A Study on the Creation of a Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Style Based on the Image of Mu Guiying*



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Abstract

This study aimed (1) to examine the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic characteristics of Mu Guiying as a female heroic figure in Chinese cultural narratives and performing arts; (2) to analyze the integration of Chinese dance elements and Thai dance aesthetics in the creation of a contemporary Sino-Thai fusion dance performance; and (3) to develop a creative performance model for a Sino-Thai fusion dance style based on the image of Mu Guiying. This research employs a mixed-methods design integrating documentary research, qualitative inquiry, and creative conceptual development. Documentary sources, expert consultations, and creative planning documents were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis.

The research found that: (1) Mu Guiying embodies a multidimensional cultural image characterized by heroism, wisdom, leadership, patriotism, and feminine strength, providing a rich cultural foundation for contemporary artistic interpretation and intercultural dance creation. (2) Chinese dance and Thai traditional dance possess compatible aesthetic principles in terms of movement quality, symbolic gesture, rhythm, spatial organization, and character expression, creating significant potential for intercultural artistic integration while maintaining cultural authenticity. (3) A Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model was proposed, consisting of cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design. The model provides a systematic conceptual framework for future intercultural dance creation based on traditional cultural figures and contemporary artistic innovation.

Keywords: Mu Guiying; Sino-Thai Fusion Dance; Intercultural Performance; Cultural Integration

Introduction

In the context of globalization and increasing intercultural exchange, artistic creation has gradually moved beyond the boundaries of a single cultural tradition and entered a stage of dialogue, reinterpretation, and integration. Dance, as a performing art centered on bodily expression, possesses unique advantages in cross-cultural communication because its meaning is generated through movement, rhythm, spatial organization, gesture, and embodied experience. Intercultural performance does not simply combine different cultural elements

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on the surface, but involves the transformation, negotiation, and reconstruction of meaning when different performance systems meet. Kruger and Pavis (2003) emphasized that intercultural theatre provides an important framework for understanding how cultures encounter one another through performance practice.

Mu Guiying is one of the most representative female heroic figures in Chinese cultural narratives. Originating from the legend of the Yang Family Generals, her image has been continuously reproduced through folklore, literature, opera, television drama, and dance. As a female military commander, Mu Guiying symbolizes bravery, loyalty, wisdom, responsibility, and patriotic spirit. In traditional Chinese opera, her heroic image is often shaped through stylized bodily techniques, military costume symbols, and martial movement patterns. Lovrick and Siu (2011) noted that Mu Guiying, as a female warrior in Chinese opera, is presented through distinctive movement techniques that demonstrate both heroic spirit and stage aesthetics. The traditional operatic representation of Mu Guiying therefore provides an important cultural and bodily foundation for contemporary dance creation (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The Peking Opera Production “Mu Guiying Takes Command”
(Source: Peking Opera Film Project Editorial Committee, 2017)

China and Thailand have long maintained cultural interaction through migration, trade, religion, and performing arts. Chinese artistic elements have entered Thai society and have gradually become part of local cultural life. Barton (2007) showed that Chinese musical traditions were brought to Thailand by Chinese migrants and became part of Thai cultural activities. This historical background provides a cultural basis for exploring Sino-Thai fusion in contemporary performance. At the same time, Thai classical dance has its own highly refined bodily system, symbolic gestures, rhythmic control, and ritualized aesthetics. Boonserm (2017) examined the tradition and transformation of Thai classical dance, showing that Thai dance continues to negotiate between inheritance and modern reinterpretation. Contemporary dance adaptations based on Mu Guiying narratives further demonstrate how traditional heroic images can be transformed into modern choreographic language while retaining cultural symbolism and emotional expression (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Dance Performance "Breaking Down the Gates of Heaven"
(Source: https://news.sohu.com/a/938837372_121119037)

Based on the above background, this study aims to explore the creation of a Sino-Thai fusion dance style through the image of Mu Guiying. The research seeks to reinterpret a traditional Chinese female heroic figure within a contemporary intercultural context and to construct a creative model that integrates Chinese and Thai dance aesthetics. The expected outcomes include expanding academic knowledge on cross-cultural dance creation, providing practical guidelines for intercultural performance development, and promoting deeper cultural understanding and artistic exchange between China and Thailand.

Objectives of the Research

This study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic characteristics of Mu Guiying as a female heroic figure in Chinese cultural narratives and performing arts.

2. To analyze the integration of Chinese dance elements and Thai dance aesthetics in the creation of a contemporary Sino-Thai fusion dance performance.

3. To develop a creative performance model for a Sino-Thai fusion dance style based on the image of Mu Guiying.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design integrating documentary research, creative performance research, and qualitative inquiry. The methodology was designed to explore the cultural meaning of Mu Guiying, examine the integration of Thai and Chinese dance elements, and develop a Sino-Thai fusion dance performance model.

The 1st Step: Documentary study

Documentary study was conducted to establish the theoretical and creative foundation of the research. Relevant literature concerning Mu Guiying, Chinese opera performance, intercultural performance, Thai classical dance, cultural hybridization, feminist perspectives, and practice-based artistic research was reviewed. The documentary sources included studies on intercultural theatre and performance (Kruger and Pavis, 1992), practice-as-research and creative performance methodologies (Haseman, 2006; Nelson, 2013), performance transformation and audience experience (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008), Thai classical dance traditions and movement systems (Boonserm, 2017), cultural exchanges between China and Thailand (Barton, 2007), and the artistic representation of female heroic figures in Chinese opera (Lovrick and Siu, 2011). In addition, feminist perspectives concerning female identity, gender representation, and performativity were examined through the work of Butler (1990).

The documentary study focused on three aspects. First, it examined the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic characteristics of Mu Guiying as a female heroic figure in Chinese cultural narratives and performing arts. Second, it analyzed the movement vocabulary, body

aesthetics, symbolic gestures, and performance structures of Chinese dance and Thai traditional dance. Third, it synthesized theoretical concepts related to intercultural performance and creative practice in order to establish a framework for developing a Sino-Thai fusion dance performance.

The 2nd Step: Field study and key informants

Field study was conducted to collect information related to the artistic interpretation of Mu Guiying and the potential integration of Thai and Chinese dance elements. Purposive sampling was employed to identify key informants who possessed knowledge and experience in dance performance, choreography, intercultural artistic practice, theatre production, and performing arts education.

The key informants consisted of specialists in Chinese dance, Thai traditional dance, choreography, music design, costume design, and stage aesthetics. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain perspectives regarding the cultural characteristics of Mu Guiying, movement vocabulary, symbolic gestures, aesthetic principles, and possible approaches to intercultural dance creation.

The information obtained from the interviews was intended to provide guidance for identifying suitable artistic elements and creative directions for the development of a Sino-Thai fusion dance concept based on the image of Mu Guiying.

The 3rd Step: Creative performance conceptual development

Based on the findings from documentary study and field investigation, a conceptual framework for a Sino-Thai fusion dance performance based on the image of Mu Guiying was proposed. The conceptual development focused on exploring possible approaches for transforming the cultural image of Mu Guiying into contemporary dance language while integrating movement characteristics and aesthetic principles from both Chinese and Thai dance traditions.

The conceptual framework consisted of character interpretation, movement exploration, choreographic concepts, music concepts, costume concepts, and stage composition. Particular attention was given to the integration of body movement, symbolic gestures, spatial organization, rhythm, and intercultural aesthetics in order to establish a coherent creative direction.

Rather than producing a completed performance, this stage focused on generating creative concepts and proposing a systematic framework that could serve as a guideline for future artistic practice and intercultural dance creation.

The 4th Step: Data collection and data analysis

Data collection consisted of documentary sources, interview records, expert consultation notes, and creative planning documents. Information obtained from these sources was systematically organized according to the research objectives.

Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis. The collected information was classified into three major categories: (1) the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic characteristics of Mu Guiying; (2) the integration of Chinese and Thai dance elements; and (3) the conceptual development of a Sino-Thai fusion dance framework. The findings were subsequently synthesized and presented according to the three research objectives of the study.

Research Results

The 1st objective is to examine the cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic characteristics of Mu Guiying as a female heroic figure in Chinese cultural narratives and performing arts. From the research result, it was found that:

Mu Guiying occupies a significant position in Chinese cultural narratives and has been continuously represented through folklore, literature, traditional opera, television drama, and contemporary dance. Analysis of documentary sources indicates that her image extends beyond the conventional representation of a military heroine. Instead, Mu Guiying functions as a symbolic embodiment of courage, loyalty, strategic intelligence, and moral responsibility. Unlike many traditional female characters whose identities are primarily associated with domestic roles, Mu Guiying demonstrates leadership and military authority while simultaneously maintaining cultural values associated with filial piety, family responsibility, and social harmony.

The analysis further revealed that the artistic representation of Mu Guiying contains both masculine and feminine characteristics. Her military role is expressed through strength, decisiveness, and strategic command, whereas her feminine identity is reflected through grace, emotional depth, and ethical consciousness. This duality contributes to the uniqueness of her cultural image and provides rich possibilities for contemporary dance interpretation.

In Chinese opera, Mu Guiying is often represented through stylized martial movement, weapon manipulation, dynamic stage positioning, and symbolic costume design. These performance elements collectively construct a visual language that communicates heroism and authority. The recurring themes associated with Mu Guiying include patriotism, sacrifice, perseverance, and collective responsibility. The major cultural characteristics identified through documentary analysis are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Cultural Characteristics of Mu Guiying

Dimension	Characteristics
Heroic Spirit	Courage, bravery, military leadership
Moral Values	Loyalty, responsibility, integrity
Feminine Identity	Wisdom, compassion, emotional resilience
Cultural Symbolism	Patriotism, collective responsibility
Artistic Representation	Martial movement, symbolic costume, dramatic expression

As shown in Table 1, Mu Guiying embodies five major dimensions, including heroic spirit, moral values, feminine identity, cultural symbolism, and artistic representation. These dimensions collectively contribute to the formation of a complex cultural image that supports contemporary artistic reinterpretation.

Beyond its literary and theatrical significance, the image of Mu Guiying functions as a cultural symbol that reflects broader social values and collective cultural memory. The character represents the integration of personal responsibility and collective obligation, embodying ideals of loyalty to the nation, commitment to family, and dedication to social stability. These symbolic meanings allow Mu Guiying to transcend historical narratives and continue to resonate within contemporary cultural discourse. In artistic creation, such symbolic value provides an important foundation for reinterpreting the character through modern performance forms.

Another significant characteristic of Mu Guiying is her position as a female hero. Unlike conventional female roles commonly associated with domestic responsibilities, Mu Guiying demonstrates leadership, strategic intelligence, and military authority. Her image challenges traditional gender expectations while maintaining cultural values associated with compassion, morality, and social responsibility. This duality creates a multidimensional character that can be interpreted from both traditional and contemporary perspectives. For contemporary dance creation, the coexistence of strength and elegance, authority and sensitivity, provides rich possibilities for movement design and character development.

Furthermore, the symbolic representation of Mu Guiying has evolved over time. In traditional opera, she is frequently portrayed through martial movement, weapon techniques, military costumes, and dramatic vocal expression. In modern adaptations, however, greater attention is often given to psychological depth, emotional expression, and female subjectivity. This transformation demonstrates the adaptability of the character and highlights her continuing relevance within contemporary artistic practice.

The findings indicate that Mu Guiying should not be viewed merely as a historical heroine but rather as a dynamic cultural symbol capable of supporting contemporary artistic innovation. Her cultural complexity provides a valuable foundation for the development of

intercultural dance creation and contributes to the construction of new artistic interpretations within contemporary performance practice.

The 2nd objective is to analyze the integration of Chinese dance elements and Thai dance aesthetics in the creation of a contemporary Sino-Thai fusion dance performance. From the research result, it was found that:

Analysis of Chinese dance traditions revealed an emphasis on expressive body lines, dynamic spatial movement, rhythmic variation, dramatic storytelling, and emotional expression. Traditional Chinese dance frequently utilizes circular movement patterns, extended arm gestures, flowing transitions, and symbolic theatrical expression. These characteristics are particularly suitable for representing the heroic and narrative dimensions of the Mu Guiying character.

In contrast, Thai traditional dance emphasizes controlled movement, refined body posture, symbolic hand gestures, balance, elegance, and rhythmic precision. Thai dance aesthetics prioritize harmony, delicacy, and formalized movement structures. The integration of these characteristics offers opportunities for creating a unique intercultural movement language.

The analysis identified several areas of compatibility between Chinese and Thai dance traditions. Both traditions utilize symbolic movement, codified gestures, narrative representation, and strong connections between movement and cultural meaning. These similarities provide a foundation for artistic integration while preserving cultural distinctiveness. To further clarify the similarities and differences between the two traditions, the major dance characteristics are compared in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Chinese and Thai Dance Elements

Chinese Dance Elements	Thai Dance Elements	Potential Integration
Dynamic movement	Controlled movement	Dynamic-balanced movement
Dramatic expression	Symbolic elegance	Expressive symbolism
Martial movement	Ritualized gesture	Heroic intercultural movement
Narrative choreography	Narrative symbolism	Hybrid storytelling
Spatial expansion	Spatial precision	Integrated stage composition

As shown in Table 2, Chinese dance emphasizes dynamic movement and dramatic expression, whereas Thai dance highlights symbolic elegance and controlled movement. These differences provide complementary resources for intercultural dance creation.

The comparative analysis also revealed that Chinese and Thai dance traditions share common aesthetic foundations despite their distinctive stylistic characteristics. Both traditions emphasize symbolic communication through bodily movement and regard dance as a medium for expressing cultural values, social identity, and collective memory. Rather than

focusing solely on technical movement, both systems prioritize the transmission of meaning through gesture, posture, rhythm, and spatial organization.

One important area of compatibility concerns body line and movement quality. Chinese dance frequently emphasizes expansive movement pathways, dynamic transitions, and expressive energy, whereas Thai dance highlights precision, control, and refinement. Such a combination is particularly appropriate for representing the heroic yet feminine qualities associated with Mu Guiying. Potential approaches for integrating Chinese and Thai dance elements are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Potential Fusion of Chinese and Thai Dance Components

Creative Aspect	Chinese Tradition	Thai Tradition	Fusion Direction
Body Line	Expansive and flowing	Controlled and refined	Balanced extension
Gesture	Narrative expression	Symbolic communication	Narrative symbolism
Rhythm	Dynamic variation	Stable continuity	Layered rhythm
Characterization	Dramatic representation	Elegant representation	Heroic elegance
Spatial Design	Broad movement pathways	Structured positioning	Integrated stage space

The integration of body line, gesture, rhythm, characterization, and spatial design provides a practical direction for constructing an intercultural movement vocabulary. These elements may serve as the foundation for future choreographic exploration.

Another area of integration involves character expression. Chinese dance often employs dramatic narrative techniques to communicate emotional development, while Thai dance relies on subtle symbolic gestures and refined physical control. Through intercultural adaptation, these approaches may complement one another and generate new possibilities for artistic storytelling. The resulting performance language can preserve cultural authenticity while encouraging creative innovation.

The analysis also suggests that intercultural dance creation should not be understood as the simple combination of two existing traditions. Instead, it requires a process of selection, adaptation, reinterpretation, and transformation. The objective is not to eliminate cultural differences but to establish meaningful dialogue between distinct aesthetic systems. Such a process allows intercultural performance to function as a platform for cultural communication while generating new artistic possibilities.

The findings demonstrate that Chinese and Thai dance traditions possess sufficient aesthetic compatibility to support the development of a fusion dance style. At the same time, maintaining cultural identity remains essential throughout the creative process. Effective

integration should therefore be based on cultural understanding, artistic respect, and creative reinterpretation rather than superficial imitation.

The 3rd objective is to develop a creative performance model for a Sino-Thai fusion dance style based on the image of Mu Guiying. From the research result, it was found that:

The proposed framework begins with cultural interpretation. At this stage, the symbolic meanings associated with Mu Guiying are identified and translated into artistic concepts. Heroism, leadership, wisdom, patriotism, and feminine strength become the conceptual foundations of the creative process.

The second dimension involves intercultural movement integration. This stage focuses on identifying compatible movement principles from Chinese and Thai dance traditions and transforming them into a coherent choreographic language. Rather than directly combining movements, the process emphasizes adaptation, reinterpretation, and contextual transformation.

The third dimension involves creative performance design. This includes choreographic structure, music concepts, costume concepts, stage composition, and symbolic representation. Together, these elements contribute to the development of a unified intercultural artistic vision. The proposed framework and its major dimensions are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Proposed Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Framework

Dimension	Components
Cultural Interpretation	Heroism, wisdom, patriotism, feminine strength
Movement Integration	Chinese dance + Thai dance aesthetics
Creative Design	Choreography, music, costume, stage composition
Artistic Outcome	Sino-Thai fusion dance concept

The proposed creative framework consists of three interconnected layers: cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design. These layers function together to guide the conceptual development of a Sino-Thai fusion dance style based on the image of Mu Guiying.

The first layer, cultural interpretation, focuses on identifying the symbolic meanings embedded within the Mu Guiying narrative. Heroism, wisdom, leadership, patriotism, perseverance, and feminine strength constitute the primary conceptual themes. These cultural meanings provide the intellectual foundation of the creative process and determine the overall artistic direction of the proposed work. The second layer involves intercultural movement integration. This stage examines the compatibility of Chinese and Thai dance vocabularies and explores methods for translating cultural concepts into physical expression. Rather than directly borrowing movement sequences from either tradition, the framework

emphasizes adaptation and reinterpretation. Through this process, movement becomes a site of intercultural dialogue, allowing cultural meanings to be expressed through newly developed choreographic structures. The third layer focuses on creative design. This includes choreography, music concepts, costume concepts, stage composition, and visual symbolism. Choreographic concepts are expected to balance dramatic narrative development with symbolic representation. Music concepts should reflect both Chinese and Thai cultural influences while maintaining artistic coherence. Costume concepts should draw inspiration from traditional cultural symbols while remaining adaptable to contemporary performance aesthetics. Similarly, stage composition should support intercultural storytelling through spatial organization, lighting, and visual imagery.

The findings suggest that future Sino-Thai fusion dance creation should begin with cultural interpretation rather than movement combination alone. By grounding creative practice in cultural meaning and symbolic representation, artists can develop more coherent and culturally meaningful intercultural performances. Consequently, the proposed framework provides both a conceptual reference and a practical direction for future artistic exploration involving Mu Guiying and other culturally significant figures.

The New Body of Knowledge

The new body of knowledge proposed by this study is the Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model Based on the Image of Mu Guiying. The model integrates cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design into a unified conceptual framework. Rather than directly combining Chinese and Thai dance traditions, the model emphasizes cultural understanding, symbolic translation, and artistic reinterpretation. The framework provides a systematic guideline for future intercultural dance creation and demonstrates how traditional cultural figures can be transformed into contemporary artistic concepts while maintaining cultural authenticity and creative innovation (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model Based on the Image of Mu Guiying (Constructed by the researcher)

Discussion of Research Results

From the research result of the 1st objective, it was found that Mu Guiying embodies a multidimensional cultural image integrating heroism, wisdom, leadership, patriotism, and feminine strength. The findings indicate that Mu Guiying is not only a historical or literary figure but also a symbolic cultural representation that reflects social values, collective memory, and moral responsibility. Her image combines both masculine and feminine characteristics, providing rich possibilities for contemporary artistic interpretation and dance creation. This is because the representation of female warrior figures in Chinese opera is often constructed through symbolic movement, theatrical aesthetics, and cultural narratives that communicate heroic identity and social values. This finding is consistent with the research work of Lovrick and Siu (2014), who emphasized that female heroic characters in Chinese opera function as important cultural symbols through which traditional values, gender identity, and artistic expression are communicated.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, it was found that Chinese dance and Thai traditional dance possess both distinctive characteristics and compatible aesthetic foundations that support intercultural integration. The analysis revealed that movement quality, symbolic gesture, rhythm, spatial organization, and character expression can be adapted and reinterpreted to create a new intercultural movement vocabulary. Rather than replacing one tradition with another, effective integration should be based on dialogue, mutual understanding, and creative transformation. This is because traditional dance systems are not fixed cultural products but dynamic cultural practices capable of adaptation and reinterpretation within changing social and artistic contexts. This finding is consistent with the research work of Boonserm (2017), who argued that Thai classical dance continuously negotiates between cultural preservation and contemporary transformation while maintaining its essential aesthetic identity.

From the research result of the 3rd objective, it was found that a Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model based on the image of Mu Guiying can be developed through the integration of cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design. The proposed framework demonstrates that intercultural dance creation should begin with cultural understanding and symbolic translation before proceeding to movement adaptation and artistic design. Such an approach enables cultural authenticity and creative innovation to coexist within the same artistic process. This is because intercultural performance is fundamentally a process of cultural negotiation in which meanings are translated, reconstructed, and reinterpreted through artistic practice. This finding is consistent with the theory and research work of Kruger and Pavis (1992), who proposed that intercultural performance emerges through the interaction of different cultural systems and generates new forms of artistic expression through processes of adaptation and transformation.

Conclusion

This study explored the creation of a Sino-Thai fusion dance style based on the image of Mu Guiying through documentary analysis, expert consultation, and conceptual creative development. The findings revealed that Mu Guiying represents a multidimensional cultural figure characterized by heroism, wisdom, leadership, patriotism, and feminine strength. These characteristics provide a rich cultural foundation for contemporary artistic interpretation and intercultural dance creation.

The study further found that Chinese dance and Thai traditional dance possess both distinctive characteristics and compatible aesthetic principles. Through the integration of movement quality, symbolic gesture, rhythm, spatial organization, and character expression, the two dance traditions offer significant potential for intercultural artistic development. Effective fusion should be based on cultural understanding, artistic dialogue, and creative reinterpretation rather than simple movement combination.

Based on these findings, the study proposed the Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model Based on the Image of Mu Guiying, consisting of three interconnected dimensions: cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design. The proposed framework provides a systematic conceptual guideline for future intercultural dance creation and demonstrates how traditional cultural figures can be transformed into contemporary artistic concepts while maintaining cultural authenticity and creative innovation. The study therefore contributes to the development of intercultural performing arts and promotes cultural exchange between China and Thailand through dance-based creative exploration.

Suggestions

From the results of the research, the researcher has the following suggestions:

1. The suggestions from the research

From the research result of the 1st objective, it was found that Mu Guiying embodies important cultural values, including heroism, wisdom, leadership, patriotism, and feminine strength. Therefore, cultural institutions, performing arts organizations, and dance creators should apply these cultural characteristics as conceptual foundations when developing artistic works related to traditional Chinese cultural figures. Emphasis should be placed on preserving cultural meaning while encouraging contemporary artistic interpretation.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, it was found that Chinese dance and Thai traditional dance possess compatible aesthetic characteristics that support intercultural artistic integration. Therefore, performing arts institutions, choreographers, and dance educators should encourage intercultural artistic exchange and explore creative approaches that integrate movement, gesture, rhythm, and performance aesthetics from different cultural traditions while maintaining cultural authenticity.

From the research result of the 3rd objective, it was found that Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model can be developed through cultural interpretation, intercultural movement integration, and creative design. Therefore, dance creators and performing arts organizations should apply the proposed framework as a guideline for developing future intercultural dance projects and cross-cultural artistic collaborations.

2. The suggestions for future research

2.1 Future studies should explore the practical application of the proposed Sino-Thai Fusion Dance Creation Model through actual choreographic development and performance practice.

2.2 Future research should compare the integration of Chinese dance with other Southeast Asian dance traditions in order to expand the scope of intercultural dance studies.

2.3 Future studies should investigate audience perception, cultural reception, and artistic interpretation of intercultural dance performances based on traditional cultural figures.

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