Ritual Embodied Historiography: Foundational Theory on the Reconstruction of Classical Han Dynasty Chinese Dance

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ABSTRACT

The reconstruction of ancient Chinese dance, particularly from the Han Dynasty period, faces epistemological, material, and cultural challenges due to the scarcity of archives and the fragmentation of visual and textual sources. This study analyses three contemporary reconstruction works—*Tonque Ji* (Sun Ying), *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance* (Liu Jian), and the *Yong Dance Series* (Tian Tian)—employing a grounded theory approach to map conceptual patterns in dance reconstruction practices.

The findings propose the conceptual model of Ritual Embodied Historiography (REH), which frames reconstruction as an embodied historiographical process, wherein the body functions as a living archive, an affective medium, and a site of symbolic reactivation through engagement with material artefacts and contemporary sociocultural contexts. The study indicates that Han dance reconstruction cannot be fully understood through conventional Western frameworks but requires approaches grounded in cosmology, Confucian ritualism, and Eastern epistemology. The model extends global dance reconstruction scholarship by emphasising the body's role as an agent of historical knowledge production in performance practice.

INTRODUCTION

The reconstruction of Han Dynasty dance presents multidimensional challenges arising from the scarcity of complete textual archives, the loss of repertoires, and the considerable temporal and cultural distance between contemporary choreographers and the ancient world (Chen, 2020a; Dou, 2024). The Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) represents one of the most influential periods in Chinese history, leaving a substantial visual and material cultural legacy, including murals, terracotta figurines, stone sculptures, ritual objects, and textual fragments depicting dance and social ritual practices (Giulo, 2016; Wang, 2025). Although invaluable, these sources are often fragmentary and require creative interpretation to enable meaningful reconstruction. This situation necessitates that choreographers navigate the complex intersection of historical interpretation, aesthetic sensitivity, and contemporary bodily embodiment (Taylor, 2003; McLeod, 2024).

In contrast to Western reconstruction traditions, which often emphasise structural accuracy, codified techniques, and movement notation, Chinese dance reconstruction foregrounds symbolic interpretation, emotional resonance, and alignment with traditional philosophical principles and cosmology (Long, 2024; Foster, 2011). This approach conceptualises the body as a living archive capable of conveying cultural memory, interpreting symbolic meaning, and reactivating historical contexts (Taylor, 2003; Barad, 2003). Consequently, Han Dynasty dance reconstruction is not merely a technical endeavour but constitutes a historiographical process

rooted in dynamic interactions among artefacts, the body, and contemporary sociocultural context.

Although Western literature has provided methodological frameworks for dance reconstruction, there remains a significant gap in non-Western scholarship that integrates local philosophy, ritualism, and embodied experience as central to the reconstruction process (Bennett, 2010; Wilcox, 2018). This study highlights the need for a conceptual model grounded in Chinese practice and epistemology, particularly concerning Han rituals, cosmology, and cultural materiality, which have been underexplored in global literature. This focus is pertinent because Chinese dance reconstruction cannot be fully understood solely through technical or theoretical Western lenses; instead, it requires attention to the interplay between the body, artefacts, and affective resonance within specific sociocultural contexts (Fāng, 2023; Min, 2025).

The three choreographers analysed—Sun Ying, Liu Jian, and Tian Tian—offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on reviving ancient dance. Sun Ying emphasises a moral-symbolic approach, foregrounding cosmological and ritual values; Liu Jian focuses on experimental material exploration to understand the physical dimensions of movement; and Tian Tian highlights ritual-cosmological sensitivity and emotional experience in performance (Wilcox, 2018; Long, 2024). Their works demonstrate that reconstruction is shaped by limited historical evidence as well as philosophical orientation, affective experience, and the choreographer's social positioning in contemporary Chinese society (Chen, 2018; McLeod, 2024). This process allows Han-era dance to be revitalised as a layered representation of memory, imagination, and embodied historiography, where performers re-experience social values, ritual atmosphere, and bodily expression embedded in ancient material.

This study positions the body as a central medium in reconstruction, not only as a technical instrument but as a vehicle for meaning-making, reflection, and affective resonance (Foster, 2011; Barad, 2003). Through improvisation, sensory alignment, and affective embodiment, dancers channel ritual energy and the emotional atmosphere characteristic of Han culture (Chen, 2020b; Long, 2024). This embodied approach emphasises that reconstruction success depends not solely on technical accuracy but on affective coherence, cultural resonance, and the capacity of historical material to elicit creative bodily responses.

The research methodology employs a grounded theory approach to capture insights emerging directly from choreographic practice, performance analysis, and participant perspectives (Pratt, 2023; Rademaker & Polush, 2022). The study traces how choreographers (1) interact with visual relics, textual fragments, and other material evidence; (2) utilise the body as a medium for memory, affect, and experimentation; and (3) negotiate sociocultural contexts influencing interpretive decisions. This approach facilitates the identification of reconstruction patterns and principles that are not solely document-based but internalised through embodied experience and symbolic practice (Baiyue et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024).

Based on this analysis, the study proposes the conceptual model of Ritual Embodied Historiography (REH), framing reconstruction as a ritualised process wherein the dancer's body engages with historical artefacts through emotional resonance, symbolic reactivation, and embodied reflection (Barad, 2003; McLeod, 2024). REH regards artefacts as creative catalysts that elicit bodily responses and generate choreographic possibilities, rather than as static evidence. The model emphasises the importance of affective engagement—empathy, emotional attunement, and imaginative projection—as a bridge between contemporary performers and the ancient individuals who inspired them (Foster, 2011; Taylor, 2003).

By presenting REH, this study contributes significantly to dance reconstruction scholarship by offering an integrative non-Western perspective, combining local epistemology, ritualism, cosmology, and embodied materiality. The contribution extends the global discourse on dance historiography, showing that reconstruction is not merely a revival of ancient forms but a

cultural act blending memory, imagination, and the revitalisation of historical life through the moving body (Wilcox, 2018; Long, 2024).

Overall, this research addresses an academic gap by providing a theoretical and practical framework grounded in Eastern philosophy and embodied experience, while emphasising plurality, contextuality, and creativity in Han Dynasty dance reconstruction. The model also opens avenues for further exploration regarding the role of digital technology, intercultural collaboration, and evolving theories of embodiment in reconstruction practice in China and other global contexts (Fāng, 2023; Min, 2025).

METHODS

This study employs a grounded theory methodology to investigate the principles and practices underpinning Han Dynasty dance reconstruction. Grounded theory was selected because it allows conceptual theory to emerge inductively from empirical data, without constraining the researcher within pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Pratt, 2023; Rademaker & Polush, 2022). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the complex and layered practices of dance reconstruction, where interactions among the body, historical artefacts, and contemporary sociocultural contexts generate unique interpretive patterns (Taylor, 2003; McLeod, 2024).

The analytical process followed three systematic stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding was conducted to identify initial categories from field data, including insights related to choreographic strategies, bodily responses, and affective resonance. Axial coding then connected categories and subcategories to highlight patterns of interaction between artefacts, embodied practice, and symbolic interpretation. Finally, selective coding synthesised the core concepts underlying the phenomenon of dance reconstruction, forming an integrated conceptual framework (Pratt, 2023; Rademaker & Polush, 2022).

Data collection was conducted through source triangulation to ensure analytical validity and depth. Semi-structured interviews with choreographers, expert audiences, and non-expert audiences revealed interpretive choices, aesthetic strategies, bodily responses, and social reception of the reconstructions (Foster, 2011; Chen, 2018). Direct observation of rehearsals and performances enabled the researcher to understand dancers' physical experimentation, emotional engagement, and interaction with historical material. Analysis of historical artefacts—including Han figurines, murals, stone sculptures, and fragmentary texts—provided context for understanding how material artefacts shape choreographic interpretation and guide embodied practice (Wang, 2025; Dou, 2024; Ding, 2025).

Three case studies were selected to represent diverse reconstruction practices: *Tonque Ji* by Sun Ying, *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance* by Liu Jian, and the *Yong Dance Series* by Tian Tian. *Tonque Ji* emphasises affective reconstruction that links historical trauma and political memory to the dancer's body. *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance* focuses on the physical interpretation of visual imagery through improvisation and material–body dialogue. The *Yong Dance Series* foregrounds the embodiment of terracotta figures, ritual symbolism, and recurring movement motifs inspired by Han funerary culture (Wilcox, 2018; Long, 2024; Tian & Wu, 2023). The selection of these cases allows for comparative analysis of methodological variation, reconstruction styles, and embodied enactment strategies.

Data triangulation was achieved through the combination of interviews, field observation, and artefact analysis, alongside cross-case comparison to identify consistent patterns in reconstruction practice. This approach strengthens the validity of findings by connecting choreographers' perspectives, dancers' embodied experience, and the historical context of artefacts within a cohesive conceptual framework (Baiyue et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024).

Continuous iteration between data collection and coding ensured that the emergent theory reflects the dynamic nature of reconstruction practice, including the affective, symbolic, and material dimensions integral to Han Dynasty dance (Barad, 2003; McLeod, 2024).

Through these procedures, the study produces the conceptual model of Ritual Embodied Historiography (REH), which positions the dancer's body as a medium of embodied historiography, artefacts as creative catalysts, and affect as a bridge across historical distance. The model emphasises that dance reconstruction is not merely a technical reproduction but an interactive process combining symbolic interpretation, emotional resonance, and material experimentation to revitalise ancient movement practices in contemporary contexts (Foster, 2011; Taylor, 2003; Barad, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to elucidate the conceptual structure of Han Dynasty dance reconstruction by analysing how choreographers reinterpret fragmented historical traces through an embodied, affective, and culturally grounded process. Grounded theory analysis revealed interconnected categories—such as the body as archive, affective reconstruction, material agency, ritual aesthetics, and sociocultural interpretation—indicating that reconstruction is not merely the revival of ancient movement but a historiographical act shaped by interactions among the body, materiality, and cultural memory.

The discussion is organised around three primary foci: (1) exploration of how choreographers engage with historical sources, including visual relics and textual descriptions; (2) examination of the body's function as a medium for memory, affective reconstruction, and experimental embodiment; and (3) analysis of how sociocultural factors shape interpretive decisions that determine the form and meaning of reconstructed works.

Interaction with Historical Sources

Han Dynasty dance reconstruction relies on the choreographer's capacity to interpret and actualise fragmentary historical sources. In the absence of complete choreographic records from this period, artists must draw upon archaeological remains, visual references, and dispersed textual fragments. These sources function more as interpretive prompts than prescriptive guides, compelling choreographers to negotiate a balance between historical fidelity and creative imagination (Foster, 2011; Taylor, 2003). This dynamic aligns with Adshead-Lansdale's (1988) view that dance reconstruction constitutes an interpretive process that merges historical archives with artistic intuition.

Visual relics—such as terracotta figurines, stone reliefs, murals, and lacquered layered images—serve as primary anchors for interpretive strategies. Choreographers analyse postures, gestures, and bodily orientations in these artefacts, extracting subtle cues from arm curves, torso tilts, or implied movement patterns. Although the artefacts are static, this visualisation enables the mapping of kinetic potential that can subsequently be translated into embodied movement (Wang, 2025; Dou, 2024; Ding, 2025). In line with Taylor (2003), visual culture stores corporeal knowledge that must be activated through performance to realise latent meaning.

In the case of *Tonque Ji*, Sun Ying utilises murals and figurines as both interpretive anchors and vehicles for emotional and narrative reconstruction. Downcast heads, low stances, and asymmetrical arm positions in the figurines guide the creation of movement phrases expressing oppression, political vulnerability, and moral tension. This process demonstrates that interpretation extends beyond visual form to incorporate complex historical and symbolic associations (Adshead-Lansdale, 1988; McLeod, 2024). Choreographers conceive artefacts as

living archives, where social and political meanings interact with the dancers' affective experience.

Conversely, Liu Jian's *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance* adopts a more experimental approach. He employs Han Dynasty paintings as conceptual triggers, examining spatial rhythm, compositional patterns, and symbolic congruence to stimulate bodily improvisation. Rather than literally translating visual forms, Liu positions artefacts as agents within the creative process, consistent with Barad's (2003) notion of intra-action, wherein meaning emerges from relational interactions between object and body, rather than pre-existing structures.

Tian Tian's *Yong Dance Series* emphasises terracotta figurines as embodiments of rituality and funerary symbolism. Tian interprets the figurines' stillness, symmetry, and repetitive gestures as reflections of Han cosmology, studying the sculptural logic to understand the underlying ritual practices. This approach aligns with Bennett's (2010) concept of vibrant matter, in which non-human artefacts possess agency that influences human creative processes. Here, artefacts actively guide movement experimentation and structure performance composition.

Fragmentary textual descriptions provide a complementary contextual framework to visual sources. Writings on ritual dance, ceremonial processions, and court entertainment inform interpretive decisions, revealing cultural ethos, bodily behaviours, and moral norms of the Han period (Chen, 2020; McLeod, 2024). These texts allow choreographers to situate embodied experimentation within social and symbolic contexts, extending the meaning of movement from mere visualisation to profound historical experience.

Moreover, artefacts offer insights into rhythm, spatial organisation, and group composition. The placement of figurines in tombs, carved angles on stone panels, or posture arrangements in murals provide choreographic patterns adaptable for the contemporary stage (Fāng, 2023; Poulton & Zi, 2020). The transformation from static visual structures into dynamic performance underscores the choreographer's interpretive role in revitalising lost traditions, demonstrating that reconstruction is a creative, dialogical, and situational process (Husain & Zulkafli, 2023).

Ambiguities in ancient sources compel choreographers to balance historical fidelity with contemporary creativity. Artefacts are treated as open structures allowing multiple embodiments, rather than rigid prescriptions of movement (Foster, 2011; Wilcox, 2018). Sun Ying emphasises emotional resonance and moral symbolism; Liu Jian foregrounds material exploration; Tian Tian focuses on ritual dimensions. These differences illustrate how historical interpretation is filtered through individual artistic identity and epistemology, generating rich variations in reconstruction style (Long, 2024; Tian & Wu, 2023).

Interaction with historical sources also raises ongoing questions of materiality: How does the arm move following this gesture? How does breath support specific postures? What cultural intention underlies a particular position? Such questions activate embodied experimentation, in which body and artefact mutually shape one another, consistent with Barad's (2003) claim that materiality co-constitutes meaning. Consequently, reconstruction emerges as a co-productive process between object and body, in which each artefact functions as a creative partner shaping artistic expression.

Through these interactions, historical material functions not as a static archive but as a productive site of embodied knowledge. Dancers and choreographers extract meaning from the texture, structure, and symbolic codes of artefacts, creating an affective and conceptual framework enabling meaningful movement embodiment. This aligns with Taylor (2003), who argues that performance can act as a living archive when artefacts alone cannot fully articulate historical corporeality.

Overall, engagement with historical sources in Han Dynasty dance reconstruction constitutes a dynamic, relational, and interpretive process, combining critical analysis of visual relics,

contextual reading of textual fragments, and imaginative transformation through embodied practice. This approach foregrounds artistic agency as a medium for cultural reanimation, demonstrating that history is not merely observed or read but reactivated through the body, materiality, and affective experience in contemporary performance (Baiyue et al., 2022; Chen, 2018; Xiang et al., 2024). The process affirms that ancient dance reconstruction is a historiographical act integrating symbolic interpretation, material experimentation, and emotional resonance to produce historically and contemporarily meaningful experience.

The Body as a Medium of Memory, Affective Reconstruction, and Experimental Embodiment

In Han Dynasty dance reconstruction, the body functions not merely as a performative instrument but as a living archive, an affective medium, and a site of experimental embodiment that enables choreographers to revive fragments of ancient culture. In the absence of a continuous movement vocabulary from the Han period, choreographers employ the body as the principal interpretive device, integrating structured intuition, somatic sensitivity, and embodied imagination to bridge a temporal gap of over two millennia (Taylor, 2003; Foster, 2011). This perspective emphasises the distinction between written or visual archives and the embodied repertoire, whereby the body retains forms of knowledge that cannot be captured by static documentation.

Cycles of bodily experimentation serve as a bridge between static artefacts and kinetic reconstruction. Choreographers engage in iterative processes of imitation, improvisation, and embodiment to assess how postures on figurines or implied gestures in murals can evolve into meaningful movement. This approach aligns with Barad's (2003) concept of intra-action, wherein meaning emerges through material-discursive entanglements between body, object, and interpretive context. Repeated exploration demonstrates that historical reconstruction is not mere reproduction of movement but the creation of embodied correspondences resonating affectively with the Han cultural world.

Affective reconstruction is particularly prominent in this practice. Choreographers prioritise emotional attunement with ritual conditions, historical experience, and collective memory as authentic entry points into Han dance. The body becomes a vessel for experiencing grief, submission, ritual sacrality, political pressure, and spiritual devotion that collectively shape the cultural ethos of the Han Dynasty (McLeod, 2024; Chen, 2018). Such affective activation underscores the body's role as a historiographical medium, where emotional cognition directs choreographic structure and movement articulation.

In *Tonque Ji*, Sun Ying demonstrates reconstruction driven by affect and somatic resonance. Dancers convey political trauma, exhaustion, and humiliation through bodily awareness emphasising weight, pressure, and fragmented cultural identity. Sun Ying guides dancers to embody the weight of snow, the intensity of oppressive governance, and social tension, rendering affect both a narrative and historiographical medium (Adshead-Lansdale, 1988; Wilcox, 2018). This process affirms that dance reconstruction is inherently empathetic, with emotional experience directly shaping movement structure.

In *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance*, Liu Jian foregrounds the body as an instrument of experimentation. His approach emphasises internalising the rhythm, spatial patterns, and symbolic dynamics observed in Han Dynasty paintings, which are then translated into movement textures through improvisation. This experimentation illustrates how the body can respond to artefact ambiguity, generating kinaesthetic knowledge unattainable through visual or textual documentation alone (Adshead-Lansdale, 1988; Dou, 2024; Fāng, 2023). Liu foregrounds interpretive flexibility, allowing the body to act as an active creative mediator within the reconstruction process.

Tian Tian's *Yong Dance Series* emphasises slow gestures, rhythmic repetition, and meditative stillness drawn from terracotta figurines. Dancers' bodies mediate ritual memory and channel the symbolic weight of Han funerary practice through breath, grounding, and sustained presence. This process exemplifies how movement embodiment conveys past ritual experiences, consistent with Bennett's (2010) concept of vibrant matter, in which non-human objects influence and guide human action. Here, the body becomes the locus where material symbolism intersects with ongoing somatic experience.

Across all three case studies, the body also operates as a medium of cultural memory. Dancers' skills, training, and habitus shape bodily responses to historical material. Sun Ying emphasises expressive upper-body articulation, Liu Jian focuses on kinetic exploration and form deconstruction, while Tian Tian highlights subtle repetition and sustained stillness. These variations reinforce Foster's (2011) observation that dance reconstruction is always filtered through dancers' experiences, training, and artistic identity, forming unique and adaptive memory modes.

The body also serves as a site of epistemic negotiation, where competing interpretations are tested through improvisation and kinaesthetic adjustment. Dancers experiment with tempo, weight, and spatial orientation to evaluate the qualities of movement most aligned with Han aesthetic and cultural values. This process highlights that historical knowledge can be generated through embodied practice, complementing or even surpassing information available in artefacts and texts (Barad, 2003; Pratt, 2023). The body functions as an active knowledge agent, facilitating affective and material exploration.

Sensory attunement, or somatic resonance, underpins bodily experimentation. Choreographers frequently experience moments in which movement phrases feel "historically correct" prior to rational justification. Such somatic intuition reflects McLeod's (2024) finding that historical understanding emerges from affective and sensory engagement rather than solely cognitive analysis. The body thus becomes a medium enabling historical experience to be accessed through sensation, not merely visual representation.

Collective embodiment further emphasises the body's role as an instrument of social memory. Group improvisation allows dancers to test relational dynamics, ritual synchronisation, and possible historical formations. These collective experiments enable the kinesthetic reconstruction of Han dance's social and spatial configurations, even where original choreographic structures remain unknown (Baiyue et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024). The ensemble functions as a living archive, preserving collective memory through bodily interaction.

Interaction with material artefacts is likewise significant. The weight of extended arms, the resistance of silk fabrics, and the tactile qualities of ritual props such as drums or swords influence dancers' movement and gestures. This material engagement demonstrates object agency within the reconstruction process, whereby the body responds to, adapts to, and collaborates with artefacts, reinforcing Bennett's (2010) claim that materiality shapes human practice. The body does not merely interpret artefacts but actively participates in generating kinetic meaning.

In sum, Han Dynasty dance reconstruction illustrates a highly embodied epistemology in which memory, affect, and bodily experimentation converge to revive historical fragments. The body operates as a living archive, an affective medium, and an experimental laboratory. Through embodiment, choreographers resuscitate cultural nuances, ritual symbolism, and aesthetic values embedded in artefacts, producing performances that are both historically informed and contemporarily relevant (Chen, 2020; Long, 2024; Tian & Wu, 2023). Embodied reconstruction is therefore not merely a technical endeavour but a theoretical framework rendering the past sensorially accessible, experientially meaningful, and performatively resonant in the contemporary context.

Sociocultural Factors and Interpretive Decision-Making

The reconstruction of Han Dynasty dance does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped by the complex interplay between historical sources, embodied experimentation, and the sociocultural context in which choreographers operate. Every interpretive decision reflects cultural background, pedagogical lineage, philosophical orientation, generational experience, and institutional influence. Foster (2011) emphasises that dance reconstruction is never a neutral attempt to "retrieve the past" literally; rather, it is an interpretive practice framed by the social and cultural ecosystem that informs artistic production. Findings from this study indicate that cultural identity, social position, and life experience significantly influence how choreographers reimagine historical material.

Sun Ying's interpretive orientation is firmly rooted in cultural nationalism and historical responsibility. His reconstruction in *Tonque Ji* foregrounds themes of morality, political oppression, and collective resilience, emphasising Han cultural continuity alongside contemporary emotional resonance (Liu & Zhang, 2020). Within this framework, dance becomes a vehicle for asserting ethical values and national identity, demonstrating that choreographic decisions are invariably shaped by broader sociopolitical narratives. His institutional position within Chinese classical dance training—strongly influenced by twentieth-century nationalist discourse and theatrical aesthetics—guides his preference for expressive upper-body movements, dramatic gestures, and intense emotional articulation (Adshead-Lansdale, 1988; Wilcox, 2018). Thus, pedagogical lineage and institutional tradition function as embedded interpretive filters within the reconstruction process.

In contrast, Liu Jian, with a background in contemporary dance, emphasises exploration and deconstruction. He treats Han artefacts—figurines, reliefs, and paintings—as starting points for somatic experimentation, whereby the dancer's body serves as a medium to probe historical uncertainty and ambiguity. This approach aligns with Barad's (2003) notion of relational becoming, which posits that interpretive practice is shaped by dynamic interactions among contemporary cultural attitudes, historical materials, and bodily creativity. Liu prioritises process over preservation, encouraging improvisation and movement discovery that generate new affective resonance with ancient material. His orientation reflects broader sociocultural shifts in Chinese arts, where interdisciplinary approaches integrating archaeology, visuality, and performance are increasingly valued (McLeod, 2024; Fāng, 2023).

Tian Tian's approach in the *Yong Dance Series* follows a distinct interpretive trajectory. Her reconstruction is shaped by philosophical engagement with ritual and spiritual symbolism, emphasising calmness, gestural repetition, and meditative awareness inspired by terracotta figurines and Han funerary practices (Bennett, 2010; Chen, 2018). This perspective positions the dancer's body as a mediator of ritual experience and a channel for manifesting the spiritual agency of artefacts, consistent with Bennett's (2010) concept of vibrant matter. Tian's sociocultural positioning—at the intersection of academic research and contemporary performance—encourages embodiment as a site of spiritual reflection rather than mere narrative or historical recreation.

Beyond philosophical and institutional factors, gender also shapes interpretive decision-making. Sun Ying's work foregrounds vulnerability, resilience, and emotional rupture, which can be read through the lens of gendered experience in both historical and contemporary Chinese contexts. Gestures expressing hardship, struggle, and collective endurance subtly mediate female experience and power dynamics, indicating that dance reconstruction functions as a medium for articulating contemporary sociocultural concerns through historical material (Chen, 2020; Long, 2024). Accordingly, interpretation is guided not only by historical analysis but also by awareness of current social and political issues.

Generational differences further influence interpretive orientation. Sun Ying, as part of a cohort emphasising cultural continuity, stresses preservation of Han aesthetic heritage. Liu Jian and Tian Tian, representing a younger generation, are inclined towards critical reinterpretation, hybrid aesthetics, and interdisciplinary experimental approaches. This generational variation reinforces Foster's (2011) argument that dance reconstruction negotiates between heritage paradigms and emerging artistic identities, where lived experience and sociocultural values shape interpretive choices.

Institutional and cultural politics further underscore sociocultural influence. Sun Ying's work is supported by institutions prioritising national cultural preservation, whereas Liu Jian's projects often unfold in experimental performance laboratories that encourage artistic risk-taking. Tian Tian, operating at the nexus of academia and performance, reflects institutional environments that emphasise both scholarly rigour and creative innovation (Poulton & Zi, 2020; Min, 2025). Additionally, the Chinese government's focus on intangible cultural heritage creates a climate in which historical reconstruction becomes a vehicle for cultural revitalisation (Jinfang & Abdul Wahid, 2025), meaning that sociopolitical discourse shapes thematic focus, aesthetic strategies, and interpretive freedom (Liu & Zhang, 2020; Chao, n.d.).

Choreographers' interpretive decisions also reflect diverse approaches to authenticity. Sun Ying seeks emotional authenticity grounded in historical suffering; Liu Jian pursues conceptual authenticity through contemporary bodily exploration and creative improvisation; Tian Tian emphasises ritual authenticity through meditative awareness and symbolic repetition. This variation demonstrates that authenticity in Han Dynasty dance reconstruction is relative, shaped by sociocultural values, philosophical lineage, and individual artistic orientation (McLeod, 2024; Taylor, 2003).

Moreover, the influence of material practice and aesthetic heritage is evident. Training environments and exposure to artefacts—figurines, reliefs, murals, and musical instruments—provide somatic and symbolic reference points that inform interpretive decision-making. The dancer's body becomes a medium in which aesthetic norms, ritual values, and social history converge, producing movement that integrates cultural heritage with contemporary sensibility (Wang, 2025; Dou, 2024; Tian & Wu, 2023). In other words, interpretive decisions are not merely cognitive but rooted in sociomaterial experience that frames each movement.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Han Dynasty dance reconstruction is an interpretive practice embedded within a sociocultural context. National identity, pedagogical lineage, philosophy, generational experience, institutional affiliation, cultural politics, gender, and interaction with material artefacts collectively shape choreographic choices, authenticity, and reconstruction strategies. This process confirms that reconstruction is not merely an artistic technique but a historiographical practice that maintains contemporary cultural and political relevance while reviving the past in an embodied, affective, and conceptual form (Foster, 2011; Barad, 2003; Bennett, 2010; Pratt, 2023).

Implications and Limitations

The findings regarding sociocultural factors and interpretive decision-making in Han Dynasty dance reconstruction carry several theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. Theoretically, this study reinforces the understanding that dance reconstruction is not merely the reproduction of historical forms, but rather an embodied historiographical practice influenced by the choreographer's identity, philosophical orientation, and sociocultural ecosystem (Foster, 2011; Taylor, 2003). This expands the discourse of Ritual Embodied Historiography by demonstrating that interpretations of the past are always mediated through sociocultural lenses, yielding reconstructions that resonate emotionally, symbolically, and conceptually.

Methodologically, the findings underscore the necessity of a multi-layered approach that integrates analysis of material artefacts, somatic reconstruction, and socio-cultural context. Reconstructions focusing solely on visual documentation or textual records risk overlooking the affective, philosophical, and institutional dynamics that shape artistic decision-making. This study supports the claims of Barad (2003) and Bennett (2010) that the body and materiality are not merely instruments but participatory agents in interpretive processes. Consequently, reconstruction practices should be considered as embodied inquiry, wherein sensory responsiveness, affect, and bodily habitus constitute legitimate sources of historical knowledge.

Practically, the implications include the development of training strategies and performance design that acknowledge the diversity of sociocultural orientations and generational experience. Arts institutions, dance schools, and performance laboratories may leverage these findings to design training programmes that respect historical aesthetic values while allowing interpretive flexibility. For instance, Sun Ying's approach may be applied to heritage preservation projects, Liu Jian's methods are suited to creative experimentation laboratories, and Tian Tian's approach is relevant for ritual reconstruction or choreographic meditation practices (Chen, 2018; Min, 2025; Wilcox, 2018).

However, the study has several limitations. First, the focus on three prominent choreographers (Sun Ying, Liu Jian, and Tian Tian) necessitates caution in generalising findings to all Han Dynasty dance reconstruction practices. Individual interpretive decisions are strongly shaped by personal background, institutional lineage, and sociocultural position; other choreographers' experiences may yield different interpretive patterns (Adshead-Lansdale, 1988; Foster, 2011).

Second, available Han Dynasty historical sources—including figurines, reliefs, murals, and textual documents—remain fragmentary and ambiguous, rendering choreographic interpretation inherently speculative. Although embodied experimentation helps bridge these gaps, there is no guarantee that the resulting movements accurately represent ancient practice in a literal sense (Dou, 2024; Wang, 2025). Reconstruction, therefore, always exists along a continuum between historical possibility and contemporary creativity.

Third, modern sociocultural contexts influence interpretive decision-making in ways that are difficult to disentangle from subjectivity. Cultural politics, gender, generational perspectives, and contemporary philosophical orientations can shape biases in how choreographers select movement, gesture, or rhythm (Liu & Zhang, 2020; Chao, n.d.). This raises epistemological questions regarding the "authenticity" of reconstruction, as the resulting movements are invariably a correlation between past practices and contemporary artistic sensibilities.

Fourth, this study emphasises reconstruction within professional laboratory and performance contexts. Practices in local communities, traditional rituals, or non-academic settings may follow different sociocultural logics, which are not fully captured in this research (Chen, 2020; Marshall, n.d.). This highlights the need for further investigation into the diversity of reconstruction practices across communities and social contexts.

Finally, the analysis is qualitative and grounded in theory, meaning that while the findings and conceptual model are rich descriptively and theoretically, they require verification and enrichment through longitudinal studies, cross-regional comparative research, or integration with quantitative methods to strengthen external validity (Pratt, 2023; Rademaker & Polush, 2022).

Overall, these implications and limitations indicate that Han Dynasty dance reconstruction is a complex, multi-layered practice embedded within contemporary sociocultural contexts. The knowledge generated concerns not only movement and aesthetics but also the interplay between body, materiality, affect, philosophy, and institutions. By acknowledging these limitations and implications, future research can develop more inclusive, reflective, and

adaptive reconstruction methodologies while maintaining the connection between historical past and contemporary artistic sensibility.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Han Dynasty dance reconstruction constitutes a multidimensional creative practice that integrates historical materials, bodily experimentation, and sociocultural context to generate new interpretations of ancient cultural expression. Grounded theory analysis of three representative works—*Tonque Ji*, *Han Painting Dance Experimental Performance*, and *Yong Dance Series*—reveals that reconstruction is not merely the restoration of a lost movement vocabulary but a historiographical process shaped by the interaction of fragmented artefacts, bodily inquiry, affective resonance, and cultural imagination. Conceptualised as Ritual Embodied Historiography, this framework emphasises how contemporary choreographers create interpretive worlds, activating cultural memory through performance rather than merely replicating historical forms.

Historical sources—visual relics, textual fragments, and archaeological remains—serve as generative prompts rather than fixed instructional documents. Choreographers read them for both structural cues and symbolic, emotional, and philosophical meaning, with the body as the primary medium for exploring and transforming such meanings. Through improvisation, sensory attunement, and affective embodiment, dancers evoke the emotional atmosphere and ritual energy of the Han era, demonstrating that reconstruction depends more on affective coherence and cultural resonance than on technical accuracy.

Sociocultural context also informs choreographers' interpretive decisions. Cultural background, training lineage, aesthetic orientation, and institutional environment shape how historical traces are read and reimagined. Sun Ying's moral-symbolic approach, Liu Jian's experimental material research, and Tian Tian's ritual-cosmological sensitivity illustrate how different sociocultural positions produce plural reconstructions of the same historical period.

Overall, this study contributes to dance historiography, reconstruction methodology, and the role of embodied knowledge in interpreting the past. By emphasising the interrelation of material evidence, bodily intuition, and sociocultural context, it offers an alternative model for non-Western historical reconstruction practices, recognising the body as both an archive and a site of historiographical creation. Future research may explore the influence of digital technology, intercultural collaboration, and embodiment theory on reconstruction practices in Chinese dance and related disciplines.

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