

Beyond the Female Gaze: Embodied Knowledge in Wen Hui's *New Birth Report*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how femininity is produced through embodied choreographic practice in contemporary Chinese dance, using Wen Hui's *New Birth Report* as a focused case study. It asks how the work constructs femininity beyond the female gaze through bodily action, material interaction, mediated perception, and relations among performers. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative single-case approach grounded in a single live observation, choreographic close reading, and published performance documentation. Rather than treating the female body primarily as an image to be interpreted, the analysis attends to movement, weight, repetition, material resistance, projection, spatial relation, and the temporal accumulation of bodily experience. The findings are organised through three interconnected dimensions. First, material embodiment shows how maternal experience is generated through physical negotiation with fabrics and stage materials rather than through fixed symbolism alone. Second, mediated embodiment shows how live corporeal presence is placed in tension with projected histories and memories, exposing the limits of visual knowledge. Third, relational embodiment shows how differently situated bodies produce forms of connection without collapsing their distinct histories into a universal model of womanhood. Taken together, these dimensions support the concept of embodied knowledge: choreography does not merely represent pre-existing meanings of femininity but participates in producing knowledge through bodily practice. The article therefore argues that the female gaze remains useful for analysing the politics of visibility but is insufficient as a complete framework for dance. By shifting attention from representation to embodiment, *New Birth Report* reveals femininity as material, temporal, relational, and continually negotiated through movement.

Keywords: female gaze; embodied knowledge; contemporary Chinese dance; feminist spectatorship; Wen Hui

INTRODUCTION

Feminist theories of spectatorship have long challenged the visual structures through which women are positioned as objects of display. Mulvey's critique of the male gaze remains foundational to this discussion because it demonstrates how visual culture can organise looking through unequal relations of power (Mulvey, 2015). Later formulations of the female gaze have sought to redistribute this relation by foregrounding women's experience, agency, and narrative perspective rather than simply reversing the direction of looking (French, 2021). These interventions are crucial for understanding representation, yet they continue to begin from a predominantly visual question: how is the female body seen?

Dance complicates this question because choreographic meaning is never produced through visibility alone. Unlike cinema, where framing, editing, and camera position organise the spectator's access to bodies, dance unfolds through the material presence of bodies in motion. Weight, breath, balance, muscular effort, rhythm, duration, spatial negotiation, and physical contact all participate in meaning-making. Research on kinesthetic spectatorship likewise emphasises that viewers encounter dance through embodied histories and perceptual conditions rather than through vision alone (Wood, 2016). The dancing body is therefore not simply an image that signifies femininity; it is also a material and temporal process through which femininity is enacted, tested, and transformed (Albright, 2019; Sheets-Johnstone, 2015).

This distinction makes embodiment especially important for feminist dance analysis. Foster's work on dance and knowledge emphasises that movement generates forms of understanding that cannot be reduced to verbal explanation or visual representation (Foster, 2019, 2023). Within this perspective, the body does not merely carry meanings formulated elsewhere. It remembers, adapts, resists, and produces knowledge through action.

Such an approach also resonates with Butler's account of gender as constituted through repeated bodily practices rather than expressed as an essential identity (Butler, 2011). Choreography can therefore be understood as a site where gendered meanings are reproduced, interrupted, and rearticulated (Bissell & Haviland, 2018).

Wen Hui's *New Birth Report* offers a particularly productive case through which to examine this shift from visual representation to embodied knowledge. Wen's wider documentary and intermedia practice has been described as treating the body as an archive of memory and women's experience, while her first-person work connects bodily communication, family history, and female kinship (Zhang, 2020; Yu, 2020). Official production documentation describes the 2023 work as combining dance with video testimony, sound, text, and visual documents, performed by Wen Hui, Alessandra Corti, Patcharaporn Krüger-Distakul, and Parvin Saljoughi (Festival d'Automne à Paris, 2023; Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm, 2023). The work brings mothers, non-mothers, and performers with different cultural and migratory histories into a shared choreographic field, allowing questions of motherhood, bodily autonomy, memory, care, and institutional regulation to be staged without collapsing them into a single model of womanhood.

The article therefore does not ask whether *New Birth Report* simply presents a more positive or empowered image of women. Its concern is more specific: how does choreography reorganise the conditions through which femininity becomes perceptible and knowable? Methodologically, the discussion uses qualitative close reading of performance material, movement structures, stage objects, mediated imagery, and relational choreography. Rather than treating the performance as an illustration of feminist theory, the analysis allows the work itself to test the explanatory limits of gaze-centred interpretation.

The central research question is: How does Wen Hui's *New Birth Report* construct femininity beyond the female gaze through embodied choreographic practice? The argument advanced here is that the female gaze remains a necessary but incomplete framework for dance. *New Birth Report* does not move beyond visibility by rejecting spectatorship; instead, it exposes the limits of visual mastery and relocates meaning within material, mediated, and relational forms of embodiment. Through this shift, the female body emerges not only as a subject of representation but as a site of embodied knowledge production.

BEYOND THE FEMALE GAZE: TOWARDS AN EMBODIED UNDERSTANDING OF DANCE

The female gaze is best understood here not as a simple inversion of the male gaze, but as an attempt to reorganise the relation between viewing, representation, and female subjectivity. Feminist screen scholarship has shown that changing who looks is inseparable from changing how experience is narrated and whose perspective structures the image (French, 2021). Work on women's first-person documentary in East Asia further stresses that feminist expression emerges through locally situated practices rather than through a single universal model of female representation (Yu & Lebow, 2020). Nevertheless, the language of the gaze continues to privilege spectatorship. Whether the concern is objectification, agency, or self-representation, the analytical starting point often remains the visible body (Hammergren, 2018).

This emphasis becomes restrictive when transferred directly to dance. Choreography is perceived visually, but it is also organised through kinaesthetic and material conditions that cannot be fully contained in an image. A spectator may see a body carrying weight, losing balance, repeating an action, or yielding to another body, yet the choreographic significance of those actions emerges through duration, effort, resistance, and relation. The body is simultaneously medium, material, and agent. To analyse it only as a visual sign therefore risks reducing movement to representation (Joufflineau et al., 2018; Reason & Reynolds, 2010).

Embodiment provides a complementary framework by shifting attention from what the body signifies to what bodily action does. In dance, meaning can arise because a movement is repeated until it becomes exhausting, because a material object alters the performer's centre of gravity, or because a gesture changes when it passes from one body to another. Foster's account of dance as a knowledge-producing practice is especially useful here because it treats movement as a mode of thinking rather than as a secondary illustration of pre-existing ideas (Foster, 2019, 2023). Embodiment, in this sense, describes the material processes through which meaning is generated (Albright, 2019; Lepecki, 2016).

For feminist analysis, the implication is significant. Butler's theory of performativity understands gender as continually constituted through repeated bodily acts (Butler, 2011). Dance makes the variability of such repetition unusually visible. A familiar gesture can be slowed, interrupted, displaced, exaggerated, or redistributed across different bodies. Choreography can therefore expose the instability of gendered conventions without requiring a simple opposition between 'traditional' and 'liberated' femininity.

The concept of embodied knowledge developed in this article builds on this intersection between bodily action and feminist interpretation. It does not claim that the body exists outside discourse, culture, or representation. Rather, it emphasises that bodily practice contributes actively to what can be known. Material contact, temporal accumulation, mediated fragmentation, and intercorporeal relation become epistemic processes: they do not merely communicate femininity but participate in producing its meanings. This emphasis is compatible with feminist accounts that locate theory in lived, embodied experience rather than in abstraction alone (Ahmed, 2017).

This perspective provides the basis for reading *New Birth Report*. Instead of asking only whether the work offers women greater control over representation, the analysis asks how choreographic processes make female experience knowable without rendering it fully transparent. The transition from gaze to embodiment is therefore not a theoretical replacement but an analytical expansion—from the politics of seeing towards the material, temporal, and relational conditions through which the body produces meaning.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative single-case research design centred on the analysis of Wen Hui's *New Birth Report*. The work was selected because it brings together bodily movement, material objects, mediated imagery, autobiographical narration, and relations among differently situated performers, making it particularly relevant to the article's central concern with how femininity becomes knowable not only through visual representation but also through embodied choreographic practice. The purpose of the case study is not to generalise across contemporary Chinese dance, but to examine in depth how one specific performance can test the explanatory limits of gaze-centred feminist analysis.

The primary analytical basis of the study is the author's live observation of the performance. The analysis therefore proceeds from performance observation and choreographic close reading rather than from interviews, audience-reception data, or repeated video-based viewing. Attention was directed to observable choreographic and performative elements, including movement quality, bodily weight, repetition, duration, spatial organisation, physical effort, interaction with stage materials, projection and mediated imagery, and relations among performers. Published production and festival documentation is used as contextual corroboration for verifiable details such as the credited performers, the work's integration of dance and audiovisual documents, and its framing around motherhood, non-motherhood, bodily autonomy, and institutional control (Festival d'Automne à Paris, 2023; Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm, 2023). These sources supplement rather than replace the live observation that forms the primary basis of the choreographic analysis.

The analytical procedure is organised around three interconnected dimensions: material embodiment, mediated embodiment, and relational embodiment. Material embodiment concerns the physical negotiation between performers and stage materials, particularly the ways in which weight, resistance, support, and bodily adjustment contribute to meaning. Mediated embodiment examines the relationship between live bodily presence and projected imagery, with particular attention to scale, temporal disjunction, memory, and the limits of visual coherence. Relational embodiment considers how meaning is produced among differently

situated bodies through juxtaposition, proximity, repetition, exchange, and collective organisation. These dimensions function as analytical lenses developed through close reading of this case rather than as a universal taxonomy assumed in advance.

Interpretation proceeds by connecting specific observable choreographic features to the theoretical concerns of the study. Rather than assigning predetermined symbolic meanings to individual gestures, objects, or images, the analysis considers what these elements do within the performance and how their significance changes through movement, duration, material interaction, and relation. For example, fabric is not treated automatically as a symbol of motherhood; its analytical significance depends on how performers carry, pull, wrap, support, or redistribute it and on how these actions alter bodily effort and relation. Similarly, projection is analysed not simply as visual representation but in terms of how it reorganises the spectator's perceptual relationship to live corporeal presence. This procedure allows theoretical claims concerning embodied knowledge to remain grounded in identifiable performance evidence.

Because the study is based on a single live observation, it does not claim exhaustive documentation of every choreographic detail or direct access to the performers' internal sensations and intentions. Live spectatorship is necessarily selective and situated, and particular moments may be perceived differently by different observers. Accordingly, the analysis distinguishes between features that were observable within the performance and broader claims concerning artistic intention, biography, or production context. Where contextual claims are made, they are supported by published sources where available. The study therefore treats performance observation as a situated interpretive practice rather than as transparent access to embodied experience.

EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE IN NEW BIRTH REPORT

This section examines how *New Birth Report* produces embodied knowledge through three interconnected choreographic processes: material engagement with the maternal body, mediated negotiation between corporeal presence and visual representation, and relational embodiment across differently situated performers. Together, these processes show how femininity emerges through bodily practice rather than as a stable representational category.

The Maternal Body as Lived and Material Experience

A recurring material motif in *New Birth Report* is the performers' interaction with sheets, cloth bundles, blankets, and other fabrics. During the live performance observed for this study, these materials were carried, unfolded, wrapped around bodies, extended across the performance space, and reorganised through individual and collective action. A contemporaneous performance account likewise describes the performers carrying bundles wrapped in bed sheets and notes their shifting associations with pregnancy, domestic burden, memory, and projection (Lu, 2024). The significance of the fabric therefore does not remain constant; its material function changes according to what the performers do with it and to the bodily effort demanded by each configuration.

This changing function is particularly important for understanding material embodiment. When fabric is carried or pulled, it modifies bodily weight and movement possibility; when wrapped around the body, it changes the body's visible boundaries; when supported or extended collectively, it reorganises relations among performers. The fabric can evoke pregnancy, domestic labour, protection, burden, or memory, but it cannot be reduced to any one of these symbolic meanings. Its significance develops through the physical relation between body, material, and action.

The choreography consequently makes maternal experience perceptible through material negotiation rather than through a stable maternal image. Bodily effort is not simply added to an already established representation of motherhood. Weight, resistance, repetition, adjustment, and support become part of the process through which maternal meaning is generated. The analytical distinction is important: the object does not merely stand for an idea; its physical properties alter what the performing body can do.

This is the first sense in which *New Birth Report* produces embodied knowledge. The performance makes knowledge emerge through bodily engagement with material conditions. What becomes knowable about maternal experience is therefore inseparable from the physical processes through which bodies carry, resist, accommodate, and redistribute material weight.

Mediated Embodiment and the Limits of Visual Coherence

Projected imagery introduces a different relationship between embodiment and spectatorship. During the performance, material surfaces used by the performers also become surfaces for projected images associated with bodily memory, family history, and women's experience. A contemporaneous account specifically records quilts from the performers' bundles being unfolded as projection surfaces for images of their mothers across different stages of life, as well as projections of women's protest images and voices (Lu, 2024). This configuration is significant because the material object does not cease to be physical when it becomes an image-bearing surface. Its weight, texture, and spatial presence remain perceptible while another visual layer is superimposed upon it.

The relationship between live performer, material surface, and projected image therefore produces a perceptual tension. The spectator encounters the corporeal body occupying the stage while simultaneously attending to mediated traces of other bodies and other times. These modes of presence cannot be completely collapsed into one another. The live body possesses immediate spatial and temporal continuity, whereas projection introduces absence, memory, displacement, and another visual scale.

This tension complicates the assumption that greater visibility necessarily produces greater knowledge of the female body. Projection makes particular bodily histories visible, but it does not make lived experience fully accessible. The spectator can encounter an image associated with another body or another moment without acquiring direct access to the experience carried by that image. Visibility therefore operates as a partial mode of knowledge rather than as its completion.

This distinction marks the second dimension of embodied knowledge developed in the article. Mediated embodiment does not oppose image and body; rather, it examines how their coexistence exposes the limits of visual mastery. The projected image can disclose, preserve, or reactivate bodily histories while simultaneously reminding the spectator that corporeal experience exceeds what an image can contain (Bench, 2020; Byrne, 2025).

From this perspective, *New Birth Report* does not move beyond the female gaze by abandoning visibility. It reorganises the relation between seeing and knowing. The spectator continues to look, but the performance makes looking encounter its own limits: what becomes visible remains connected to material bodies, temporal histories, and experiences that cannot be fully possessed through observation (Hammergren, 2018; Wood, 2016).

Collective Embodiment and the Production of Relational Femininity

The relational dimension of embodied knowledge becomes particularly visible through the coexistence of performers with differently situated bodily and cultural histories. Official programme materials identify Wen Hui, Alessandra Corti, Patcharaporn Krüger-Distakul, and Parvin Saljoughi as the four performers and frame the work through encounters among mothers, non-mothers, and women with different cultural and migratory histories (Festival d'Automne à Paris, 2023; Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm, 2023). *New Birth Report* brings experiences concerning pregnancy, motherhood, bodily autonomy, family relation, and the choice not to become a mother into a shared choreographic field without presenting them as interchangeable versions of a universal female experience. Their significance lies not only in what each narrative communicates individually, but in how the performance places different experiences beside one another. A maternal experience does not cancel a refusal of motherhood; one cultural history does not become the explanatory model for another. Juxtaposition creates relation while preserving difference (Chapman & LaMothe, 2021; Hill, 2023).

This principle is also realised choreographically. Bodies share space, encounter common materials, enter temporary collective configurations, and become perceptible in relation to the actions and histories of other performers. The collective therefore does not operate as a visual image of female unity. It is produced through changing relations among bodies.

Repetition across bodies is particularly useful for understanding this process. When an action, material relation, or spatial configuration is encountered through more than one body, repetition does not necessarily establish sameness. Each body modifies what is repeated through its own corporeal organisation and situated history. Choreographic transmission can therefore be understood as re-articulation rather than duplication.

Relational embodiment consequently offers a third form of embodied knowledge. Knowledge is neither located exclusively within an autonomous individual nor transformed into a universal female truth. It emerges through encounter: one situated bodily history becomes perceptible beside another, producing connections, differences, tensions, and resonances without requiring equivalence. Butler's account of embodied interdependency is useful here because it challenges individualist models of agency and foregrounds the social conditions through which bodies act (Butler, 2020).

Femininity can therefore be understood here as relational rather than homogeneous. The performance does not answer the question of what all women share. Instead, it creates choreographic conditions in which differently situated experiences can coexist and acquire meaning through relation. This is precisely what allows embodied knowledge to remain collective without becoming universal.

DISCUSSION: FROM THE FEMALE GAZE TO EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

The analysis of *New Birth Report* suggests that the principal limitation of a gaze-centred approach to dance lies not in its concern with visibility itself, but in the assumption that questions of gender can be adequately addressed through representation and spectatorship. The female gaze remains valuable for examining who is permitted to look, whose perspective structures representation, and whether women appear as subjects rather than objects within visual culture. Yet choreography introduces another level of meaning that cannot be fully contained within the politics of looking: the production of knowledge through bodily practice.

The Female Gaze as a Necessary but Incomplete Framework

To move beyond the female gaze does not mean that questions of spectatorship become irrelevant. *New Birth Report* remains a performance encountered by spectators, and its bodies inevitably participate in structures of visibility. The problem arises when spectatorship becomes the primary explanatory framework. Gaze theory is particularly effective at identifying unequal visual relations, but it tends to begin with the body once it has already become visible as an image. Choreography requires attention to what precedes and exceeds that image: weight, effort, repetition, balance, physical contact, temporal accumulation, material resistance, and bodily memory (Joufflineau et al., 2018; Leroy, 2025).

The term “beyond” therefore identifies an expansion of the analytical field rather than a chronological replacement of gaze theory. The female gaze can explain transformations in the politics of seeing, while embodiment is required to understand how movement itself participates in producing gendered knowledge. Dance is inevitably both visual and embodied, and studies of spectatorship show that viewing is itself conditioned by kinaesthetic and embodied relations between performance and audience (Wood, 2016).

Embodied Knowledge as Choreographic Knowledge

The concept of embodied knowledge developed through this analysis refers to more than the familiar claim that performers possess knowledge in or through their bodies. In *New Birth Report*, embodiment is not simply a container for personal experience. Choreography actively organises bodily experience so that it becomes a mode of inquiry. Movement does not merely communicate something already known about femininity; it participates in discovering, testing, and transforming what femininity can mean.

If choreography is understood primarily as representation, the analytical task is to decode movement: a gesture stands for an emotion, an object symbolises motherhood, or a bodily configuration represents solidarity. Such readings can be useful, but they assume that meaning exists prior to movement. An embodied epistemological approach instead attends to how meaning can emerge because movement takes place. The body's encounter with weight, resistance, proximity, repetition, mediation, or another body generates conditions through which understanding develops. Choreography becomes productive rather than merely expressive.

For feminist dance analysis, this creates a methodological implication. The researcher cannot rely exclusively on what the body appears to represent. Attention must also be given to what movement does: how bodily weight is organised, how duration affects perception, how material objects alter physical possibility, how mediation reorganises visibility, and how bodies enter and leave relationships. Close choreographic analysis is therefore not supplementary description but a necessary method for understanding embodied knowledge (Foster, 2019, 2023).

From Female Representation to Feminine Becoming

The shift towards embodied knowledge also changes how femininity can be conceptualised. If femininity is approached primarily through representation, analysis tends to ask whether a performance reproduces or challenges existing images of women. *New Birth Report* suggests a different possibility: femininity does not have to precede choreography as a stable category that movement subsequently represents. It can emerge through choreographic processes themselves.

This is consistent with a performative understanding of gender in which identities are sustained through bodily practices while remaining open to variation, interruption, and re-articulation (Butler, 2011). Dance makes this process especially perceptible because movement is both organised and transformable. A familiar action can be altered in rhythm, scale, force, relation, or context, exposing the instability of what otherwise appears natural (Kuppers, 2017; Nijhawan, 2017).

This perspective also avoids a simple binary in which conventional femininity equals oppression and its visible rejection equals liberation. A body does not become emancipated merely by appearing stronger, occupying more space, or reversing familiar gendered imagery. What matters is how choreographic practice reorganises the conditions through which bodies act, relate, and produce meaning. Femininity in *New Birth Report* is therefore better understood as a process of becoming than as a representational destination.

Rethinking Feminist Spectatorship through the Body

An embodied approach also requires reconsidering the relationship between seeing and knowing. A spectator can see bodily action without having complete access to the experience that produces it. In *New Birth Report*, this gap becomes productive. The audience can witness effort without possessing the sensation of that effort, encounter bodily history without fully inhabiting it, and observe another person's corporeal experience without converting that experience into its own.

This has ethical implications for feminist spectatorship. Greater visibility does not automatically produce greater understanding, and spectators bring different histories and perceptual conditions to the viewing experience (Hammergren, 2018; Wood, 2016). Embodied spectatorship, as used here, therefore does not imply that the spectator literally experiences what the performer experiences. It describes a mode of attention sensitive to movement, materiality, temporality, relation, and the limits of visual knowledge.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that the movement beyond the female gaze is best understood as an expansion of feminist dance analysis rather than a rejection of spectatorship. Material embodiment demonstrates that meaning can be generated through bodily negotiation with physical conditions; mediated embodiment shows that visibility does not provide complete access to bodily experience; and relational embodiment demonstrates that knowledge can emerge between situated bodies without becoming universal. These dimensions converge in the concept of embodied knowledge: choreography functions not simply as a

representational medium through which ideas about femininity are displayed, but as an epistemic practice through which such meanings are materially, perceptually, and relationally produced.

CONCLUSION

This study asked how Wen Hui's *New Birth Report* constructs femininity beyond the female gaze through embodied choreographic practice. It has argued that the female gaze remains important for analysing the politics of visibility, but cannot fully account for how dance produces meaning through bodily action, material interaction, mediation, temporality, and relation. In *New Birth Report*, femininity does not appear as a stable image that choreography simply represents. It becomes perceptible through processes in which bodies encounter materials, mediated histories, and other differently situated bodies.

Moving “beyond” the female gaze therefore does not mean abandoning spectatorship or visual representation. It means expanding feminist analysis from the question of how the female body is seen towards the question of how bodily practice itself participates in producing knowledge. This shift allows the dancing body to be understood not only as an object or subject of representation, but as an active epistemic site through which meanings of femininity are negotiated and generated.

Theoretical Contribution: Embodied Knowledge as Choreographic Production

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is a case-based conceptualisation of embodied knowledge as knowledge generated through choreographic processes, rather than simply knowledge possessed, stored, or expressed by the body. This distinction does not claim to originate the broader concept of embodied knowledge. Instead, it specifies how the concept can be operationalised within feminist choreographic analysis. The present analysis proposes that movement itself participates in producing understanding: meaning develops as bodies encounter material resistance, enter relations, repeat and transform actions, and negotiate the coexistence of corporeal presence and mediated imagery.

The material, mediated, and relational dimensions identified in *New Birth Report* specify how this choreographic production of knowledge occurs. They should not be understood as a universal taxonomy for feminist dance, but as analytically connected processes emerging from this case. Material embodiment identifies knowledge produced through bodily negotiation with physical conditions; mediated embodiment identifies knowledge produced through the tension between corporeal presence and visual mediation; and relational embodiment identifies knowledge produced through encounters among differently situated bodies. Together, they demonstrate how choreography can make femininity knowable without reducing it to a stable representational image.

The contribution is therefore not the replacement of gaze theory with embodiment. Rather, the case suggests an analytical shift from a predominantly representational question—what can be known by looking at the female body—towards a choreographic-epistemological question—what becomes knowable through what bodies do, undergo, and produce in movement. Embodied knowledge names this second emphasis. It allows feminist analysis to retain questions of visibility and power while recognising that dance can generate meanings through materiality, temporality, mediation, and relation that cannot be explained by visual representation alone.

Case-Based Contribution

As a focused case study, *New Birth Report* also demonstrates the value of allowing choreographic practice to test the limits of theoretical frameworks rather than using a non-Western performance merely to illustrate concepts developed elsewhere. Scholarship on Chinese and East Asian performance has emphasised the historical and cultural situatedness of embodied and first-person practices (Wilcox, 2018; Yu & Lebow, 2020). Wen Hui's choreography is significant in this context because its feminist force cannot be located in a single alternative image of womanhood. It emerges through bodily memory, materiality, mediation, and relations among differently situated performers.

This study does not propose *New Birth Report* as representative of contemporary Chinese feminist dance as a whole. Its contribution is case-specific: it demonstrates how one contemporary Chinese choreographic work can expose the limits of a predominantly gaze-centred analytical framework and contribute to feminist theorisation through the particular organisation of bodies in performance.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the importance of grounding feminist dance analysis in identifiable choreographic processes rather than relying primarily on thematic or representational interpretation. Attention to bodily weight, effort, duration, repetition, material interaction, mediation, spatial relation, and changing configurations among performers makes it possible to examine what movement does rather than only what it appears to signify. At the same time, such analysis must recognise the limits of observation: visible bodily action does not provide transparent access to performers' internal sensations or intentions. Choreographic close reading is therefore treated here as a situated interpretive practice grounded in observable performance evidence.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single choreographic work and therefore does not claim that its findings are representative of contemporary Chinese dance more broadly. Second, the performance analysis is grounded in a single live observation. Although live spectatorship provides direct access to the spatial, temporal, and corporeal conditions of performance, it does not permit repeated verification of every choreographic detail in the manner of video-based analysis. The study therefore limits its claims to identifiable performance features and uses published documentation where available to support contextual details.

Third, the study does not include empirical audience-reception data. References to spectatorship consequently describe perceptual positions and possibilities organised by the choreography rather than uniform responses among actual viewers. Future research could combine choreographic analysis with repeated video analysis, audience interviews, or comparative case studies to test and refine the concept of embodied knowledge across different choreographic contexts.

Ultimately, *New Birth Report* demonstrates that feminist significance in dance cannot be assessed only through the images of women that choreography presents. Bodies also produce meaning through what they carry, resist, remember, encounter, and transform. The concept of embodied knowledge provides a way of recognising this epistemic dimension of choreography while retaining feminist attention to visibility and power. Moving beyond the female gaze therefore does not lead towards another definitive image of femininity. It leads towards an understanding of femininity as something made and remade through bodily practice—materially situated, perceptually incomplete, relationally constituted, and continually open to transformation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study analyses a publicly presented performance and published performance documentation and does not report research involving recruited human participants or animals.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No research dataset was generated for this study. The article is based on qualitative live-performance observation, choreographic close reading, and publicly available performance documentation.

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