

The Emotional Expression in the Dance Performance of 'Confucius' in the Dance Drama 'Confucius'

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ABSTRACT

The dance drama *Confucius*, created by the China National Opera and Dance Drama Theatre in 2013, portrays the life experiences of the renowned historical figure Confucius. Through the expressive integration of dance body movements, the performance deeply explores Confucius's emotional world while conveying Confucius philosophical ideas. This research explores how the character of 'Confucius' in the dance drama expresses both positive and negative emotions through dance body movements, and how these emotional expressions impact the reflection of Confucius's philosophical ideas. The objective of this study is to analyze the dance movements of the character 'Confucius,' explore their expression of emotions, and the potential influence of these emotions on the expression of Confucius's thoughts. This research adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on the text analysis method and the semi-structured interview method. It examines the physical dance movements of the character 'Confucius' in the dance drama *Confucius*, and conducts semi-structured interviews with Kong Dexin, the director of the dance drama *Confucius*. The research findings reveal that the body movements of the character 'Confucius' convey diverse emotions, and emphasize the positive impact of these expressions in reflecting Confucius's thoughts and attitudes. This provides a new perspective for the fields of dance studies, theatrical art, and Confucius's thoughts.

Contribution/Originality: The primary contribution of this study lies in the analysis of 'Confucius' dance performance in the dance drama *Confucius*, revealing that 'Confucius' dance performance effectively conveys both negative and positive emotions, and these emotions have a positive impact on the expression of Confucian thoughts.

1. Introduction

Emotion is the organism's response to a specific stimulus, such as a person, situation, or event. It is typically an intense and short-lived experience, of which the individual is

generally highly aware (Dzedzickis et al., 2020). Human emotions are highly complex and can generally be categorized into two types: positive emotions and negative emotions (Huang, 2016). Negative emotions, a common psychological phenomenon, are adverse emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and tension that an individual experiences during certain behaviors, triggered by internal or external factors (Pan, 2023). Positive emotion refers to the pleasurable feelings such as joy, interest, contentment, and pride that an individual experiences in response to internal and external stimuli and events, and it is a conscious process that encompasses multiple components, including pleasant experiences and facial or bodily expressions, and it is widely acknowledged that humans can utilize dance movements to express themselves in ways that words alone cannot convey (Yin, 2019). In academic research, the concept of conveying emotions through dance has been examined in greater depth (Dyck et al., 2017). Emotional expression is the soul of dance, profoundly enhancing its artistic appeal. Such expressions have the power to evoke audience emotions, fostering a deep sense of resonance and engagement (Sheng & Jiang, 2022). Dance drama is a multidisciplinary stage performance art that seamlessly integrates four key artistic elements: drama, music, dance, and stage design (Wang, 2007). Moreover, an important characteristic of dance drama is its reliance on the expressive dance body movements of performers to convey information (Langer & Teng, 1983). Therefore, emotional expression also holds a crucial position in dance drama, exerting a significant influence on the audience during the actors' performance.

The dance drama *Confucius* was created by the China National Opera & Dance Drama Theater in 2013 and premiered at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in China that same year. As a fine dance work of the China National Opera and Dance Drama Theatre, the dance drama *Confucius* is still being staged in major cities on the Chinese mainland, such as Beijing, Hangzhou, Jining and other cities. The dance drama *Confucius* was created by Kong Dexin, a renowned Chinese dance drama director (China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater Company, 2014). As the first dance drama to depict Confucius's ideological system and life journey, the work represents a significant innovation in presenting Confucian thought through the art of dance drama (Yan, 2015). Since its premiere, the dance drama *Confucius* has been performed over 300 times, attracting an audience of more than 450,000 and generating a total box office revenue exceeding 100 million yuan. The production not only provides Chinese audiences with a high-quality cultural and artistic experience but also promotes outstanding Chinese culture globally through the medium of art (Tao, 2019). Since its premiere in 2013, the dance drama *Confucius* has toured internationally, with performances in the United States, Japan, Australia, Italy, Greece, and Russia. Staged in many of the world's top theaters, the production has garnered significant attention from international audiences (Zhu, 2020).

The dance drama *Confucius* is created based on the historical life journey of Confucius. Through dance, it portrays Confucius's character traits, highlighting his inner emotions and philosophical thoughts (China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater Company, 2014). Kong (2020), the director and choreographer of the dance drama 'Confucius,' states that dance excels in expressing emotions and can evoke deep resonance in the audience through rich and profound emotional expression. The dance drama also emphasizes moving the audience through dance. In the choreography of dance drama *Confucius*, "the portrayal of characters' emotions serves as the core driving force for the progression of the entire production, while the expression of their inner world constitutes the structural foundation of the dance drama" (Kong, 2020, p. 132). Therefore, analyzing and interpreting the emotional expression through 'Confucius' dance movements in the

dance drama *Confucius* represents an innovative academic exploration, providing valuable insights for audiences and scholars worldwide. Grounded in the theory of dance emotion analysis, this study examines the dance performance of the character 'Confucius' in the dance drama *Confucius* as its primary subject. It explores the character's internal emotional expression and the potential impact of this emotional portrayal on the representation of Confucian thoughts.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study primarily explores the emotional expression in the dance performance of the 'Confucius' in the dance drama *Confucius*. The research aims to achieve two objectives. The first objective is to examine the expression of positive and negative emotions in Confucius's dance performance. The second objective is to analyze the impact of Confucius's emotional expression on the conveyance of Confucius's thoughts. By addressing these three objectives, this study seeks to provide an in-depth interpretation of the emotional expression in the dance performance of 'Confucius.'

2. Literature Review

The dance drama *Confucius* is inspired by the historical figure Confucius and depicts his journey across various states (Kong, 2020). Confucius, whose Chinese name is Kong Qiu, is regarded as a great thinker, educator, and the founder of Confucianism in Chinese history (Zhang, 2010). Confucius advocates the principles of 'benevolence' and 'ritual,' and his thoughts has influenced the course of Chinese history for over two thousand years, making enduring contributions to both Chinese civilization and global culture (Jia, 2007).

The dance drama *Confucius* expresses Confucius's inner emotions and philosophical thoughts through dance performance. Since its premiere, the dance drama *Confucius* has received widespread acclaim. Audiences have praised dance drama *Confucius*. Forsyth (2017) states, experiencing the performance of the dance drama *Confucius* leaves a lasting and profoundly positive impression. The dancer portraying 'Confucius' demonstrates exceptional technical skill and remarkable expressiveness. Ludder (2017) also praises the dance performances in the production are remarkably exquisite, showcasing a high level of technical mastery. Moreover, each dance sequence exudes elegance, offering the audience a deeply immersive aesthetic experience.

Several scholars have previously conducted research on the dance drama *Confucius*, analyzing it from various academic perspectives. Su (2019) states that, the dance drama *Confucius* delves into Confucius's principles of 'ren' (benevolence), 'li' (ritual), and educational philosophy, portraying Confucius's envisioned future through a compelling narrative. Zhang (2020) analyzes the choreographic aspects of the dance drama *Confucius*, highlighting its strong emphasis on traditional Chinese culture as well as its meticulous dance composition. In solo performances, the primary focus is on expressing emotions, while duets and trios serve to convey the narrative. Group dances emphasize composition, enhancing the visual aesthetics for the audience. Through the portrayal of 'Confucius' character, the production explores his inner emotions and presents his philosophical thoughts within an authentic historical context. Zhang (2021) also conducts research on the dance drama *Confucius*, focusing on the analysis of dramatic elements. She points out that the production skillfully utilizes narrative conflicts to highlight Confucius's character, emphasizing the expression of his emotions and

philosophical thoughts. The choreography of 'Confucius' dance movements demonstrates innovation, effectively conveying traditional Chinese culture while catering to audience expectations. Although these scholars have analyzed *Confucius* from various perspectives, there remains a lack of research specifically on the emotional expression of 'Confucius' character.

Emotional expression is defined as the process by which an individual conveys emotions through actions, including both verbal and nonverbal means. As a comprehensive art form, dance utilizes a rich repertoire of bodily movements to convey emotions through variations in time, space, and force. Different dance movements correspond to distinct emotional expressions, and analyzing these dance movements can reveal the character's emotional state (Huang, 2016). On stage, every deliberate movement reflects a character's emotions and mental state. When an individual finds themselves in a specific environment, faces a particular situation, or interacts with other characters, these circumstances evoke specific thoughts and emotions, which in turn trigger corresponding physical movements (Wu & Hu, 2015). Therefore, in dance drama, interpreting body movements should be closely linked to the narrative context, as this is a crucial aspect of examining emotional expression. By analyzing Confucius's dance movements, this research aims to reveal the character's inner emotional expressions. Ultimately, the study seeks to elucidate the influence of emotional expression on conveying Confucius philosophical ideas.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on textual analysis and semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research is an approach aimed at exploring the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human issues (Creswell, 2009). Textual analysis serves as a method for researchers to explore how individuals construct meaning in the world. By interpreting various forms of media, such as films, television programs, and advertisements, researchers gain insights into the ways in which people from specific cultures and time periods understand and interpret their surroundings (McKee, 2003). Through the process of textual analysis, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of a text's narrative and the underlying themes it conveys. This study selects the dance performance of the character 'Confucius' in the dance drama as the subject of analysis, examining in depth how dance movements express 'Confucius' inner emotions and their potential influence on the representation of Confucian thought. Therefore, this study conducts a comprehensive examination of the narrative and other key elements of the dance drama *Confucius* by repeatedly viewing its video recording. The primary focus is on an in-depth analysis of the dance performance of the character 'Confucius,' exploring his emotional expression and its impact on Confucius thoughts.

This study also employs a semi-structured interview method, conducting an interview with Kong Dexin, the director and choreographer of the dance drama *Confucius*. An in-depth discussion with Kong Dexin was conducted on key elements such as the narrative structure of the dance drama and the choreography of the character 'Confucius.' This study draws upon a wide range of secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical review essays. The collected data is systematically analyzed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

This study analyzes the dance movements of the character 'Confucius' in the dance drama *Confucius*, focusing on facial expressions, arm movements, leg movements, and torso movements. It explores in depth how these body movements contribute to the expression of both negative and positive emotions in the character of 'Confucius,' as well as their impact on the conveyance of Confucian thoughts.

4. Findings

Dance drama *Confucius* portrays the journey of Confucius throughout the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, serving as an exploration of his spiritual realm. During this travel, Confucius visited numerous states to offer counsel to monarchs, with the expectation that they would embrace his principles of governance. The dance drama *Confucius* has six stage scenes: Prelude 'Inquiry,' 'The Chaotic Time,' 'Out of Food,' 'Great Harmony,' 'Mourning for Benevolence,' and Epilogue 'Happiness.' It tells the story of Confucius's travels across various states. The dance performance of the character 'Confucius' takes place across Stage Scenes 1 to 5. Analyzing the dance movements within these scenes allows for an examination of the expression of both negative and positive emotions, as well as their impact on the conveyance of Confucian thoughts.

4.1. Negative and Positive Emotions in 'Confucius' Dance Performance

4.1.1. Negative Emotions in 'Confucius' Dance Performance

Among the basic human emotions, the three fundamentals of negative human emotions are anger, fear, and sadness (Huang, 2016). According to Huang's (2016) dance analysis theory, when expressing anger, individuals may exhibit behaviors such as stomping, clenching teeth, furrowing brows, performing exaggerated movements, and maintaining an upright posture. When expressing fear, behaviors may include adopting a crouched posture, shivering, retreating, closing the eyes, drawing in the neck, and pulling the shoulders inward. When expressing sadness, behaviors may involve displaying a sad facial expression, adopting a slouched posture, exhibiting a relaxed or limp body, and lowering the head. By drawing on these behavioral manifestations in dance performances, the emotional expression of the 'Confucius' character can be examined. Furthermore, the emotional expression of dancers is closely related to the dramatic narrative (Wu & Hu, 2015). Integrating the dramatic narrative into an analysis of Confucius's dance performance can help identify the emotional expression of the 'Confucius' character. The following section will investigate how the dance performance of the 'Confucius' character embodies negative emotions.

In stage scene 1 titled 'Prelude: Inquiry,' the scene depicts 'Confucius' on the verge of departing from the State of Lu. The State of Lu is the birthplace and childhood home of 'Confucius.' He harbored a deep affection for his motherland. However, the rulers of Lu were reluctant to accept Confucius's admonitions. Consequently, 'Confucius' is compelled to depart from Lu and seek to realize his political ideals in other states, so his inner world is fraught with profound ambivalence. Faced with the city walls of Lu, he lingers for a long time, reluctant to leave. In this segment of the dance performance, 'Confucius' falls into deep contemplation. His facial expression is extremely solemn, with his eyes fixed on the distance, revealing the internal conflicts within him. In the movements of his arms, 'Confucius' performs gestures such as slowly raising his arms, extending both arms wide, and embracing with both arms, which reflect his inner melancholy. In the movements of his legs, 'Confucius' executes actions like half-

squatting, slow shifting, and rotating, which convey his reluctance to part with the State of Lu. In the torso movements, 'Confucius' demonstrates his inner persistence through actions such as bending over and leaning forward. His dance movements are slow, as shown in [Figure 1](#), where 'Confucius' gently raises his left arm and slowly turns around. His profound reluctance to leave the State of Lu is deeply conveyed, evoking a sense of sorrow. As illustrated in the [Figure 1](#), 'Confucius' gently lifts his left arm and turns around slowly, his inner reluctance to part with Lu is profound, conveying a sense of sorrow.

Figure 1: Confucius is leaving the Lu State



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* ([Kong, 2022](#))

In the second stage scene titled 'The Chaotic Time,' which narrates the story of 'Confucius' offering his political ideas to the Monarch in the court, 'Confucius' attempts to promote his political thoughts to improve the nation's governance and management. However, the court officials and their followers realize that Confucius's ideas would undermine their personal interests. In such a social condition, the rulers' thoughts are divergent from those of Confucius, and thus they are unable to collaborate ([Kong, personal communication, June 19, 2024](#)).

As a result, during Confucius's process of offering advice, he encounters significant obstruction from the officials. After recognizing the political situation in the court, 'Confucius' tries to break free from the officials' constraints to gain the Monarch's attention. Unfortunately, due to the considerable disparity in power between 'Confucius' and the officials, his efforts end in failure. In Confucius's dance performance, he expresses his inner discontent through various body movements in the dance. In terms of facial expressions, Confucius's eyes are widened in anger, his eyebrows furrowed, revealing his disapproval of the actions of the villainous rulers and conveying his shock and indignation.

In terms of arm movements, 'Confucius' performs actions such as swinging his arms, pulling, raising his arms high, and spreading his arms wide, which depict the intense

confrontation between 'Confucius' and the rulers. Throughout this process, his attitude of discontent and the expression of his emotions are clearly demonstrated. In terms of leg movements, 'Confucius' executes actions like lifting his legs, striding, walking briskly, kicking, and jumping, which illustrate his determination to break free from the obstruction of the officials, thereby expressing his inner urgency and anger. In terms of torso movements, Confucius's body leans forward and bends at the waist, depicting the complex struggle with the rulers. Despite the significant disparity in strength, 'Confucius' remains unyielding, demonstrating his resolute opposition to their actions. As shown in Figure 2, when the Courtier attempts to dissuade 'Confucius' from offering his advice, 'Confucius' waves his arms to indicate refusal, thereby displaying his anger.

Figure 2: Confucius is engaged in a confrontation with the Courtier



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

In Scene 3 of the stage performance titled 'Out of Food,' the narrative depicts 'Confucius' being forced to flee with his disciples due to a palace coup. During their escape, 'Confucius' encounters displaced common people who are living in dire poverty, surrounded by hunger and cold. Witnessing this societal scene evokes profound sympathy and deep sorrow in 'Confucius' for the plight of the common people. Witnessing the society and its way of life deteriorate to such a state, 'Confucius' experiences a profound sense of disillusionment, helplessness, and inescapable pain (Kong, personal communication, June 19, 2024).

In the dance performance, 'Confucius' conveys sorrow for the plight of common people through a variety of body movements. In terms of facial expressions, 'Confucius' furrows his brows, with eyes filled with melancholy and a countenance marked by deep sorrow, thereby demonstrating his concern for the common people and revealing his inner displeasure. In the arm movements, 'Confucius' swings his arms, places one hand behind his back, and raises his arms high, all of which illustrate his inner worry for the people's suffering. In the leg movements, 'Confucius' walks slowly, a process that reflects his sense of helplessness and melancholy over the inability to resolve the people's difficulties. In the torso movements, 'Confucius' leans forward with a hunched back,

which signifies his care for the common people and expresses his profound empathy. As shown in [Figure 3](#), 'Confucius' is standing on the stage with a furrowed brow and a countenance filled with distress, these actions vividly convey Confucius's heartache over the suffering of the common people.

Figure 3: Confucius is observing the common people.



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* ([Kong, 2022](#))

Subsequently, the Courtier and his attendants soon catch up. The plight of the common people has driven them into an insufferable state of despair. Upon seeing the rulers, these ordinary people long for relief. However, the officials, with disdain for the commoners' suffering, display a callous indifference that deeply wounds the hearts of the populace. Against this backdrop, the Courtier exploits the basic survival needs of the common people as a means of coercion, compelling them into submission. The common people kneel and plead for food, their dignity and hope stripped away by hunger.

In stark contrast, 'Confucius' strongly opposes such actions. He resolutely declares his refusal to support tyranny, steadfastly upholding his moral principles. In the dance performance, 'Confucius' sits on the ground reading bamboo slips. Through stable postures of the legs and torso, he resists the rulers' temptations unswervingly. Confronted with the rulers' mockery of the common people, his facial expressions become vivid and intense. He is almost breathless, with fury flashing in his eyes. His arm movements are more abundant and powerful. By shaking his sleeves and pointing fingers, he expresses his discontent and opposition to the rulers' actions. In terms of leg movements, the actions of sitting cross-legged on the ground and taking firm steps demonstrate Confucius's firm inner attitude. The upright and forward-leaning postures of Confucius's torso show that he is not intimidated by the rulers' provocative behavior and strongly opposes their actions, expressing his anger. As depicted in [Figure 4](#), 'Confucius' points at the Courtier in the dance performance, vehemently denouncing the tyrannical actions of the rulers and expressing his indignation.

Figure 4: Confucius is gesturing towards the Courtier



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

In scene four, titled 'Great Harmony,' this scene depicts the world in Confucius's dream. In Confucius's ideal society, everyone has access to education, the nation enjoys stable and prosperous politics, and the people live in peace and contentment. However, these ideals do not exist in the real world. In scene five, titled 'Mourning for Benevolence,' 'Confucius' awakens from his dream world, realizing that his various efforts to achieve his political ideals have not borne fruit. This leaves him feeling disheartened about the future and causes his inner beliefs and ideals to waver, plunging 'Confucius' into deep sorrow. In the dance performance portraying 'Confucius,' he conveys his innermost feelings through a rich array of body movements.

In terms of facial expression, he furrows his brows and widens his eyes, expressing his incredulity at what is unfolding before him. Faced with an unchangeable world, his face twitches and he weeps, revealing his profound sorrow. In terms of arm movements, 'Confucius' executes gestures such as raising the arms, spreading them wide, folding them around the body, and flinging them about, thereby depicting Confucius's sense of helplessness and sadness in the face of a harsh world.

Regarding leg movements, the performance includes actions such as half-squatting, rapid shifting, jumping, striding, and kneeling on both knees, which vividly portray Confucius's inner powerlessness and sorrow. In the torso movements, the 'Confucius' executes actions such as hunching the back, curling up the body, lying prone, and collapsing onto the ground, vividly expressing Confucius's desolation. As shown in Figure 5, 'Confucius' curls up, holding bamboo slips in his hands and pressing them against his cheek, with his eyes in a pensive gaze, which vividly expresses his profound sorrow.

Figure 5: Confucius is holding bamboo slips with both hands



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

4.1.2. Positive Emotions in 'Confucius' Dance Performance

In the realm of positive emotions, happiness is one of the most fundamental manifestations and has an energizing effect on human behavior (Huang, 2016). According to Huang's (2016) dance analysis theory, when individuals display the emotion of happiness, their behaviors may include the following: displaying expressive facial expressions, exhibiting energetic behavior, demonstrating light and elastic movements, performing aerial body flips, and maintaining a straight posture or upright back. By analyzing these movements, we can understand how such dance movements serve as an expression of emotions. Moreover, the emotions conveyed are closely intertwined with the narrative of the drama (Wu & Hu, 2015). The analysis of these dance movements should be integrated with the narrative of the drama, in order to identify how dance performance expresses emotions.

In stage scene 1 titled 'Prelude: Inquiry,' 'Confucius' encountered political setbacks in the State of Lu and was compelled to leave his homeland. Despite his reluctance, he decides to depart in order to propagate his philosophical ideas. In Confucius's plan, realizing his political ambitions and disseminating his thoughts are his ultimate pursuits. At this moment, 'Confucius' is filled with hope for the future and is delighted to embark on a new journey. In this part of the performance, 'Confucius' is in a state of excitement. He departs with a sense of joy and happiness, filled with anticipation and hope (Kong, personal communication, June 19, 2024). In the dance performance, his body movements are graceful and fluid, with a majestic momentum. In terms of facial expressions, he is utterly enraptured, with a relaxed face, smiling eyes, and upturned corners of the mouth, immersed in anticipation of a bright future. In the arm movements, 'Confucius' executes gestures such as spreading the arms wide, folding them around the body, flicking the sleeves, raising the arms high, and shaking the arms, thereby expressing an immense sense of joy within Confucius's heart. In the leg movements, 'Confucius' performs actions like running, spinning, and jumping, which

convey a sense of inner delight. In the torso movements, 'Confucius' employs actions such as bending the waist, leaning forward, and leaning backward, which reflect an eager anticipation of a promising future. As shown in [Figure 6](#), 'Confucius' waves his hands, smiles on his face, and has an intoxicated expression, demonstrating his beautiful expectations for the future and revealing his joyful emotions. These dance movements reflect Confucius's inner joy.

Figure 6: Confucius wears a smile on his face



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* ([Kong, 2022](#))

In the second stage scene titled 'The Chaotic Time,' after Confucius's unsuccessful attempt to offer advice, the Concubine of the court learned of this news. She believes that Confucius's ideological concepts are viable and thus invite him to discuss his ideas. Following his failure, the Concubine's invitation gives 'Confucius' a glimmer of hope for success, prompting him to meet with her. During their meeting, the Concubine engages 'Confucius' in a discussion of his political philosophy, to which 'Confucius' patiently expounded. 'Confucius' places great emphasis on the social hierarchy system (Kong, personal communication, June 19, 2024). Therefore, 'Confucius' treats the Concubine with utmost respect.

In Confucius's dance performance, he engages in interactions with Concubine through a variety of rich body movements. Regarding his facial expressions, his face is relaxed, with his lips curled upwards into a smile and his eyes bright, conveying an emotion filled with hope and delight. In terms of arm movements, 'Confucius' executes actions such as raising his arms high, swinging his arms, embracing with both arms, and waving his arms, which demonstrate his respect for the Concubine while also revealing his inner excitement. In his leg movements, 'Confucius' displays great joy through actions like rapid movement, jumping, striding, lifting his legs, squatting halfway, and stepping backward. In the movements of his torso, he interacts with Concubine by bending his waist, leaning his body forward, and leaning backward, thereby expressing his inner delight. As shown in [Figure 7](#). When facing the Concubine, 'Confucius' leans forward,

conveying a sense of anticipation and reflecting his inner excitement. This series of dance movements expressed Confucius's joyous emotions.

Figure 7: Confucius leans forward to look at concubine



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

In Scene 3 titled 'Out of Food,' 'Confucius' and his disciples encounter a group of common people who are suffering from hunger and cold. 'Confucius' and his disciples provide assistance to these people. They actively impart and explain Confucian thought to the suffering common people, helping them to realize that under the guidance of Confucian thought, future social life will improve. 'Confucius' enthusiastically encourages the common people to be hopeful about the future, and many of them join Confucius's ranks, supporting and following his plans.

In the dance performance, 'Confucius' conveys the hope of life to the common people through active body movements. He firmly believes that under the guidance of the ideas he has proposed, life will become increasingly better. In terms of facial expressions, 'Confucius' gazes into the distance with a smile on his face, revealing his anticipation and longing for a better life, thereby demonstrating an excited inner emotion. In his arm movements, 'Confucius' performs actions such as raising his arms high, waving his arms, swinging his arms, and drawing circles, which express his intense inner feelings. In his leg movements, 'Confucius' conveys his hope for the future and a sense of excitement through actions like jumping, brisk walking, lifting his legs, and squatting halfway. In the movements of torso, 'Confucius' expresses his aspiration for a better future life and his unwavering confidence through actions such as leaning forward, rolling over, turning around, and bending the waist. As shown in Figure 8, 'Confucius' spreads his arms wide, smiling, and exudes great confidence in the future development of society, which reflects his inner excitement.

Figure 8: Confucius stretches out his arms and gazes into the distance



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

In Scene 4 named 'Great Harmony,' this scene depicts the vision of a world in great harmony as conceived by 'Confucius.' In this ideal society, the nation enjoys stable governance, the people live affluent lives, and everyone is content and secure in their homes. Education is accessible to all, and the atmosphere is rich with academic pursuit. During the dance performance, 'Confucius' movements are characterized by their expansiveness and liveliness, conveying an optimistic attitude towards knowledge. During the performance, he employs bamboo slips as props to execute a diverse range of body movements.

In terms of facial expressions, 'Confucius' face is relaxed, with his eyes narrowed and a smile on his lips, clearly savoring the joy of learning and imparting knowledge, thereby revealing an excited inner emotion. In his arm movements, 'Confucius,' holding bamboo slips, performs actions such as swinging his arms, waving his arms, and raising his arms high, which demonstrate his proactive attitude towards scholarship. In his leg movements, 'Confucius' exhibits a positive demeanor through actions like walking across the stage, lifting his legs, squatting, kneeling on both knees, and rotating.

In the movements of the torso, he expresses a serious attitude towards knowledge through actions such as leaning forward, bending his waist, and turning around. During interactions with his disciples and fellow scholars, 'Confucius' conveys his positive emotions, communicating his enthusiasm for teaching and sharing knowledge. As shown in Figure 9, 'Confucius' stands among the scholars, discussing academic knowledge. He holds the bamboo slips in his hand, with a gratified smile on his face, expressing his admiration for the scholars' knowledge and actively engaging with them, thereby reflecting his inner joy.

Figure 9: Confucius engages in academic discourse with scholars



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

In Scene 5 titled 'Mourning for Benevolence,' this scene portrays 'Confucius' awakening abruptly from his dream, only to find that the real world remains in chaos. After much introspection, 'Confucius' eventually realizes that his ideals cannot be realized in the current society. Thus, he ultimately comes to terms with this reality and redirects his aspirations towards educating his disciples, hoping that they will fulfill his dreams.

In the dance performance, 'Confucius' stands at the center of the stage. Confronting a harsh world, he undergoes a transformation in his thinking and conveys a rich array of emotions through his bodily movements. In terms of facial expressions, his face is relaxed, with his eyes filled with deep emotion, revealing an earnest hope for the future and expressing a sense of inner calm and joy.

In his arm movements, actions such as spreading his arms wide, crossing his arms, swinging his arms, and sweeping his arms demonstrate Confucius's inner freedom and convey an emotion of joy. In his leg movements, actions like jumping, running, and lifting his legs exhibit Confucius's inner excitement and express a rekindled hope within. In the movements of the torso, 'Confucius' leans forward, bends his waist, and turns around, showcasing his firm confidence in a better future world and communicating positive inner emotions. As shown in Figure 10, 'Confucius' spreads his arms wide, gazing deeply into the distance with eyes filled with hope, thereby conveying his inner excitement and positive emotions.

Figure 10: Confucius extends his arms



Source: Video of Dance Drama *Confucius* (Kong, 2022)

4.2. The Influence of Emotions on Conveying Confucian Thoughts

In history, Confucius was a teacher who was beloved and respected by many. He had a large number of disciples who followed him, and it was through their efforts that his philosophy and some of his core values were transmitted to the present day (Kong, personal communication, June 19, 2024). The dance drama *Confucius* portrays Confucius' philosophies of 'ren' (benevolence), 'li' (ritual), and his educational thoughts. The concept of 'Benevolence' constitutes the central tenet of Confucian thoughts. It is essentially the practice of caring for and loving others, extending tolerance towards them, and coexisting harmoniously (Li, 2018). The concept of 'ritual' serves as the cornerstone of human behavioral norms, underpinning the relationship between individuals and society. It functions as a vital mechanism for maintaining social stability and harmony (He, 2022). Confucius, as an educator, is deeply passionate about the field of education. He emphasizes that teachers should possess profound knowledge, approach knowledge with rigor, led by example, and show concern for their students. In his educational philosophy, he advocates for the universal accessibility of education, without restrictions based on students' family background, age, or geographical location, thereby ensuring that everyone has the right to education (Gu, 2020). The subsequent analysis examines the influence of the emotions conveyed through dance performances on the expression of Confucian thoughts.

The negative emotions conveyed through 'Confucius' dance performances serve to enhance the expression of Confucian thought, more vividly highlighting Confucius' inner attitudes. In the first scene, when 'Confucius' departs from the State of Lu, his slow movements reflect his reluctance to leave his homeland. In the third scene, when 'Confucius' encounters suffering people, he expresses his sorrow over their plight. When officials mock the common people, 'Confucius' is extremely angry at these rude behaviors. These negative emotions reinforce the expression of the Confucian concept of

'ren' (benevolence). In the second scene, 'Confucius' expresses strong dissatisfaction with his ministers. Through the dance performance, he conveys his resistance to the officials' overstepping of their authority, which evokes his intense anger. This reinforces the expression of the Confucian concept of 'li' (ritual). In Scene Five, Confucius' inability to realize his aspirations and objectives is poignantly conveyed through the dance performance, which expresses his profound sense of loss. This sorrowful emotion further underscores Confucius's unwavering commitment to his thoughts. In summary, the expression of these negative emotions enhances the external manifestation of Confucius's dance movements, highlights his strong attitudes towards people or things, and accentuates and reinforces the expression of Confucian thoughts.

The positive emotions conveyed through 'Confucius' dance performances highlight Confucius' attitudes and reinforce the expression of his thoughts. In the first scene, 'Confucius' departs from the State of Lu in pursuit of disseminating his ideas. At this moment, he harbors great hope for the journey ahead. This excited positive emotion strengthens Confucius' adherence to and confidence in his thoughts. In the second scene, 'Confucius' meets the concubine and receives her assistance. 'Confucius' conveys the joy of interacting with concubine through the gestures of dance. He is extremely delighted, which enhances the expression of the Confucian concept of 'li' (ritual). In the third scene, 'Confucius' actively assists the suffering people and encourages them to stand up. This excited emotion reinforces the expression of the Confucian concept of 'ren' (benevolence). In the fourth scene, 'Confucius' teaches his students and interacts with scholars. This positive and joyful emotion demonstrates Confucius' rigorous approach to knowledge and his pursuit of it. In the fifth scene, 'Confucius' comes to terms with his previous experiences and then gathers the courage to educate his disciples, entrusting them with the realization of his dreams. This excited emotion strengthens Confucius's educational thought. The expression of these positive emotions reveals Confucius's optimistic and open-minded attitude towards life, highlights his strong stance towards people or things, and enhances the articulation of Confucius's core ideas, specifically the concepts of 'ren' (benevolence), 'li' (ritual), and his educational philosophy.

5. Conclusion

In the dance drama *Confucius*, the dance performance of 'Confucius' is rich and varied. Through a diverse range of dance gestures, 'Confucius' effectively conveys a spectrum of emotions. In the expression of negative emotions, 'Confucius' exhibits distinct and specific bodily movements and rich facial expressions during the dance performance, which effectively communicate his inner sorrow, helplessness, and anger. In the expression of positive emotions, Confucius's bodily movements are expansive and grand, externalizing his inner excitement. Through diverse bodily movements and facial expressions, he conveys positive emotions such as relief and pleasure. The emotions conveyed through dance gestures enhance the expression of Confucius's thoughts. Within the narrative of the dance drama, these emotional expressions highlight Confucius's attitudes towards people and things, thereby facilitating the drama's portrayal of Confucius's ideas of 'benevolence,' 'ritual' and his educational thought. In summary, the dance performance of 'Confucius' in the dance drama 'Confucius' effectively conveys his emotions and thereby strengthens the expression of Confucian thoughts. The positive impact of these emotional expressions on the reflection of Confucian thoughts underscores the significance of integrating emotional depth with philosophical exploration in dance dramas. This study not only enriches the understanding of the dance drama *Confucius* but also offers valuable insights for

audiences and choreographers alike, providing a deeper appreciation of the interplay between dance performance and philosophical expression.

This research also contributes to the broader fields of dance studies, theatre arts, and Confucian thoughts by offering new perspectives on the intersection of dance and emotional expression. It suggests that dance dramas can serve as a powerful medium for conveying complex philosophical ideas through the medium of emotional embodiment. Future research may further explore the potential of dance to engage with other philosophical traditions or investigate the impact of different choreographic approaches on the expression of philosophical concepts. As the dance drama *Confucius* continues to be staged, it will continue to attract an increasing number of audiences to experience the charm of Confucian culture.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study

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