

The relationship between Ballet Body and Professional Ballet - the History, System and Future behind Ballet

Kanhe Zhou

International department, the Experimental High school attached to Beijing Normal University,
Beijing, China

Abstract. The paper delves into the stringent physical standards set for professional female ballet dancers worldwide, commonly termed as the "ideal ballet body". This concept largely emphasizes the physical appearance of dancers, such as long limbs, small head, and a specific proportion between the leg and upper body lengths. While it's acknowledged that this "ideal" is mostly a fantastical standard, professional ballet institutions in different countries respond variably. Using Russia and China as examples, the paper underscores their focus on recruiting dancers whose physiques align closely with this ideal. In contrast, the American professional ballet system is explored for its broader and more holistic approach to recruitment, beyond the "ideal" physique. The paper then offers an in-depth exploration across three chapters: a comparative look at how countries prioritize the "ideal ballet body"; an analysis of the pros and cons of these systems; and, finally, a discussion on the role and future of China's ballet system based on interviews.

Keywords: Professional ballet; Romantic and classical ballet; Artistic presentation; Ideal ballet body; Body proportion.

1. Introduction

Ballet originated from the court dance of the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century, which was called "decorative dance" at the time and was mainly used for aristocratic social activities. At the end of the 15th century, ballet was introduced into France from Italy and became an important part of French court life. A century on, Louis XIV, himself a talented dancer, inaugurated an academy for dance in 1666. Ballet continued to thrive in France, but remained largely a male-dominated field. In the early days of ballet, women were not allowed to participate in most performances, and all female roles were performed by male actors. It was not until 1681 that a professional actress appeared in the ballet *Triomphe de L'Amour* (Triumph of Love). Under the support of Westernizing project by Tsar, in 1738, French ballet master Jean-Baptiste Rondelet brought ballet to Russia and established the first ballet school in St. Petersburg, thus as one of reasons promoting the rise and prosperity of Russian ballet. At the end of the 19th century, the Great Russian composer Tchaikovsky created "Swan Lake", "Sleeping Beauty" and "Nutcracker", and the center of ballet art in the world has been transferred from Paris to St. Petersburg since then. In the early 20th century, a new generation of dancers and choreographers sought to free themselves from the strict regime of the Imperial Theatre. With the emergence of new ballet groups, the choreography of modern ballet began to sprout.

Specifically, ballet can be divided into five periods: Early ballet (1500-1832), Romantic Ballet (1832-1876), Classical Ballet (1876-1895), Modern ballet (1898-1977), and Contemporary ballet (1977 - present). The shift to a majority of women in ballet took place during the Romantic ballet period of the 19th century. In ballet at that time, the female characters were the most. Fairies, elves, specter, these images are often ethereal. Compared to male dancers, female dancers are more likely to embody the pure beauty and elegance that romantic ballet emphasizes. The invention of pointe shoes and the resulting technical skills also deepened the perception that ballet was a female domain. Pointe acting is often considered the exclusive domain of women and is also considered a tool for dividing gender roles, which is attributed to the different body structures between the sexes it implies. Male actors often weigh more than female ballerinas, but pointe movements need to reflect lightness of movement and line of feet. In contrast, girls with slender legs are more likely to do pointe movements. In classical ballet, although male dancers still have the opportunity to show solo dance, their main role is to help female dancers complete the lifting and rotating movements. Therefore,

unlike the female dancers who are required to be light and ethereal, the body shape of the male dancer that ballet chooses is more focused on smooth muscle lines, straight posture, and strong body, reflecting solid and strength. So almost from the beginning, men and women were trained differently to enter the professional ballet world with different body types and different skills.

“While men do experience certain aesthetic pressures, the range of acceptable body types for male ballet dancers has always been broader than that for women, and has continued to widen in recent years. Yet female ballet dancers are still held to drastic standards.” says dance historian Lynn Garafola. Behind the different body types of men and women in professional ballet, gender inequality is reflected. On stage, female dancers dance on their toes and are scrutinized by the audience for their appearance, figure and performance, while men are responsible for lifting and supporting them, demonstrating masculinity with muscle and strength. In many romantic and classical ballets, such as *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the hero always rescues the heroine in a very heroic way. At the curtain call, Women receive flowers and men escort women off stage. As Choreographer Robert Binet says: “It’s strange sort of in that it’s definitely the most gendered of all art forms. It is this gender balance of men being the strong one supporting the light, dainty fairy-like women which is not how we live today in the world. “It seems that in ballet, Women are always weak victims who need men to save and help them.

It's worth thinking about whether these gender inequalities in ballet are also being reflected in our social lives. Are women always judged on their bodies? Are men giving women the help they think they "need" but don't really need? Are women being treated unfairly even in professions that seem to be dominated by women?

This paper will focus on the relationship between professional ballet's body shape requirements for professional female dancers (especially for the body shape to perform romantic and classical ballet plays) and their artistic presentation. "An ideal ballet body" is an ideal concept that is shared in ballet all over the world, which reflects more the requirements for the body appearance (body shape) of professional female ballet dancers than the physical fitness of them. The ideal ballet body may have a slightly different definition, but in general it includes these requirements: long arms, long legs, long neck, small head and high instep; in some strict cases, the ideal ballet body also includes the first three toes being the same length. One of the most important requirements is the body proportion: in the best case, the ballet dancer's legs (from the hip line to the heel) are 20 centimeters longer than the upper body (from the second vertebra to the hip line). Hardly anyone will have everything it takes to live up to this ideal, which is largely a fantasy. In the face of the impossible ideal ballet body, the professional ballet system in some countries (I will focus on Russia and China) chooses to set requirements on the body shape of candidates, so that they can choose students whose bodies are infinitely close to the ideal ballet body. Professional ballet systems in other countries (I will focus on America) choose not to be bound by the concept of the ideal ballet body and focus more on other aspects of the candidate when recruiting.

But either way, the idea of the ideal ballet body shapes our impressions of ballerinas. When talking to the body shapes of professional ballet dancers, the picture of slim bodies, long legs, and small heads first comes to mind, rarely thinking of a plump, short-legged, stout ballerina. However, going back 150 years, the situation is almost the opposite. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, slim ballerinas were rare. Most ballerinas are plump and round, with no difference in shape from the average person. None of the following great ballet stars of that time, Marie Taglioni, Fanny Elssler, and Carlotta Grisi, had the ideal ballet bodies of today (Marie Taglioni was even widely ridiculed for her poor proportions and humpback), and perhaps no modern professional dance school would admit them, but they still dominated the history of romantic ballet with their artistic excellence.

It's hard to say when the idea of the ideal ballet body was created. But there are two reasons why the ballet body has been slimming down. One reason was a change in costumes. In order to better show the dancer's leg movements, the tutu gradually evolved from the long dress of the Romantic period to the short skirt of the classical period. The hemline of a short tutu appears below the waist line and spreads out from the hip, which makes the dancer's body line and shape more exposed to the

public, so the slender figure and long legs have become body requirements for wearing a short tutu more beautifully.

Another reason was fashion. According to Lynn Garafola, the early 20th century—particularly the 1920s, when the boyish flapper image was in vogue—is when ballet dancers began to thin down. Another period of growing thinness followed World War II, especially among European dance groups with connections to high-end fashion houses. According to Garafola, George Balanchine, one of the most influential choreographers of the 20th century, might be affected by his experience in Paris in the 1950s as well as the rise of ultrathin supermodels like Twiggy. Balanchine created ballet for super-skinny, long-legged ballerinas. Although he also created many roles for dancers of different body types -- tall, short, athletic, it was believed by some -- and still is -- that Balanchine's preference was for dancers with long legs and tiny heads. The idea of a body with long legs and small heads became a template for what ballerinas should look like.

Ballet's demands on the body figure of its professional dancers have changed dramatically in more than a century. By the 1950s, ballerina Galina Ulanova's lyrically long limbs came to embody the so-called "visual ideal"; by the 1980s and 1990s, many ballets professional dancers had very long legs, forming vivid contrast to the figure of ballet dancers in the early 20th century; and at the beginning of the 21st century, the professional ballerina stereotype was rooted: a small head, slim figure, long arms and legs. But what has changed as a result? What did it bring? Does it promote the development of dance or lose many good dancers? Which features of young, aspiring dancers will be foregrounded? How will "potential" be recognized? What factors will be seen as promising?

In this paper, I will step in to answering those questions. In the first chapter, I will introduce two different professional ballet systems that put metric of the ballet body in admissions differently, using three countries as examples and extending the history and culture of ballet behind those countries. In Chapter 2, I will analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems and the flow between them. In the third chapter, I will share the results of my interview, discuss the role of ballet body in ballet, and focus on the promotion methods and future development of China's professional ballet system.

2. Chapter 1

When I saw California Dance Classics 2018 Gold Medal winner Jasmine Cruz's Don Quixote Act 1, I was overwhelmed by her flowing and emotional performance, while a classmate from a professional ballet school in China asked me in confusion: "With her body figure, how did she get accepted into a professional ballet school?" I looked at the dancer's figure again, and it was true that her figure was unlikely to be accepted into a professional ballet school in China. But so what? She still brings out the beauty of ballet and the quality of the character. What is behind all this is the different selection criteria of different professional ballet systems?

Due to differences in educational training systems and cultures, countries place different emphasis on body type in professional ballet talent selection. For example, a prospective dance student who wants to specialize in ballet at a major dance school will have different chances of being admitted depending on where she or he is applying. A candidate with relatively not so good musical sensibility and expression might be accepted in China if they have what is considered to be a well-proportioned and slim body. But the same student might have challenges in other countries, which foreground musical talent. In this chapter, I will mention history and culture in countries with typical state-founded classical ballet selection systems in the first section. Then, in the second section, I will focus on comparing state-founded classical ballet selection systems, such as Russia and China, with that of private-based selection system in other countries like the United States. By knowing different cultures and selection systems, we can better understand the reasons why professional ballet in different countries places different emphasis on body types.

2.1. Strict National-Sponsored Selection System

Russia is the representative of a state-founded classical ballet selection system. In order to understand its rigorous and comprehensive selection system, one has to know the establishment and development of ballet in Russia first.

Today, ballet in Russia is a popular art, accessible to the general public, with many young children taking ballet classes, but it was not the same situation as its introduction in the 1700s. Peter the Great, thinking only by learning from the advanced experience and culture of the West could Russia move from the closed and backward state to modernization, introduced ballet in the Westernized cultural revolution, while Ekaterina the Great followed, promoting ballet as a fashion for the Russian aristocracy. After the official establishment of the first Russian ballet school in 1738 and the first state Ballet Theatre in 1766, Russia brought in a large number of talented French and Italian ballet teachers.

First loved by the aristocracy, it was not until the rise of Serf Theater, forming several private troupes of Russian aristocrats and landowners with a cast of serfs, that common people eventually gained access to ballet. The serf theater originated at the end of the 17th century and developed in the 18th century. After Ekaterina the Great released the nobility from their obligation to serve the state, they returned to their villages to use their newfound freedom to establish personal manors that mimicked the autocratic state, establishing Serf Theater in imitation of the court Theatre. At that time, many owners of the serf theaters, the nobles, trained domestic serfs in Western culture and art, especially cultivating female serfs performing ballet, in order to let serfs in the serf theater imitate the performers in the court theater for dancing ballet for the tsar, getting the feeling of czarist supremacy. Generations of ballet dancers in serf theaters came from serf families, orphans, and people of lower status. Then, when serf theaters were abolished in large numbers for economic difficulties brought by war in the early 19th century, these professional ballet dancers from the lower classes all belonged to the state. All dancers, no matter how professional and famous they were, had to obey the tsar and the state. As one ballerina said, seeing the Majesty even once is like a gift to heaven. To this day, Russian classical ballet follows this tradition. Their submission to authority, their sense of responsibility, the reverence they ascribe to their traditions are far greater than those of French and Italian dancers. This is one of the historical reasons that Russian ballet dancers have been more subservient to the state and more respectful of tradition than those in other countries even today.

As the "second home" of ballet, Russia considers the art of ballet to be its national treasure, and it devotes a lot of effort and resources to professional ballet schools, making those schools awesome. The top three professional ballet schools in Russia have been in existence for over two hundred years, and many of the world's most famous ballet masters, such as Galina Ulanova, George Balanchine, Olga Lebeschinskaya, and Rudolf Nureyev Makarov have, graduated from these schools. Upon admission, students not only have access to a strong faculty, most of whom are professors and nationally decorated performers, but also have the opportunity to perform annually in internships with ballet companies directly subordinate to them. After graduation, the best students may directly enter the world's top ten ballet companies, and thus have a greater chance to become ballet superstar. Other students, even in the worst situations, can still enter the school's university department to study, which is considered as a good opportunity in the eyes of many people. As a result, every year countless students from all over the world apply for the entrance exams, aspiring to study at one of Russia's top ballet schools.

The state-sponsored professional ballet schools in Russia set up extremely rigorous screening tests and have further some of the highest body shape requirements in the world when it comes to recruiting in order to select and train the best talent. Take the Vaganova Ballet Academy, one of the world's top professional ballet academies, as an example. The school entrance exam is divided into three stages. The first stage of the test is based on body shape such as the most basic assessment of body proportions, flexibility, jumping ability, coordination ability and so on. If a candidate passes the first test to enter the second stage of the examination, his or her height, weight, vision will be

measured by a professional doctor. Only after fully passing the second stage can they proceed to the third stage of the dance test, which assesses learning ability, musicality and expressiveness.

Vaganova, implementing compulsory education and exempting tuition fees for local students, chooses only the most suitable dancers by its own standards for the school, which means that it requires candidates born with a body type that corresponds with ideas about the aesthetics of ballet. The examination process does not overemphasize the student's dance fundamentals, but the child's body shape and even family genetics are highly valued. During the entrance exam, candidates as young as 10 to 11 years old are allowed to wear only panties so that teachers can see the child's bones and muscle tone. The examiners also use rulers to measure the children's wrists and neck length to determine if the future child's figure will look good. In addition, all children must be accompanied by their mothers for the interview, and the examiner will decide whether or not to accept the student based on the mother's body type, as the mother's size is thought to be largely indicative of the child's future size than fathers. [Note the father: **]

After such a rigorous selection process, only 60 new students are accepted out of approximately 3,000 applicants each year. However, being accepted by Vaganova does not mean one can graduate successfully from one of the top ballet schools. At Vaganova, the school conducts an annual assessment, and students who do not pass the assessment are expelled and cannot advance to the next grade. Being overweight, having health problems, failing a major or non-major class are all culprits for elimination. Some girls had to leave school simply because they gained two more kilograms or are not getting taller. In each class, less than half of the students, only about 25 students, usually graduate from the grueling eight-year program. In order to pass the test and annual examination, the girls have to strictly control their diets and train under a lot of pressure.

In short, because of the rigorous selection of Russians and the "devil training", ballet has reached its pinnacle in Russia. Because of the high status of ballet in art and a promising future in Russia, many Russian girls still want to enter professional ballet schools, even if they have to go through extremely cruel selection, grueling ballet training and great mental and physical stress. This constant flow of application also allowed the state-sponsored professional ballet schools to select the most suitable professional ballet students for the country from among the countless children with ballet dreams, in which superior body figures were very important preconditions. China, helped by the Soviet Union to establish its ballet system, is another country that typically applies the state-established selection system.

Yu Rongling, daughter of Manchu aristocrat Yu Geng, Minister of Japan and France, was the first Chinese to introduce ballet to China. While attending a performance in Paris at the age of 17, she was captivated by the exquisite dancing of Isadora Duncan and took her as her teacher. Under Duncan's tutelage, Yung Ling's dancing skills improved rapidly, and she later entered the French National Opera, now called Palais Garnier, to receive formal ballet training. 1904, Yung Ling, already returned to China to become an interpreter for the Empress Dowager Cixi, danced a ballet on Cixi's seventieth birthday, thus introducing ballet to China. In the early 20th century, there were also foreign ballet troupes that came to China to perform ballet, but only on a limited scale. Moreover, because Chinese feudal society had long demanded that women not show their thighs, the behavior of ballet actresses exposing their legs was considered violating the customs of that time. In addition, many of the movements performed by the male and female dancers in the pas de deux of the ballet were also considered too intimate and indecent by the Chinese, making it difficult for the Chinese to accept ballet. In the following decades, the development of ballet in China was stagnant due to the World Wars and the New Democratic Revolution in China, which brought people to the battlefields of life and death.

Ballet truly rose to prominence in China only after the establishment of New China, 1949, in which society was becoming more and more stable, and people's thoughts changed from being bound by the feudal ethics under the absolute monarchy to gradually understanding and accepting some Western cultures and viewpoints under the Republic era. In 1954, the first Soviet expert, O.A. Irina, was invited to Beijing to start the first "Teacher Training Course", and miraculously completed the

syllabus for grades 1-6 of the Soviet Dance School in half a year. In the same year, the Beijing Dance Academy was founded, and the first batch of students was recruited with the help of Russian experts, and the children who were selected from the applicants as far as possible were physically fit for the ballet body standards considered by Russia. Zhao Ruheng, among China's first group of professional ballet dancers, recalled: "The teacher in charge of enrollment eliminated my companions, judging that they would get fat in the future, and the teacher remained me, saying that my legs were long. There were also several rounds of second interviews. The children only wore vests and shorts, and the teacher not only measured the proportion of the children's bodies, but also let us do leg kicking, back bending and other actions." Despite the established process and criteria in the selection, the students admitted at that time generally did not have the body shapes that fits the ideal ballet body better of today's admitted students. This was not only because people were not fully familiar with ballet at that time in China, and there were fewer students signed up that could choose from, but also because the selection criteria on body type at that time were not as strict as today's requirements, which was a common situation in various countries at that time. In 1957, China staged its first complete ballet, *La fille mal gardée*. In the following years, Chinese ballet dancers successfully staged several world-classic ballets, including *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire* and *Giselle*.

Despite having less than one hundred years of development, China started to develop its own unique style of ballet since 1964. While studying and rehearsing Western classic plays such as *Notre Dame de Paris*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker*, China also created ballets with its own cultural background, such as *The White-haired Girl*, *The Red Detachment of Women*, and *A Dream in Red Mansions*, which differed from the Western ballets in terms of plots, themes, and choreographic props. In terms of plot, many western classical ballet plays are based on the royal family legend or myth story, reflecting the precious love and freedom; while some plots of Chinese ballets are related to China's modern war and revolution, reflecting the bravery of the soldiers, and many also are adapted from classic Chinese literature and drama, aiming to reflect the cruelty and malice of the old Chinese feudal society, serving as a foil to the wellbeing of the new China. For structure and movement, Chinese ballet has broken the Western classical ballet's A-B-A three-stage structure of *pas de deux*, dance for two people, in the (A *adagios*: supported and lifted by the male actor, the female actor shows various dance positions in a coherent manner, and the two complete a series of rotation, jumping and other technical movements on the ground and in the air; B *Variations*: male and female actors perform solo dances respectively to show their respective skills; A *Coda*: The *allegros* by the actors and actresses demonstrating their skill.) Instead, *pas de deux* in Chinese ballet adds elements of the Peking Opera fighting scene as well as some movements of Chinese folk dance and Chinese classical dance. In the stage design aspect, different from the classical *tutu-sandy short skirt*-and the romantic *tutu-romantic long dress*-common in classical ballet, Chinese ballet actresses wear Chinese military uniforms, *cheongsam*, water sleeves and other traditional Chinese costumes. In addition, ink painting, red lanterns Red wall and other background with Chinese characteristics are often used in the stage scenery.

Chinese dancers and commentators have tended to subscribe to the notion that Russians always have superior body proportions than them, which is a unique advantage for Russians in ballet in their eyes. Even though Russian ballet and Chinese ballet reflect different national characteristics, styles and cultural connotations, Chinese ballet still follows the Russian professional ballet's method of selection, adopting the three-trial system that measures the proportion of the body and the body shapes as the basic threshold in the first trial. In the first test of the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy, the best dance school in China, the examiner will look at the candidate's body shape, bones, joints and body proportion. After entering the second examination, the candidates' body type will be carefully measured again, and candidates are going to show some basic dance skills including flexibility and jumping. In addition, candidates also have to complete a dance piece prepared in advance within two minutes. In the third test, the examiner will conduct simulation teaching and improvisation inspection. After passing both the three exams, candidates have to complete the academic exam and hospital physical examination to be admitted.

Although ballet in China does not have the same artistic status as ballet in Russia, this still does not affect the Chinese professional ballet schools to continuously make their admission standards more demanding, which means to change their admission standards to more closely correspond to what they considered an ideal dance in order to select “the best talents” for the country. Just one of the entry standards- body proportion-of the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy, elevates from requiring one has a lower body longer that is longer than the upper body 10cm to the current 15cm, and the vast majority of Chinese people's body proportion is far from reaching this standard, eliminating 70% of the test takers in the first trail, approximately the same with the number of eliminations in Vaganova's first test. Even though Chinese people have the idea that Russian bodies are more ideal for ballet, in fact the same proportion of candidates are dropped for this reason in both countries. However, unlike best professional ballet schools in Russia, best ballet professional schools in China are not highly ranked internationally and attract few foreign students. Due to China's vast population and the huge difference in value between the number of students applying for admission and the actual number of students admitted each year, the top Chinese ballet professional dance schools are still able to admit students whose body proportions meet the standard.

In the National-Sponsored Selection System, with such a high barrier to entry and a rigorous examination during the seven or eight years study after entry, even students who have been selected for professional dance schools are hardly guaranteed to stay until the end, not to mention the difficulty for amateur ballet trainers who want to transfer to these professional schools.

2.2. Ope Private-based Selection System

If we look beyond Eurasia and around the globe, we will find very few examples of state-sponsored professional dance schools being established in other parts of the world by such countries to train professional dancers. Apart from those top professional ballet schools in China and Russia, the only other widely known state-established schools are the Royal Academy of Dance in the UK, Paris opera ballet in France, and The Royal Danish Ballet School in Denmark. However, even the state-founded professional ballet schools in other countries are far less strict in terms of body requirements than those in China and Russia, and they focus on other directions, such as sense of dance and expressiveness. In October 1985, Barbara Foster, a female teacher from the Royal Ballet School of the United Kingdom, spent a month at the Beijing Dance Academy, where she made the following speech: "The British have fewer people and not many children with long legs, so it is not easy to choose the ideal students... But we found that often some children, although they are in good ballet body shape, lack dance talent, so we test the candidates' dance talent first in the admission exam..." As Steven Mcrae, principal dancer of the Royal Ballet, says, "A great dancer is an artist who can move their emotions and has the ability to tell a story, not just having an 'ideal ballet body'.

While most of the other professional ballet dance schools in other countries are private. Since a very young age, most of their professional ballet dancers have spent a lot of time training in professional institutions, which are hardly subsidized by the government and rely on private sponsorships as well as their own incomes to maintain survival. The average fee for studying in those private ballet professional schools is \$14286 to \$42857 per year (The per capita income of US residents in 2020 was about \$37,300). I will focus on America to illustrate how those private professional ballet school work.

Although these professional dance schools also have admission selection, the assessment process is far less stringent and complex than the process of China and Russia's state-established dance schools, and their annual acceptance rates are also far more than the acceptance rates in Vaganova Ballet School and the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy per year. In the entrance exams, candidates are generally examined on their physical dexterity, jumping ability and sense of rhythm, where the body shapes play a less role in the selection threshold. For some professional private ballet schools, the most important conditions for ballet dancers are physical strength, coordination, sense of music and expression. The body shape and body proportion, which are emphasized most in State-established selection system are ranked last, being considered only

when the previous factors have been compared. As there are only private dance training schools, the difference between the skill of professional dancers and amateur dancers is not very huge, and many amateur dancers can be transferred to professional dance schools at any time as long as their skills and abilities pass.

Take the world-renowned institution, School of American Ballet, as an example. Students can either take the selection test to enter the school from the age of 5 to learn the basic courses, or they can directly enter any grade, even the highest, as long as they have the meeting strength. Lower grade admissions are held in April each year throughout New York City. In order to have more diverse students, SAB does set up test centers in different parts of New York, such as Chinatown, Harlem and Brooklyn, rather than letting all test takers have audition in Lincoln Center, the school's headquarters. During the course of the exam, the admissions officer asks candidates to perform several ballet positions and postures to test their rotation, turnout, arch, extension and flexibility. Each examiner is also asked to do two running jumps to see how their legs and feet will land, finding out whether they have good move ability, jumping ability and sense of rhythm. Each year, SAB admits about 175 students from the lower grades of six to ten years old out of 700 candidates, with an annual admission rate of 25 percent (an annual admission rate of Vaganova Ballet School). SAB advanced grade admissions are primarily through summer school programs and nationwide selection.

In addition to the fact that admission is much freer than in state-established professional dance schools, the mandatory requirements of studying at the School of American Ballet can also be relatively fewer. According to the report of Russia's Globe, one of the teachers at the School of American Ballet says that coming to study here is all about "how far you want to go". There are no tests or grades, and no one is forced to control eating or drinking. "If you do really well and dance to the top, you'll get a chance to perform in shows and possibly receive a \$10,000 scholarship. But if you no longer want to pursue a professional career, you can leave immediately", said the teacher. More of a constraint and regulation come from the love for ballet and self-discipline of the students themselves and. Competition to enter the best professional ballet companys is also one of the key factors to promote students to work harder. SAB has been the official training academy for the New York City Ballet, a top ballet company in the world, and 95% of NYCB dancers come from SAB. The NYCB does not hold open auditions and rarely invites professional dancers who are not trained at the SAB to join its ranks. But the artistic directors of the school and the company select only 10 SAB students each year to intern at the New York City Ballet.

To sum up, despite their different ballet styles, being the typical example of state-established professional ballet system, the Russian ballet system and the Chinese ballet system both have strict physical requirements for professional dancers. As a representative of the more general private-funded ballet system, the American ballet system focuses less on the so-called ballet figure and more on other aspects such as physical fitness and performance, and its ballet schools have a relatively less stressful learning atmosphere.

3. Chapter 2

These different systems have created different values that impact ballet dance in different ways In terms of who has access to dance, what training looks like, and the kinds of dancers that are produced? Who get to be dancer? Who decides? On what basis do they decide? What ideals aesthetic is that decision based on? Is that "fair" to all people who want to become dancers? What kind of dance culture does this produce? In this chapter, in the first section I will compare and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of two different professional ballet selection systems, which can help us further explore the role of body type in ballet performance. Moreover, taking the United States and Russia as examples, the second section in this chapter will discuss the differences of the top ballet companies, the strengths and weaknesses of the top ballet dancers and the exchange of professional talents under the two ballet systems.

3.1. Pros and Cons

It is not entirely unreasonable for the state to set up a selection system with a rigorous and complex selection process and high entry requirements. First of all, different from the private established selection system, in the state-established selection system, the state spends a lot of financial resources on professional dance schools to train talents. For example, with various sponsor ships and subsidies from the Chinese government, the annual tuition fee for a student in the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy is only 8,000 yuan, which is one-third of the tuition fee for a year's schooling at a private professional dance school. In addition, the school provides students with free nutrition, daily necessities and dance supplies. The state, which spends so much money on training performers, has the right and the authority to select candidates whom it considers as having a higher success rate to study in the schools it subsidizes. Secondly, some good body shapes can indeed be an advantage in ballet. Aesthetically, long limbs bring a sense of lightness, being important in the extreme pursuit of beauty in classical ballet; lighter weight reduces the amount of gravity required to be on point, making it easier for female dancers to handle technical movements and for male dancers to carry female dancers; and looking at body shapes determined by birth is a more reliable way of selection, unlike technique and sense of movement, which are factors that will change a little through hard work later in life, a child's body figure remains basically unchanged.

It is worth recognizing, however, that there are certain unavoidable problems with state-established selection system where body shape is the basic requirement for entry, such as China and Russia. On the one hand, perhaps the body shape is the most stable factor in the future career development of a child that the examiner can see during the recruitment, but the body figure should not be the most important thing in ballet, nor is it a necessary thing to become a good ballet dancer. Ballet, as a performing art, is not only about showing beauty, but it is also about conveying stories, emotions and interactions to the audience. In *Nuit Blanche 2023*, a female dancer demonstrated how body type is not necessary for ballet. The dancer was not slim, or even fat, but her performance of *The Dying Swan*, accompanied by Saint-Saëns's soundtrack, perfectly illustrated the swan's noble gesture and the movement and stillness of wings. When body shapes are considered as an more important factor over other criteria such as expressiveness, musicality, and dance sense in selecting a child to join the professional ballet school, such selection criteria have already departed from the original intent of ballet as a performing art.

On the other hand, the use of body type as a basic criterion for entry into professional schools is becoming more and more extreme, (for example, as mentioned before, one of the entry standard body proportion elevates from requiring one has a lower body longer that is longer than the upper body 10cm to the current 15cm) and may even evolve into that some people have noticed, and given the name: "Conditionalism". This means only the body shape of a professional ballerina, things such as long arms and long legs that can be seen on the surface of one's body are important. Although some professors at professional dance schools that use the national-established selection model claim that their selection system does not focus only on body shape, but rather on a comprehensive and holistic examination of all aspects of a candidate's ability, such a selection system still reduces the importance of other aspects in ballet to a certain extent, and loses some children who are very gifted in terms of their musicality and expressive ability.

Because the examination of external body proportion is in the first test, those children who have great talent in other aspects but their body type are not up to standard simply do not have the opportunity to let the examiner see their own talent, such as extraordinary musicality and sharp expressiveness, and with no possibility to enter a professional dance school to become a professional dancer.

In the entire professional ballet system, the participation of audience opinion is missing. Is it the standard ballet body? Who should take the lead on stage? What is the audience's favorite things? It's always the directors, the choreographers and the teachers who judge them, rarely the audience themselves. In a situation where the ballet body is seen as more and more important and becoming more and more extreme, professionals almost forget to ask the audience for their opinions on this. Do

they think dancers are more beautiful with this kind of body type? Do they really think this body type promotes performing the art of ballet? Actually, the emphasis on body shape in professional ballet has further led to audience dissatisfaction and skepticism in recent years about the selection criteria of ballet companies under the country-established selection system in China and Russia. For example, the Mariinsky Ballet, one of the world's top ballet companies, has been criticized by some audience members for increasingly pursuing the body proportions of its female performers. As early as fifteen years ago, when Mariinsky promoted Alina Somova, who is tall, long legged, super slim and slender but lacks acting skills and characterization, to the rank of principal, some viewers thought that the Mariinsky Ballet was overly focused on the body shape of the dancers. Not long ago, only half a year after graduation was newly promoted to the first soloist Maria Khoreva, a member of the new generation of dancers once again triggered the audience to "Conditionalism" of fierce criticism. Maria Khoreva has excellent body proportions and body shape, but her musicality is so poor that she can't match the sound of a symphony orchestra, and her stage performance and emotional handling of her role still need to be honed. If a ballet dancer can't cooperate with a live symphony orchestra in classical ballet repertoire and is unable to understand the mood of the music or complete the movements according to the rhythm of the music, especially for some plays with high music sense requirements such as George Balanchine's Tschaikovsky Pas de deux, then the fluency of the dancer's dance language and the appeal of the performance will be greatly reduced, worsen the audience's experience. According to the Weibo @Russian Knowledge Service, after Maria Khoreva performed the first act of Swan Lake at the Mariinsky Theater on July, 2023, a large number of people walked out and gave poor reviews.

The extreme emphasis on body shape also increases the mental and physical stress of professional dancers. Although there is no requirement for the weight of candidates in the enrollment prospectus of The Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy, light weight has become an unspoken standard in everyone's mind. Taking the example of a girl candidate with a height of one meter five three, for children in this height range, the chances of being admitted will be greater only if they weigh about thirty kilograms, while medical science gives a healthy weight of about fifty kilograms corresponding to this height. Even the young dancers in the demonstration video of the preliminary examination for admission released on the official website of The Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy are worried by the general public because they are too thin. The weight standards continue to exist after students pass the entrance exams and enter the professional ballet school. Many students are asked by their teachers and parents to lose weight and go on diets because of their weight and body shape, and some of them even suffer from anxiety and depression as a result, even though they are already very thin. In addition to the psychological problems, dieting without the guidance and prescription of health professionals can also affect the health of these students. These altered eating habits mainly mean a reduced consumption of particular products, which can determine a failure to provide the body with a sufficient amount of nutrients. Rigorous exercise undertaken by young girls, combined with a negative energetic balance, is related to substantial physiological changes in one's body and destructive behaviors, often leading to eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia); hormonal imbalance manifested by: delayed puberty, delayed menstruation, menstrual disorders, and even long-term secondary amenorrhoea (cessation of regular menses for three months or the cessation of irregular menses for six months); and low bone mineral density. These weight standards, which were originally designed to reduce the chances of dancers getting injured when doing technical movements, are now in turn jeopardizing the health of dancers.

But is a private-established selection system perfect? The answer is no. private-sponsored selection systems also have downsides. Although the system does not overly look at body shape, which allows many companies to select non-slim but have the strength and acting skills type ballerinas who are satisfied by the audience, because of its too free in and out requirements and non-compulsory teaching environment, those private professional ballet schools are difficult to train the world's top dancers like those taught by the national-sponsored system of rigorous teaching environment. Kate Leyden, deputy managing editor of Dance Magazine in the United States, has stated, "Most of America's top

ballet dancers come from countries other than the United States itself." Moreover, it is worth noting that even at the supposedly inclusive and versatile New York City Ballet, body-discrimination still occurs. New York City Ballet principal Ashley Bouder has put on 4.5kg while recovering at home from an injury. At the opening gala of the 2022 season in September, she was supposed to return to perform. However, before she went on the stage, the senior management told her that she was not allowed to continue to perform because her current appearance was not appropriate. Ashley said: "I was so happy when I was finally able to return to the stage, but at the last minute I lost the opportunity because of my size. That night I had to sit there with my husband and kids, who had come to see me dance, fighting back tears as another dancer danced my part." Whether or not the company did not let Ashley perform because of her weight, Ashley's misadventure shows how common the body judgment is in ballet.

3.2. Difference and Exchange

Russia's top ballet companies tend to perform more pieces of classical ballet, which better suited to Russian ballet that focuses on skill and drama, and the female dancers in the ballet companies are generally slim. The top ballet companies in the United States staged more modern and contemporary ballet as well as neoclassical ballet (George Balanchine's anti-literary and dramatic performance of dance, emphasizing the formal beauty of dance itself and expressiveness of ballet), which is more in line with American education idea of freedom that gives people chance to express their own thought, and the female dancers in ballet companies are more diverse in body type: some are slim and slender, others are strength and muscular.

In the two different ballet systems, the level of the extremely top ballet dancers is almost the same. But for most of the top ballerinas, Russia's dancers as a whole are better than America's. Unlike the Russian state-established professional ballet schools, in the national cultural and political background of the United States, the private professional ballet schools do not have the right to force students to control their diet or complete the same rigorous training as in Russia, and the level of students varies greatly from one to another. Plus, unlike in Russia, where it is customary to criticize and punish students, under the encouraging education in the United States, students need to have strong motivation and self-discipline to reach a higher level, rather than relying on the teacher's scolding and reminding. Therefore, the average level of graduating class in top ballet school in the United States is not as outstanding as the average level of graduating class of the top ballet school in Russia.

Due to the outstanding educational level of the top Russian state-founded professional ballet schools in the world, we can often see in the annual enrollment that it attracts students from countries that use the private-founded professional ballet selection system. Take Julian Mackay, one of the world's most famous ballet dancers, for instance. Born in Montana, Mackay began ballet classes at an amateur ballet school near his home at the age of four and won a summer camp scholarship with the American National Ballet at the age of eight. In order to pursue a better professional ballet education, he enrolled in the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, Russia's top professional ballet school, at the age of 11. However, there are few students from countries using the system of national-established professional ballet be attracted by America's top private ballet school.

In order to make up for the shortage of top dancers under the inevitable more liberal professional ballet education system, the major ballet companies in the United States have adopted the method of recruiting and attracting top dancers from other countries or from the nation-founded professional ballet selection system. Take the American National Ballet company, the top world-class ballet company, for example. As a private enterprise, it uses its powerful financial resources to hire excellent professional ballet dancers from all over the world. From the 18 principal dancers listed on the company's website, nearly 40 percent are from countries outside the United States or have received professional ballet education in other countries. Among the many Ballet companies in the United States, the exception is the New York City Ballet, which recruits mainly from its official training Academy School of American Ballet. This indicates that the United States is not without its own good dancers, and some of the American principal dancer of NYCB like Tiler Peck, who has great rhythm

and musical sense, are not inferior to the Russian Principal dancers of the Mariinsky Ballet Company. But the overall number of such top dancers is still less to that of Russia. Plus, it cannot be ignored that even the NYCB and SAB were originally founded by George Balanchine, who was born in St. Petersburg and graduated from the Vaganova Ballet Academy. Balanchine is regarded as the father of American ballet and modern ballet. It can be said that he, a Russian educated under the nation-founded professional ballet selection system, opened up the glorious history of American ballet.

The dancers under the two professional ballet selection systems are not never intersecting, and the top dancers under the two systems exchange through serving as guest principal of the dance company or cooperating in the performance. For example, Polina Semionova, a graduate of the Bolshoi Ballet School, is a prima of the Berlin State Ballet, a guest artist of the Tokyo Ballet. She also joined the American Ballet Theatre in 2012 as principal dancer. While Isabella Boylston, a principal of the American National Ballet, has also appeared as a guest artist with the Paris Opera Ballet, the National Ballet of China and the Royal Danish Ballet.

All in all, the State-founded professional ballet system's emphasis on ballet body shape has evolved more and more extremely. Though it has some reason because the state supporting the whole system what to select candidates that have most potential, it ends up adding too much pressure on the students, which may make them unhealthy, and losing talents on other expressiveness on musicality and expressiveness. Private-funded professional ballet system, though less demanded in body shape and offering a more enjoyable environment, also has problems with cultivating the best ballerinas in the world. But lucky enough, both ballerinas in those two systems can be exchanged from one to another, thus dealing with the problems a bit.

4. Chapter 3

This chapter will explore the meaning of body image in ballet, and has three sections. I will give answers from my one-on-one interviews with professional ballet dancers as well as ballet teachers and professors, along with my own opinions. In addition, as a native of China, I will also discuss how China can improve its system of selecting professional ballet dancers, the feasibility of making changes, and the future trends of professional ballet education in China. These discussions not only provide potential answers to this paper's thesis-Whether the strict body shape requirements of ballet on professional dancers promote the development of dance or risk of losing many good dancers-but also allow readers to envision the future development of professional ballet in China.

The main method I use in this chapter is interviews. I interviewed three people. My first interviewee Mr. Wang (to protect interviewees' privacy, I will only give their pseudonyms here, not their full names) is a teacher in one Dance examination institution in Beijing, a dance training center that prepares students for the entrance examination for Chinese state-established professional dance schools. He graduated from the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy. In the Dance institution he worked for, I experienced the complete simulation process of the first trial in professional ballet entrance examination of the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy. The second interviewee Mrs. Liu has experience as a professional dancer in a professional dance company, later entering the Beijing Dance Academy to study choreography. Now she is the instructor of a top student dance team in a high school in Beijing (she has been teaching there for nearly 20 years). The third interviewee professor R, used to be a leading performer in the National Ballet of China, a top Chinese ballet company. She has both experience of being a professor in professional schools in the United States and China.

Over the course of three separate, nearly 50-minute interviews, I asked them questions like who gets to be a professional ballet dancer selected by top state-founded Chinese professional ballet schools. What's the selection process and determinants? What ideals and reasons are those determinants based on? What is it about the professional ballet body selection system in different countries and the different ballet cultures formed by it? Is it possible to diversify the ballet body? Etc.

By asking the interviewees these questions in the interview, I hope to get more authoritative first-hand information that will help me better understand the topics I want to discuss in this chapter.

4.1. How to improve the selection system of professional ballerinas in China?

The controversy over the selection system of professional ballet in China centers on the body type requirements of candidates for professional ballet. Therefore, before discussing whether and how to improve the selection system of professional ballerinas in China, we have to discuss the role of the body type in ballet.

When I asked the interviewees what they thought about the body shape requirements of professional ballet dancers, professor R answered that "a good body shape is very important for ballet, and dancers who meet the body shape requirements of ballet are more beautiful on stage. For example, dancers who have long arms are more beautiful when they imitate swans moving their wings on stage in *Swan Lake*", and Mrs. Liu said "I think these body figure requirements allow dancers to finish their routines better, as well as be more aesthetically pleasing. These demanding body shape requirements are not unique to ballet; many professional sports also have physical requirements." Undoubtedly, both respondents' answers reflect the role of body shape in the visual aesthetics of professional ballet. But is the so-called ideal ballet body fully equivalent and necessary to achieve ballet beauty, or is it just one of the factors that constitute ballet beauty? To find out this, I asked the interviewees, "Is it possible for a professional ballet dancer who does not fulfill these body shape requirements to still bring visual beauty to the audience? All the respondents gave the answer yes, that is, body shape is only one of the factors in achieving ballet beauty, and that apart from body shape, expressiveness, understanding of the music and the role, and coordination are also factors in achieving ballet beauty. One of the interviewees gave a direct answer that went a step further when she said, "People with legs and arms that are not that long can also be very good dancers. There were some professional ballerinas before whose upper body were only 8 centimeters longer than their upper body (the "ideal" body proportion in ballet is above 15 centimeters) but they still danced well."

For me, like the interviewees, I believe that an "ideal ballet body" is one of the factors in achieving ballet beauty, but not the only one. Therefore, it is unreasonable to overemphasize the body shape of ballet dancers. Although professor R and Mrs. Liu denied that the ballet selection system overemphasized body shape, stating that "the body shape requirement is just the threshold, and we don't put body shape at the top of the list of requirements after candidates reach the threshold," this did not convince me to deny their over-emphasis on body shape. On the one hand, the fact that the body shape size requirement is a threshold already implies that it is the most important indicator of whether a candidate can move from the amateur to the professional field, because even if a candidate is talented in other aspects of the requirements, her lack of body shape will directly declare that she will not be able to get into a state-established professional ballet school. On the other hand, the over-emphasis on body shape requirements is also reflected in the progressively higher body proportion requirements for entry into state-founded ballet schools. As Mrs. Liu put it, "When there were not many people majoring in ballet, there was basically no threshold for professional ballet. But when more people want to learn ballet, professional ballet must have some threshold to select the talent, and one of the thresholds is body shape."

But why does ballet have to use body shape as an important threshold for selecting candidates? Professor R gave me the answer that "body shape is one of the indicators that is difficult to be changed and stabilized later in life, although there are people who have changed their body proportion through harsh stretching training". However, when I next asked whether dance sense and expressiveness can be improved through continuous training, professor R gave a negative answer, "I think dance sense is actually innate, and it may only be a little bit developed later on." From this, I believe that the assertion that the reason for using body shape as a threshold is because of its stability is untenable, and probably more so because it is a convenient way to quickly and massively exclude a vast number of candidates which far exceed the final enrollment number: unlike measuring a candidate's expressiveness, body proportions are presented through objective numbers, with little room for

ambiguity due to subjective judgment. This reasoning, in turn, supports the idea that an overemphasis on stature is unreasonable, because we cannot go on raising the threshold of the body shape requirement simply because this method allows for a quick and massive exclusion of candidates, rather than because it plays a role in the performance of professional ballet more than any other factor does.

So, how should we determine the importance of body requirements in professional ballet auditions in order to enhance the Chinese ballet selection system? I think the answer is that the Chinese ballet selection system should emphasize the role of the body as an expressive device in dance rather than as one of a ciphers of an ideal of elegance, because the essence of dance is to use the body to release the ego and express emotions. I'm not saying that we shouldn't keep the body shape requirement in professional auditions; after all, the ideal body shape is both justified as one of the tools for expressing beauty, and it is indeed a metric that can quickly single out our students in a national audition system with a large number of candidates and is less likely to cause disagreement or controversy. On the other hand, on stage, when a dancer is wearing a romantic long white, long gauze dress, or even if she is wearing a tutu that doesn't go above the knee, it's hard for the audience to see the 3 to 4cm leg length difference through the naked eye.

To sum up, I think the 4cm leg length raised in the requirement, or the 5 pounds lighter weight in the requirement is meaningless. As long as a dancer's body shape does not affect her ability to present beauty on stage, and can support her in her daily training to do technical movements on pointe without getting injured, then such a body shape should be accepted both in the professional ballet admissions exams and in the professional ballet companies. Marika Molnar, a physical therapist and director of health and wellness at New York City Ballet, said she thinks the dancers she works with look great at the moment. "Maybe they've gained five pounds, but they look fantastic," she said. "I don't know how that's going to translate onto the stage and a tutu, but they all look terrific now, very healthy." The lowering of the proportionality requirement may reduce the number of candidates eliminated due to unqualified stature, and the indicators that should play a role in elimination at this time are comprehension, musicality and expressiveness, which are also difficult to change later in life. The examination strategy for testing candidates 'comprehension, musicality and expressiveness should be improved. In order to prevent the candidates' expressiveness from being affected by their different dance fundamentals in the examination, the dance school should teach a group of simple but emotionally expressive dance sections on the spot during the audition, so that the candidates can learn and show them on the scene, and it can ensure that candidates are able to fairly display their true perception, musicality, and expressiveness as much as possible. In this way, China's nation-founded ballet selection system can both absorb the advantages of the private-founded selection system that emphasizes more on the expressiveness, which is the essence of the dance, and retain the strategy of quickly eliminating candidates whose personal conditions are far from perfect.

4.2. Can we actually get the ballet selection system and ballet shape change implemented in China?

China's professional ballet system, which places a high value on body image, has been continuously consolidated through generations of ballet teachers and students. Under the so-called System of Transmission from Master to Apprentice, in which teachers organize their thoughts and experiences into a complete theoretical system and pass them on to their students, the notion that body shape is important has been perpetuated: students whose body shape meets the requirements of ideal ballet will be cultivated emphatically by their teachers, and even if their comprehension or expressiveness is a bit poor, the teachers do not bear to give up on them because the teachers themselves were selected to enter the professional dance schools due to their outstanding ballet figures at the beginning of the recruitment process, and then became teachers. And these students who received preferential treatment from the teachers would continue to pass on the same ideas to their students through their behavior.

In such a system, professionals not only lose sight of the need to question and justify the gradual increase in body shape standards as a threshold, because they are tasted blood, but they also develop prejudice and discrimination. On the one hand, discrimination is displayed in practitioners' disdain for out-of-shape dancers. In my conversation with a Mr. Wang, his face was full of contempt when he talked about students with bad body shape: "Every time I meet students with such poor body shape, I feel that they are wasting both my and their time. I will quickly dissuade such a student with bad body shape from the beginning, if her body proportion does not meet the requirements of the ballet major of the professional dance school, even if she has a good sense of dance we will let her give up or apply for other majors that have lower requirements on body proportion." Here, I don't think it is discrimination for Mrs. Wang to persuade or refuse these students with poor body type to enter dance examination institutions. But I consider the disdain and impatience in his facial expression and tone when he talked about students who are in poor body figure, contrasting with his respectful glowing face when he mentioned meeting clients who fit well with the body type requirements of top professional nation-founded dance school, constitutes discrimination (here means bias). For children who have not yet entered the professional field, but just come to consult and try, no matter whether their body shapes are "ideal" or not, the teacher should maintain a respectful attitude for them at least. For students who have entered dance examination institutions or students who have entered professional dance schools already, teachers should not show preconceived dislike, impatience or disregard for students who meet the body figure standards but are relatively not so "ideal", and put students with extremely "ideal" ballet body shapes in supremacy. This is both because of the idea that everyone is equal, and because this deprives talented children of the potential to become good professional ballerinas in other areas, such as musicality and expressiveness.

On the other hand, bias is also reflected in practitioners' disapproval of private-sponsored selection systems in America that place less emphasis on body size and their preference for Russian. Mrs. Liu commented on the Russians was "Most Russians are physically fit for the ideal ballet body in their own right, so actually the requirements for professional ballet are not so demanding for them. If you look on the streets of Russia, almost everyone you can see has a body proportion of more than 14cm," while her evaluation of American ballet is "because American ballet schools and ballet companies do not strictly manage the body shape of dancers, some dancers with weak self-control can easily get fat, so American ballet schools often fail to train their own country's talent, and American ballet companies instead need to recruit good dancers breed in other countries into their companies." Mr. Wang also directly stated that "American ballet schools do not emphasize body shape, so many fat dancers are there. I think American ballet is so inferior that it can't even be called good ballet."

Although the above fact is discouraging for us to carry out a reform of the professional ballet selection system in China, it also shows at the same time that Chinese ballet's emphasis on body shapes is not innate, but can be shaped and changed. It is because the selection system only admits slender dancers by setting up thresholds and requirements that professionals believe that only slim dancers are worthy of entering the field of professional ballet, and not because only slender dancers are worthy of entering the field of professional ballet that the selection system only admits slim dancers. Prejudice can be broken down if only professionals have the courage to implement a selection system that is less demanding of body size, and that embraces and nurtures dancers of a little bit diverse body sizes.

When I asked Professor R what were the factors that triggered people to go ahead and set these body size requirements for professional ballet, the professor replied that it was because people's aesthetics at the time favored thinness as beauty, and these standards were based on human aesthetics. When I asked her if she thought that the body shape requirement for professional ballet would change in the future, as there are now foreign ballet dancers and companies calling for a diversity of body shapes for ballet dancers, she denied it. However, I personally think, if professional ballet's requirements for body shape were based on the aesthetics of the time, why can't professional ballet's requirements for body shape be changed in today's era, which doesn't take thinness only as beauty but promotes diversity in aesthetics? Previously, the constant emphasis on the ideal ballet body was

more the result of industry insiders, and the audience was only the recipient. But when the changing aesthetics of the times makes the audience no longer accustomed to accepting only slender ballet dancers, I think more diverse ballet figures will appear. There are indeed some people that have the similar idea with me. In New York time artical What Is a Ballet Body, arthor Gia Kourlas wrote that ballet is subjective; what looks good, what becomes a kind of standard, is set by the company director — typically a man, and a white one at that. Many think that change is overdue. Benjamin Millepied, the former artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet who now leads the contemporary company L.A. Dance Project, said: “We’ve gone through a longtime trend of this idea of the skinny body, and I’m really against this. I want to see dancers who have their individuality.”

4.3. Future development of professional ballet education in China

During the interview, I was surprised to learn that ballet education in China is also beginning to see professionals trained by private ballet organizations. When I asked professor R, "Can we say that a Chinese child who is not in good body shape, but has a good sense of expression and dance, will have a better development if she goes to the United States to receive ballet education? Because she can at least go to a professional institution to study ballet there?" She replied, "She doesn't need to go to the United States to receive ballet education, because although she can't enter a professional dance school in China, she can enter a private organization for training. Nowadays, there are a lot of children in private ballet training institutes who train five days a week, from 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day, and their training time is even longer than that of the students of national professional dance schools. I recruited a student who had been training in a private ballet institute to enter the Beijing Dance Academy for undergraduate education. She didn't get into the nation-founded dance school when she was a child because of her body shape, but she loved ballet and practiced for a long time in a private ballet institution. After she graduates from the Beijing Dance Academy undergraduate program in the future, she will have a chance to join a professional company if she dances well (being expressive, understanding the character, and having a sense of dance and music, etc.)." In my opinion, this indicates that because of her constant practice, her skill, musicality and expressiveness ultimately “remedied” her body type that didn’t meet the standard of entering professional ballet school. Dance historian Lynn Garafola thinks that ballet has historically been slow to embrace new trends, but it is possible the art form may follow fashion’s example again. While very thin models are still the norm, in recent years many brands have won acclaim and commercial success by using models with a wider variety of body types. This path may appeal to ballet companies, who are facing the problem of declining and aging audiences.

This is not an isolated case, and after some research I learned that private organizations have been growing rapidly in the past few years in China. Some professional-level dancers are beginning to appear in the Guangzhou and Shenzhen areas of China who are receiving their ballet training in private institutions. Nowadays, there are many teachers who have graduated from national professional ballet schools and even some retired performers from professional ballet companies teaching in private ballet education institutions in China. Students who love ballet and are committed to becoming professional ballet dancers train one-on-one with professional teachers for eight hours a day in these private institutions. In the interview, the Beijing Dance Academy ballet professor told me: "In the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy, we can't do one-to-one teaching. Usually, one teacher teaches 12 students, and the training time is only 5 hours a day. This is nowhere near the resources enjoyed by students who spend a lot of time in private ballet institutions with top-notch teachers for one-on-one instruction. At present, there are some private ballet institutions in China that even teach our children better than the ballet students of the Affiliated Secondary School of Beijing Dance Academy. First, some students who practice in private dance institutions have better learning conditions than those in state schools. Second, the enrollment of national dance schools is nationwide, while the students of private institutions are generally local children, and sometimes the children in big cities have a wider vision and higher artistic accomplishment. These children not only learn dance, but also learn music and painting, and their comprehensive ability is better than the

children in second - and third-tier cities. I don't mean to discriminate, but because kids in big cities have more exposure to different kinds of arts, they have better comprehensive ability and technical understanding."

The rapidly growing trend of China's private ballet institution market shows us a new route to becoming a professional ballet dancer, and now it's not the only way to get into a state-established professional ballet school in order to be a professional ballerina in China. In the future, the professional ballet system in China is likely to be a combination of the state-founded ballet selection system and the private-sponsored ballet selection system. And because private ballet institutions do not have such severe restrictions on body size, more ballet dancers of various body sizes will appear on the Chinese ballet stage.

5. Conclusion

Because of the pursuit of the ideal ballet body, the Russian professional ballet has its extremely strict selection system. Although the selection system also focuses on other aspects such as musical sense and coordination ability, whether a candidate's body shape meets the requirements inevitably becomes a prerequisite for all admission factors. China followed Russia to establish its own ballet system, adopted the concept of Russia's professional ballet selection system, and developed unique ballet themes and styles with Chinese national characteristics. However, different from the Russian professional ballet system, though the Chinese professional ballet system does not pay less attention to the body figure of the candidate than the Russian professional ballet system, its emphasis on expressiveness and musicality is less than that of the Russian professional ballet system, which makes "Conditionalism" more likely to appear. Because it is supported by the state, the nation-founded ballet system largely provides financial support to students and tuition fees are relatively inexpensive. In China, going to a state-founded professional ballet school has therefore become a way out for some children from relatively poor families who are not good at school study but have a good ballet body. The teaching style of the state-established professional ballet system as a whole is strict, and students are under relatively high physical and psychological pressure during training, thus they may not be able to enjoy it as much as students in the private-sponsored ballet system. Some weight requirements also allow candidates or admitted students to continue to lose weight on an already thin body, which has a great health risk.

Unlike the above countries with the state-founded ballet system, the American ballet system is a completely different thing. As a country with a private ballet system, the United States pays less attention to body shape in the selection of candidates, but pays more attention to expression. However, because the private ballet system cannot manage dancers that strictly and train students as rigorously as the nation-founded ballet system, most of the ballet dancers cultivated in the United States cannot reach the world's top level technically, and the American ballet system makes up for this disadvantage by importing the elite ballet talents cultivated in other countries. In addition, unlike students in the state-established ballet system, private professional ballet schools generally require higher tuition fees. With the exception of a small number of students who apply for financial aid, the majority of students are from the middle class.

How will the nation-established professional ballet system and the private-sponsored professional ballet system develop in the future? How will they respond to their emerging problems? Let's wait and see.

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