

THE CONGOING STORY OF THE "OSCAR" OF CHINESE DANCE OR THE "ACADEMY AWARDS" OF DANCE

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We don't know when or by whom competitions were invented. Competition events are like magic. They will become a focus no matter in what time and in which field. Major sports events like the Olympic Games or The World Cup, in modern times, grab the attention of audiences all over the world.

By definition, competition is a competing activity to establish superior ability under certain rules followed by the contestants. Different rules make different games. Dance as an art, has its own rules and regulations. Therefore, dance competitions will always be present.

It was in the first National Dance Competition (including solo, dual and triple dancing performances) in 1980 that we first applied this word 'competition' to the Chinese dancing field. Before that, it was known as 'DIAO YAN' or 'HUI YAN' which literally means the observation of dance performance for research and comments on the dancing training results. From 1980, several national dancing competitions consecutively emerged, such as the Taoli Cup among art academies and schools in 1985, and the Lotus Award in 1998. These competitions had diverse functions and focuses because of their different initiators.

However, nowadays, only the Lotus Award remains as a dancing competition. The other early competitions such as The National Dancing Competition and Taoli Cup have been withdrawn from the competitions as they were only regarded as a form of dancing showcase and performance. The dancers and staff were shocked when this news was confirmed. In 2016 these two original dancing competitions were transformed into forms of performances only. As a result, fewer people attended than previously. Considering The National Dancing Competition and Lotus Award have overlapping functions, we understand why one

1 > *China* won the Best Performance and Creation Award at the 6th Academy Awards in 2015
2 > *River* won the Best Performance and Creation Award at the 6th Academy Awards in 2015



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1> The work *Poisonous wine* won the Best Creation Award at the 6th Academy Awards in 2015. For professional dancers or choreographers, whether they can control or create a dance work is the touchstone to test their maturity

of them was withdrawn, but we are confused that the same thing happened to the Taoli Cup. Noted for its educational purpose and as an academic dancing competition, the Taoli Cup has an irreplaceable position in the dancing field. That is to say, there has to be this kind of dancing competition even if there is no Taoli Cup.

Why? Because we need to set the highest academic standards. Globally, the most influential awards – the Oscars and the Grammys – were all started by professional academies. At the beginning of 2019, the Moonlight blunder at the 89th Oscars drew worldwide attention, and was widely reported by all the global media, by which we can see their influence on the world. Statistically, the Oscars and the Chinese Spring Festival Gala have the highest audience ratings across the world. There are two reasons for the Oscars drawing so much worldwide attention. One is that film art is so familiar to people and it is a worldwide event. The other is that it has the highest standards

and is the most authoritative film award. It is an award given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in America, a not-for-profit organization joined by over 6000 film experts and senior film workers. It also has a less familiar name – the Academy Awards.

There is also an Academy Award for music. The Grammy is an award with a 50 year history, given by the American National Academy of Recording Arts. In China, we also have a similar performing arts award given by the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. The core meaning of this award is to advocate for art classics and to reward the best performers each year. This award is beneficial in developing drama performance. Within six years, it has become the highest award in the Chinese drama performance field.

For that reason, the Academy Awards have become synonymous with professionalism and excellence. Receiving such an award means being recognized in

this professional field, which is the dream of everyone in their area of expertise.

In fact, we have an 'Academy Award' in the Chinese dancing field, given by the Beijing Dance Academy. In comparison with those big dancing events such as Lotus Cup, Taoli Cup, and the National Dancing Competition, this award is still not very influential in its size and coverage. However, it has developed a deep foundation after just ten years' growth. We'd rather describe the award as a dancing education practice than call it a competition. Every teacher and student who participates will be requested to demonstrate the highest standard in their field.

Undoubtedly, the Beijing Dance Academy is one of the most elite academies of dancing education. In recent years, its students have done very well in a variety of dancing performances and competitions. It is because of this Academy Award that many dancing works are filtered through this event and finally are able to

perform on bigger stages.

A touchstone of the maturity of a professional dancer or choreographer is to see whether he or she can create or master a dance work. In 2007, Beijing Dance Academy established their Academy Award to provide a platform for dancing practice for all the faculty members and students. Mr. Guo Lei, the president of this academy, says: "Art practice is the key part in fostering an art talent. Missing this part, the education is incomplete. We used to have insufficient equipment for students. There was no chance to

perform after study. Many students who major in dancing performance can only perform their first dance at the time of recruiting from professional organizations when they are about to graduate. This is very harmful to dancing education. Aware of this, we added more art practice in dancing education reform and development, such as setting up the Practice Center of Beijing Dance Academy. In 2007, offering a new method of education, we advocated and introduced art practice from outside of the academy. Therefore, we have made this Academy Award."

In 2015, the Beijing Dance Academy Award was renamed as Dancing Art Academy Award. And it enriched its competition in both contestants and contents. Focusing on its core spirit of 'art', 'creativity', 'appearance' and 'style', and with the growth of ten years, this award has generated many excellent art works and outstanding dancers, including Wang Yabin, Sun Ke, Tang Shiyi, Zhu Han, Su Hailu and others. This competition has great significance for each one of them. Su Hailu, from Beijing Dance Academy's Youth Dancing Group, says: "I think this award is just a

touchstone for us. You never know whether a work can be a success unless it comes to the stage facing the audience."

With the development and advocacy of this award, many new art works and young students are able to become familiar to the audience. In 2016, in the 11th Taoli Cup, a Korean art work "Zhu Ying Xun Sheng" (chasing after the shadow and finding the source of voices) impressed the audience. The actor Zhang Han said, "Frankly speaking, thanks to the platform that the work can be finally completed. The experience

of attending this competition expedites my growth and improves the quality of my practice. It enhances my feelings about and recognition of my performance and benefits my profession and expertise and it gives me more accurate feelings about this art work."

For this successful work, not only do we need to thank the students' wonderful performance but also thank the choreographers and directors. Chen Qingye, the director of "Tracing the Shadow and the Sound" requested the highest standard in each detail

of this performance. He even announced several problems after this work had been rewarded. Boldly using modern dancing as a form of performance, the young teacher Shuai Xiaojun, who is also the director of "River", devoted two years' hard work to designing and performing the classic dancing drama "Huanghe River". All these stories illustrate the achievement of the highest standards in their own work, and how the Dancing Art Academy Award has infused a sense of professionalism into each one of the artists.

In the past ten years, the Dancing

Art Academy Award has provided a platform for the growth of dancers and choreographers. Seeing the development and improvement of the students day by day, the Beijing Dance Academy decided to keep this award going. Hu Huaibei, the chief of the Practice Center of Beijing Dance Academy, says: "We used to have to stop our normal curricular activities when it came to the competitions such as the Taoli Cup or the Lotus Cup due to the tight schedule of preparation. But now we have this Dancing Art Academy Award, which includes the competition preparation in our normal

1 > *Guo Feng* won the 15th Beijing Dance Competition Award for dance drama and dance poetry and the best work award of the "Academy Award" of dance art of Beijing Dance Academy
2 > *Ode to the Chinese Dragon* won the excellent work of "the 12th national dance exhibition" and the finalist of the 7th "Academy Award"





> *Door-God* won the Best Performance and Creation Award at the 5th Academy Awards and silver medal of "Lotus Award" in 2013. The "Academy Award" of dance art has created and honed many excellent works and trained many excellent dancers with the purpose of "art, innovation, image and style"



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curricular activities. So when all the important competitions come, we just present what we daily do. It is ineffable to describe my happiness when our students are receiving applause and flowers on the stage. It was as if I were on the stage in the old days. But those are not what is the most important. What's the most important is that students will have a much deeper understanding of this art after all these experiences."

In the most recent awards we held, many experts and teachers outside the academy were invited, which improved the impartiality and

influence of this event, and allowed many artworks from other academies to be performed on this stage.

In the upcoming 6th Dancing Art Academy Award in 2017, dancing drama, dancing poetry, and stage design were added to the existing traditional competition units, for instance, choreography and dancing performance (including solo, dual, triple and group dancing performance), dancing thesis, and visual arts (image and photography). And the dancing dramas and dancing poems are collected from art schools and academies nationwide. The

awards will be more diverse and interesting. The judges will follow the format of the film awards: Rather than using first second and third place, the award will tally the scores and votes for these works to finally give them the titles of the best performance, the best choreography, the best dancing drama, and so on. By giving awards purely according to the performance and creativity, this has the clear purpose of developing more excellent dancers and choreographers. The judges will take into account the techniques, mastery, understanding and performance, etc., of the works,

to provide a comprehensive judgement of the dancer.

It was the first time, and was experimental, that stage design was added to the competition units. Therefore, this unit was limited to students of the Beijing Dance Academy only. If successful, it will in future be open to all organizations across the country. Stage design has become a key factor in a dancing work. A good stage design consists of at least several elements as below:

First, it must not cause problems for the dancers. Second, it must



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combine with the work itself and play as a harmonized part of this whole work rather than a central part. Third, it must be creative.

About adding these new competition units, Guo Lei, the president of Beijing Dance Academy, said: "It is not about whether the award is ideal or not. We were just setting up a platform. For example, we once set up a Multimedia Dance Award. All of us felt that it was still far from maturity after this event. However, we thought we should show our work if we have this educational program. We have no bias about

any of our attempts, as long as they are dance centered. Any dance related works can join in the competitions. Art education and practice need communications and crossover. Our education reform is aiming at fostering more comprehensive, highly qualified and creative talents."

With the ten years' growth, the Dancing Art Academy Award has become an award with a very wide coverage. It is just like planting bamboo. The growth in the first few years seems slow, but its roots are plunging into the earth deeply and continuously. After the

transformation of the Tao Li Cup and National Dancing Competition, we need to establish an academic competition in the dancing field, as we did in the drama field. This sets up a paradigm and acts as a lead in this field. It is a necessity for elevating and refining the art works from the 'high land' to 'the peak'. This unofficial name, the 'Oscars' of Chinese Dance, originally referred to the Taoli Cup. But what will be the next award to be thought of as? Shall we consider the Dancing Art Academy Award, which has been developing for ten years? Let's continue writing the legend of the 'Oscars' of Chinese Dance.

1 > *Scholars with Paper Fan (Zhi Shan Shu Sheng)*, a participating work in 2017 "Academy Award"
2 > *Tracing the Shadow and the Sound* won the Best Performance and Creation Award at the 6th Academy Awards in 2015