitan practices are inseparable from the representation of gender and nation (Rofel 2007). On the one hand, the BDA ballerinas’ ethereal, slim, and chaste bodies in Swan Lake corresponded to the male desire for female ideals in Chinese traditional philosophy. The white swan dancing on the natural setting of West Lake incarnated the fairy-like and unattainable quality of feminine figures in traditional Chinese descriptions and visualized a hybrid Chinese and Western imagination of female beauty. The collective male gaze that was engendered by the ballet and the G20 gala facilitated the domestication practice of cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the masculine national agenda of globalization was achieved through the feminized practice
of cosmopolitanism. When explaining why the G20 *Swan Lake* did not include the role of Prince Siegfried, one of the choreographers in the production team, Tao Wenting, states the use of “two [female] big swans” in lead roles in lieu of ballerina and danseur represented the G20 summit’s goal of unity (CCTV News 2016). Tao further suggests that the dance of the two swans “could better embody innovation, as well as a balanced, inclusive and harmonious relationship between participating countries” (CCTV News 2016). Tao’s explanation stresses a stereotypical binary between masculinity and femininity, where the male dancer as a masculine force would intrude on the balance of the feminine and peaceful ballet bodies and dismantle the imagined universal cosmopolitanism. In fact, the entire G20 gala, which was set between the two-day conference, has been feminized as a “soft power” and simplified as a “business card” by CCP leaders and Zhang to disseminate the masculine national power and global ambition of the state (Zhang 2016). The feminization of China through the gala performance, however, was also complicit with Western Orientalism and imperialism that weakened China’s global power.

**4.2.2 The Struggle of the Ballet Body and The State**

After the innovative and dazzling *Swan Lake* performance, many reports by Chinese official media highlighted the physical labor of BDA ballet dancers. *China’s Youth* newspaper reported that to accommodate the vast and distant stage setting on the West Lake, the production team selected tall ballerinas from BDA to enhance the visibility of the dancers’ movements (Huang and Du 2016). One of the BDA dancers, Zhao Huizi, shared that due to being a tall 5’7”, she had never had the opportunity to
perform the “Little Swans” variation in previous performances of *Swan Lake*. Therefore, the G20 gala was her debut in the “Little Swan” choreography (Huang and Du 2016). Choreographer Gao Zhiyi told the journalist from *Qilu Evening News* that “when dancing on the ground, a movement transition might only need eight counts, but on the 3000-square-meter [32,291-square-feet] platform [the movement] cannot be accomplished within two eight counts” (Guo 2016). The dancers, therefore, spent ten to twelve hours a day practicing to expand their movement range on the sunken platform in the water, while retaining the swift and effortless movement quality of the *corps de ballet*. The 32,291-square-feet metal platform that Gao mentioned was placed 1.2 inches below the water surface during the actual performance to create the effect that the dancers were floating on water. However, in rehearsals, the metal stage was set 2 inches underwater to allow the ballerinas to adapt to the water resistance and the slippery stage (CCTV News 2016). After the first rehearsal on the West Lake, multiple dancers shared that the effort from dancing with their feet submerged in water was exhausting (CCTV News 2016). The choreographer Tao emphasized that to enhance the dancers’ physical strength “there is no other way but to let the dancers rehearse in water as much as possible” (CCTV News 2016). Throughout the fifty-five days of rehearsal, the dancers not only took warm-up ballet classes in a small studio in Hangzhou, they also sank their feet every day in the water and received intense training to overcome the difficulties of the vast stage environment, dancing against the resistance of the water, soaking-wet shoes, a slippery stage, as well as an extremely hot outdoor temperature due to the time of year.

In addition to the struggle that the *corps de ballet* experienced in dancing on a lake, the solo dancer Sun Yimeng risked the danger of dancing on the movable and
narrow stage. Sun, a former principal dancer of the Finnish National Ballet who graduated from ASS and won the gold medal in Helsinki International Ballet in 2016, was selected to be the leading white swan of the G20 gala. Whilst focusing on matching the pre-recorded virtual images, Sun had to overcome the jerkiness generated by the start and stop of the movable stage and to appear to dance effortlessly on the narrow 39-inch stage (CCTV News 2016). There were also four understudy dancers from BDA who experienced the intensive training with the other twenty-six dancers but had no opportunity to perform (Huang and Du 2016). BDA leader and teacher Guan said that eating bitterness and enduring hardship is the traditional virtue of our Chinese nation, and challenging ourselves, constantly exploring and innovating is the spirit of the time in contemporary China. The two [spirits] are perfectly integrated and embodied in our [G20] performance. (Guan 2016)

In her study of the physical labor of Chinese dancing bodies, Wilcox suggests that the physical struggle, or chiku nailao, in dance training has operated as a means of ideological cultivation for dancers to commit to the revolution in socialist China (Wilcox 2011). By recognizing the connection between the Chinese Confucian and Taoist philosophy of self-cultivation and the Maoist notion of physical labor, Wilcox’s analysis indicates that Chinese dancers’ endurance of physical struggle is an ideological inheritance of Chinese traditional philosophy. This moral heritage of Chineseness, supported by Guan’s statement, was carried on by the BDA ballerinas during the G20 rehearsals.

To extend my analysis of ballerinas’ physical struggle towards a discourse of gender, I argue that the image of suffering and hard-laboring female bodies have been
exploited in narrating national struggles and establishing patriarchal nationalism. In the documentary *Ballet* (CCTV 2010), Bai Shuxiang recalls a time when she was practicing Odile’s technically challenging thirty-two fouetté turns and a Soviet expert asked her to place chairs around herself to ensure she remained in one spot. She says that “[if] you turned badly, you hit your leg when you moved; then you would suffer. It forced you to stay where you were” (CCTV 2010). Zhong Runliang, one of the earliest Chinese performers of *Swan Lake*, recalls in detail her painful and bloodied feet in her first practice in pointe shoes with Soviet ballet teacher Ol’ga Il’ina. She said that “when we took off [the pointe shoes], the shoes and [our] feet were glued together … we practiced every day like this. I feel I ended up with calluses all over my feet. There was not a day that [if] I hurt my feet then I [can] rest; that was not possible” (CCTV 2010). The image of tortured female feet due to training en pointe has been a favored subject in media reports, which I will elaborate on in the next sub-section.

Bai and Zhong’s hard work are portrayed as a precondition of the successful premiere of the BDS *Swan Lake* in 1958 which lived out a dream of pursuing an international culture by socialist Chinese dancers as well as Chinese people (CCTV 2010). As expressed in a VoiceOver in a 1958 dance clip celebrating the Chinese premiere of *Swan Lake*, BDS “applies the spirit of ‘dare to think and dare to act’ (敢想敢干) in performing the world-famous ballet *Swan Lake* during the Great Leap Forward [1958-1962]. [BDS dancers’] dance technique has caught up with international standards” (CCTV 2010). Although Bai’s insufficient leg turnout and sloppy arms failed to meet an established international level in ballet, the recognition of *Swan Lake* as a “world-famous ballet” and the desire of “international standard” reflected a socialist
practice of cosmopolitanism that combined revolutionism. The BDS ballet bodies’ struggle, therefore, became the propaganda for the alleged socialist achievement in 1958 and has continued to be exploited to promote nationalism by the state’s official media in contemporary China.

The image of female suffering has also been central to negotiating a national discourse in Chinese literature, film, opera, and dance since the early twentieth century. For instance, modern Chinese critical writer Lu Xun’s short story, *New Year’s Sacrifices* (*Zhufu* 1924), portrays the tragic life of Xianglin’s wife who is tortured by a traditional Confucian family. Told from a point of view of a young male scholar, the short story narrates the miserable life of Xianglin’s wife who has suffered from an imposed marriage, the death of her only child, and criticism from villagers towards her lack of chastity. The unsympathetic tone of the male scholar reflects Lu Xun’s critique of feudal patriarchal Confucianism and his longing for China’s modernization. Chinese literature scholar Rey Chow (1991) also draws upon Lu’s writing and argues that women’s suffering was a symbol of a weak, invaded, and wounded Chinese nation in the early twentieth century. While Man has explored how a healthy and athletic physique, or *jianmei*, of the Chinese female body became a national ideal during the Sino-Japanese War, the sacrificial woman figure continued to be a subject of fascination for authors of literature and arts of the time. In the film *Street Angel* (1937), the sacrifice and death of sex worker, Xiao Yun, embodies the tragedy of lower-class victims in 1930s’ Shanghai wherein only her sacrifice empowers her to pronounce the class and gender injustices of society (Berry and Farquhar 2006). In socialist literature, female victims become representatives of class struggle. In the revolutionary ballet *White-Haired Girl* (1965), the
female protagonist Xi’er, a peasant girl who lives with her father, is forced to be a salve of the landlord Huang Shiren. Her liberation from Huang’s physical control and abuse symbolizes the class struggle of Chinese proletarians against the feudal culture and bourgeois class. In socialist literature and arts, the image of sexually oppressed women was deemphasized and transformed into an asexual identity of the oppressed class (Meng 1993).\textsuperscript{124}

During the sexual awakening period in the post-1980s, the feminine ideal was transformed by the emergence of consumer culture and the beauty industry, wherein sexual, desirable, and fashionable bodies replaced the socialist, asexual “iron women” (Man 2016). Nevertheless, female bodies remain important sites for negotiating the dynamics of the state. Building on Liu’s analysis (2004) of the post-Socialist ideological vacuum that resulted from the official abandonment of Mao’s revolutionary hegemony, the imported Western individualism and feminism in contemporary China might destabilize an authoritarian patriarchal indoctrination over female ideals. However, the female body’s physical devotion to the national agenda in official media news reports continues to be emphasized as a traditional virtue of Chineseness, a reminder of socialist heritage, as well as an embodiment of national soft power. In the G20 gala, in addition to engendering an elegant and elite feminine ideal, the BDA ballerinas’ bodily struggle to overcome the challenges of dancing \textit{Swan Lake} in water offered an opportunity for the state to show its substantial strength by calling upon national labor and asserting paternalist forces.

\textbf{4.2.3 No More Suffering and Imagined Nationalism}
As evident in Zhong Runliang’s description of her bloodied feet in pointe shoes, dancing on tiptoes as a symbol of ballet has been publicized as both a practice of beauty and struggle by the Chinese media. In 2015, the Chinese multinational technology company Huawei (华为) launched a global advertising campaign that featured a photograph of a ballerina’s battered feet. Shot by American photographer Henry Leutwyler, the ballerina in the photo is pictured holding a parallel foot position *en pointe*. While one foot stands in a satin pointe shoe with the ribbon neatly tied across her ankle, the other foot is bare, bony, bruised, and with bandages surrounding her bloody toes. Beside her feet, a citation from French novelist Romain Rolland says, “The people make a sport of the sublime. If they could see it as it is, they would be unable to bear its aspect” (Osawa 2015). According to Huawei’s leader, Ren Zhengfei, who was a former engineer in the People’s Liberation Army, the tortured foot symbolizes the hardship behind the company’s development. Ren says that

> It is because we started too late, the years of growth are too short, and we have accumulated too little, we have to suffer more than others. So, we have a ballet foot, a very bad [battered] foot, I think Huawei’s people are in pain and happiness. Huawei is such a bad foot, it explains how we go to the world. (Lanxueyanjiu 2020)

Huawei is a national company that has been fostered by the Chinese government in order to compete against the US technology company Apple and the South Korean company Samsung. Therefore, Huawei’s struggle and success not only represent its rise in the global technology industry, but also embodies the endeavor and achievement of China’s globalization. The beat-up ballet foot that signifies Huawei’s historical struggle has also
been promoted by Chinese media as a sense of bitterness behind the country’s national pride.

The exploitative use of battered ballet feet to symbolize the hardship of Huawei specifically, or Chinese globalization generally, has evoked a debate among users on social media. To challenge the idea that the deformed ballet foot is due to ballet training, many professional and amateur ballet practitioners wrote about their own experiences of learning ballet. In the article, “The Ballet Feet in Huawei Advertisement: Is This the Truth about Ballet,” on China’s social media WeChat, the author criticizes the idea that ballet is “dancing on the tip of a knife” (Institute of Ballet Affairs 2019). The article explains that dancing en pointe is an advanced ballet technique that is reliant on proficiency in basic ballet training; the strength of abdominals, ankles, legs, and back are preconditions for a dancer to stand en pointe; and well-conditioned pointe shoes and an anti-slip dance floor are necessary for practicing pointe technique. By calling upon a proper understanding of ballet training, the article criticizes Huawei’s advertisement as misleading. In the forum “What Happens to A Ballerina’s Feet” on Zhihu (知乎), a social website for sharing questions and answers, an online user comments and juxtaposes the image of Huawei’s tortured ballet feet with an image of non-injured ballet feet, along with several toepad protection products, to condemn the media’s terrifying depiction of ballet training. In the same forum, a self-claimed semi-professional dancer also compares ballet feet with Chinese traditional foot-binding. After posting a list of screenshots of ballerinas’ feet adopted from the American social media platform Instagram, she explains that the ballerinas’ curved instep reveals their effort in pointing their feet, which is different from the irreversible shape produced through foot-binding.
Many professional dancers from China’s ballet companies and dance conservatories, such as Li Yijie from Guangzhou Ballet Company and Eva from a Taipei private high school, as well as part-time ballet practitioners, have shared photos and videos of their own feet to mimic the angle and format of Leutwyler’s photo, thereby creating debate against the overexaggerated publicization of the ballet feet as an image of suffering.

In addition to ballet practitioners’ critiques, Huawei employees contested the advertising of ballet feet in international airports and media. Among 1,585 employees, almost 96% considered the ballet feet as “not good, not beautiful, and not supportive,” while only 68 employees chose the option that “[the ballet feet are] very in line with our company’s struggle culture, strongly support” (Lanxueyanjiu 2020). According to some negative comments, the depiction of the hurt ballet feet is unpleasant and only brings sorrow and pity to the company rather than admiring and acknowledging its struggle. Furthermore, the advertisement reflects a narcissistic view of the company leader who ignores the needs of its employees and clients (Lanxueyanjiu 2020). Recognizing the tight connection between the development of Huawei and the politics of the CCP, I argue that the self-centered Huawei poster mirrors the state’s propaganda. The battered and bare ballet foot on one side, as women’s hard work in contemporary “new China”, is exploited as an emblem of the Communist party’s historical struggle, which is seen as necessary in the party and nation’s path to glory. Both ballet practitioners’ and Huawei employees’ criticism of the pain-enduring feet challenges the cult of bitterness in promoting an imagined Chinese nationalism. While each group was asserting their individual interests, they both objected to an authoritative discourse, revealing how
contemporary female body liberation has led to the critique and negotiation of cultural and national identities.

Online users’ reviews explicitly challenge the imagined nationalism of Zhang’s G20 gala. In a performance review, “Pure Technical Analysis and Knowledge Sharing: How to Evaluate the Water Ballet ‘Swan Lake’ at the G20 Summit,” Zhihu user duanmuyi analyzes what she deems as the disrespectful and ignorant production from the perspective of a ballet practitioner (2016). She emphasizes that the primary concern with the choreography is that it places the dancers in a slippery and dangerous water environment that will ruin the dancers’ pointe shoes and their feet. For ballerinas who dance en pointe, a slip-resistant floor is needed to reduce the risk of injury. However, it is common for directors of Chinese cultural events to “not provide the dancers with the lowest standard of venues, but pay more attention to some fancy lighting spectacular” (Zhihu 2016). The author also mentions how a mistake in a rehearsal of Zhang’s Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games caused a lifelong paraplegic disability for the BDA dancer Liu Yan (Barboza 2008). In addition, the author also intensely criticizes the marginalized status of Chinese dancers in the program. She thoughtfully observes that, in the CCTV live broadcast of the G20 gala, each performance begins with an introductory subtitle in the left-hand corner of the screen. However, only the name of the composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and the three choreographers in the production team appeared in the subtitle. The omission of the dancers’ names completely downplayed their physical labor and the intense rehearsal that I address above.

Disrespectfulness for the dancers’ physical labor was also revealed in the objectification of the dancers’ bodies by Zhang and his production team. As I describe
above, the scene of twenty-four ballerinas holding each other’s hands and performing the “Little Swan” dance in unison looked like a long chain of paper dolls moving across the water. By positioning the female dancing bodies alongside virtual dancers’ images and the grandiose water setting, Zhang’s G20 *Swan Lake* focused on creating visual reflects, while treating the ballet bodies as movable decorations. The Zhihu author, for example, recognized that the objectification and marginalization of dancers in national events is a common phenomenon. She states,

> It can be seen that the dancers still stay in the marginalized position as “backup dancers (伴舞)” in grand events with Chinese characteristics like this [G20 gala]. [Dancers are] just a bunch of beautiful lace and a group of human flesh background walls. Nothing is more disrespectful than this. (Zhihu 2016)

While objectification of female dancers reflects the patriarchal demand for a filial and loyal female figure in Chinese culture, I suggest that many female dancers and choreographers also adhere to the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity that legitimatizes the continuation of the male gaze. The feminine bodily construction in *Shenyun-gudianwu* training, which I analyze in Chapter 2, exemplifies female *gudianwu* practitioners’ commitment to the gender binary that is inscribed in traditional Confucianism.

While incorporating the ballerinas’ bodies in *Swan Lake*’s message of China’s globalization and cosmopolitanism, the objectification and omission of the dancers’ physical labor allowed the “soft power” and its embodied nationalism to be questioned. When commenting on duanmuyi’s Zhihu article, some online users directly expressed their dislike towards the performance and sympathy towards the ballet dancers:
I feel embarrassed by watching this show, so embarrassed. (jay262229, December 20, 2016, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

Oh my god ... I feel so distressed. Can I call for BDA to refuse to perform in the future ... [when] encountering such a substandard arrangement? (平凡的世界, January 12, 2017, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

Lao Mouzi [Zhang Yimou] takes it as his duty to consume the professional life of dancers. (sppppps, August 4, 2018, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

In addition to the criticism of the director and the dangerous performance, many users realized the fundamental issue of Chinese authoritarianism and the patriarchal CCP governance. They sarcastically criticized that,

This country is just like this. For the so-called [visual] effect, the opening ceremony of the [2008] Olympic Games used fake singing. [The national leader would think] to employ you is to look upon you highly. Regarding the danger [of the performance], the wear and tear of shoes, it is nothing. It is nothing to sacrifice some [of your] personal interests. (凰可愛彈, December 20, 2016, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

In order to show something different to the leaders of the allied countries, to please them, and to sacrifice a few dancers, so what? How could musicians, dancers, opera players, and actors (倡伎优伶) be worth speaking of in the face of national affairs? (Mir-Pozolovski, December 21, 2016, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

Anyway, as long as the Zhao masters [the CCP bureaucrats] are happy, who cares about the life and death of the dancing girls? From feudal Zhao to capitalist Zhao, dancing girls are just the epitome of how these masters treat the people. (李立敦, January 11, 2017, comment on duanmuyi 2016).

By connecting my discussion of the criticism directed at Huawei, and its subversive potential, I reiterate that such marginalization of the dancing bodies in national events helps to frame the myth of China’s nationalism and cosmopolitanism. The visual
spectacle created by employing a large number of dancing bodies and the dazzling lighting and stage designs symbolizes an intrinsically empty nationalism, which has an ornate surface but is filled on the inside with fragile images.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored my first and third research questions: how the mixed Chinese and Western traditions have influenced the training of ballet bodies and how the hybrid ballet body complicates the construction of cultural and national identity. From the strict physical assessment and selection of ballet students to the G20 performance, the process of cultivating the ballet body in China intertwines discourses of gender, nation, and globalization. Rather than framing the Chinese female ballet body as a mere representation of China’s aspiration for Westernization, I compare the female ideals in ancient Confucian Chinese literature with the ballerina’s physique and temperament to explain the Chinese admiration of the female ballet body. By sharing characteristics of elegance, slenderness, chastity, whiteness, and devotion, the female ballet body projects a supreme aesthetic ideal of female beauty that differs from the homogenous and attainable female figure influenced by modern Chinese consumer culture. Within the economic reforms of postsocialist China, the idealized femininity of the balletic body serves as a refraction and projection of patriarchal desire that correlates with the national and political agenda. The virtuoso and beautiful ballerinas who dance Swan Lake on the water of West Lake during the G20 gala as a means of domesticating and transcending cosmopolitan culture embody the state’s desire for cultural and economic globalization.
The interviews and reports by official media and advertisements further the discourse of Chineseness by foregrounding the difficulties and hardship of the ballerinas’ bodily struggle from a patriarchal perspective. The struggle of the female ballet body as an embodiment of virtuous Chineseness reflects a long-lasting masculine narrative in literature and art, in which the suffering female image becomes a site to represent and negotiate the dynamics of the state. While the authoritarian state propaganda still heavily stresses the patriarchal social norm, the rise of gender equality and the popularization of the internet and online social platforms have empowered contemporary Chinese female subjects to build up their own ideal body that challenges the cult of tortured female images. The female ballet practitioners’ criticism towards the objectification and manipulation of the ballet body in both the cases of the G20 Swan Lake and the battered ballet feet in Huawei’s advertisement negotiates traditional patriarchal epistemology and the imagination of Chinese nationalism. While acknowledging the ongoing existence of the male gaze and gender inequality within dance practices and Chinese society, my examination of the Chinese female ballet body enriches discussions of Sinicized ballet practice as well as the hybrid gudianwu dancing body.
CHAPTER 5

DANCING AMBIGUOUS CHINESENESS: THE REVIVAL OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN GUDIANWU

When gudianwu pioneers at BDA re-established the gudianwu curriculum in the late 1970s, Chinese dance practitioners in local dance troupes dedicated themselves to reviving national dance dramas with historical themes and traditional folklore (Wilcox 2018a). In 1979, Central Opera and Dance Drama Theater (CODDT) collaborated with gudianwu teachers at BDA such as Li Zheng and Tang Mancheng to choreograph Princess Wencheng (文成公主), a dance drama based on a real story of a princess in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). That same year, Gansu Provincial Song and Dance Ensemble (GSDE) created another Tang Dynasty-related dance drama, Flowers and Rain on the Silk Road (Silu Huayu 丝路花雨) (Wilcox 2018a). Later that year, Shanghai Opera Theatre (SOT) premiered Flying to the Moon (Benyue 奔月), a large-scale dance drama that originated from Shanghai Experimental Dance Ensemble’s Houyi and Chang’e (后羿与嫦娥 1962). In the 1980s, the choreography of short gudianwu pieces and dramas went hand in hand with the development of gudianwu training at BDA. For instance, the hybrid Shenyun-gudianwu style influenced Yao Yong and Zhang Yujun’s The Yellow River (1988), while Dancers of The Tongque Stage (1985 铜雀伎) marked Sun Ying’s first experimentation of his Han-Tang gudianwu curriculum. The movement vocabulary in Flower and Rain on the Silk Road led to the creation of Gao Jinrong’s Dunhuang dance curriculum at Gansu Art School; BDA later adopted that curriculum into their
Chinese dance scholars consider Shenyun, Han-Tang, and Dunhuang as the three major styles of contemporary gudianwu (Su 2004; Meng 2016).

In the twenty-first century, other Chinese dance practitioners contributed to reviving traditional Chinese culture in dance. Ma Jiaqin, a dancer and choreographer from Jiangsu Province in southeast China, who was also one of the students in BDA’s first choreography class (1982-1986), created Kunwu (Kun Dance 昆舞) at Nanjing Art Academy in 2003. Ma based Kunwu on Kun Opera (Kunqu 昆曲), a local opera style that developed in southeast China in the fourteenth century. In 2003, Ma staged a large-scale Kunwu drama titled Gan Jiang and Mo Ye (干将莫邪), which inaugurated Kunwu in Jiangsu Province. Similarly, in the 1990s, Taiwanese dance scholar Liu Fengxue’s take on Tang Yuewu (Dance of the Tang Dynasty 唐乐舞) received recognition in mainland China. Liu began her reconstruction of Tang Yuewu dances in the 1950s. From 1963 to 2003, she choreographed twelve Tang Yuewu pieces based on her research of classical dance performance and dance notation in Japan and Korea. In 2014, Liu brought her Tang Yuewu to Beijing and rehearsed four dances for BDA students: The Song of Warbler, Storax, Fun of Toast, and Tuan Luan Xuan (Tian 2014). Together with Shenyun, Han-Tang, and Dunhuang gudianwu, Ma’s Kunwu and Liu’s Tang Yuewu provided new threads for the embodiment of Chinese traditional culture within gudianwu choreography and recruited a new group of artists for the purposes of restoring Chinese classical dance.

In this chapter, I focus on gudianwu choreography inspired by Shenyun (Body-rhythm) and Han-Tang styles to examine the embodiment of traditional Chinese culture by gudianwu dancing bodies. Given my argument in the Introduction that dance
choreography is inseparable from dance training, I suggest that *gudianwu* choreography by BDA teachers and graduates perpetuates the hybridity of Chinese and Western dances as well as traditional and modern cultures. *Gudianwu* practitioners consciously applied movements, choreographic techniques, and aesthetics from modern dance and ballet and combined them in *gudianwu* choreography. By emphasizing this hybridity and discourses of identity, I employ Chinese performance scholar Chen Xiaomei’s (1995) theory of Occidentalism and historian Arif Dirlik’s (1996) “self-Orientalization” into the discussion of cultural contamination in Homi Bhabha’s (1994; 1996) theory of hybridity. I argue that the revival of traditional Chinese Han culture in *gudianwu* plays a significant role in the reconstruction of Chinese national identity in postsocialist China. Particularly in the twenty-first century, the increasing circulation of *gudianwu* choreography through the internet and social media facilitates the heightened nationalism promoted by the Chinese communist party (CCP). However, the hybrid aesthetics and movements in *gudianwu* also simultaneously undermine the essentialist claim of cultural and national identities promoted at the state level and provide a space for *gudianwu* choreographers to experiment with a sense of individualism and liberation.

By drawing upon video recordings, dancer interviews, documentaries, and choreographers’ writings, I first compare *Shenyun* and Han-Tang *gudianwu* choreography in the first two decades of post-socialist China. I analyze two *gudianwu* works: *Fan Dance and Chinese Painting* (*Shanwu Danqing* 扇舞丹青 2000) choreographed by BDA graduate Tong Ruirui, and *Dancers of The Tongque Stage* (*Tongque Ji* 铜雀伎 2008) choreographed by Han-Tang *gudianwu* pioneer Sun Ying. My analysis of movements and aesthetics of *Fan Dance and Chinese Painting* will address my second research question:
how does *gudianwu* choreography draw upon the mixture of ballet, modern dance, *Shenyun* technique, and Chinese traditional theatrical elements? Comparatively, I explore how *Dancers of the Tongque Stage* embodies Sun’s realist approach to reconstructing Chinese classical dance from ancient sculptures and frescos. In the second section, I investigate my third question: how does *gudianwu* function as both propaganda for CCP’s cultural policy and anti-nationalist assertion of autonomous artistic creation? I conduct a case study of *Young Scholar with Paper Fan (Zhishan Shusheng 纸扇书生 2017)*, a short *gudianwu* piece by BDA teacher Hu Yan. I explore the circulation of Hu’s *Young Scholar with Paper Fan* in Chinese social media to illustrate how *gudianwu* propagandistically promoted CCP’s cultural policy of enhancing the “Cultural Confidence” of Chinese people (Xi 2014). I then examine young Chinese choreographers’ negotiation of artistic autonomy and national identity through innovative adoptions of traditional Chinese culture into experimental choreography over the past decade. I further suggest that BDA teacher Tian Tian’s innovative Han-Tang *gudianwu*, *Tomb Figures I (Yong I 2017)*, demonstrates how experimental *gudianwu* choreography becomes a place for claiming the agency of individual aesthetics and identities.

### 5.1 Experimenting with the “Classical” and Chineseness: *Shenyun* and Han-Tang

*Gudianwu* Choreography in Postsocialist China

From the outset of BDA’s reform in the 1980s, *Shenyun-gudianwu* pioneers emphasized “using the Western to serve Chinese needs” (*yang wei Zhong yong*) and “using the past to serve the present” (*gu wei jin yong*) in reconstructing a traditional Chinese dance culture. To enact this idea, *Shenyun-gudianwu* practitioners incorporated
Western ballet in *gudianwu* training and experimented with formalist aesthetics in *gudianwu* choreography. The adoption of plotless works, symbolic artistic expression, dance-music cohesion, and virtuoso dance tricks signifies an endorsement of Western-influenced modernism by *Shenyun-gudianwu* choreographers. In contrast, Sun Ying intensely resisted the use of Western dance in the fashioning of Chinese classical dance. While Sun’s concept of Chinese classical dance also reflected the idea of *gu wei jin yong*, he stressed a discourse of Chinese cultural essentialism and lineage from the “past” (ancient China) to the “present” (contemporary China). By promoting a relatively uncontaminated Chinese culture, Sun insists on a realist approach to reflect the reality of Chinese ancestral culture and established his Han-Tang *gudianwu* style.

While maintaining different approaches to constructing *gudianwu*, *Shenyun* and Han-Tang practitioners have strived for supplementing the word “Chinese” with the notion of “classical dance” to draw comparisons with classical European dance and represent a unique Chinese dance culture. This action is theorized by Chinese literature scholar Rey Chow as the “ethnic supplement” of Chineseness, which means Chinese intellectuals possess “a collective habit of supplementing every major world trend with the notion of ‘Chinese’” (Chow 1998). According to Chow (1998), the “ethnic supplement” first occurs as China’s grappling with representation and contestation against the Western hegemony during semi-colonial China. The obsession with Chineseness, in turn, foregrounds a cultural essentialism that turns Chinese people who are marginalized and victimized by Western imperialism into arrogant nationalists and sinocentrists (Chow 1998). In this section, I examine how distinctive ideas of Chinese
classical dance promoted by Shenyun and Han-Tang gudianwu negotiate with essentialist Chineseness and speak to Western modern culture.

5.1.1 Evolution of Gudianwu Choreography from the Late 1970s to 1990s

In 1980, China’s Ministry of Culture held the first National Dance Competition (NDC 1980) and many innovative gudianwu pieces emerged in this event. Among them, Shenyang Qianjin Song and Dance Troupe’s The War Drum of Jinshan (Jinshan Zhangu 1980) won first prize in choreography and performance, BDA’s Drunken Sword (Zui Jian 1980) won first prize in performance, and Dance Troupe of the Air Force Political Department’s Sculpture of Dunhuang (Dunhuang Caisu 1980) won second prize in choreography and first prize in performance (Yu 2016b). These gudianwu pieces included historical and romantic themes as well as Chinese Opera (xiqu)-styled movements that mirrored the xiqu-gudianwu training in socialist China. Characters, such as female and male warriors in The War Drum of Jinshan and Drunken Sword respectively, recalled xiqu’s “hangdang” (specialized role types) performance. The dramatic content, narrative plot, traditional xiqu costuming and hairstyles verified the influence of xiqu and socialist realism.

With the blossom of American modern dance in China since the mid-1980s, however, Shenyun-gudianwu choreographers were dedicated to breaking with conventions of xiqu and experimenting with new gudianwu styles that adopted choreographic strategies and movement techniques of modern dance. According to Chinese modern dance scholar Fangfei Miao, this commitment to “updating” xiqu-gudianwu, was impacted by “the influx of [American] modern dance” in China (Miao
While Western modern dance had been introduced to China by both Chinese and Western dancers in the 1920s, socialist leaders banned it after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The CCP leader Deng Xiaoping’s enactment of the economic reform in the late 1970s restored China’s connection to the West. Modern dance (especially American modern dance) experienced a rebirth in China due to the persistent exchanges between Chinese study groups and Western dance companies (Miao 2019 and 2022).

From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, American dance companies toured China, such as Boston Ballet (1980), Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (1985), and Trisha Brown Dance Company (1985). While many Chinese dancers visited the US to study modern dance in the 1980s, American and Chinese American modern dance practitioners such as Chiang Ching taught modern dance workshops specifically for dancers with training in gudianwu, Chinese folk dance, or ballet. Modern dance, therefore, symbolized an innovative and democratic practice that attracted both professional and amateur dancers’ interest in learning it (Miao 2019). Chinese dance critic Cheng Xintian coined this trend of learning modern dance during the 1980s as “modern dance fever,” which paved the way for the development of Chinese modern dance. Subsequently, the “Guangdong Modern Dance Experimental Program,” established China’s first modern dance major at Guangdong Dance School in 1987 (Cheng 1981; Miao 2019 and 2022).

The “modern dance fever” of the 1980s also prompted the evolution of Shenyun-gudianwu choreography. Together with BDA’s balletic gudianwu training, gudianwu choreographers experimented with novel gudianwu styles by removing xiqu’s role type performance and mixing xiqu poses with modern dance’s fall and rebound, contraction and release, and floor work. Inspired by Western formalist aesthetics, the choreographers
also explored formal elements of *gudianwu*, such as abstract characterization, complex
dance sequences involving group dances, duets, and solos, and emphasis on the
relationship between dance and music. BDA teacher Zhang Yujun and Yao Yong co-
choreographed a fourteen-minute *gudianwu* work titled *The Yellow River (Huang He*
1988), a group dance that encapsulates the transformation of *Shenyun-gudianwu* style in
the late 1980s (Yu 1998). *The Yellow River* takes for its score Yin Chengzong’s *Yellow
River Piano Concerto* (1969) and portrays an abstract image of Chinese patriotism.135 By
expressing the vigor and turbulence of the mother river Huang He (The Yellow River),
also a symbol of Chinese civilization, the music mirrors the tenacity of the China’s
struggle against foreign aggressions. Inspired by the passionate and melodious music,
Zhang and Yao’s choreography emphasized extreme harmony and affinity between dance
movement and music. This choreographic method, known as “symphonic choreography”
(交响编舞法) in China, which liberates concert dances from narrative and highlights the
use of bodily movement to interpret music and express or provoke emotions, to some
extent, resembles Russian-born ballet choreographer George Balanchine’s style.136

*The Yellow River* consists of four sections and each section corresponds with a
movement from *Yellow River Piano Concerto*.137 At the climax of the dance, a group of
dancers moves in unison to execute dynamic, explosive movements that echo the melody
and tempo variations in the music. At the beginning of the finale “Defend the Yellow
River,” a male dancer raises his right hand with five fingers splayed open and stands
firmly at center stage. With the musical crescendo, a flood of dancers surge onto the stage
from different directions and gather around him, summoned by the male dancer into a
battlefield formation. Their modest costumes of linen shirts and pants, dark red burlap
waistbands for male dancers and small aprons for women portray their status as Chinese peasants who live by the Yellow River. Mimicking the male dancer at the center, the dancers around him sharply raise their hands one by one and determinedly look toward the sky as if answering a military call of duty. To the rapid sounds of violins and majestic euphony, the dancers rush forward and spread out like a current traveling across the ocean. In a male trio, dancers proceed to fuse different dance techniques at a bewildering rate: the repeated cross step from Han Chinese folk dance, the stinging jump front kick from Chinese martial arts (wushu), the dynamic fall and rebound from American modern dance, and the flying grand jeté from European ballet. To mirror the polyphonic canon of the music, dancers in trios, quartets, and large groups continuously show off difficult techniques, bouncing up and down on the stage like endless waves rolling through the Yellow River or perseverant soldiers dedicated to fighting for their nation.

The finale ends with all the dancers flooding the stage. To the melodies East is Red and Internationale, the dancers slowly roll their bodies and heads from a squatting position and look up towards the left, a direction that signifies the sunrise, indicating the dawn of a victorious battle. To mimic the crescendo of the music, the dancers successively raise and bend their bodies which brings the raging Yellow River to life and drives the dance to its climax. The choreography of The Yellow River merges movements from Chinese and Western dance forms. For example, rolls, falls, and rebounding, geometric shapes in group dance formations, and formalist choreography derive from American modern dance. When recalling the choreographic process, Zhang said that he combined shanbang (mountain shoulder) from gudianwu with the breathing technique of Korean folk dance. The magnificent finale also resembles the “technique tricks
exhibition” of gudianwu class that shows the virtuosity of gudianwu dancers through jumps, turns, and acrobatic movements. BDA gudianwu teacher Pang Dan confirms the tight relationship between the gudianwu curriculum and The Yellow River stating that “from its premiere to now, more than thirty years, [The Yellow River] has been a performance reserved for Repertoire Teaching [class] in our Zhongguo Gudianwu Department.”

Dance critic Hong Ji suggests that The Yellow River represents the height of Chinese dance choreography in the 1980s and sets the precedent for gudianwu choreography in the 1990s. According to Hong (2000), The Yellow River was a product of BDA’s Shenyun curriculum in the Gudianwu Department and the “symphonic choreography” pedagogy of the Choreography Department. I build upon Hong’s argument and suggest that it was the “modern dance fever” in the 1980s that facilitated an endorsement of innovative aesthetics in gudianwu choreography. For example, body waves, crawling, falling, and running, which are rarely seen in early gudianwu choreography, became fixtures in The Yellow River. By adopting modern dance, Chinese folk dance, ballet, wushu and the emphasis on formalist artistic expression, Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners actively reacted to the official call for modernizing Chinese culture by aligning with Western standards in postsocialist China. The innovative style of The Yellow River, therefore, influenced the evolution of Shenyun-gudianwu choreography in the 1990s and the twenty-first century.

5.1.2 Embodiment of Yijing: Shenyun-gudianwu Choreography in the Twenty-First Century
While *gudianwu* choreographers at BDA and local dance troupes created exemplary *gudianwu* works during the 1980s and the 1990s, BDA graduate Tong Ruirui’s *Fan Dance and Chinese Painting* (*Shanwu Danqing* 2001; hereafter *Fan Dance*) set the aesthetic and choreographic standard for *Shenyun-gudianwu* in the twenty-first century. Tong’s *Fan Dance* was a five-minute *gudianwu* solo performed by Wang Yabin, a senior student of BDA affiliated middle school, in the fifth NDC in 2001.141

Accompanied by Chinese zither music *High Mountain and Flowing Water* (*Gaoshan Liushui*), Wang wears a lavender jumpsuit consisting of a tube top, wide-legged pants, and a translucent chiffon robe, accessorized with a long ombre silk fan in her right hand. The dance begins with a dim spotlight on Wang: she shows her back to the audience and casually leans her upper body to the side. To the gentle plucking sounds of the zither music, she leisurely stretches her arm and waves the fan like a brush to draw an ink painting. She harmoniously bends over to every downbeat and lifts her body with every inhalation. Slowly, she stands straight and effortlessly extends her left leg above her head to a 180-degree *développé*. Simultaneously, Wang delicately circles her head and her outstretched foot in the air. While maintaining her upstage facing, Wang demonstrates spatial, level, and dynamic changes, a congruous relationship with the zither music, and integrates virtuosic leg extensions with *Shenyun* breathing technique.

In the first half of the dance, Wang’s fan is generally folded, in line with her calm and subdued movement dynamics. She holds the folded fan as a brush and slowly initiates movement from her core, transferring internal energy from her torso to her limbs, and through the fan. By drawing upon the aesthetic and movement quality of Tai Chi (a Chinese martial art), Wang’s movements focus on the coordination of contrasts.
such as softness with sharpness and swiftness with slowness. While her feet carry out rapid *yuanchang* steps (fast and small heel-to-toe steps in *xiqu*) and make a small circle on stage, she subtly opens her fan and gently floats it on her hand. As the zither music intensifies, Wang executes dazzling jumps, rolls, kicks, and level changes. Along with her swift flick and spin technique of the ombre fan, Wang resembles a colorful tornado wildly moving across the stage. In contrast to the dynamic movement changes that focus on fluidity, virtuosity, and musicality, Wang’s neutral facial expression does not convey character or emotion. Throughout the dance, the long silk of the fan and the flowing costume move together with Wang’s turns and jumps and accentuate her fluid and ethereal movement qualities.

*Fan Dance* is considered by many Chinese dance practitioners a great success, for the way in which it embodies “ancient Chinese civilization” and evokes a specific *yijing* (artistic realm) that integrates Chinese calligraphy, Chinese zither music, Tai Chi movement, and Chinese painting (Chen 2011; Jin 2001; Lü 2013; Wang 2018). As a core Chinese aesthetic theory and essence of Chinese poetry, *yijing* combines the character *yi* (“meaning” or “idea”) and *jing* (“realm” or “sphere”) which translates to “the realm of meaning” or “artistic realm” (Kao 1991; Wilcox 2011). Chinese aesthetic theorist Ye Lang defines *yijing* as “the realm born beyond the image” and elaborates that “the aesthetic target of the artist is not the ‘image’ but rather the ‘realm’” (Ye 1985, 621). Ye continues, “realm is the unification of the virtual (*xu*) and the real (*shì*)” (Ye 1985, 621). The real (*shì*) in the context of artistic production refers to scene, image, movement, props, costume, and even music, collectively named as the artistic image (*yixiang*). However, it is a virtue of emotion, idea, and spirit that the artist and audience pursue.
The creation of the artistic realm or *xieyi* (literally “writing the realm”), which combines external images and internal emotions, is considered by Chinese artists as the ultimate goal of artistic practices (Tang 2014; Wilcox 2011; Ye 1985). I argue that this creative strategy in Chinese art and performances also echoes the cultural trend of disengaging from socialist realism and accepting Western formalism and expressionism in postsocialist China.

In *Fan Dance*, *Shenyun* breathing technique, traditional Chinese zither music, Han Chinese costume, and Chinese silk fan all function as artistic images that help to create an artistic realm of Chineseness. Invoking the emotional and spiritual artistic realms through the formal elements of *gudianwu* to represent traditional Chineseness replaced the socialist realist choreography of narrating Chinese legends. This aesthetic turn in *Fan Dance* catalyzed a paradigm shift in *Shenyun-gudianwu* choreographies in the twenty-first century. After *Fan Dance* won first prize in the fifth NDC, Tong choreographed other competition *gudianwu* solos *The Green Sleeves* (*Lüdai Dangfeng* 2004) and *Dancing in the Rain* (*Biyu Youlan* 2006) and *gudianwu* drama *Goddess of the River Luo* (*Shuiyue Luosheng* 2009) for CODDT. Following the artistic style of *Fan Dance*, BDA choreographer Zhang Yunfeng’s *The Chant of Wind* (*Fengyin* 2001) and *The Sole of Chess* (*Qihun* 2003), and Zhao Xiaogang’s *On Loving the Lotus* (*Ai Lian Shuo* 2006) applied images such as chess and lotus in traditional Chinese literature to evoke aesthetics of Chineseness.

Dance scholar Yan Zhenzhen criticizes *gudianwu* works in the twenty-first century for dismissing *xiqu* style and revealing a “shadow of *Fan Dance*” (Yan 2015, 96).
She argues that *Shenyun-gudianwu* works after *Fan* have had a tendency toward homogenization:

[they] focus on the fluidity of movement, abandon the expression of ‘real’ images, deliberately create an elegant and ethereal dance style, apply a large number of floor movements, and pursue “novel” and “strange” way of exerting bodily power and articulating movements … (Yan 2015, 96).

Yan’s statement affirms a formalist approach in *Shenyun-gudianwu* choreography of the twenty-first century, which emphasizes aestheticism, emotional restraint, and a structural approach to dance and music.

*Shenyun-gudianwu* as a contemporary dance form differs from *xiqu-gudianwu* in socialist China by undertaking a national strategy of exporting Chinese traditional culture against the backdrop of China’s globalization in the 2000s. *Guidanwu* pioneer Tang Mancheng enthusiastically conveys his expectations for new generations of *gudianwu* practitioners. He says,

[I] hope ‘contemporary Chinese classical dance’ will achieve the same global status as Western ballet and modern dance before or earlier than the mid-twenty-first century. Not only should [*gudianwu* practitioners] promote our country’s dance culture, but they should promote it [*gudianwu*] to a treasure of global culture. (Tang 2002, 12)

To fulfill the goal of globalizing *gudianwu* and Chinese culture, *Shenyun-gudianwu* practitioners sought an international and contemporary expression of Chinese classical dance by adopting movements and aesthetics of modern dance and ballet. This hybridity between Chinese and Western dance styles and aesthetics, read through the lens of Bhabha’s notion of hybridity (1990;1994), reflects an ambivalent Chineseness that
undermines gudianwu practitioners’ essentialist claim of reviving Chinese traditional dance.

That said, an examination of the hybridized Shenyun-gudianwu choreography should take into account the concept of self-Orientalism and Occidentalism. While Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism shows how Western imperialism imposes a Westernized image upon its colonial others (1978), historian Arif Dirlik’s “self-Orientalization” and Chen Xiaomei’s Occidentalism focus on self-representation of the Orient itself in the negotiation with a Euro-American centered global order (Chen 1995; Dirlik 1996; Yan 2009; Zhang 2006). By focusing especially on the Chinese orient, Chen’s theory of Occidentalism analyzes how Chinese cultural practitioners creatively revised and manipulated Western imperialist culture for their own use (Chen 1995). As a result of Chinese Occidentalism, an interaction between “the Western construction of China” and “the Chinese construction of the West” keeps operating (Chen 1995, 5).

I suggest that gudianwu practices in the twenty-first century enacted a self-Orientalist approach in which Chinese gudianwu practitioners intended to create a Chinese national dance form that could compete with European classical ballet in the Western-dominated cultural order. In order to internationalize Chinese dance, Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners simultaneously appropriated Western dance forms to modernize Chinese dance and played upon Western idealizations of Chinese culture through yijing aesthetics and theatrical elements to Orientalize their works. Chinese writer and literary critic Lu Xun’s famous phrase “only the national is international,” became a central tenet for many Chinese cultural practitioners in exporting Chinese culture and arts (Lin and François 2018; Lu 1937). In terms of the globalization of gudianwu, Tang alters the
phrase to “the more national [of a dance/culture], the more international [it is]” (Tang 2002, 13). Accordingly, I argue that the creation of yijing and the use of traditional Chinese costumes, props, and music in Shenyun-gudianwu choreography re-appropriates Western stereotypes of traditional Chinese culture. By hybridizing Western modern dance with the symbols of traditional Chinese culture, Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners Orientalized and classicized the contemporary dance form of gudianwu. However, this self-Orientalist approach perpetuates Western imperialism by placing Chinese culture under the gaze of Western hegemony. Through the process of self-Orientalization, Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners promoted a homogenous cultural nationalism that emphasized the Han Chinese culture and blurred the cultural differences of ethnic minorities.

5.1.3 The Adoption of Realism: Sun Ying’s Han-Tang Gudianwu Choreography

Yan’s critique of homogenous and hybrid Shenyun-gudianwu style suggests that “when we erase the dancers’ costume and the dances’ titles, these [Shenyun-gudianwu] dances resemble twins and intertwine with each other” (Yan 2015, 96). In contrast to the criticism toward Shenyun-gudianwu, Yan considers Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu as different from the homogeneous dancing bodies of the Shenyun style. Instead, it is an “aesthetic intelligence” that understands “how [Chinese] ancestors created beauty, historically” (Yan 2015, 99). In other words, Yan admires Sun’s approach to establishing a unique Chinese “dance language” through researching ancient Chinese dance sources without involving Western culture. In addition to pursuing a pure Chinese classical dance, Sun insists on a realist approach in choreographing gudianwu drama (Sun 2006,
Sun’s realism emphasizes a vivid depiction of dance characters and references to ancient Chinese history to cultivate a Chinese national identity. Accordingly, Sun choreographed his first dance drama, *Dancer of the Tongque Stage (Tongque Ji)* for CODDT in 1985 as the culmination of more than three decades’ worth of archeological study of dance sculptures and portrait bricks.  

Sun’s idea for *Tongque Ji* can be traced to the early 1980s, during his return to BDA from political persecution during the Cultural Revolution (Wilcox 2012a). As a part of the first generation of *gudianwu* teachers at BDA, Sun saw limitations in *xiqu* dance since the 1950s and questioned the choreographic output of *xiqu-gudianwu*, such as *Flying to the Moon* (1979) and *Phoenix Tweeting on the Qi Mountain (Feng Ming Qi Shan)* 1981) (Sun 1980 and 1982). He finished writing the story of *Tongque Ji* in 1983 and submitted a drama script and proposal for creating a *gudianwu* style in the manner of the Han Dynasty to the leaders of CODDT. Rather than immediately commencing on choreography, Sun continued his research on ancient Chinese history and collected dance imagery of the Han Dynasty (Sun 1988). After organizing, selecting, and analyzing more than five hundred dance figures of the ancient Han, he drew the selected dance figures on paper and hung them on the walls of his studio (Sun 2009). By immersing himself in the “cultural flavor” and the “aesthetic characteristics” of the dance portraits, Sun embedded these static dance images into his mind. Sun recalls, “when [I] close my eyes, these [dance portraits] become active on the ‘screen’ of my thoughts … [Therefore] when rehearsing, [I] rarely encounter the confusion of not making up a movement” (Sun 2009, 27). Due to his familiarity with the dance images and his knowledge of Han Dynasty
aesthetics, Sun confidently improvised most of the movements during rehearsals without “repeatedly refining the movements in front of mirror” (Sun 2009, 27).

While many Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners questioned Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu style due to his lack of experience in choreography, Tongque Ji received sizeable critical acclaim after its premiere in 1985 (Sun 1988; Sun 2009; Zhou 1985). Sun’s colleague and gudianwu practitioner Luo Zhang praises Tongque Ji as an innovative creation that eschews the hybridity of xiqu-gudianwu, explores a “dance language” that is specifically Chinese, and integrates dynamic movements with the grandiose and pristine cultural aesthetics of the Han Dynasty (Luo 1988). Stage designer Fang Xuling also comments that Sun’s 1985 Tongque Ji was “an aesthetic revolution of gudianwu” that explored national dance based on ancient dance sources without relying on Soviet ballet and xiqu dance (Fang 2015, 93). As a first step, the success of Tongque Ji enabled Sun to continue to develop his unique Chinese classical dance style based on ancient Chinese dances.

After retiring from BDA in 1989, Sun choreographed dances for many historical teleplays and finished designing the course “Chinese Ancient Dance” in 1994. In 1997, BDA gudianwu teacher Wang Peiying invited Sun to stage a full-length performance, Yanhuang Ji (The Rite of Yanhuang), for senior gudianwu students. Yanhuang Ji consists of six dance pieces and each dance is inspired by dance sources from a specific historical period in China, such as Chu Yao (楚腰) during the pre-Qin period (early eighth century BCE), Xiao Huxuan (小胡旋) during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and Ta Ge (踏歌) during the Wei-Jin Dynasties (220-420). The female group dance Ta Ge won the gold medal of the first LACDC in 1998 and secured a
position in the canonical Chinese dance repertoire, even garnering recognition by non-
dance professionals. Following the success of *Yanhuang Ji* and *Ta Ge*, Sun staged
another evening-length dance performance, *Longzu Fengyun* (*Charm of the Dragons*) in
1999, performed by Chongqing Song and Dance Troupe. With the establishment of his
Han-Tang *gudianwu* program at BDA in 2001, Sun’s development of Han-Tang
*gudianwu* technique was concurrent with the refinement of his choreography. In 2007, he
revived *Tongque Ji* for his Han-Tang *gudianwu* students and staged it in March of 2009.

*Tongque Ji* is a two-hour long *gudianwu* drama that tells a love tragedy between
two fictional characters, the heroine Zheng Feipeng and the hero Wei Sinu of the Han
Dynasty. Sun based the story on the actual history of *Tongque Tai* (*Bronze Bird
Terrace*), a place of entertainment built by the prominent warlord Cao Cao in the city of
Ye in 210 CE. In the *gudianwu* plot, Zheng and Wei learned *ta gu wu* (dancing on drums)
together as children. Through learning this dance, they developed affection for one
another. Because of their skillful dancing, Cao selected them to perform on the Bronze
Bird Terrace. However, Cao became attracted to the beauty and talent of Zheng and took
her as one of his concubines. The sudden separation of the two lovers prompted Wei to
break into the palace and challenge Cao; the latter then blinded Wei by stabbing him in
the eyes. When Zheng danced with Wei at a court banquet, she was shocked to find Wei
blinded and refused to perform for Cao. Her defiance infuriated Cao and he demoted
Zheng to a frontier army prostitute. Finally, Zheng was killed for resisting the sexual
abuse at the hands of the military.

Duets between Zheng and Wei are the crux of the performance and occur
throughout different scenes and connect the whole plot. The seven-minute duet in the first
act shows their childhood friendship and the early stages of their love emerging through the drum dance. At the beginning of the duet, Zheng and Wei are shown as children.\textsuperscript{152} Young Wei carries a cowhide drum and a hand drum on his back as he scurries onto the stage, while young Zheng lazily follows him and holds another drum in her hand. Zheng catches up with Wei and impishly puts her drum on his back, which does not bother Wei. As they practice the drum dance, young Wei acts as both teacher and accompanist. He lifts Zheng’s arm to correct her movements and taps beats on his hand drum to lead her steps. However, young Zheng shows her naughtiness by sporadically interrupting Wei’s instructions and stealing his hand drum. Rather than dancing viruously, the two young dancers perform in a pedestrian, playful, and innocent manner, which vividly shows the development of intimacy between the two characters. They give chase and play hide-and-seek behind a tree (a prop on the stage); momentarily, Zheng and Wei emerge from the tree as adult dancers.

The adult Zheng dances proficiently on the drums and Wei is still her best accompanist and dance partner; meanwhile, something beyond friendship develops. Wei still taps his hand drum and leads Zheng’s steps. Following Wei’s rhythm, Zheng bends her knees slightly, rapidly stomps and prances between the drums, and tilts her upper body deep to the side (in the half-moon shape). While swaying her torso, she tosses her white long sleeves above her hand and makes a C-curve shape with her body, and bashfully peeks at Wei. The leaning upper body, raised arms, and C-curve shape are the iconic movements of Sun’s Han-Tang female character. Her specially-designed shoes decorated with wooden beads allow her to use her feet percussively on the drum, producing a variety of crackling and scraping sounds that complement the drumming.\textsuperscript{153}
Zheng’s lively movements and playful characteristics are also enhanced by her bright rose-colored V-neck top and pants. In order to highlight Zheng as his heroine, Wei wears a plain white outfit modestly decorated with a burgundy belt, and always moves lower than or behind Zheng in deep pliés and lunges. When Zheng dances on the drums, Wei looks at her fondly and enthusiastically provides accompaniment by tapping his hand drum. When she dances on the floor, Wei always stands slightly behind her in a supportive role, foreshadowing his resolute protection of her in later acts. At the climax of their duet, Zheng jumps off the drum and holds Wei’s hand and they run across the stage, madly like lovers. They leap together in the air and intertwine with each other in lifts and deep back bends. However, the duet belies the tragic ending in store for the ill-fated pair.

While the 2009 revival of *Tongque Ji* is largely the same tragic love story as the 1985 production, Sun refined the structure of the drama, added female group dances as a supplementary plot device, and emphasized the use of drums and sleeves in solo, duet, and group dances. Most importantly, he revised much of the choreography for Zheng and Wei’s duet. The 2009 version commissioned new Chinese lute music and emphasized the polyphony between Wei’s hand drum and Zheng’s foot drum. Moreover, Sun discarded the lifts and partnering of ballet and instead focused on a more realistic narrative in which the cooperative harmony of Zheng and Wei’s rhythms and movements express their emotional intimacy. In contrast to the effortless and fluid movement of *Shenyungudianwu*, the dancers’ movements in *Tongque Ji* are steady and strong. For instance, in the drum dance, the directional force of Zheng’s movements aims downward: she bends her knees and rhythmically uses her toes, ankle, and sole of her foot to beat the drum. By
assigning the powerful and swift movements to Zheng, Sun creates a free-spirited female of the Han Dynasty, rather than the soft and delicate femininity of xiqu (Sun 1988). This promotion of gender equality and downward movement aesthetic in Tongque Ji also epitomizes Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu technique (illustrated in Chapter 2).

The revival of Tongque Ji in 2009 further clarified Sun’s gudianwu style and his realist approach to choreography. Realism is emphasized in his use of narratives and characters based on Chinese history (Sun 2006 and 2009). Sun says that

the form, style, and cultural aesthetics of gudianwu are made of history, [therefore], from [classroom] training to stage performance, [gudianwu] has to embody a historical form and a sense of antiquity and the subject matter of gudianwu drama has to relate to historical events. (Sun 2006, 276)

By emulating ancient dance and dancers, Sun fiercely opposes Shenyun-gudianwu’s creation of abstract yijing and its embrace of modernist aesthetics and contemporary themes. He critically asks, “is not the emphasis on using classical dance to represent modern life and modern subject matter an idea of destroying classical dance? … The meaning of using the past to serve the present is by no means to turn classical dance into modern dance” (Sun 2006, 275). Sun considers that modern dance is playing with “ethereality, indifference, and transcendence” and it is only “readable for like-minded dance practitioners” (Sun 2006, 277). Gudianwu, however, should be readable by society (Sun 2006). According to Sun, gudianwu represents the spirit of the Chinese national community and has the responsibility to promote “health, aliveness. taste, beauty, and [Chinese] ethnic affinity” as well as an appreciation of “our local culture and historical tradition” (Sun 2006, 277).
Sun’s realist approach to gudianwu reflects Wilcox’s reading of socialist realism. When examining Chinese dance practitioners’ approach to realism in the first half of the twentieth century, Wilcox (2011) reads Chinese realism as a way for intellectuals to assert nationalist sentiments in support of socialist modernism that went against the hegemonic Western modernization. Wilcox cites diverse scholarship on Western and socialist realism (Anderson 1990; Haraszti 1989; Lucács 1973; Wang 1992; Yee 1983) to suggest that realist works reflect “the world’s objective surface” as well as narrate “the deep truths” ingrained in cultural-historical realities (Wang 1992; Wilcox 2011).

Although realist writing and performances functioned as political and ideological propaganda in Maoist China, I argue that Sun’s gudianwu choreography is a contemporary practice of realism rooted in Chinese nationalism and postcolonial sentiment. By mining ancient Chinese dance sources, Sun’s Tongque Ji espoused faithfulness to the historical reality of the Han Dynasty and creatively brought to life the static dance sculptures. The tilted body positions, sudden swerves, and powerfully rhythmic drum dance are unique vocabularies derived from Sun’s historical research and creative reconstruction.154

*Shenyun* and Han-Tang gudianwu’s distinct representations of Chineseness in choreography not only show their dichotomy of artistic styles but also reflect dynamic reactions to postsocialist ideology and politics. In the context of China’s economic reform and globalization, *Shenyun-gudianwu* practitioners default to the norms of Western culture to evaluate the development of classical dance in China. By embracing Western modernization and self-Orientalism, *Shenyun-gudianwu* reflects the ambitions of the CCP towards a cosmopolitan and globalized Chinese culture. Sun’s realist gudianwu
choreography, on the contrary, is closely related to his cultural essentialism as well as anti-colonial practice. By negating the influence of ballet and modern dance, Sun’s gudianwu choreography challenges the asymmetric relationship between “the West and the Rest,” a cultural mode formulated by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996). Moreover, Sun’s idea for a unique Chinese “dance language” also criticizes the self-Orientalist and authoritative Shenyun-gudianwu. At BDA, many Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners hold leadership positions and have more opportunities to earn government funding, recruit students, choreograph large-scale dance dramas, and advertise themselves in the state’s official press and media. Through claiming autonomy in Chinese classical dance choreography, Sun’s Han-Tang style offers an alternative Chineseness that challenges the dominant Shenyun-gudianwu.

5.2 Nationalism and Anti-Nationalism: Gudianwu Choreography in 2010s

In 2014, two years after president Xi Jinping came into power, Xi espoused the revival of traditional Chinese culture through explicit cultural policy in his “Talks at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art” (Xi 2014). Xi states that

China’s excellent traditional culture is the spiritual lifeline of the Chinese nation, is an important source nourishing the socialist core value system, and is a firm basis for us to get a firm foothold within the global cultural surge. To enhance [our] cultural consciousness and cultural confidence is to strengthen the self-confidence of [our socialist] road, [communist] theory, and [authoritarian] regime … We must integrate the conditions of new times with inheriting and carrying forward China’s excellent traditional culture, and inheriting and carrying forward a Chinese aesthetic spirit.155
Xi cites traditional Chinese culture to imbue Chinese citizens with a sense of pride in their nation and calls for rediscovering their national “aesthetic spirit” through literature and art. By recognizing the crucial role that art plays in propaganda, Xi imitates Mao’s cultural policy and his “Yan’an Talks” in 1942 and takes advantage of the imperative of traditional culture within the discourse of nationalism to reinforce the CCP’s government. The re-emphasis on Chinese traditions, including Confucianism, classical poetry, and ancient music and dance, intends to compensate for the ideological vacuum of the three decades following the collapse of the Maoist revolutionist utopia (Liu 2004) and promote chauvinism in the context of Sino-American rivalry.

While reiterating the importance of Chinese traditional culture, Xi’s “Beijing Talk” also constructs Western culture, especially the US popular art forms, as a foreign Other which needs to be sanitized. He notes,

If we treat the foreign with reverence, treat the foreign as beautiful, only follow the foreign, take overseas prize-seeking as the highest goal, blindly following and unsuccessfully impersonating others . . . there is absolutely no future! In fact, foreigners have also come to us seeking inspiration and source materials, with Hollywood making *Kung Fu Panda*, *Mulan*, and other films using our cultural resources … After reform and opening, our country widely studied and borrowed from the world’s arts. Nowadays, circumstances are still the same, and many art forms arise from overseas, such as hip-hop, breakdance, etc., but we should only adopt them if the masses approve of them, while also endowing them with healthy, progressive content.156

The Chinese government’s nationalistic essentialization of the West is defined by Chen as official Occidentalism, in which its ultimate goal is to suppress Chinese people within the country (Chen 1995, 5). Official Occidentalism once found its best expression in Mao’s foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution. During the Cold War era, Mao
demonized the Soviet Union and the US as two superpowers that exploit Third World countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. However, Mao’s Occidentalism aimed at consolidating his “shaky and increasingly problematic position” within the CCP rather than exporting Chinese hegemony in the Third World (Chen 1995, 5-6). With the increasing economic conflict between China and the US since 2018, Xi overemphasizes the Otherness of Western culture to engender hatred towards American culture and augment nationalism within domestic politics.

In this section, I investigate the interplay between gudianwu choreography and heightened nationalism within the context of Xi’s authoritarian cultural policy. I explore how the increasing presence of gudianwu on state-sanctioned television programs and social media turned gudianwu into a national icon for promoting Chinese “cultural confidence” and a unified national identity. Although Xi executes the “severest and the most sustained crackdown” on the free expression of information (Zhao 2016, 92), gudianwu as an embodiment of traditional Chinese culture and an educational tool for enhancing nationalism has been highlighted by official press and media. The process of de-balletization (去芭蕾化) in gudianwu training at BDA, as I discussed in Chapter 2, is also intensified as a response to Xi’s advocacy of Chinese “cultural confidence.” Simultaneously, avant-garde choreographers who are sponsored by national dance projects experimented with the mixture of gudianwu and Western theories of artistic expressions, such as minimalism, modernism, formalist self-reflexivity, and advanced stage technologies. Under the cover of revitalizing traditional Chinese culture, these gudianwu practitioners staked their claim over artistic and identity freedom against the official discourse of nationalism.
5.2.1 Propagandizing Chineseness: the Circulation of Gudianwu on Social Media during the 2010s

Young Scholar with Paper Fan (Zhishan Shusheng 2017) is a seven-minute male group gudianwu piece choreographed by BDA gudianwu teacher Hu Yan and danced by sophomore male students of the gudianwu major. It won Best Choreography in the Academy Award Competition of BDA in 2017 and was nominated for the eleventh Lotus Award of Chinese Dance Competition in 2018. Within this short gudianwu, thirteen male dancers wear long V-neck robes with loose sleeves, bundling their wigs high in a bun. Each of them holds a paper fan, a symbol of a young student or scholar in ancient China, and dances to an orchestral rendition of traditional zither and flute music.

Young Scholar with Paper Fan consists of three sections, “humor” (qu 趣), “elegance” (ya 雅), and “pride” (kuang 狂), and each section portrays a characteristic of young Chinese scholars (Hu 2018). In the first section, the agile flute melody and dancers’ tripping steps depict a group of thirteen humorous and playful teenage scholars. Their childlike entertainment, pedestrian greetings, and swaggering walks bring the innocent and optimistic Chinese young men to life. Hu’s choreography draws upon many movements from xiqu, such as the perky head wobble combines with the fast wave of the fan and the flick of the wrist to open and snap the fan. In contrast to the playful and animated tone of the first section, scholars in the second section apply extended and steady movements to demonstrate the thinking, discussion, and awakening process of study. Rather than flocking together to sweep across the stage as in the first section, the dancers either stand still with a unique posture in relation to their paper fans or exert
conversational movements as duets. When a spotlight focuses on a duet, one dancer flaps his fan and smoothly turns toward to the other dancer; while his moving, his partner closely watches him with a fan slowly waving in his hand and the partner’s deep inhalation and exhalation create a sense of acknowledgment. The soft and fluid tone of the flute music echoes the dim stage lighting and depicts a group of gentle and graceful Chinese young scholars.

To push the dance to a climax, the third section adds strong drum beats and orchestral music, and employs a wider range of motion with sharper movement transitions to demonstrate an ambitious and vigorous Chinese manhood. The dancers spread out on the stage and swiftly plié into a deep lunge. They sweep their fans and arms in a vertical circle around their bodies to create windmill imagery (fenghuo lun, or wind-fire wheel). With the momentum of the sweeping wheel movements, they sharply unfold their fans by making a crisp snapping sound and suspend their movement in a pose with opened fans and uplifted chests. Momentarily, they run and spin around the stage like a tornado while simultaneously fanning and looking up toward the ceiling. They come back to their original spots and sweep their arms with another deep plié and wind-fire wheel. The unison movement sequence ends with all the dancers kneeling down but directing their energy upward. They wave their fans in front of their chests and precisely move their heads along with the rhythm of the fanning. As the flute and marching drum beats crescendo, the movement sequence brings the dance to a climax. Hu recalls that when he choreographed phrases across the stage in the third section, he applied a bigger range and different levels to represent the enthusiastic and free spirit of scholars during the Wei-Jin Dynasty (Hu 2018).
Many *Shenyun-gudianwu* works such as *Fan Dance and Chinese Painting* (2001) and *Young Scholar and Paper Fan* (hereafter *Young Scholar*) use traditional Chinese instruments, costumes (V-neck robes), props (paper fans), and movements from *xiqu* and *wushu* to create an artistic realm of Chineseness. However, different from its *gudianwu* predecessors, the circulation of *Young Scholar* went beyond the arena of the professional dance field and received recognition from the broader public through the internet. On March 11, 2018, the official account of China National Radio (CNR) re-posted a 15-second rehearsal clip of *Young Scholar* taken by a smartphone in a BDA studio on Sina Weibo (a Chinese microblogging website), one of the biggest social media platforms.\(^{158}\) In the post, CNR celebrates the dance as “expressing the unique charm of Chinese classical dance.”\(^{159}\) The original video clip was published by one of the thirteen dancers of *Young Scholar* on China’s TikTok (*Douyin* 抖音 in Chinese) two days before it was circulated on Weibo. In the video, the dancers perform the climactic sequence of the third section. Although the dancers did not wear any makeup or style their hair, and the studio space is limited, their energetic movements and radiant smiles display the jaunty and free characteristics of young Chinese men. To capture most of the studio space and the dancers, the camera was placed at an angle from a downstage corner of the studio. The slightly shaky image and sudden zoom shots show the basic quality and amateur use of the video. In other words, the video neither intended to promote *gudianwu* as a national dance form nor emblematize itself as traditional Chinese culture.

This partial, low-resolution rehearsal video, however, attracted a large number of online users after CNR publicized it. When CNR reposted and commented on the rehearsal clip of *Young Scholar* on Weibo, many official Weibo accounts such as
Guangzhou Daily, Jiangnan Evening, Guangxi News, Gansu Daily, and Beijing Colleges and Universities, as well as countless individual users quoted CNR’s post and re-shared the dance to their own pages. With the rapid and mass dissemination of the video, the hashtag #Young Scholar and Paper Fan# had been searched more than 37,000 times on March 18, 2018, which made it the 33rd trending topic on Weibo’s Hot Search List (HSL) on that day. Many Weibo users were attracted to the coordination of dance with music, the sounds of the fans, and the merging of the traditional young scholar with modern college students. Besides commentary on the beauty of the music and the good-looking dancers, many posts celebrated the dancers’ embodiment of Chineseness and deemed gudianwu a Chinese cultural treasure.

From 2018 to 2021, Young Scholar became representative of traditional Chinese culture, broadcast by a variety of television programmes. In 2019, the dance was shown on the second season of National Treasure, a television program on China Central Television (CCTV) that focuses on introducing Chinese cultural artifacts. To adapt to the length of the program, the seven-minute dance was reduced to four minutes by cutting the entire second section and some phrases from the first section. In addition, the projection of a pre-recorded Chinese ink painting animation on the LED backdrop screen helped to increase the spectacle and the artistic realm of Chineseness of the dance. In 2021, the dance was also performed on Qingming Festival Wonder Tour, a thirty-minute film produced by Henan Television (HNTV) to celebrate Chinese traditional festival, Qingming, or Tomb-Sweeping Day. The program featured song, dance, and music performances that were popular on the internet and performed by internet celebrities. For the first time, Young Scholar was danced and filmed outside the studio and theater and
performed at historic sites in Henan Province, including Songyang Academy, Shaolin Temple, and Laojun Mountain. To engage *gudianwu* with the historic sites and nature, the film added reading, writing, and napping scenes of young scholars and applied a montage of them dancing in front of ancient architecture, in a forest, on a wooden bridge, and in the mountains. The outdoor version of *Young Scholar*, once again, promoted the dance to the HSL on Weibo in April 2021 with the hashtag: #Live-action filming of *Young Scholar and Paper Fan* only used 4 days#.

The rise of social media and video platforms allowed *gudianwu* works and dancers to attract larger audiences beyond the dance field. Many of these *gudianwu* were choreographed for the proscenium stage but television programs focused on promoting traditional Chinese culture made them into well-known screen dances. However, the fad of *gudianwu* on screen is by no means isolated to aesthetic and economic constituents that empower spectators to curate their favorite programs. Screen and popular dance scholar Sherril Dodds argues that

> Although the spectator is empowered in relation to whether or not she or he chooses to watch a programme or film (Brooks, 1993), the work shown on the television network and in public cinemas is subject to broadcasting policy and the discourse of censorship. (Dodds 2001, 3)

Under the strictly censored broadcasting system in Xi’s China, official media such as CNR, CCTV, and HNTV are vehicles of the CCP in spreading its cultural policy and unified national identity (Gorfinkel 2018). Therefore, I argue that the increasing emergence of *gudianwu* on social media and state-sanctioned television programs has
turned *gudianwu* into a national icon for educating “cultural confidence,” promoting Chinese nationalism, and consolidating the power of the CCP.

In addition, I suggest that hybrid *gudianwu* that combines *yijing* of Chineseness and contemporary aesthetics echoes the trend of integrating traditional Chinese culture with innovative artistic creations, known as *guochao* (national trends or “China-chic” in Chinese).\(^{166}\) *Guochao* was originally a subcategory of *chaopai* (trendy brand) and used in brand marketing as a selling strategy for goods that feature Chinese cultural elements (Jing Daily 2021). To promote the idea of “cultural confidence,” *guochao* fashion extends its meaning from traditionally styled consumer goods to traditional art forms in innovation. The popularity of *Young Scholar* mirrors the trend of *guochao*. The spectacle of *Young Scholar* on television screens, which was informed by the incorporation of *gudianwu* and contemporary television codes, conventions, and technologies, has transformed the traditional aesthetics and viewership of *gudianwu* in theaters and to a popular dance culture. While featuring the traditional image of young scholars, the dance portrays humorous, elegant, and unrestrained male characters that resonate with contemporary Chinese youth.

### 5.2.2 An Internal Challenge: Modernism as Individualism and Anti-Nationalism

To cultivate a new generation of *gudianwu* choreographers and advance the emergence of innovative *gudianwu* works, official cultural apparatus in the 2010s initiated many state-sponsored projects such as China National Art Fund (CNAF), Talented Young Dancer and Choreographer Cultivation Program (TYDCCP), Raising Young Artists Project (RYAP), and Youth Incubation Platform of Shanghai International
Art Festival (YIP). Some *gudianwu* choreographers took the advantage of the opportunity to assert their artistic autonomy and individualism through engagement with Western modernism. I employ the English term “modernism” as an ideological and aesthetic concept referring to modernist principles that choreographers explored in dance, such as abstraction, subjectivism, formalism, minimalism, erasure of emotionality, and preference for geometric shapes and planes (Giersdorf 2013). As a product of Western industrialization, modernism has impacted China’s literary and artistic modernization since the early twentieth century. While Maoist China (and many other socialist regimes) despised modernist formalism as antithetical to socialist realism, it re-emerged in Chinese artistic productions when China reopened itself to Western culture in the late 1970s (Kolb 2008). Although it is tempting to characterize Western modernism as imperialistic, it can also be understood as a powerful anti-official discourse and a practice of Occidentalism by Chinese choreographers who assert artistic autonomy and individual identity.

Tian Tian, one of Sun’s first Han-Tang *gudianwu* students, choreographed a sixteen-minute female group dance *Tomb Figures I (Yong I)* in 2017. Tian depicts the revival of eight female tomb figures in glass display cases of museums, starkly illuminated by hard-edged spotlights. Eight female dancers wear tight, long yellow dresses to represent figures excavated from tombs of the Han Dynasty. Many of their gestures resemble the tilted body shapes and movements of Sun’s *Tongque Ji*. For instance, the dancers bend their knees slightly, lean their upper bodies forward, lift their right forearms and lay the sleeves on their right shoulder, while their left arms naturally hang down. Standing directly under their spotlights, the dancers display precise and direct movements: they mechanically lift their arms, suddenly bend their knees, and sharply tilt
their bodies side to side like clockwork toys. The simple drum beat of the music further enhances the ticktock movements of the dancers. Throughout the dance, the dancers barely step outside their respective spotlights, but their upper bodies use a full range of motion. By bending their upper bodies deeply to the side and stretching one foot to the same side, they embody the half-moon shape derived from Sun’s Han-Tang *gudianwu* technique. To add flavor to the mechanical gestures, Tian incorporates swings, mini waves, and contractions of the upper body, repeating the movements with varied rhythmic patterns and changes of direction.

*Tomb Figures I* was one of the choreographies resulting from TYDCCP’s state-sponsored project of cultivating young and talented choreographers. After *Tomb Figures I* in 2017, Tian choreographed *Tomb Figures II (Yong II)* in 2018, *Tomb Figures: Dancing Myself (Young: Dundun Wu Wo)* in 2020, and *Tomb Figures III (Yong III)* in 2021.°° Tian notes in her reflective article that the series of *Tomb Figures* was inspired by her long-term study of Han-Tang *gudianwu* and ancient Chinese clay figures in museums (Tian 2021). In order to “activate the old and past history,” she adopted the body shapes of the historical figurines and applied “modern creative consciousness” to build an imagined ancient China (Tian 2021, 108). While Tian minimizes the influence of ballet and modern dance vocabularies, she nevertheless incorporates modernist aesthetics, such as minimalism and abstraction in *Tomb Figures*. According to Tian, “the adoption of the minimalist aesthetic in [choreographing] movement vocabularies is to build a relationship between the self and the world” (Tian 2021, 113). By emphasizing autonomous artistic creation and international recognition, Tian opposes Lu Xun and *Shenyun-gudianwu* Tang Mancheng’s idea that “the national is international” in
globalizing Chinese culture and stresses that “the individual is international” and “the individual can create the nation” (Tian 2021, 113).

However, Tian also admits that under the appearance of a “moderate,” “minimalist,” and “quaint” movement vocabulary lies the “conjoint” dance gestures (Tian 2021, 113). This choreographic method of switching gestures without using fluid transitions between movements highlights the choreographer’s objective of “maintaining a primitive artistic image and an antique quality [of the dance]” (Tian 2021, 113). “The more flow [of the movements],” says Tian, “the greater [the choreographer’s] imagination, the further [the dance] from its origin” (2021, 113). Tian’s reluctant application of fluid transitions and space changes in Tomb Figures reflects her choreographic strategy of replicating the original gestures of the ceramic figurines and their signified Chineseness. Instead of creating a commonly recognized Chinese classical dance form, she insists on a distinct, contemporary, and liberal choreography in which her dance is both traditional and modern, individual and national, local and international (Tian 2020, 2021). The hybridization between Western modernism and Chinese movement vocabulary challenges a definitive and monist categorization of gudianwu by questioning collective, authoritative, and nationalist ideologies.

In addition to Tian’s self-identification, I suggest that the hybrid avant-garde Chinese dance choreography functions as a powerful anti-official discourse of Occidentalism. By taking advantage of cultural policy advocating for reviving Chinese culture, Chinese choreographers employed Occidentalist gudianwu practices to navigate the severe censorship of free expression in domestic politics and to promote their works domestically and internationally. From 2018 to 2020, Tian brought her Tomb Figures to
many national and international dance festivals such as Shanghai International Art Festival and the Italy Firenze Dance Festival in 2019. Her frequent references to Bulgarian dance critic Yasen Vasilev’s commentary on her work also suggest her desire to modernize and internationalize her choreography (Tian 2020 and 2021; Vasilev 2020).

Besides Tian’s Tomb Figures, many avant-garde choreographers integrated Western modernism with Chinese dance vocabularies in their choreographies. For instance, Zhao Xiaogang, a graduate of BDA who choreographed the Shenyun-gudianwu work On Loving the Lotus (2006), created his own dance company “Xian Wu Ren Dance Studio” in 2009. Zhao’s company focused on using modernist approaches to express traditional Chinese culture (Wilcox 2018a). His gudianwu theater work Lotus (2016), which was one of the artistic projects funded by CNAF in 2015, adopted gestures and costumes of Dunhuang sculptures and combined them with abstract narratives and modern dance movements. Tian and Zhao utilized gudianwu and Chinese dance training as the artistic foundation and adopted Western dance forms and aesthetics to produce a hybrid and individual-styled modern dance. While inadvertently received support from the official cultural apparatus, their Occidentalist choreography destabilized the state’s ideological oppression of free expression and the official discourse of Chinese nationalism.

5.3 Conclusion
In this chapter, I explored the evolution of gudianwu during postsocialist China and its close connection to Western modern dance and modernism. BDA’s *The Yellow River* in 1988 represented the progress of the Shenyun curriculum and initiated the trend of employing modernist movement, aesthetics, and choreographic methods in gudianwu choreography. *Fan Dance and Chinese Painting* in 2001 set a precedent for Shenyun-gudianwu choreography in the twenty-first century, in which modernist abstraction, formalist self-reflexivity, and choreographic methods (“symphonic choreography”) blended with Chinese cultural images to create yijing of Chineseness. The examination of BDA’s *Shenyun-gudianwu* works revealed my second research question of how the hybridity between Chinese and Western dance culture shapes gudianwu choreography. In contrast to the embrace of modernism by Shenyun-gudianwu, Sun’s Han-Tang gudianwu drama *Tongque Ji* (1985; 2009) insisted on a realist approach to oppose the reliance on Western ballet and modern dance in choreographing gudianwu drama. While Han-Tang gudianwu ceased to exist as an independent dance major at BDA after 2016, debates over the authenticity of Shenyun and Han-Tang continued in academic circles. Under Xi’s cultural policy of reviving Chinese traditional culture since 2014, gudianwu functions as both a cultural representative with global circulation and an Occidentalist practice for claiming artistic autonomy amongst avant-garde choreographers.

The diverse responses by gudianwu practitioners to Western modernism reveal ambivalence about the adoption of Western paradigms in Chinese contexts as well as a fluid Chinese identity. By focusing on the hybrid gudianwu practice in the twenty-first century, this chapter also investigated my third research question of how gudianwu practitioners promote Chineseness in dance and how some of the critics and
choreographers are skeptical about the extent to which gudianwu can render a pure Chineseness. While the engagement with Western modernism in fashioning traditional Chinese culture can suggest conformity with Western imperialism, I interpret it as a discursive practice of Occidentalism and self-Orientalism. Chinese gudianwu choreographers’ distinct ways of employing traditional Chinese culture in dance creation allow them to navigate official ideology, achieve artistic individualism, and modernize Chinese traditional culture.
CHAPTER 6
DANCING OTHERNESS: CHINESE BALLET CHOREOGRAPHY IN POSTSOCIALIST CHINA

Chinese dance pioneers and ballet practitioners have adopted Chinese stories and dance forms in choreographing Chinese ballets since the early People’s Republic of China (PRC). While some cultural critics criticized the application of a short tutu and pointe technique in Dai Ailian’s Peace Dove (1950) as anti-socialist during that time, many ballet practitioners now regard Peace Dove as the first Chinese ballet and an experiment of Chinese dance drama by gudianwu practitioners in postsocialist China (Li and Lü 1987; Ma 2008; Yang 2010). Under the direction of Soviet ballet expert Petr Gusev, students at Beijing Dance School (BDS) staged a large-scale Chinese ballet titled Fish Beauty in 1959. By casting students from both ballet and Chinese dance programs and employing movement vocabularies of Chinese opera (xiqu), ballet, and Chinese ethnic minority dances, the ballet was also one of the earliest experiments of hybrid gudianwu curriculum. During the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the revolutionary ballets Red Detachment of Women (1964) and The White-Haired Girl (1965) dominated China’s dance stages by presenting revolutionary propaganda. Although the choreography used ballet technique, these two works also revealed the hybridity of Chinese dance and ballet, and crystalized dance practitioners’ efforts to develop a national dance form in the 1950s. The development of Chinese ballet in Maoist China then informed Chinese ballet choreography in early postsocialist China.
As a result of Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening Up” policy, China’s ballet companies and conservatories placed emphasis on inviting Euro-American ballet masters, learning different ballet styles, and staging Western classical and contemporary ballet repertoire since the late 1970s. For instance, European danseur William Martin Viscount was the first Western choreographer invited by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and National Ballet of China (NBC) in 1979 to stage the European ballet Napoli (1842). Postsocialist China also witnessed a boom in cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, especially the United States. Chinese ballet dancers brought Red Detachment of Women to American audiences in 1978 along with other Chinese performing artists. BDA teachers and dancers observed the first International Ballet Competition in Mississippi, visited the Martha Graham Company, and watched performances of New York City Ballet in 1979; in 1986, NBC toured ten cities in the US for ten weeks, performed Red Detachment of Women, Swan Lake, and Giselle and first encountered Balanchine’s style at the School of American Ballet. In response to Chinese dancers’ visits, US ballet companies, such as Boston Ballet (1980), Jerome Robbins Dance Company (1981), Washington Ballet (1985), and American World Star Ballet (1985), brought classical and contemporary ballets to Chinese audiences. English and American ballet masters such as Belinda Wright, Anton Dolin, Ben Stevenson, and Norman Walker were invited to teach masterclasses and rehearse Western ballet repertoire for Chinese ballet dancers.

While learning and performing Western ballets, China’s ballet conservatories and companies (especially NBC) persistently created ballets with distinctive Chinese national characteristics, echoing Lisa Rofel’s model of “cosmopolitanism with Chinese
Characteristics” (explored in Chapter 3). Soon after the Cultural Revolution, BDA teachers choreographed short Chinese ballet pieces such as Lin Lianrong’s *Hongyan Qingsong* (1976 红岩青松) and Yin Peifang, Zhangxu, and Sun Tianlu’s *Chi Zhu Ping* (1978 赤竹坪); NBC also restaged *Fish Beauty* in 1979. In the 1980s, NBC ballet choreographers choreographed ten new Chinese ballets, such as Jiang Zuhui’s *Zhufu* (*The New Year’s Sacrifices* 祝福 1980), Li Chenlian and Wang Shiqi’s *Lin Daiyu* (林黛玉 1982), and Shu Junjun’s *Lan Huahua* (兰花花 1988), which exceeded the number of Western ballets they performed. In the twenty-first century, the increasing establishment of local ballet companies facilitated the production of full-length Chinese ballets, such as Liaoning Ballet Company’s *Hua Mulan* (花木兰 2018) and Suzhou Ballet Company’s *Tangyin* (唐寅 2017). Besides choreographing ballets based on traditional Chinese stories, Chinese ballet choreographers also experimented with plotless contemporary ballet, such as *The Yellow River* (1999) by Chen Zemei, *Mechanician* (*Yanshi* 偃师 2014) by Wang Sizheng, and *Match* (*Yi* 奕 2022) by Sun Haifeng. While BDA ballet practitioners also choreographed a full-length ballet called *Family* (*Jia* 家) in 1983, ballet teachers at China’s dance conservatories focused on developing professional dancers through classroom training and polishing students’ performance skills through learning Western ballet repertoire (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board 1997). In postsocialist China, NBC and other Chinese ballet companies undertook a mission to produce Chinese ballet repertoire that represented a unique Chinese identity.

As the only ballet company directly led by the Ministry of Culture of PRC, NBC’s ballet practices play a significant role in reflecting CCP’s cultural policies and
China’s sociocultural transformations. In this chapter, I focus on NBC’s Chinese ballet choreography during the postsocialist era to explore my second and third research questions: how has Chinese dance influenced ballet choreography and the ways in which ballet bodies interrogate Chinese identity through hybrid Chinese ballet? I define Chinese ballet as hybrid because of its combination of Chinese and Western dance forms, the adaptation of Chinese stories into Western concert dance structures, and the collaboration between Chinese and Western artists across the fields of dance, film, music, and theatre. I argue that the hybridity of Chinese ballet in postsocialist China reflects a two-way otherness: by recognizing their alienation from European ballet, Chinese ballet practitioners attempt to localize the Western art form through a self-Orientalist approach and, by doing so, they also downplay the agency of Chinese dance in integrating and representing Chinese identity in the process of Sinicizing ballet. As I have argued throughout, ballet practices in China are at the center of tensions between China’s globalization and localization. Chinese ballet choreography is therefore mobilized by a crisis of cultural homogenization brought about by globalization, while simultaneously reinforcing the Western Orientalist gaze and exoticized Chinese culture. To elucidate the interactions between hybrid Chinese ballet and postsocialist modernization and globalization, I draw upon literary scholar Liu Kang’s (2004) analysis of China’s globalization, Said’s (1978) theory of Orientalism, and Dirlik’s (1996 and 1997) concept of self-Orientalism.

To explore the development of Chinese ballet choreography in the last two decades of the twentieth century, in the first section, I draw upon my archival research of Jiang Zuhui’s New Year’s Sacrifices (1980) as a representation of Chinese ballet...
choreography in the 1980s. By analyzing the choreographic process and movements, I articulate how it inherits socialist ballet legacies and transcends the aesthetic of revolutionary ballets toward Chinese modernism. I argue that NBC’s Chinese ballet choreography experienced a brief renaissance in the 1980s but then stagnated in the 1990s. I examine this period of NBC’s ballet activity to demonstrate how postsocialist reform facilitated ballet dancers’ pursuit of Westernization and limited innovation in Chinese ballet. In the second section, I examine NBC’s full-length ballet *Raise the Red Lantern* (2001/2003), directed by the film artist Zhang Yimou. Through choreographic and textual analysis, I explore the ways in which the ballet builds on Chinese and Western traditions to reinforce or interrogate the dichotomy of the hegemonic Western other and the localized Chinese self in global cultural communication.

6.1 Revealing the Past, Investigating the Present: Transition of Chinese Ballet Choreography from Socialist to Postsocialist China

When examining the concept of socialist legacies or “red legacies,” Chinese literature and culture scholars Jie Li and Enhua Zhang state that socialist legacies are “cultural artifacts” or “remainders and reminders” of the Communist Revolution which can be found in inherited aesthetic forms and practices of the post-Mao era (Li 2016, 2). Wilcox (2018a) also draws upon Li and Zhang’s statement and argues that Chinese dance inherits many aspects of socialist legacies of the early Maoist period, such as the persistence of developing a national dance form and large-scale dance dramas through researching “local imagery, sound, and movement vocabularies” and the employment of dance as a symbol of friendship during intercultural communications (Wilcox 2018a,
While Wilcox considers the “redness” of Chinese dance is associated with a pluralistic dance culture in the pre-Cultural Revolution, my examination of the “distorted continuation of revolutionary ballet” (Chapter 1) suggests a lineage of cultural hybridity throughout socialist dance practices. In this section, I examine how the hybridization between Chinese dance and Western ballet as a significant component of socialist legacies informs early postsocialist ballet choreography.

### 6.1.1 Revealing the Past: Chinese Ballet Choreographers in Maoist China

Since the introduction of ballet by Soviet experts to the newly founded BDS in 1954, both Chinese dance and ballet practitioners experimented with integrating Chinese movement vocabularies and aesthetics with ballet technique. For instance, BDS gudianwu teacher Li Chenglian, who trained in martial characters (wusheng or wudan) in Beijing Opera since he was eleven years old, choreographed a ballet duet *Date* while taking Viktor Ivanovich Tsaplin’s Choreographer Training Class in 1955 (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board. 1997). Li’s colleague, gudianwu pioneer Li Zhengyi, recalls that although Li Chenglian learned wudan in xiqu, he was interested in ballet and willing to refine traditional xiqu movements into gudianwu technique (Li and Li 2017, 67). In the same year, BDS ballet teachers Qu Hao and Chen Lun choreographed another ballet duet *Jump Ropes* (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board. 1997). During the second Choreographer Training Class from 1957 to 1959, Li Chenglian and two Chinese folk dance teachers Li Chengxiang and Wang Shiqi became Gusev’s assistants and participated in the choreography of *Fish Beauty* in 1959; these three teachers later became choreographers at BDS Attached Ballet Ensemble. Li Chengxiang credits
Gusev with the idea to experiment with combining Chinese classical dance and Western ballet; Gusev encouraged all of his students in the choreography class to collaborate on *Fish Beauty* (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). When choreographing a fight scene between the fish beauty and the flame faeries in the third act, Li Chengxiang says that he incorporated fighting movements from Beijing Opera to highlight a Chinese national character and focused on transforming the abrupt *xiyu* movements into dance vocabulary to emphasize the climax of the ballet (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018).

The early experimentation of cultural hybridity in ballet and Chinese dance choreography at BDS contributed to the localization of ballet and the emergence of *Red Detachment of Women* (hereafter *Red*) in 1964. One of the choreographers of *Red*, Jiang Zuhui studied Korean dance, modern dance, and ballet with Choe Seung-hui in Korea from 1948 to 1950 (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018; Wilcox 2018d). She later joined Choe’s Dance Research Course at the Central Academy of Drama (CAD) in 1951 and learned body gestures, steps, hand movements, sleeve and sword dances with *xiyu* masters such as Han Shixiang and Ma Xianglin. After studying at BDS for a year in 1955, she was assigned to finish a five-year course in Choreography at Moscow State Theatre Arts in the Soviet Union. During her time in Moscow, she not only took choreography, ballet, and Russian folk dance classes, but also studied music analysis, character construction, as well as history and theory courses in dance, music, art, theater, and literature. Jiang says that her choreography teacher in the Soviet Union encouraged her to innovate and choreograph dance works with Chinese themes (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). In her second-year study in Moscow, Jiang collaborated with Zhu
Jianer, a Chinese student who studied at the Music Academy of the same school. Together, they choreographed a Chinese-themed ballet *The Mortal Thoughts of a Nun* (*Sifan* 1957) based on a repertoire of Kun Opera. In this dance, Jiang first experimented with transforming ballet vocabularies by integrating Chinese dance movements.

After graduating from the school of the Soviet Union in 1961, Jiang returned to China and became a choreographer for the BDS Ballet Ensemble. When choreographing *Notre Dame de Paris*, Jiang read Victor Hugo’s novel *Notre Dame de Paris* and researched the history of medieval Europe. She found that the acrobatic movements in images of European jugglers resembled some movements in Chinese dance. Thus, “to recover the life of the medieval [Europe]” and “to approach life [of the Chinese],” she abandoned many ballet techniques in the female variations of the second act and included Chinese dance movements and props into her choreography (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). This idea of “approaching and experiencing the lives” of dance characters has become an artistic strategy of dance choreographers in socialist China. For instance, Li Chengxiang spent almost two years in Tibet from 1951 to 1953 and learned a variety of Tibetan dances including *reba* (热巴 a drum dance), *xianzi* (弦子), *guozhuang* (锅庄), and tap from local dancers. Based on his fieldwork in Tibet, he choreographed a group Tibetan dance *Friendship* in 1954 and won the silver award at the fifth World Youth Festival in 1956.

When conceptualizing the socialist practice of fieldwork (*caifeng* 采风), Wilcox states that “for dancers in socialist China, the socialist ideological imperative to ‘experience life’ and ‘learn from the worker, peasant, and soldier masses’ helped bring about a new creative practice for dancers, namely, fieldwork” (Wilcox 2012, 6). While
the bodily experience of fieldwork became a politically mandated practice for socialist artists and intellectuals to echo Mao’s instruction of “entering deeply into life,” it was also “a source of meaningful artistic practice and inspiration for those whose own lives it indelibly shaped” (Wilcox 2012, 2). This idea of “experiencing life” to create realist stories and characters also inspired socialist ballet choreographers in the process of Sinicizing ballet. In 1963, to reflect the political “three transformations,” “revolutionization,” “nationalization,” and “massification,” in music and dance, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai instructed BDS Ballet Ensemble to choreograph a ballet based on a revolutionary theme such as the Russian October Revolution (1917) or the French Revolution (1789-1799). By recognizing the time constraints and the difficulty of doing fieldwork abroad, Vice Minister of Culture Lin Mohan proposed using a revolutionary story in China and Li Chengxiang came up with the idea of adapting the film Red into a full-length ballet.

Red takes place on Hainan Island and tells the story of maidservant Wu Qinghua and her escape from the violence and torture by the feudal landlord Nan Batian. With the help of the hero Hong Changqing (who represents the CCP), Wu later becomes a soldier of the Red Detachment of Women. In 1964, the production team led by Li Chengxiang stayed in Hainan for two months to experience the life of the local people. Jiang Zuhui recalls that they visited the Coconut Village, interviewed local females, and learned Hainan “Li” (黎) folk dance. Jiang recognized the similarities between Russian and Hainan folk dance and fused the two dance forms when choreographing a celebration scene between the military and civilians in the fourth act. Jiang says the fusion of Western and Chinese folk dances enriches ballet vocabulary and emphasizes the
characteristics of socialist China. She confirms that “going deep into [local] life had determined our choreography of the ballet, especially its structure, as well as our choreographic mentality. If [we] just stayed at home and worked on the script, maybe it will not be as good as it is now” (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 340). In addition, Li Chengxiang notes that when dancers portrayed the characters of Wu, Hong, and Nan, they frequently incorporated movements from Chinese folk, ethnic, and military dances (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). Li coined this ongoing choreography by dancers a “second-time creation (二度创作),” which distinguishes peasant and soldier characters in Red from princesses and fairies in Western ballet (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). Stage designer Ma Yunhong replicated the unique scenery of Hainan in the ballet, such as the coconut grove in the first act, ceiba trees in the second act, and the Wanquan River in the fourth act.

Although Mao’s wife Jiang Qing later modified Red and designated it one of the Model Plays to impose the revolutionary hegemony, the original choreography was based on the choreographic team’s rigorous discussion and fieldwork which reflected their aspirations of Sinicizing ballet. Li Chengxiang and Jiang Zuhui’s choreographic process reveal their harmonious collaboration and enthusiastic fieldwork experience. As Wilcox concludes, the highly physical aspect of fieldwork … entails corporeal displacement and associated emotional and physical consequences,” in which “dancers have often found themselves ‘moved’ (both literally and figuratively) by their experiences during fieldwork trips” (Wilcox 2012, 9). After the successful experimentation with the revolutionary ballet, the three choreographers of Red also choreographed a group ballet Seamstresses (Fangzhi Nugong) and staged it in May of 1966.
Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the CCP revolutionary team denounced many dance practitioners as “bourgeois reactionaries” who were then sentenced to manual labor in the countryside. Jiang Zuhui recalls that China’s first white swan Bai Shuxiang could dance the difficult and physically demanding solo of the heroine in *Red*; but after Bai was denounced as a revolution reactionary, the dancer who replaced her had less physical ability and modified the solo which weakened the dance’s artistic expression (Jiang 2018). After 1968, the three choreographers of *Red* were also criticized as “capitalist roaders” (走资派) by Jiang Qing and ceased to work at BDS Ballet Ensemble. In the mid-1970s, due to the urgent need for professional dancers, some ballet practitioners and choreographers such as Bai and Li were allowed to return to Beijing and continue their professional work. In 1973, Wang Shiqi, Wang Xixian, and Li Chenglian co-choreographed *Children of the Grassland* (*Caoyuan Ernü*), which combined ballet with Mongolian dance vocabularies; at the same time, Li Chengxiang, Xu Jie, and Guo Bingling adapted BDS *Red Sister* and choreographed *Ode to Yimeng* (*Yimeng Song*). During the late Cultural Revolution, BDS choreographers adapted one of the Chinese Opera Model Plays, *The Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuan Shan* 1975) into a ballet.

With the fall of the “Gang of Four” (a political faction led by Jiang Qing) in 1976, Chinese artists were liberated from the decade-long suppression of artistic innovation and as a result, diverse dance choreographies emerged in this period. In 1977, BDS teachers Zhang Dunyi, Wu Fukang, and Huang Bohong adopted the Danish fairy tale *The Little Match Girl* (1845) by Hans Christian Andersen and choreographed a full-length ballet with the same name. This work became the first ballet based on Western literature.
choreographed and performed by Chinese artists (Guo 2005). In BDS Ballet Ensemble, Wang Shiqi and three others co-choreographed Xiangzhang Qu (1977), a ballet that featured the story, dance, and costumes of Miao (苗族) minorities in southwest China. Li Chenglian and Li Chengxiang led a group of choreographers who created The Scorching Sun (Jiao Yang 1977), which praised Mao’s first wife Yang Kaihui who died in 1903.

Many literary and art critics consider the Cultural Revolution a catastrophe in which only a few artists were allowed to continue their work for Jiang Qing’s Model Plays (Wilcox 2018a). However, I suggest that the ongoing choreography and performance of the revolutionary ballets during the Cultural Revolution, albeit weaponized as political propaganda, provided an opportunity for dance practitioners to continue their work under intense political censorship and allowed a relatively smooth transformation of ballet in postsocialist China. Ballet choreographers such as Li and Jiang have contributed to the localization of ballet through integrating their expertise in Chinese dance and their lived experiences during fieldwork. This innovative and compatible fusion between ballet, xiqu, Chinese folk dance, and military dance promoted Red as nostalgic for the socialist legacy and a successful experiment of Chinese ballet. As the backbone of China’s ballet training and choreography, socialist ballet practitioners continued to cultivate ballet dancers and choreograph Chinese-themed ballets in the 1980s.

6.1.2 Investigating the Present: Inheriting the Socialist Legacy and the Innovation of Individual Expression
With the end of the Cultural Revolution, BDS Ballet Ensemble was reconstructed as NBC in 1979 (Niu et al. 2002). Meanwhile, many other ballet ensembles were established in the big cities of China, such as Shanghai Ballet Company (SBC; 1978) and Liaoning Ballet Ensemble (1981). To eradicate the hyperactive revolutionary aesthetics of the revolutionary ballet, these ballet ensembles focused on staging Western ballet repertoire as well as choreographing new Chinese ballets based on modern Chinese literature. At NBC, Jiang choreographed Zhufu (*The New Year’s Sacrifices*) based on modern writer and literary critic Lu Xun’s story of the same name in 1980, and Li Chengxiang and Wang Shiqi choreographed *Lin Daiyu* (1982) based on Cao Xueqin’s classical novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou Meng* 1791). Simultaneously, SBC choreographers also adapted Lu Xun’s short stories and choreographed *The Soul* (*Hun* 1980) *Regret for the Past* (*Shangshi* 1981), and *Ah Q* (1981) in the celebration gala of Lu Xun’s Centennial Birthday (1981). In 1983, BDA gudianwu teacher Tang Mancheng and ballet teacher Lin Lianrong co-choreographed *Family (Jia)* based on Ba Jin’s novel *Jia* (家 1933).

This trend of adapting modern Chinese literature into artistic works responded to the self-reflexive movement and aspirations for Chinese modernization by both Chinese intellectuals and the CCP leaders. During the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists in 1979, writers and artists firmly indicted the Gang of Four and called for a democratic and liberal environment for creativity in post-Mao China (Goldblatt 2016). In his Congratulatory Message on the Congress, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping called upon the co-existence of literary “criticism and anti-criticism” as well as “praising the good and exposing the bad” with the aims of education, enlightenment, and aesthetic
appreciation (Gao 2016). Deng also demanded an end to the designation of “literature and art as propaganda” and encouraged Chinese intellectuals to work for China’s socialist modernization through developing diverse artistic works by learning from the West (Gao 2016; Goldblatt 2016). Deng’s Congratulatory Message in 1979 set an optimistic tone toward China’s literature and art and provided a relatively liberal environment for literary and artistic creation in postsocialist China. Within the context of post-revolutionary reflexivity and Chinese modernism, the 1980s witnessed a blossoming of Chinese ballet repertoire that focused on individual expression.

Jiang’s Zhufu emerged in the context of learning from the West and the revival of artistic creation in the early 1980s. The original story of Zhufu came from a short story written by Lu Xun in 1924. It tells the tragic life of a character known as Xianglin’s wife (Xianglin sao), a widow who was kidnapped by her ex-mother-in-law to marry the peasant He Laoliu on a mountain. Although she fought, cried, and attempted suicide, she surrendered and eventually delivered a son a year later. While she began to accept her new life with He and their son, He died of illness and her son was eaten by a wolf in the mountain. The loss of her son destroyed her mentally and she repeatedly told the story of her son’s death to the villagers, blaming it on herself. Xianglin’s wife spent the rest of her life ridiculed by the villagers for marrying twice. Her landlord disdained her and despite employing her as a servant, forbade her to touch the sacrificial offerings because of her misfortune. Xianglin’s wife ended up begging for survival and repeatedly told others about her struggles. She died alone on the street during a freezing night while everyone else celebrated the New Year’s sacrifice to the sound of firecrackers. Lu Xun portrayed the tragedy of Xianglin’s wife to reveal the cruel patriarchy of conventional
Confucianism and the blind obedience of the masses to traditional superstition to satirize remnants of Chinese feudalism and the failure of the Republican revolution in the 1910s (Gardam 2013). As one of the first generation of modern Chinese writers to receive a Western education overseas, Lu’s writing (including *Zhufu*) was published in *New Youth* magazine and evoked Chinese modernization during the New Cultural Movement (discussed in Chapter 1).

When adapting *Zhufu* into ballet, Jiang reversed the stereotypical image of Xianglin’s wife in the film version of *Zhufu* (1956), where she was portrayed as a middle-aged, robust house servant and white-haired, deranged street beggar. Jiang was inspired by her mother Ding Ling, a celebrated contemporary of Lu Xun, and thus depicted Xianglin’s wife as a young, beautiful, and elegant woman from the Yangtze River delta in southern China (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). Instead of copying the dismal mood throughout the literary work, she lengthened happier scenes and shortened but heightened the tragedy of Xianglin’s wife. For instance, the evening-length ballet begins with a lively female group dance in a town on the Yangtze River delta. The small stone bridge, Hui-styled buildings constructed with white walls and black tiles (painted on the background canvas), and a wooden boat that transports the dancers render an idyllic life for Xianglin’s wife. The group of dancers and the heroine wear cotton headscarves with cropped pants and simulate hand-washing clothes, squeezing the water, and using their arms to wipe the sweat from their brows. The pedestrian movements are embellished by the dancers’ *pointe* technique, arabesque turns, and gestures, and accompanied by a variation of the traditional southern Chinese song *Jasmine Flower*. The
delightful first act ends with a dramatic twist in which Xianglin’s wife is kidnapped by her former mother-in-law which leaves the female villagers in shock and sorrow.

In the first half of the second act, male and female dancers perform as peasants and cheerfully give blessings to He Laoliu for his upcoming wedding with Xianglin’s wife. By adopting movements from Chinese folk yangge (秧歌), the male dancers wear linen shirts and red ballet tights, gathering at the center of the stage. Their movements blend technical tricks from wushu, cross steps from Drum Yangge (guzi yangge 鼓子秧歌), kneel turns from Uyghur dance, and ballet chaîné turns and grand jeté leaps. Meanwhile, the female dancers’ steps and props also draw upon Anhui folk dance Flower-drum Lantern (花鼓灯) in which the dancers hold red fans and handkerchiefs in each hand and skip as they circle around the male dancers. Jiang’s choreography tactfully fuses ballet pointe technique with Chinese folk dance steps in creating a unique Chinese-styled ballet. The enthusiastic and joyful dance scene continues when the bride comes on stage with a red veil covering her face. In a traditional Han Chinese wedding, the groom lifting the bride’s veil to uncover her face is an important moment. To dramatize this event, Jiang choreographed a threefold unveiling. While the first two unveilings failed to show the bride’s face, when He uncovers the red veil for the third time everyone is astonished to see Xianglin’s wife, bound and gagged, taking in her surroundings with terror and rage. The unveiling creates a stark contrast between the exuberant wedding and the intense resistance of Xianglin’s wife, concluding the scene with a dramatic conflict, just like the end of the first act.

While the rest of the second act only features Xianglin’s wife and He in solos and a duet, Jiang adopted a realist approach to vividly portray a complicated physical and
emotional struggle between the heroine and hero. To fight against the marriage, Xianglin’s wife executes expansive windmill turns (*fanshen*) and waist circulations (*shuanyao*) to show her continual resistance; and the dramatic moment is heightened by her hitting her head on a desk in an attempt at suicide. The music and the dancers’ movement suddenly became silent and the dancers realistically act out the heroine’s coma and the hero’s shocked reaction. With a dim mood, He takes care of Xianglin’s wife’s injury. In He’s solo, his balletic spins and jumps and the amplified backbends from *gudianwu* signify his psychological frustration and struggle. He grasps the rope that is used to tie the heroine and repeatedly swirls his body in turns across the stage. Sometimes he holds the rope tightly to show his unwillingness to give up the marriage, while he also pushes the rope away from his body to demonstrate his psychological struggle of setting the heroine free. After Xianglin’s wife wakes up, the duet between the dancers also differs from conventional ballet duets by adding props and dancers’ acting skills to express their movements. He determinedly offers Xianglin’s wife a red flower to stop her from leaving, but the heroine’s averted eyes and rejective arms push him away. He is disappointed by Xianglin’s wife’s action and decides to let her go. By handing her a bag and turning his back on her, He sadly points his arm behind him as if to say “please go before I change my mind.” Simultaneously, Xianglin’s wife is surprised by her freedom; she takes the bag and slowly walks away, while gratefully looking back at He. In response to He’s struggle and desperation, the heroine hesitates, moving back and forth with tiny and fast *bourrée* steps on pointe. A moment later, she throws her bag and lunges toward He. To an uplifting melody, the scene ends with an exhilarating ballet duet in which the hero offers the red flower again and the two dancers interact in intimate lifts.
and spins. They look deep into each other’s eyes and together turn their heads towards the far horizon, optimistic for their new life together.¹⁹¹

In Lu Xun’s story, the author did not describe He Laoliu or the wedding in great detail. Readers only get a glimpse of the character and the marriage through the villagers’ gossip. In the ballet *Zhufu*, however, Jiang expanded upon this by creating a dramatic contrast between the joyful wedding and Xianglin’s wife’s resistance, and portraying the struggle between Xianglin’s wife and He. Jiang explains,

the second scene primarily shows Xianglin’s wife as a victim of feudal ethics in which she herself thinks that she should not get married again. But Mr. Lu Xun once said, there is no woman who does not want to marry again. Therefore, the reason she wants to be with He Laoliu afterward is because He Laoliu moves her, allows her to leave, gives her the bag, [and] provides her with medicine. She sees such a kind person and she cannot bear to let him suffer. Throughout the duet, with a few transitions, I united the two kind hearts together. (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018)

Chinese dance critics label Jiang’s realist and exquisite choreography with its emphasis on the characters’ mental development as a “psychological depiction” (Yang 1997; Yu 2019b). Ballet critic Yang Shaopu argues that the psychological depiction in *Zhufu* is an expression of Chineseness: the progression of the characters’ emotions reveals layers of their interior feelings expressed through their movements, which plays a tremendous role in the progression of the plot (Yang 1997). To build upon Yang’s argument, I suggest that the psychological depiction in *Zhufu* hybridizes a reserved and indirect Chinese communication style (Gao, et al. 1996) with the vocabulary of Western ballet and the Western ideology of individualism to promote female liberation and Chinese modernization. By assigning each movement a unique Chinese meaning to show the
gradual psychological transformation of the couple, Jiang’s choreography render a classical ballet with Chinese characteristics.

Yang also considers that the emphasis on individual expression in *Zhufu* reflects the repression of Chinese intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution and their introspection as well as rebellion toward the revolutionary Model Plays (Yang 1997). Jiang mentions that the direct motivation for choreographing *Zhufu* derived from her own struggle during years of rural labor (Yang 1997). The portrayal of Xianglin’s wife’s tragic life, therefore, was a projection of Jiang’s own suffering. By comparing the blind obedience of the masses to superstition in feudal China to revolutionary fetishism, which both caused the repression of female/human individualism, Jiang criticized the cruel and ignorant Cultural Revolution. The choreographic strategy of applying physical and facial expressions to reveal the inner feelings of characters and advance the plot can also be seen in many other ballet works. For instance, SBC’s *Hun* which also depicts the story of Xianglin’s wife, questions whether a person has a soul after death; NBC’s *Lin Daiyu* transcends socialist realism and displays tragic love through a fantasy of Lin; and BDA’s *Family* even reduces the plot and highlights each characters’ psychological journey through a non-traditional ballet structure and achronological narrative (Hu 2016; Yang 1997). Besides ballet, artists of painting, film, and theatre also explored innovative works that disengaged from revolutionary subject matter and focused on portraying complicated individual characteristics.192

While the individual psychological ballet in the 1980s set apart from the propagandist revolutionary ballet (Yang 1997), I argue that Chinese ballets of the 1980s nevertheless aligned with socialist ballet choreography in terms of the integration of
Chinese dance, realism, and fieldwork. As I discuss above, ballet choreographers in socialist China such as Jiang and Li played a major role in ballet companies and in Sinicizing ballet in early postsocialist China. Their versatile background in both ballet and Chinese dance, in tandem with their fieldwork, are all socialist legacies that continued to influence their choreography. Before choreographing the first act of *Zhufu*, Jiang went to Lu Xun’s hometown of Shaoxing in Zhejiang to observe characteristics and behaviors of women in the Yangtze River delta (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). The small stone bridges, singers on paddle boats, and women who wash their clothes at the water’s edge all inspired Jiang’s choreography, character description, and costume design (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). Her extensive knowledge on Chinese folk dance also allowed her to refine unique characteristics and details from various Chinese folk dances and seamlessly blend them with ballet. With the characteristics of compatible hybridity between Chinese dance and ballet vocabularies, the method of fieldwork, and the Chinese brand of realist and individualist expression, post-Maoist Chinese ballet succeeded and transcended the socialist ballet repertoire.

6.1.3 Investigating the Present: Pursuit of Cosmopolitan Culture and Problems of Chinese Ballet Choreography in the 1990s

The prosperity of Chinese ballet choreography of the postsocialist twentieth century lasted only a decade. In the second half of the 1980s, NBC choreographer and BDS alumni Shu Junjun choreographed *Miguang Trilogy* (1986) and *Lan Huahua* (1988); Cao Zhiguang, among the first-generation of Chinese ballet dancers, adapted the
Beijing Opera *Picking Up a Jade Bracelet* (*Shi Yuzhuo*) into a ballet duet of the same name (1986); and in 1989, Jiang Zuhui, Li Chengxiang, and Jiang Weihao co-choreographed a full-length drama, *Yang Guifei* (*Concubine Yang*). In the 1990s, NBC focused on staging Western ballet repertoire such as *Sleeping Beauty* (1995), *Swan Lake* (1996), and *Theme and Variations* (1998), and the only Chinese ballet choreography that continues in the repertoire is the ballet version of *The Yellow River* (1999) by Chen Zemei (a *gudianwu* dancer and choreographer at BDA). NBC’s *The Yellow River* was set to the finale of *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and adopted dance structures, movements, and costumes that are similar to the *gudianwū* version (1988; discussed in Chapter 4). However, an emphasis on female dancers’ soft arabesque and delicate pointe technique reduced the vitality of repeated dance tricks in the *gudianwū* version. Although male ballet dancers employed *gudianwū* kicks and jumps, the lack of dynamic fall and rebound floor technique decreased the contrast of their movements, which further reinforced the otherness of ballet when representing Chinese-ness.

Yang observes that the paucity of new Chinese ballets sits in contrast to the abundance of Chinese *gudianwu* dance drama in the 1990s (Yang 1997). While Chinese ballet choreography in the 1980s mapped out a bright blueprint for the Sinicization of ballet, “unfortunately, the time has passed, I have never seen such a scene again” (Yang 1997, 24). Yang’s statement emerged in response to comparisons between *gudianwu* and ballet versions of *The Yellow River*. While the *gudianwu* *The Yellow River* solicits high demand at BDA and on school, television, and international stages, both NBC and BDA’s ballet (2012) versions are only occasionally performed to celebrate a national event. I suggest that the problem of limited Chinese ballet choreography since the 1990s not only
reflects the privileging of *gudianwu* as a national dance project, but also results from comprehensive issues in the Chinese ballet field since the early years of postsocialist China. As I illustrate in the previous chapters, the “Reform and Opening-up” policy permitted re-exposure to Western cultures for Chinese dance practitioners coming out of the ten-year lockdown of the Cultural Revolution. Chinese ballet dancers and educators thus preoccupied themselves with learning from Western styles of ballet and joining cosmopolitan ballet culture. The economic reform of the state intertwined with transnational exchanges at BDA and NBC and caused a series of problems that impacted Chinese ballet choreography from the late 1980s onward.

First, the division of ballet and Chinese dance training at dance conservatories interrupted the cultivation of versatile Chinese ballet choreographers. Chinese ballet practitioners who trained during the late Cultural Revolution spent their educations rehearsing and performing revolutionary ballets without studying or experiencing choreography. After the Cultural Revolution, the reconstruction of BDA included the separation of the training, performance, choreography, and administration of the Chinese dance and ballet programs, such that teachers in one program could not interfere with the other. The program division isolated ballet practitioners from learning Chinese dance and experiencing hybrid Chinese ballet choreography. When these self-centered and Westernized Chinese ballet practitioners became dancers and choreographers at NBC and other ballet companies in China, they abandoned socialist choreographic values. During the process of creating *Yan Nanfei (The Cranes are Flying*, 1991), commissioned by the PRC Ministry of Culture to celebrate the CCP’s seventieth birthday, several disagreements on choreographic methods erupted between older generation
choreographers such as Li, Jiang, and Wang, and elder dancers newly promoted to choreographers, such as Cao Zhiguang, Chen Cuizhu, Jiang Weihao, and Niu Deli. Jiang recalls that,

these young choreographers, although not young for their ages, did not want to listen to suggestions or do fieldwork. Because they thought they knew many dance movements and knew how to teach and create [ballet] combinations. However, it is different from choreographing [a full-length ballet] and creating combinations” (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 367).

Chinese ballet in the late 1970s and 1980s, therefore, relied heavily upon the first generation ballet choreographers with the knowledge and lived experiences of both Chinese dance and ballet. When these ballet choreographers retired in the 1990s, NBC lacked ballet choreographers and collaborated with choreographers from BDA with a Chinese dance background, such as Chen Zimei and Wang Yuanyuan.194

Second, the embrace of Western ballet technique and aesthetics hindered the experiment of Sinicizing ballet at dance conservatories. Compared to ongoing gudianwu choreography by gudianwu practitioners at both dance conservatories and companies, the task of creating Chinese ballet is relegated only to ballet companies, especially NBC. After BDA gudianwu teacher Tang Mancheng and ballet teachers Zhang Xu and Lin Lianrong co-choreographed the Chinese ballet Jia in 1983, the BDA ballet program focused on cultivating virtuoso classical ballet dancers and performing Western ballet repertoire. A ballet graduate at BDA bluntly told me that “I personally do not like to dance Chinese ballet. I enter [the ballet program] to learn pure classical ballet.”195 In fact, almost all of my ballet interviewees remarked that they prefer to perform Western ballet
repertoire such as *Swan Lake* and participate in international tours, instead of rehearsing Chinese ballets.\(^{196}\) When reflecting upon the need for Sinicizing ballet, a BDA ballet teacher indirectly stated her skepticism. She noted that “there are so many Western ballet works that we are busy learning. Why [do we] have to have a Chinese-styled ballet?”\(^{197}\) The unwillingness to dance and create Chinese ballets by BDA reflects their desire for transcending locality through joining Western standards and cosmopolitan culture (a practice that I explore in Chapter 3).

Besides aspiring to Westernization, NBC’s monopoly of Chinese ballet choreography also limits collaboration between ballet and Chinese dance practitioners. For instance, when NBC prepared to produce *Yang Guifei* in 1988, choreographer Jiang Weihao proposed the employment of a choreographic team that included NBC choreographers Li and Jiang, as well as *gudianwu* teacher Li Zhengyi, and Chinese dance choreographer Zhang Minxin from BDA (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018). However, according to Jiang “people in the company thought teachers from the dance school might not be unified [with NBC choreographers] in terms of ideology, and it would be difficult to collaborate” (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 365). In the twenty-first century, NBC leaders aimed at cultivating the company’s resident choreographers by recruiting BDA students who graduated from ballet and *gudianwu* programs. As I explain above and in the previous chapters, however, the homogeneous Westernized ballet training and balletic *Shenyun-gudianwu* aesthetic in contemporary China restrict the promotion of Chineseness in ballet choreography, which supports my theorization of a two-way otherness of Chinese ballet.
Third, increasing transnational exchanges and domestic economic reform caused the emigration of talented Chinese dancers as well as the capitalist institutional reform of NBC. In the wake of transnational communications between China and the United States, the 1980s witnessed a fever of Chinese people studying abroad (Lu 1998; Yu 2018; Zhou 2017). In 1986, NBC leaders and dancers toured the United States and tasted American modern dance, jazz, breaking, and Balanchine ballet. The introduction of American dance and culture to NBC ballet dancers was filmed in the documentary, *On the Move: The Central Ballet of China* (1986), directed by Merrill Brockway. In a jazz class at Alvin Ailey School, the NBC female dancers were learning a high energy and voluptuous step with Kathleen Breitenfeld (Brockway 1986). However, when they tried the step with live drumming, Breitenfeld said that they needed to “let go” of themselves and to “feel the unbalance” (Brockway 1986). While most of the ballerinas constrained their movements, one dancer in the front row waved her torso and tilted her hip to fully embraced the jazz style. Her name is Wang Yanping, but the voiceover of the film names her “the jazz girl” (Brockway 1986). When interviewed in the film, Wang shyly lowered her head in front of the camera and said “I like here, I want to study here” (Brockway 1986). Soon after returning to China in April of 1986, Wang immediately applied to school in the United States and left in September. According to He Ping, then-vice-director of NBC, “[after finishing the tour, the dancers] cannot wait to leave. It is because, at that time, there were great differences between China and foreign countries” (*Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years* 2009). The trend of studying abroad saw more than a hundred dancers and musicians leave the company, including many principal dancers.
Besides the dancers’ aspiration for cosmopolitanism, the stagnant and centralized planned economy at NBC affected unbalanced salary allocation for the dancers. Former dancer Liu Xuejing recalled that

I remember clearly, when [we are] performing Don Quixote at that time, top actors like Tang Min and Zhao Minhua only earned 5 yuan [0.74 dollars]. It is stipulated by the Ministry of Culture. [Each company member got a] 5 yuan. 5 yuan for male and female principals, 5 yuan for soloists, 5 yuan for the group dancers, 5 yuan for the team of stage designers, and even those [crews] who sold performance pamphlets would get 5 yuan, all 5 yuan. So, what enthusiasm do we have for performances? (Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years 2009)

As Liu noted, the seemingly equal allocation of dancers’ salaries disregarded the diverse labor of company members and reduced the dancers’ enthusiasm. Choreographer Li Chengxiang confirmed that when he was director of NBC from 1984 to 1993, the Ministry of Culture executed the policy of “balance subsidy” (差额补助) to its directly affiliated art troupes, in which the state only guarantees the basic salary of NBC staff (dancers, musicians, and administrators) and the company has to rely on their commercial performance income to offset their yearly expenditures (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 111). Li continues, “unlike [dancers at] Western ballet companies who close the [studio] door and go to their own home, we are in charge of our staff’s clothes, foods, and lives as well as their birth, illness, and death” (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 112). From the 1980s to the early 1990s, the lack of income and performance opportunities caused NBC dancers anxiety about their short-lived dance careers.200

The sustained planned economy at NBC also encountered a rise of marketization and popular culture in China’s society. Unlike state-sponsored and assigned
performances in socialist China, the company constantly toured domestically and abroad to increase the financial income of the dancers. However, these frequent commercial performances neglected the quality of dance and prevented the innovation of Chinese ballet. When recalling the era of the 1980s and 1990s, Jiang regretfully says,

> I think we had a problem with the choreography and rehearsal processes, after [a dance was] choreographed and performed on stage, there was no modification. Like Zhufu, I have always wanted to revise it, but did not get a chance … the troupe was facing financial pressure, so they often went to [commercial] performances, and the dancers also hoped that the performances can earn more labor costs. (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 362)

When Li, Jiang, and Wang attempted to revise *Yang Guifei* in 1994, vice-director of NBC Liu Tingyu suspended their work under the reasoning that first, NBC was introducing new leadership and there was no time for restaging the dance; and second, collaboration among choreographers in creating dance dramas belonged to the socialist planned economy, which did not match the postsocialist commodity economy (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018, 366). Since the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Culture loosened its control on NBC and the inner system reform (内部体制改革) of NBC has prompted a corporate management strategy adopted from capitalism (Wilcox 2012c). The reform divided dancers’ annual salary based on their ranks of principals, soloists, and *corps de ballet*, and allowed NBC to support its star performers.

In conclusion, the reduction of NBC’s Chinese ballet choreography in the 1990s was a historical problem tied to China’s socioeconomic transformation since the late 1970s. The isolation of ballet training at BDA, the dancers’ pursuit of cosmopolitanism, and the planned economic issues at NBC were direct or indirect consequences of Deng’s
economic reform. Under the cover of the slogan “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” Western modernization with the traits of marketization, “down-to-earth pragmatism,” and consumerism intruded the sociocultural practices of the PRC since the 1980s. When egocentric consumer culture replaced Mao’s revolutionary idealism, postsocialist ballet practitioners emphasized individual fulfillment rather than devoting themselves to China’s socialist revolution. In facing the risk of cultural homogenization within China’s globalization in the twenty-first century, NBC’s new director Zhao Ruheng concentrated on promoting a “Chinese brand” of ballet (*Chinese Ballet in Fifty Years* 2009).

### 6.2 Globalization of Chinese Ballet in the Twenty-first Century

Transforming from the awakened 1980s and the disoriented 1990s, Chinese ballet saw a new boom in response to globalization during the twenty-first century. After prolonged negotiations and applications since the 1980s, China finally joined “the wealthiest and most powerful club of capitalist globalization,” the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, which symbolized China’s full integration of Western globalization (Liu 2004, 12). Liu Kang considers this economic action by the Chinese government as “opening China ever more widely and accepting an ‘international standard’ (or, in a Chinese idiom, ‘join the international track’) as the only viable way of modernization” (Liu 2004, 12). This participation in the international standard inevitably impacted the activities of China’s sociocultural sectors. Chinese ballet dancers and choreographers, as practitioners of an art form that comes from the West, naturally and undoubtedly joined the ballet world and accepted Western standards of training, choreographing, and evaluating ballet.
Among ballet conservatories and companies in China, NBC played the most significant role in embracing the international standard of ballet and globalizing Chinese ballet bodies through staging Western ballet repertoire and conducting cultural exchanges between China and the West. Through international performances, however, NBC leader Zhao realized a lack of Chineseness in NBC’s productions and therefore promoted new Chinese-themed ballets. In this section, I examine the full-length ballet *Raise the Red Lantern* (2001/2003; hereafter *Red Lantern*) and elucidate how it interacts with China’s globalization and nationalism. By analyzing dance movements, newspaper reviews and television documentaries, I outline the choreographic process and public debates around the production. I contend that the self-Orientalist approach and the absence of Chinese dance movement in *Red Lantern* reveal my argument of the two-way otherness of Chinese ballet as well as the ambivalent Chineseness.

### 6.2.1 Experimenting with Chineseness in *Raise the Red Lantern*

An old man slowly enters a dark stage and reaches his dragon-headed walking stick into the air. Momentarily, countless huge red lanterns are illuminated and quietly flash their dim lights. Once these large red lanterns slowly rise and disappear, the stage becomes lit with a sequence of small faint lights. Accompanied by the warbling female chanting of the Beijing Opera, the lights brighten and form a sea of illumination floating on the dark stage. When the stage lights slowly come on, the sea of lights turns out to be red lanterns carried by dancers as maids. The maids wear tightly fitted dark blue *cheongsams* (or *qipao*) with high slits in the sides. They synchronously and mechanically rise on pointe, *développé* their legs, twist their pelvises, and step to heavy drumbeats,
while repeatedly lifting the red lanterns over their heads with empty facial expressions. Under the dim stage lights, they are like a group of cold female ghosts wandering in an abandoned Chinese quadrangle courtyard and the eerie red lanterns create a solemn and gloomy atmosphere. The row of maids lifts the lanterns in front of their heads, raise their legs and takes big strides forward in the same direction, which creates a spectacle similar to the entrance of the Shades in *La Bayadere* (1877) of the third act. When the female chanting re-emerges, the maids tighten their steps using *xiqú*’s fast heel-to-toe patterns and disappear off stage. Meanwhile, the lights of the red lanterns fade away leaving the stage silent and dark.

This dark prelude of the three-act *Red Lantern* (2003) lays the foundation for the tragic story of the heroine Songlian, who was forced to marry a wealthy old feudal lord, became one of his concubines, and be beaten to death for meeting with her old lover, an actor from the Beijing Opera. The plot of the ballet was adapted from Zhang Yimou’s award-winning film *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), itself an adaption of Su Tong’s novel *Wives and Concubines* (*妻妾成群* 1990). In both the film and the ballet, Zhang challenges the traditional Chinese meaning of red lanterns with festivals and happiness by portraying it as a symbol of Chinese patriarchal feudalism. In the film, Zhang deliberately highlights the Chinese traditional red lantern as a sexualized symbol that signifies the lord’s patronage to one of the concubines at night. In the ballet, however, the red lanterns symbolize compulsory feudal marriage rather than concubines competing for the lord’s favor. In addition to the prelude, the red lanterns also appear in the first act when Songlian arrives at the house in a palanquin and spends her first forced night with the lord. She comes out of the ornate palanquin and looks alertly at the maids and the
concubines around her. Her gaze falls down at her ruby wedding cheongsam, she shrugs her shoulders and attempts to get rid of the restrictive wedding dress. She desperately hugs herself and kneels down, falls to the ground and struggles to rise again. Her depressive movements and restricted use of space create a contrast with the huge red lanterns hanging above the stage as well as the bold red stage set and costumes. At the end of the ballet, when Songlian, her lover, and the second concubine are beaten to death, the group of maids steps out in a line at the back of the stage holding red lanterns in their hands, which echoes the prelude and heralds the arrival of a new concubine.

Besides the contrasting uses of the red lanterns, Zhang’s stage and set design played an important role in portraying the characters and advancing the plot. For instance, when Songlian wears a school uniform and laments her forthcoming fate, four men in black military robes approach her and each holds a decorated plank. While Songlian runs back and forth trying to escape, the men obstruct her by closing the planks around her and suddenly form the four walls of the palanquin. The next time Songlian appears, she is inside the palanquin wearing her scarlet cheongsam. This clever application of the planks from a moving prop to a stable set surprises the audience. The palanquin also encapsulates Songlian’s shift from a Western-educated college student to a concubine who marries a feudal landlord. Another brilliant element of the set design occurs with the synchronized performance between the Beijing Opera and pas de deux between Songlian and her lover in the second act. The dance scene begins with the lord inviting a group of actors from Beijing Opera, including Songlian’s lover, to perform at his house. Here, Zhang boldly invites Beijing Opera actors and musicians from the Chinese National Beijing Opera Company to perform on the ballet stage to create an
effect of a play within a play. The Beijing Opera performs on a mini stage with transparent panels at the center back of the stage under a bright spotlight, while Songlian’s *pas de deux* with her lover occurs downstage in a dim light to indicate their illicit reunion.

After the premiere of *Red Lantern* in 2001, many reports celebrated the striking stage design, the accomplished music, and *xiagu* performance but criticized the insufficient ballet choreography and a fundamental incompatibility between Beijing Opera and ballet ("Speak about the Red Lantern” 2001). Yang criticizes the ballet’s ambiguous plotline, unconvincing characters, absence of dance movement, and abrupt combination of ballet and Beijing Opera (Yang 2001). Dance critic Ge Zhaohong even sent a letter to *Wenhui Newspaper* (文汇报) to object to the program before the premiere of the ballet. According to Ge, ballet is supposed to articulate truth, goodness, and beauty but the jealousy, competition, and murder of the original *Red Lantern* story are not appropriate material to adapt into a sublime balletic love story (Ge 2001). Based on the criticism from dance critics, journalists, and audiences, NBC restaged *Red Lantern* in 2003 by modifying more than half of the ballet and adding additional movements to the original choreography (Yan 2003). The revised *Red Lantern* fused movements from Chinese folk dance, Beijing Opera, and ballet in female group dances reminiscent of the wedding celebration scene in Jiang’s *Zhufu*.205

In the first act, after Songlian is locked in the palanquin, the lord’s wife and his first concubine enter the stage with their maids to welcome the new concubine. The two ladies and their maids are divided into two factions by the palanquin, one stage left and one stage right. The wife’s faction wears olive *cheongsams* and holds paper fans, and the
concubine’s faction wears mustard cheongsams and holds handkerchiefs. While the two women are the protagonists of the wedding scene, they have few movements to display their competitive relationship except for some back-to-back poses in attitude and disdainful glances. In contrast, the maids’ group dances embody the inner rivalry between the two ladies through the fusion of ballet pointe technique with Chinese folk dance skips and hand swirls. Their bourrée en pointe connects with little back kicks from yangge and their walks are performed in parallel (instead of turned out) with the hips swinging from side to side, arms waving front and back. The nifty and delicate movements of the maids integrate neatly with the pauses and beats of the Chinese cymbal and reed in Beijing Opera. The two groups of maids also carry out conversational movements by contemptuously throwing their handkerchiefs or proudly waving their fans to the opposite side.

Ballet and xiqu movements fuse more clearly in the group dance of the second act, in which the lord invites Beijing Opera performers to teach xiqu’s sleeve dance to his concubines. All the female dancers put on colorful robes with white silk water sleeves and combine the ballet pointe technique with sweeping sleeve movements. They toss, whirl, and flick the sleeves and occasionally rise en pointe into the ballet arabesque or attitude position. Their flying sleeves look like ripples of water that spread out onto the entire stage. The long-sleeved robe also becomes a metaphor for Songlian and her lover’s emotional bond. The lover approaches Songlian as her xiqu teacher and plays with the sleeves of her robe. While they spin around each other, the lover takes off Songlian’s one sleeve and twines it around his arm. Songlian bashfully avoids the physical connection, but the long sleeves on the robe bind them together. Eventually, the lover and Songlian
are wrapped in the same robe and each of them wears a sleeve. The short duet tactfully utilizes a traditional water-sleeve costume in xiqu to indicate an extramarital affair.

Songlian’s delicate bodily movements and exquisite facial expression show her complicated emotions including shyness, fear of discovery, and happiness in dancing with her lover. This acting skill adopts the realist artistic style that focuses on articulating the dancer’s movements and contributes to the dramatic narrative. The subtle emotional expression of Songlian in Red Lantern corresponds with the psychological expression of Xianglin’s wife in Zhufu. The two female characters of Songlian and Xianglin’s wife, who are tortured by Chinese patriarchal society also reflect discourses of the female body during the “sexual awakening period” of China, where female characters are depicted as liberated spirits in search of their individualism, love, and gendered identity (Man 2016).

After the restaging of Red Lantern in 2003, dissatisfaction flingered from dance critics and audiences regarding the weakness of the ballet movements and the choreographic structure. Admittedly, some ineffectual hybridity between Beijing Opera and ballet showed a heavy-costumed xiqu hero doing awkward lifts and a pas de deux with the heroine in a modern-style pleated skirt, while the ballet dancers of Red Lantern retained the uplifted and effortless aesthetics of ballet. Yet, I would argue that the remarkable fusion of Chinese folk dance, Beijing Opera, and ballet in female group dances and the adoption of xiqu music and chanting added a flavor of Chineseness to the ballet choreography. Particularly, the NBC ballet dancers performed dazzling xiqu sleeve technique accompanied by Beijing Opera strings and percussions which exemplified the hybridity of Chinese art forms with Western ballet vocabulary. The cross-genre collaboration between xiqu and symphonic music, Chinese traditional elements on a
Western theatrical stage, and the realist way of storytelling with an innovative play within a play further facilitated the hybrid experimentation. Most importantly, the adaptation of Chinese literature into ballet works allowed Chinese directors and ballet practitioners to represent the patriarchal oppression of Chinese female figures, which distinguished itself from the fairy tales of Western classical ballet. As the first full-length Chinese ballet created since the late 1980s, the innovative Red Lantern informed national ballet choreography at NBC and popularized ballet to Chinese audiences in the twenty-first century (Yan 2003).

6.2.2 Globalizing the Red Lantern: Complicating Self-Orientalism and Nationalism

As the blockbuster of NBC, Red Lantern received extensive acclaim and criticism after its premiere in 2001. Whilst both highbrow and lowbrow media recognized its influences, the Ministry of Culture elected NBC to perform the ballet in international cultural exchanges. Since 2003, NBC toured the revised version of Red Lantern to more than twenty countries in Europe, America, and Asia, and the ballet received positive and negative reviews by both Eastern and Western press (Zhang 2022). Globalizing Red Lantern had been a long-term goal of NBC director Zhao since the initial stage of the production. During one of the earliest production meetings on Red Lantern, Zhao asks Zhang to “find a point that is acceptable to both Chinese and foreigners” (Gan 2010). In addition to inviting award-winning film director Zhang as the director of the ballet, Zhao’s production team also included Chinese German choreographer Wang Xinpeng and Chinese choreographer Wang Yuanyuan, Chinese French composer Chen Qigang, Chinese stage designer Zeng Li who worked for Beijing People’s Art Theatre, and French
costume designer Jerome Kaplan. While it was not the first time NBC collaborated with foreign artists in creating a ballet using Chinese stories, Zhao’s ambition for Red Lantern intended to break the stagnation of the company and globalize a unique Chinese ballet that represents Chinese national characters.

The international tour of NBC’s Red Lantern began in a small town in southern France in November 2003. In the two-hour documentary about the choreography and performances of Red Lantern, We Are Dancing – Red Lantern Dance (2010) directed by Gan Lu, the theater staff in France indicated their skepticism of Chinese dancers’ ability to perform ballet. However, the French premiere of the ballet received rapturous applause from its audiences and initiated twenty more performances of Red Lantern in Europe. On this tour, NBC performed the Red Lantern in more than ten cities in France, Italy, and England and received attention from local media, mass audiences, professional dancers, dance critics, and performance promoters (Gan 2010). During a press conference in Italy, Zhao proudly said that “if Red Detachment of Women belongs to China’s past, Red Lantern represents a modernizing developing China” (Gan 2010). By showing the European newspaper clippings and audiences’ enthusiastic responses, Gan’s documentary displays the achievement of Red Lantern in Europe and evokes a patriotic sentiment by connecting the success of the ballet with China’s increasing global influence. Soloist Meng Ningning comments that Red Lantern has reached another level as it has gone global (Gan 2010).

After successful performances of Red Lantern in Europe, NBC was nominated for the Best Foreign Dance Company at the UK National Dance Awards along with Merce Cunningham Dance Company and Bolshoi Ballet in 2004. In China, Red Lantern was
also awarded as one of the ten best artistic productions in “Chinese National Project to the Distillation of the Stage Art” (国家舞台艺术精品工程 2003-2004). Since then, Red Lantern has supplanted Red Detachment of Women to become a new representative of Chinese ballet constantly performed on international stages, such as the United States (2005 and 2019), Greece (2007), Mexico (2007), Russia (2007), the United Kingdom (2008), Australia (2009), Canada (2013), and Indonesia (2016). While the premiere of Red Lantern in 2001 received skepticism and criticism from China’s dance critics, its constant international touring since 2003 mollified domestic criticism into praise. This transformation is also explicitly revealed in Gan’s documentary. In the first half of Gan’s documentary, the production and premiere of Red Lantern are shown with a tone of insecurity. The collaborative choreographic process of the production team interacts with the clips of Zhang holding the Wenhuai Newspaper with Ge’s skeptical letter on it to create a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. In the second half of the documentary, however, the montage of foreign audiences’ acclaim, the dancers’ smiling faces, local newspaper reports, and receptions after performances altogether reveals the great triumph of Red Lantern in Europe. The project producer of the ballet, Gao Shan, notes that Red Lantern brought financial benefits to NBC and encouraged NBC to represent itself through Chinese ballet rather than Swan Lake (Gan 2010).

The contrasting domestic and foreign public reactions toward the ballet in the documentary and the celebration of the ballet’s international performances by Chinese media perpetuate the notion that the success of Chinese ballet necessitates evaluation and approval by Western audiences and media. This strategy of globalizing Chinese ballet through recognition by the West falls into self-Orientalism and reaffirms the value of
Westernized ballet to Chinese ballet practitioners. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Dirlik’s self-Orientalism shifts the position from Said’s Orientalism which emphasizes Euro-American imagination to the self-representation of the Oriental itself. He argues that rather than “an autonomous product of Euro-American development,” orientalism is a “product of an unfolding relationship between Euro-Americans and Asians, that required the complicity of the latter in endowing it with plausibility” (Dirlik 1996, 99). In other words, self-Orientalism is one side of Orientalism in which the Orient’s self-image collaborates with Western imperialist exoticism in the construction of the Orient. Thus, the examination of NBC’s strategy of globalizing Chinese ballet needs to take into account the discourses of both Orientalism and self-Orientalism.

Ballet as a Eurocentric and orientalist practice can be viewed in stereotypical dance segments in classical repertoire, such as the Hindu temple dancer in La Bayadere (1845), the Arabian harem in Scheherazade (1910), and the Chinese tea dance in Nutcracker (1892).\(^{210}\) The idea of ballet as a global physical culture (Wulff 2008) in postcolonial discourse, although occasionally challenged by scholars such as Joann Keali‘inohomoku (1970), has continued to bear its traces to Eurocentrism. As I discuss in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the introduction of ballet by Russian émigrés to China since the early twentieth century went hand in hand with Western invasions of capitalist modernization and ideological enlightenment. It was the military and ideological invasion that facilitated the orientalist construction of modernized Western culture and the exotic, feudal Chinese culture that impacted the self-image of Chinese intellectuals. As a result, this orientalist process also promoted the emergence of Chinese nationalism (Dirlik 1996)
in which Chinese intellectuals attempted to modernize China through learning from the West as well as establishing a new national identity since the early twentieth century.

Just as gudianwu practitioners in the 1950s intended to create a Chinese national dance form that could compete with European classical ballet, Chinese ballet practitioners also created Chinese ballet repertoire such as Fish Beauty to join cosmopolitan Western ballet culture. During a Sino-Britain cultural exchange in 1986, the first NBC director Dai Ailian gave a talk about “Ballet in China” and said that “Chinese ballet is now anxious to be part of a worldwide family of dance in order to maintain its standard” (Dai 1986, 11). Dai’s aspiration to bring Chinese ballet into the “worldwide family of dance” reflected her identity as a cosmopolitan, or world citizen, born in the British colony of Trinidad, who learned ballet and modern dance in London, and became a Chinese dance pioneer in the PRC. By indicating that only when Chinese ballet joins the Western-dominated world can it “maintain its standard,” Dai’s statement reaffirmed an orientalist and cosmopolitan construction of Eurocentric ballet and subordinated status of Chinese ballet.

In the context of China’s globalization and the revival of nationalism, however, Zhao offered an alternative to Dai by not only learning Western ballet repertoire but also exploring a unique Chinese ballet style that integrates Chinese traditional performances and ballet. Zhao kept encouraging NBC dancers during rehearsals of Red Lantern that “as a Chinese, to go outside and to gain [a] foothold abroad, [we] have to have our own thing [Chinese ballet repertoire]” (Gan 2010). Zhao’s assertion reflected a new stage of cosmopolitan practice that focuses on the domestication of cosmopolitan culture (Man 2016; Rofel 2007). In other words, NBC ballet practitioners in the twenty-first century
stressed a heterogenous ballet culture attached to Chinese cultural and national identity, an idea of “cosmopolitan patriotism” conceptualized by cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah (2002 and 2006). According to Appiah (2002), cosmopolitan citizens have their roots in diverse locations (nations) but the rooted cosmopolitans could celebrate cultural variety instead of contradicting each other. In the case of NBC’s Chinese ballet productions, the nationalist strategy of promoting Chinese ballets also contributed to cultural heterogenization without questioning Western ballet practices and aesthetics.

The ideological transformation from Dai to Zhao’s statements also mirrors the comparative ballet practices of NBC ballet bodies in the 1980s and the twenty-first century. After the last performance of the European tour in 2003, all NBC dancers were extremely excited for the triumph of their performances and the upcoming return to China (Gan 2010). NBC members including Zhao laughed, cried, and shared their complicated emotions with the camera about how much they missed China, in terms of food, family, and lifestyle. Some of them said that the first thing they would eat when they returned to China was porridge, youtiao (Chinese cruller), or hotpot and some of them cried, saying they would call their mother or son. While the dancers conveyed their fondness for the quiet and pretty European cities during the tour, their expression of homesickness contradicted previous NBC dancers from 1986 who desperately wanted to stay and study in the United States. As the first-time NBC dancers toured abroad, the experience of trying diverse American dance styles, the exposure to modern architecture and infrastructure in New York in 1986 impacted the underdeveloped China’s dance field as well as Chinese dancers’ pursuit of cosmopolitanism. In the context of China’s economic and cultural globalization, such as the successful joining of WTO and the 2001
bid to host the Olympic games, NBC leaders, dancers, and choreographers shifted their focus from pursuing Westernization to domesticating cosmopolitan culture and promoting Chinese cultural identity.

With the rise of nationalism and the CCP’s authoritarianism, the patriotic cosmopolitan practice of Chinese ballet has been deployed by the state into a new wave of propaganda to consolidate its governance. Since the mid-2010s, the development of Chinese ballet witnessed a return of revolutionary themes such as NBC’s *Yimeng* (沂蒙 Dec 2020), Liaoning Ballet Company’s *Eight Heroines* (八女投江2015), Shanghai Ballet Company’s *Bright Red Star* (闪闪的红星2018), Guangzhou Ballet Company’s *The Flag* (旗帜 2021), and Suzhou Ballet Company’s *My Name is Dingxiang* (我的名字叫丁香 2021). The emergence of these new revolutionary ballets celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP in 2021. Following the model of *Red Detachment of Women*, ballet dancers in contemporary China again picked up rifles and donned military uniforms. However, without stylized gestures and steps from *xiqu* or Chinese folk dance, the new revolutionary ballet was divorced from the socialist ballet legacies and more aligned with the standard aesthetics of Western ballet, such as ethereal jumps, repeated *arabesque* and *attitude* shapes, and elements from modern dance.

Although the revival of revolutionary-themed ballets in contemporary China reflects Xi Jinping’s ideological campaign to bolster CCP’s authority and the communist regime (Zhao 2016), Mao’s revolutionary idealism in the revolutionary ballet of the 1960s cannot be resurrected through the Westernized ballet bodies and choreographies.
6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined two full-length Chinese ballets, Jiang Zuhui’s Zhufu and Zhang Yimou’s Red Lantern, to reveal my second research question on how Chinese dance and ballet draw upon each other in the creation of Chinese ballet. Through discussions of the choreographic process, the hybridization of Chinese and Western dance forms, and identity, I elucidate the transformation of Chinese ballet choreography from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century. Although Jiang’s Zhufu relied heavily upon socialist dance productions and artistic style, I suggest that the fieldwork research and versatile dance training of socialist ballet choreographers allowed them to create remarkable Chinese-styled ballet. However, the curricular isolation of ballet at BDA, the passion to study abroad in the 1980s, and the institutional reform of NBC influenced the cultivation of ballet choreographers and reduced the number of Chinese ballet productions in the 1990s. To reflect upon the risk of cultural homogenization in the context of globalization in the 2000s, then-NBC director Zhao Ruheng collaborated with the famous film director Zhang Yimou in producing Red Lantern to assert Chineseness in cosmopolitan ballet practice. While receiving skepticism and criticism, Red Lantern revived the hybrid choreographic method of Chinese traditional performance with Western ballet and recalled a realist way of exploring oppressed female figures in a patriarchal society. In contrast to the domestic and international recognition of Red Lantern, NBC’s other large ballet productions such as The Peony Pavilion (2008) and The Light of Heat (2017) have not had an impact in China or overseas.

The productive but short-lived Chinese ballet choreography of the twenty-first century precisely reflects my argument of the two-way otherness of Chinese ballet, which
also clarifies my third research question of how the cultural hybridity/otherness in Chinese ballet complicates the concept of Chineseness. By realizing the alien character of ballet, ballet practitioners and choreographers since socialist China attempted to localize and nationalize ballet to promote national subjectivity in ballet choreography. However, the deficiency and absence of Chinese dance movements and aesthetics in NBC’s choreography downplays the agency of Chinese dance and the flavor of Chineseness. My investigation of this two-way otherness of Chinese ballet choreography, together with my discussion of the cosmopolitan female ballet body in the G20 gala (Chapter 3), illuminates the tension between China’s desire for transcending locality and domesticating cosmopolitanism. During a time of increasing nationalism in China, the Westernized ballet bodies are unable to convey effective Chineseness or political propaganda as that in the Maoist period. The two-way otherness of Chinese ballet bodies, therefore, not only subverts the promotion of Chinese cultural identity in ballet works but also challenges the authoritarianism imposed on ballet productions.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

This dissertation, *Dancing Chinese Nationalism: An Examination into the Hybridity and Politics of Chinese Classical Dance and Ballet*, explores the hybrid training, performance, and choreography of Chinese classical dance (Zhongguo gudianwu) and ballet at China’s elite dance conservatory, Beijing Dance Academy (BDA). When the Beijing Dance School, the predecessor of BDA, was established in 1954, the hybridity between Chinese traditional performance and Western dance forms was first institutionalized in training professional Chinese dance and creating Chinese national dance drama. After the lockdown during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in the 1980s, China’s exposure to Western culture promoted a trend of learning from the West in both gudianwu and ballet fields. While many gudianwu practitioners adopted Western dance forms, such as ballet, modern dance, acrobatics, and gymnastics to modernize Chinese classical dance, ballet practitioners were eager to learn authentic European ballet styles as they aspired to join Western ballet culture. Since the twenty-first century, Chinese gudianwu and ballet practitioners have endeavored to create a unique Chinese national body aesthetic to negotiate the risk of cultural homogeneity brought about by increasing globalization.

By recognizing the contaminating and fluid identity that emerges through cultural hybridity, I argue that the hybrid dancing bodies of gudianwu and ballet have become important sites for negotiating Chinese nationalism, modernism, and individualism within the context of globalization. By keeping hybridity and Chineseness as the two central
concepts in this study, my research examines three research questions: first, how have *gudianwu* and ballet drawn upon the mix of Western models and Chinese traditional cultures within dance training at BDA; second, how have the two dance forms drawn upon each other in the creation of dance works; and third, how has the tension and interrelationship between these two hybrid dance practices complicated the concept of Chineseness? To probe these questions, I compare the hybridity of *gudianwu* and ballet bodies within two realms of dance practice: dance training and dance choreography. It is through the investigation of BDA dancers’ daily technique class that reveals the generation of the hybrid style and aesthetic in dance performance and choreography. In Chapters 2 and 3, I address the realm of dance training in *gudianwu* and ballet respectively and explore how *gudianwu* and ballet hybridize Western models and Chinese traditional cultures within dance training at BDA. In Chapters 4 and 5, I focus on the realm of dance choreography and examine how dancers’ bodies represent Chineseness through an amalgamated aesthetic in major dance works.

While focusing on hybrid *gudianwu* and ballet practices in post-socialist China from the 1980s to the present, this dissertation takes a diachronic view of modern Chinese history since the early twentieth century and connects hybrid dance practices with China’s socio-political transformation. In Chapter 1, I reveal the evolution of hybrid dance practices in socialist China (1949-1979) within two historical stages: the Sino-Soviet alliance (1954-1960) and the period before and during the Cultural Revolution (1960-1976). While dividing the socialist period based on the transformation of political context, I view the dance practices between the two eras as interrelated in terms of the hybrid artistic style. In 1954, Soviet ballet experts helped Chinese dance pioneers
establish the first state-sponsored dance conservatory, Beijing Dance School, and the systematic Soviet ballet was foregrounded in the school’s dance training. In the 1950s, gudianwu pioneers adopted ballet class structure and training methods to establish the gudianwu curriculum as well as experimenting with national dance dramas based on socialist realism, the theatrical structure of ballet, and Chinese opera (xiqu) movements. Although ballet practices received skepticism and criticism from art critics and politicians, the continuous hybridity between Chinese and Western dance forms was rooted in Chinese cultural modernization in the May Fourth Movement (1919), where Chinese intellectuals attempted to utilize Western culture to modernize Chinese traditional culture. The privileging of revolutionary ballets during the Cultural Revolution was a distorted continuation of the hybrid socialist dance practice in the 1950s. For many Chinese ballet practitioners, the revolutionary ballet localized the Western bourgeois art form into socialist revolutionary narratives and provided an opportunity for dance practitioners to continue their work under the intense political censorship.

Following the contextualization of hybrid dance practice in socialist China, Chapter 2 focuses on the revival of gudianwu training at BDA in post-socialist China. I compare the technique class of Body-Rhythm (Shenyun) and Han-Tang gudianwu styles and their different approaches to hybridity and Chineseness through embodying the idea of “using foreign things to serve Chinese needs” (yang wei zhongyong) and “using the past to serve the present” (gu wei jinyong). Since the re-establishment of gudianwu curriculum in the 1980s, Shenyun-gudianwu practitioners emphasize the contemporariness of gudianwu and apply movements and aesthetics of ballet, xiqu, martial arts (wushu), acrobatics, and gymnastics to cultivate virtuoso gudianwu dancing.
bodies. On the contrary, Sun Ying’s Han-Tang style created in the mid-1980s foregrounds the reconstruction of ancient Chinese dance through researching frescos, sculptures, and historical relics and provides an alternative representation of Chineseness. Although the Han-Tang gudianwu was downgraded from a pedagogical system to a training course and repertory practices in 2016, I argue that it enriches the hybrid gudianwu training at BDA and facilitates gudianwu dancers’ virtuosity and versatility. The technical and aesthetic versatility of gudianwu bodies also embody a fluid Chinese national and cultural identity and empower dancers to traverse a temporal dimension from the traditional to the modern and a cultural landscape from China to the West.

In Chapter 3, I investigate the interaction between Western classical ballet training and discourses of gendered and national identities in cultivating and conceptualizing ballet bodies in contemporary China. Unlike the hybrid training method of gudianwu, BDA ballet training pursues authentic European classical ballet techniques. I argue that the desirability and privileging of a disciplined, elegant, and ethereal female ballet body, however, is shaped by Western ballet culture, the traditional male imagination in Chinese philosophy, and the patriarchal nationalist forces of contemporary China. By delving into the discipline of ballet at BDA, I reveal how the physical comportment and aesthetic of the female ballet body correspond to the ideal female beauty constructed by hybrid Confucian values. While the slender, supernatural, and white characteristics of female beauty embody the pre-Qin (476 – 221 BCE) Confucianist view of female bodies, the “pure and noble” image of the ballerina echoes the bodily abstinence in late imperial China (1639-1912).
In the example of the G20 Swan Lake performance in the second half of Chapter 3, the laboring female ballet bodies become instruments of nationalist spectacle that asserts China’s desire for cosmopolitanism and ambition for globalization. The employment of the battered female image to reinforce an imagined nationalism has been a long-lasting narrative in Chinese literature and art. In addition to BDA ballerinas’ hardship of dancing en pointe on water, the tortured ballet feet in Huawei’s advertisement also demonstrated the propagandistic function of female ballet bodies’ struggle in narrating Chinese nationalism. With the rise of gender equality and the circulation of dance practices online, the criticism towards the objectification and marginalization of the female ballet body offers resistance to a traditional patriarchal epistemology and the imagination of Chinese nationalism. Chinese female ballet bodies that are shaped by Chinese and Western cultural hybridity become sites for negotiating gender, cultural, and national identities.

The hybridity between Western dance forms and Chinese traditional culture continues to impact the realm of dance choreography. Chapter 4 extends the study of hybrid gudianwu practice in Chapter 2 and discusses how Shenyun and Han-Tang gudianwu choreography alternatively embody Chinese traditional culture in contemporary China. Since the late 1980s, the introduction of American modern dance and Western formalism have impacted the Shenyun-gudianwu choreography. BDA gudianwu choreographer Yao Yong and Zhang Yujun’s The Yellow River (1988) and Tong Ruirui’s Fan Dance and Chinese Painting (2001) adopted plotless narration, symbolic artistic expression, dance-music cohesion, and virtuoso dance tricks to represent abstract ideas of Chineseness. Beginning with Tong’s Fan Dance, Shenyun-gudianwu
choreographers also applied Western stereotypes of Chinese traditional culture, such as Chinese traditional costumes, props, and music to self-Orientalize and classicize gudianwu works. In contrast, Sun’s dance drama, Dancers of the Tongue Stage (1985/2009), emphasized a vivid depiction of dance characters and references to ancient Chinese history. His adoption of a realist aesthetic within gudianwu choreography was closely related to his dance nationalism and his inquiry into the asymmetric cultural communication between China and the West.

Chapter 4 also investigates how gudianwu functions as both propaganda for promoting CCP’s cultural policy and an anti-nationalist practice for asserting an autonomous artistic creation. Within the context of Xi Jinping’s authoritarian cultural policy, the increasing circulation of gudianwu, as the example of Hu Yan’s Young Scholar with Paper Fan (2017) in a state-sanctioned television program and social media, turned gudianwu into a national icon for enhancing Chinese “cultural confidence.” The strict censorship and broadcasting policy in Xi’s China propagandizes the innovative gudianwu dance to promote the revival of Chinese nationalism. However, avant-garde choreographer Tian Tian’s Tomb Figures I (2017) has mixed Han-Tang gudianwu technique with Western minimalism and modernism to assert her artistic autonomy and liberal choreography. This experimentatation of cultural hybridity subverts the official discourse of nationalism under the cover of revitalizing Chinese traditional culture.

In Chapter 5, I shift my focus to Chinese ballet choreography by characterizing the creation of Chinese-themed ballet in contemporary China as a practice of two-way otherness. On the one hand, Chinese dance practitioners pursue the cultural other, European-rooted ballet, as a way of transcending locality. On the other hand, Chinese
ballet practitioners attempt to localize the Western art form through a self-Orientalist approach and, by doing so, they also downplay the agency of Chinese dance in representing Chinese cultural identity. I compare two full-length Chinese ballets produced by the National Ballet of China, Jiang Zuhui’s *New Year’s Sacrifices* (1980) and Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (2001/2003) in terms of the choreographic process, the amalgamation of Chinese dance and cultural elements, and the identity discourse surrounding the two ballets. I argue that the fieldwork research and versatile dance training of socialist ballet choreographers, like Jiang, allowed them to create remarkable Chinese-styled ballet that promoted Chineseness and Chinese female liberation in early post-socialist China. Since the mid-1980s, however, the Chinese ballet practitioners’ pursuit of cosmopolitanism caused a stasis in Chinese ballet choreography in the 1990s. While the production of *Red Lantern* temporarily revived a hybrid Chinese ballet, the short-lived Chinese ballet works in the twenty-first century reflect their deficiency in representing Chineseness, which further echoes the concept of the two-way otherness.

Fangfei Miao (2019 and 2022) critically examine the practices of *gudianwu*, Chinese folk and ethnic dance, Chinese ballet, and modern/contemporary dance, the Anglophone Chinese dance studies is still an underdevelop area. As the first academic study that foregrounds the interaction between Chinese dance and ballet, this dissertation creates a theorization of how hybridity works through dance to understand the political tradition of the People’s Republic of China. Through the critical assessment of cultural hybridity in Chinese dance practices, this study reveals the entanglement of Chinese semi-/anti-colonialism, Western cultural imperialism, and Sino-chauvinism and prompts discourses of Chineseness, ideas of classicism, and the localization of ballet in non-Western countries. I elaborate on these contributions and interventions in the following paragraphs.

First, my application of postcolonial notions of hybridity challenges the solid representation of Chineseness in cultural practices of mainland China. While acknowledging the semi-colonial and post-semi-colonial identity of Chinese modernism, my adoption of postcolonial theory in examining hybrid *gudianwu* and ballet is in light of the imperialist trait of ballet and its ongoing influence as a cosmopolitan culture. Throughout the dissertation, I stress the interaction between Western ballet and Chinese traditional performance in undermining the rhetoric of Chineseness and its accompanying nationalism. Conversely, the discussion of Chineseness also challenges the “happy hybridity” (Lo 2000) in intercultural translation that ignores the asymmetrical power balance between the West and the Rest. The theoretical intervention between hybridity and Chineseness, thus, enriches each other in the discussion of Chinese cultural phenomenon.
Second, in researching the invented tradition of *gudianwu*, my dissertation redefines classicism in relation to China’s modernization and globalization. The category of “classical dance” which translates to *gudianwu* in Chinese, follows its own development from socialist China in the 1950s and currently emblematizes a national identity of contemporary China. So to speak, the classicization of dance in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) coincides with China’s modernization and the emergence of nationalism. The entanglement between the artistic style and state politics shapes the unique category of Chinese “classical dance,” in which dance practitioners utilized Western classical dance to modernize and classicize Chinese traditional performance including *xiqu* and *wushu*. For the sake of the state’s authoritarian governance, the dance classicization also prioritizes Han ethnicity and downgrades the classical dance form of ethnic minorities into the category of ethnic or folk dances. In other words, the highly politicized Chinese “classical dance” constitutes a fundamental paradox in terms of the power dynamic between Chinese and Western culture as well as tradition and the modern. The alternative classicization of Sun Ying’s *gudianwu* style further destabilizes “classical dance” as an aesthetic and ideological category. Therefore, my examination of the hybrid Chinese “classical dance” enriches the conceptualization and construction of classicism.

Finally, by theorizing the two-way otherness of Chinese ballet choreography in contemporary China, I contribute to an analytical framework in exploring Western ballet indigenization. While Anglophone Chinese ballet scholarship largely focused on revolutionary ballet in socialist China (Bai 2010; Brown 1978; Chen 1994; Chen 2002, 2017; Cheng 2000; Christopher 1979; Chung 1972; Clark 2008; Davis 1973; Desmond
contemporary Chinese ballet choreography remains an underdeveloped area of study. My comparative discussion of the two ballets, *New Year’s Sacrifices* and *Raise the Red Lantern* reveals the Westernization of Chinese ballet bodies in twenty-first century China and illuminates the deficiency of contemporary Chinese ballet in challenging hegemonic and universal classical ballet practices. It does not mean, however, that classical ballet cannot be indigenized by non-Western cultures. As explained in Chapter 5, the versatile dance training and lived experience of fieldwork enabled socialist dance choreographers to create unique Chinese-styled ballets. I suggest that these training and choreographic methods also make classical ballet indigenization possible elsewhere for diverse cultural practices.

While centered on Chinese cultural and national identity discourses, the exploration of hybrid *gudianwu* and ballet practices also contributes to the discussion of globalization, cosmopolitanism, Orientalism and self-Orientalism, female gender identity, and Chinese-Western transcultural communication. In this sense, this dissertation converses with contemporary Chinese cultural studies and supplements Anglophone Chinese dance studies. Scholars and dancers who see themselves located in an in-between culture may find the hybrid Chinese dance a discursive point to enrich their negotiations of cultural, gendered, racial, and national identity. In the light of US-China economic and cultural conflict in the 2020s, I hope that this dissertation *Dancing Chinese Nationalism* elucidates a rationale of cultural practices in contemporary China and provides a lens to view the interaction between Asian and Western cultures.
The dance drama *Goddess of the River Luo* (水月洛神) was based on a traditional Chinese story in the East Han Dynasty (25-220). Within the production team, the choreographer Tong Ruirui, Tang Shiyi who played the heroine Zhen Fu, and Wang Zihan, who played the hero Cao Zhi, all received Chinese classical dance training and graduated from Beijing Dance Academy. The video for the duet can be found at [1:27:56-1:31:30]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp6A1HTKSGU&ab_channel=ChineseinUS%7C%E5%8D%8E%E4%BA%BA%E5%9C%A8%E7%BE%8E%E4%B8%9C3%E5%8F%B0

In order to make the language concise, I use *gudianwu* as synonymous with the dance form *Zhongguo gudianwu*, except when referring to the Department of *Zhongguo Gudianwu* at BDA.

BDA (北京舞蹈学院) was reestablished in 1978 based on its predecessor Beijing Dance School (BDS), which was built in 1954. BDA in postsocialist China focuses on offering undergraduate studies for students who pursue a professional career in theatre and dance. The undergraduate education at BDA includes majors in *Zhongguo gudianwu*, Chinese ethnic and folk dances (*Zhongguo minzu minjianwu*), ballet, ballroom dance, musical theatre, modern dance, choreography, art and design, dance study, and arts management. BDA also has an Affiliated Secondary School (ASS) that includes two major dance programs, ballet and Chinese dance. In this dissertation, I concentrate on *gudianwu* and ballet practices at BDA and discuss the ballet training and audition of ASS in Chapter 3.

Rather than using the term “post-colonial,” I apply “postcolonial” and “postsocialist” without hyphen to indicate the ongoing colonial and socialist forces in contemporary China.

Concessions were the foreign settlement originated from the 1840s of the late Qing Empire until 1947. These foreign concessions were governed and occupied by foreign powers, and are frequently related to colonialism.

Hu Rongrong and Zi Huanyun were born in wealthy and elite families during the Republican China era (1911-1949). Hu is known as “the first Chinese who danced ballet.” Her father was a businessman who operated both shipping and theatre businesses in Shanghai (Huang 2014, 54). Zi’s father Zi Yaohua was a highly regarded banker and financial economist in Tianjin. Both Hu and Zi became celebrated dance educators in postsocialist China.

Yin was the first Chinese conductor of the Chongqing Symphony Orchestra. He studied music in France in the 1920s and returned to China to promote Western music in the 1930s. For more information about how theater and opera reform during the New
Cultural Movement has impacted the aesthetic of Chinese modern theaters, see Chen (2002).

8 The Soviet experts specifically introduced Vaganova academic ballet training, a fundamental training method established by Agrippina Vaganova. This method includes the development of lower back strength and arm plasticity and the requisite strength, flexibility and endurance for ballet. The Vaganova method focuses on the capability of the dancer to perform a classical *pas de deux* and the skills necessary for such a performance. In terms of pedagogical training, Vaganova demands precision in a teacher’s instruction, particularly regarding when to teach certain skills, how long to teach, and in what amount. This method shares traits with the strict classroom discipline in Chinese opera’s movement training. For more information on the similarity between ballet training and Chinese opera, see Christopher (1979).

9 Dai Ailian gave the talk at the Britain-China cultural event in 1986. The talk was summarized by Nicola Macbean and published in the Newsletter of the Great Britain-China Centre after the event.

10 All translations in the dissertation are my own unless attributed otherwise.

11 Chinese national dance drama is defined by Wilcox as “a narrative dance work with a unified set of characters and linear theatrical plot that uses Chinese dance as its core movement vocabulary” (Wilcox 2018a, 92).

12 “Socialist realism” is an important and influential ideology and aesthetic in Chinese art and literature (to be elaborated in Chapter 4).

13 Chinese dance, in this dissertation, refers to three major Chinese dance forms: Chinese classical dance, Chinese ethnic dance, and folk dance. “Chinese dance practitioners” refers to the professional dance community who practice these three dance forms in PRC. While Chinese ethnic and folk dance are important dance forms within the discourse of hybridity and Chineseness, I primarily focus on the interaction between ballet and *gudianwu*.

In 1974, the National Ballet of China (then the Chinese Dance Ensemble) created two new revolutionary ballads: *Ode to Yimeng* (yimeng song 沂蒙颂) and *Children of the Grassland* (caoyuan ernü 草原儿女). However, these two ballets were less popular than *Red Detachment of Women* and *White-Haired Girl* in light of the impending end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976.

15 The impact of ballet aesthetics is evident in the video sample of advanced gudianwu technique class at BDA. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ob411p7kR/?p=2&vd_source=ff44f6fa04981895e57](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ob411p7kR/?p=2&vd_source=ff44f6fa04981895e57)

16 The selection also includes a test of students’ flexibility, jumping ability (intensity, height, and explosiveness), joints and muscle shape, and facial beauty.

17 In fact, the “hybridity” between modern and traditional elements of these stories has added to the hybridity in their ballet adaptations, which I will explore in Chapter 5.

18 Chinese dance critic Liu Jian has examined the plural aesthetic of Mongolian dance and Uyghur dance. By reading historical texts, he recognizes that many minority dance styles that are defined as ethnic or folk dance forms, such as the Mongolian wine-cup dance (酒盅舞) and Uyghur *Twelve Maqam* (十二木卡姆), have their historical roots in the court and aristocracy (Liu 2017). Therefore, Liu suggests that Chinese classical dance should consist of dance practices from multiple ethnic groups, but what prevents diversification of contemporaneous Chinese classical dance is the “Han authority,” which is promoted by the Chinese government (Liu 2017).

19 According to the curriculum schedule in 2021, BDA undergraduate gudianwu students only take Shenyun class twice a week in their first year, while they take the technique class, Gudianwu Basic Training, four days a week (Monday to Thursday) throughout their four-year study.

20 *Eight Heroines* is a revolutionary-themed ballet based on a real story of eight women soldiers fighting against the Japanese army in Northeastern China during the Sino-Japanese War. The Liaoning Ballet Company, located in the city of Liaoning, was the first ballet company in Northeastern China.

21 Shanghai is the largest city on China’s east coast and was the largest of a dozen treaty ports during the Western colonial period from the 1860s to the 1940s. The city’s dominant status in China’s economy has led to competition between Shanghai and Beijing in terms of urban culture, social life, and artistic production. While many intellectuals condemned the literary and artistic circles of Beijing as conservative and closely tied to state sponsorship, “the culturally and politically hegemonic status of Beijing remain unchallenged” (Lee 1999).

During a conversation with a dance professor at STA, I noticed that he despised the ballet training and production in Beijing as “tu” (土 local or not fancy) and considered Shanghai
ballet practices as “yangqi” (洋气 with foreign “flavor” or “style”). While I do not endorse his idea, this conversation made me realize the nature of the competition between Shanghai and Beijing in the field of Chinese ballet. See Lee (1999) for more information about the relationship between Shanghai and Chinese modernity.

22 Shijiazhuang is the capital city of Hebei province that approximately 175 miles from Beijing.

23 I intentionally keep my interviewees’ names anonymous. For those who agreed to use real names, I will show their names in chapters.

24 See Appendix II for copies of questions and Appendix II for the sample of Interview Consent Form.

25 See Appendix IV for a list of public social media accounts with video blogs.

26 “A day as a teacher, a life time as a father” (一日为师, 终身为父) derives from the text《鸣沙石室佚书·太公家教》 in the Qing Dynasty.

27 With the exception of Japanese-dominated Manchuria (1931-1945) in northeast China and British-colonized Hong Kong (1841-1941 and 1945-1997), China maintained its local governance, currency, language, and seemingly sovereign status in international affairs.

28 The government provided full scholarships to all the students at BDS. See Zou (2003), for more information about the auditions for the first group of students.

29 This way of selecting students from local elementary schools or private dance studios (in postsocialist China) continued until the 1990s.

30 According to Chart 4.2 in Beijing Dance Academy Chronicle (1997, 90), the first to third year students had nine hours ballet class and six hours gudianwu class per week. Although the school cut off three hours ballet class for students in fourth, fifth, and sixth years, their twelve-hour ballet classes per week were still three hours longer than gudianwu (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board. 1997). The proportion of the four major dance classes for BDS students were 52.05% for ballet, 37.25% for gudianwu, 5.7% European folk dance, and 4.9% Chinese folk dance (Beijing Dance Academy Editorial Board. 1997, 90).

31 Xing not only means the body posture but also includes the movement between body shapes. Shen is the core of shenyun-gudianwu, which refers to gudianwu dancers’ inner spirit, consciousness, and feelings. Jin is the dynamics of movement, which means the force of movement is not evenly distributed but changes in terms of speed and strength. Lü has two meanings: the rhythm of movements and the law of movement patterns (Tang and Jin 2004). These four aspects are the core artistic values in Shenyun curriculum created in the 1980s.
Wilcox (2018a) also explored the discipline division. She argues that the purpose of *fen ke* was to “ally future criticism” generated by critics in *Dance News* towards the overemphasis of ballet study (Wilcox 2018a, 127). Here, I offer another explanation of BDS’ discipline division. Chinese dance historian and critics, Wang Kefen and Long Yinpei, argue that “[i]t is impossible to ask every student to master all the four dance styles, while learning all kinds of academic lessons” (Wang and Long 1999). Li, Tang, and Ye also indicated that *gudianwu* teachers had revised teaching syllabus of *gudianwu* every semester and every year from 1954 to 1960, which not only re-examined but also enriched the teaching materials of *gudianwu* (Li, Tang, and Ye 1960).

*Drambalet* is a dramatized ballet genre that was associated with the wake of antiformalism campaign in the Soviet Union during the 1930s to the 1950s (Ezrahi 2012). As a result, *drambalet* became the only genre of ballet that was compatible with socialist realism. Russian ballet scholar and historian Christina Ezrahi has argued that “Socialist realism was not just an artistic style but a propagandistic ideology that promoted a view of Soviet life that had little to do with reality” (2012, 30). The propagandistic function of realism was also adopted by the socialist CCP leaders to promote their ideology and politics (Yee 1983; Wilcox 2011).

Yu Meiren has different versions of English translation. The published music score and record name the dance as *The Mermaid*, Wilcox (2018a) translates the name as *Lady of the Sea*, and Baidu Encyclopedia (Baidu Baike) designates its foreign name (外文名) as *Fish Beauty*.

https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%B1%BC%E7%BE%8E%E4%BA%BA/15286604

Some photos of *Fish Beauty* have been archived by the digital library of Chinese dance at University of Michigan.

https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dance1ic?rgn1=ic_all&select1=all&q1=dance1ic&op2=And&rgn2=ic_all&select2=all&q2=fish&op3=And&rgn3=ic_all&select3=all&q3=&op4=And&rgn4=ic_all&select4=all&q4=&op5=And&rgn5=ic_all&select5=all&q5=&med=1&view=thumbnail&type=boolean

See more information about the controversial ballet status in the pre-Cultural Revolution in Wilcox (2018a) Chapter 4.

For photos of *Peace Dove*, see

https://baike.baidu.com/pic/%E5%92%8C%E5%B9%B3%E9%B8%BD/3821618/1/a044ad345982b2b71bd0923c37adcbef77099bff?fr=lemma&fromModule=lemma_top-image&ct=single#aid=1&pic=a044ad345982b2b71bd0923c37adcbef77099bff


The original quote in Chinese is “datui manchang pao, gongnongbing shoubuliao (大腿满场跑，工农兵受不了)”. Wilcox translates it as “a stage filled with thighs; workers, peasants, and soldiers despise” (Wilcox 2018a, 58).
Although Wilcox (2018a, 136) also recognizes the political impact of the “three transformations” on gudianwu practitioners’ self-criticism, she understates the compulsion of the CCP’s art policy and interprets dancers’ criticism/self-criticism towards ballet during that time as an active action.

The idea of zhongti xiyong (中体西用) was also framed as 师夷长技以制夷 in Hanguo Tuzhi (1984) by the late Qing philosopher Wei Yuan (Mitchell 1972).

In order to respond to the criticism towards New Youth by Chinese conservative faction, Chen published an article, “Replying to the Crime of New Youth” in New Youth in January 1919. He says, “[t]hose who oppose New Youth are simply because we broke Confucianism, broke rituals, broke the quintessence of the country, broke old ethics, broke old art, broke old religion, broke old literature, and broke old politics. We confessed to these crimes. But only because [we] support the two gentlemen, Democracy and Science, we commit to these heinous crimes … We believe that only these two gentlemen can cure all the darkness of China’s politics, morality, academia, and ideology. By supporting these two gentlemen, we will not refuse all the oppression from the government, attacks and laughter from the society, even until bloodshed” (Chen 1919).

While ballroom, cabaret, and jazz were also Western dance styles that were popularized in large cities of China, they functioned more as entertainment than serious concert dance form such as ballet and modern dance.

On September 1, 1964, Chen Lian, a student of the Department of Musicology at the Central Conservatory of Music, wrote a letter to Mao Zedong describing problems in the teaching and performance of the institute. Mao Zedong responded and proposed the literary and art policy of “using the ancient for the present and the foreign for the Chinese” (Sun 2010).

This split reflected a long-term ambivalence between the Soviet Communist Party and the CCP since the 1930s. When the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev enacted the policy of de-Stalinization in the USSR in the late 1950s, Mao Zedong criticized the policy as Marxist revisionism. Fearing that Chinese Communism could take this same “perverted” course, Mao stirred up a new political campaign to condemn revisionists in China and treated those CCP members who had copied Western culture and had friendly feelings toward the USSR as “capitalist reactionaries” (Longley 1996).

The Great Leap Forward Movement (1958 -1962) was an economic campaign launched by Mao, who intended to change China’s rural agrarian economy into an industrial economy through the establishment of People’s Communes. This economic movement also augmented production beyond agriculture and industry and influenced the creation of artistic works. However, this economic campaign was fundamentally impractical, and so caused famine, death, and resistance. By blaming the failure and the problems of the Great Leap Forward on CCP revisionists such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng
Xiaoping, Mao initiated the Socialist Education Movement in 1963 and foregrounded class struggle to purge the CCP cadres who opposed him.

47 The four cleanups were the cleansing of politics, economy, organization, and ideology within the bureaucracy of the CCP. This movement also caused many dance practitioners who had foreign backgrounds, such as Dai Ailian, to be denounced as bourgeois and some of them were sent to the countryside to be re-educated through working with peasants.

48 Interestingly, since 2020, Beijing Dance Academy divided its CCP party branch into the Foreign Dance Party Branch and Chinese Dance Party Branch, which echoes the program division in 1957 and 1961.

49 The ballet *Spanish Daughter* was adapted from Spanish playwright Lope de Vega’s play, *Fuenteovejuna*, which was written between 1612 to 1614. The play and the ballet tell of a historical event in which an entire village rebels against the abuses perpetrated by a Spanish nobleman in the fifteenth century.

50 With the increasing class struggle before the Cultural Revolution in 1963, Zhou instructed BDS Ballet Ensemble to unite with the Number Two Ensemble of CEOT, because of shared ventures in performing Western classics (Wilcox 2018a). During the first six years of the Cultural Revolution, most female dancers at CEOT were graduates from BDS’ ballet program since they could perform ballet and the pointe work in *Red Detachment of Women*. After the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the ballet ensemble detached from CEOT and established National Ballet of China. For consistency and clarification, in this dissertation, I refer to the ballet ensemble of CEOT during the Cultural Revolution as BDS Ballet Ensemble.

51 I will elaborate on this hybridity in Chapter 5.

52 During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards were groups of students mobilized and guided by Mao and Jiang and became the main force behind the attacks on the “Four Olds” of Chinese society, including petite bourgeoisie and intellectuals. These attacks often resulted in struggle sessions, which were held in the accused person's workplace, classrooms, or auditoriums. The sessions involved verbal and physical abuse from colleagues, friends, students, and even family members and were designed to dehumanize and attack those accused of ideological or political deviation (Lipman, et al. 1990).

53 For instance, Bai Shuxiang, who was praised as China’s first White Swan, was forbidden from dancing and sent to rural Beijing to do hard labor such as farm, cutting wheat, feeding pigs and horses, carrying manure, digging silt from rivers, etc. Her father, persecuted for being a Nationalist Party member during the Republican era, was killed by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution (Feng 2019).

54 While Stalin attempted to stage this revived ballet to represent the Sino-Soviet friendship, Mao was dissatisfied with the story and condemned it as a distortion of the Chinese revolution (Chao 2017).
“Wuqi” was an indication of one of Mao’s revolutionary instructions made on May 7th, 1966. “Wu” means five (May) and “Qi” means seven.

Interview with professor Qu in Shijiazhuang in November 2020.

Here, Qu mainly talked about students who are currently studying at BDA ballet program because ballet training in contemporary China emphasizes learning “authentic” European ballet styles and has abandoned every technique and dance trick from gudianwu.

For more information of BDA’s staging of Western ballet repertoire in early postsocialist China see Chapter 5.

Deng’s Reform and Open policy refers to an economic reform program termed “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “socialist market economy” which Deng Xiaoping started in 1979.

The then-president was Chen Jinqing and the Vice president was Li Zhengyi, one of the pioneers of Zhongguo gudianwu.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the concepts were framed by Mao Zedong in his “Yan’an Talk” in 1942, which also continued the idea of zhongti xiyong (中体西用) in the late Qing Dynasty.


Shenduan literally means the body segments. In xiqu, the term means actors’ physical technique and movement sequences.

Other required classes included Rhythm (节奏课), Music (音乐课), Chinese Classical Dance Pedagogy (中国古典舞教学法), Chinese Ancient Dance History (中国古代舞蹈史), Kinesiology and Physiological Anatomy (运动及生理解剖学), and Practical Teaching (教学实习)

Wilcox (2011) translates the term Shenyun (身韵) as Body Rhyme. I use the term Rhythm to emphasize the aesthetic soul of Shenyun, which are xing (bodily shape and articulation), shen (spirit), jin (dynamics), and lü (rhythm and pattern) (Tang 2004). In Merriam-Webster dictionary, “rhythm” not only means music accent or tempo, but it also relates to “movement, fluctuation, or variation marked by the regular recurrence or natural flow of related elements” and “the effect created by the elements in a play, movie, or novel that relate to the temporal development of the action” (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary). Thus, I consider the term “rhythm” better refers to the flow and dynamic of the moving body. See more explanation of the four aesthetic principles in endnote 31.

I consider that Hobsbawm’s theory is useful in examining the construction of gudianwu. While Hobsbawm’s paradigm is built upon the phenomenon of European modernity, I
have suggested in Introduction and Chapter 1 that Chinese modernization and the rise of Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century intertwined with Western modernity. The Chinese intellectuals in modern and contemporary China aimed at modernizing Chinese traditional culture by adopting Western cultural forms.

66 Although Zhu Qingyuan’s gudianwu training textbook was published in 1994, it summarized the gudianwu syllabus in the 1980s.

67 I stress that the Chinese name of each exercise is not the translation of French vocabulary, though the exercises feature the same leg movements. In general, the barre exercises in gudianwu are named after Chinese descriptions of the movements. For example, tendu in French means “stretch,” but the gudianwu 擦地 (cadi) means “mop floor”; jeté/degage means “throw/disengage,” while 小踢腿 (xiao titui) means “little kick;” fondu means melt and 单腿蹲 (dantui dun) is “one leg bend”; frappé literally means “struck beating,” but 小弹腿 (xiao tantui) means “little leg spring” and 大弹腿 (da tantui) is “big leg spring,” which is a higher version of frappé with leg beats on 90 degrees; and developpé means “develop,” while 控制 (kongzhi) means “control.”

68 For detailed movement definition and description see Glossary in Appendix I.

69 For video demonstration of the waist exercise, see [7:33-9:07] at https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1gb41177yH?p=5&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87

70 Balletic gudianwu training also influenced the aesthetics of xiqu. Xiqu practitioner Liu Chuanfang suggests that a transformation of xiqu training occurred by adopting the barre work, pointed feet, and waist technique for female characters from gudianwu training (Liu 1999).

71 Shenyun was originally called Shenduan (literally body shape 身段). The director of Hong Kong Dance Company, Jiang Qing, who studied at BDS in the 1950s, suggested the name Shenyun after watching a demonstration class by BDA students in Hong Kong in 1984.

72 Yunjian zhuanyao (云间转腰) derives from a xiqu technique, gulu yizi (轱辘椅子), designed by xiqu martial role master, Qian Baosen (Li, Gao, and Zhu 2004). It is a 360-degree circular movement on a horizontal plane around the dancer’s waist with a simultaneous movement of yunshou (云手). A basic yunshou looks like using two hands to knead and circle an invisible ball in front of the chest; it not only features a kneading movement between two hands that initiates with one hand above and ends with the other hand above, but also requires a simultaneous circulation of the two wrists (called panwan 盘腕 in gudianwu) while the hands move in a big circle. There are different types of yunshou such as boliang yunshou (波浪云手), which extends the arm movements from the chest to above the head, as if kneading a huge ball in front of and above the head.
A video demonstration of *yunjian zhuanyao*, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1hg411S7TU/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.1&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87

For definition and description of *Huangshou* (sway hand 晃手) and *Fenghuolun* (wind-fire wheel 风火轮) see Appendix Glossary.

73 For an example of Wang’s *gudianwu* technique class, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1VW41157nJ?p=4&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87

74 *Zì* (子) and *wu* (午) in traditional Chinese language are time vocabularies that indicate midnight (11pm-1am) and noon (11am-1pm). Therefore, *zì* as midnight represents the darkest (*yìn* 阴) moment of a day and *wu* as midday represents the lightest (*yáng* 阳) time of a day.

75 *Tabu dun* (踏步蹲) in *gudianwu* is a deep squat with legs crossed and knees overlapped. It requires a tight connection between the front and back knees without a gap in between. *Heshou* (合手) in *gudianwu* is a circular arm movement in which the dancer raises one or both arms from the side(s) of the body above the head and bends the elbow(s) and lowers the arm(s) in front of the chest. While circling arms in a vertical circle, dancers are required to keep their elbows slightly bent.

76 It is also a writing technique in Chinese calligraphy.

77 Training attire for male dancers is the same as ballet students who wear black tights and short sleeved compression shirts. Female dancers are allowed to wear simple designed t-shirts and shorts during their daily training.

78 Wilcox (2011) also recognizes the connection between dancers’ exceptional technical ability with socialist moral cultivation and personal enlightenment. She observes that the sacrifices of time and endurance of physical hardship that cultivated dancers’ exceptional virtuosity in socialist China also demonstrated their commitment to socialist ideology and self-enlightenment as valuable members of socialism. However, some Chinese dance scholars and practitioners outside of the *gudianwu* field have criticized the cult of virtuosity as an empty pursuit of technical skills. See more in (Wilcox 2011).

79 An example video for *Gudianwu* Technique Tricks Exhibition https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV13x411577f?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0

80 Tang also performed the heroine of *Goddess of the River Luo* (2009) that I mentioned at the beginning of the Introduction.

81 The video for Tang’s signature technique tricks can be found at: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1fY4y1x7YN?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87
Lin Chong is a fictitious character in the earliest Chinese novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (*Water Margin*) written by Shi Nai’an in the fourteenth century.

Interview with Xinyi in January 2022 through phone call.

While I observed several classes of Han-Tang *gudianwu* training in 2021, I primarily draw upon video sources of Sun’s classes in the 2000s to emphasize his individuality and the unique conception of Chinese classical dance.

*Little Hand Drop* used to be a court dance piece that was recorded in ancient literature in Tang Dynasty.

For a demonstration the leg kick, see [46:24-47:10] at https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Hb41177R3?p=3&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87

The naming of Chinese classical dance movements also reflects Sun’s profound knowledge in Chinese history and traditional literature. For example, *changhong guanshi* (长虹贯日 literally long rainbow across the sun), *yidai dangfeng* (衣带当风 literally the wind blows the sash), *fenghuang yiwei* (凤凰依尾 phoenix lean towards its tail), *xieyi taishan* (斜倚泰山 literally side lean towards the Tai Mountain), *baihe liangchi* (白鹤亮翅 literally white crane open its wings), and *zhitian wendi* (指天问地 literally point to the sky and ask the ground), emphasizes the Chineseness and literary reference from Chinese ancient poetry.

The information draws upon interviews with Wang, Zhang, and Lian in 2021 and 2022.

In chapter 4, I will examine how the success of *Young Scholar* went hand in hand with the national project of reviving Chinese traditional culture promoted by the chairman of PRC, Xi Jinping.

Hu also occasionally interacts with students by raising questions and explaining the context of a movement. When teaching a fan movement in which dancers use the palms of each hand to brace against the head and bottom of the fan horizontally and circle the hands to move the fan, Hu asked students to think of a name for this movement. Several students came up with the name of *roushan* (揉扇 kneading/massage fan), which Hu seemed to really like and considered naming it as such.

Before the Cultural Revolution in 1966, only four ballet pedagogical books, which were Chinese translations of Soviet ballet texts, existed in China. In 1981, Chinese ballet scholar translated Noverre’s *Letters on Dancing and Ballets* (1760) and brought a different ballet style to Chinese ballet practitioners.
While cosmopolitanism as an idea is tightly associated with the rise of globalization, it has roots in the ancient Greek philosophy of Cynicism and was later developed by German philosophers in 1975 to stress the human equality within a universal community (Appiah 2006; Nussbaum 2002; Taylor 2010). Although Western culture was introduced to modern Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth Movement (1919), the ideology of cosmopolitanism coincided with Chinese traditional Confucian ideal of “the great harmony” (datong 大同) and influenced the Chinese modern conception of Chinese nationalism (Zhang and Ren 2012).

Translated by (Chou 2018).

Nocturne is a section of Les Sylphides (1909) choreographed by Michel Fokine.

For example, Odette and white swans in Swan Lake, Aurora and Lilac Fairy in Sleeping Beauty, Sugar Plum Fairy in Nutcracker, and sylphs in La Sylphide.

The secondary study at ASS includes ballet, Chinese dance, ballroom dance, and musical theatre programs. Ballet and Chinese dance are the two major dance programs.

In 2020, more than 50,000 students applied for ASS. However, the ballet program only recruited 30 students and the Chinese dance program recruited 48 students and separated them into two classes (Wudao 2020).

In China, teachers use centimeters to measure students. In this chapter, I transform all the Chinese metric system to the US metric system.

Informal interview with the mother in July 2020. All respondents agreed to the use of informal conversations in this dissertation.


To protect my interviewee’s confidentiality, I will not reveal how she knows the information.

Interview in September 2021 through Chinese social media WeChat.

Interview in September 2022 through WeChat.

A journalist interviewed Bai Shuxiang, who is known as the first “White Swan” of China, in 1996 and asked her to share her method of diet and weight loss. The journal report notes that “dancers’ bodily shape and pose are appreciated and even envied by people… Nowadays, weight loss is a trend” (Cui 1996, 3).
When theorizing the idea of docile body, in his groundbreaking work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), French philosopher Michel Foucault uses the soldier’s body as an example and notes that “the soldier was someone who could be recognized from afar” (1995, 127). It is the discipline that makes them “become accustomed to ‘holding their heads high and erect; to stand upright, without bending the back’” (Foucault 1995, 128). Similarly, worker bodies in factories and schools all function as docile bodies that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved (Foucault 1995).

The Book of Songs, also translated as The Book of Poetry, is a oldest collection of poems in China written by anonymous authors during the Zhou Dynasty (西周 1046-771 BCE) and the Chunqiu period (春秋 600 BCE). Confucius has been credited as the editor of the collection by historians in the Han Dynasty (202BCE-25AD) and was celebrated as one of Confucian classics since then.

In “A Splendid Woman” (碩人) in The Book of Songs, Man notes that female bodily parts were described as “the blades of the young white-grass represent her fingers; congealed ointment her skin; a tree-grub her neck; melon seeds her teeth; a cicada her forehead; and [the antenna of] the silkworm moth her eyebrow, and so on; in others, clouds represent black hair in masses” (Man 2016, 48).

For instance, “In the Wild is a Dead Doe” (野有死麕) portrays a young woman longing for love and sex activity.

Informal interview with the mother in July 2020.

Dance scholar Jane Desmond has similarly described the restrained hip movements of European ballet, in which the dancer’s “torso tends toward quietude and verticality, and the pelvis rarely functions as an expressive bodily unit of its own” (Desmond 1993, 44-45).

The romantic and dehumanized female images, such as the white swan, in Western classical ballet repertoire also impacted the portrayal of the virtuous, beautiful, and loyal female figures in Chinese national dramas, such as the Third Sacred Mother in *Magic Lotus Lantern* (1957) and the mermaid in *Fish Beauty* (1959).

The documentary *Ballet* (2010) can be found at: https://tv.cctv.com/2010/04/15/VIDE1355513855805876.shtml?spm=C55924871139.PT8hUEEDkoTi.0.0

Chinese artists’ preference for Swan Lake is also evident in several adaptations, such as the acrobatic version of Swan Lake (2011) by Guangzhou Acrobatic Military Troupe (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQiJuVRH2NA), the modern dance version of Swan Lake Diary (2006) by choreographer Wang Mei (https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV19h411H7mm/), and its appearance in Chinese commercial movies, such as the teenage film *Zhīzhūhuá Kāi* (*Gardenia in Blossom* 2015) directed by He Jiong (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-R40pXqrCOM).
Dance scholar Eva Shan Chou (2016) has explored how the highest CCP leader Mao Zedong was exposed to ballet during political interaction with the Soviet Union and the important role that ballet played in the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s. Wilcox (2018a) also argues that ballet functioned as international communication and competition in China’s cultural diplomacy during the Cold War period.

The 2016 G20 Gala can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdWQaMIO70A

While Zhang and his production team kept asserting that the white swan dancers’ images were created by hologram technology, it was in fact the optical illusion created by Pepper’s ghost projection technique. During the performance, a projection screen was set below the movable stage at 45 degree and the dancers had to correspond to the movement of virtual dancers on the screen (Science+ 2016).

Zhang’s interview can be found at: http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/09/02/ARTI10cD1rhxqSqCYVKT01UZ160902.shtml

See the G20 Swan Lake at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ru9SkGABQ4

See more interpretation of the logo in G20 official website. http://www.g20chn.org/English/China2016/Logo/201512/t20151201_1672.html

Guan’s interview can be found at: https://www.sohu.com/a/113870071_119700

In addition, the application of Chinese traditional costume and instruments, the projection images of traditional Chinese fan patterns, and the luminated pavilion in the distance of the West Lake along with performance Chinese music and classical dance also manifested a self-Orientalist approach in asserting Chineseness. Self-Orientalism is an idea I will examine in detail in my exploration of Chinese classical dance in Chapter 4.

Tao’s interview can be found at: http://m.news.cctv.com/2016/09/09/ARTIRFf8W3Uy6tyhWEo9n1tA160909.shtml

The slogan of “Dare to think and dare to act” in the Great Leap Forward is a translation by BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-24923993

Chinese literature scholar Meng Yue (1993) has studied the transformation of Xi’er’s sexual oppression to class oppression in the opera (1942), film (1950), and ballet (1965) versions of White-Haired Girl.

In the Chinese version of the advertisement, the photo is the same, but the proverb has been changed to “our life is painful and happy” (我们的人生痛, 并快乐着) without any citation. https://www.sohu.com/a/393586113_479829

The forum question was published by Xu Xiner in 2013, and Zhihu users began to comment (or answer) in 2016. The user who quoted the Huawei poster was uploaded by
The creation of Dunhuang dance was based on research around the fresco of Mogao Caves, known as Thousand Buddha Grottoes, in China’s Northwestern city Dunhuang. See Sohu (2019).

Su says, “If a genre is defined by style and choreography works, I think there are roughly three types of genres: the first one is Li-Tang’s (Li Zhengyi and Tang Mancheng) Shenyun and its representative dances are Princess Wencheng and The Yellow River; the second one is Sun Ying’s Shenyun, Han-Tang and its representative works are Tongque Ji and Ta Ge; and the third one is Gao Jinrong’s Zaoxing. Among them, Li-Tang’s style is close to court opera, Sun Ying’s style is similar to ancient folk dance, and Gao Jinrong’s style relies on the western China’s traditional customs” (Su 2004).

For more information about Liu Fengxue, see https://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=20848


Miao divides the development of modern dance in China into three period: the New Dance Period (1900s–1940s), the Forbidden Period (1950s–1970s), and the Rebirth Period (late 1970s–the present). The introduction of Western modern dance was similar to the developmental trajectory of ballet in China. During the 1920s, Western modern dance was introduced by Western modern dance companies and Chinese dance pioneers to the audience of the east coast of China. However, after the establishment of PRC in 1949, modern dance was considered by CCP as relevant to capitalism and American imperialism and was forbidden to be studied across the country. Wilcox (2018c) also sheds light on a postcolonial logic of refusing Western modern dance by BDS dance practitioners during socialist China.

Taught by teachers from American Dance Festival (ADF), the Guangdong program had cultivated the first group of Chinese modern dancers, such as Wang Mei, Ma Shouze,
Jin Xing, and Su Ka, who have later become the mainstay of teaching and choreographing modern dance in China (Miao 2019 and 2022).

135 Yin’s *Yellow River Piano Concerto* was an adaptation in the late 1960s of composer Xian Xinghai’s famous choral suite, *Yellow River Cantata* (1939) and became one of the three symphonies allowed to be performed during the Cultural Revolution. Xian composed *Yellow River Cantata* in communist-controlled Yan’an during the Sino-Japanese War to evoke the patriotic spirit of the Chinese to defend their motherland during war time.

136 The idea of “symphonic choreography” (交响编舞法) was formulated by the Russian-born Chinese ballet dancer and choreographer Xiao Suhua. By studying choreography with Soviet ballet master Yuri Grigorovich from 1987 to 1988, Xiao’s concept of “symphonic choreography” was inspired by Grigorovich’s “symphonic ballet” *Spartacus* (1968). In opposing to the application of mime in “drama ballet” (戏剧芭蕾) or classical ballet, “symphonic ballet” emphasizes the coherence of dance movements and characters’ emotional expression with music. In other words, the characters’ dance scenes in ballet was no longer motivated by plot but consistently attached to the dynamic changes of music (Lü 2018). However, “symphonic ballet” in English is a term that specifically describes ballets choreographed by Russian ballet choreographer Léonide Massine (Craine and Mackrell 2010).

137 The *Yellow River* (1988) https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1xf4y1R7tt/

138 The song *East is Red* is used to honour Chairman Mao Zedong’s great victory of his concept of the people’s war.

139 Zhang Yujun’s interview in Centennial Works Exhibition of BDA in Celebrating the Establishment of the CCP (2021). https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1gL411c7wd/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87 Video

140 Pang Dan’s interview in Centennial Works Exhibition of BDA in Celebrating the Establishment of the CCP (2021).

141 In 2000, Tong was a senior student of the department of Choreography at BDA and *Fan Dance* was originally the capstone project of Tong. In 2001, *Fan Dance* won the first prize of choreography and the first prize for performance in the fifth NDC.

142 Wilcox (2011) also cites Ye’s definition of yijing when exploring the unique Chinese aesthetic in gudianwu.

143 *Goddess of the River Luo* is the dance I describe at the very beginning of the Introduction chapter. The heroine of the dance, Zhenfu/Goddess of the River Luo, was performed by Tang Shiyi, who developed her own signature technique tricks when she was a student of the BDA gudianwu program (Chapter 2).
Wilcox (2011) examines the expression of the artistic realm in the choreography of Ai Lian Shuo.

Portrait brick or portrait stone (画像砖) refers to the decorative brick engraved or molded with images and patterns on ancient buildings or frescos. It originated during China Warring State Period (475-211 BCE) and was later popular with aristocrats and emperors in the Han Dynasty as decorative elements in the frescos of their tombs. The images on portrait bricks features ancient legends and social activities, such as planting, marketing, horse riding, hunting, feasting, and dancing.

For video record of 1985 Tongque Ji, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV17b411k7Mv/

Sun choreographed Han court dances for the famous television series Romance of the Three Kingdoms (1994), see video examples at https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ea4y1e7Rr/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87.

The other three dances and their associated historical periods are Qianggu during the Han Dynasty (202 BCE-220 AD), Shuzu Le during the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BCE), and Yutu Huntuo during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

In April 29, 2016, the United Unions Postal Administration issued six special stamps to celebrate International Dance Day and feature the dance characters of Ta Ge, who wear V-neck green robes and toss their long sleeves. For a video recording of the original Ta Ge in 1997, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPjyb-20MXU&ab_channel=robbsic

Yanhuang Ji and Longzu Fengyun were later combined by Sun into his larger project of “Seeking the Roots, Interpreting the Ancestors, and Composing Chinese Aesthetic” (Xungen Shuzu Puhuafeng), a Chinese classical dance gala in 2004. For a video recording, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Fs411r7iH?from=search&seid=1732613273014947539&spm_id_from=333.337.0.0

For a video record of 2009 Tongque Ji, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKBz4N7mPls&list=PLpp9KqcG8to1Kz03rE-Q270kXLBbMWwHA&index=1&ab_channel=ChineseFolkDance

Two young dance students from BDA Affiliated Middle School performed the childhood roles.

These same shoes were also used by dancers in Xianghe Ge (The Xianghe Song) of the fourth act of Tongque Ji, in which a group of female dancers wore V-neck robes with long sleeves and danced on their 16-inch drums.
With his background in music, Sun also composed the music of *Ta Ge* and adapted ancient Chinese poems into lyrics in *Ta Ge* and *Xianghe Ge*, where dancers sing while dancing.


The English translation of Xi’s instruction on foreign art form comes from [https://www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org/2019/07/01/xi-jinping-on-art-and-culture/](https://www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org/2019/07/01/xi-jinping-on-art-and-culture/).

For the video recording of *Young Scholar and Paper Fan*, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQPnXAvedM0&t=349s&ab_channel=%E5%BC%A0%E4%BF%8A%E5%8F%B0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQPnXAvedM0&t=349s&ab_channel=%E5%BC%A0%E4%BF%8A%E5%8F%B0).

According to the official development report of Sina Weibo, the monthly active users of Weibo in 2018 was 462 million and the number has been increased to 573 million in September 2021.

CNR’s Weibo post. [https://weibo.com/1867571077/G6RAXvYZs?refer_flag=1001030103](https://weibo.com/1867571077/G6RAXvYZs?refer_flag=1001030103)

Trending Topics or Hot Topics on Weibo is the real-time amalgamation of popular topics based on the participation of users as well as the manipulation of Weibo staff (Yan and Zhao 2015). They reflect the information searches and commentary of users. The background system of Weibo counts the amount of searches, posts and reposts, interactions, and views of each hashtagged topic within every minute and update the top 50 trending topics on the Hot Searches List.

A Weibo user “兰小壮” (兰小壮) comments on a stage version of *Young Scholar* posted by Hu, that “the studio version is the greatest, just like the students were studying at a college a second ago and began to dance after class.”

*Young Scholar and Paper Fan* also performed in the introduction film of *The Chinese Youth*, an online reality show on iQiyi that focuses on promoting Chinese traditional culture, in late 2018; the Coolest Dragon-Boat Festival in 2019, a special television program that celebrates Chinese Dragon-Boat Festival and features performances of Chinese traditional and ethnic culture; and in 2021, it was performed in CCTV 2021 New Year gala, *Sail*.

*Qingming Festival Wonder Tour* combined shooting on location at historical sites in Henan with virtual reality technology. *Young Scholar* in the program was danced by BDA junior *gudianwu* male students, as the original cast had graduated in 2019. For the whole film, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMSErLe9-EM&ab_channel=%E6%B2%B3%E5%8D%97%E5%B9%BF%E6%92%AD%E7%94%](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMSErLe9-EM&ab_channel=%E6%B2%B3%E5%8D%97%E5%B9%BF%E6%92%AD%E7%94%).
The popularity of gudianwu beyond the professional dance field has been coined by the Chinese presses as chuquan or poquan (going beyond or breaking through the circle) and wanghai wudao (internet celebrity dance). Similar to Young Scholar, a female group gudianwu titled A Banquet of Tang Palace was that was nominated for the 12th Lotus Award of Chinese Dance in 2020. HNTV recognized the fad of gudianwu and promoted a series of television programs in 2021 that combined traditional dance and music with innovative film technology. These programs included gudianwu Young Scholar in Qingming Festival Wonder Tour in April, an underwater work River Goddess (Luoshen Shuifu 2021) in Dragon-Boat Festival Wonder Tour, a Dunhuang dance in Qiqiao Festival Wonder Tour in August, and lion dance in Mid-Autumn Festival Wonder Tour. Dance Millennium in November was a series with eight episodes and each episode promoted three gudianwu works, such as Sun’s Ta Ge and Chen’s Emperor Qin’s Soldiers, which were performed by professional dance companies.

In China, every television show, series, and program is subject to censorship by State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT). The circulation of information, pictures, and videos online are also censored by Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC; http://www.cac.gov.cn/). Therefore, shows that audiences see on television and online platforms have been already filtered by SARFT and CAC.

Informed by the innovative gudianwu videos by HNTV, the demonstration of gudianwu on screen through camera editing techniques and advanced visual technologies has been considered by newspaper critics as guochao or China-chic (Guangming Daily 2021; Renmin 2021).

For video of Tomb Figures I, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV18U4y1a7kM?spm_id_from=333.905.b_72656c61746564.1

Tomb Figures: Dancing Myself (2020) is a fifty-minute concert dance performance that consists of Tomb Figure II and Tian’s new choreography. It is also considered the 2.5 version of the Tomb Figures series by Tian (Tian 2021). Tomb Figures III (2021) is a seventy-minute concert dance performance which consists of eight independent short pieces. For video of Tomb Figures II, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1tT4y1g7ub/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.3

Lotus was the second production of the Fat Tang Thin Song (肥唐瘦宋), a series “dance theater” experiments by Zhao Xiaogang and Zhang Yunfeng since 2013. Wilcox (2018a) has analyzed the first production of Zhao and Zhang’s series and explored how “dance theater” aligns with German Tanztheater and differed from realist dance drama.
For detail of the criticism towards *Peace Dove*, see Chapter 1.

*Napoli* was a three-act ballet choreographed by Danish ballet master and choreographer August Bournonville for the Royal Ballet of Denmark in 1842. Viscount was also the first choreographer to introduce Bournonville style to Chinese ballet dancers. In 1981 he performed and staged the full-length *Giselle* for the Shanghai Ballet Company. The trend of stage Western ballet also occurred in other places, such as BDA students performed *Swan Lake* and *Coppélia* in 1979, Tianjin People's Song and Dance Theater restaged *Spanish Daughter* in 1982, and Liaoning Ballet Company, which was established in 1981, staged *Le Corsaire* in 1983.

“The Implementing Accord of the US-PRC Cultural Arrangement,” signed by American Vice President Walter Mondale and Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping in 1979 advanced cultural exchanges between China and the US in the 1980s with ballet at the center of the communication. In 1980, more than 10,000 Chinese academic and technical specialists studied in the US with government support.

In 1978, more than 150 Chinese musicians, dancers, and performers of Beijing Opera comprised a temporary art troupe and toured five cities in the US. They introduced Chinese traditional music, opera, Chinese folk and ethnic dance, as well as the revolutionary ballet, *Red Detachment of Women*. However, Shanghai Ballet Company was the first Chinese dance company toured abroad. It performed *The White-Haired Girl* in Toronto in 1977.

Since 1979, ballet companies from England, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Canada also introduced contemporary ballet to Chinese audiences. In 1979, English National Ballet (then London Festival Ballet) toured to China and first brought contemporary ballet repertoire, such as Harald Lander’s *Étude* (1948); in 1981, Jerome Robbins Chamber Dance Company toured China and performed Vaslav Nijinsky’s famous ballet *L’Après-midi d’un faune* (*The Afternoon of a Faun*); in the same year, Ben Stevenson, the then-director of Houston Ballet, toured his company to China.

Stevenson first visited China in 1979 as part of the initial arts delegation of the United States in the wake of the China-US diplomatic relationship. Over the course of his nine visits, he taught his ballet *Three Preludes* to dancers of National Ballet and spent most of his time teaching at BDA where he offered a scholarship to the talented ballet dancer, Li Cunxin.


In addition, NBC produced *Raise the Red Lantern* (大红灯笼高高挂 2001), *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭 2008), and *The Light of Heat* (*Dunhuang* 敦煌 2017), Tianjin Ballet Company staged *Jingwei* (精卫 2001), Shanghai Ballet Company choreographed *The
Sigh of Love (花样年华 2006) and Bright Red Star (闪闪的红星 2018), Liaoning Ballet Company premiered The Moon Over a Fountain (Erquan Yingyue 二泉映月 1997), and Guangzhou Ballet Company created Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳 2001) and Returning in Snowy Night (风雪夜归人2009).

178 Li Chenglian is one of the gudianwu pioneers and taught a gudianwu basic training course from 1954 to 1955.

179 In 1959, Li Chenglian also choreographed a Chinese dance solo Spring, River, and Flowers on a Moonlit Night for Chen Ailian. The dance promoted Chen as a star of Chinese dance and won gold awards in the seventh and eighth World Youth Festival in 1959 and 1962. For more details of the form and aesthetic of the dance and the criticism towards it, see Wilcox’s book Revolutionary Bodies (Wilcox 2018a).

180 A capitalist roader was defined as the ruling class who was intimate with or sympathy to capitalism during Mao’s China.

181 Bai says that Prime Minister Zhou asked about her in 1974 and she was allowed to return to Beijing (Su 2018).

182 Meanwhile the recovery of dance training at CWAU in 1973 also allowed ballet teachers to choreograph ballet pieces for students. Yin choreographed Bee and Bear in 1975, Lin Lianrong choreographed Red Rock Green Pine (Hongyan Qingsong) in 1976, and Luo Xiongyan choreographed Young Pioneers in Orchard in 1977.

183 According to newspaper reports, English Ballet dancer Margot Fonteyn watched the ballet during her visit to China in 1987 and decided to include an excerpt of the ballet in her autobiographical film The Magic of Dance in 1979 (Guo 2005). For video recording of the ballet see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIIWqZLuPD0&ab_channel=DoReMiSharing.

184 While the video of Xiangzhang Qu is not opened to the public, photos and drawings of the ballet in costume designer Li Keyu’s book shows the combination of Miao’s costumes and props with ballet pointe technique. https://books.google.com.hk/books?id=B90EAA8AQA&pg=PT130&lpg=PT130&dq=%E9%A6%99%E6%A8%9F%E6%9B%B2+%E8%8A%AD%E8%95%BE&source=bl&ots=aDVMzrAGpN&sig=ACfU3U3q0KKFVb7W6KPPq2qu4qdX_fFh9FA&hl=zh-CN&sa=X&redir_esc=y&sourceid=cndr#v=onepage&q=%E9%A6%99%E6%A8%9F%E6%9B%B2%20%E8%8A%AD%E8%95%BE&f=false

185 “The scorching sun” is a metaphor for Yang in Mao’s poem Die Lian Hua: Da Li Shuyi in 1957 to lament Yang’s death and her revolutionary spirit. According to Cheng Shunyao, the Gansu Deputy Minister of the Publicity Department, The Scorching Sun was performed across twenty-eight provinces in China after the Cultural Revolution. I suggest that the creation and nationwide performances of the ballet was also political propaganda that responded to the fall of Mao’s second wife Jiang Qing and compared the
“heroic” Mao’s first wife and the “reviled” second wife.  
http://discovery.cctv.com/20070605/106463.shtml

186 From the 1990s, professional ballet ensembles gradually emerged in the big cities of China, such as Tianjin Ballet Company in 1992, Guangzhou Ballet Company in 1994, Suzhou Ballet Ensemble in 2007, Beijing Dance Theatre (focusing on contemporary ballet and modern dance performance) in 2008, Chongqing Ballet Company in 2012, Lanzhou Ballet Company in 2017, and Harbin Ballet Company in 2019. The establishment of these ballet ensembles represents the rapid emergence of ballet practitioners and audiences in China.

187 Sacrificial offerings are used to celebrate ancestors or gods.

188 See the English translation of the short story Zhufu at https://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1924/02/07.htm.

189 The two images were portrayed by the director Sang Hu in the movie New Year’s Sacrifice in 1956.

190 According to Jiang, she adopted movements of Drum Yangge, a Han Chinese folk dance for males in Shandong Province (Jiang 2018).

191 For video of the reconstructed duet by NBC, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kRqwerwDpA&ab_channel=%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%AE%E8%8A%AD%E8%95%BE%E8%88%9E%E5%9B%A2NationalBalletofChina.

192 The portrayal of complicated individual characteristics can also be found in other artistic works, such as painter Luo Zhongli’s oil painting Father (1980), director Chen Kaige’s film Yellow Earth (1984), author Mo Yan’s novel Red Sorghum (1986), and playwright Gao Xingjian’s drama The Bus Stop (1983) and Wild Man (1985).

193 In 2012, BDA ballet teacher Guan Yu and NBC choreographer Wang Sizheng co-choreographed another ballet version of The Yellow River for BDA ballet program.

194 In the late 1990s, modern dance teacher and choreographer Wang Yuanyuan, who graduated from the Chinese dance program at BDA Affiliated Middle School, became a resident choreographer at NBC and choreographed Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Butterfly Lovers) in 1999 and a Chinese version of The Nutcracker in 2001. However, the then-NBC leader, Zhao Ruheng, comments that “neither of these ballets is particularly successful” (Wan 2011).

195 Interview with Li in January 2021 through WeChat.

196 This preference of dancing Western ballet has been a long-term issue among Chinese ballet practitioners. When Jiang proposed to choreograph Zhufu in 1979, she received
many objections from the company leaders and dancers who wished to restage Western ballet repertoire such as Swan Lake (Dancers Association of China et al. 2018).

Informal conversation and cited with approval.

The television documentary was aired on Phoenix TV in 2009 and is forbidden to be shown on television or online in today’s China.

The three principal dancers who stayed were Wang Caijun, Feng Ying, and Zhang Dandan. Wang and Feng are currently leaders of NBC and Zhang became the leader of Guangzhou Ballet Company and then established Harbin Ballet Company.

When Zhao Ruheng became the new director of the company in 1993, many NBC dancers were poached by the newly established Guangzhou Ballet Company (Wan 2011) and some of them pursued their academic and professional careers abroad.

For more information about China’s “cultural system reform” for dance troupes not directly affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, see Chapter 2 and 3 of Wilcox’s dissertation (Wilcox 2011).

While both the ballet and the film revealed the remaining dying feudal ethics of the 1920s, the ballet Raise the Red Lantern focused on demonstrating the heroine’s helpless fight with the lord and her tragic love with the opera actor. Instead of joining the competition between the concubines that the film and novel display, Songlian in the ballet version was portrayed as an innocent young woman who was loyal to her old love even if she was forced to marry the lord. Zhang explains that he simplified the plot in the ballet Red Lantern to emphasize the emotional relationship between the characters, the distortion of female humanity in feudalism, and the human nature of aspiring to life and happiness (Zhao 2001).

The concept of a school uniform entered China along with the Westernized modern education in the early twentieth century. School uniforms for female students during the Republic China combined a Chinese-style jackets and Western-style pleated skirts. See photos of the 1920s’ female school uniform at https://www.pinterest.com/pin/228698487307589889/.

Unfortunately, the original version of the ballet in 2001 is not circulated online or produced as a DVD, which is impossible for executing a comparison between the 2001 and 2003 versions of Red Lantern in this chapter.

For the revised version Red Lantern, see https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1hs411x7EL/.

During rehearsal, NBC director Zhao invited Beijing Opera experts to teach sleeve movements and xiqu’s body postures and articulations (shenduan) for both the ballet dancers and choreographers.
In 2000, NBC invited Swedish choreographer, Pär Isberg, to choreograph *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai (Butterfly Lovers)* based on a romantic Chinese story.

According to the producer Gao Shan, *Red Lantern* was not sponsored by the Chinese government at the beginning of the production in 2001. Gao says “[the project] was started secretly because the Ministry of Culture did not approve, so the company could not establish the project and without project establishment there would be no reimbursement from the company, it would be illegal to use public money, so Zhao had to advance her own money” (Gan 2010). It was through the later sponsorship from Li Jiacheng, the richest man in Hong Kong, that the production of the *Red Lantern* was able to continue.

Some of the performance information of *Red Lantern* can be seen at *Souhu Entertainment* [https://yule.sohu.com/20110225/n279528822.shtml](https://yule.sohu.com/20110225/n279528822.shtml).

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2021. Li Chenegxiang


APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

*Anzhang* (按掌): a hand position in front of the chest. Palm facing downward, open and straighten the thumb, while keeping the other four fingers straightened and tied together.

*Bantui* (搬腿): dancers stand straight and lift one of their legs to their chest and use two hands to straighten the lifted leg above their head in a 180 or more than 180 degree split.

Banyue shi (half-moon shape 半月式): a side-bend of the body.

*Bingchi* shi(side by side wings 并翅式): an arm pose. Dancers lift their arms with the natural palms to one side of their bodies, slightly bend their elbows and raise their inner wrists.

*Changhong* (rainbow 长虹): an arm pose. Hands in natural palms up and arms stretch to each side of the body with one arm higher and the other arm lower and use arms to form a straight line.

*Chuanfanshen* (串翻身) or *xiao bengzi* (小蹦子): a series of fanshen moves across the floor with arms stretching out vertically to the opposite side.

*Chuanju* (川剧): Chuan opera

*Chuaiyan* (kick swallow 踹燕):

*Da yebu* (big tucking step 大掖步): a big lunge position with the front leg bends to 90 degrees and the back leg stays straight and point, while the upper body twist horizontally towards the back leg.

*Dian fanshen* (点翻身): a succession of pinwheel-like turns or fanshen in a place

*Duantui* (端腿): one leg lift in which the working leg bends and lifts horizontally in front of the body with sickling of the foot.

*Fanshen* (翻身): turnover of the body with torso bends forward and turnover the body quickly in 360 degrees.
Feijiao (fly feet 飞脚): a jumping and turning with piantui on one leg and gaitui on the other leg in the air

Fenghuolun (wind-fire wheel 风火轮): a complex movement that requires the coordination of arms, waist, and leg. Arms stay pointing to opposite direction beside the body and when torso finishes a circle with the trajectory of twisting to one side, uplifting and high released to the center, twisting to the other side, and coming back to original position, the arms follow the torso and execute two vertical circles as two blades of a windmill.

Gaitui (盖腿): a leg kick towards the side of the body and sweeps across the front of the body to the opposite side.

Gudianwu (古典舞): classical dance

Heshou (合手): a circular arm movement. Dancer raises one or both arms from side/sides of the body above the head and bends the elbow/elbows and lowers the arm/arms in front of the chest. While circulating arms in a vertical circle, dancers are required to keep their elbows slightly bend.

Huangshou (sway hand 晃手): arms lift and down in a vertical circle front one side of the body to the other side of the body, while torso moves against the arms direction.

Jiaotui bengzi (绞腿蹦子) :for female, small jumps in xitui fanshen with both legs in passé parallel in the air

Jingju (京剧): Beijing Opera

Kongzi (控制): leg control or développé

Kunqu (昆曲): Kun opera

Lanhua zhi (orchid finger 兰花指): keep five fingers straight and the thumb touches the middle finger to form an orchid shape that is exclusively for female dancers.

Latui bengzi (拉腿蹦子): for male, a simultaneous big jump and turns with legs split in the air

Pitui Tiao (劈腿跳): jump and split legs in the air

Piantui (蹁腿): a front kick towards the opposite shoulder and sweeps to the side of the body
Shanbang (mountain shoulder 山膀): similar to ballet second arm position with both arms stretch out to the side of a body, but with palms facing outward.

Shangyang tui (Shangyang leg 商羊腿): a one leg gesture from xiqu, in which the working leg bends and lifts in front of the body with a sickled foot. Shangyang is an ancient bird in China. In Chinese mythologies, the bird would dance on one leg when the rain comes.

Sheyan (shot swallow 射燕): a one leg standing position. Dancers stand in a T shape feet position, while the thighs of two legs close and attach together, dancers lift their back lower leg as high as possible with pointed foot. As the same time, dancers upper body stay straight, lifted, and twist towards the back leg.

Shizi bu (十字步): a cross step. Two feet step alternatively with the right foot steps across the body to the left side, the left foot steps across the right foot to the front, then right foot steps back to its starting place, and the left foot steps straight backward, vice versa.

Shuanyao (涮腰): a circle of the waist. Dancers stretch their arms above the head while bending their waist deeply and circle their waists to forward, side, back, and side, they circle their upper bodies horizontally around the waist and show the flexibility and control of their torsos.

Tabu (踏步): a standing position. One leg steps on demi point behind the supporting leg with two thighs and knees overlapping and close together.

Tabu dun (踏步蹲): a deep squat in tabu position with leg crossed and knees overlapped. It requires a tight connection between the front and back knees without a gap in between.

Tangshen feijiao (躺身飞脚): torso stays laying in a horizontal plane while doing feijiao.

Titui (踢腿): leg kick or grand battement.

Tuoshou (托手): a hand and arm position above the head. Palm facing upward, open and straighten the thumb, while keeping the other four fingers straightened and tied together. Similar to the fifth position in ballet, but the palm facing outside.

Tunmen dajuan (云门大卷): a reversed side and momentum of tangshen feijiao, the torso stays prone in the air and legs kick and spiral behind the body.
Woyun (lying cloud 卧云): a cross-leg sitting position. Dancers squat down to the floor in tabu dun and form a leg-cross sitting position with two knees tightly overlapping and bending, and the upper bodies fold forward and twist to one side.

Xiao chuishou (little hand drop 小垂手): dancers’ arms separately drop in front and at the back of the body while slightly bending their elbows and flexing their wrists; their hips push to one side and their legs also bend a little with feet standing in an opened T shape.

Xie tanhai (斜探海): similar to penché in ballet.

Xieta (leaning tower 斜塔): a lean position of the body, literally means leaning tower.

Xiqu (戏曲): Chinese opera.

Xitui fanshen turns (吸腿翻身): fanshen with one leg in passé parallel and arms stretching out vertically to the opposite side.

Xuanzi (旋子): cyclone, a sideway somersault with body tilt parallel to the floor in the air.

Yanzi chuanlin (swallow flies across the forest 燕子穿林): a sequence of movements derived from martial arts. It integrates Shenyun principles of shift, lean, move inward, side lift, and the horizontal twist of the upper body and is accomplished with shifting foot works, turns, squats, and stands. The phrase yanzi chuanli describes the rapid movement quality and likens dancers’/fighters’ movements to the swift and graceful flight of swallows as they dart through a forest.

Yanshi Tiao (swallow jump 燕式跳): jump with one leg bent and the other leg stretched, like a flying swallow.

Yangge (秧歌): is a type of folk dance that originated in Northeast China. It is a lively and upbeat dance that is performed by groups of people and is often accompanied by drumming and singing. The dance is traditionally performed during festivals, celebrations, and other joyous occasions, and is known for its simple, repetitive movements and cheerful, upbeat rhythm. Today, Yangge remains a popular form of entertainment in China and is widely performed across the country, both by professional and amateur dance groups.

Yuanchang (圆场): a fast and small heel-to-toe step adopted from xiqu.
**Yunjian zhuanyao** (云间转腰): derives from a xiqu technique. It is a 360-degree circular movement in the horizontal plane around dancer’s waist with a simultaneous movement of **yunshou**.

**Yunli** (云里) or **manzi** (蛮子): an aerial backflip. Dancers keep the torso straight and form a leg split during upside down in the air.

**Yunshou** (云手 could hand): A basic **yunshou** looks like using two hands to knead and circle an invisible ball in front of the chest; it not only features a kneading movement between two hands that initiates with one hand above and ends with the other hand above, but also requires a simultaneous circulation of two wrists (called **panwan** 盘腕 in **gudianwu**) while the hands moving in a big circle. There are different types of **yunshou** such as **boliang yunshou** (波浪云手) extends the arm movements from the chest to above the head, as kneading a huge ball in front of and above head.

**Zhongguo** (中国): China

**Zi-jin-guan tiao** (purple-and-gold crown jump紫金冠跳): a big jump. Dancers spring off from two feet, split both legs in the air, and land on one foot, as a sissonne fermé in ballet. **Zi-jin-guan tiao** in **gudianwu** requires female dancers to split their legs beyond 180 degrees by kicking their back legs toward their head while at the same time bending their waists backward and using their hands to touch their back feet.

**Ziran zhang** (自然掌 the natural palm): five figures loosely stretched out and dropped down.

**Ziwu xiang** (子午相): a body position adopted from xiqu that emphasizes a slight twist relationship between the head, torso, and legs.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewer:

Offers thanks for participating in the interview

Give brief reminder of the research topic

Ensure CONSENT form is signed

Explain that if any questions are unclear, then to ask for clarification and that, if the interviewee wishes to pause or decline to answer at any stage, then that is fine.

Questions:

1. Just to begin with, could you briefly tell me when and how you began to study Chinese classical dance/ballet at BDA?

2. And could you tell me what drew you to study Chinese classical dance/ballet?

3. What do you enjoy about dancing Chinese classical dance/ballet?

4. What interested you most in studying at BDA?

I am interested in the process of BDA admission-audition and your everyday dance training, so I’m going to ask you a little about both:

5. Could you describe the audition process when you applied BDA?

6. Did you receive any dance training before applying to BDA and how long was it?

7. What was your most memorable experience during the audition?

8. Could you tell me about your daily dance training, including dance classes, morning and evening drills, rehearsals, and other training that you have experienced? What are the functions of this training in developing specific bodily
9. Do you think your daily training of Chinese classical dance/ballet has any connection with ballet/Chinese classical dance training, in terms of dance technique, training method, class structure, dance attires, or any other aspects you have recognized?

From my own experience of ballet and Chinese classical dance training and my understanding of the dance forms’ histories, I think Chinese classical dance combines ballet technique and Chinese Opera vocabularies and ballet also combines Chinese dance vocabularies in many Chinese ballet choreographies. Therefore, I think they are hybrid dance forms. However, I am interested in your perspective of Chinese classical dance/Chinese ballet as a hybrid dance form and you can draw on your experiences from classes and performances, rehearsals or any other part of the training to help you answer them.

10. Do you think Chinese classical dance is a hybrid dance form which combines Chinese traditional culture and Western models?

11. If yes, how do you experience the hybridity in your dance training and performance?

12. If not, how do you think the presence of the aesthetic and technique of ballet in Chinese classical dance choreography/performance and ballet choreography also adopted Chinese classical dance movements?

13. What do you think about Chinese classical dance practitioners’ efforts to minimize ballet in Chinese classical dance training over the past two decades? In what way do you think they are successful, or in what way do you think they are not successful?

14. If you are aware of the debate between the Han-Tang style of Chinese classical dance and the Shenyyun style of Chinese classical dance at BDA about the authenticity of Chinese classical dance (I can explain if you are not familiar)? Where this position your own views in relation to the debate?

15. Can you think of a Chinese classical dance piece in your performance experience that serves as a perfect example of Chinese classical dance? In what way does it
inherit Chinese traditional culture?

16. Since the 1980s, ballet companies in China also created many ballet-based on Chinese legends. What do you think of those Chinese ballets? Do you think they successfully indigenize ballet and represent unique Chinese characteristics?

17. Can you think of a Chinese ballet that you feel like it successfully represents unique Chinese characteristics and smoothly articulates Western ballet and Chinese culture? How it did these in terms of the dance narrative, choreography, and dancers’ performance?

18. Can you tell me about what your understand to be “Chinese”? What characteristics do you think associate with being “Chinese” or what are the hallmarks of Chinese national identity?

19. Can you tell me about an experience where you feel dancing Chinese classical dance/Chinese ballet enhanced your pride of being Chinese or vice versa?

20. Based on your experience, do you have any suggestions regarding the future development of Chinese classical dance and Chinese ballet? Can you think of any ways in which they can better represent the uniqueness of Chinese culture?

21. As you know, I am interested in how the hybrid Chinese classical dance and Chinese ballet speak to the idea of Chineseness – is there anything else you want to add, or anything we haven’t covered?

End interview with follow-up comments:

Thank you to the interviewee.

Explain that I will send her/him a copy of the transcript.

Ask interviewee is s/he has any further questions

Chinese Example:

采访问题：
1. 首先，可否请你简单回忆一下你是什么时候开始并且如何开始在北舞学习古典舞/芭蕾的？
2. 可否请你告诉我是什么契机导致你开始了专业的古典舞/芭蕾舞学习呢？
3. 你喜欢古典舞/芭蕾的什么地方呢？
4. 古典舞/芭蕾让你最感兴趣的地方是什么？

我对于你考入北舞时的面试过程和考上以后每天都舞蹈训练都很感兴趣，所以我接下来的问题跟这两个方面相关：

5. 可否请你描述一下你考学面试时候的过程？
6. 在你读北舞之前有没有接受过舞蹈训练，大概是多久的训练？
7. 在面试过程中让你记忆最深刻的经历是什么？
8. 可否请你描述一下你每天都舞蹈训练，包括都有什么舞蹈课、早晚功、排练以及其他你经历过的训练？你认为这些训练对于发展自己的身体能力分别有什么功能？
9. 你是否觉得你每天都古典舞/芭蕾训练跟芭蕾/古典舞的训练有什么相关性或联系，比如在舞蹈技术、训练方式、课堂结构、练功时的穿着以及你注意到的其他方面？

从我自身学习芭蕾和古典舞的经验和我学习舞蹈史的经验来看，我认为古典舞的语汇结合了芭蕾的技术技巧和戏曲的动作，而芭蕾舞的作品也经常结合中国舞蹈的语汇。所以我认为他们是融合的舞蹈形式。不过，我很想知道你对古典舞和中国的芭蕾是融合舞蹈形式这一说法的看法。你可以从你自身的舞蹈学习和表演经历出发来回答一下问题。

10. 你是否认为中国古典舞是融合了中国传统文化和西方舞蹈样式的舞蹈形式？
11. 如果是的话，你在你的舞蹈训练和表演中是如何感受到这种融合性的？
12. 如果不是的话，你对古典舞中芭蕾的动作和美学元素怎么看，并且对芭蕾作品中融入古典舞的动作怎么看？
13. 你对近20年来古典舞人一直致力于去掉芭蕾对中国古典舞的影响怎么看？从什么方面来说你认为他们是成功的，或者从什么方面来说你认为他们并不成功？
14. 你是否知道汉唐古典舞和身韵古典舞之间的辩论，有关哪个派别才是真正的中国古典舞（如果不知道也没关系，我会简单的解释一下）？你本身比较支持哪一边，为什么呢？
15. 在你表演过的古典舞作品中有没有哪个作品让你认为是古典舞的代表作？它是怎么传承了中国的传统文化的？

16. 从上世纪80年代开始，中国的芭蕾舞团也开始创造中国自己的芭蕾作品。你对这些中国的芭蕾舞怎么看？你觉得他们有没有成功的让芭蕾艺术本土化并且能代表中国特色？

17. 在你看过的作品中有没有哪个作品让你感觉它非常成功的表现了中国的特色并且把西方和中国文化很好的融合在了一起？你可以从舞台叙述、舞蹈编排和舞蹈表演具体谈论一下这个作品如何做到这些的吗？

18. 你能不能跟我说说你对于作为“中国人”的理解？你认为作为一个“中国人”需要有什么特殊的品质，或者说中国的国民身份认同需要通过拥有什么品质来证明？

19. 你能在你的舞蹈经历中有没有哪件事或哪次让你觉得能成为古典舞/芭蕾演员并且跳中国古典舞/中国芭蕾让你觉得作为中国人非常的骄傲和自豪？

20. 根据你的舞蹈经验，你对于未来中国古典舞和中国芭蕾的发展有什么建议吗？你认为这两种舞蹈形式如何才能更好的表现中国文化的特色？

21. 就像我之前提过的，我对于古典舞和中国芭蕾如何表达中国特色非常的感兴趣——除了刚刚我问的问题之外，你对于这个话题还有没有什么补充的，或者你觉得我没有提到的？
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Temple IRB Approved
10/19/2020

My name is Ziying Cui and I am a PhD student of Dance at Temple University. I am working on my dissertation research project called Dancing Chinese Nationalism: An Examination into the Hybridity and Politics of Chinese Classical Dance and Ballet. I am specifically focusing on dancers at Beijing Dance Academy in China who practice Chinese classical dance (Zhongguo gudianwu) and ballet. My aim is to explore the hybrid characteristic of Chinese classical dance and Chinese ballet and how these hybrid dance forms inform the idea of Chineseness and dancers’ national identity.

I invite you to take part in a research study because I would like to learn more about your dancing experience and how you feel it has shaped your aesthetic values and national identity.

What should I know about this research?

• I will explain this research to you.
• Whether or not you take part is up to you.
• You can choose not to take part.
• You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
• Your decision will not be held against you.
• You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact the researcher at Ziying Cui +1 216-925-7111 or +86 13273112455; at WeChat: cuiziying123; or at ziyng.cui@temple.edu.

The interview will take approximately an hour and 30 minutes and will focus on your dance background, your experiences of dance training in the classroom and of performances on stage, and how you think Chinese classical dance/Chinese ballet as a hybrid national dance form has informed your aesthetics values and identity of
Chinese identity. I will explain this again before the interview and I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Although I anticipate that the questions are straightforward, you will be free to ask me for further explanation at any point. I do not anticipate that any of the questions are of a sensitive nature, but you are free to decline to answer selected questions if you wish and you may stop the interview at any time. If you decide not to take part or to stop the interview, this will not be held against you.

The interview will be recorded and I will give you a copy of the interview transcription. I will use selected quotations for the purposes of academic publishing therefore I will need your permission to use your interview material for this reason. Unless you wish to be known by your real name, I will use fictionalized names for the purposes of publishing this work. This will ensure that you can retain anonymity if you so wish.

The audio recordings will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared by anyone other than the researcher.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the researcher.
- You cannot reach the researcher.
- You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research

To the extent allowed by law, I limit the viewing of your personal information to the researcher (i.e. myself). I cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

Please check one of the following:

I would prefer you to give me a fictional name................................. ☐

I would prefer you to use my real name as follows ............................................. ☐
Signature Block for Adult Subject Capable of Consent

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of subject................................................................. Date ........................................

Printed name of subject............................................

Signature of person obtaining consent................................. Date .................................

Printed name of person obtaining consent ..................................................

Thank you for assisting me with this research project. If you wish to follow anything up with me, I can be contacted as follows:

Email: ziyieng.cui@temple.edu or hermione1124@126.com WeChat: cuiziying123
Phone: US: +1 216-925-7111; China: +86 13273112455

Chinese Example:

当代中国古典舞和芭蕾舞的混合性及民族主义

采访同意书

您好，我叫崔梓滢，我是美国天普大学舞蹈在读博士生。我目前在进行我的毕业论文研究——当代中国古典舞和芭蕾舞的混合性及民族主义。由于我曾是北舞舞蹈学系的学生，我主要关注于北京舞蹈学院的古典舞和芭蕾舞的学生及教师(在校生、老师和校友)的训练、教学和表演。我的主要研究目标是探索中国古典舞和芭蕾舞的混合的特征以及这种混合性如何体现中国特色和当代中国的民族主义。

由于我想更多的了解舞者的经历, 他们学习和表演古典舞/芭蕾的体验，还有他们对中国舞蹈混合性的看法，我想邀请您加入我的论文采访。

对于这个采访我应该了解什么？
我会向您解释我研究和采访的内容。
您可以自行决定是否参加这个采访。
您可以参加或不参加这个采访。
您可以反悔自己的决定。
您的决定不会对您不利。
在您决定之前可以向我问任何问题。

我可以和谁谈论这项研究？

如果你有疑问，顾虑，或控诉，或者认为此项研究会伤害你，请联系研究人崔梓滢，电话+1 216-925-7111或+86 13273112455；微信：cuiziying123；
或者发送邮箱至ziying.cui@temple.edu.

采访大约会进行一到一个半小时。内容主要关于您的舞蹈背景，您的舞蹈训练和表演的经历，您如何看待中国古典舞和中国的芭蕾是一种混合性的舞蹈形式，还有他们如何塑造了您的审美价值和作为中国人的身份认同。在采访前我会进一步解释这些内容。如果您有任何问题我都十分乐意解答。
虽然我认为这些问题都比较易懂，但是您在任何情况下都可以询问我并让我对他们进行解释。我虽然不认为这些问题设计敏感话题，但是在任何时候您都可以拒绝回答某个问题并且要求终止采访。不参加或终止采访并不会对您不利。

此次采访会被录音，之后我也会给您一份转录的采访稿。
由于我的研究可能会被出版并且会包含我们采访的内容，因此我需要您的同意才能把我们采访的内容写入研究论文里。如果您不希望读者知道您的真名，我在写作和出版研究的时候会用假名代替。如果需要，这能确保您的名字不被公布。

采访录音只会用于研究，并且不会分享给研究者以外的人。
此项研究已被天普大学审查委员会审查和批准。如有一下情况，您可以致电：(215) 707-3390 或发送邮件到:irb@temple.edu:

- 研究人不能回答您的问题，顾虑，或控诉时。
- 您联系不上研究人时。
- 您想与研究人之外的人员交谈时。
- 您作为研究对象对于自己的权利有问题时。
- 您想获得更多的信息或对研究提供建议时。

在法律允许范围内，您的个人信息只对研究人员（也就是我本人）可见。天普大学审查委员会（The IRB of Temple University）、天普大学健康系统（Temple University Health System, Inc.），以及天普大学的附属部门可能会检查并负责您的信息。
请确认一下选项:

我希望我的名字被匿名或使用假名. ............... ☐

我希望用我的真名 .................... ☐

签名栏（有行为能力的成年受访者）

你对签名证明你同意加入采访

签名................................................. 日期............................

印刷体签名.............................

Signature of person obtaining consent.......................... 日期 .........................

Printed name of person obtaining consent ..............................................

非常感谢您帮助我的论文研究和采访。如果您希望有后续的交流，请联系：邮箱: ziying.cui@temple.edu or hermione1124@126.com
微信: cuiziying123
电话: 美国: +1 216-925-7111; 中国: +86 13273112455
APPENDIX D

VIDEO BLOGS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Douyin

LH_Ballet.
https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAA1y4mhzy1bkPmSeJAj6Yf23FQ
Mz9jYLb5hlMLk8VOAc?is_search=0&list_name=follow&nt=0

Monica He.
https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAAaBMqhWz0wtYkd99Z10NIYs
M7nmCpTch0yML8EDe1X6A

土尼土尼https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAAAI7UUGGW4F6kZ1xqiizj_ Fi5BtXME_SRGbSVV4Tc48

邹梦洁.
https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAAAWcLFFc_4OzQ1Q2nxJirC4vS7 Q_78P0_KNLM45FSKvQ

小爱.
https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAAYqJ77bjui0NzsmLEM45AOMX
H7ylCkHXu7zqWpOs3Pa8?is_search=0&list_name=follow&nt=0

希贝.
https://www.douyin.com/user/MS4wLjABAAAAoSfSz8JGCnEMcDmWydgC6
CcWlrvatnLs4FrMesHzMw?is_search=0&list_name=follow&nt=0

Xiaohongshu (Red Book)

Si Yu. https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/58c4c9ae346094121bd3823f

小梨涡.
https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5b126c244eacab190ed3a980/638ff697
00000002203781e

李加薪嘉欣. https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/63399a15000000001802e770

果莉橙https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5a546fa34eacab0af1425a8e
晴大个儿. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5abf92dd4eacab2bae2c2834]
若希芭蕾. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/60405c47000000000100ba6c]
蒋金贝. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5e3662280000000001006661]
暴躁小吴. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5c0281830000000008007c10]
_胡慢慢. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/59eca7ebe8ac2b570eee1106]
大柳. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/5c0265f251783a0b0ad6fa68]
柯筱雅. [https://www.xiaohongshu.com/user/profile/59fc0a44e8ac2b073e082bd6]

Bilibili

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1JP4y1V7rg/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0]

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1idD4y11ah/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.7&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87]

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Z3411g7H3/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87]

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV18T4y1e7jE/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87]

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1F7411n7Rw/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87]

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1hy4y1e7sF/?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0&vd_source=f3d49ca0e9826fe48b872d9a2c37ee87]