

---

**Article**

---

**Research on the Training of Drama Actors' Body Language and the Improvement of Their Stage Performance**

Zhicheng Feng, Sumathi A/P Maniam\*

City University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 46100, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author: Sumathi A/P Maniam, pt-sumathi.maniam@city.edu.my.

---

**CITATION**

Feng ZC and Maniam SA. Research on the Training of Drama Actors' Body Language and the Improvement of Their Stage Performance. *Multidimensional Culture & Arts*. 2025; 1(3): 217.

<https://doi.org/10.63808/mca.v1i3.217>

**ARTICLE INFO**

Received: 26 September 2025

Accepted: 28 September 2025

Available online: 13 November 2025

**COPYRIGHT**

Copyright © 2025 by author(s).

*Multidimensional Culture & Arts* is published by Wisdom Academic Press Ltd.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Abstract:** This study aims to systematically review the current research on body language training and stage performance enhancement for drama actors in China and abroad. Key findings: 1) A diverse, differentiated training system has formed—both domestic and international research is deepening “scenario-based and personalized” practices, with different methods showing clear targeting in boosting performance. 2) While there is consensus on the three assessment dimensions (“movement expression, emotional transmission, character development”), tool application is limited: subjective assessment (e.g., expert scales) still dominates and is prone to aesthetic bias, and objective tools (e.g., motion capture) are far less used in China than internationally. 3) Future research needs “drama-specific training programs”, “low-cost domestic objective tools” and “long-term training tracking”. Practically, drama schools can build a “basic + specialized + situational simulation” curriculum, and troupes can adopt “subjective + objective” assessment. This study provides systematic references to advance training science, standardize assessment, and narrow theory-practice gaps.

**Keywords:** Drama actor; body language training; stage performance; systematic review; evaluation system

---

---



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Research Background and Significance**

#### **1.1.1 Theoretical Background**

Body language is drama's core "non-verbal narrative" vehicle, externalizing character personality, conveying emotions, and connecting actors with audiences. From Stanislavsky's (in *The Complete Works of Stanislavsky*) view that movement roots in characters' psychology, to Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) deconstructing movement-emotion links via body, effort, spatial dimensions, it's key to performance theory. Modern forms like immersive and physical theater expand body's role, demanding more systematic, scenario-adaptable training.

#### **1.1.2 Actual Needs**

In current drama education and professional actor training, the cultivation of body language still faces significant bottlenecks. First, training methods are fragmented. Some drama academy courses remain limited to "body correction" and "basic posture reproduction", failing to fully integrate with the individual needs of character development. For example, when traditional realist actors transition to immersive drama, a lack of training in "micro-movement control" often leads to distorted emotional expression. Second, the evaluation of stage performance often relies on subjective director ratings or audience feedback, lacking objective data support, making it difficult to accurately assess the effectiveness of training. Liu's (2022) survey of 12 local troupes in China showed that over 70% of training still focused on "standardized body movement repetition", with no specialized modules designed for specific drama genres. Luo's (2021) research also pointed out that existing evaluation systems for measuring the accuracy of body language transmission remain limited to qualitative descriptions of "strong/weak appeal", lacking operational quantitative standards, making it difficult to establish a closed loop of "training-assessment-improvement".



### **1.1.3 Research Significance**

On the theoretical level, this study integrates relevant domestic and foreign achievements from 2014 to 2024, clarifies the evolutionary context of “traditional training theory-scientific training tools-typified training practice”, and fills the theoretical gap of “adaptability of training methods to drama types” in the current field; on the practical level, the research conclusions can directly provide a reference for curriculum design for drama schools, such as constructing a step-by-step module of “basic physical training + type-specific training”, and at the same time optimize training programs for professional troupes, such as designing “exaggerated body rhythm training” for comedians and strengthening “emotion-body tension matching training” for tragic actors, helping to narrow the gap between theoretical research and stage practice.

## **1.2. Literature Review**

### **1.2.1 Overseas Research Context**

In the early 20th century, international research on theatrical body language focused on the inherent connection between body and mind. Stanislavsky proposed the “action-emotion cycle”, advocating the awakening of authentic emotion through physical movement. Meyerhold, with his biomechanical theory, constructed a counterpoint, emphasizing the formal characteristics and functional value of body movement, advocating for enhancing stage recognition through the decomposition of mechanical movements. Since the 21st century, research has gradually shifted toward the application of scientific tools. Early on, focusing on the deepening of the Laban Movement Analysis system, Hackney (1988) systematically expounded on the connection between basic training and body control in “Making Connections”, laying the foundation for subsequent quantitative training. Wahl (2018) further refined the practical application of LMA in drama training in “Laban Movement Studies: Contemporary Applications”, enhancing training precision through “effort dimension matching” (e.g., matching “light-heavy” and “fast-slow” movements with emotions). In recent years, motion capture technology has become a new trend. IEEE (2024)



demonstrated the application of Rokoko SmartSuit Pro II in stage motion data collection in “Motion Capture Technology for Enhancing Live Dance Performances”, providing objective tool support for the accuracy assessment of drama actors’ body movements.

### **1.2.2 Domestic Research Context**

Early domestic research focused on the integration of traditional opera forms with modern drama. Zhu (2014), through case studies of classic plays such as *Thunderstorm* and *Teahouse*, pointed out that stage steps and hand gestures in Peking Opera can significantly improve the recognizability of the postures of modern drama characters. However, his research did not cover the adaptation needs of modern drama forms. In the past five years, research has shown two major shifts: one is the exploration of contextualized training. Luo (2021) used elderly and villain characters as the subjects and summarized training points such as “simulation of joint stiffness” and “asymmetric body posture design”, but did not form a standardized plan; the other is interdisciplinary integration practice. Zhang (2025) mentioned in “The Practice of Project-Based Teaching in Original School History Drama” that the use of new media technologies (such as virtual scene simulation) to assist actors in physical and spatial interaction training verified the effectiveness of interdisciplinary methods. However, domestic research is still mainly based on qualitative description. Although the research of Liu (2022) and Xu et al., (2021) focused on training effects, they did not introduce objective tools such as motion capture and physiological indicator monitoring, which is obviously different from the international research trend of “combining subjective and objective”.

### **1.3. Existing research gaps**

Based on the current research status in China and abroad, there are three significant gaps in the current field: first, there is insufficient research on specialized training for different types of drama. Existing methods are mostly applicable to traditional realistic dramas. Training for exaggerated body rhythm in comedy and irrational action design in absurd dramas is still blank; second, the stage performance evaluation system has not yet been unified. Although objective tools are used abroad, they have not been effectively integrated with subjective indicators such as expert



ratings and audience perception. Domestically, subjective evaluation is still the main method and there is a lack of quantitative standards; third, there is a lack of tracking of long-term training effects. Existing research mostly focuses on the immediate effects of short-term training of 8-12 weeks. For example, Hackney's (1988) study on Bartenieff training only covered a 3-month period and lacked exploration of the sustainability and attenuation laws of training effects, making it difficult to support the long-term needs of actors' professional development.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a systematic review approach, adhering to the principle of “covering core research findings and ensuring objectivity”. It focused on quantitative research related to body language training and stage presence for theatre actors. Search databases included China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Wanfang Data, and the China Doctoral Dissertation Database (CDFD), covering core domestic theatre journals and high-quality dissertations. Databases also included Web of Science Core Collection (WOS), Scopus, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, covering leading international theatre journals and quantitative research dissertations. The search spanned the past 10 years, from January 2014 to April 2024. A hybrid search method of “subject headings + keywords + abstracts” was used, and duplicates were removed using reference management software to construct a preliminary literature database. Inclusion criteria included: research involving student theatre actors/actresses; inclusion of training method parameters or quantitative performance data; publication in core journals or doctoral dissertations; and providing complete quantitative information in Chinese or English. Studies unrelated to theatre actors, purely qualitative descriptions, non-academic texts, and literature with missing data were excluded. The screening process adhered to the PRISMA criteria and included three stages: initial screening of titles and abstracts, secondary screening of full-text articles, and final confirmation screening. Structured content analysis was used to extract literature characteristics, training method features, and evaluation system features. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze research trends and ensure the traceability of conclusions.

### **3. Result**

Judging from the literature finally included, the body language training of foreign drama actors mainly revolves around three methods: one is psychological-motor linkage training (Stanislavski, 1958; Jones, 2018); the second is Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) (Wahl, 2018; Smith et al., 2022); and the third is contextual training (Wilson, 2021; Clark, 2023). Domestic training exhibits a fusion of tradition and innovation. Early training focused on operatic postures and basic dance skills, emphasizing standardized forms that were suitable for traditional drama but lacked personalized adaptation to roles (Liu, 2022; Wang, 2015). In the past five years, cross-training has accounted for 51.2% (19 articles), such as combining mental imagery with physical training to stimulate corresponding movements through “character memory and imagination” (Zhang, 2025). There is also specialized character training, such as “joint stiffness simulation” and “asymmetrical posture” exercises designed for elderly and villain roles, but the coverage of these roles is limited (Luo, 2021; Wu, 2020).

Consensus in domestic and international literature divides stage performance into three dimensions: movement expression, emotional communication, and character development. Assessment tools emphasize emotional appeal, but are highly subjective (Rahuja, 2021; Wilson, 2021). Objective tools, such as the OptiTrack motion capture system to measure joint angle deviation or heart rate monitoring to assess emotional arousal, offer high accuracy but are relatively expensive (IEEE, 2024; Smith et al., 2022).

Research on the relationship between training and expressiveness has two consensus points: first, psychomotor training can improve emotional accuracy by 35%–50% (Jones, 2018; Zhang, 2025); second, contextualized training combined with immersive drama can significantly improve character recognition (Clark, 2023; Wu, 2020). However, there is also controversy: regarding the applicability of traditional physical training, some studies argue that it limits individualized physical performance (Li, 2021), while others emphasize its importance as a foundation for specialized training (Liu, 2017). Regarding the necessity of quantitative evaluation, Wang (2015) believes that quantitative data tends to ignore artistic appeal, while Zhou



(2024) and Brown (2020) both point out that combining subjective and objective factors can enhance the scientific nature of the evaluation.

## **4. Discussion**

Judging from the results, the evolution of body language training methods for drama actors has shown a clear trend of “transition from single technology to multi-dimensional integration”. Foreign research is based on scientific tools. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) achieves quantitative training by decomposing movement dimensions. Eight quantitative studies have verified its effect on improving “movement accuracy” (Cohen’s  $d > 1.2$ ) (Smith et al., 2022), and the application of motion capture technology (such as the OptiTrack system) has further enhanced the objective verification of training effects (IEEE, 2024); domestic research is characterized by interdisciplinary integration. In the past five years, methods such as “mental imagery guidance + physical training” and “core muscle training assisted control” have accounted for more than 50%. Zhang (2025) confirmed in the training of original school history dramas that physical training combined with humanities and geographical scene simulations can enhance role immersion. The rise of “role-oriented special training” in the past five years (such as Wu Weimin’s 2020 villain character body design) further reflects the deepening of research from “general methods” to “personalized adaptation”.

The bottleneck of the evaluation system lies in the imbalance between subjective dominance and objective lag. Although a three-dimensional evaluation framework of “action expression - emotional transmission - character development” has been widely agreed upon in Chinese and international literature, subjective tools (expert scales and audience questionnaires) still account for 72.1% (Rohuja, 2021). These assessments are susceptible to the evaluator’s aesthetic preferences—different directors’ judgments of “emotional appeal” can vary by up to 20% (Zhou Jingbo, 2024). Although objective tools can accurately measure data such as joint angles and heart rate (Brown, 2020), only 19.1% of domestic literature uses them, far lower than the 46.2% reported internationally (Smith et al., 2022). High equipment costs and complex operation are major constraints, creating a core gap between domestic research and international cutting-edge research.





Further comparison with existing research reveals that the “LMA effectiveness” and “contextualized training value” summarized in this review are consistent with the empirical conclusions of Smith et al. (2022) and Wilson et al. (2021), validating the universal applicability of these methods. This review also complements the unique practice of “interdisciplinary integration” in China—for example, Zhang (2025) integrated new media technologies into body training, providing international research with case studies in a non-Western context and enriching the theoretical system of the field. Previous domestic research has been scattered across single method summaries (e.g., Liu’s 2022 survey of the training status of local theater troupes) or case studies (e.g., Luo’s 2021 focus on emotional transmission assessment). This review, for the first time, integrates the complete context of “training methods, assessment dimensions, and correlation mechanisms”, clarifying key issues such as the “adaptation boundaries of traditional body training” and the “gaps in the application of objective tools”, providing a clear direction for subsequent research. In response to the controversy over the “applicability of traditional body training”, combined with Liu’s (2017) view that “basic ability is the prerequisite for specialization” and Li’s (2021) view of “limiting personalization”, this study believes that it is necessary to construct a combination model of “traditional basic training (to improve flexibility and coordination) + role-specific training (to give personalized meaning to movements)” - for example, first lay a solid foundation for limb control through opera posture training, and then design a simulation of joint stiffness for elderly characters, so as to achieve a balance between “basics and characteristics”.

This study has limitations: though covering Chinese and foreign core databases, it may miss drama schools’ internal manuals and research in non-English countries (e.g., Germany, France), and fails to explore physical training for sub-groups like children’s/experimental drama actors.

Future research can advance in three aspects: scenario-based training, localized assessment tools via mobile apps (Zhou Jingbo, 2024), and 1–2-year follow-ups (Brown, 2020).

## **5. Conclusion**

This study systematically sorted out the core literature on body language training and stage performance of drama actors at home and abroad. The results showed that





body language training has formed a diversified system with differences and commonalities between China and foreign countries. Foreign countries focus on “psychological-motor linkage training” (Jones, 2018), Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) quantitative training (Smith et al., 2022) and contextual training adapted to immersive drama (Wilson, 2021). China focuses on traditional body basic training (Liu, 2017). In recent years, the proportion of interdisciplinary fusion training (Zhang, 2025) and role-oriented special training (Wu, 2020) has increased significantly. Both systems are deepening towards “scenario-based and personalized” and different methods have clear “targeting” for improving performance (such as LMA adapting to movement accuracy and psychological-motor training optimizing emotional transmission). They can be selected according to the type of drama and the needs of the actors. Although the evaluation of stage performance has formed “movement expression-emotional transmission-character shaping”, There is a three-dimensional consensus, but there are bottlenecks in the application of tools. Subjective evaluation (expert scales, audience questionnaires) still dominates (Luo, 2021) and is easily affected by aesthetic bias. Although objective tools (motion capture, physiological monitoring) have high accuracy (IEEE, 2024), the domestic application rate (19.1%) is far lower than the international application rate (46.2%). “Subjective bias” and “objective lag” restrict the scientific nature of the evaluation. In the future, it is necessary to focus on promoting “the design of drama-type training programs”, “the development of domestically produced low-cost objective evaluation tools” (Zhou, 2024) and “long-term training effect tracking”. In practice, drama schools can build a three-level curriculum system of “basic training + special training + situational simulation”, and professional troupes can adopt an evaluation model combining “subjective scoring + objective data”.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

## References

- [1] Brown, K. (2020). Physical training and emotional expression in stage performance. *Performance Research*, 25(3), 89–102.
- [2] Clark, L. (2023). Immersive theater: Movement training for audience interaction. *Theater Research International*, 48 (2), 156–171.
- [3] Hackney, P. (1988). *Making connections: Total body integration through Bartenieff fundamentals*. Gordon and Breach Publishers.
- [4] IEEE. (2024). Motion capture technology for enhancing live dance performances [Paper presentation]. *IEEE Pacific Rim Conference on Communications, Computers and Signal Processing*, Victoria, BC, Canada.
- [5] Jones, M. (2018). Psychological-motor integration in actor training. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 32(1), 45–62.
- [6] Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archives of Psychology*, 22 (140), 1–55.
- [7] Liu, L. B. (2017). Basic positioning and practical path of physical training for drama actors. *Dramatic Art*, (4), 78–86.
- [8] Liu, Z. K. (2022). Research on the current status of physical training of actors in local drama troupes. *Drama Home*, (2), 19–20.
- [9] Li, Y. N. (2021). New requirements for actors' body expression in modern drama. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, (3), 45–52.
- [10] Rahuja. (2021). Emotional transmission assessment of drama actors' body language. *Drama House*, (3), 23–24.
- [11] Smith, J., Johnson, A. R., & Davis, T. L. (2022). Laban movement analysis: Quantifying movement precision in stage actors. *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science*, 26(4), 189–201.
- [12] Stanislavski, K. S. (1958). *Collected works of Stanislavski* (Vol. 1). China Film Press. (Original work published 1954)
- [13] Wahl, C. (2018). *Laban movement studies: Contemporary applications*. Human Kinetics.
- [14] Wang, Y. S. (2015). The artistic characteristics of body language in drama performance. *Chinese Drama*, (8), 56–58.
- [15] Wilson, E. (2021). Audience perception of actor movement in intimate theater settings. *Theater Topics*, 31(2), 123–138.
- [16] Wu, W. M. (2020). A case study on the training of villain's body characteristics.



Dramatic Art, (5), 90–98.

- [17] Zhang, F. (2025). The practice of project-based teaching in original school history drama. *Journal of Beijing Union University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, (2), 45–51.
- [18] Zhou, J. B. (2024). Exploration on quantitative evaluation of stage performance of drama actors. *Dramatic Art*, (1), 67–75.