Dancing into Modernity: Kinesthesia, Narrative, and Revolutions in Modern China, 1900-1978

By

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Table of Contents

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dramas. Qiong shared her professional experience and knowledge as a dancer with me, invited me to participate in her dance projects, and encouraged me, a literary student, to peek into the most fantastic world of dancing, to which I extend my ultimate thanks.

Abstract

This dissertation project has two goals. Substantively, it aims to write a long-neglected transnational and transcultural history of dance in modern China from the early 1900s to the late 1970s, focusing on key moments, figures, organizations, and dance works in relation to their particular historical contexts. Theoretically, it strives to explore the complicated relationship between the bodily dance and dancing body on the one hand, and words, narrative (together with other forms of representation), and ideology on the other. Therefore, conceptually, this study places dance on a plane spanned by two axes: the vertical axis is the word-dance relation, and the horizontal one is the transcultural and transnational dimension. Moving this plane across historical time, this project attempts to capture the dynamics through which the rise and fall of various forces competing, struggling, or collaborating along these two axes had shaped the landscape of dance in China. By highlighting the unique nature of dance, which turns the body into a (non-linguistic and often non-representational) dynamic engine of meaning generation and communication, this project challenges, first, the common conceptions of the body as a passive fetish or metaphor, on which external meanings are inscribed, and second, the hegemonic semiotic system of language- and representation-based paradigms, without, however, detaching dance from its concrete relation with the constraints of these conceptions and paradigms in the analysis.

Introduction

> Poetry is where intention goes. Being within one's heart, it is intention; coming out in words, it is poetry. Emotion stirs within, and then flows in words. Where words are inadequate, one sighs [to express] it. Where sighing is inadequate, one sings it. Where singing is inadequate, unconsciously one's hands swing and feet stamp [to express] it.[1]
>
> —— "The Great Preface," *Shi jing* 詩經 (The book of poetry)

> The dance, poor wretch, handed down from generation to generation by imitation, if at all, illiterate, unrecordable, depends for its existence upon the vulgar exertions of the body, that vile prison in which the sin of Adam has encased man's spirit.
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> —— John Martin, *America Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance*

In the first passage quoted above from the *Shi jing* (*The Book of Poetry*), the widely regarded cornerstone of the classical literary tradition of China, there are two verbs describing the unconscious expressive movements of hands and feet, respectively—*wu* 舞 (swing) and *dao* 蹈 (stamp). These two verbs, in modern Chinese, coalesce into a compound word, *wudao* 舞蹈, for dance. The purpose of quoting this passage is, however, not merely etymological. What it embodies is the problematic relationship between *yan*

[1] The original Chinese text is in Guo Shaoyu 郭少虞, *Lidai wenlun xuan* 歷代文論選 [Selected works of Chinese literary theory in all dynasties] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), vol.1, 63.

言 (words), poetry, and literature in general on the one hand, and the nature of the bodily dance and the dancing body on the other. In its historical context, this passage aims to establish the dominant status of words in the Confucian literary orthodoxy, by placing words at the foundation and core of poetry which, at that time, was an integrated art consisting of music (singing) and dance (or dance-like) movement, in addition to words.

This Confucian order of poetics is characterized by a series of concentric circles with intention/emotion at the center. Words occupy the privileged innermost circle closest to intention/emotion; nothing can be expressed through any other medium without words first trying to translate and release a welling-up of feelings. Partly as a result of this long history of privileging words over other forms, *yan* gradually became the only predominant denotation of poetry in Chinese. In contrast, dance is exiled to the margin, as the residual, unconscious, and primitive (even more so than music/singing), to the extent that when Western modern dance traveled to China around the turn of the twentieth century, which triggered serious native self-reflection on the Han Chinese dance tradition, a "shameful" consensus was reached in the intellectual circle that dance, as an independent and serious art, had disappeared from Chinese history for centuries.[2]

This model of Confucian poetics easily reminds us of logocentrism, which may also be conceptualized as a concentric hierarchy, with the privileged "logos" (spoken words and speech) residing in the innermost circle closest to "ideas," "truth," or "reality" at the center, and writing and other representations of speech, or "sign of a sign," being

[2] Wang Kefen 王克芬 and Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, eds., *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* 中國近現代舞蹈發展史 [The development history of modern and contemporary Chinese dance] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 14.

relegated to the margin.[3] Despite their formal similarity, the Confucian poetic order differs from logocentrism in an important respect. Whereas the latter centers more on *representation* (of truth), the former is based more on *expression* (of emotion/intention).[4] While the power of representation is largely determined by the *degree* of correspondence between "what represents" and "what is represented," the power of expression is better measured by the *capacity* of "what expresses" to carry "what is expressed."

This relative difference between representation and expression results in the different statuses of the respective "margins" of the two concentric models. In logocentrism, meaning is monopolized by the logos—as going from the center to the margin, "truth" is increasingly distorted and blurred because the degree of correspondence between the representing and the represented decreases. However, in the Confucian poetic order, the word *cannot* monopolize meaning because of its inadequacy—as flowing from the center to the margin, "emotion/intention" *spills over* in a cascading manner. It is this "spillover" that gives the margin an edge which can be easily used to deconstruct the Confucian concentric order and subvert the center.

Then, it should not be a surprise that the marginalized and repressed "unconscious" dance had its recent dramatic return in China. Paradoxically, the same passage from *Shi*

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[3] Jacques Derrida, "Linguistics and Grammatology" in *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 27-73, 29.

[4] This relative difference between representation and expression is by no means clear-cut in Chinese dance aesthetics. For example, several centuries later than *Shi jing*, in the book *Tong dian* 通典 (A chronological record of political institutions) written by Du You 杜佑 in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the author gave a slightly different definition of dance: "dance is, when chanting and singing is inadequate, hands swinging and feet stamping [to express] it, which makes them [the viewers] moved (*dong qi rong* 動其容), and imitates their [certain] experiences (*xiang qi shi* 象其事)…" While "making them moved" is more of an effect of expressing emotion, "imitating their experiences" is closer to the concept of representation. For the original text, see Wu Zhao 吳釗 et al., eds., *Zhongguo gudai yue lun xuan ji* 中國古代樂論選輯 [Selected works of ancient Chinese musical theory] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2011), 163.

jing has become an often quoted one by Chinese dance scholars and practitioners as a theoretical justification of dance as a privileged art form. In the modern (re)interpretation of this text, only with the final unconscious participation of hands and feet can the mind be able to communicate its deepest inner urge through the body. Compared with other artistic media, dance corresponds to the most heightened, immediate, and general life response that transcends words and other art forms. For example, in *Wudao biaoyan xinlixue* 舞蹈表演心理學 (The psychology of dance performance), an official textbook of the Beijing Dance Academy—the most prestigious academic institution of dance in China, the author observes that "the body is the carrier of the subject, and also the only hinge that connects the subject and the object. Hence, this book argues that the body is expression, the body is the most expressive [medium], and the expressive power of the body surpasses all. As it is said, *since words are inadequate, hands swing and feet stamp* [*to express*] *it*."[5] That is, the Confucian poetic order is overthrown from within, as a result of the power struggle between words and the body in the discursive field of dance.

This ancient passage, along with its new interpretation, goes beyond both the classical age and the Chinese context, and has gained global recognition in our time. On April 29, 2013, the 31st UNESCO International Dance Day, Lin Hwai-min 林懷民, the founder and artistic director of the world-renowned Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan, delivered the "International Dance Day Message" in English to the whole world.[6] Lin begins his message with the same passage, but deliberately omits its first two sentences,

[5] Ping Xin 平心, ed., *Wudao biaoyan xinlixue* 舞蹈表演心理学 [The psychology of dance performance] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2013), 236, emphasis added.

[6] The date of April 29th was picked as the International Dance Day to commemorate the anniversary of Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810), the creator of modern ballet. See doi: http://www.international-dance-day.org/en/danceday.html.

as part of a strategy to dethrone words and crown dance. Dance, in the Message, is celebrated as "a powerful expression," as it "speaks to earth and heaven," "speaks of our joy, our fear," and "speaks of the intangible."[7]

Fig 1: *Song of the Wanderers*, 1994, choreographed by Lin Hwai-min, The Gloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan.

What is more revealing is a video clip of the epilogue of *Song of the Wanderers* (1994, fig. 1), a Cloud Gate dance work choreographed by Lin, that accompanies his audio speech. On a large patch of ground covered by 3.5 tons of golden rice grown in Taiwan, a half-naked young man pulls a heavy harrow over the rice-covered land. Bending his muscular body forward and with a solemn facial expression, the man trudges backward slowly yet steadily, so that his footprints, the only imprint of his body, are immediately erased by the plowing harrow. Accompanied by the soundtrack of Lin's own voice

[7] For the video and Lin's speech, see doi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVu6xXZK_DU.

reading the passage of the “The Great Preface,” the man and the harrow move in a circular route, at a first glance similar to the concentric pattern of the Confucian poetic order (and the agrarian culture upon which it is built). However, a closer look reveals that the pattern is not concentric but a centrifugal spiral—the original order is literally and physically turned inside out by the laboring body of the dancer through the spiraling movement of the harrow. The dancer (and dance), as an outcast and vagrant, carves out a road, grain by grain, to the center, by paradoxically “wandering” away, step by step, from the center.

This performance of dance rebelling against the central (literary) order, though disguised in an ambience of Zen Buddhist peace, may be seen as neither complete nor without price. First, the spiraling movement itself is a sign of the constant gravity of the center. The wordless dance comprises only the visual part of the Message; the audio part is still largely verbal, written in poetic language full of tropes of speech. Second, the spiraling road of escape is one of no return, of no peaceful end; what waits ahead is vast infinity and emptiness (even a single footprint must be obliterated, which also signifies the futility of the nostalgic effort to connect with the tradition of the agrarian past). Lin’s bodily Message, together with the ancient passage, epitomized a major concern of this project—it is from this dilemma and ordeal, the dialectic non-binary and nonlinear relationship between words and the body, center and margin, representation and expression, past and present, that a modern subject emerges. However, this is only half of the story. The centrifugal spiral also evidences the existence of other pulling center(s) of gravity (be it the West, the modern, or the global), as shown below.

Surprisingly or not, the millennia-old Chinese polemic revolving around the word-dance relationship finds its counterpart in the history of modern dance. The second passage quoted at the beginning of John Martin, the highly influential critic of American modern dance, if read out of context, seems to disdain dance as illiterate, vulgar, and sensual. In fact, on the contrary, Martin was a loyal and radical champion of (modern) dance, and had deep distrust in words. He wrote: "In the present period of civilization an excessive evaluation is placed upon literacy…Nothing has meaning until it is translated into words; there is no substance in an emotional reaction, no validity in a muscular response; there is only language."[8] Clearly, Martin uses dance as a bodily means to subvert Western logocentrism, which parallels, and actually predates and in some sense had inspired, the rebellion of his Chinese counterparts against the Confucian poetic order.[9]

Moreover, for Martin, unlike music which can be reduced to word-like notes written in ink on paper, or film which must be mediated by the modern technology of camera, dance, exactly because it is "illiterate," "vulgar," "sensual," and "primitive," becomes the only candidate for the immediate and universal "postliterate" language that precludes the necessity of translation.[10] That is, overthrowing the hegemony of logocentrism is only a necessary step to elevate (modern) dance to the status of a "universal language" capable of transcending various linguistic, racial, national, and cultural boundaries.

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[8] Martin, *America Dancing*, 87-8, quoted in Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 119.

[9] In fact, the abovementioned subversive reinterpretation of the passage in *Shi jing* and John Martin's theory are presented on the same page in the Chinese textbook *The Psychology of Dance Performance*. See Ping, *Wudao biaoyan xinlixue*, 236.

[10] Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 117-9.

In the twenty-first century characterized by globalization, the "American Dream" of dance, with a Tower-of-Babel sentiment, seems more enticing than ever. The International Theatre Institute, the founder of the International Dance Day, officially states that "[t]he intention of the 'International Dance Day Message' is to celebrate Dance, to revel in the universality of this art form, to cross all political, cultural and ethnic barriers and bring people together with a common language—Dance."[11] However, the issue of the word-dance relation has never been settled once for all, as clearly demonstrated by the paradox inherent in Lin's Message. Dance has always been, and will continue to be, a muddy, generative, and transformative ground for the power struggle, negotiation, and collaboration between words and the body, ideology and practice, the local and the global. This is a main thread throughout this project of writing a transnational and transcultural history of dance in China.

Utopian as it is, the fantasy of dance as the unmediated universal language does reveal something unique about dance. Because of its direct reliance on the movement of human bodies as its medium, and of its "vulgar," "illiterate," and "primitive" social origin, dance indeed has a superb ability "to cross all barriers." This celebrated "universality" of dance, on the one hand, makes it the "mother tone" of all humanity that can be readily circulated worldwide and thus seems to serve as a perfect medium for cultural communication. On the other hand, it is the same "universality" that makes dance subject to convenient appropriation, adaptation, and hybridization. As illustrated by the following example (and also the first chapter), from the earliest days of modern dance, its defining

[11] See the official website of The International Dance Day (IDD), doi: http://www.international-dance-day.org/en/danceday.html

moments, artists from China have been actively participating in its production, performance, and consumption on the international stage.

These "oriental" contributions to modern dance have long been neglected in Western dance historiography until recently.[12] The case of dance compellingly demonstrates Shu-mei Shih's argument that "modernism never traveled one way from a point of origin to a place of destination. But it was consistently described as such due to the imbalance of discursive power between China and the West."[13] It seems that, after all, the "unmediated universality" of dance cannot completely escape the gravity of the "discursive" hegemony.

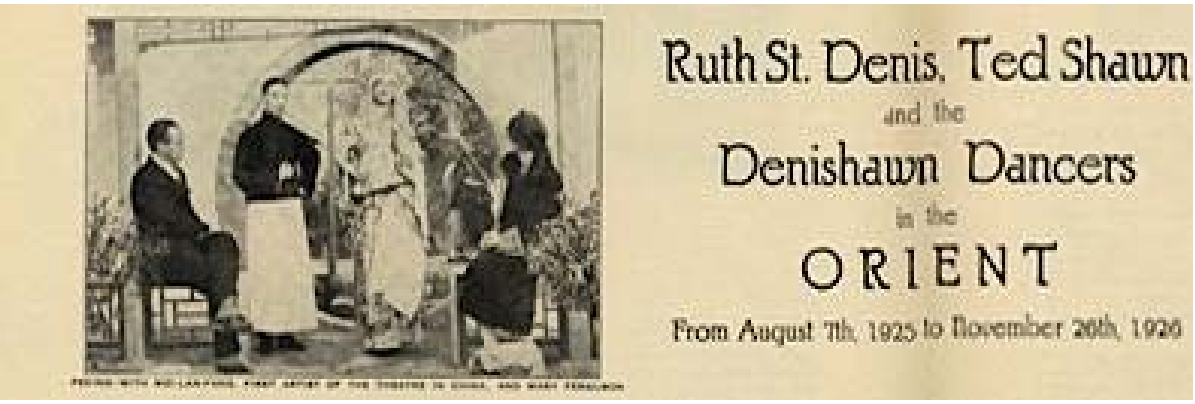

Fig 2: (from left to right) Ted Shawn, Mei Lanfang, Mary Fergu Son (the president of the Peking Society of Fine Arts), and Ruth St. Denis, 1925-26

During 1925 and 1926, the dance troupe of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, the founding figures of early American modern dance, visited China twice and performed for

[12] For the "Oriental" contributions to the early modern dance, see, for example, studies on the Japanese dancer Michio Ito and his connections with German and American modern dance: Carrie J. Preston, "Michio Ito's Shadow: Searching for the Translational in Solo Dance," in Claudia Gitelman and Barbara Palfy, eds., *On Stage Alone: Sololists and the Modern Dance Cannon* (Gainesvill: University Press of Florida, 2012).

[13] Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11.

Chinese audiences in many coastal cities. Among the works they performed were two dances inspired by Chinese sources, *White Jade* and *General Wu's Farewell to His Wife*, of which Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961), master of Peking Opera, directly contributed to the choreography (fig. 2).[14]

Fig 3: *White Jade*, 1926, Ruth St. Denis, Denishawn Dance Troupe.

A photograph captures Ruth St. Denis performing her dance *White Jade* (1926) in the role of *Guanyin* (Avalokitesvara) (fig. 3). At a first glance, the dancer's transformation of her own body into an image of Avalokitesvara seems to be a sincere homage paid to the Oriental goddess. However, the implications of this gesture are betrayed by a poem written by the dancer for this solo: "My body is the living Temple of all Gods. The God

[14] See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 44; Mei Shaowu 梅紹武, *Wo de fuqin Mei Lanfang* 我的父親梅蘭芳 [My father Mei Lanfang] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 184.

of Truth is my upright spine. The God of Love is in the Heart's rhythmic beating. The God of Wisdom lives in my conceiving mind…The God of Beauty is revealed in my harmonious body."[15] By simply referring to "my body," the oriental origin and identity of the goddess Avalokitesvara are concealed, and the female Caucasian body turns into a totalizing hermaphroditic configuration of Western values represented by Gods with ancient Greek origin.[16] The mysticism and exoticism embodied by the oriental goddess are appropriated as some transcendental "feminine" power that promises to totalize and harmonize Western "masculine" values.

Such a transcultural strategy is not only gendered, but also racialized, which is manifest in the mismatch between the Chinese and English titles of the dance. While the Chinese title is *Bai yu Guanyin* 白玉觀音 (White Jade Avalokitesvara), referring to a white-jade icon of Avalokitesvara, the English title is simply *White Jade*. Once again, the oriental origin and identity of the goddess are suppressed. In doing so, the color white is highlighted so that it seems to directly refer to the white skin of the dancer. What drives the displacement, replacement, and suppression of the oriental goddess by the Caucasian dancer may be seen as an unconscious fear of the inherent risk of becoming the other. However, the repressed has found its way back. It is exactly through the juxtaposition of the mismatched English and Chinese titles, *White Jade*/*Bai yu guanyin*, that one can clearly witness the return of the repressed oriental goddess. This translingual

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[15] Jane Desmond, "Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* of 1906" in Ann Dils and Ann CooperAlbright, eds., *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 261.

[16] As Desmond points out, the gender dimension of St. Denis' dance may be related with her religious faith in Christian Science, which asserts the androgynous nature of God and extends its meaning into the social sphere. Ibid.

juxtaposition of titles is made possible and meaningful only through the border-crossing travels and performances of the dancers in the colonial worlds.

This dance reveals a fundamental paradox underlying the alleged superiority and authority of the West in the imperialist world order: the "modernity" of Western modern dance is, from its very beginning, constructed from the exoticized "primitive" oriental other. On the one hand, the Western dancers seem to sincerely celebrate and embrace this otherness, since it represents some mystic raw power they may tap and harness to their own use. On the other hand, such a transcultural strategy, characterized by hybridity and border-crossing, has an intrinsic risk of "atavism"—the self becoming the other, the colonizing becoming the colonized, the modern becoming the primitive (and vice versa). This is the haunting fear, as forcefully exposed in the case of dance that has been constantly disturbing the Western unconsciousness.[17]

Revealing and subversive as it is, dance itself, however, should not be romanticized as an immanently liberating and equalizing force, as promised by the statement of the International Theatre Institute. It may be true that dance can easily two-way "cross all political, cultural, and ethnic barriers;" yet such two-way crossing is often asymmetric and unequal. The "imbalance of power" does not just exist in the "discursive" sphere; rather, it is the very condition under which the border crossing happens.

The reason for discussing this example at length here is not just because it marks (one of) the beginning(s) of artists from China participating in the international creation of modern dance. Rather, the example illustrates the richness and complexity of dance as a

[17] For this point of view, I benefit from insightful studies in which psychoanalysis is combined with postcolonial perspectives. One of such works is Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

transcultural and transnational phenomenon, which the current project strives to fathom. As illustrated by the example and further evidenced by each chapter of this dissertation, the space of dance may be best conceived as a fluid bodily frontier of occupation, resistance, negotiation, and collaboration among different individuals and parties, often within relations of imbalanced power, and a nebulous (trans)formative ground of contesting meanings, identities, ideologies, and authorities.

Situating the Project

As the literary theorist Andrew Hewitt points out, "the body" became a major focus of research in the heyday of cultural studies—its concrete materiality seems to guarantee the breaking away of cultural studies from the text-based models of "high theory."[18] Yet dance seems to refute the presupposition of the cultural turn that the body constitutes a signifier with taken-for-granted materiality, as dance "locates the social energumen [the unity of matter and energy] not in bodies but in the dynamic spaces that separate and link those bodes, in dialectic 'movement' rather than in brute soma."[19] For this reason, Hewitt shares with Friedrich Jameson's antipathy to the "reemergence of 'the body' as a ubiquitous, but undialectical, grounding topos in the cultural turn of recent years."[20] For Hewitt, as well as the current project, dance provides a new possibility of reconsidering both "the body" and the cultural turn by bridging between cultural studies and text-based high theory.

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[18] Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 7.

[19] Ibid.; Amy Koritz, "Re/Moving Boundaries: From Dance History to Cultural Studies," in Gay Morris, ed., *Moving Words: Rewriting Dance* (Londaon: Routledge, 1996), 88-103, 91.

[20] Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 7.

In this sense, paradoxically, or even contradictorily, this project is both about dance and not about dance. It is about dance because it highlights the value of dance, as both an art and cultural practice, which in its own right deserves empirical and theoretical attention from modern Chinese studies. It is also not about dance, as it refrains from reifying dance as any rigid, well defined, or isolatable entity, which, in so doing, would irremediably "immobilize" the power of dance, as some "in-between," to challenge various national, cultural, media, conceptual, and disciplinary boundaries.

Conceptually, this study places dance on a plane spanned by two axes: the vertical axis is the word-dance relation, and the horizontal one is the transcultural and transnational dimension. By moving this plane across historical time, this project attempts to capture the dynamics through which the rise and fall of various forces competing/collaborating along these two axes shapes the landscape of dance in China.

This dissertation focuses mainly on two dance genres—modern dance and *wu ju* 舞劇 (dance drama, the Chinese counterpart, and variant in some cases, of ballet). There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, these two genres are the most theorized, systemized, and historicized, and thus occupy the central position on the international discursive stage of dance. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature in dance studies on the origin, global dissemination, and local evolvement of modern dance and ballet by foregrounding the Chinese case as the nexus of negotiation, adaptation, and evolvement.[21]

[21] In dance scholarship on the global dissemination of early modern dance and ballet's evolvement in socialist countries, this dissertation benefits greatly from the following seminal works, which are only a sample instead of in any sense complete: Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993, 2006); Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006); Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (Switzerland: Harwood

Second, the two genres are often pitted against each other in terms of their relations to words, narrative, and ideology (note that this is not always the case, especially in today's dance world where the distinction between the two has becoming more and more blurred). While dance drama (such as ballet) is typically regarded as relying more on dramatic narrative and literary tradition and therefore easily subject to manipulation by ideology, modern dance is often portrayed as promoting the bodily dance against verbal language and thus resistant and subversive to the domination of ideology. Therefore, by simultaneously exploring the historical trajectories of these two genres in China, this project may cast new light on the vexed relation between narrative and choreography, words and the body, ideology and practice, an important topic which has been picked up by not just dance scholars, but also anthropologists, and literary, film, and cultural scholars.[22]

Academic Publishers, 1994); Ann Daly, *Done Into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, 1999); Claudia Gitelman and Barbara Palfy, eds., *On Stage Alone: Soloists and the Modern Dance Canon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); L. Karina and M. Kant, *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003); Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, "Race" and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (London: Rutledge, 1998); Jens Richard Giersdorf, *The Body of the People: East German Dance Since 1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); For ballet studies, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreography & Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. Lynn Visson, ed. Sally Banes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Janice Ross, Like a Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[22] The relevant scholarship on the relations between the body, narrative, and ideology is mainly concerned with what dance and other art forms (such as film) or bodily activities (such as sports) can do to complicate the common understanding on this issue, highlighting the significance of corporeality, affect, kinesthesia, virtuosity, social choreography, and the socialist body. For example, Amy Koritz, *Gendering Bodies/Performing Art: Dance and Literature in Early Twentieth-Century British Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Gay Morris, ed., *Moving Words: Rewriting Dance* (Londaon:

Third, modern dance and dance drama are the two major genres "imported" to China that triggered the evolvement of the hybrid identity of "Chinese dance." For instance, the formation of the so-called "classical Chinese dance" and "ethnic and folk dance" as relatively coherent genres in China is, to some extent, a direct or indirect anachronistic response to the advent of modern dance and ballet. Thus, the cases of modern dance and dance drama compellingly demonstrates the transcultural and transnational origin of the "Chinese dance" and the underlying struggles for the discursive authority over universality and nationality, the modern and tradition. Therefore, this study also speaks to the literature of postcolonial cultural studies.

Finally, the major pioneering figures discussed in this dissertation were all first trained in both ballet and modern dance, and then later explored into the realms of classical dance and/or ethnic and folk dance. All the aforementioned problematics more or less find their varying embodiments in the stories of these figures. At the time when modern dance and ballet first arrived in China in the early twentieth century, there were no training institutions, production organizations, performance platforms, or consumer bases for dance—dance even had not formed a recognizable, coherent, or legitimate

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Routledge, 1996); Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreography & Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2 edition, 2015); Ellen Goellner, *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Jane C. Desmond, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Elena del Rio, *Powers of Affection: Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, 2012); For studies focusing on China, see Emily E. Wilcox, "The Dialectics of Virtuosity: Dance in the People's Republic of China, 1949-2009," PhD dissertation, University of California Berkeley, San Francisco, 2011; Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich, eds., *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance & Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

identity as an independent serious art. Note that social dance and popular dance in, for instance, cabarets, revues, circuses, magic shows, and films had indeed established their own markets and popularity in several treaty-port cities, but these dance forms "biased" the perceived image of theatrical dance toward something more like fashionable social skills or "vulgar" and "decadent" commercial diversion.[23] Therefore, focusing on these two genres of "high culture" can better investigate the personal experiences, choices, dilemmas, and strategies of the individual artists involved in the long and challenging campaign of establishing dance as both a legitimate and independent serious art in China. In this sense, this project also addresses the relationship between artists and politics, especially the possibilities and limits of the agency of artists in the field of cultural politics.

Despite its main focus on modern dance and dance drama, this dissertation, at various points, touches on the history of classical Chinese dance and ethnic and folk dance, because all these dance genres are in constant conversation, competition, collaboration, and hybridization. And naturally, the boundaries between these genres should not be seen as well-defined, rigid, or time-invariant. In this sense, this project converses with and hopefully complements the recent anthropological scholarship on the "socialist body" of Chinese dancers and on the classical Chinese dance and ethnic and folk dance.[24] In particular, it is shown that the "Chinese" socialist body and the aesthetics and ideology of the "Chinese" classical dance and ethnic and folk dance are formed and transformed in

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[23] Andrew D. Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919-1954* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2010); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 23-8. (Unless further noted, the word "dance" used in this dissertation does not refer to these two dance forms.)

[24] Emily Elissa Wilcox, "The Dialectics of Virtuosity."

relation to the evolvement of modern dance and ballet and within a transcultural and transnational historical process that can be traced back at least to the turn of the century.

Moreover, this transcultural and transnational development of dance is not an isolated one. As a relatively "new" art form in China, dance, from the very beginning, has to keep (re)establishing and (re)justifying itself as an independent and legitimate art, in a web of relations to other more well-established yet still fast changing art forms, such as literature, film, music, and drama. This dissertation, at various places, discusses the difficulties and opportunities faced by dance practitioners, and their strategies, successful or not, to navigate through the web of relations to find the "rightful," though often precarious, position for dance. This project, therefore, greatly benefits from, and also complements, the existing scholarship on these sibling arts.[25]

[25] For studies on the sibling arts, the following is a highly selected list arranged according to different art fields. Theater: Chen Xiaomei, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: Univaersity of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2014); Brian James Demare, *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Music: Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: the Politics of Chinese Music in Hongkong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1997); Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013); Literature: Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2005); Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 2001; Wang Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: the Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Richard King, *Milestones on a Golden Road, Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Xiaojue Wang, *Modernity with a Cold War Face: Reimagining the Nation in Chinese Literature across the 1949 Divide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013); Film: Zhang Zhen, *Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002); Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: the Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915-1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

The historical period covered by this study spans from the turn of the century to the late 1970s.[26] It starts with the travel of Isadora Duncan (1877-1927)'s "Greek dance" (or early modern dance as called today) from Paris to the Late Qing imperial court of Empress Dowager Cixi around 1903, and its adaptation and evolution into the early (both modern and classical) "Chinese dance," which evidences the powerful influence of modern dance as a "postliterate" border-crossing bodily medium. This dissertation ends at the height of dance drama before, during, and right after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which embodies the dominance of a well-coded and narrative-oriented genre deriving from the Soviet Russian *drambalet* (or dramatized ballet). That is, the balance of the word-dance relation moves from tilting towards "dance" (modern dance) at the beginning to tilting towards "narrative" (dance drama) at the end. However, this is by no means a smooth transition—in between, the power struggles, negotiations, and collaborations among different individuals, parties (or Parties), discourses, and ideologies make the tilting of the balance exhibit a "teetering" pattern. Moreover, even in the genre dance drama, as demonstrated in the last chapter, the tension between dance and words persists.

This dissertation is, however, not a seven-decade comprehensive history of modern dance or dance drama in China, but instead focuses on some important and representative

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2015); *Painting:* Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: the Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Xiaobing Tang, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[26] The reason for closing up this dissertation at the end of 1970s is that the Cultural Revolution marks the height of dance in the artistic and cultural configuration in China. See Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Rosemary A. Roberts, Maoist Model Theater: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 (Leiden: Brill, 2009). After that, dance as a profession and artistic genre, and its socio-political environment, experienced dramatic change, which deserves another dedicated project. For relevant discussion on this transition, see Wilcox, "The Dialectics of Virtuosity."

historical moments, individuals, organizations, and dance works. Yet it takes up critical questions on the word-dance relation in a roughly chronological order. There are two reasons. First, modern dance did appear in the first thirty years of the twentieth century and dance drama became a main dance form as late as the 1950s and 60s. Second, by moving chronologically, this project emphasizes the continuity of this history from the semi-colonial period to the socialist era, and the persistence of its focus on the body, choreography and narrative.[27] Thus, this dissertation as a whole is organized in chronological thematic chapters.

Methodology

A fundamental paradox of this whole project is that its investigation of the bodily dance and dancing body, and the discourse thereof, is based primarily on words and languages, and secondarily on visual representations—that is, to some extent, this is a dance history without dance. The primary sources used by this study include (1) the dancer-choreographers' own writings, autobiographies (or biographies), photos, and verbal descriptions of their dance works, (2) memoirs of their friends, collaborators, and students, and (3) relevant newspaper and journal articles by these dancer-choreographers and others in the period under study. The potential retrospective and/or ideology-related biases, errors, and gaps of the first two categories may be, to some extent, balanced, checked, complemented, or compensated by the third. Yet, ultimately, the meanings contained in these texts are unstable and uncertain at the best, which necessitates the use of "a third eye" reading between lines (and between texts).

[27] As Wilcox argues, the "dialectics of virtuosity" becomes the most important issue in contemporary Chinese dance from the 1980s. See Wilcox, "The Dialectics of Virtuosity."

For most of the dance works discussed, with a few exceptions, there are only photographic documentation and verbal descriptions and testimonies that help preserve some information of their performances as historical events. Thus, it is impossible to recover the details of the dance choreographies and performances on stage. As a result, the dance history presented here is inevitably a "partial" and "distorted" one. This is a direct consequence of the nature of dance as ephemeral bodily movements in time and space with no convenient notation system or recording technologies at that time.

However, this paradox need not be seen as necessarily debilitating. On the contrary, it may be quite theoretically enabling and informing, as to explore the intricate entanglement—mutual mediation, appropriation, antagonism, or alliance—between the body and the mind, dance and language, is a major task of this study. Therefore, in some sense, this study does *not* strive to directly reconstruct or recover, as much as possible, the ephemerally dynamic dance works from either texts or photos. Rather, it treats the dance works—and the texts, photos, stories, discourses, and histories (available or not) surrounding them—as a "vase" broken into numerous shards, with many essential pieces already lost (such as the details of dance choreographies and performances). Instead of hoping to directly "extract" the exact information about the missing pieces from the existing ones, which is destined to be an ineffective or even futile endeavor, the current study tries to connect the existing shards (mainly texts and photos) in a reasonable manner—just like piecing together a puzzle with missing pieces—in hope of, if lucky enough, revealing some traces of, if not "resembling," the original "vase," which had been something perhaps already impossible even before it was broken (as demonstrated

by Lacanian psychoanalysis and deconstructionism). Only after finishing the (incomplete) puzzle might one be able to have a peek into the hollow contours of the missing pieces.[28]

Dissertation Outline

Chapter one "Traveling Princess and Dancing Diplomat" follows the international travel of Yu Rongling 裕容齡 (c.a. 1888-1973, daughter of a top-rank Late Qing diplomat), who learned "Greek dance" (or early modern dance) with Isadora Duncan in Paris around the turn of the century, brought it back to the imperial court of the crumbling Qing Empire, and further created its Chinese counterpart under the patronage of Empress Dowager Cixi. This may be seen as the first state-sponsored and also individual attempt to create something similar to what is later called "classical Chinese dance"—the product of a much more enduring project of inventing the "national dance form" carried on in the socialist era half a century later. "Classical" as it seems at the surface, the historical significance of Yu's dance creation needs to be understood in relation to the rise of modern dance around the globe in the early twentieth century.

Specifically, it is shown that, on the one hand, Western modern dance, at its very beginning, had incorporated the "oriental body" within itself, rather than just treating it as some exotic other. On the other hand, the birth of the "classical Chinese dance" cannot be simply seen as some "invented tradition" created by the local as some "old" way to resist the "new" way imposed by the colonial powers, because it not just appropriates and exploits, but fundamentally exposes the paradox inherent in the very logic of Western

[28] This metaphor is borrowed from Walter Benjamin's Lurianic conceptualization of translation, which is found quite similar to the methodology at work here. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Collins, 1973), 69-82.

modernism in the case of dance—that is, modern dance is, in the words of Yu, “both inventing the new and reviving the old.”

It is further argued that this paradox is caused by a particular mode of corporeal modernity underlying the philosophy of early modern dance, which is characterized by the blurred boundaries between the past and the future, the universal and the national. This mode of corporeal modernity enables early modern dance and the women performing it to easily cross various borders of race, culture, nation, and time. However, it can also be easily appropriated and re-articulated by the local as a means to handle the anxieties about perceived differences and particularities which spring from all these border-crossings under a global colonial order. Therefore, this chapter contributes to the rethinking of the origin of modernism and feminism as global and multiple (rather than exclusively Western) in nature, and of the evolving Late Qing court as part of global modernity (rather than simply a “backward” and “reclusive” monarchy).

Chapter two “Transmediating Kinesthesia” examines the choreography and performance of modern dance by Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦 (1906-1995) in Tokyo and Shanghai in the 1930s. Known as the “father of China’s New dance,” Wu studied modern dance in Tokyo first with Takata Seiko 高田原世子 (1895-1977) and then shortly with Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉 (1900-1977), both of whom learned modern dance in European countries and/or the United States, and became the first professional dancer in modern China. By creating a new identity for dance in China, touring the whole country to disseminate his arts, establishing studios and schools to educate the first generation of Chinese dancers, and publishing books on dance aesthetics, pedagogy, histories, and critical reviews, Wu stands as a distinct figure in modern Chinese cultural

history.

While Chapter one focuses on the relatively static concept of corporeality—a result of, first, the lack of detailed information about the dance movements, and second, the fact that the direct physicality of the body, instead of movement, seems to be the focus of attention among the historical agents in the initial border-crossing encounters—chapter two centers on the more dynamic concept of *kinesthesia*, a word combining movement (*kine*) and sensation (*aesthesia*), which refers to the contagious nature of human bodily movement. The theoretical significance of kinesthesia lies in its potential of transforming the spectators off stage into quasi-participants of the performance on stage and thus blurs the distinction between the "active" performer(s) and the "passive" audience. Moreover, by turning the body into a non-linguistic and non-representational dynamic engine of meaning generation and communication, kinesthesia challenges, first, the common conception of the body as a passive fetish or metaphor, on which external meanings are inscribed, and second, the hegemonic semiotic system of language- and text-based paradigms. In fact, modern dance promotes kinesthesia as a bodily means to overturn the domination of logocentrism.

However, the adaptation and evolvement of modern dance in China, as represented by the artistic practice of Wu Xiaobang, did not pit kinesthesia against language and narrative, but instead incorporated elements of these, along with properties of other artistic media, into its kinesthesia. It is argued that this strategy of transmediation was partly caused by the fact that modern dance was a "latecomer" in the field of other more well-established modern art forms, striving to establish its legitimacy and independence in relation to other more powerful arts. It was also the result of the more or less

conflicting dual goals of modern dance in China—to position itself as an urban high art on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a useful tool for mass enlightenment and mobilization in an age of national crisis, revolution, and total war. It is further demonstrated that this transmediation in Wu's modern dance was by no means a smooth process, but instead fraught with diverging momentums.

Chapter three "Dancing Reclusion in the Great Leap Forward" follows Wu Xiaobang's artistic endeavor into the late 1950s of the early socialist era. While the previous chapters focus more on the transnational, transcultural, and transmedia aspects of dance, this chapter pays particular attention to its "trans-temporal" dimension. By that time, Wu's modern dance (or New dance) had fallen out of political favor due to its "bourgeois ideology." As a response, Wu looked into the literary and philosophical classics of the past to create the paradoxical "New classical (Chinese) dance" as a disguised haven to harbor his modernist ideas of New dance.

Wu's "New classical dance" is the antithesis of the "classical (Chinese) dance" which was simultaneously being invented at the Beijing Dance School (predecessor of the Bejing Dance Academy) based on the Chinese *xiqu* 戏曲 (traditional theaters) tradition. The invention of "classical dance" as a tradition was part of a much larger national project, demanded by the CCP, to create "national forms" in literature and the fine arts by resorting to traditional and folk forms. A major purpose of this cultural-political project is to use the "national form" in the making as a means to "interpellate" the bourgeois and West-leaning intellectuals and artists into subjection under the new socialist regime. It is argued that Wu's philosophy of the "New classical dance" is a circuitous modernist critique of both "invented tradition" and "national form," and thus a resistance to the

interpellation of the regime, by denying the stability of any codified form in dance—the very premise underlying the discourse on the "national form" and "invented tradition."

Moreover, Wu also appropriated the millennium-old Chinese intellectual ideal of "reclusion" in his New classical dance to construct an individual-based spiritual utopia characterized by a timeless (or slow) temporality and reclusive spatiality to resist the collectivist material utopia of the Great Leap Forward Campaign (1958-1960) characterized by an ever-accelerating temporality and all-encompassing spatiality. However, this resistance is self-contradictory in nature—it is shown that Wu's expansive embracement of spirituality is at the cost of the physicality of the body in his dance. Ironically, dance, which relies heavily on the material body, had to deny its very physicality decisively in Wu's choreography. As a result, this strategy was, as it turned out, unsustainable and self-defeating. Therefore, this chapter also sheds light on the particular possibilities and limits of the agency of dancer-choreographers in negotiating and defending the autonomy of art, in the genre of dance, against the ideological control of the state.

The last chapter (chapter four) "Adaptation of Trauma" shifts its focus to the more integrative genre of dance drama. As the name of the genre suggests, the rise of dance drama as the most prominent dance form (and also one of the dominant theatrical forms) in China in the late 1950s, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, was a result of the tightening control of the bodily dance by ideology which relies heavily on narrative and representation. However, the tension between the expressive aspect of dance and the representational aspect of drama has never been fully resolved in this genre. It is further shown that this problematic is not Chinese in origin, but has its root in the Soviet Russian

drambalet (or dramatized ballet), by examining the transnational influence of the latter on the former.

This chapter extends the concept of kinesthesia to the more general theory of affect. It is argued that kinesthesia is the fundamental bodily mode of affect, while affect is generalized kinesthesia. The highlighting of this conceptual connection between kinesthesia and affect is partly necessitated by the shifting of focus in this chapter from mainly dance solos to large-scale full-length dance dramas, which has closer affinity with theater, where the more general affect is a better suited analytical concept. However, the theoretical role of kinesthesia is by no means supplanted by that of the affect; rather, it is the affective-kinesthetic coupling that is emphasized here. By doing so, this study strives to recuperate the unjustly neglected theoretical role of dance in the recent "affective turn" in performance arts in particular, and humanities (and social sciences) in general.

The focus of this chapter is a specific kind of affect—trauma. By explicitly associating trauma with affect, this study aims to stress that trauma is not merely personal and psychological, but has bodily implication of concrete actions and the ability to affect, and be affected by, the traumas of others. That is, the representation-based psychoanalytic framework of trauma may be extended to include an affective one. "Adaptation of trauma" here refers to, first, the transmedia adaptation of traumatic themes, which are quite common in Chinese dance dramas on contemporary revolutionary topics, and second, the fact that trauma itself evolves and adapts to different political contexts. In the prolonged repetitive process of revision, re-adaptation, and re-performance of dance dramas, trauma, which has the tendency to repeat, not only perpetuates itself, but also acquires new meanings while losing old ones, couples and

decouples with other traumas and the traumas of others, and sometimes even subverts the ideology which strives to harness it into its own use.

To demonstrate these subtleties, this chapter analyzes the two-decade history of the adaptation of a particular work—*Butterfly Loves Flower*—from the politically authoritative text of a famous poem by Mao Zedong into different versions of dance drama. It is shown that, in the genre of dance drama, the affect of dance provides "a line of flight," in the Deleuzian sense, from ideological constraints even in its strictest form, by inadvertently (or not) deconstructing and subverting the authoritative meaning of the poem. This, in some sense, echoes the image of the centrifugal spiral in Lin Hwai-min's *Song of the Wanders* rebelling against the Confucian poetic order.

Chapter 1 Traveling Princess and Dancing Diplomat: Corporeal Modernity, Evolution, and the Dance of Yu Rongling, 1900-1905

Paris, 1901, shortly after the Exposition Universelle and the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1900), Yu Rongling 裕容齡 (ca. 1888-1973),[1] the fifth and youngest child of Yu Geng 裕庚 the Qing Minister to France, at her age around fourteen, started to take "Greek dance" classes with the twenty-three-year-old Isadora Duncan, which lasted for about two years.[2] Duncan, who arrived in Paris from London a year earlier, just opened her dance studio and began to teach dance lessons (fig. 1). By that time, Duncan had commenced her experiment on the "Greek dance" (later known as the modern dance), often performing in the semi-private salons of her patrons, a close circle of noble wealthy Grecophile lesbian American expatriates.[3] Though had yet to make a name for her dance, Duncan had already become a controversial figure in the Parisian upper-class society, as

[1] In a short autobiography hand-written by Yu Rongling in the mid 1950s, she dates her birth in 1882, which has been adopted in the official history. However, there is strong evidence showing that Rongling's elder sister Deling 德齡 [Princess Der Ling] was born on June 8th, 1885, and Xinling 馨齡, elder brother of Rongling, was born after Deling. Moreover, the age difference between Deling and Rongling should not be greater than a few years. Therefore, a reasonable estimate of Rongling's true birth year is around 1888. See Grant Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade: the Legend of Princess Der Ling* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 3, 366; Ye Zufu 葉祖孚, "Xi taihou yuqian nüguan Yu Rongling (Si)" 西太后御前女官裕容齡(四) [Yu Rongling: Lady in waiting of the Western Empress Dowager (IV)], *Zongheng* 縱橫 no. 7 (1999): 50-3, 53.

[2] Yu Rongling 裕容齡, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu" 清末舞蹈家裕容齡回憶錄 [The Memoir of Yu Rongling, A dancer of the Late Qing], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 2 (March, 1958): 44-5; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Kowtow* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1929), 271; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 99-104.

[3] Samuel N. Dorf, "Dancing Greek Antiquity in Private and Public: Isadora Duncan's Early Patronage in Paris," *Dance Research Journal* 44. 1 (Summer 2012): 3-27.

she danced in ancient Greek style "white robes that were so thin you could see her naked body underneath!"[4]

Fig 1: Isadora Duncan, Paris, c.a. 1900.

Sometime around 1902, Yu Rongling took a major role, as a certain "goddess" from Greek mythology, in one of Duncan's Greek dramatic dances performed either publicly or semi-publicly in Paris.[5] A pretty innocent Asian girl from the Manchu court of the

[4] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 101.

[5] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45. However, the title and content of the dance work are uncertain. In her book, the Chinese dance scholar Tong Yan 仝妍 identifies the title of the work as, in Chinese transliteration, *Aofeiliya* 奥菲利亞. However, she did not provide the source of this information. According to the transliteration, the original English title of the work seems to be *Ophelia*. In one of Duncan's earliest public performances back in the United States in 1898, there was a dance work interpreting the prominent American pianist and composer Ethelbert Nevin's *Water Scenes* (1891), which consists of five piano pieces, each with a mythological or literary allusion of a water theme. Duncan's dance was based on three of them, *Ophelia*, *Water Nymph*, and *Narcissus*. While the musical piece *Ophelia* was probably inspired by the character Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Duncan's dance interpretation seems to center on the Greek mythological character Narcissus throughout the three piano pieces. Based on this and the information that Rongling at some point also performed a dance called *Shui xiannü* 水仙女 (Water nymph), the dramatic dance Yu performed in Paris in the early 1900s might be an adaptation and

Qing Empire—characteristically depicted by the Western press as backward, conservative, and xenophobic—danced gracefully as a Greek goddess, barefoot and thinly clad in some chemise-like silk garment in front of a Parisian audience of the upper-class, artist-aristocratic, and diplomatic circles. This dancing cosmopolitan figure, characterized by dazzling temporal, spatial, and racial hybridity, should be mind boggling for the audience at the turn of the century who had just witnessed the ending of the Victorian era. Note that about a mere year earlier, when Duncan first performed in Paris, her unprepared elite audience, who prided themselves as vanguards in fashion and avant-garde arts, were left slack-jawed by her shocking performances.[6]

Such an image of Yu Rongling seemed even more out of place back in the "misogynistic" patriarchal Qing Empire (which, however, was ironically ruled by a powerful matriarch). Many decent Chinese women were then still often hidden in the inner quarters of households, with their feet bound. *Nüjie zhong* 女界钟 (The Women's Bell), which marks the beginning of systematic advocacy for women's rights in China, would be published by Jin Tianhe 金天翮 (1873-1947) a year later in 1903. Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907), the famous feminist revolutionary, would not travel to Japan until 1904, and

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expansion of this earlier work of Duncan, with more roles and more discernible plot added and possibly Ophelia being the main character. If that was the case, then the role(s) Yu played could be any of Narcissus, the water nymph, or some Grecianized version of Ophelia. *Aofeiliya* might also be the mis-transliteration of Orpheus. Although this transliteration is less likely, Duncan's dance *Orpheus*, deriving from the German composer Christoph Willibald Gluck's French opera *Orphée* and evolving continuously from 1900 to the 1920s throughout Duncan's dance career, has a more distinctively "Greek" theme and a more coherent "dramatic" structure, which better befits the description of the "Greek dramatic dance" Yu performed. If this was the case, Eurydice, wife of Orpheus, might be the role Yu danced. See Tong Yan 仝妍, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu*, 1912-1949 民國時期舞蹈研究, 1912-1949 [Research on the dance of the Republican era, 1912-1949] (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2013), 4-7; Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2; Lida Rose McCabe, "A Maker of Imperishable songs," *Form* 1.9 (1913):18-9, 19; Paul D. Buchanan, *American Women's Rights Movement: A Chronology of Events and Opportunities from 1600-2008* (Boston: Branden Books, 2009), 102.

[6]Dorf,, "Dancing Greek Antiquity in Private and Public," 8.

her friend Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883-1943), the equally famous cosmopolitan feminist, would begin her journey to the US and Europe as late as 1918. Fictions featuring well-educated activist Chinese "new women" traveling around the globe would not flourish until a couple of years later—for example, the famous novel *Niehai hua* 孽海花 (Flower in a Sea of Karma), would be written by Zeng Pu 曾樸 (1871-1935) in 1904.

Because of the Yu children's cosmopolitan background, mastery of foreign languages and knowledge, and good reputation among the trusted Qing ministers, Rongling and her elder sister Deling 德齡 (1885-1944, known more famously as Princess Der Ling in the West) were ordered by Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 to serve as her "Second and First Ladies in Waiting," and in fact personal consultants on foreign affairs, in the imperial palace in 1903, where Rongling stayed for about four years (and Deling two years).[7] This experience of the Yu sisters uncannily resembles the plot of *Shitou ji* 石頭記 (The Story of the Stone), masterpiece by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹: just like the heroine Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 who enters the Grand View Garden only to witness the fall of the once powerful clan of Jia, the Yu sisters experienced the last days of the crumbling empire at its very heart, and they did form a granddaughter-grandmother like affection with the "*lao zuzong*" 老祖宗 (old matriarch) Cixi (fig. 2). The old lady, the same "merciless xenophobic ruler," was so fond of the energetic cosmopolitan girls that she bestowed upon them the royal tile of *junzhu* 郡主—a princess-rank title reserved only for the daughters of *qin wang* 親王 (Grand Prince).

[7] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 125-26, 152; Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji* 清宮瑣記 [Miscellaneous records of the Qing Palace] in Wang Shuqing 王樹卿 and Xu Che 徐徹, eds., *Cixi yu wo* 慈禧與我 [Cixi and me] (Shenyang: Liaoshen shushe, 1994), 1-43.

However, Rongling and her sister were not mere onlookers; what they brought with them into the semi-reclusive Qing palace was part of a world that was still foreign to the people living in it (mainly women and eunuchs), including Western fashion, etiquette, knowledge, technology, thought, and art. Among these, Cixi was especially fascinated by Western dance.[8] After hearing out the outline of Duncan's philosophy with great interest, Cixi expressed her enthusiasm in meeting Duncan in person.[9] Although this hoped-for meeting never materialized, the Yu sisters did create some sort of connection, however "mismatched," between the two famous women, who seem to live in totally different space-times in the current popular imagination, in the dawn of a global modernity.

Knowing that Rongling was particularly good at Western dance, Cixi, with enthusiasm, asked Rongling to study and revive the dance tradition of China that had long been lost in history. Following Cixi's order, Rongling created several works of "Chinese dance." These dance works, along with Western dances, were performed by Rongling in front of Cixi and other royal and noble women and court ladies, which greatly pleased the empress dowager.[10] This project of reviving the Chinese dance tradition was carried on by Rongling, on and off as a personal effort, long after the fall of the Qing dynasty, at least into the late 1920s, which may be seen as the inception of a much larger and enduring national project of inventing both the modern Chinese dance and the classical Chinese dance. As shown by later chapters, the approaches adopted by Rongling's successors were not that different from hers.

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[8] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 172.

[9] Ibid., 171; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1930), 251.

[10] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji*, 11, 40-1.

Fig 2: From left to right: Louisa Pierson (Yu Tai-tai 裕太太), Yu Deling (Princess Der Ling), Cixi, Yu Rongling, Summer Palace, Beijing, c.a. 1903.

Then, why, in the case of dance, could Yu Rongling, a girl from the "conservative," "backward," and "misogynistic" Far East, stand so easily and "naturally" at the international frontier (and center) of avant-garde modernism and feminism in Paris at the turn of the century, when, in the other fields of arts and literature back in China, the influence of modernism and feminism, though germinated, had yet to burgeon at its full speed?[11] Why was Cixi, stereotyped as the close-minded xenophobic old empress

[11] For the intersection of modernism and feminism in Duncan's modern dance, see Elizabeth Francis, "From Event to Monument: Modernism, Feminism, and Isadora Duncan," *American Studies*, 35. 1 (1994): 25-45. For a theorization and introduction of early Chinese (proto)feminism around the turn of the last century, see Lydia He Liu, Rebecca E Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds., *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

dowager, so fascinated by Western dance in general and Duncan's modern dance (and its underlying philosophy) in particular that she enthusiastically sponsored Rongling's initial attempt to create its Chinese counterpart? Is this "Chinese dance" a continued development of modern dance guided by its modernist and feminist ideology, or an abrupt departure and retreat from this ideology into the "illusion" of a long lost national tradition? How does the transnational and transcultural metamorphosis of Rongling (and her sister) and her dance inform our understanding of the origin of modernism and feminism as global and multiple, rather than exclusively Western, in nature?[12]

The key to the answers, as argued here, lies in a particular mode of "corporeal modernity" represented by Duncan's philosophy of early modern dance. The term "corporeal modernity" is derived from an anthology edited by Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich, entitled *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, And Chinese Cultures*.[13] The original concept refers to, first, how representations of the body in various media played an important role in the discourse on modernity in twentieth century China, and second, how modern science, technology, and ideology shaped the representations of the body and body culture in China. The "corporeal modernity" meant in this chapter is based on both conceptions, but further emphasizes that corporeality is not just about the body or body culture per se, or the representation thereof, but also an *interpersonal-level* communicative channel and site of perception, articulation, and

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[12] See, for example, Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[13] Ari Larissa Heinrich and Fran Martin, "Introduction to Part I" in Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich, eds., *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures* (Hawai'i: University Of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 3-20.

negotiation during interactions between individual bodies—a corporeal process fundamental to the formation of the modern subject in the colonial context.

The concept of corporeal modernity is of great relevance to this study for two reasons. First, Duncan's feminist philosophy of modern dance, which had great influence on Yu Rongling and her choreography, is based on a particular mode of corporeal modernity. Instead of basing her conception of the human body mainly on modern medical and anatomical knowledge, Duncan paradoxically goes back in time to search for the Greek ideal of the body and further graft that ideal onto the theory of evolution. As elaborated later, on the one hand, the "masculine" theory of evolution, which supposedly applies to all organic bodies, supplies a universal corporeal-temporal basis for the modernist and feminist philosophy of modern dance. On the other hand, Duncan's philosophy imposes feminist agency upon the theory of evolution, by twisting the unidirectional temporal order of the evolution of the (female) body back to the particular locus of ancient Greece as a middle point linking the present to the future. The resulting corporeal modernity is characterized by the blurred boundaries between the past and the future, the universal and the national.

Second, as shown later in detail, this mode of corporeal modernity enables early modern dance and the women performing it to easily cross various borders of race, culture, nation, and time by leveraging the spatio-temporal universality and evolutionary "truth" associated with this corporeal modernity. However, it can also be easily appropriated and re-articulated by the local as a means to handle the anxieties about perceived differences and particularities which spring from all these border-crossings happening under a global colonial order viewed more and more in terms of Darwinism,

by providing a possibility, though perhaps illusive, of exerting agency over the course of evolution.

Therefore, the particular mode of corporeal modernity underlying the fascinating polymorphic images and international travels of Yu Rongling and her modern dance provide a unique prim to examine one aspect of the final "clash"—non-violent, permeating, generative, yet full of anxieties—between the West and the very core of the Qing empire (Cixi's court). At that time, what the retrospective term "modernity" denotes was perceived in China more as relative geopolitical and cultural differences under an imposed colonial hierarchy than as a universal temporal division between the backward and the advanced, the old and the new (a division to be finally reified by the May Fourth Movement almost two decades later). The main players involved in these peaceful "clashes" under study were predominantly women, be they Chinese or Western, Manchu or Han, or in-between. Their "firsthand" experiences thus registered the responses, dilemmas, creativity and agency of elite women who once stood close to or even directly at the centers of power. With old identities challenged and borders crossed, new identities, however instable, began to take shape. The original perspective of the self could no longer be taken for granted, and the foreign other's point of view must be taken into account. This identity dynamics was lubricated by the cosmopolitan background of Rongling and her sister with their ability to embrace and switch between multiple identities and perspectives. This generative and transformative process, though it happened under a decisive structural imbalance of power, should be viewed as two-directional, rather than a one-way traffic from the West to China. On the one hand, Yu Rongling, as a pupil of Duncan, actively participated in the creation of Western modern

dance and the avant-garde modernism and feminism it embodied. On the other hand, by ordering the cosmopolitan girls to serve at her inner court, Empress Dowager Cixi invited part of the Western world into the heart of her empire.

While the existing scholarship has investigated a similar process happening in the larger late Qing society mainly through the lens of literature and language,[14] the case of Yu Rongling and her dance highlight its corporeal dimension, which is relatively understudied. After all, the "clashes" addressed here were, in large part, encounters between different (female) bodies, and were mediated, first and foremost, through and on the site of bodies, rather than languages (in fact, when language obstacles existed, a situation not rare in international contacts, the role of the linguistic was often limited). Thus, the transnational and transcultural metamorphosis of Yu Rongling and her modern dance need to be viewed and understood in terms of this corporeality.[15]

To bring the argument further, on the one hand, the origin of Western modern dance was not exclusively Western in nature. Instead, modern dance incorporated the "Oriental bodies" within it from the very beginning, rather than simply treating them as some

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[14] For example, see Ying Hu, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Women in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, eds., *Different Worlds of Discourses: Transformation of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Brill, 2008); David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[15] A fundamental paradox of this whole project is that its investigation of the body and dance, and the academic delivery thereof, is based primarily on words and languages, and secondarily on visual representations. While the corporeal interactions and the bodily dance may indeed constitute a more direct communicative channel and in some cases even mediate the linguistic, the study of them here is inevitably mediated (reversely) by these different forms of representation, especially language. However, this paradox, which largely results from the transmedia nature of this academic project and the ephemeral dynamics of dance, need not be seen as necessarily debilitating. On the contrary, it may be quite theoretically enabling and informing, as to explore the intricate entanglement—mutual mediation, antagonism, or alliance—between the body and the mind, dance and language, is a major task of this study.

exotic other. On the other hand, the birth of the "Chinese dance" was not exclusively Chinese either, but a transnational and transcultural product of modernity. Moreover, this modernity of the "Chinese dance" cannot be entirely explained as some "invented tradition" that was created by the local as some "old way" to resist the "new way" imposed by the Western colonial powers,[16] because it not just appropriates and exploits but also betrays the paradoxical nature of Western modernism in the case of dance, where Western modernism itself, as pointed out by Yu Rongling, is both "reviving the old" and "creating the new," both highlighting the national and promoting the universal. As demonstrated later, the cosmopolitan identity and international travel of Yu conveniently facilitated the interaction between Western modern dance and Chinese dance (both modern and classical) since their births, which had been in a competing and mutual-borrowing relationship ever since.

The following sections will first highlight the cosmopolitan identity of Yu Rongling, tracing her transnational and transcultural travels from China to Paris and her experiences of studying and performing modern dance with Isadora Duncan, showing how her hybrid cosmopolitan identity was appropriated, on the one hand, by Duncan's modernist and feminist ideology and, on the other hand, by the Parisian audiences' tastes of Oriental exoticism and queer eroticism. By teasing out the relation between Duncan's theory of corporeal modernity and evolutionism, it is demonstrated that Duncan's "Greek" approach to modernism and feminism employs a pseudo-atavist logic of modernity, which proposes that the corporeal modernity of the human (especially female) body can only be achieved by going back to the past through the feminist agency of modern dance,

[16] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition," in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7-8.

and how Yu Rongling's identity is fit into this logic. The second half of this chapter follows Yu Rongling's steps from Paris back to Cixi's imperial court, which brought about a series of cultural "clashes." Corporeality became a central channel and site for perceiving, understanding, and negotiating these clashes. Situated within this corporeal context, it is further argued that the paradoxical logic of the corporeal modernity of Duncan's dance was appropriated by Yu Rongling and Cixi to serve a nationalist purpose in the process of creating the "classical Chinese dance," which from the very beginning had been a transnational and transcultural "modern" product with a temporality pointing to both the past (old) and the future (new).

Fig 3: Yu Rongling (left) and Deling dressed for a fancy dress ball given by her parents to celebrate Chinese New Year at the Qing legation, Paris, c.a. 1900.

The Cosmopolitan Children

In some sense, Yu Rongling was more ideal than the above-mentioned late Qing feminist icons that existed in either reality or fictions. The miracle of "total communication," a term used by Hu Ying to denote the speedy and effortless acquisition of foreign languages and knowledge by the heroines in late Qing novels (for instance, in *Niehai hua*, "Caiyun, the ambassador's concubine, masters German in a few months"),[17] was virtually a given fact for Yu Rongling rather than a fictional utopia. All children of the Yu family were multilingual—Rongling herself was fluent in Chinese, English, French, and Japanese at a rather young age, and about eight years of her childhood were spent abroad, with traveling experiences in Japan and almost all the major European countries. Even before they left China, the Yu family, as described by one of their foreign acquaintance, was "a noisy family of English-speaking children."[18]

Furthermore, whereas almost all of the Chinese feminist icons, either real or fictional, were more or less troubled by a feeling of self-loathing due to a deep sense of cultural, racial, and gender inferiority, Rongling (and her siblings) was radiant with remarkable confidence, which can be best proved by the Greek goddess she performed elegantly and naturally under the gaze of the Parisian audience. Thus, unlike Lü Bicheng who, as Grace Fong argues, espoused a version of cosmopolitanism that emphasizes the cultivated detachment and distance from any restrictive form of cultural identity and political

[17] Hu, *Tales of Translation*, 11.

[18] Sir Robert Hart [the British Inspector General of Imperial Maritime Customs Service], *I. G. in Peking*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1976), letter 1143, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 12.

affiliation,[19] the young Rongling (and her siblings) represents the other side of cosmopolitanism characterized by easy and playful embracing and switching between multiple roles and identities (fig. 3).[20] Xunling 勛齡, Rongling's elder brother, quickly became "a great social favorite in diplomatic circles" in Paris due to his European-like physical features and upbringing, and created a sensation by marrying a French girl (fig. 4).[21] Rongling herself, at that time known as "Miss Nellie Yu-Keng" in the Western press,[22] became "a unique figure in Paris society," who "enjoys a popularity in the French capital that makes her an object of envy to many a young Frenchwomen moving in the same circle of society" and was described by a French paper as "a charming Chinese girl who is Parisian in all but name" (fig. 5).[23]

[19] Grace S. Fong, "Reconfiguring Time, Space, and Subjectivity: Lü Bicheng's Travel Writings on Mount Lu" in Qian Nanxiu, Grace S. Fong and Richard J. Smith, eds., *Different Worlds of Discourses: Transformation of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Brill, 2008), 87-114, 90.

[20] For example, Rongling and her siblings all felt comfortable to dress themselves in all kinds of fancy costumes, foreign or Chinese, in public, and both Rongling and her sister Deling, fond of enacting foreign plays, seriously considered to become a professional dancer or actress. See Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 101, 110; Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45.

[21] Doi: http://photo.weibo.com/2079186127/photos/detail/photo_id/3622219300400116#3622219333940771.

[22] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 114.

[23] Doi: http://photo.weibo.com/2079186127/photos/detail/photo_id/3622219300400116#3622219300400116.

Chinese Minister's Son and French Girl Wed.

The son of Yu Keng, Chinese minister in Paris created a sensation there recently by his marriage to Mlle Genevieve Deneux. This young Chinaman is

C HSING LING.

much better looking, according to western ideals, than most of his race, and has been a great social favorite in diplomatic circles.

Fig 4: Western media coverage on Yu Xunling, c.a. 1902.

CHINESE GIRL IN EUROPEAN DRESS
A UNIQUE FIGURE IN PARIS SOCIETY.

MISS NELLIE YU KENG

Miss Yu Keng, who is a daughter of the Chinese Minister to France, enjoys a popularity in the French capital that makes her an object of envy to many a young Frenchwoman moving in the same circle of society. Miss Yu Keng is described by a French paper as "a charming Chinese girl who is Parisian in all but name." Minister Yu Keng has another daughter, Lizzie, and two sons, all of whom wear European costume and follow the fashions closely. The Minister himself and his wife also would

Fig 5: Western media coverage on Yu Rongling, c.a. 1902.

Moreover, unlike those feminist icons most of whom lived in the margin of the late Qing society (many were "criminals," either in fiction or reality, wanted by the government), the Yu family had close connections and direct access to the centers of power, both abroad and in China. Due to his integrity, charisma, diplomatic craftiness, and foreign-friendliness, Yu Geng gained respect from and maintained a good rapport with the ruling classes and royal houses of Japan and European countries, which also opened the doors for his children to these power centers. As a result, the Yu children had been very active in important diplomatic occasions since a young age. For instance, Deling was received by the Emperor Meiji and Empress Haruko of Japan at age eleven, and the whole family, as secret Christians, was blessed by Pope Leo XIII in an audience particularly arranged for them in Vatican.[24] The debut party of Deling, at which Rongling was also likely to be present, was hosted by French President Emile Loubert, honoring King Oscar II of Sweden who announced the young lady's formal entry into society.[25] Back in China, the names of powerful supporters and loyal friends, either Han or Manchu, of the Yu family were also stellar. Among them were Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, Ronglu 榮祿, Prince Qing 慶親王, and, behind all these, the ultimate ruler Empress Dowager Cixi.[26]

This unique combination of atypical "traits" among Rongling and her siblings is a direct outgrowth of their unusual family background. Rongling is widely recognized as the "first Chinese who studied Japanese and Euro-American dance" in the Chinese dance

[24] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 58, 117.

[25] Ibid., 119.

[26] Ibid.

historiography. However, what is suppressed by this alleged "Chineseness" is her complicated lineage and cultural identity. Rongling's father Yu Geng was an elite member of the hereditary Han-martial Plain White Banner (*Hanjun zheng bai qi* 漢軍正白旗) with probably both Manchu and Han ancestors, a secret baptized Christian, a pro-West reformist, and also an open-mined, tolerant, and protective farther, who admitted that at heart "I am more like a foreigner"—an attitude more or less shared by his children.[27] He insisted his young daughters receive the same education as their brothers, learning Chinese classics and, more importantly, studying Western languages and knowledge with foreign missionaries, with seemingly more weight placed on the latter (Rongling's literacy in foreign languages seems to be at a higher level than classical Chinese).[28] When Zhang Zhidong, then the supervisor of Yu Geng, once with a good intention questioned Yu's "heretical" way of educating his daughters and attempted to persuade him to return to the "Chinese way," Yu Geng's reply may have seemed annoyingly frank to Zhang: his daughters "must be educated;" he believed that "they will go far in this world," and he was "ambitious for them;" he would not allow either or both of his daughters "to become playthings of any man, whether Emperor or commoner," and felt that "they themselves should have something to say about their own futures…"[29] Clearly, the liberal Yu Geng had a cosmopolitan vision for his daughters' futures.

Besides a "heretic" father, Rongling and her siblings also had an unusual mother. Louisa Pierson, the beloved wife of Yu Geng, was a Eurasian born probably out of

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[27] Ibid., 5-6.

[28] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji*, 7, 41; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 23-4.

[29] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Kowtow*, 90-2; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 23-6.

wedlock, daughter of a "mysterious" American merchant from Boston, Massachusetts, who owned a business in Shanghai.[30] Therefore, the cosmopolitan spirit of the Yu sisters was partly cultivated by their strong-willed parents with a hybrid cultural and racial background and identity. In fact, the experiences of the Yu family, though far from representative of the average Chinese household, were literally an embodiment of a larger historical process of various border-crossings—race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality—that had been happening in the late Qing colonial world, which was characterized by a severe imbalance of power. The international travels of Rongling and her siblings throughout their childhood was a direct consequence of the disastrous failures of the Qing Empire in wars against colonial powers. Yu Geng was first appointed as the Qing Minister to Japan (1895-1899) to deal with the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and then the Minister to France (1899-1903) in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion, which brought his family to the cosmopolitan Paris, where they bore the brunt of the diplomatic crisis engendered by the bloody upheavals at home.[31]

Dancing in Paris with Isadora Duncan

Regardless of all the stress entailed by his official duty, Yu Geng did succeed in bringing his cosmopolitan vision for his daughters into reality—to let them "go far in this world." Louisa, due to her superb taste in fashions and arts, American lineage, and diplomatic status, had wide social connections with the "vaguely demimonde artist-

[30] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, xxiii, 4.

[31] Ibid., 79-98.

aristocrat circles" in Paris.[32] It was through these connections that the Yu family quickly blended themselves into the Parisian society, making acquaintance at parties with painters, writers, composers, and finally the famous modern dancer Isadora Duncan. Ignoring the warnings given by the Parisian "society leaders" about the controversial reputation of Duncan and her dance, Louisa chose to send her daughters to Duncan's dance studio rather than other "safer" options like ballet schools, because she was determined to expose her daughters to the most up-to-date trends of arts and fashions in the world.[33]

Rongling and her sister Deling were among the very first students on whom Duncan experimented her new "Greek" philosophy of dance creation and education being developed around the turn of the century.[34] During the two or three years (1901-1903) when the Yu sisters studied and danced with Duncan, the (female) bodies were a constant focus of mutual gaze, perception, and conversation between the two parties involved.[35] These years were crucial to Duncan and her modern dance, because it was during this period that she created her first mature modern dance works, established a coherent modernist and feminist theory of modern dance, and started to gain international fame. Thus, the bodily experiences of Rongling and Deling, who witnessed and actively participated in this process, provide an important lens to examine the origin of Western modern dance, which incorporated the "Oriental" bodies (actually with mixed lineage as in the case of the Yu sisters) within it, rather than constructed them purely as some exotic

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[32] Ibid., 100.

[33] Ibid., 100-101; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 239.

[34] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 231.

[35] Ibid., 230-52.

"other" outside the "self." This deliberate incorporation is, as demonstrated below, through careful selection and investment.

Although part of the reason why Duncan offered dance classes in Paris was to make her economic ends met, she maintained her idiosyncratic standard in selecting students. On the first day of class, Rongling and Deling, together with other more than twenty girls who were all potential students, were led by Duncan to run in circles in her dance studio, accompanied by the piano played by Duncan's mother. Rongling was asked to stop after just finishing the first round. She became nervous, thinking that she had been eliminated in the process, but it turned out later that she (and her sister) had passed Duncan's test in the very first round. Duncan commented that despite the financial straits she was in, she was willing to teach her for free, and offered to instruct the Yu sisters in private lessons, rather than in much bigger regular classes.[36]

Rongling was undoubtedly talented in dance, which had been manifest since a very young age when she spontaneously danced to the music played by one of her language teachers.[37] However, there might be something else, in addition to the talent in dance and bodily sensitivity to music, that helped the Yu sisters easily pass Duncan's test. As Manchu girls, Rongling and Deling were not allowed to have their feet bound, and because of their father's tolerance, the energetic and active young girls often engaged in such bold activities and mischief as climbing up trees, wading in ponds and, for once, even climbing up the high flagpole of the Qing legation in Tokyo.[38] Duncan, by

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[36] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 233.

[37] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 44.

[38] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Kowtow*, 188-90; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 11, 51.

observing their way of running, might as well be impressed by this "ungirly" boldness and physical energy, agility, and coordinating ability, which, as discussed at length later, were in much accord with Duncan's modernist and feminist vision of the natural and healthy female body.

The selection did not stop there. After the Yu sisters were admitted to Duncan's class, Deling recalled, Duncan closely examined them "as a scientist studies the antics of newly discovered creatures."[39] Duncan, who grew up in San Francisco and Oakland, California, was of course not unfamiliar with the Chinese bodies. Rather, she was contemplating how to fit the Oriental bodies into her "Greek dance." Before long Duncan made her decision: Rongling, who was "taller, more willowy, and more conventionally beautiful" than Deling, was "more appropriate for Duncan's 'Greek interpretations,'" while the plumper Deling was to be assigned other roles, such as a Pan-like figure, in future performances.[40]

The Yu sisters, together with other two girls who also passed Duncan's test (but dropped off before long), began to take dance class with Duncan, at a cost of five dollars each lesson.[41] The class met three times a week, one and a half hours each time, which were broken into three sections.[42] The greatest strengths of Duncan's teaching were her patience and the charismatic presence of her own body. As remembered by Deling, during the classes she found it "difficult not to go into rhapsodies over the glorious body

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[39] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 236, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 102.

[40] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 103; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 236-7.

[41] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 234-6.

[42] Ibid., 237.

of Duncan,"[43] and Rongling, even more than half a century later, could still vividly recall with admiration a scene of Duncan's dancing body—"Duncan, in her white tunic with a tint of light green,…as if a beauty dances trippingly in the moonlight, just like a natural painting, making us enthralled and longing."[44]

While the entrance test was about running, the dance training started with walking. Duncan taught the young girls how to walk up stairs gracefully, presumably in a natural, rather than affected, manner. Although no detail about the contents of the classes is available, it can be inferred that the training seems to start from dance moves not far from daily body movements, such as walking, running, jumping, leaping, and posing, which is congruent with Duncan's emphasis on the "natural" body movements. This basic training stage lasted for about a year to "soften" the girls' bodies until they gained "absolute control" of them.[45]

The training was by no means "natural" or effortless—it was more like military drilling. The hard-working Duncan explained with extreme patience to each girl her mistakes in each move and asked her to repeat until perfection. To ensure this, Duncan broke down a single dance move into a series of poses and, just like the technique of slow motion in cinematography, asked the girls to swing "gradually from one pose to the other" and "must fall instantly into the exact pose"—a training method called "posing."[46]

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[43] Deling, *Lotos Petals*, 237, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 102.

[44] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45.

[45] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 235-7.

[46] This approach of "dance-sculptural iconography" was common among the pioneers of modern dance and performance around the turn of the century, which is called the "vitalist" paradigm—the paradoxical combination of a focus on "the dynamics of movement" and the "primarily static body imagery that was oriented along the lines of ancient sculpture." For example, Genevieve Stebbins (1857-1934) called her method as "statue posing," which directly inspired Duncan. See Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49.

Duncan "spared no effort or expense" to bring the point home to the girls that to dance and pose elegantly "means to practice, practice…until the head aches and the heart aches, and even the soul perspires with the endless effort. For a single awkward posture is…monstrous. Even the people in the last row can see *that*!"[47] To make her point vivid and unforgettable, Duncan often let the Yu sisters observe her regular classes from the perspective of audience, to see how she pointed out and corrected the mistakes of each student.[48] Therefore, as recalled by Deling, "[a] thousand beginnings, all wrong, until finally we caught the right one, which we probably forgot again when the next day came, but gradually, through labor and heartache, mastering the little things that led, in their sum total, to mastery of ourselves."[49]

Probably after the first stage of training, Duncan started to let the girls to engage in "real dancing." Instead of molding every student according to a predetermined standard "repertoire" as in ballet training, Duncan "created dances for her pupils, building the dance around the individual," and "did the best she knew for each individual pupil" with strenuous effort, which finally led to coherent dance works such as the "Greek dramatic dance" depicted at the beginning of the chapter.[50]

From time to time, Duncan took her students to the Louvre and Versailles to study the "sculptured works of the masters," as an important means to reinforce the ideas of "perfect poses" she taught in class. The figures of human bodies were often the major

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[47] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 242.

[48] Ibid., 240.

[49] Ibid., 243.

[50] Ibid., 240.

topic of conversations during their wandering around. Duncan would explain to the girls "every important detail" of the masterpieces, "over and over again, seemingly without end." Deling once told Duncan that she wished she could see Duncan's body taking the place of the great naked statues. Duncan replied humorously: "I'd like to have their fashions generally adopted. You know how I feel about clumsy conventional clothes!"[51] On another occasion, Duncan also told the girls that "I do not *live* in ordinary dress. I cover my body because the law demands it. Silly, the law!"[52]

Then, how should we understand Duncan's "exhibitionistic" tendency in her philosophy of "Greek dance," and the role of the "Oriental" bodies incorporated in it? What are the particular mode of corporeal modernity and the underlying power relations embodied in this transnational and transcultural origin of modern dance? What did the spatially and temporally hybrid figure of Rongling, a thinly-clad girl from the Far East dancing as a Greek goddess in front of a Parisian audience, mean to Duncan, the audience, and the girls themselves? The clues may be found in Duncan's manifesto of her early modern dance *The Dance of the Future*.[53]

The Dance of the Future and the Body of the Orient

The Dance of the Future is a public speech delivered by Duncan in Berlin in 1903, in which she for the first time systematically presented her philosophy of modern dance. As the time of the speech coincides with the ending of the Yu sisters' three-year study with

[51] Ibid., 243-4.

[52] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 234, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 102.

[53] Isadora Duncan, *Der Tanz Der Zukunft* [The Dance of the Future], Karl Federn, ed. & trans. (Eugen Biederici-is Leipzig, 1903).

Duncan, *The Dance of the Future* may be seen as a summary of Duncan's theoretical contemplation on the pedagogy and choreography of modern dance which were practiced during that three-year period preceding the speech. Therefore, it provides important, though indirect, information about the role of Rongling and Deling, and the "Oriental" body they represented, in the origin of modern dance.

It is argued here that Duncan's philosophy of modern dance brought forth a particular mode of corporeal modernity based on evolutionism. Unlike the conception of the human body based on medical science which treats the body as an absolute given object, for Duncan, who was also greatly influenced by Nietzsche, the human body is still in the middle of "crossing" over an abyss "between beast and Higher Man."[54] However, the current position of the human (especially female) body on this evolutionary trajectory, according to Duncan, has dangerously deviated from the right (or natural) path due to the suppression of the (female) body by the current state of civilization.

Thus, in order to cross from the "bad" present over to the "good" future along the right evolutionary path, the (female) body had to first return to the "ideal" past of ancient Greece free of suppression, through modern dance (fig. 6). This is the twisted temporality of evolution—characterized by the pattern "present→past→future" with the ahistorical past as a central link—that underlies the corporeal modernity in Duncan's feminist philosophy of early modern dance. This mode of corporeal modernity exhibits blurred boundaries between the past and future, the universal and the national, the constant and the variable, engendering instable meanings that are subject to multiple interpretations

[54] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One* in *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1982), 126-27, quoted in Melissa Ragona, "Ecstasy, Primitivism, Modernity: Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman," *American Studies* 35, no. 1 (1994): 47-62, 49.

and appropriations by different parties. The cosmopolitan identity and "Oriental" body of Rongling, as demonstrated later, fit well into this "boundary-free" corporeal modernity of Duncan's modern dance.

Fig 6: Isadora Duncan dancing at the Theater of Dionysius, Athens, 1903.

The importance of evolution in Duncan's theory is evident from the beginning of *The Dance of the Future*.

> A woman once asked me why I dance with bare feet and I replied, "Madam, I believe in the religion of the beauty of the human foot"—and the lady replied, "But I do not" and I said, "Yet you must, Madam, for the expression and intelligence of the human foot is one of the greatest triumphs of the *evolution of man*." "But," said the lady, "I do not believe in the evolution of man;" At this said I "My task is at an end. I refer you to my most revered teachers Mr. Charles Darwin and Mr. Ernest Haeckel"—"But," said the lady, "I do not believe in Darwin and Haeckel." At this

> point I could think of nothing more to say. So you see, that to convince people, I am of little value and ought not to speak.[55]

In this amusing conversation, or failure thereof, used by Duncan to open her speech, the bare feet of the (female) body is presented as a fetish for the "greatest triumphs of the evolution of man." The dramatized impossibility of conversation between Duncan and the "lady" is a reflection of Duncan's own anxiety in her one-against-all battle of legitimizing and promoting modern dance. The "lady" actually stands for several things. The first and foremost is the aesthetic and disciplinary tradition of ballet—the "natural" bare feet of Duncan form a sharp contrast to the deformed *pointe* feet bound in ballet shoes. For Duncan, not just the feet, but the whole body of any well-trained ballet dancer is deformed due to "incorrect dress and incorrect movement."[56] More generally, Duncan challenges the prohibitions and constraints imposed on the female body by the Victorian apparel, as represented by heavy layers of clothing, binding corset, and tight laces.[57]

Interestingly, what paralleled Duncan's foot fetish was a Western Christian obsession of the Han-Chinese foot binding.[58] It may be conveniently argued that the bound feet of Chinese women might as well serve as an implicit target and negative counterpart of

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[55] Duncan, *Der Tanz Der Zukunft* [The Dance of the Future], 11, emphasis added.

[56] Ibid., 14-5.

[57] Elizabeth Francis, "From Event to Monument: Modernism, Feminism, and Isadora Duncan," 25-45, 26, 29, 33.

[58] Angela Zito, "Bound to Be Represented: Theorizing/Fetishizing Footbinding" in Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich, eds., *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures* (Hawai'i: University Of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 21-41.

Duncan's bare feet—after all, the deformation resulting from foot binding, from the Western perspective, was even more abhorrent than that from ballet training.[59]

However, unlike those Western missionary activists who advocated the abolishment of foot-binding within a "masculine missionary hierarchy" and a Christian cultural framework,[60] Duncan, in the most general sense, opposed *any* form of constraint and oppression inflicted upon the female body, which went well beyond Christianity. By promoting the Greek nudism as the highest form of natural beauty, Duncan strived to purge the Original Sin branding the Christian (female) body and undo the body-soul divide enforced since the biblical age of Garden of Eden—"Man, arrived at the end of civilization, will have to return to nakedness, not to the unconscious nakedness of the savage, but to the conscious and acknowledged nakedness of the mature Man, whose body will be the harmonious expression of his spiritual being."[61]

Moreover, by advancing an evolutionary interpretation of the Greek body tradition, Duncan redirected the time arrow pointing to the past forward, toward a universal "New Woman" dancing triumphantly in a higher stage of human evolution. That is, Duncan's philosophy of modern dance is not just about liberating the female body *as it is* (or *was*); rather, its goal is to "restart" the natural evolution of women that has supposedly been arrested since the advent of the Christian civilization. Thus, for Duncan, modern dance "is a question of race, of the development of the female sex to beauty and health, of the

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[59] In fact, it seems that Duncan maintained enthusiastic attention to China's feminist course. For example, she choreographed a dance work entitled *Long Live, the Liberation of Chinese Women* in the mid 1920s. See Wang Kefen 王克芬 and Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, eds., *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* 中國近現代舞蹈發展史 [The development history of modern and contemporary Chinese dance] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 45.

[60] Zito, "Bound to Be Represented," 27.

[61] Duncan, *Der Tanz Der Zukunft* [The Dance of the Future], 12-3.

return to the original strength and to natural movements of woman's body. It is a question of the development of perfect mothers and the birth of healthy and beautiful children. The dancing school of the future is to develop and to show the ideal form of woman."[62] It is in this sense that "returning" to the past (represented by ancient Greece), on the one hand, becomes a necessary path to the future and to the corporeal modernity of the "female sex," and on the other hand is a primary means to exert feminist agency upon the iron law of evolution by twisting its unidirectional temporality. The "past," no longer a forever-lost Golden Age to be lamented or the counterpart of "modernity" to be left behind, is rescued by Duncan's modern dance as a bridge crossing over the evolutionary abyss separating the present and the future of women. As Duncan claims, "the dance of the future is the dance of the past."[63]

Duncan's evolutionary interpretation of the "Greek dance" not only recycles the past into modernity, but also challenges the boundaries of nations and cultures. For Duncan, the Greek dance "is *not* a national or characteristic art but has been and will be the art of *all humanity for all time*. Therefore dancing naked upon the earth I naturally fall into Greek positions, for Greek positions are only earth positions."[64] Clearly, Duncan claims both temporal and spatial universality for her "Greek dance," which transcends temporal, national and cultural borders.

Viewed within this context, the role of the cosmopolitan identity of Yu Rongling and her Oriental body in Duncan's agenda becomes clear. On the one hand, the body of Rongling, a girl from the "misogynistic" Qing Empire, was a symbol for "Chinese

[62] Ibid., 22-3, emphasis added.

[63] Ibid., 12.

[64] Ibid., 18, emphasis added.

Women," who suffer oppressions more severe and "barbarian" than those inflicted upon Western women and thus serve as a stronger negative counterpart to Duncan's evolved New Woman. On the other hand, Rongling is not just a "Chinese Woman"—her cosmopolitan identity provides an "interface" through which the Oriental body may be conveniently transformed and assimilated into the universal body of Duncan's New Woman. The "Greek" grace played out perfectly by Rongling becomes compelling proof of Duncan's universalist claim—even the "Chinese body," allegedly most astray from the right evolutionary path, can be saved and brought back on track through modern dance, thus forcefully showing that the "Greek dance" is "the art of all humanity for all time" and "Greek positions are only earth positions."

However, Duncan's universalist interpretation and exploitation of the Greek dance and the Oriental body is precarious. The very gesture of "returning" to the past cannot automatically guarantee a magical jump to the future, but implies the danger of being "stuck" in the past (or present). The assimilation of the other and the universalization of the particular entail the intrinsic risk of exoticizing the self and particularizing the universal. Moreover, embracing evolutionism itself precludes stability of meaning, as what is the "fittest" can never be predetermined, but always exists in a state of "to become," subject to the selection by "nature" through trial and error in the "unending ever increasing evolution, wherein are no ends and no stops."[65]

[65] Ibid., 17. In some sense, this instability inherent in Duncan's philosophy of modern dance is a reflection of a more general anxiety about constructing the nationality of America as a kind of universality that is constantly in the performing, unfolding, and evolving, which corresponds to the struggle of the United States, as a "historyless," immigrant, and assimilating nation, in its historic rise to global power around the turn of the century. See Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 117-55.

This instability may have been well exploited by the Parisian audience viewing Rongling's performance of the Greek dance. Unlike Duncan who strived to incorporate the "Chinese body" from the Far East into her universalist interpretation of the Greek dance, in the mind of the Parisian audience, the "Far East" was not that far from the "Greece" in the first place—they both belong to the Orient.[66] At that time, as recalled by Rongling, fantasies of ancient Greece were widespread in Paris. Body images copied from Greek artifacts were on items for sale all over the marketplace (such as postcards).[67] However, these Parisian fantasies were much less universalist Hellenistic ones (as Duncan's) than Oriental (that is, exotic and erotic) ones. As Emily Apter points out, "[t]his conflation of Greece and the orient was of course particularly common in turn-of-the-century art, literature, opera, dance and theatre; syncretistic otherness was the fashion, spawning a wild hybridity of styles—Egypto-Greek, Greco-Asian, Biblical-Moorish."[68] Moreover, such an Oriental approach to Greece was often seen as cipher for queer eroticism.[69] Therefore, the hybrid "Greco-Asian" image of Rongling, instead of being interpreted as the proof of the universality of Duncan's "Greek positions," may have been consumed as an Oriental exotic and (queer) erotic commodity by the Parisian audience. On the receptive side, Duncan's "return" to ancient Greece lost its forward-seeking

[66] Emily Apter, "Acting Out Orientalism: Sapphic Theatricality in Turn-Of-the-Century Paris" in Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 15-34; Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[67] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45.

[68] Emily Apter, "Acting Out Orientalism: Sapphic Theatricality in Turn-Of-the-Century Paris," 24, quoted in Dorf, "Dancing Greek Antiquity in Private and Public," 14.

[69] Dorf, "Dancing Greek Antiquity in Private and Public," 14.

evolutionary potentiality, and the "self" became exoticized (and eroticized) and the universal particularized.

In fact, Duncan herself was quite aware of these risks. In a passage addressing "a misunderstanding that might easily arise," Duncan clarifies: "[f]rom what I have said you might conclude that my intention is to return to the dances of the old Greeks or that I think that the dance of the future will be a revival of the antique dances or even of those of the primitive tribes. No, the dance of the future will be a new movement, a consequence of the entire evolution which mankind has passed through. To return to the dances of the Greeks would be as impossible as it is unnecessary. We are not Greeks and cannot therefore dance Greek dances."[70] Duncan also emphasizes that the universality of her modern dance is not a Procrustean bed, but instead promotes the development of individuality and particularity.[71] She implicitly admits that each country has its own unique "ideal of the beauty of form and movement,"[72] and even hints that the dance of the ancient "Greek" is but one among several other legitimate representatives of the "dance of the past," such as those of the "Egyptian" and "early Italian."[73]

However, these dialectical, and even contradictory, qualifications and clarifications made by Duncan do not and cannot eliminate those risks, but in fact betray them, foregrounding the problematics intrinsic to her philosophy of modern dance. Any act of border-crossing, be it temporal or spatial, always entails the possibility of a reverse crossing, and thus generates instability in meanings and opens up the space for multiple

[70] Duncan, *Der Tanz Der Zukunft* [The Dance of the Future], 24.

[71] Ibid., 21-2.

[72] Ibid., 23.

[73] Ibid., 26.

interpretations and appropriations. This point may be seen more clearly in Yu Rongling's creation of the "classical Chinese dance" in Cixi's imperial court after traveling back to the disintegrating Qing Empire.

Corporeal Modernity in the "Forbidden Palace"

The service of the Yu sisters in the imperial palace ordered by Cixi was part of a delayed response of the Qing court to the repeated failures in struggles against colonial powers. Although the socio-economic and cultural landscapes of many Chinese cities (especially treaty ports) had been fundamentally changed due to constant interaction with foreign presence, Cixi's court remained largely reclusive around the turn of the century. The knowledge and impressions about the empress dowager and her court formed in the West were largely based on hearsays that mixed facts with stories, limited, fragmented, and distorted at the best, and it was equally true the other way around.[74] This situation gradually became intolerable for the Qing court, since Cixi had to involve herself and her court more personally and deeply in dealing with foreign affairs, as necessitated by the deepening of the semi-colonial status of China—a direct result of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the more recent Boxer Rebellion.[75]

No longer could she sit comfortably behind the curtain. The empress dowager, the semi-divine figure upon whom eyes could not be laid, had to reveal more of herself and her court to the outside world. Her imperial women and court ladies needed to attend

[74] Sterling Seagrave and Peggy Seagrave, *Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, xxi; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911), 315-16; Sarah Pike Conger, *Letters from China* (Chicago: McClurg and Company, 1909), 247-8; Katherine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China* (New York: The Century Co., 1905).

[75] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 126.

banquets on invitation by the wives of foreign ambassadors, and Cixi herself, as a hostess showing hospitality, had to open her forbidden palace to host feasts in return and present herself in formal or informal meetings with foreign visitors on various occasions, catching up with the international standards of diplomacy (fig. 7).[76] This is the reason why the Yu sisters, with their knowledge of foreign languages, manners, and customs, were desperately needed in Cixi's court—compared with the ineffective bureaucratic and male-dominated Foreign Office,[77] they were a more direct, personal, and reliable bridge between Cixi and the foreign world. By asking the cosmopolitan Yu sisters to serve as her "ladies in waiting," Cixi literally invited part of the foreign world into her court.

Fig 7: Cixi with the ladies of the American legation, ca. 1903.

[76] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong sui ji*, 23-5; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 140-4.

[77] S. M. Mêng, *The Tsungli Yamen: Its Organization and Functions* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, 1962), 81.

This cultural "clash" between the West and the Qing court was, first and foremost, a corporeal one embodied by elite women, Western, Chinese, and in-between. Since Cixi was the only major sponsor of Yu Rongling's dance, some discussion of this bodily "clash" can foreground the necessary corporeal context within which the transnational and transcultural dance practices and creations of Rongling took place.

As demonstrated below, the corporeal—body features, clothes, manners—became a constant focus of attention for all the (female) parties involved. This focus on the corporeal should not be quickly dismissed as some characteristically trivial female "obsession" of vanity. Rather, it highlights the bodily aspect of the dynamics of identity (trans)formation. Through the self-conscious switching, comparing, and negotiating between different perspectives, the self and the other were being redefined and transformed, and a new kind of (inter)subjectivity gradually emerged, which was distinctively corporeal and might be retrospectively called "modern." This bodily (inter)subjectivity, as argued here, had subtle connection with evolutionary thinking. While the modern China scholar Andrew F. Jones, by analyzing literary texts and visual cultural materials, highlights the problematic of agency and the risk of atavism inherent in evolutionary (or developmental) thinking (the vernacular, often "scientifically imprecise or inaccurate," popularization of the theory of evolution in the "popular media and everyday discourse"),[78] this section, by focusing more directly on the corporeal, shows how these "risks" associated with evolutionary thinking might actually provide a corporeal-temporal framework to transform the body into a site of mediation, resistance, negotiation, and change.

[78] Andrew Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 5.

Although the Yu sisters served as interpreters on diplomatic occasions, the role of language was, as it turned out, often limited. Those occasions—state banquets, formal lunches and dinners—necessitated simultaneous one-to-one or small group interactions among many people, which rendered complete translation impossible. Even possessing some knowledge of the native language of the other party in interaction was ineffective for communication, as misunderstanding was common.[79] During one such lunch, a foreign lady spoke in heavily accented Chinese to a Qing princess for a long time, but the princess thought she was speaking in some foreign language, and the same foreign lady mistook the German a Qing court lady spoke for Chinese.[80] It seems that the language barrier was substantial in this kind of socialization, and language lost its efficacy in communication.

Instead, the corporeal became the focus of attention for both parties in interaction. (In some sense, even the linguistic was mediated by and understood *as* the corporeal. A Qing princess once naively asked the Yu sisters whether one acquires a foreign language by drinking the water of that country.[81] In this "tale," learning foreign languages was clearly conceived as a corporeal experience, as represented by the bodily act of "drinking.") Physical appearance, make up, dresses, facial expressions, etiquette, bodily manners—these corporeal features constituted the main channel through which each party in

[79] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 147.

[80] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong sui ji*, 36-7.

[81] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 24; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 139.

interaction strived to present the favorable image of the self to the other and infer relevant information—such as taste, status, upbringing, intention, and personality—of the other.[82]

During the first few months following their entry into the imperial court, the curly haired Yu sisters were ordered by the empress dowager to be dressed in the latest styles of Paris. Cixi, a lover of beauty, now finally got a chance to have a close look at the high fashion of the West. While the hybrid image of Yu Rongling covered by Greek tunic back in Paris served as a perfect advertisement for Duncan's universalist Hellenistic interpretation of ancient Greece and (perhaps inadvertently) catered for the Oriental exotic and (queer) erotic appetite of the Western audience, now the cosmopolitan Yu sisters in the fashionable Stamler and Jeanne gowns became a magnifying glass for Cixi and her imperial and court ladies to scrutinize, compare, and reflect upon the states of corporeality of Western and Chinese women.[83] After closely examining the heavy layers of the apparel, especially the whale bone and steel made corsets, Cixi scornfully commented that it is indeed "pitiable" for Western women to bind their waists with steel bars to the extent that they can hardly breathe, and this is "no better than" foot binding.[84]

Being painfully aware of the fact that the bound feet of Chinese women had become the laughing-stock of foreigners, Cixi, who herself as a Manchu deemed foot binding abhorrent, unexpectedly turned out to be on the same side as Isadora Duncan for criticizing Victorian clothing for its "barbarian" oppression of the female body. It is no wonder that Cixi was so interested in Duncan's philosophy of modern dance, as its

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[82] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 53.

[83] Ibid., 8-9; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 81, 125-26, 133.

[84] Isaac Taylor Headland and Dr. Headland, *Court Life in China: The Capital, Its Officials and People* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909), 105-6, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 184.

universalist claims can be readily exploited to "equalize" Western and Chinese women based on a "no-better-than" argument, at least on the corporeal dimension.

Cixi was however no true follower of Duncan—she would certainly frown upon the "exhibitionism" in Duncan's philosophy. After seeing an oil portrait of Deling dressed in a usual European evening dress, Cixi was very much shocked by the revealing garb "without sleeves and without collars" and "laughed and exclaimed" that "[e]verything seems to *go backwards* in foreign countries." [85] The same comment would also apply perfectly to Duncan's even more revealing Greek tunic, and Cixi was indeed partly right about the fact that exposing the female body can be used as a gesture of returning to the past. Cixi's comment here echoes the linear temporality of evolutionary thinking, which was appropriated to establish a sense of cultural superiority by interpreting the Western fashion as a kind of cultural atavism.[86] The same logic exists in Cixi's remarks on the physical features of Western women—she thought they were unattractive because of their hairy faces and cat-like colored eyes, which has an undertone of biological atavism.[87]

Biased as they seem, these comments made by Cixi should not be simply seen as a narrow-minded, egocentric, and racist defense of the superiority of, among other things, the Chinese (female) corporeality. Rather, they are informed and transformed by a constant awareness of the self being viewed and judged, with no less if not more bias, by

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[85] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 210 (emphasis added), quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 199.

[86] Saying this does not suggest that Cixi necessarily had any direct knowledge of the scientific theory of evolution *per se*, but rather emphasizes the developmental linear temporality implied here, which Cixi might pick up from some vernacular variants of evolutionary thinking in the "everyday discourse" discussed in Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*. As clearly demonstrated by the expression "go backwards," the evolutionary/developmental linear temporality had supplanted the traditional spatio-cultural hierarchy of *hua yi zhi bie* 華夷之別 (the distinction between China and its peripheral).

[87] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 144; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 189.

the foreign other, real or imagined. After every diplomatic meeting, Cixi always asked the Yu sisters to report everything about what the foreign visitor(s) thought of the audience, the food, the decoration, and most importantly, Cixi herself.[88] When foreign visitors were present at a luncheon, Cixi would order the other imperial women to sit down to eat with her at the table, even though the court rules strictly forbade this, because she was afraid that following the rules on such occasions would make the foreign visitors "think we are barbarians" and "form a wrong impression."[89] Partly due to the pressure of this foreign gaze, Cixi (and some of the imperial women and court ladies) even began to use foreign-made cosmetics, drink coffee, and adopt the etiquette of hand shaking.[90] After noticing that some of her foreign guests "did not behave very well," Cixi returned that gaze: "They [the foreigners] seem to think we are only Chinese and do not know anything, and look down upon us. I notice these things very quickly and am surprised to see people who claim to be well educated and civilized acting the way they do. I think we whom they call barbarians are much more civilized and have better manners."[91]

If the distinction between the barbarous and the civilized, the primitive and the evolved, the backward and the advanced is so blurred and fluid in the realm of the corporeal and subject to different interpretations, and if the corporeal is governed by the logic of evolution thinking, then the final authority to judge does not rest in the hands of foreigners, or Chinese, or anyone, but rather in some indefinite future to be determined

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[88] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 53, 238; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 146-7.

[89] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 234.

[90] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 50, 152, 188; Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji*, 25.

[91] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 52-3.

by "natural selection." It is in this indeterminacy that lies the possibility of agency, illusive as it may seem with hindsight. Cixi once compared herself with her model hero Queen Victoria of Britain: "Although I have heard much about Queen Victoria and read a part of her life which someone has translated into Chinese, still I don't think her life was half so interesting and eventful as mine. My life is not finished yet and *no one knows what is going to happen in the future*. I may surprise the foreigners some day with something extraordinary and do something quite contrary to anything I have yet done."[92]

From this perspective, Cixi and the "Chinese corporeality" she defended should not be dismissed as "the old" to be buried in the past, nor should the Western counterparts be regarded as "the new" that was predestined to prevail in the future. Instead, the very act of comparing, emulating, and competing compels Cixi, along with whatever she represents, and the Western counterparts into the same evolutionary space-time, whose future fates are only to be adjudicated by the law of "natural selection." It is in this sense that this "new" (inter)subjectivity ("new," because both the self and the other are being constantly redefined and transformed in this process) activated in the evolutionary space-time may be retrospectively called "modern."

The same corporeal consciousness may well apply to the case of dance. If the dance of "the Greeks," "the Egyptian," or "the early Italian" can be regarded as valid candidates to represent "the dance of the past" and, further, "the dance of the future," why cannot the dance of the Chinese? By simply asking this question, the universalist logic of Duncan's modern dance is reversed into a nationalist one. Since this nationalist pursuit was informed by the linear temporality of evolutionary competition, "the dance of the Chinese"

[92] Ibid., 356, emphasis added.

created thereby cannot be simply "old" or "traditional," but must be at the same time "new" or "modern"—just as Duncan's "Greek dance" which, as Rongling once commented, "can be said to be creating the new, and as well reviving the old."[93]

"Reviving the Old" and "Creating the New"

The motivation for Cixi to order Yu Rongling to create "Chinese dance" was unlikely to be purely artistic or entertaining. Given the perceived importance of the corporeal in her dealing with foreigners, Cixi probably reserved a place for dance in her diplomatic agenda. The potential utility of dance in diplomacy was first sensed by Yu Geng when he was at the post of Qing Minister to Japan (1895-1899). His wife Louisa once received a visit of a Japanese countess, during which Rongling, then at an age no more than eleven, against Louisa's will volunteered to perform a classical Japanese dance *Tsurukame* 鶴亀 (crane-tortoise) she learned from a Japanese servant without her parents' knowledge. Rongling's performance greatly impressed the countess, and also Yu Geng who heard about the countess' praise afterwards. Realizing that dance may be of some use in the diplomatic life of his family, he hired a professional Japanese dancer to teach Rongling (and probably Deling too) at the legation.[94] After Yu Geng arrived in Paris as Qing Minister to France, he quickly put his idea about the socio-political function of dance into practice by hosting fancy balls at the Chinese legation for the Parisian diplomatic circles

[93] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45.

[94] Ibid., 44; Ye, "Xi taihou yuqian nüguan Yu Rongling (Si)," 34-8, 38.

and attending balls held elsewhere, at which the Yu children were active participants (fig. 3).[95]

Cixi was aware of and interested in these dancing activities—including both artistic dance and social dance—of the Yu family abroad.[96] As shown below, due to gender issues, Cixi preferred artistic dance to social dance, which led her to invest in the former eventually. This decision linked the origin of the "Chinese dance," whether classical or modern, to Duncan's modern dance in a relation of emulation, differentiation, and competition.

When the Yu sisters served at her court, Cixi once asked Deling: "What is dancing? Someone told me that two people hold hands and jump all over the room. If that is the case I don't see any pleasure in it at all. Do you have to jump up and down with men? "[97] After hearing out Deling's explanation of all kinds of social dances popular in the Western societies, Cixi ask the Yu sisters to give her some demonstration. The two girls danced a waltz accompanied by a large gramophone found in Cixi's bedroom. Cixi commented that the dance was "very pretty, and just like the girls used to do centuries ago in China," but she thought it would be very inappropriate in China for a man to dance with a girl, let alone with his arm around the girl's waist. Still, through switching between foreign and Chinese perspectives, Cixi admitted that "[i]t shows that they [the foreigners]

[95] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 232, 246; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 102; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 114-5, 125.

[96] Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 114-5.

[97] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 101-2, quoted in Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 170.

are broader minded than us."[98] In fact, Cixi might be "broader minded" than she admitted. Deling once performed for Cixi a "Greek dance" Duncan had taught her, though, following Louisa's advice, in costume having "plenty of lining, so that it would not be *too* transparent." Cixi thought the dance was beautiful and said: "I should like very much to see her [Duncan]. I wonder if you could persuade her to come to China."[99]

Cixi was apparently drawn more to Duncan's artistic dance than social dance, because the former seemed more gender "appropriate" and more in accord with Cixi's conception of dance as what "the girls used to do centuries ago in China." When watching the Yu sisters' performances of Western dance, what was in Cixi's mind was the long lost dance tradition in China, which eventually motivated her to order Rongling to resurrect that tradition. This project was in large part motivated by, and emulated and competed with, Duncan's effort to revive the dance of the ancient Greeks, which, as elaborated above, had already blurred various temporal, racial, and cultural boundaries and been subject to local appropriations and reinterpretations. Although Cixi's agenda of "reviving the old" was unlikely to be guided by Duncan's universalist and evolutionist vision, the very motivation of emulation and competition with early modern dance alone determined the resurrected (or created, more precisely) "Chinese dance" to be a "modern" product. As demonstrated below, not just the motivation, but also the sources, elements, and methods used to create the "Chinese dance," and even the venue and situation of its first performance, were both Chinese and foreign, old and new.

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[98] Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 102-3; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 172.

[99] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 250-1; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 171.

On an occasion where Cixi and Louisa discussed Western and Chinese arts, the empress dowager said: “Long ago at the end of the Ming dynasty, there was an imperial secondary wife with the surname Tian who could dance very well, but unfortunately it has been lost. I have always wanted the princesses of the royal houses to study dance, but could never find the right person. Now that Rongling know how to dance, let her study in the palace!”[100] Following Cixi’s order, just like Duncan who invented the “Greek dance” through observing the body figures in various forms of ancient Greek artifacts displayed in museums, Rongling, by studying the images of dancing beauties portrayed in ancient Chinese paintings in the imperial art collections and discussing musical matters with the court eunuch musicians, created at least three “Chinese dances”—*Hehua xianzi wu* 荷花仙子舞 (Dance of the Lotus Blossom Fairy), *Shan wu* 扇舞 (Fan Dance), and *Ruyi wu* 如意舞 (Ruyi Dance, where *ruyi* is a jade mascot meaning good fortune and pleasance).[101]

It is very likely that Rongling might have also incorporated motifs, postures, moves inspired by Peking Opera, classical Japanese dance, and Duncan’s modern dance and ballet. For example, the fairy theme of *Lotus Blossom Fairy* resembles those of typical Western ballets, and the prop fan in the *Fan Dance* was also characteristic of the classical Japanese dance *Tsurukame* she learned in Tokyo.[102] Moreover, as Cixi was a lover of

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[100] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong sui ji*, 11. Here “Tian” refers to the secondary wife of the Chongzhen 崇禎 Emperor (Zhu Youjian 朱由檢). However, the official history only says that Tian “had many artistic talents” (*duo caiyi* 多才藝), but does not specifically mention dancing. See Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., “*Hou fei liezhuan* II” 后妃列傳第二 [The second biography of empresses and secondary imperial wives] in *Ming shi* 明史 [Book of Ming] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), vol. 114, 3528-46, 3545.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Yu Rongling, “Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu,” 44.

Peking Opera, Rongling had many chances to watch the performances of famous actors, and the court musicians were all accompanists of the opera.[103]

While it is unclear whether, and to what extent, Rongling directly borrowed formal elements from Duncan's modern dance, it can be reasonably inferred that Duncan's teaching had significant influence on Rongling's choreography. Unlike the training of classical Japanese dance, Western ballet, or Peking Opera, the primary goal of which is to let the apprentice master the well-developed dance moves of the existing repertoire, Duncan's instruction offered greater opportunity to expose her students to the more intellectual and creative process of choreography.[104]

Duncan, as Deling put it, was a "mistress of dance-creation," creating dance for each girl according to her own individuality. The Yu sisters often had chance to observe how Duncan choreographed new dances by "interpreting" the music, a spiritual process phrased by Duncan as "I have to create as I do."[105] Their long walks, observations, and private conversations with Duncan in the Louvre and Versailles would be another good opportunity for Rongling to learn this rare and intimate feat, through which the static postures of the great sculptures and paintings, with "every important detail" explained "over and over again," were animated into Duncan's legendary dances. As Duncan stated in *The Dance of the Future*, "I shall not teach the children to imitate my movements, but to make their own, I shall not force them to study certain definite movements, I shall help them to develop those movements which are natural to them." This consistent exposure to

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[103] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji*, 8-10; Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 27-36.

[104] Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 44.

[105] Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 239-40, 246-7.

Duncan's choreographic practice, an invaluable experience that was hard to get elsewhere, conceivably left a deep imprint in Rongling's creative mind, with which she could breathe life into the portraits of ancient beauties and alchemized dance elements from different cultural sources into "Chinese" dance movements which were "natural" to her.[106]

Rongling's first dance performance in the imperial palace was triggered by a diplomatic crisis. In February 1904, the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) broke out after the failure of diplomatic negotiation.[107] Awkwardly caught in the middle of the struggle between two expansionist powers over the Far East hegemony, the much weaker Qing Empire had to embarrassingly choose a neutral stance in this war rampaging on Chinese soil. The empress dowager was, once again, deeply troubled by a sense of personal and national humiliation and stuck in a sullen mood. In order to cheer Cixi up, Rongling was urged to hold a personal concert in the palace on the third day of the fifth lunar month (June 16th, 1904), which was probably the first formal concert of an individual dancer/choreographer held in China.[108]

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[106] Compared with Yu Rongling's trainings in classical Japanese dance and ballet, the influence of Duncan's modern dance on Rongling's choreography should be predominant. Yu Rongling's ballet training was only short term. As per Deling, the Yu sisters began their study with Duncan in either late 1900 or early 1901, which continued for more than two years (Yu Deling [Princess Der Ling], *Lotos Petals*, 232, 239, *Kowtow*, 271), while according to Rongling, the study started in 1901 and lasted for two years (Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45). Therefore, a reasonable estimation of the time when the Yu sisters ended their study with Duncan is sometime in late 1902. Because Rongling only began her ballet training after leaving Duncan's studio and the Yu family left France for China in early 1903 (Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45; Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 123-4), the duration of Rongling's ballet training cannot be more than a few months. While it is uncertain how long Rongling was trained in classical Japanese dance, it is known that the training method was imitation-based, the student copying whatever the teacher danced (Yu Rongling, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 45), and Rongling was quite young then (around ten).

[107] Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "Late Ch'ing Foreign Relations, 1866-1905" in John K. Fairbank and Kwang-Ching Liu, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vol. 11, 70-141, 130-41.

[108] Yu Rongling, *Qing gong suo ji*, 40-1.

Three dances, all chosen by Cixi herself, were in the concert program. The first was a Spanish dance, the second the *Ruyi* dance, and the last the Greek dance. Because there were both Western and Chinese dances, two bands were oddly arranged by the sides of the "stage"—the red-carpet covered courtyard of the *Lei Shou Tang* 樂壽堂 (Hall of Happiness and Longevity) in the *Yihe Yuan* 頤和園 (Garden of Nurtured Harmony, or Summer Palace). While the Chinese band consisted of court accompanists of Peking Opera, the Western orchestra was transported from Tianjin by Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916), future President of the Republic of China and briefly the emperor. The costume for the two Western dances was carried by Rongling back to Beijing when her family left Paris, and that for the Chinese *Ruyi* dance was particularly tailored as per Cixi's order. Besides the empress dowager, in the audience were Emperor Guangxu 光緒, the other imperial women, court ladies, and the wives and daughters of princes.[109]

Fig 8: Yu Rongling performing a "Greek dance" in the Summer Palace, Beijing, 1904.

[109] Ibid.

No detail about the dances was available, except for the costume. For the Spanish dance, presumably fast-paced and passionate, Rongling donned a long yellow satin dress, a shawl with red tassels covering her shoulders, with two big red flowers attached to the sides of her hair. In sharp contrast to this "Spanish" costume and that of the "Greek dance" (fig. 8),[110] for the *Ruyi* dance, Rongling was clad in the formal Manchu *qizhuang* 旗裝 (literally, "flag dress")—more specifically, a *mangpao* 蟒袍 (literally, "python robe"), an all-covering long red dress embroidered with dragon-like patterns. Her hair was braided in the Manchu style *erbatou* 二把頭 (literally, "two barred head") with two red tassels dangling on the sides (fig. 9). The prop *ruyi*, instead of using the real jade one (too unwieldy and hard to decorate), was made of paper and bound with red satin, which was to be presented to the empress dowager at the end of the dance as a gesture of paying homage. The concert ended with the "Greek dance."[111] The performance was successful, which greatly delighted the "Old Buddha" Cixi.

[110] Based on the style of the architecture in the background, this picture was probably taken at where Yu's dance concert was held—at the front door of the *Le shou tang* in the Summer Palace. It can be seen from the picture that the costume is of Egyptian style, instead of the Greek tunic characteristic of Duncan's dance. It might be the case that since there was no Greek tunic at hand, Rongling instead chose the Egyptian costume brought back from Paris—after all, the hybrid "Egypto-Greek" style was "particularly common" on the turn-of-the-century Parisian stage, with which Rongling must be very familiar. Note that Yu seems to have also performed a "Greek dance" in a ballet production back in Paris, which could be an "Egypto-Greek" hybrid. See Tong, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu 1912-1949*, 5. However, the dance gesture captured in the picture and the fact that Rongling was neither in ballet shoes nor *en pointe* both suggest that this "Greek dance" was unlikely to be a ballet. In either case, Cixi probably would not care much about the differences, but conflate them under a single label of "Greek dance." The picture is from Yu, "Qingmo wudaojia Yu Rongling huiyilu," 44.

[111] Ibid.

Fig 9: Yu Rongling in Manchu-style costume for performing the *Ruyi* dance, Summer Palace, 1904.

However, this performance should not be simply treated as some "mindless" court entertainment—just as those in the ancient dynasties whose mere purpose was to please the emperors. As argued here, this concert of Rongling, in addition to its diverting function, may be interpreted as a rehearsal of introducing the newly (re)born "Chinese dance" into the competitive corporeal stage of world dances. Cixi's choices of the three "national" dances deserve some deliberation. The new "Chinese dance" accounted for only one of the three items in the program, while foreign dances constituted the majority. Clearly, Cixi was not interested in Chinese dance *per se*, but rather the Chinese dance *in relation to* Western dances, especially the early modern dance (or "Greek dance"), which she had watched once before (performed by Deling).

The ordering of the dances is informative. The Greek dance was the last one, corresponding to the last act of a typical Peking Opera performance called *zhouzi* 軸子 (literally, the "axis")—an insignificant act during the acting of which seasoned audience would leave for home. Rongling's *Ruyi* dance was arranged next to last, mirroring the second act from the last in Peking Opera called *yazhou* 壓軸 (the one "on top of the axis"), which was the most important act usually performed by the leading actor in a troupe. Being a big fan and major sponsor of Peking Opera who was instrumental in its formation, Cixi seems to use this arrangement to suggest that the creation of the "Chinese dance" was intended to challenge and compete with the early modern dance. Thus, this "act" of Rongling may be read as a means for Cixi to demonstrate the potential superiority of the Chinese (female) corporeality—"I think we whom they call barbarians are much more civilized and have better manners." Although "they," the foreigners, were not present in person among the audience, their constant gaze imagined by Cixi was probably lurking by the stage.

Beneath the surface of the stark difference between the image of Rongling dancing in the skimpy Greek tunic and that of the same girl moving gracefully in the head-to-toe Manchu *qizhuang* was hidden a long neglected connection between Isadora Duncan and Empress Dowager Cixi, between early modern dance and (classical) Chinese dance, and between the Western corporeality and its Chinese counterpart, which were in constant interaction and transformation. Yu Rongling, with her "mixed-blood," cosmopolitan identity and experiences, and border-crossing dance, played a non-negligible role in establishing and facilitating this corporeal connection and interaction.

In June 1926—twenty two years after Rongling's dance concert in the imperial palace, eighteen years after Cixi's death, fifteen years after the demise of the Qing Empire, and one year before the tragic death of Isadora Duncan—John Van Antwerp MacMurray (1881–1960), American Minister to the Republic of China (1925-1929), filmed a three-minute length video footage of Yu Rongling, who was in her late thirties, performing a *Sword Dance*.[112] Against the background of the grand walls and turrets of Beijing with part of the Temple of Heaven hidden behind, Rongling, dressed in traditional Chinese theater styled costume and wielding two Chinese swords, danced trippingly and confidently in front of the camera (fig. 10). The dance, including the theme, costume, props, and movements, was apparently inspired by the performance of Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961), the great master of Peking Opera, in his celebrated play *Ba wang bie ji* 霸王別姬 (literally, the heroic king's farewell to his secondary wife, fig. 11).

Fig 10: Yu Rongling performing Sword Dance, Beijing, 1926.

[112]Doi: http://blogs.princeton.edu/reelmudd/2010/09/peking-friends-and-family-scenes/.

Fig 11: Mei Lanfang performing *Ba wang bie ji* (The heroic king’s farewell to his secondary wife).

Interestingly, just a few months after this filming, in late September 1926, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, also pioneers of (American) modern dance, began their second tour in China, during which they performed two dance works with Chinese themes—*Wu shuai bie qi* 吳帥別妻 (General Wu’s farewell to his wife, fig. 12) and *Bai yu guanyin* 白玉觀音 (White Jade Avalokitesvara, fig. 13) in Shanghai. Mei Lanfang directly contributed to the choreography of the fomer—the American version of *Ba wang bie ji*—during Denishawn’s pervious Chinese tour less than a year ago in Octorber 1925.[113] Yu

[113] This collaboration between Mei and Denishawn would turn out to be instrumental in the sensational success of Mei’s American tour five years later in 1931. See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 44; Mei Shaowu 梅紹武, *Wo de fuqin Mei Lanfang* 我的父親梅蘭芳 [My Father Mei Lanfang] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 184.

Rongling's *Sword Dance* and another work of her the *Guanyin wu* 觀音舞 (Avalokitesvara dance, see fig. 14) correspond neatly to these two "American modern dance" works. Therefore, although the image of Rongling in traditional Chinese costume, coupled with the grand architectures of the past dynasties, in today's view seems to be a perfect representative of the "classical" Chinese dance of the past, it may be better seen as a continued effort of Rongling to posit "modern" Chinese dance in an emulating, competing, and mutual-borrowing relationship with the Western, especially American, early modern dance.

Fig 12: Denishawn dancer Anne Douglas performing *General Wu's Farewell to His Wife*, China, 1926.

Fig 13: Ruth St. Denis performing the *White Jade*, 1926

Fig 14: Yu Rongling performing the *Guanyin wu* (Avalokitesvara dance).

In November 1926, just one month after Denishawn's performance in Shanghai, the dance troupe of The Isadora Duncan School in Moscow, led by Irma Duncan (1897-1977), one of the six "Isadorables" (Duncan's major students and adopted "daughters"), began their Chinese tour, which received considerable media coverage in China.[114] News reports, reviews, and comments written by Chinese and foreign intellectuals—for example, the famous writers/artists Tian Han 田漢, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, and the Prussian philosopher Alfred Westharp (countryman of Irma Duncan and good friend of the Chinese philosopher Liang Shuming 梁漱溟)—appeared in several major print media, reflecting seriously on the nature and potential socio-cultural roles of modern dance in China.[115]

What is of particular interest here is Tian Han's response to Irma's performance at the Odeon Theater in Shanghai. The near-sighted artist could not see the performance on stage clearly—in his eyes was only "*the movement of shade and colour*" that were "so simple and pure, so natural, and so powerful."[116] Yet this in fact gave Tian a vantage point to peek at the "essence" of Irma's dance. As he talked to Irma,

> "Yours is really a kind of movement, but not the so-called dance. You are not a bright star among many dancing girls; you are virtually a commander of the Red

[114] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 45.

[115] Ibid.; Tian Han 田漢, "Shuo feng" 朔風 [The north wind], *Fan bao* 汎報 1.1 (1927) in *Tian Han quan ji* 田漢全集 [The complete works of Tian Han] (Hebei: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 2000), vol.13, 81-7; Alfred Westharp, "Xila shi wudao de yuanli" 希臘式舞蹈的原理 [The rationale of the Greek-style dance], *Beiyang hua bao* 北洋畫報 no. 49 (1926): 4; Pantu 叛徒, "Dengken tiaowu tuan" 登肯跳舞團 [The Duncan dance troupe], *Liang you* 良友 no. 12 (1927): 17.

[116] Tian, "Shuo feng," 83, Italicized parts are written in English in the original text.

> Army on stage! Your teacher is known for reviving the ancient Greek dance, but I saw in your dance drama not so much ancient Greece as modern Russia! The resistance of the oppressed, the triumph of life! …"[117]

"Quite so, Mr. Tien," Replied Irma.[118] Tian continues in his essay,

> Among those who had seen Ruth St. Denis' dancing and then came to see Irma Duncan's dancing, there must be someone who would say their [Irma's] dancing is overly non-technical, overly simple. In fact, this kind of technique that does not pursue techniques, and this simplicity that dances out of complexity, are the greatest characteristics of the New arts: "the New artists are not jewelers carving gems; they are blacksmiths. Their weapons are iron hammers." You have a look at Irma's *Blacksmith*! They are truly the unifier of life and art. Irma explains that the essence of her dance is distilled from the "*unconscious movement*" of our daily life. This word in particular proves that their art is consistent with the mainstream of modern literature. Ah, the embodiment of bitterness and depression! The manifestation of the unconscious! Aren't these what we are doing? Irma's dancing, dressed in red and barefooted, raising her arm with a battle cry, leading her troops to fight toward where evil hides, flying and dancing toward a bright realm, is the dancing of modern people.[119]

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 84.

[119] Ibid., 84-5, Italicized parts are written in English in the original text.

What was filtered through Tian's near-sighted eyes turned out to be quite far-sighted—he spotted in her modern dance a paradoxical convergence of the abstract avant-garde modernist dance *movement* (as in "the movement of shade and colour") and the international socialist/leftist *movement* (as in the revolutionary movement of the Red Army) galvanized by the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, which would become a constant refrain in the development of modern dance in China throughout the decades to come.[120] In fact, the world of international modern dance was about to experience a profound "leftist turn" in the 1930s—the "decorative, exotic female representations popularized by St. Denis" (as those of Rongling's) would be "rejected," as would be "the maternal representations of 'Women' that Duncan's later choreography constructed," both of which had been accurately "predicted" by Tian in the paragraphs quoted above.[121]

However, what was not mentioned by Tian is the tension between elitist modernism and populist socialism/leftism inherent in Irma's dance, which may be best illustrated by the stark contrast between the costume and movement in her *Blacksmith* mentioned above (fig. 15). As shown in the picture, two young girls, barefoot and dressed in the exposing Greek-style tunic characteristic of Duncan's modern dance, clenching their fists as if holding the long helve of a hammer, seem to be hammering the iron on an anvil together or engaged in fighting with each other. This dance may be interpreted as Irma's effort to reform/transform the elite modernist femininity defined by her mentor-mother, through fusing it with the militant masculinity of the proletarian blacksmith. Yet it may as well be

[120] This intersection of artistic avant-garde and political vanguard was also a persisting theme characterizing Tian's own artistic pursuit throughout his life. See Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2014).

[121] Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 21.

interpreted as Irma's reluctance to completely proletarianize and masculinize such elite femininity in the socialist regime by reserving its most potent symbol. After all, the feminine details of the costume and the female body were so conveniently filtered out, inadvertently or not, by Tian's bad sight—what remained were only the "barefoot" and the color "red" which symbolize the proletarian side of the story.

If the (feminine) elite modernism serves to make manifest (or "enlighten") the repressed (masculine) proletarian unconscious, it makes the unconscious become the (new) conscious. Then, after the trace of elite modernism was further stripped off (as symbolized by the abandonment of the Greek tunic, which would happen in a few years), would not it become the (new) repressed unconscious? Would the repressed find its way of return? These questions are the main thread for the two following chapters. Note that highlighting the tension between elitist modernism and populist socialism/leftism is by no means to "go backward" to reinforce the division between the two. Rather, its purpose is to emphasize that the relationship between them is characterized by *both* symbiosis *and* competition.

Fig 15: Irma Duncan's *Blacksmith*, 1926

Chapter 2 Transmediating Kinesthesia: Wu Xiaobang and Modern Dance in China, 1929-1939

In the spring of 1929, the twenty-three year old Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦 (1906-1995), who grew up in a wealthy landlord and financial capitalist family in Suzhou but secretly joined the Communist Youth's League, set off for Tokyo, where he began to study violin and Western music (fig. 1). Prior to his education in music, Wu was at first a student of finance, then a bank intern, a student of law, a military cadet, a soldier of the Great Revolution (1924-1927), and a middle school history teacher.[1] Just like his previous endeavors, the young bourgeois' enthusiasm in music was short-lived. One day, Wu watched the dance *A Group of Ghosts* performed by the students of Waseda University. Wu was so shocked by the power of the performance that he could not sleep for several nights. The dance, accompanied by the rhythmic knocks of a Buddhist wooden fish, brought to life the images of various ghosts—vampires, people who starved to death, and those who died in injustice—lost and wandering in a silent night. In Wu's own account, this dark dance struck him because it forcefully embodied the miseries of the oppressed, which made him settle down in dance as his life-long pursuit.[2]

[1] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya* 我的舞蹈藝術生涯 [My Artistic Career of Dance] reprinted in Feng Shuangbai and Yu Ping, eds., *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji* 吳曉邦舞蹈文集 [Anthology of Wu Xiaobang on Dance] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1, 1-162, 1-16.

[2] Ibid., 18.

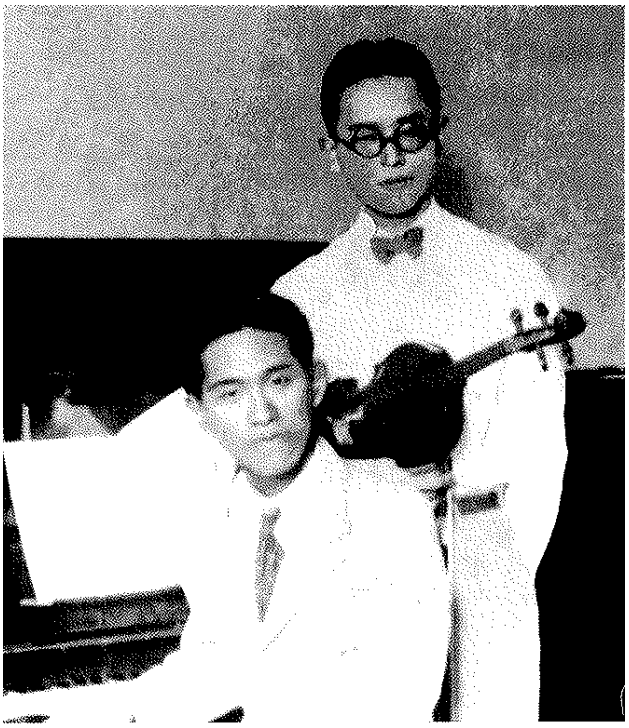

Fig 1: Wu Xiaobang (on the right) and his Japanese violin teacher, Tokyo, c.a. 1929.

From 1929 to 1936, Wu studied modern dance in Tokyo first with Takata Seiko 高田原世子 (1895-1977) and then shortly with Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉 (1900-1977), both of whom learned modern dance in Western countries, and became the first professional dancer in modern China. He later spent more than two decades transforming the modern dance (known as the "New dance" around the globe at that time) he introduced from Japan into the so-called "China's New Dance," which apparently emulated the various "New" art movements in literature, theater, music, painting, and cinema, all promoted by the May Fourth intellectuals and later the leftist and left-leaning artists in the first decades of the twentieth century.[3] In creating a new identity for dance in China, touring the whole

[3] Ibid., 93; Among other dance practitioners who contributed to this enduring endeavor, Dai Ailian (1916-2006), who studied German modern dance and ballet in England, is another important figure. Yet Dai participated in this cause only after 1940 and her major contribution was primarily concentrated on ethnic and folk dance and, later, ballet. See Richard Glasstone, *The Story of Dai Ailian: Icon of Chinese Folk*

country to disseminate his arts, establishing studios and schools to educate the first generation of Chinese dancers, and publishing books on dance aesthetics, pedagogy, histories, and critical reviews, Wu, "father of China's New dance," stands as a distinct figure in modern Chinese cultural history.

Given Wu's importance in the history of modern Chinese dance, the self stylized episode of Wu's viewing of *A Group of Ghosts* may be compared to the legendary moment of Lu Xun watching slides at Sendai Medical College more than two decades earlier, which supposedly started his writing career. In both events, the abrupt changes of life courses were stimulated by visual images in which the body (and the theme of death) figured saliently. Yet Lu Xun and Wu followed seemingly opposite paths—while Lu Xun chose the mind over the body as he abandoned medicine for words, Wu devoted himself to the wordless bodily dance. However, this dichotomy between words and the body dramatized since the time of Lu Xun turned out to be simplistic in the case of Wu's dance. The dancing body and literary narrative had always been closely yet uneasily intertwined with each other in Wu's choreography. This transmedia entanglement is crucial to understanding the significance and the particular role of Wu and his dance, which have largely escaped the scholarly attention on modern Chinese culture, in the field of the

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Dance, Pioneer of Chinese Ballet (Alton: Dance Books Limited, 2007); Wang Kefen 王克芬 and Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, eds., *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* 中國近現代舞蹈發展史 [The development history of modern and contemporary Chinese dance] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 72-80; Tong Yan 仝妍, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu* 1912-1949 民國時期舞蹈研究 1912-1949 [Research on the dance of the Republican era 1912-1949] (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2013), 69-71, 88-9. For other secondary yet non-negligible forces shaping the New dance movement in China, see Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*; Tong, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu* 1912-1949.

"New" and leftist literary and art movements in 1930s China during a time of national crisis and war.[4]

In order to better explicate this relationship between modern dance and the other literary and art forms, first, two particular conditions under which the transnational travel of Wu's modern dance occurred need to be highlighted. The first concerns the timing of this travel. At a first glance, the story of modern dance told above seems to be not unlike those of the other sibling arts—a group of students went abroad, usually in Japan, to learn modern Western arts and brought them back to reform the "old" and establish the "new" (with the minor exception that Wu was alone in his generation as the only one to seriously study dance). However, there are complications. When Wu brought modern dance to China in the mid 1930s, it was more than fifteen years after the May Fourth movement, and all the other major "New" arts had already taken root in China and begun

[4] There is no existing study on the transmission of modern dance to China in English. For the scene of early Japanese modern dance, see Gennifer Weissenfeld, *Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde 1905-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 233-39. For the transcultural dissemination and evolvement of modern dance in Japan and Taiwan in the colonial period, see Faye Yuan Kleeman, "Body (Language) aross the Sea: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Embodiment of Post-/Colonial Modernity" in Shu-mei Shih and Ping-hui Liao, eds., *Comparatizing Taiwan* (U.K.: Routlege, 2015), 217-44. Emily Wilcox discusses some artistic and research practices of Wu Xiaobang in the period under study here from the anthropological perspective of "dancers doing field work," but neither Wu nor the transnational travel and adaptation of modern dance in China is the primary focus; see Emily Wilcox, "Dancers Doing Fieldwork: Socialist Aesthetics and Bodily Experience in the People's Republic of China," *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*, 17.2 (Fall 2010): 6-16.

As for the Chinese scholarship on Wu, his endeavor of learning and performing modern dance in Japan and China in this period is too often hastily subsumed into a "leftist" narrative characterized by a linear transition from the "bourgeois" (modernism) to the "revolutionary" (leftism), rather than treated as a complicated transnational and transcultural phenomenon in its own right, fraught with problematics and dilemmas. Moreover, the issues associated with the unique characteristic of dance—using the physical body and its movement as the primary artistic medium—has not yet been explicitly and adequately addressed. This study aims to overcome these two major shortcomings. Also, the existing Chinese historiography on Wu tends to overly identify him with the leftist artistic camp in the 1930s, largely a result of retrospectively extrapolating Wu's experience as a CCP member since 1949 to his earlier life (as Wu himself did too, to some extent) under ideological imperative. The current study shows that, just as in the cases of many his contemporary artists, the "bourgeois," "liberal," or "May Fourth" aspect of Wu coexisted uneasily yet symbiotically with his "leftist" aspect during this period (actually throughout his whole life), and thus complicated the image of Wu in the current Chinese dance historiography. See, for example, Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 64-72; Tong, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu* 1912-1949, 57-59, 67-69.

to wield considerable influence in major cities in both the discourses and practices of enlightenment, nation building, and revolution. Moreover, in the shadows of gathering war clouds, the "new" arts had started to join forces in the cause of mass mobilization to prepare China for the total war against Japan. Thus, the main task for Wu and his dance, as a latecomer, was to strategically carve out a niche within the field of these more "powerful" new arts through cooperation, differentiation, and competition, in order to establish a both legitimate and independent status under historical conditions different from the May Fourth Era.[5]

The second condition concerns the ideology of modern dance's promoting *kinesthesia* as the primary means for meaning generation and communication. Kinesthesia,

[5] Note that Western social dance and popular dance performance in, for instance, cabarets, revues, circuses, magic shows, and films had indeed established their own markets and popularity in several treaty-port cities, but these dance forms "biased" the perceived public image of theatrical dance toward something more like fashionable social skills or "vulgar" and "decadent" commercial diversion. Pointing out this by no means denies the value of these dance genres as cultural phenomena deserving serious and focused study. Rather, the purpose here is to stress that these dances, widely deemed non-art or anti-art in the period under study, were "liabilities," instead of "assets," to the newcomer modern dance which strived to establish itself as a "useful" and serious art.

In addition to social and popular dance, ballet also began to appear on the stages of several treaty ports (especially Shanghai) since the early 1920s (with limited influence), mainly initiated by the "White Russians" in exile after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. However, ballet had long been an entrenched "elite" art associated exclusively with nobility and upper-class, which could not be easily retooled to serve the urgent leftist movements. Moreover, modern dance, since its birth, had positioned itself as the antithesis of ballet in terms of ideology and practice. Therefore, it was very difficult for modern dance to capitalize on the existing (limited) influence and audience base of ballet. Actually, in 1939, Wu indeed made an attempt to appropriate the influence of ballet by advertising his first dance drama *Yingsu hua* (The poppy flower) as a "modern ballet". This strategy, which exploited the common conflation of "ballet" with all kinds of "dance drama" in the Chinese popular perception, seemed to receive harsh reviews from advocates of ballet. For example, Si criticizes Wu for his "over-publicizing" the dance drama by illegitimately associating his "naive" work with the mature establishment of ballet. It seems that, since then, Wu had forsaken this attempt for good. See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 48-51, 43-48; Tong, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu* 1912-1949, 11-14, 8-9; Andrew D. Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919-1954* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2010); Qin Tailai 秦泰來 and Du Ao 杜鰲, "Zhongguo zhi xinxing wuyong ju" 中國之新型舞踊劇 [China's new dance drama], *Liang you huabao* 良友畫報 no. 141 (1939): 38-39; Si San 思三, "Ballet yu zhongguo wu ju de qiantu" Ballet 與中國舞劇的前途 [Ballet and the future of China's dance drama], Zuo Feng 作風 no.1 (1941): 114-20.

combining movement (*kine*) and sensation (*aesthesia*), refers to the contagious nature of human body movement. More specifically, it is the natural physio-psychological empathy felt by one person for another person through the former watching the body movements of the latter, a kind of direct bodily communication, supposedly *unmediated* by language or other forms of representation.[6] Kinesthetic empathy does not necessitate the viewer's actual action of repeating the body movements; rather, it only entails an automated physio-psychological process in which the watched movements and the related experiences are simulated in the viewer's muscular, neural, and cognitive systems.

This property of kinesthesia is both practically and theoretically important. It is practically important because it potentially transforms the spectators off stage into quasi-participants of the performance and thus blurs the distinction between an active performer and a passive audience, which, as demonstrated later, became a useful strength of modern dance in the practice of mass mobilization during wartime. The wordless kinesthesia is also of theoretical significance, since it, by turning the body into a dynamic "engine" for both meaning generation and ("unmediated") communication, poses a serious "post-literate" challenge, on the one hand, to the common conception of the body as some "passive" object in which external meanings are invested (such as the conceptions of "the body as a metaphor" and "the body as a fetish") and, on the other hand, to the

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[6] Susan L. Foster, "Movement's Contagion: the Kinesthetic Impact of Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, edited by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46-59; "Dancing with the 'Mind's Muscles': A Brief History of Kinesthesia and Empathy." Keynote address, presented at the conference Kinesthetic Empathy: Concepts and Contexts, University of Manchester, April 2010 (available at http://www.watchingdance.ning.com); *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2011). The hugely influential American modern dance critic John Martin argues that while all dance forms resort to kinesthesia in varying degrees, the discourse of modern dance, "instead of employing the cumulative resources of academic tradition" as ballet does, modern dance "cuts through directly to the source of all dancing"—"the inherent contagion of bodily movement," that is, kinesthesia. See John Martin, *The Dance* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1946), 105, quoted in Foster, "Movement's Contagion," 2008, 49.

semiotic hegemony of language- and text-based paradigms.[7] (This theoretical "strength" of kinesthesia is also its "weakness" that has kept modern dance away from the analytical focus of the scholarship on modern Chinese culture.) It is by promoting kinesthesia, which promises to undo the dichotomies between the mind and the body, perception and action, arts as objects/spectacles and as lived experiences, that modern dance offers a possibility of kinesthetic universality capable of transcending the barriers of nations and cultures, which are in large part defined by national histories and literatures written in different languages.

However, the universality of kinesthesia is by no means unconditional, as manifested in its transnational and transcultural travel to and development of modern dance in 1930s China. The arrival of Wu's dance in China could be characterized by a "mismatch" between the status of modern dance as a "post-literate" urban high art that resists mass-mediation and China's overarching imperative of enlightening and mobilizing the largely illiterate masses for the cause of national salvation, which was hard to accomplish without language, narrative, and mass media.[8] Advocating the "unmediated" nature of kinesthesia, Western modern dance had the tendency to resist the technologies of mass

[7] The global rise of modern dance and the promotion of kinesthesia as unmediated bodily communication in the early twentieth century can be conceived as a "post-literate" reaction against the hegemony of language- and text-based paradigms. See Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 6-11, 117-23. Hewitt is careful to note that his division of the literate and the post-literate is highly schematic and he uses it only to highlight this particular strategy of modern dance to establish its legitimacy.

[8] According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Education of the Republican government, in 1926, the rate of illiteracy among adults in the Zhabei District 閘北區 of Shanghai, where the labor class was concentrated, was as high as 78%. The percentage of school-age children that were not in school was about 80%, and these figures should be at the lower end compared with those of other areas in China, which were typically much less developed than metropolitan Shanghai. See Shanghai shi defang zhi bangongshi 上海市地方志辦公室 [Office of the Local Chronicles of Shanghai], *Shanghai chengren jiaoyu zhi* 上海成人教育志 [The chronicle of adult education in Shanghai], doi: http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node82368/node82374/index.html.

mediation. For example, Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) "refused to be filmed by a motion picture camera, believing that the technology distorted her practice as a dancer and distanced her from the audience," because the camera, as an inserted medium, attenuates the direct bodily communicative effect of kinesthesia and objectified her unique and ephemeral art into a mass-replicable commodity.[9] Also, as discussed in greater detail later, in order to claim its "purity" and independent status, Western modern dance, in contrast to ballet, tended to avoid using any framing literary narrative and even accompanying music.

To reconcile the more or less conflicting goals of establishing modern dance as an independent high art on the one hand and as a useful tool in the cause of national salvation and mass mobilization on the other, Wu chose *not* to follow the paths of his foreign mentors that focused on the formal purity of kinesthesia. Instead, he insisted that dance should be "an independent yet integrative art" that incorporates the traits of literature, music, and painting, and had emphasized as early as in the late 1930s that this is the lynchpin of the development of artistic dance in China.[10] As a result, Wu pursued an approach that may be called "reverse integration." That is, dance, which was originally integrated in other arts (theater, for example), claims its independence by reversely integrating elements of those arts (such as literary narrative and music) into its kinesthesia, rather than excluding those from it. Reverse integration, as demonstrated later, was by no means a frictionless process; it was fraught with dilemmas and diverging

[9] Elizabeth Francis, "From Event to Monument: Modernism, Feminism, and Isadora Duncan," *American Studies*, 35.1 (1994): 25-45, 44.

[10] Wu Xiaobang, "Queli xin de wudao yishuguan" 確立新的舞蹈藝術觀 [Establishing a New Artistic View of Dance], in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 54-61, 55.

momentums. Nevertheless, modern dance did succeed in establishing its niche in both the intellectual discourses and cultural praxis in 1930s China by providing a unique bodily alternative and complement to other artistic media.

Therefore, the current study contributes to the growing literature on the convergence (or intersection) of avant-garde (or modernism) and populism (or leftism), and the corresponding intermedia/cross-genre hybridization and fertilization, in literature and arts in general and performance arts in particular, which is typically situated in a transnational context and/or the framework of colonial modernity (e.g., Jones 2001; Tang 2008; Liu 2013; Luo 2014).[11] However, Wu and his modern dance constitute a more extreme case in the period under study. Unlike the other arts, artistic/aesthetic dance in China, be it modern or traditional, had achieved *neither* a widely-recognized independent elite (or avant-garde) status *nor* a popular one, but remained largely obscure in the field of arts. As a result, the difficulties, tensions, and uncertainties faced by the other arts became doubled in the case of dance. Moreover, the property of modern dance relying primarily on kinesthesia as its expressive medium—without meaning secured in verbal (written or spoken) or visual forms of representation—further exacerbated these problems. These "particularities" of modern dance, as demonstrated later on, shaped the trajectory of its development in China in some unique ways. Thus, the case of modern dance further complicates our understanding of these matters.

[11] For example, Andrew F Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (University of California Press, 2008); Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2014).

The rest of this chapter is divided into four sections. Section one traces Wu's learning, choreographing, and performing experiences in Tokyo and Shanghai to contextualize the particular problems accompanying the transnational travel of modern dance to China. Section two focuses on Wu's discursive effort to overcome these problems and to establish modern dance as a legitimate and independent art in China. This section pays particular attention to Wu's translingual struggle centering on the naming of dance, underlying which are two major problems: the tension between the somatic and kinetic aspects of modern dance, and the uneasy relationship between dance as a "latecomer" and other more established art forms. Section three addresses Wu's practical strategy of "reverse integration." By examining one dimension of reverse integration—the incorporation of elements of narrative and speech into dance—this section highlights the fraught relation between kinesthesia and language through close analysis of two modern dance works by Wu. The last section shifts its focus to another dimension of reverse integration—the incorporation of songs and music. It demonstrates how Wu capitalizes on the leftist "mass music" with military themes to facilitate the communication of kinesthesia and extend the influence of his modern dance during a period of war and mass mobilization. In the meantime, however, Wu seems to deliberately keep his dance from being identified entirely with the themes of mass mobilization and war. This ambivalence results from the dual goal of modern dance in China—to build up its general significance in the cause of national salvation, and to establish itself as an independent high art at the same time.

Between Tokyo and Shanghai

In winter 1929, Wu Xiaobang began his dance study in Tokyo with the famous female dancer Takada Seiko. Takada, together with many other prominent pioneering modern Japanese dancers, was first trained in Western ballet in the 1910s at the opera division of the Imperial Theater in Tokyo, but later became dissatisfied with the ballet system.[12] From 1922 to 1924, Takada visited the United States and European countries to study dance, where she was deeply influenced by various schools of modern dance, including that of Isadora Duncan. Although the training methods used by Takada in her teaching were based on ballet,[13] evident of the influence of modern dance, Takada did not use any barre in training and seems to deemphasize the pointe techniques.[14]

From 1929 to 1936, Wu went back and forth between Tokyo and Shanghai three times and studied dance with Takada for more than four years in total. During the two interludes in Shanghai, Wu opened a dance school in the first (November 1931-September 1932) and a dance research institute in the second (winter 1934-October 1935), taught some short-term students, choreographed several dances for a *yue ju* 樂劇 (musical drama) and a *hua ju* 話劇 (spoken drama), and held a public concert of his dance works composed in Tokyo. The time Wu spent in Shanghai was relatively short (less than one year for each stay) and none of his activities there was successful. He spent

[12] Kusaka Shirō 日下四郎, *Modan dansu shukkō: Takada Seiko to tomo ni* モダン·ダンス出航: 高田せい子とともに (Tōkyō: Mokujisha, Shōwa, 1976), 78-100.

[13] Wu Xiaobang, *Wudao xue yanjiu* 舞蹈學研究 [Research on Dance] reprinted in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji,* vol. 2, 223-316, 228.

[14] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 21.

a great deal of money maintaining his dance schools but only had a few uncommitted students, and he sold just one ticket in his first public dance concert.[15]

Nevertheless, the two interludes in Shanghai are important, because these provided him with opportunities to test, reflect on, adjust, and negotiate the positions of his dance in two vastly different cultural-political worlds under the overarching East Asian colonial order. By the 1930s, in Japan, various artistic dances, including modern dance, had become an important and active force in the artistic arena in major cities, which had a large audience base.[16] Dance had become a standard course in the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. As recalled by Wei Bu 韋布 (who took Takada's dance classes together with Wu and became an accomplished film producer later), advertisements for performances of well-known dancers could always be found in newspapers in Tokyo. When Takada held a dance concert in 1936 at the Hibiya Auditorium, one of the largest theaters in Tokyo, there was no empty seat left, which is in stark contrast to the single ticket sold at Wu's first public concert in 1935 Shanghai.[17] The contrast reflects the huge gap between the statuses that the post-literate modern dance obtained in the newly industrialized Japan and in the illiterate China.

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[15] Ibid., 23.

[16] For general studies on modern Japanese dance, see Michiko Toki 土歧迪子, *Kindai Nihon josei shi: geinō* 近代日本女性史: 芸能 [The history of Japanese women: performance arts] (Tōkyō: Kajima Kenkyujo Shuppankai, 1970); Kuniyoshi Kazuko 國吉和子, *Yumeo no ishō kioku no tsubo: buyō to modanizumu* 夢の衣裳・記憶の壺: 舞踊とモダニズム [The clothes of dreams and the jar of memories: dance and modernism] (Tōkyō: Shinshokan, 2002); Nishimiya Yasuichirō 西宮安一郎, ed., *Modan dansu Eguchi Takaya to geijutsu nendaishi* モダンダンス江口隆哉と芸術年代史: 自 1900 年至 1978 年 [Modern dance and the chronicle of the arts of Eguchi Takaya: from 1900 to 1978] (Tōkyō: Tokyo Shinbun Shuppankyoku, 1989); Nishikata Setsuko 西形節子, *Kindai Nihon buyōshi* 近代日本舞踊史 [The history of modern Japanese dance] (Tōkyō: Engeki Shuppansha, 2006).

[17] Wei Bu 韋布, "Wangshi nanwang" 往事難忘 [The unforgettable past] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 1, 183-97, 189-90.

In October 1935, Wu went to Japan for the third time. This time, Wu started to pay more attention to other schools of modern dance in Japan. In July 1936, Wu took a three-week course on German modern dance taught by Eguchi Takaya (1900-1977), who later became a hugely influential dancer, choreographer, theorist, and educator in Japan.[18] Eguchi once studied dance at Takada's dance institute together with Wu, but in 1931, he went to Germany to pursue an apprenticeship with Mary Wigman, master of modern dance and student of the founder of German modern dance Rudolf von Laban.

Unlike other modern dance schools of the time that relied mainly on the idiosyncratic genius of individual artists, the founders of German School strived to theorize and systemize the "natural law" of human body movement and the general method of composing dance works from scratch. Laban, by relating the moving human body with the polyhedral space it spans, invented the system of Laban movement analysis, which promised that human body movements, even those unconscious ones, are to some extent analyzable, predictable, and recordable.[19] Wigman developed a general method of creating body movements for each dance work through improvisation driven by the artist's inner desire to express, a method that paradoxically installed the creative agency of the dancer at the center of Laban's "natural law" of body movement.[20]

Both the "natural law" and the methodology of dance composition were the major content of the three-week course. Among the course contents are introductions to the

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[18] Nishimiya, *Modan dansu Eguchi Takaya to geijutsu nendaishi*, 1989; Sondra Fraleign and Tamah Nakamura, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 14.

[19] Carol-Lynne Moore, *The Harmonic Structure of Movement, Music, and Dance According to Rudolf Laban: An Examination of His Unpublished Writings and Drawings* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 187.

[20] Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 47-84.

major parts of the human body, the instinctive and habitual movements of the body, the various forms and forces of movements, the primary, auxiliary, and oscillating movements, and the rhythms of movements.[21] To familiarize the students with all these concepts, Eguchi first taught various movements of each single joint, and then the movements of two and more joints, and at last the movements involving the body as a whole. That is, based on the "natural law," Eguchi's training method first breaks down the holistic body and its movement into parts and categories, assigns hierarchical roles and functions to them, rebuilds their interconnections, and then reintegrates them into a holistic and organic "Gestalt"—something, as a whole, more than the sum of all its parts.[22] This movement theory and training method were very different from those based on ballet. As Wu recalls, the ballet training focused only on some parts of the body, while Eguchi's training emphasized the movements of every part. Wu was not used to it at first, and felt pain all over his body, especially in his chest and abdomen, which were seldom exercised in ballet training.[23]

A unique feature of Eguchi's training methodology is that there was an independent session called "the theory and techniques for the practice of composition," in which the students were required to create their own dance movements according to the "natural law."[24] Unlike other dance training systems which usually demand the students to practice the existing formal vocabulary, codes, and repertoire for many years before they

[21] For detailed technicality of the training content, see Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 23-34.

[22] Nikaido Akiko, "Takada Eguchi's Creative Methodology and Ideas through the Influence of M. Wigman," Taipei DRST paper, April 5 (2010).

[23] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 30.

[24] Ibid., 28, 32.

can choreograph their own dances, Eguchi's method, inherited from that of Wigman, forced each student, at the very beginning, into the position of an "inventor" who creates new movements for each dance work based on personal life experiences and inner inspirations.[25] That is, the continual innovation of dance movements is an imperative.[26]

The German modern dance was of great appeal to Wu. The appeal first derived from its ostensible systematicity and scientificity in terms of both the theory and methodology of dance composition and training methods. By that time, Wu had already read books on Duncan's modern dance; he knew that Duncan's dance is different from ballet, but he "had no idea at all about how to proceed."[27] After years of ballet-based training, Wu realized that he was still trapped in the arts of the nineteenth century and "felt clueless when he had to represent the characters of modern people in the twentieth century."[28] The German modern dance provided a flexible framework that, in Wu's view, could be readily appropriated to systematically "invent" the dance movements of "modern people." Moreover, for Wu, it made available an alternative training method much simpler than that of ballet. This simplicity was a highly desirable property, especially in China, because it could facilitate the spreading of modern dance in the urgent times of revolution, war, and mass mobilization. As proved by his later teaching practices, with this method, Wu often only needed several months, or even weeks, to train students who had learned

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[25] Nikaido, "Takada Eguchi's Creative Methodology and Ideas through the Influence of M. Wigman;" Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, 47.

[26] Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉, *Wudao chuangzuo fa* 舞蹈創作法 [Buyō Sōsakuhō 舞踊創作法, Methodology of dance creation], trans. by Jin Qiu 金秋 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005).

[27] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 27.

[28] Ibid., 28.

little dance previously, before they could put up a decent public dance performance of considerable scale and complexity.[29]

What Wu learned from Eguchi in the three-week workshop became the theoretical and methodological basis of his dance choreography and teaching practices for the rest of his life. In October 1936, Wu finished his dance study in Tokyo, returned to Shanghai, reopened his dance research institute, and began to fully devote himself to the cause of promoting and establishing modern dance as a legitimate and independent art in China during a period of national crisis and war.

However, Wu's early dance works composed in Japan, even those with a clear Chinese theme, were largely the outgrowth of the particular urban culture of Tokyo. To search for inspirations, Wu frequently attended concerts, plays, and art exhibitions held in Tokyo, and sometimes stood in front of the gate of the Shinjuku Railway Station for days to "observe the passengers coming and going, trying to perceive the secrets of their inner activities through their expressions and walking manners."[30] Unsurprisingly, when Wu "transplanted" his dance works from Tokyo to Shanghai with a quite different urban culture and socio-political environment, "maladaptation" occurred—Wu's only audience was a small group of the elite literary and artistic circles, many of whom had the

[29] Ibid., 38, 45-9; Wu Xiaobang 吳晓邦, "Guanyu *Yingsu hua* de yanchu" 關於罌粟花的演出 [On the performance of *The Poppy Flower*], *Wenxian* 文獻 no. 6 (1939): 215-8; Shide 拾得, "Xinxing wuyong ju *Yingsu hua* de yanchu (fu tupian) shi ren shifen xingfen" 新型舞踊劇"罌粟花"的演出(附圖片)使人十分興奮 [The performance of the new dance drama *The Poppy Flower* (with pictures) was very exciting], *Shen bao* 申報, (Feb. 23, 1939): 18.

[30] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 25.

experience of studying abroad, especially in Japan.[31] Thus, how to adapt his modern dance to "fit" the new environment of China became a major concern for Wu.

Between the Kinetic and the Somatic

> For the gymnast, the movement and the culture of the body are an end in themselves, but for the dance they are only the means. The body itself must then be forgotten; it is only an instrument, harmonised and well appropriated, and its movements do not express, as in gymnastics, only the movements of a body, but, through that body, they express also the sentiments and thoughts of the soul.[32]
>
> —Isadora Duncan

Isadora Duncan, in her autobiography *My Life*, on the one hand suppresses the somatic aspect of dance to distance her modern dance from the other dance genres, the attraction of which relies mainly on the display of the somatic body, especially the female body. On the other hand, Duncan underscores the kinetic aspect of dance and links it to the embodiment of spirituality and philosophy (that of Nietzsche in particular). Duncan employed this strategy mainly in the 1920s—probably as a response to her own visibly aging body, the "dance crazes" of popular folk dance "sweeping the country," and the efforts of her contemporary critics to immobilize her into a cultural monument—to

[31] Wu formed wide personal connections with both established and young artists based in Shanghai, such as the painter Ye Qianyu 葉淺予, the musician and composer Chen Gexin 陳歌辛, and the playwright and theater actor Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩. Many of these connections turned into lifelong friendships and played a crucial role later in Wu's dance career. See Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 20-3.

[32] Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Company, 1927), 175.

reinforce the threatened status of modern dance she established in the 1900s and 1910s.[33] This strategy, ironically, was based on the very body-mind dichotomy Duncan had been striving to dismantle with kinesthesia which supposedly unifies the kinetic (*kine*) and the somatic (*aesthesia*). As the body is the vessel for the mind/soul and the latter is "higher" and more "lasting" than the former, and as the body is also the carrier of movement, a logical conclusion is that, to lift the status of dance, the kinetic must be heightened, relative to the somatic, to a position as "high" as the mind/soul so that it could become an equivalent of the latter. In some sense, for the aging Duncan, the essence of modern dance was not so much to free up the body and unite it with the mind/soul as the mind/soul freeing itself up from the mortal body by sublimating the body through the transcendental movement of dance.

The German modern dance school and its transnational development in Japan followed a similar path of heightening the status of the kinetic relative to that of the somatic. For example, in 1935, Eguchi proposed and promoted the concept of "object dance"—the dance without a dancer, which pushed Duncan's two-faceted strategy to an extreme. The underlying logic is twofold. First, since the "essence" of dance is movement and the body is only a "carrier" of that movement, the body, in principle, can be replaced with other "objects." Second, since kinesthesia can be easily generalized as the human sensation of movement (not just the movement of the body in particular), what can be conveyed by the movement of the body, in principle, can be at least partly conveyed by the movement of other objects. Based on this rationale, in fall 1935, Eguchi put up a performance of the "object dance," in which the mechanically driven movements of

[33] Francis, "From Event to Monument," 37.

various inter-linked geometric shapes, such as triangles, rectangles, and ovals, were designed to substitute for the human body to express different "characters" and "emotions."[34] As a disciple of Eguchi, Wu, however, did not follow this radical path. Instead, Wu chose a path closer to, yet still different from, that of Duncan, a path that both suppresses and relies on the somatic body.

In 1940 Guilin, Wu published an article in the journal *Xin Zhongguo xiju* 新中國戲劇 (New Chinese theater), entitled "*Wuyong yishu jianghua*" 舞踊藝術講話 (A talk on the art of dance, hereafter, the "dance talk").[35] This article may be seen as a manifesto of establishing modern dance in particular, and artistic dance in general, as a legitimate and independent art in China. In the article, Wu defines (1) what can be called an "artistic dance" and what cannot, (2) the nature and elements of dance, (3) its relationship with the sibling arts, and (4) the natural principle of body movement. While most of the contents are directly inherited from Eguchi's teachings, what is of particular interest here is Wu's own interpretation of the "artistic dance" and its relationship with the sibling arts, because both issues are central to establishing modern dance as a legitimate and independent art in China. Underlying these issues, as it turns out, is the fraught relationship between the kinetic and somatic aspects of dance.

The article begins with a translingual struggle centering on the proper naming of dance in Chinese. The word "dance" in modern Chinese is *wudao* 舞蹈, a combination of

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[34] Eguchi Takaya, "Buttai buyō no teishō: odori te no inai buyō," 物體舞踊の提唱: 踊リ手のいない舞踊 [To promote the object dance: dance without a dancer] in Nishimiya, *Modan dansu Eguchi Takaya to geijutsu nendaishi*, 231.

[35] Wu Xiaobang, "Wuyong yishu jianghua" 舞踊藝術講話 [A talk on the art of dance] in Jia Zuoguang 賈作光, ed., *Yidai wudao dashi: jinian Wu Xiaobang wenji* 一代舞蹈大師：紀念吳曉邦文集 [The great dance master: an anthology in memorial of Wu Xiaobang] (Beijing: Wudao zazhi chubanshe, 1996), 272-78.

two characters *wu* (to wave with hands) and *dao* (to stomp), while the Japanese word for "dance" is *buyō* 舞踊 (*wuyong*, in Chinese), also consisting of two *kanji* characters, *wu* and *yong* (to jump). No later than the 1910s, the Japanese word *wuyong*, together with many other Japanese *kanji* characters, traveled to China and gradually became interchangeable with the Chinese word *wudao*, though *wudao* was still used more frequently.[36] However, in the late 1930s, after Wu returned to China, he started to promote the use of *wuyong* exclusively for "artistic dance," including his modern dance, which he translated into English as a gerund "dancing." In contrast, the Chinese *wudao*, which Wu translated into the noun "dance," was relegated to encompass various ethnic and folk dance, dance passed down from ancient rituals, cabaret dance, and dance for the purpose of *tiyu* 體育 (physical education).[37]

An obvious reason for Wu to redefine *wuyong* and *wudao* is that he wanted to use the Japanese *wuyong* to signify the origin of modern dance as a serious high art he learned from Japan, so that people could easily distinguish it from *wudao*, which, at that time, was widely associated with various dances as "low arts" or even "anti-arts." Wu's English translation of *wuyong* and *wudao* into "dancing" and "dance," respectively, is also revealing. By juxtaposing the loan word from Japanese and the indigenous Chinese word and further translating both into English, Wu Xiaobang capitalizes on the unequal relationship among the three languages to establish a hierarchy of various dances with his modern dance on the top. The final distinction in English between "dance" and "dancing" reveals Wu's interpretation of the relation between the somatic and kinetic aspects. At a

[36] This is based on a survey of the frequencies of the two words appearing in *Shenbao* 申報 since the 1910s.

[37] Wu, "Wuyong yishu jianghua," 272.

first glance, it seems better to reserve the noun “dance” for *wuyong*, as “dance” is more appropriate for naming an independent art. On the contrary, Wu chose the gerund “dancing” instead, by which he highlights the kinetic aspect of his modern dance. To differentiate from various ethnic and folk dances, cabaret dance, and *tiyu* dance which are “rigidified” into “dances” (*wudao*) that function through displaying or exercising the somatic body, Wu attempted to depict his new dance as the vital dynamic “dancing” (*wuyong*) that is in constant emergence, capable of continual evolvement and innovation.

Moreover, these linguistic choices of Wu should also be explicated in light of the “embarrassing” position of modern dance as a “latecomer” in China. By the time Wu introduced modern dance into China, its sibling arts such as the “new” literature, theater, and music had taken root and gathered considerable influence among both intellectuals and common people in major cities.[38] As a result, Wu on the one hand has to extend the influence of his modern dance under the assistance of the other “new” arts by positioning dance as a kinetic “technique” useful to those arts, and on the other hand has to differentiate it from those arts to claim its own independence. This dilemma can be most clearly illustrated by the relation between Wu’s new dance and the new spoken drama.

As mentioned before, the debut of Wu’s choreography in Shanghai was several dance episodes inserted, respectively, into the 1935 leftist spoken drama *Nala* 娜拉 (Nora), adapted from Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, and the 1935 rightist *yue ju* 樂劇 (musical drama) *Xishi* 西施 which revamps the old tale of the famous ancient beauty *Xishi* into a

[38] Wei, “Wangshi nanwang,” 190.

patriotic propaganda—a self-sacrificing girl saving the country through sexuality.[39] Interestingly, while a fierce "battle" between the creators and advocates of these two plays was raging in China's major print media, Wu somehow managed to keep a certain distance from this vortex of left-or-right debate.[40]

It seems that, by utilizing his low profile and the advantageous position of being the only choreographer in the circle, Wu tried to avoid choosing sides and find as many allies as possible for his dance. Since then, Wu and his modern dance had become deeply embedded in the dense network of the other New arts, especially theater, in terms of resources, personal connections, and performance practices and institutions. For example, Wu (1935) coined a specific term for the dance episodes choreographed for the *yue ju Xishi—ju de wuyong* 劇的舞踊 (dramatic dance), signifying the auxiliary status of dance in relation to theater. Wu's own living, travels, and public performances later during the wartime were largely supported by the practitioners of theater.[41] For a quite long time, most of Wu's students had been theater and film actors and actresses who believed receiving some dance training would be conducive to their performances on the stage and silver screen. Such a situation continued right into the early 1940s.[42]

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[39] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Wo duiyu *Xishi* zhong pailian ju de wuyong de yidian yijian" 我對於 "西施" 中排練劇的舞踊的一點意見 [My opinion on the choreography of dramatic dance in *Xishi*], *Xinren zhoukan* 新人周刊 2.4 (1935): 63; Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 22; Jia, *Yidai wudao dashi*, 334; Xiang Yang 向陽, "Cong yue ju *Xishi* kan zuoyouyi juren de yichang lunzheng" 從樂劇《西施》看左右翼劇人的一場論爭 [A debate between the leftist and rightist practitioners of theater: the musical drama *Xishi* as a case], *Xiju yishu* 戲劇藝術, no.3 (2013): 70-81.

[40] Xiang, "Cong yue ju *Xishi* kan zuoyouyi juren de yichang lunzheng."

[41] To promote his modern dance after the outbreak of the War, Wu's strategy was to, in his own words, "popularize dance" so as to further "establish connections with the organizations of theater…" See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Zai kangzhan zhong shengzhang qilai de wuyong yishu" 在抗戰中生長起來的舞踊藝術 [The dance art growing up in the war of resistance], *Zhong Su wenhua* 中蘇文化 9.1 (1941): 96-8, 96.

[42] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 55.

This "embedded" status of Wu's dance may be best illustrated by a passage in the "dance talk:" "Nowadays, what the practitioners of stage need urgently is dancing, especially the practitioners of theater, who everywhere feel the need to learn it right now, because it provides the stage-theater actors the necessary on-stage body conditions in terms of rhythm, expression, and composition."[43] In another earlier article, framed in an explicitly evolutionary and developmental linear narrative, Wu places the modern dance training method as the highest "scientific" end of a millennia-long "natural history" of the evolving body-movement training method for *all* "stage arts" (not just dance), from the rituals of pre-history primitive tribes, to ancient Greek theater, to ballet, to Duncan's dance—and in China, from the "Old" dramas to the "New" theaters—to, finally, Laban and Wigman's "natural law" of body movement.[44] Clearly, Wu advertised his dance as a useful bodily "technique" for the other performance arts, which is similar to the role of *shenduan* 身段 (body contours) in the Peking Opera, except that it is more natural, scientific, progressive, and advanced. Then, it is not hard to understand why Wu translates *wuyong* into "dancing," as a useful kinetic "technique," rather than "dance," as an independent genre.

This strategy, on the one hand, did succeed in helping modern dance to make its initial presence in the artistic arena in China, survive its most vulnerable infancy, and

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[43] Wu, "Wuyong yishu jianghua," 273. The word "dancing" is written in English in the original text.

[44] See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Wutai renti yundong xunlian fa de guoqu he xianzai" 舞臺人體運動訓練法的過去和現在 [The past and present of the training method of human body movement on stage], *Kangzhan xiju* 抗戰戲劇 2.10 (1938): 3-6. In the same article, Wu stated that "dance training has become a required course for not just dancers but also all stage artists…as long as being well trained in this method, [stage performers] can play any role on the stage," and that "the maturing scientific training method of [German modern] dance has gradually attracted attention in China. Because it [the method] can enable the talented stage performers to shorten the time to achieve technical maturity, and at the same time need not to grope blindly." See Wu, "Wutai renti yundong xunlian fa de guoqu he xianzai," 5-6.

establish its legitimacy. Wu's talks and training lessons on the "natural law" of body movement became very popular among practitioners and organizations of performing arts (especially theater) nationwide along Wu's traveling routes during wartime—one of Wu's talks given in the city of Changsha in August 1941 attracted an audience of more than three thousand in size, and talks and lessons like this "had very huge effects."[45] On the other hand, however, it hindered the further development of modern dance into an independent art. Although Wu opened his own dance school/institute as early as 1932 and held his first public dance concert in 1935, the role of Wu, to some extent, was similar to a professional choreographer and dance instructor working within the theater, rather than an independent artist. Wu was apparently aware of this dilemma. Attempting to theoretically solve this dilemma, he observes in the same article:

> In the domain of dance…what is of primacy is [to let] the somatic body [become something] like a good conductor of electricity, and at the same time, [to let] the somatic body to paint the picture, play the music, and do the literature. The somatic body of the *wuyong* master must first achieve the conditions of being capable of all these. As long as this requirement is satisfied, [the problem] of the independence of *wuyong* is resolved as a result.[46]

The metaphor of the "good conductor of electricity" easily reminds us of Isadora Duncan's likening the body of the dancer to a well-tuned musical instrument. Clearly, for

[45] Wu, "Zai kangzhan zhong shengzhang qilai de wuyong yishu," 97.

[46] Wu, "Wuyong yishu jianghua," 275.

Wu, and for the aging Duncan as well, the somatic body in the domain of dance is largely a "tool," a means to an end, a "carrier" of movements. However, unlike in the case of Duncan where the body should be "forgotten" in the dance, or in the extreme case of Eguchi's "object dance" where the body is "annihilated" all together, Wu keeps a firm place for the somatic body (and even arguably confers some degree of agency on it) in this statement, because the somatic body, as the unique medium of dance, is the primary basis from which Wu build up the independence of *wuyong*.

Yet before being able to claim its independence, the new dance, as a latecomer, has to first establish its legitimacy as a serious genre by proving that it is capable of "doing" the tasks typically done by literature, music, and painting, instead of emphasizing dance can do something the others cannot. That is, the legitimacy of dance in China derived, in large part, from the recognition by the other sibling arts, which were all unified under the overarching discourses of enlightenment, nation building, and mass mobilization. It seems that commonality, rather than uniqueness, was more important to establishing the legitimacy of dance in China during the 1930s. Then, when it comes to the issue of independence, the only thing Wu can rely on to differentiate dance from the other arts is the otherwise suppressed somatic body.

Now it becomes clear that the lynchpin of Wu's translingual struggle to redefine the Chinese *wudao* and the Japanese-originated *wuyong* and their respective English translations is the uneasy relationship between the somatic and kinetic aspects of dance. Of course, this problematic is not unique to China, as illustrated by the cases of Duncan and Eguchi. However, the particular position of dance in China being a "latecomer" deeply embedded in the dense network of its sibling arts, especially the theater, requires

Wu to employ a strategy different from those of his foreign mentors to establish his new dance first as a legitimate and then an independent art. Such a discursive strategy implies that the somatic body needs to be at the same time suppressed for legitimacy and preserved for independence. (Although the Japanese word *wuyong* was gradually abandoned in modern Chinese in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by then dance had succeeded in finding itself a legitimate and independent role in China. In this sense, the word *wuyong* had served its duty, before it was supplanted by the new term *Zhongguo xin wudao* 中國新舞蹈—China's new dance.)

This new strategy of Wu to establish both the legitimacy and independence of modern dance in China may be named "reverse integration." That is, dance, which was originally integrated in other arts (theater, for example), claims its independence by reversely integrating elements of those arts (such as literary narrative and music) into its kinesthesia, rather than simply excluding them from it. The following section elaborates another important reason for Wu to choose the approach of reverse integration and illustrate this strategy and the associated merits and problems by "close-reading" some representative works of Wu.

Between Dance and Narrative

The post-literate modern dance, starting from the early Duncan, tended to avoid employing recognizable narrative structure, in order to distinguish itself from the narrative-framed Romantic ballet in particular and language- and text-based paradigms in general.[47] Moreover, its development in Germany, represented by Wigman, further

[47] Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, 34.

"peeled" the accompanying music off her modern dance to claim its "purity" and independence (only simple percussion instruments are allowed).[48] Eguchi also followed a similar path of minimizing the traces of literature and music in his modern dance. For example, his "object dance" is designed as the representation of "pure" movement, devoid of any narrative framework. As early as 1930, even before meeting Wigman, Eguchi started to experiment with the possibility of a kind of dance without music, because he believed that music, especially those masterpieces, places serious constraints on both the contents and spatio-temporal structure of dance, and thus thwarts the full realization of its expressive and representational power and creativity.[49] Influenced by these avant-garde ideas, Wu also experimented with non-narrative dance and dance without music in a few of his earliest works composed in Japan. For example, in 1933, Wu choreographed a dance work *Wu jingzhi de dong* 無靜止的動 (perpetual motion), which has no trace of narrative and is accompanied only by percussion, to represent the idea that motion is absolute in the universe.[50]

However, Wu eventually chose an opposite path for his version of modern dance. He vigorously promoted the idea that dance should be "an independent yet integrative art," and believed that this is crucial to the development of dance in China.[51] In his own words, the body of the dancer should be fully able to "paint the picture, play the music, and do the literature." This is a belief Wu continued to hold for the rest of his life, even after his dance achieved legitimacy and independence in China. Thus, this is not an expedient, but

[48] Ibid., 209.

[49] Eguchi, *Wudao chuangzuo fa*, 9-12.

[50] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 4.

[51] Wu, "Queli xin de wudao yishuguan", 55.

a lifelong tenet for Wu. Then why did Wu forsake this "avant-garde" experimentation and seemingly turn "backward" to emphasize integration in dance?

The answer has to do with the "mismatch" between modern dance as a post-literate high art that resists mass-mediation, and China's national imperative of mass enlightenment and mobilization that is hard to accomplish without the conditions of language, narrative, and mass media. The imperative requires that every art reach, and be understood and welcomed by, an audience as large as possible in order to maximize its utility as a means of propaganda and mobilization during the national crisis. This pressure, and dilemma, of popularization faced by Wu's modern dance is evidenced by a critical article on one of Wu's dance concert held in 1939, Shanghai, two years after the outbreak of the War. The leftist critic comments that "[Wu's dance] should strive to become popularized, in order to facilitate the intuitive reception by the masses…most of the works in this concert were as light-hearted as poems and proses, but [their] meanings were very abstruse. Thus, many viewers with weaker comprehending ability treated it [Wu's dance] as esoteric or strange," and that Wu should purge any remaining traces of "bourgeois aestheticism," which is "crucial to the prospect and development of Mr. Wu's dance in the future."[52] The integrative quality of Wu's dance is a natural response to pressures as such and a logical outgrowth of the utilitarian paradigm during wartime.[53]

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[52] Lu Jiabin 盧家彬, "Shige duan ping wuyong" 詩歌短品舞踊 [Poetic short dance], *Qingnian shenghuo* 青年生活 1.4 (1939): 14.

[53] However, Wu Xiaobang's strategy of "reverse integration" in the 1930s should not be seen as a unique and isolated local "mutation" of modern dance. At about the same time, modern dance in America was experiencing a similar "Leftist turn" to reach down to the proletarian class, and Mary Wigman's German modern dance was also facing the pressure of appealing to the masses, though towards a different direction—fascism. Also, the later phase of Duncan's dance choreography experienced a transition from "pure dance," or "musical dance," to a "dramatic mode" of dancing. In fact, as Manning argues, in general, "the kinesthesia and representational frames of early modern dance often worked at cross-purposes. Or perhaps more accurately, the juxtaposition of individualized kinesthetic subjectivity and generalized

As can be imagined, it would be hard for a "pure" dance, such as *Perpetual Motion*, to win any sizable audience in 1930s China.[54]

In fact, the issue of transmedia integration was not unique to dance. Rather, dance should be viewed as embedded in the greater cultural field of performance arts, which in general had been experiencing a turn of transmedia integration.[55] For example, the new genre of *yue ju* (musical drama), represented by *Xishi*, can be seen as the transformation of *hua ju* (spoken drama) to an integrative genre incorporating music and dance back into theater, because the "tepid" spoken drama had been losing audiences.[56] Similarly, in the case of music, the Russian Jewish diasporic composer Aaron Avshalomov (1894-1965), who was the mentor of Nie Er 聶耳 (1912-1935) and the first to orchestrate Nie's famous

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representational type created a dynamic tension underlying the form of early modern dance, a tension that grounded the paradoxical social function of the form." See Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, 131-66, 221-54; Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 148; Susan Manning, "The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance" in Jane Desmond, ed., *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 153-66, 146.

Yet highlighting these transnational connections in the dance world is not meant to discount the particular local conditions "modulating" the global connections. For example, in the case of modern dance in China, Wu had to deal with the dual pressures of, first, establishing dance as a legitimate and independent high art and, second, transforming it into an effective tool for mass mobilization *at the same time*, rather than, as in the cases of its Western (and Japanese) counterparts, first facing mainly the first pressure and then the second. This suggests that the frictions or conflicts between different or divergent goals and momentums of modern dance, which more or less characterize the general modern dance movements around the globe in the 1920s through the 1940s, became more intensified, and the results of this dynamics became more uncertain, in the case of China. Local "particularities" as such inevitably shaped the course of development of modern dance in China, as demonstrated in this dissertation.

[54] Wu had recorded the audience's reactions to his public performance of this work: "I choreographed a dance with the theme 'perpetual motion'…however, at the end, people all shook their heads and did not understand it." See Wu, *Wudao xue yanjiu*, 229.

[55] See, for example, Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China*, 150-3; Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China*, 114-8; Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[56] This may be ascribed to Chinese audience's "habit" of viewing traditional drama *xiqu* which integrates music and dance; see Xiang, "Cong yue ju 'Xishi' kan zuoyouji juren de yichang lunzheng," 70-81; Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China*, 150-3; Goldstein, *Drama Kings*.

song *Yiyongjun jinxingqu* 義勇軍進行曲 (March of the volunteers), experienced a transition of his artistic creation from symphony, opera, dance drama, to the first influential *yinyue ju* 音樂劇 (musical) *Mengjiang nü* 孟姜女 (The women Mengjiang, with the English title *The Great Wall*, 1945).[57] Starting from music, the path of Avshalomov ended with the genre of musical in the early 1940s, which is also characterized by the integration of music, dance, and drama. The converging paths of the *yue ju* (from theater) and the musical (from music) suggest that integrating different performance art forms was an effective approach in an age of mass enlightenment and mobilization.[58] This was even truer for the post-literate dance, which had virtually no audience in China at that time.

As a result, Wu chose the strategy of reverse integration, the traces of which had been evident since Wu's early choreographies. Most of these works employ both a coherent narrative structure and a framing musical piece, which are recorded in Wu's written descriptions. Interestingly, most of the descriptions focus on the narrative and accompanying music, while the dance movements themselves are seldom mentioned. [59] Even after taking into account the difficulty of recording dance movements with words,

[57] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi*, 61-2; Tong, *Minguo shiqi wudao yanjiu* 1912-1949, 75-6, 89-90.

[58] The difference between *yue ju* and Avshalomov's musical is that the former is first and foremost a drama, with music only being a supplement, while in the latter music is of primacy.

[59] These introductions of Wu's dance works are not anything like the advertisements of the public performances or the program guidelines for the audience. They were the materials prepared by Wu purposefully for the historiography of his dance works and dance career in modern Chinese dance history. For this reason, it would be reasonable to include the accounts of movements. Wu's other writings on dance textbook and theories show that he is fully capable of writing movement analyses. However, this part is not included in the whole volume on his works. See Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5.

the great deal of attention received by narrative and music alone indicates their importance in Wu's appraisal of his own dance works.

Most of the themes of Wu's early works are gloomy, sorrowful, painful, and fearful, conveying the despair and anxiety of individuals, no matter what roles he plays—such as a desperate marionette emperor, a distressed youth who falls down in front of a sculpture of a god without having any news of his lover, a young man in a long black gown walking in a funeral procession, or a haggard man who died of poverty and illness by the Huangpu river. With no trace of sunshine, happiness, or joy, these works "kinestheticize" dark emotions within well-developed narrative frameworks, and often at the same time, kinestheticize the accompanying famous musical pieces, such as Chopin's *Funeral March, Nocturne*, and Kreisler's *Love's Sorrow*.[60]

However, reverse integration was not frictionless. For instance, Wu's integration of narrative is at odds with the ideology of modern dance that fundamentally distrusts language-based paradigms. Also, as Eguchi argues, the reliance of dance on music (especially the masterpieces) is likely to discredit the ingenuity and creativity of the choreographer. The tension between integrating music into dance and maintaining the independence of dance (from music) is manifested in Wu's effort in the early 1940s to distinguish between *changge biaoyan* 唱歌表演 (singing-performance) and *changge wudao* 唱歌舞蹈 (singing-dance). According to Wu, in *changge biaoyan*, dance "has no independence, as without singing, [dance] movement alone cannot express its content."

[60] Dance works mentioned here include: *Kuilei* 傀儡 (The puppet, 1933), percussion music, first performed in Tokyo, Japan; *Wu jingzhi de dong* 無靜止的動 (Perpetual motion, 1933), performed in Tokyo, Japan; *Songzang qu* 送葬曲 (Funeral march, 1935), music by Frédéric Chopin, performed in Shanghai; *Huangpu Jiang bian* 黃浦江畔 (By the Huangpu River, 1935), music by Chopin, performed in Shanghai; *Ai de bei'ai* 愛的悲哀 (Love's Sorrow, 1935), music by Fritz Kreisler, performed in Shanghai. See Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5.

In contrast, in *changge wudao*, "singing and dance are mutually independent and [each] can exist without the other…This is because dance is (simply put) an art of movement. This artistic movement, which has its own reasonable organization, can exist alone before audience."[61] Clearly, Wu's "reverse integration" was not about "alchemizing" other artistic genres into dance as an inseparable organic whole (such as in Wilhelm Richard Wagner's famous German Romanticism-inspired concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total work of art," in which all the other arts are synthesized as the integral yet subsidiary parts of drama),[62] but rather about striking a delicate balance between "integration" and "independence" of different artistic media (a point to be further demonstrated in the next section).

It is because of these subtleties that this chapter refrains from using such terms as intermedia "hybridity" or cross-genre "fertilization."[63] While these biology-derived terms imply a holistic "offspring" in which the "parental traits" can no longer function independently or be separated/isolated meaningfully, the tension between "integration" and "independence" among these "traits" is exactly the focus of this study.

An analysis of three of Wu's early works illustrates Wu's strategy of reverse integration and its complications. To simplify analysis, the three representative works are selected in such a way that the first two, which appear in this section, mainly integrate the elements of narrative (only accompanied by simple percussion instruments), while the

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[61] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Ertong changge wudao shuoming" 兒童唱歌舞蹈說明 [An introduction to the singing-dance for children], *Yue feng* 樂風 1.10 (1941): 15-6.

[62] Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 46-9.

[63] For example, Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China*, 150-3; Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China*, 115.

third mainly incorporates music (with no fully-developed narrative except the sketchy one implied in the accompanying music), which appears in the next section.

Kuilei 傀儡 (The Puppet)

In 1933, Wu choreographed his first solo *Kuilei* (The Puppet) after two years of study with Takada. Before he left Takada's studio in 1936, Wu executed this work at the Hibiya Auditorium, where "there was no empty seat left," as an independent item of Takada's public concert. This was the first work of modern dance ever choreographed and performed by a Chinese artist for a Japanese audience, during a time when the Japanese Imperial Army was at the doorstep of the North China Plain. By performing this dance, Wu intended to convey a political message to the Japanese audience about his attitude toward the looming invasion.

Fig 2: Wu Xiaobang performaning *Kuilei* (The Puppet), Tokyo, 1936.

The dance employs a double mimesis by combining both mechanical and animal movements. The inspiration of dance movements comes from the marionette play, according to which Wu designs the style of the movement, while the costume and makeup take the shape of a dog. The combined image of a marionette and a dog is intended to satire Puyi, the Emperor of Manchuria, a "puppet" controlled by Japan. Wu uses different dog gestures and movements—such as groveling, crawling, and waging—to mock the "sycophantic" and cowardly emperor. Moreover, the movements are by no means the imitation of a living dog. Instead, they are mechanical and stiff, enhancing the satirical effect by emphasizing that the actions and fate of the dog are suspended on strings in the hands of his invisible master—the Japanese colonizer. It ends with an abrupt death of the dog when the strings of the puppet break suddenly. As visualized in an extant picture of this work, Wu crouches in a twisted shape with the deathly white face featuring one of the wide opened eyes, with his slender arms half hidden and half revealed by the costume (fig. 2).

All the dance movements are framed within a clear narrative structure. The dog always follows its master. Sometimes it wags its tail to make sycophantic gestures. Sometimes it lies down on the ground and plays tricks to regale its master. Every now and then it observes the expressions of the master, guessing at his intentions. Suddenly, it senses the angry expression on the master's face. It spots the enemies of his master. It quickly puts on a hideous face, barking toward the enemies. But that does not frighten the enemies, so it opens its big mouth, exposes its sharp teeth, raises its claws, and then jumps on the enemies. Its actions are praised by the master, which makes it feel happy and complacent. Just when it turns with a wagging tail to the master, expecting to be

fondled, the strings are cut off abruptly. The dog collapses on the ground, like a dead body.[64] Clearly, this dance has a complete narrative structure—from exposition, introduction of conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, to resolution.

In the comments of Wei Bu, who designed the costume and makeup, he praises this performance as Wu's attempt to compete with Japanese dancers through both choreography and the political message of anti-Japanese imperialism. Wei interprets the dance as "handing out political pamphlets in the capital of Imperial Japan with big characters on it stating, 'China is against Japanese invasion! Chinese people will fight against Japan!'"[65] However, Wei's shouting out the "big characters" for Wu actually reflects the anxious fact that *Kuilei*, even though incorporating a well-developed narrative structure and the pantomime movements, still could not anchor the precise meaning it tries to convey without the final participation of words in the imagined "pamphlets." *Kuilei* failed to directly point to the Japanese invader, since it may refer to any puppet dog, or any groveling sycophantic person. Of course, it is likely that Wu deliberately created this ambiguity for self-protection (he also used his Japanese name, Yamada Urarakai 山田麗介, in this performance), but if modern dance is to become an effective "weapon" of political struggle and mobilization in China, it seems to be necessary to rely on unambiguous narratives, and even language, to convey the precise political message.

However, the integration of narrative (even unambiguous, if ever possible) into modern dance is not without problem. After all, the rise of modern dance is a post-literate subversion of the hegemony of language and words. Then, does bringing the repressed

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[64] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 3.

[65] Wei Bu 韋布, "Ji Wu Xiaobang" 紀念吳曉邦 [In memorial of Wu Xiaobang] in Jia, *Yidai wudao dashi*,, 43-4.

language and narrative back into modern dance provide a possibility for the former to fight back and subvert the primacy of body movements in modern dance? In fact, Wu might be quite aware of this possibility and in some way addressed this problem through self-mockery in his 1937 dance *Qi meng* (A Strange Dream).

Qi meng 奇夢 (A Strange Dream).

Qi meng is the first dance that Wu choreographed in China after studying German modern dance with Eguchi. It may be seen as a summary of and self-reflection on his early life experiences of revolution, mobilization, and modern dance practices. *Qi meng* was performed by Lü Ji 呂吉, a student of Wu, in 1937 Shanghai, before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) (fig. 3).[66] The dancer, in ordinary clothes and barefoot, plays the role of a young revolutionary who has a strange dream one night: he becomes a giant ticking clock. His two arms serve as the two hands of the clock, moving in a mechanical manner, and the lighting and shadows on the stage render the ambience dark and uncanny.

At midnight, the "clock" is shocked by sudden gunshots and runs out to a street, where he witnesses the enemies shooting at common people. He is angered and rushes towards the enemies, and finally captures their weapons. He feels extremely satisfied by the victory and goes back to be the ticking clock, pushing time to progress. This victory makes the revolutionary feel himself a hero who saved his nation and people. The second part of the work starts at 3am. The revolutionary suddenly stops being a clock, steps down from the circular stage, and enters a giant mansion with great pride, carrying a

[66] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 11.

pistol. Ascending to a forum, he waves to a large audience and then gives a political speech (performed using exaggerated body gestures and movements). Just when he reaches a state of fanaticism and feels himself "floating above tens of thousands of audience," a bullet is shot right into his body. The death wakens the young revolutionary and he realizes that it is just a strange dream.[67]

Fig 3: Lü Ji performing *Qi meng* (A Strange Dream), Shanghai, 1937.

[67] Ibid.

Several meaning-laden elements are interwoven into this work—revolution, violence, speech, dream, and death, all organized within a well defined narrative structure. This narrative with layers of its symbolic and embodied experiences invites a psychoanalytic interpretation. The ticking clock not only serves the structural function of dividing the narrative into two parts (two dreams) and signifies the dream theme of the dance, but also functions as a tool to "hypnotize" the audience, inviting them to join the dream with the dancer. What is active in the dream is the repressed unconscious, and this unconscious is given a material form, or embodied, by the dance movement. Such a correspondence between the embodying movement of dance and the embodied unconscious is manifest in the fantastically seamless transformation of the dancer's body back and forth between the ticking clock and the character in the dream.

The first dream of the fight scene may be interpreted as the repressed memory of Wu's own war experiences during the Great Revolution. In spring 1926, the twenty-year-old Wu was still a cadet studying at the Central Military and Political Academy in Wuhan. Wu and his fellow cadets were ordered by the Wuhan Republican Government controlled by the left-leaning Republicans to join in a military campaign to repel attacks from the troops allied with the Nanjing Republican Government. Although the situation was critical and panic-inducing, no enemies were encountered and no real battle was fought by Wu's detachment—they only experienced distant gun shots, misfires from friendly units, and being welcomed by the people as war heroes. What ensued was the bloody "Internal Purge" by the rightist Nationalists starting from April 1927, which ended Wu's short military career.[68] This first dream may be read as a virtual realization, with a tone of

[68] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 10.

self-mockery, of Wu's unfulfilled "dream" of becoming a revolutionary commander and war hero, which highlights the blind, random, and absurd aspect of revolution and war.

Of particular interest is the second dream with the speech scene, which seems to question the effectiveness of language in political propaganda and mass mobilization. Wu's doubts about the efficacy of language and words may also be rooted in his early life experiences. When Wu was studying at the Central Military and Political Academy in 1927 Wuhan, he once fainted and collapsed onto the training ground during a "tiring" political speech given by the provost Zhang Zhizhong 張治中 (1890-1969), the famous GMD general.[69] After his failed military pursuit, Wu returned to the countryside of his hometown and taught Chinese history at a high school for about a year. By writing his own history textbook and teaching classes, Wu enthusiastically tried to enlighten his poorly educated rural students and instill in them the ideas of revolution. However, his approach was not very effective, as only a few students understood his teaching.[70] His unsuccessful experiences of using language and words as the only means for political propaganda may partly explain why he turned to the kinesthesia of modern dance.

Then, how does Wu deal with the contradiction between the principle of integration and the distrust of language and narrative inherent in the ideology of modern dance? Wu seems to play around with this ambivalence by allowing multiple interpretations of this second dream. A "literal" interpretation is that the bodily dance movement *represents* the verbal language of the speech, and thus the death of the character is caused *solely* by the speech. This reading implied a one-sided criticism and denial of language, which is

[69] Ibid., 8.

[70] Ibid., 14-15.

somewhat at odds with the integration principle. An alternative reading is that the dance movement does *not* represent the speech. Instead, it is driven and possessed, from within, *by* the swelling desire and anxiety of speech, which in the first place are silenced and repressed by the kinesthesia of modern dance. Such a reading places kinesthesia and language into a dialectical and friction-fraught relationship. Then, the death of the character is not just caused by the speech; rather, it is more a result of the frenzy and hysteria caused by the struggle between the repressing body movement and the repressed language/speech which is fighting back.

The death ending of the dream can be easily linked to the "death drive," which, usually set in motion by traumatic events (such as war experiences), refers to the human instinct to return to a forever lost pre-disturbance state, the best approximation of which is death. Interestingly, the death does not happen in the battle scene, but in the speech scene. This seems to suggest that the repression of language/speech by kinesthesia, which signifies the birth of modern dance, may be seen as a "traumatic" event, and the disturbance and struggle generated by the second traumatic event—the return of the repressed language/speech—finally trigger the "death drive." After all, *both* the dancing body and speech are "killed" in the dream, not just the latter. This "strange dream" can be read as an allegory about the problematics inherent in both "traumatic" events—the removal of narrative from modern dance and Wu's effort to bring it back.

Between Kinesthesia and Music

Although Wu may be well aware of these problematics as suggested by the pre-war *Qi meng*, he had always stuck firmly to the principle of integration, especially after the

outbreak of all-out war. The choice is a natural result following the utilitarian logic of the time, since winning audiences was a hard imperative for the "latecomer" modern dance in peaceful times and an even harder imperative for arts in general during a time of national crisis.

In fact, the (Western or Westernized) "New" music in 1930s' China faced a dilemma similar to, yet still different from, that of Wu's modern dance—the struggle between maintaining its status as a serious art and embracing popularization (though dance had not yet established itself as a high art in China in the first place). This dilemma is manifest in one of the most representative figures of popular music in modern China—Chen Gexin 陳歌辛 (1914-1961), known as *ge xian* 歌仙 (god of songs) on a par with Li Jinhui 黎錦暉 (1891-1967) known as *ge wang* 歌王 (king of songs). Chen, trained in formal Western music, was a very good friend of Wu and composed accompanying music for many of Wu's dance works, including the music of the 1935 *yue ju Xishi*.

Interestingly, instead of promoting his music in *Xishi*, as the other collaborators did (for their respective contribution to *Xishi*) in a group of newspaper articles publicizing the drama, Chen wrote in a cynical tone to self-mock the compromises he had made to compose "popular music" for the play: "…all the songs in *Xishi* were composed in the popular style. No matter how people praise them, I know the position they deserve: the expressionist [self] and the popular [self]…[in comparison] have a distance of thousands of miles in-between—there should not be any comparison at all! Such comparison would make the latter self so embarrassed that [it] cannot find any place [to hide]…but in the

process of striving to gain audience, we made compromises as the dear cost, in order to become popularized…Yet compromise has a limit…"[71]

This is not just Chen's personal stance on this matter, but also his response to a considerable (though perhaps not dominant) pressure of resisting popularization from part of the artistic circle—as he remarks at the beginning of his article, "there are 'uncompromising' critics in the world, who criticize others rather harshly; Xin myself would be unlikely to escape [their criticism]. Therefore I am 'taking a bow' in advance, giving [the critics] a heads-up…As for music composition, I am sympathetic toward the modernist school, so my own [composition] inevitably has that propensity."[72] Obviously, this article is Chen's preemptive defense against potential criticisms of his "popular songs" in *Xishi* by clarifying his "genuine" expressionist/modernist belief and justifying his composition of popular music as an expedient "necessary evil" in advance.

In contrast, in Wu's article on the page previous to that of Chen's, Wu does not have Chen's condescending "luxury" to self-mock his "popularized" dance in *Xishi* (in order to popularize his dance, Wu "made great effort to remove many difficult techniques").[73] Instead, Wu tries to establish his dance (though more or less popularized in *Xishi*) as a serious art among the others, which is evidenced by the opening paragraph of his article: "The more civilized a nation is, the more serious the respect received by arts is, as artists have transcending goals, by means of such divisions as literature, theater, painting, sculpture, music, and dance, to represent the ideals they strive for."[74] It is clear that the

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[71] See Chen Gexin 陳歌辛, "Zuo yi" 作揖 [Taking a bow], *Xinren zhoukan* 新人周刊 2.4 (1935): 64.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Wu, "Wo duiyu *Xishi* zhong pailian ju de wuyong de yidian yijian," 63.

[74] Ibid.

situation of Wu's modern dance differed from that of the "New" music—whereas the former was under the dual pressures of establishing itself as a serious art and pursuing popularization *at the same time*, the latter had, to a considerable extent, achieved the status as a modernist high art in the Chinese intellectual and artistic community.

Regardless of these tensions, as Andrew Jones argues, the Shanghai-based leftist musicians of the 1930s relied on the capacity of music to "straddle different media (gramophone records, wireless broadcasting, sound cinema) and places of performance" (including concert halls, dance halls, stadium rallies, schools, streets, and factories) to effectively expand the influence of the "mass music" in the cause of political mobilization and national salvation. Therefore, reversely integrating the popularized New music (or mass music) was a reasonable strategy for Wu to moderate the two more or less conflicting goals of modern dance. The best evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy is perhaps his dance *March of the Volunteers*, based on, and sharing the same title with, the famous song, which first appeared as a screen song in the 1935 leftist movie *Fengyun ernü* 風雲兒女 (Children of the storm) and had become widely (in fact, internationally) popular by 1937.[75]

However, before proceeding to analyze this dance of Wu, it is worthwhile to note that the integration of the New music into modern dance was not without problem, as the more powerful genre of music was "unwilling" to paly a merely subsidiary role in dance and lose its own independence. This tension is best demonstrated in an article of Chen Gexin on his music composed for Wu's 1939 dance drama *Yingsu hua* 罌粟花 (The

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[75] See also, Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China*, 145-76.

poppy flower).[76] In this article, Chen first utters his dissatisfaction with the music he composed for Wu's previous dance works, in which the music is only an "appendage." He then expresses his fondness for his music for *Yingsu hua*, because "this time, music, as did dance, managed to obtain the status it deserves on the stage. While dance is drama and singing is speech, music is portrayal."[77] It seems that Chen had been striving to maintain a relatively independent status for his music in Wu's dance. This kind of benign and subtle power struggle in the cooperation among different artistic genres (and artists) is similarly reflected in the abovementioned distinction Wu made between singing-performance and singing-dance, through which Wu also attempted to keep a certain degree of mutual independence between different artistic media in his strategy of reverse integration.

March of the Volunteers

While both the pre-war *Kuilei* and *Qi meng*, among other early works of Wu, touch on the issues of national crisis, war, and mobilization, they are mainly the idiosyncratic expressions of Wu's personal life experiences and his own interpretation thereof. As a result, the kinesthesia he projected through his dance only invoked limited resonance among his urban audience in Shanghai, which suggests that he had not yet found the right "frequency" to communicate with the more general Chinese audience and to further connect and fuse his individual experiences with those of the collective via kinesthesia. That "frequency," unexpectedly or not, had already been prepared by the tune of Nie Er,

[76] Chen Gexin 陳歌辛, "*Yingsu hua* de yinyue, dengdeng" "罌粟花"的音樂, 等等 [The music of *The Poppy Flower*, etc.], *Wenxian* 文獻 no. 6 (1939): 218.

[77] Ibid.

the lyrics of Tian Han, and the orchestration of Avshalomov—that is, the song *March of the Volunteers*, which later became the national anthem of the People's Republic. Wu must have known this song well, but not until the fall of 1937 did he recognize that right "frequency" in its familiar tune.

Fig 4: The "Forth Branch" of the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Performing and Theatric Troupes, 1937. Wu is the second one from the left of the last row.

After the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out, from September to December 1937, Wu joined the "Forth Branch" of the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Performing and Theatric Troupes, which toured inland cities, towns, and countryside, using performing arts—mainly spoken drama and singing—to mobilize people to join forces in the Anti-Japanese War (fig. 4). Among more than forty artists, Wu was the only dancer.[78] One night during a performance rally in Wuxi, Jiangsu, Wu decided to choreograph a dance based on the *March of Volunteers*, as he found that "not just students, but also workers

[78] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 36-9.

and peasants knew how to sing it."[79] The *March of Volunteers* and the leftist mass music movement had prepared for Wu's modern dance a large "well-tuned" audience that greatly exceeded that of the metropolitan Shanghai in terms of size, region, and the share of the proletarian and peasant classes, through the power of mass media and the "mass-singing rallies" in streets and factories.[80]

To choreograph this solo only took Wu forty minutes. Such a short time was, of course, partly due to the extemporaneous nature of the performance, but it was more a result of the fact that the structure, theme, and codes of the dance had been largely spelled out by the lyrics, tune, and the original film. The major task for Wu was to use dance movement to visualize, or more precisely, to kinestheticize the contents of the lyrics line by line. For example, Wu uses three repetitions of the movement "crouching and straightening up" to embody the line "Arise! Arise! Arise" in an almost verbatim manner. Some of the dance moves are appropriated from martial arts (like the big jump in fig. 5), military training (the goose step), and the coded gestures of anti-Japanese soldiers figuring prominently in woodcut pictures which were in wide circulation through the print media.[81] Even the "costume" is real clothes directly borrowed from an old peasant watching the performance. The reception of the dance among the audience was "unexpectedly" enthusiastic, as evidenced by their "cheering and applause."[82]

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[79] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 14.

[80] Jones, *Yellow Music*, 121-22.

[81] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 16; See also Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde*.

[82] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 15-6.

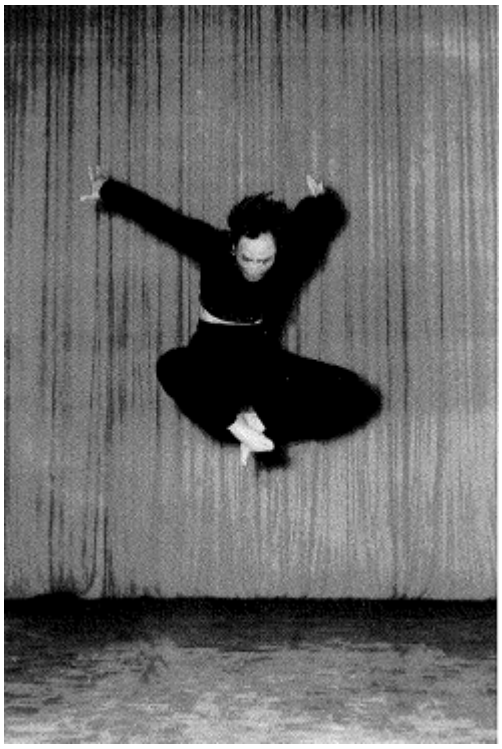

Fig 5: Wu Xiaobang performing *Yiyongjun jinxingqu* (March of the volunteers), Headquarters of the New Fourth Army, Nanchang, 1937.

The success of the "unmediated bodily communication" through kinesthesia in this dance was predicated on Wu's careful selection of those bodily codes to evoke in the audience some shared experiences already formed and shaped by mass media (such as film, gramophone records, radio broadcasting, woodcut, and print media) and mass-singing rallies. In fact, even the song *March of the Volunteers* alone, sung by the chorus of the Forth Branch to accompany the dance, would be sufficient to rouse a shared strong sentiment. Ultimately, the post-literate modern dance that resists mass-mediation has to rely, at least in part, on the mass media and words to conduct mass mobilization in China.

Encouraged by the success of the *March of the Volunteers*, Wu choreographed a series of dance works using well known anti-Japanese songs written by leftist musicians, such as *Dadao wu* 大刀舞 (Machete dance, 1937) inspired by the song *Dadao jinxingqu*

大刀進行曲 (March of the machetes, 1939) by Mai Xin 麥新, *Youjidui zhi ge* 游擊隊之歌 (Song of the guerillas, 1938) based on the song with the same title by He Luting 賀綠汀, *Liuwang sanbuqu* 流亡三部曲 (The trilogy of exile, 1937) corresponding to the three songs *Songhua jiang shang* 松花江上 (On the Songhua River, 1936) by Zhang Hanhui 張寒輝, *Liuwang* 流亡 (Exile) and *Shang qianxian* 上前綫 (To the front) by Liu Xue'an 劉雪庵. All of these dance works stirred up strong emotional resonance among the audiences during the tour of the Fourth Branch and Wu's later traveling performances in wartime. In his memoir, He mentions that these dances "were welcomed by the masses in the same way as the spoken dramas were," and that sometimes the viewers spontaneously sang the songs to accompany his performances.[83] Such effects are also corroborated by the memoirs of some of the viewers.[84] Undoubtedly, the success of these dance works, to a large extent, can be ascribed to the success of the leftist mass music.

Nevertheless, Wu's dance did add something important and new to the effect of the mass music. Indeed, the leftist music could mobilize "the masses into a collective body singing in unison for national salvation," either through the imaginary created by cinematic prowess or through the collectivity formed by the mass-singing rallies.[85] While this "collective body singing in unison" may be quite enough for the formation of a

[83] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 37-8.

[84] Du Xuan 杜宣, "Cong pannizhe dao tuohuangzhe" 從叛逆者到拓荒者 (From a rebel to a pioneer); He Minshi 何敏士, "Liangshi. Yaolan: Yi Wuxiaobang laoshi zaonian zai Guangdong banxue" 良師, 搖籃: 憶吳曉邦老師早年在廣東辦學 (Good mentor, cradle: recollecting Teacher Wu Xiaobang's teaching early in Guangdong); Chen Ming 陳明, "Yi Wuxiaobang laoshi zai 'Xinlü' de jiaoxue yu yishu huodong" 憶吳曉邦老師在"新旅"的教學與藝術活動 (Teacher Wu Xiaobang's teaching and artistic activities in "Xinlü"); Bu He 布赫, "Wu Xiaobang yu Nei Menggu xin wudao yishu" 吳曉邦與內蒙古新舞蹈藝術 (Wu Xiaobang and the art of New Dance in Inner Mongolian) in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 1, 178, 181; 199; 216; 222;

[85] Jones, *Yellow Music*, 122.

shared nationalist identity in the pre-war period, it was inadequate in a total war, which required not just singing, but flesh-and-blood wrestling, life-or-death struggling, and armed-to-teeth combating. That is, there was still a gap between the collective body with a *will* to fight and the collective body ready for the *action* of fighting. This was the very gap in mass mobilization Wu's dance could bridge through kinesthesia.

This goal, if ever achieved at all, was achieved by suppressing the somatic aspect of dance while highlighting its kinetic aspect. What is most revealing is Wu's borrowing the clothes of an old peasant when performing the *March of Volunteers*. A possible reason for Wu to do so might be that he wanted to invoke the original film scene accompanied by that song, in which a band of peasants make a pledge to join the resistance. However, there might be another reason—Wu perhaps attempted to cover his white smooth skin, slim build, and near-sighted eyes which could easily remind the proletarian and peasant audience of his bourgeois class origin. How can a bourgeois body legitimately represent the bodies of the proletariat and peasantry? Shrouded in real peasant clothing, Wu's "old" bourgeois body symbolically dies and resurrects as a "new" body of the oppressed. In so doing, Wu directs the attention of the audience away from his body and focuses it on his dance movement.

While the class "birthmark" of the somatic body is hard to erase and can only be temporarily masked, the kinetic movement is, at least in theory, more capable to penetrate the class barrier through the "universal" kinesthesia. If the "natural law" of body movement is really natural, it must be natural to students, peasants, workers, and soldiers, more or less alike. For example, the simple body movement of "crouching and straightening up," even performed by a bourgeois intellectual, can deliver a sense of

transition from an oppressed and restricted body state to an active and enabled state, which supposedly can be understood and re-experienced by most of the audience, regardless of their class origins.

More importantly, the purpose of these dance works was not just to generate physical and psychological resonance in the audience by performing those body movements familiar to them. Rather, the dances strived to instill in the audience a new militant "culture" of body movement through kinesthesia, which inevitably involved systemized, though aestheticized, violence, justified by the war and vengeance. For instance, the movements of "hacking toward the devils' heads with machetes," firing with rifles, throwing grenades, and stabbing with bayonets figure saliently in those dances.

The kinesthesia projected by these violent dance movements in some sense transforms the audience from pure spectators sitting or standing off stage into quasi-participants who are able to virtually experience those same violent movements together with the dancer on stage. Through this empathetic bodily experience, the body movements of one person may generate a simulated bodily experience, similar to the original one, within the sensory and cognitive systems of the viewers, in such a way that the viewers feel or imagine as if they are performing, and want to perform, those same body movements.[86] Such a performative kinesthetic process provides a possibility to turn the static "collective body" with a will to fight into an active one ready for the action of fighting through both the imaginary and the sensory.[87]

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[86] Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds, "Kinesthesia, Empathy, and Related Pleasures: An Inquiry into Audience Experiences of Watching Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 42.2 (Winter 2010), 49-75.

[87] Thus, kinesthesia has a close affinity with the concept of "performativity." In particular, kinesthesia provides a bodily mechanism through which a sense of collective identity is not only formed and embodied but also "activated" by the bodily movements of the individual performer(s), and the ideological discourse is not only materialized but also "animated" by the bodily performance.

Although no direct record is found about the exact bodily kinesthetic responses of the audience, Wu's dances do seem to have, at least, some physio-psychological effects on the viewers, as he uses the word *feiteng* 沸騰 (boiling), an adjective full of motions, to describe the fanatic state of the audience watching his *Machete Dance*.[88] In the end, Wu's unfulfilled dream of being a revolutionary commander is realized on stage.

However, the effectiveness of kinesthesia, on which the whole theory of modern dance is based, is by no means unconditional. This has already been demonstrated by the "maladaption" of the modern dance, which Wu learned from Japan, in the vastly different socio-cultural environment of Shanghai. Likewise, the kinesthetic effect of these mass-mobilizing dances of Wu on the viewers seems to vary across regions (rural, urban) and compositions of audience (peasants, workers, soldiers).[89] Unsurprisingly, the most heightened response these dances evoked was from the military.

In spring 1938, Wu performed the *March of Volunteers* at the headquarters of the Communist-controlled New Fourth Army. During the performance, the excited soldiers all spontaneously stood up, clapped their hands to the rhythm, sang the song, and urged Wu to re-perform the dance again and again—in the end, Wu performed five times in a row.[90] This "unforgettable" experience of Wu suggests that the bodies of soldiers, trained in a homogeneous military "kinesthetic culture," were well in tune with those mass-mobilizing dances with military themes. This was perhaps a both exciting and disturbing

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[88] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 37.

[89] Wu uses different adjectives to describe the audience's varying intensity of reactions to his live performances, such as "welcomed," "cheers and applause," and "boiling." See Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 37-8.

[90] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 38.

discovery for Wu. It was exciting because it indicated a great opportunity to extend the influence of his dance and establish it as a legitimate and useful art in China by associating his dance with the military. It was also disturbing because it suggested the potential danger of his dance being permanently "captured" by the military and overwhelmed by the themes of violence and war.

Although Wu did not utter this concern, it may be inferred from the two parallel paths he chose to follow in the decade to come. Along one path, he continued to cooperate with the Communist armies to choreograph mobilizing dances with military themes. The culmination of this path is his 1947 group dance *Jinjun wu* 進軍曲 (Dance of the strategic offense, fig. 6), which represents the training and battling scenes of the infantry, cavalry, and artillery.[91] While the previous mass-mobilizing dances are largely built on the already successful "mass music," this dance may be seen as a more typical case of "reverse integration," since its narrative and accompanying music are composed particularly to fit this dance. *The Dance of the Strategic Offense*, choreographed in Harbin at the turning point of the Civil War (1946-1949), almost became some ritual often performed right before the soldiers were sent to the battlefield and in the celebrations of victories.[92] Within one and a half years after its debut, more than twenty performance troupes, and over two hundred performers in total, had come to Wu to learn the dance.[93] Accompanying the sweeping victories of the Communist armies, this dance

[91] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Jinjun wu de chuangzuo ji yanchu de zongjie (jielu)" 進軍舞的創作及演出的總結 (節錄) [A summary of the creation and performance of the *Dance of the Strategic Offense* (excerpt)], *Wenyi bao* 文藝報 1.9 (1949): 10-2.

[92] Feng Shuangbai 馮霜白, "Xin wudao yishu de xianqu: Wu Xiaobang" 新舞蹈藝術的先驅 [The pioneer of the art of new dance: Wu Xiaobang], in Jia, *Yidai wudao dashi*, 223.

[93] Wu, "Jinjun wu de chuangzuo ji yanchu de zongjie (jielu)," 10.

traveled across China from the northernmost city of Harbin to the southernmost Hainan Island.[94]

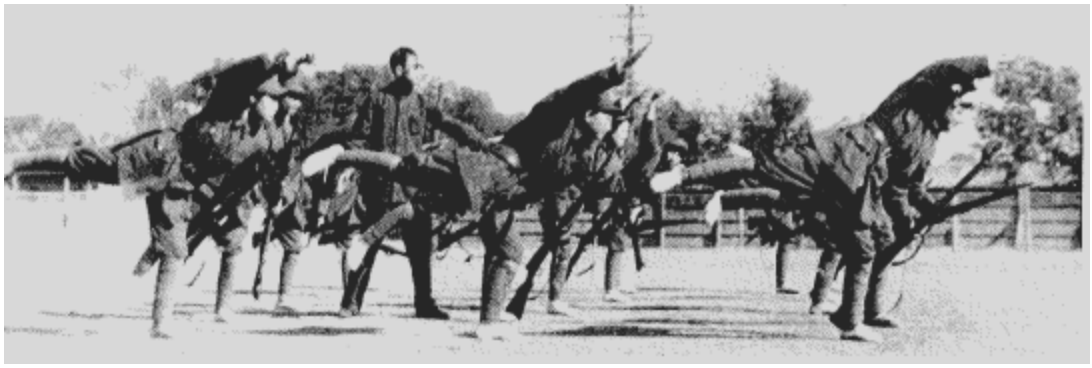

Fig 6: Wu Xiaobang directing the rehearsal of the *Jinjun Wu* (Dance of the Strategic Offense), Dongbei minzhu lianhe zhengshibu xuanchuandui (The Propaganda Group of the Northeast United Democratic Political Division), 1948.

Along the second path, Wu choreographed many dance works having little to do with the master narrative of mass mobilization, revolution, and war. The themes of the works include, to name a few, the sorrow of love, the innocent wish of a young girl, pure friendship, a confused poet, the struggle between mundane desires and religious faith of a young monk, a playful little girl, an ordinary man struggling within layers of webs set up by everyday life, nostalgia, the happiness of two lovers, and the fall melancholy.[95] These dance works cannot be interpreted as mere residuals of Wu's pre-war modern dance endeavor (as suggested by some of Wu's contemporary critics),[96] because of their sheer

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[94] Ibid., 11-2; Yan Ke 彥克, "Xian gei renmin he shidai de wudao: yi Wu Xiaobang de *Jinjun wu* chuangzuo" 獻給人民和時代的舞蹈——憶吳曉邦的《進軍舞》創作 (Dance presented to the people and the times: a recollection of Wu Xiaobang's creation of the *Jinjun wu*) in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 108-9.

[95] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 43-94.

[96] See Lu, "Shige duan ping wuyong," 14.

number (accounting for almost half of the works Wu choreographed between 1937 and 1944) and incessant creation throughout the wartime. Rather, the bifurcating paths seem to reflect the uneasy tension between the dual goals of modern dance in China—to establish itself as something of general significance in the cause of national salvation on the one hand, and as an independent high art on the other.

Chapter 3 Dancing Reclusion in the Great Leap Forward: Conflicting Utopias and Wu Xiaobang's New Classical Chinese Dance, 1956-1960

> I have always insisted that dance should innovate and reject rigidification and formulization. Every time I see people who have made breakthroughs and innovations, I regard them as my kindred spirits. Therefore, those who revere the tradition of classical and national dance have treated me as a heretic and kept a far distance from me…Seeing them isolating Tianma [Wu's dance studio], [my] heart was afflicted with struggles—to hold on or to give up?[1]
>
> —Wu Xiaobang, "The Confession of an Enlightener of New Dance"

Imagine that our bird's-eye view is hovering above Beijing in the late 1950s. To locate the nucleus of the Chinese dance world at that time, our view would glide to the southern area of the capital and zoom in to focus on the two adjacent brand-new Soviet Russian-styled grand buildings that face the tranquil *Taoran ting gongyuan* 陶然亭公園 (Park of the Pavilion of Joyfulness).[2] This was the newly established *Beijing wudao xuexiao* 北京舞蹈學校 (Beijing dance school, predecessor of the Beijing Dance Academy), the first and also most renowned dance institution in the People's Republic of China (1949-) (fig. 1). By 1958, the four-story buildings had already had eighteen

[1] Wu Xiaobang, "Yige xin wudao qimengzhe de zibai" 一個新舞蹈啓蒙者的自白 [The confession of an enlightener of New dance] in Feng Shuangbai 馮雙白 and Yu Ping 余平, eds., *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji* 吳曉邦舞蹈文集 [An anthology of Wu Xiaobang on dance] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1,163-74, 173.

[2] The Beijing Dance School held its first class in Beijing Xiang Er Alley in 1954 and was later transferred to the Baijia zhuang in Beijing City in the same year, and was relocated to # 19 Taoran Road from 1955 to 1988. See *Xuanwu wenshi* 宣武文史 [The culture and history of the Xuanwu district] (Beijing: Zhongguo zhengzhi xieshang weiyuanhui xuanwuqu wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 1997), vol. 6, 117.

spacious dance classrooms covered by wooden dance floors, eight classrooms for cultural courses, and one makeup room, all of which were equipped with heating systems, a rare feature in 1950s' Beijing. With Dai Ailian 戴愛蓮 (1916-2006) being the president and Chen Jingqing 陳錦清 (1921-1991) the vice president, the school launched seven teaching and research programs staffed by forty three faculty members, including foreign instructors (especially Soviet ballet and folk dance teachers), and developed a comprehensive curriculum composed of *Zhongguo gudianwu* 中國古典舞 (classical Chinese dance), *Zhongguo minjianwu* 中國民間舞 (Chinese folk dance), ballet, foreign folk dance, piano, Chinese music, and other cultural courses. Beijing Dance School once trained the best Chinese dancers throughout the 1950s to bolster the institutional and disciplinary system of dance for the new socialist regime. The school was also productive in terms of stage production—forty-nine dance works, foreign and Chinese, were choreographed within the first three years following its establishment.[3]

Fig 1: Beijing Dance School at *Taoran ting* Park, 1954.

[3] See "Beijing wudao xuexiao fangwenji" 北京舞蹈學校訪問記 [The record of visiting the Beijing Dance School], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 1 (1958): 22-4. Also see the journal *Wu xiao jianshe* 舞校建設, no. 1, 1957.

Fig 2: Wu Xiaobang (middle) and students at the Tianma Dance Studio, 1956-1960.

Although Beijing Dance School, with its central and official status, cast bright lights on the dance stages of the socialist China in the 1950s and 1960s, the focal point of this study passes over those two buildings and finally lands in an almost hidden alley in Beijing. In 1958, a two-quarter Chinese *siheyuan* 四合院 (quadrangles) in the East 42th Alley was being renovated—a 1,076 square feet dance studio gradually took shape, which became the base of *Wu Xiaobang Tianma wudao gongzuoshi* 吳曉邦天馬舞蹈工作室 (Wu Xiaobang heavenly horse dance studio, 1957-1960, hereafter Tianma) (fig. 2). The back quarter of the compound consisted of two rooms as the residence of Wu's family, three small dance classrooms, and a large one converted by covering the courtyard with a wooden floor and roof shading. The front quarter, with newly planted trees, Chinese enkianthus and chrysanthemums, a fish tank, and a pair of budgerigars, accommodated two groups of people that could not be more different: about a dozen of

students of Tianma, boys and girls in their late teens or early twenties, who were "always energetic and lively," and the much quieter and spiritual musicians who were Daoist priests invited by Wu to join Tianma from the *Xuanmiao guan* 玄妙觀 (Temple of Mystery) in Suzhou.[4] While always keeping a certain distance, the Daoist musicians and the young dancers lived in an odd harmony in the same quadrangle.[5]

The Curious Case of Tianma

Tianma was the first and, to the best of the author's knowledge, also the only government-sponsored dance studio of an individual artist in socialist China, a rare and bold experiment for both the artist and the state (the Ministry of Culture was the direct supervisor of Tianma).[6] As explicitly stated in an announcement published in the late 1956 right before the founding of Tianma, Wu's goal was to let Tianma grow "from small to big, gradually become corporatized, and hopefully turn into an economically self-sufficient artistic troupe within a certain period of time. When performing, it will change its name to Tianma Dance Art Troupe."[7] Apparently, in Wu's blueprint, Tianma would become a financially autonomous and market-oriented dance company, which

[4] Following Alan J. Berkowitz, throughout this chapter, the orthography "Taoist" (or Taoism) is reserved for "the general philosophical bent (often called 'philosophical Taosim') that has found expression in such texts as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*. The orthography 'Daoist' (also Daoism) is used when referring to China's indigenous system of religious beliefs whose codification began in the second through fourth centuries of the Common Era." See Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 2-3n.

[5] Pu Yimian 蒲以勉, "Wudao de bieyang nianhua: shenghuo zai tianma wudao gongzuoshi" 舞蹈的別樣年華：生活在天馬舞蹈工作室 [Distinct age of dance: living in the Tianma dance studio] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 1, 268, 272.

[6] Ibid., 278; Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 209.

[7] Li Shan 李山, "Wu Xiaobang tongzhi zhuchi de Tianma Wudao Gongzuoshi jijiang chengli" 吳曉邦同志主持的天馬舞蹈工作室即將成立 [Tianma Dance Studio, headed by Comrade Wu Xiaobang, will soon be founded], *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 no. 12 (1956): 2.

more or less resembles its Western models.[8] Economically speaking, this enterprise of Wu seems especially remarkable during a time when the Socialist Transformation (1953-1956) of means of production had been declared complete and planned economy had secured an iron grip nationwide. Politically speaking, the birth of Tianma was facilitated by the *Shuang bai fangzhen* 雙百方針 (Double hundred policy: "Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend"), a major short "liberal" interlude (1956-1957) in the cultural and intellectual realm between waves of escalating political purges.

As suggested by the name of the studio, Tianma, "the heavenly horse," unmistakably signifies the ambition of Wu (who was born in the year of horse in Chinese Zodiac) to spread his wings of creativity and soar high in the heaven of artistic (and economic) freedom. Unsurprisingly, this endeavor had been in a strained relationship with the socialist state and was destined to fail eventually, as the "Pegasus," foaled and fed by the state, had been dreaming of breaking loose from her absolute control since his birth—this was clearly at odds with the long term political agenda of the CCP to put artists and their arts into harness. What might be unexpected, however, is that Tianma had successfully lasted for more than four years, which went far beyond the Double Hundred period. Tiama had survived the brunt of the Anti-Rightist Movements (1957-1958) and most of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960). Wu not only managed to turn a considerable profit through 121 concerts during five national tours, which attracted more than 166,000

[8] In fact, Wu advocated the corporatization of state-owned song-and-dance ensembles nationwide. See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Ge wu yishu fazhan shang de jige wenti" 歌舞藝術發展上的幾個問題 [Several problems concerning the development of the arts of singing and dance], *Renmin ribao* 人民日報 (March 22, 1957): 3.

audience in total, but also was able to put most of his artistic and organizational visions for Tianma into practice (fig. 3).[9]

Fig 3: Wu Xiaobang and Tianma dancers answering the curtain call after a public performance, 1957.

[9] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya* 我的舞蹈藝術生涯 [My artistic career of dance] reprinted in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 1, 129-54.

In the newly renovated reclusive Beijing *siheyuan*, Wu, who had been a student of modern dance and promoter of the "New dance" in China, looked back to the past to create what was later called the "New classical (Chinese) dance."[10] As his New (or modern) dance had quickly fallen out of political favor since the 1951 *wenyi zhengfeng* 文藝整風 (Rectification campaign in the literary and artistic realm) because of its underlying "bourgeois ideology,"[11] Wu had to hide his New dance in the disguise of

[10] *Xin gudian wu* 新古典舞 (New classical dance) is a term with different definitions in the field of Chinese dance studies. First, it could refer to the "classical dance" itself, which was created in Beijing Dance School in the mid 1950s. The qualifier "New" is used to distinguish the newly invented "classical dance" from the real ancient (or classical) dances lost in history; see Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, Xu Erchong 徐爾充, Ou Jianping 歐建平, eds., *Wudao zhishi shouce* 舞蹈知識手冊 [Handbook of dance knowledge] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 99-100. Second, the term could also refer to a large group of classical-styled dance works choreographed after the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s and 1980s, which diverged from the *xiqu*-based code of the earlier "classical dance" and later coalesced into a new codified system; see Mu Yu 慕羽, *Zhongguo dangdai wudao de chuangzuo yu yanjiu* 中國當代舞蹈的創作與研究 [The composition and study of contemporary Chinese dance] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2009), 111; Third, as Wu Xiaobang's Tianma dances shared similar motivations with, and provided inspirations for, the "New classical dance" of the 1980s (some of the major choreographers were Wu's students), Wu's classical-themed dances of Tianma are also called "New classical dance;" see Zi Huajun 資华筠, *Wu yi wu li* 舞藝, 舞理 [Dance art and dance theory] (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 159. Fourth, to distinguish Wu's "New classical dance" from its successor in the 1980s (and further from the "classical dance" of the 1950s), the former is sometimes called Gudian xin wu 古典新舞 [literally, classical New dance] to further stress its lineage from Wu's New (or modern) dance (Wu himself also used this term); see Mu, *Zhongguo dangdai wudao de chuangzuo yu yanjiu*, 58-9. This study uses "New classical dance" to refer to Wu's classical-themed Tianma dances. In fact, the qualifier "New" turns out to be somewhat anachronistic, as classical Chinese dance (as a dance form/genre)—the competitor of Wu's "new" version—was being constructed contemporaneously in Beijing Dance School in the 1950s. All the elements needed to justify "classical dance" as a coherent discipline and genre—such as vocabulary, repertoire, methodology of choreography, training curriculum, and underlying aesthetics—were still quite fluid and under incessant debate. Thus, as illustrated below, what Wu intended to suggest by the adjective "New" is not so much temporality as the superiority of the ideological underpinnings of his approach over those of the classical dance.

[11] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Chengqing wo de sixiang" 澄清我的思想 [Clarifying my thoughts], *Wenyi bao* 文藝報 no. 3 (1952): 13-5; Luo Zhang 駱璋, "'Yige wudao yishu jiaoyu xin tixi de niyi' duhou" "一個舞蹈藝術教育新體系的擬議"讀後 [Comments on "Proposal of a new system of dance art education"], Wudao congkan 舞蹈叢刊 no. 2 (1957): 70-7, 71; Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 119; Si Xiaobing 司小兵, "Tan Wu Xiaobang tongzhi duidai minzu chuantong de cuowu taidu" 談吳曉邦同志對待民族傳統的錯誤態度 [On the wrong attitudes of Comrade Wu Xiaobang toward national tradition], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 8&9 (1958): 59-65, 64-5.

"classical dance" to continue his modernist endeavor, which became the paradoxical "New classical dance."[12]

Thus, Tianma constitutes a curious case. A leading artist and authority of expertise on the one hand subjected himself, in large part sincerely, to the socialist state (Wu had been a CCP member since 1949 and President of the Chinese Dance Art Research Association since 1954). On the other hand, by exploiting the inconsistencies in state policies and carefully treading through the gaps and interstices in ideological discourse, he succeeded in directing state-controlled resources into openly advancing his artistic pursuits that to a large extent ran against the dominant ideology during a time of strict censorship. Therefore, the case of Tianma highlights the limits of the parameters of state control over arts and artists in socialist China, which, restrictive as it is, may be more porous than commonly believed.

It is argued here that, to defend the minimal autonomy of arts and independent status of intellectuals and artists against the fast tightening ideological and institutional controls, Wu uses the kinesthesia of his "New classical dance" to achieve two sub-goals—first, to subvert the artistic-political imperative of creating the "national form" in the case of dance, and second, to construct an individual-based spiritual utopia characterized by a reclusive spatiality and timeless (or slow) temporality to resist the collective communist utopia with an all-encompassing spatiality and ever-accelerating temporality which culminated during the Great Leap Forward. However, "resistance" and "subsersion" here should not be simply understood as a head-on confrontation against the state. Rather, it

[12] The nominal "marriage" between the New dance and classical dance, however, should not be surprising after all. Isadora Duncan once established the legitimacy of modern dance by claiming her dance being the true follower of Classical Greek dance. Because the ephemeral dance is hard to record and preserve in history, the lost dance of the past becomes an empty signifier which can be conveniently filled by the modernist dancers with different meanings.

was a subtle strategy of the artist to push the envelope, from within, of ideological control of the state, of which he was a loyal subject who nevertheless pursued an unsanctioned agenda by following yet exploiting the existing rules of game and nudging to negotiate and test the boundaries. Thus, Wu's strategy, along with the utopia he constructs, has a conflicted nature. Moreover, this conflicted consciousness is not just a trauma resulting from the political struggle, but also, as shown later on, has its deeper root in the intrinsic problematics of modernism in the case of dance and in the split modern subject.

To demonstrate this, the rest of the chapter first teases out Wu's modernist theoretical strategy to subvert the "classical dance form," as a major representative of the "national dance form," being developed in Beijing Dance School since the mid 1950s. It is then followed by an examination of Wu's innovative and controversial organizational and pedagogical practices in Tianma, which were used to bring his theoretical visions for his New classical dance into reality, and the polemics they had generated. It then goes on to show how Wu appropriated the ideal of "reclusion," which has a long and prominent history in the Chinese intellectual tradition, to create an individual-based utopia in his choreography, as a means to resist the collective utopia of communism which fueled the fanaticism of the Great Leap Forward. To demonstrate Wu's resistant strategy and its conflicted nature, this chapter ends with close analyses of two representative works of New classical dance as illustrations.

A Modernist Critique of the "National Form" and "Invented Tradition"

In the mid 1950s, Beijing Dance School started to invent the "classical dance" by mainly adapting the dance (or dance-like) codes originally integrated in the Chinese *xiqu*

戲曲 (theater, such as Peking Opera), and to build up a corresponding training system by combining the training methods of both Russian ballet and the Chinese *xiqu*. This project sprang from the political imperative of searching for the "national forms" in all major arts demanded by the CCP, which can be traced back to 1942 Mao Zedong's "Talk at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (and beyond to the late 1930s). Clearly, the "classical form," whatever that is, is an important constituent of the "national form," as evidenced by Mao's famous dictum *gu wei jin yong yang wei zhong yong* 古為今用, 洋爲中用 (Make the past serve the present and the foreign serve the Chinese).[13]

Emily Wilcox has interpreted this process (and its continuous developments through the post-socialist era) within the framework of "invented tradition." [14] This term is first developed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger to refer to those "spurious" traditions that are claimed to be old and authentic but actually new in origin and even invented.[15] Joshua Goldstein, by studying the formation of Peking Opera in the colonial context, further argues that the participants involved in the invention did not intend to conceal, but instead were quite explicit about their intention and action of inventing, as a conscious means to form a competitive cultural identity for the cause of nation building against the pressure imposed by Western (or Westernizing) cultural hegemony.[16] Wilcox's argument

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[13] On Mao's various observations regarding this notion, Mao Zedong 毛澤東, *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛澤東選集 [Selected works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 3:81 ("Talks at the Yan'an Forum," 1942); 3:60 ("Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing," 1942); 2:340-1, 380-1 ("On New Democracy," 1940); etc.

[14] Wilcox, "Han-Tang Zhongguo Gudianwu and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance," 224.

[15] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition," in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7-8.

[16] Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-5.

is similar to that of Goldstein, but transplants the concept from the original context of colonial modernity to the socialist state.

However, it is argued here that although applying the framework of invented tradition to the case of the "national form" in the socialist context provides valuable insights, it may be inadequate to explain some important aspects of the phenomenon. There were several motivations driving this lasting cultural project of creating the "national form." First, as Robert Hegel points out, in the late 1930s, Mao was keenly aware of the fact that in order to efficiently mobilize, organize, and control the masses (mainly peasants and workers) to win the wars and speed up the revolutions, abstract political ideas—such as nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and its analytical methods—must be presented in literary and artistic forms familiar, intelligible, and attractive to the masses, that is, the "national forms."[17] This idea is often expressed as "using the old bottle to contain the new wine." Second, to achieve this goal, the CCP must first use this cultural campaign as a long-term hegemonic means to subjugate the cultural producers (intellectuals and artists), many of whom had bourgeois and Western leaning attitudes, transforming and incorporating them and their work as a productive yet submissive part of the gigantic revolutionary machine. At last, after the founding of the People's Republic, the young socialist state needed some distinctly "Chinese" "national form" in the artistic realm to create an unprecedented unified national culture as a means to further the profound socio-political transformations on the one hand, and on the other hand to establish and communicate the national image and pride of China on the international stage, signaling its status in and contributions to

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[17] Robert E. Hegel, "Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama: From the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution" in Bonnie S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 198-9.

the socialist alliance and articulating its stance against Western capitalist and imperialist ideology and culture in the Cold War (note that this had not become a primary concern for the CCP until it took over China in 1949).[18]

Now it becomes clear that while the concept of invented tradition largely concerns only the last point—identity politics and nationalism at both the domestic and international levels, it says little about the other two, which, in the Althusserian sense, concerns interpellation and subjection/subjectivation.[19] It was exactly on this latter dimension that resilient resistance took place. For bourgeois intellectuals and artists, the utilitarian campaign of inventing the national form may be both enabling and disabling. It is enabling because it provides an effective way for them to greatly extend the influence of their arts among the masses in the sublime cause of revolution, nation building, socio-cultural transformation, and even on the international stage—this was especially attractive to the fledging art of dance, which had limited influence compared with the other more well-established arts. However, this can only be achieved at the dear cost of the "autonomy" of art and the independent status of intellectuals and artists, which afford them the right and potency to criticize the Party, the state, and the social reality.[20]

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[18] Xiaobing Tang, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11, 24-33; Wilcox, "Han-Tang Zhongguo Gudianwu and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance," 214-5.

[19] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparratuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy, eds., *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 204-22.

[20] Tang, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China*, 21-2. Tang sees the denial of artistic autonomy by the socialist regime as part of a radical, concerted, and systematic "experiment" of "striving for a profound cultural transformation," which is "a continuation of the project to achieve cultural modernity." This approach is informed by Tang's main motivation—"with regard to the political culture of socialist China, it should be more revealing to see politics as a forceful response to cultural issues, than to see culture as being exploited for political purpose." That is, Tang reverses the common conception of the "means-end" relationship between culture (or arts) and politics. Despite the fresh and generative insights, this perspective is inadequate (or inappropriate) to explicate the phenomenon under study here.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the discourse on the national form became one of the major battlefields where resistance occurred. What was at stake in this battle is essentially the subjecthood, in every sense of the word, of intellectuals and artists—whether or how to answer the call of creating the "national form" determines whether or how to subject themselves to (and be subjectivated by) the interpellation of the CCP.

The most famous "dissident" is perhaps Hu Feng 胡風 (1902-1985) who stubbornly insisted that the "national form" should be defined by the Westernized New literary and artistic forms developed since the May Fourth era, rather than by traditional (classical) or folk forms, which would be a step backward.[21] Wu clearly shared similar May Fourth sentiments with Hu on this matter. In 1957 (two years after the systematic criticism of Hu's literary and art theory initiated by the state) Wu still publicly claimed that "after the May Fourth, the dance formed by adapting European culture to the particular

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First, Tang's reversal of means and end concerning the relation between culture and politics is fundamentally unstable, because it cannot preclude the intrinsic possibility of a "re-reversal." For example, in the paragraph immediately following the one from which Tang's main argument (above) is quoted, he refers to Paul Clark's observation of the Cultural Revolution to corroborate his own argument—"the Cultural Revolution…should not be dismissed as 'an aberration,' but bore witness to a range of experimentation that 'continued, deepened, or distorted the modern inheritance of cultural response to China's changing global condition.'" Yet in this observation, "culture" is turned back into a means ("response") to a political end (addressing "China's changing global condition"). In the next paragraph, Tang further invokes Clark's remark on the socialist mode of cultural production—"'[i]n the sphere of cultural production,' observes Paul Clark while commenting on practices fully carried out during the Cultural Revolution, 'the amateur challenged the entrenched elitism of the professional.'" Here, once again, "culture" (the socialist cultural practices) is seen as a means to an unmistakably political end (the "class struggle" of the amateur challenging professional elitism), rather than the other way around. As Clark notes, "Mao Zedong had set the Cultural Revolution in motion from his determination to undermine what he saw as elitist, increasingly entrenched superiority in political and professional life." See Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 253.

Second, portraying the socialist cultural campaigns as a "concerted" and "systematic" project of socio-cultural transformation risks suppressing the conflicting, resisting, and diverging undercurrents that "cracked" the united front of the project (which itself is fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions). Individuals, groups, and organizations with different, and not uncommonly conflicting, interests often appropriated these campaigns and exploited the inconsistencies thereof to advance their own, sometimes even subversive, political and/or artistic agendas. This is exactly the focus of this study.

[21] Hu Feng 胡風, *Lun minzu xingshi wenti* 論民族形式問題 [On the problems of the national form] (Shanghai: Haiyan chudian, 1947).

circumstances of China is also [part of] tradition" and denying this is to "cut off tradition."[22] Differing from Hu, however, Wu adopted a more circuitous strategy of subverting the "national form" in the case of "classical dance" to achieve a theoretical goal in some sense even more radical than that of Hu's. The ultimate goal of Wu is to object in his choreography any system of stable dance codes that is necessary for any dance to qualify as a coherent dance *form*, be it national, classical, folk, or new. That is, Wu, in the case of dance, aims to reject all together the stability and coherency of codified form—the very premise underlying the discourse on the "national form." Undoubtedly, such a radical modernist pursuit, inherited from the German modern dance school through Wu's Japanese teacher Eguchi Takaya, is fundamentally subversive, as the "national form" in the making is a major formal bridle to harness artists and their artistic creation.

To achieve this ambitious and risky goal, Wu employed a three-fold strategy which is strikingly similar to, yet goes beyond, the critical logic of the invented-tradition paradigm. First, he criticizes the formal sources of the classical dance being developed in Beijing

[22] Quoted in Si Xiaobing, "Tan Wu Xiaobang tongzhi duidai minzu chuantong de cuowu taidu," 64. Wu had been consistently advocating this May-Fourth like attitude. For example, as Wu observes in the early 1940s, "the entire artistic field was engaged in the debate on the national form [in 1940 and 1941]; many people believed that folk forms are the only source of the national form, and thus turned history backwards. Since the time of our departure, [I] had been determined not to be a slave of folk forms, not to be fettered by the old forms…" See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Zai kangzhan zhong shengzhang qilai de wuyong yishu" 在抗戰中生長起來的舞踊藝術 [The dance art growing up in the war of resistance], *Zhong Su wenhua* 中蘇文化 9.1: 96-8, 97. As another example, in Wu's 1949 summary of his experiences of creating the *Jinjun wu* 進軍舞 (Dance of the strategic offense), he maintains that "as for the issue of the national form, we…felt that, concerning the representation of the life content of soldiers, if [we] can manage to [let the dance] be realistic and liked and accepted by the soldiers—in other words, when we achieve [the goal of] representing the rich content of the nation—[the dance] would be guaranteed to obtain a realistic, national form of our own nation. Therefore, as for the issue of the national form, we were determined not to cut the feet to fit the shoes to contain the cut feet, but must create forms according to the content…" See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Jinjun wu de chuangzuo ji yanchu de zongjie (jielu)" 進軍舞的創作及演出的總結 (節錄) [A summary of the creation and performance of the *Dance of the Strategic Offense* (excerpt)], *Wenyi bao* 文藝報 1.9: 10-12, 10.

Dance School—the *xiqu* tradition originating in late imperial China—being not "authentic" and representative enough. After all, the dance-like movement integrated in *xiqu* is only auxiliary to theater, far from a well established independent art. Moreover, Peking Opera as the "national drama," a major basis for building the classical dance, is itself an "invented tradition" with a history not much longer than that of the May Fourth New Culture.[23] Therefore, Wu on the one hand relativizes *xiqu* as only one of many dance traditions, including, ironically, the May Fourth "tradition" of his New dance.[24] On the other hand, Wu observes that more "authentic" traditional dance forms do exist, which remain largely intact in the form of religious ritual dance, such as *Yi wu* 佾舞 (Rank dance, the Confucian ritual dance performed in the memorial ceremony for Confucius), *Nuo wu* 儺舞 (Exorcism dance, a kind of Shamanic ritual dance), and various Daoist and Buddhist ritual dances, preserved by generations of clergy in temples.[25] In Wu's view, these living ancient dances are the more "genuine" tradition, and thus Beijing Dance School's strategy of constructing the classic dance, which "particularly emphasizes the *xiqu* tradition," is in fact "denying the preserved dance [traditions] of the ancient times."[26]

Second, Wu argues that these more "authentic" traditional dance forms should be first "excavated" and preserved for their historical and anthropological values, and should not, and could not, be hastily appropriated as the proper basis for building the classical dance.

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[23] Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 1-13.

[24] Si Xiaobing, "Tan Wu Xiaobang tongzhi duidai minzu chuantong de cuowu taidu," 64.

[25] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 120-8.

[26] Quoted in Si Xiaobing, "Tan Wu Xiaobang tongzhi duidai minzu chuantong de cuowu taidu," 64.

For example, when directing the two-year (1955-1957) nationwide field research as President of the Chinese Dance Art Research Association, Wu found that many of the Shamans who knew the *Nuo* dance had changed their profession to performers of theater during the profound socialist reforms. In order to save the fast disappearing ancient dances like *Nuo*, Wu proposes that "dancers had better not destructively change them at first, [but instead] let them remain what they are, and cherish these materials like discovered historic artifacts."[27]

As the last step of his strategy, Wu argues that what the classical dance should and could grasp is not any invented "classical dance form" whose authenticity is intrinsically problematic, but rather the general *gudian jingshen* 古典精神 (classical ethos). At a first glance, the "classical ethos" seems even more abstract and elusive than the "classical form." However, it may actually more easily evoke consensual sentiments among Chinese people (at least among intellectuals), because the "classical ethos"—aesthetics, attitudes, beliefs, virtues, etc.—is supposed to be passed down across generations through, among others, the written classics of history, literature, philosophy, and artistic artifacts. In this sense, the "classical ethos," however defined, is more lasting and "authentic" than any ephemeral dance form claimed to be "classical." In Wu's own words, "the classical is by no means just a category of temporality or times, and the classical ethos…is by no means just something that belongs to a specific time either; in modern life continues the classical ethos."[28] Therefore, by shifting the focus from the concrete "classical form" to

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[27] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Tan wudao chuangzuo huodong shang de fanwei jiqi xianghu guanxi" 談舞蹈創作活動上的範圍及其相互關係 [On the scopes of the activity of dance choreography and their mutual relationship], *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 no. 8&9 (1956): 43.

[28] Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Gudian wu he gudian jingshen" 古典舞和古典精神 [Classical dance and the classical ethos] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 159-63, 162. Note that Wu had not

the abstract (and elastic) "classical ethos" which supposedly transcends the temporal division between the traditional and the modern, Wu intends to free dance choreography and training from the restriction of any "classical" formal codification, and thus preserves the possibility of employing modern dance philosophy and methods in his New classical dance.[29] In Wu's view, as long as centering on the "classical ethos," the dance form should *not* be limited to the "classical codes" based on *xiqu*—"the techniques [of choreography] can be diverse… such as those of Symbolism and Romanticism."[30]

This is exactly where Wu goes beyond the logic of "invented tradition" and the discourse on the "national form." Wu's New classical dance may be seen as a modernist critique of both—he never intended to invent any stably codified dance form at all, let

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published his idea of the relationship between classical dance and the "classical ethos" until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), but this idea was taking shape in the Tianma period. In fact, Wu was not the only one who adopted this strategy in the mid and late 1950s. Guo Mingda 郭明達 (1916-)—who received systematic graduate training in dance (especially modern dance) and dance education in the United States from 1945-1955 and was greatly influenced by his modern dance mentors Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, and Alwin Nicholais—also advocated that the foregrounding of "national style" in dance should focus on "traditional ethos" instead of "traditional forms." However, different from Wu who shrewdly disguised his New (modern) dance ideas in "classical Chinese dance," Guo proposed to establish a new dance training and education system largely independent of those of ballet, classical Chinese dance, and ethinic and folk dance, and based mainly on Western modern dance methods. This made Guo a major target of attack from the opponents of modern dance. Moreover, as Guo returned to China as late as in 1955 and did not have powerful backup in the Chinese dance world, he quickly became marginalized, a situation that would not be improved utill the end of the Cultural Revolution. Guo's ideas about dance education and choreography, which were deeply influenced by German modern dance (and its American development), are very similar to those of Wu's. See Guo Mingda 郭明達, "Yige wudao yishu jiaoyu xin tixi de niyi" 一個舞蹈藝術教育新體系的擬議 [Proposal of a new system of dance art education], *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 no. 12 (1956): 12-4; Luo Zhang, "'Yige wudao yishu jiaoyu xin tixi de niyi' duhou;" Guo Mingda, "Zai tan 'Yige wudao yishu jiaoyu xin tixi de niyi:' da Luo Zhang tongzhi" 再談"一個舞蹈藝術教育體系的擬議:" 答駱璋同志 [Further discussion on "Proposal of a new system of dance art education:" a reply to Comrade Luo Zhang], *Wudao congkan* 舞蹈叢刊 no. 2 (1957): 77-86.

[29] Note that Wu's idea about the relationship between classical dance and the "classical ethos" was later appropriated by some practitioners/scholars of classical dance to justify that the "classical dance" indeed captures the "classical ethos," while Wu's original intention of using the "classical ethos" to liberate his New classical dance from the formal restriction of the "classical" codes was entirely dismissed. For a quoted example of this kind of appropriation, see Wilcox, "Han-Tang Zhongguo Gudianwu and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance," 218.

[30] Wu, "Gudian wu he gudian jingshen," 163.

alone any codified dance "tradition." That is, For Wu, the constant innovation of fluid new dance movement/form, instead of invention aimed at codification, should be the "normal state" of choreography.[31]

In contrast to Hu Feng who, while admitting the necessity of the "national form," bluntly antagonized the May Fourth New Culture against "tradition" in the struggle of defining the "national form," Wu worked within the logic of "tradition" to covertly subvert the "national form." Wu keenly sensed the crux of the problem: "tradition" (the old) is *not* the most dangerous enemy of the May Fourth legacy (the New), at least in the case of dance, because what counts as "tradition" is always changeable and subject to (re)interpretation—his New dance did find cover in "tradition" as the New classical dance. Instead, what is more lethal to his New dance is the concrete "national form" in the making, which, whether "classical" or not, would become a rough bridle once it has taken shape. Wu's Tianma and New classical dance may be seen as a circuitous effort to break free from this "bridle"—after all, it is the restriction of any stably codified *form*, instead of *content*, that was the main target of modernism. As Wu publicly put it in 1957, "all human creation and research need freedom, but freedom can never be gained without effort; freedom depends on us reaching our hands to society and nature to fight without stop."[32]

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[31] Wu Xiaobang, "Shi lun shehuizhuyi wudao yishu de duoyanghua fazhan" 試論社會主義舞蹈藝術的多樣化發展 [A tentative discussion on the diversifying development of socialist dance art] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 3-9, 6; "Zai lun wudao yishu de duoyanghua" 再論舞蹈藝術的多樣化 [Continued discussion on the diversification of dance art] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 17-25, 19, 21; "Yao chuantong, bu yao chuantong zhuyi" 要傳統, 不要傳統主義 [Hold tradition, not traditionalism] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 153-8, 156-8; "Leitong, liupai he xiongxin" 雷同, 流派和雄心 [Repetition, style, and ambition] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 4, 390-6.

[32] Wu, "Ge wu yishu fazhan shang de jige wenti," 3.

A Hermit Hiding in the City: Tianma's Organizational and Pedagogic Innovations

> Modern dance never produces fixed movements and gestures. There is no fixed structure in modern dance works...Thus, it is definitely impossible to pass down any single modern dance movement and gesture to the next generation, which means, modern dance has no element that can make it join in the camp of classical dance…modern dance is a different form in stark opposition to classical dance.[33]
>
> —Eguchi Takaya, Wu Xiaobang's modern dance teacher

To be sure, Wu's practical goal is less radical (though no less ambitious) than his theoretical one. He did not mean to, and could not, replace the classical dance (and the "national dance form" in general) with his New classical dance—his aggressive gesture toward the former is merely a defensive strategy for the latter. Wu had been marginalized in the practice of dance choreography, performance, and education, especially after Wu turned down the generous offer of being the first president of Beijing Dance School, a protest to the higher authority's decision of imposing Soviet Russian ballet (and the Chinese *xiqu*) as the primary training system of the school.[34] Wu himself had been off stage for more than a decade and had not choreographed any dance work for seven years by 1957 when Tianma was founded.[35] Thus, Wu's basic goal was limited to carving out a

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[33] Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉, *Wudao chuangzuo fa* 舞蹈創作法 [The Methodology of Dance Creation], translated by Jin Qiu 金秋 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005), 5.

[34] Wilcox, "Han-Tang Zhongguo Gudianwu and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance," 208-9.

[35] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 215.

plot in the socialist artistic field for his New classical dance—a haven for his modernist ideas—as a "unique flower among hundreds."

Nevertheless, Wu did have some advantages on his side. Although Wu had been practically excluded from the stage of dance choreography and performance since 1950, he had managed to maintain his central position in the discursive field of dance by transforming his identity from a dancer/choreographer to a dance scholar and academic authority. Throughout the 1950s, Wu was the only major dancer who ever systematically wrote on virtually all areas of dance as a discipline, including dance historiography, dance theory, methodology of choreography, and dance pedagogy. He also conducted extensive field research at the national scale. Wu first studied ethnic dance at the frontiers from 1952 to 1954 as the director of the Ethnic Minority Cultural Work Group, and then studied folk dance and religious dance in South and East China from 1955-1957.[36] Moreover, as President of Chinese Dance Art Research Association (hereafter, Dance Research Association, the major official organization devoted to academic research on dance), Wu established his authority in the discursive field of Chinese dance and controlled the key discursive device—the major academic/professional dance journals.[37]

Therefore, before the founding of Tianma, the core of the Chinese academic dance world in the 1950s may be roughly divided into two specialized camps, as symbolized by the picture depicted at the beginning of the chapter. The first is represented by the dance

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[36] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 120-8; See also, Emily Wilcox, "Dancers Doing Fieldwork: Socialist Aesthetics and Bodily Experience in the People's Republic of China," *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*, 17.2 (Fall 2010): 6-16.

[37] Wang Kefen 王克芬 and Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, eds., *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* 中國近現代舞蹈發展史 (1840-1996) [A Developmental History of Dance in Modern China] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 223-24.

practitioners at Beijing Dance School, backed up by Soviet experts, who dominated the realm of practice, including dance choreography, performance, and education. The second camp was headed by Wu Xiaobang, with the institutional support of the Dance Research Association (which also followed the Soviet model of literary and artistic institutions), mainly specialized in academic research, including dance history, anthropology, theory, and criticism.[38] The two camps cooperated yet competed with each other, maintaining a delicate balance of power between practice and discourse in the field of dance.[39]

However, Wu, as a dancer/choreographer, was not content with being left out from the practical realm and had made persistent effort to put his artistic vision into practice, which culminated in the birth of Tianma. The nature of Tianma is, in Wu's words, a cutting-edge "scientific experimental lab," which strives to create a distinct organizational form integrating dance research, education, choreography, and commercial performance. That is, Tianma was not just a small dance studio; it actually contained the functions of a dance training school, a dance company, and a high-level research institute which, in Wu's design, would eventually become qualified for training graduate students.[40] In some sense, Wu attempted to combine flexibly in Tianma the characteristics of the model of academic education and the model of apprenticeship. This approach of organizational innovation was so ahead of time that it would not be picked

[38] The division of the two camps is only schematic—the two did have some personnel, organizational, and disciplinary overlaps.

[39] "Dai Ailian deng zai zuotan hui shang tanshuai piping: wudao jie jiaotiaozhuyi zongpaizhuyi yanzhong" 戴愛蓮等在座談會上坦率批評: 舞蹈界教條主義宗派主義嚴重 [Dai Ailian etc. criticized at the discussion session that dogmatism and fractionism are serious in the field of dancce], Renmin ribao 人民日報 (May 18, 1957).

[40] Wu Xiaobang, "Yige xin wudao qimengzhe de zibai," 169-74; *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 129-54.

up again by *xiqu* education until the new millennium.[41] Therefore, it is unsurprising that Tianma had been highly controversial since its birth, because it not only represented a "heretical" school of artistic thoughts, but also constituted a novel organizational alternative challenging the Soviet model of academic institutions which had prevailed in China. The balance of power had been upset.[42]

Wu was fully aware of the political risks of his bold endeavor, so he had been meticulous in guarding Tianma from making imprudent mistakes which might become the targets of potential political attacks. Tianma to Wu, in his own words, was like "a precious son [he] had at an old age" (when Tianma was founded Wu was already fifty four, a rather old age for a dancer), so he had done everything he could to ensure Tianma's safety. Since 1956, Wu had begun to cut down his publications to minimum in order to keep a low profile in the turbulent times.[43] Tianma itself, as symbolized by the walled reclusive *siheyuan*, had literally lived a hermit life. Students of Tianma could only leave the studio on Saturday and must return by Sunday night, and were not allowed to develop romantic love relationships, get married, or be involved in any "unhealthy social activities," both inside and outside Tianma. Wu consistently turned down higher authorities who requested the female students to be dance partners in important balls, and film companies which invited the Tianma students to shoot dance scenes.[44] Ironically, Wu—who himself grew up wandering freely in the boisterous urban cultures of Suzhou,

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[41] Wang Tao 王濤, "Xiqu biaoyan rencai peiyang de xiandai xuetuzhi tansuo" 戲曲表演人才培養的現代學徒制探索 [The exploration of modern apprenticeship in cultivating talents of *xiqu* performance], *Guangming ribao* 光明日報 (June 24th 2013): 16.

[42] "Dai Ailian deng zai zuotan hui shang tanshuai piping: wudao jie jiaotiaozhuyi zongpaizhuyi yanzhong."

[43] Wu Xiaobang, "Yige xin wudao qimengzhe de zibai," 173.

[44] Pu, "Wudao de bieyang nianhua," 273.

Shanghai, and Tokyo and pursued the liberating art of modern dance—had to force his young students to live an ascetic life under political pressures. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Tianma students, Wu's care for them "seems to surpass that for his own children," and Wu "held as abhorrent the humiliation or physical punishment inflicted upon students by the Soviet experts and the education of apprenticeship in Old China."[45]

Fig 4: Wu Xiaobang teaching students at the Tianma Dance Studio, 1957.

The training methodology and philosophy of Tianma is also innovative, which uses the German modern dance system of "natural human body movement" and dance composition to synthesize elements of other training traditions (fig. 4). A typical day of the Tianma students began at 8am with a one-and-a-half hour "basic training" class, which includes the teaching of the "natural body movement," reformed ballet basics, Chinese martial arts, and *tanzi gong* 毯子功 (literally, Skills on carpet, the method of physical skill training used in the *xiqu* tradition). The second class in the morning focused

[45] Ibid.

on developing the students' creativity and imagination necessary for choreography. Students were required to creatively use different rhythms of breath and movements to express various emotions (such as happiness, sadness, regret, and disgust), to represent daily body movements (walking, fording a river, plucking flowers, and riding a bike), and to interpret all kinds of people and animals (normal or abnormal). The afternoons were ususally devoted to choreographing and rehearsing dance works for public performance, practicing Chinese musical instruments and folk songs, and cultural courses on literature and arts (including the history of Chinese dance, music, and literature).[46]

Wu's eclectic training system of New classical dance differs fundamentally from that of the classical dance of Beijing Dance School in several important aspects, though the two shared some sources. First, the tenet of "natural body movement" is the master principle, based on which the ingredients of other systems are carefully selected and reformed. For example, there were no barre or mirror utilized in Tianma's training courses (including the course focusing on ballet basics)—a modern dance tradition Wu inherited from his Japanese teachers Takada Seiko and Eguchi Takaya, because Wu believes these tools are for the trainees to correct their postures and movements according to the "affected" standard of beauty imposed from without, rather than to understand and master the "natural law" of body movement from within.[47]

Second, to learn the techniques of ballet, *xiqu*, and martial arts is only for the purpose of cultivating the necessary bodily skills, but not to achieve formalistic exactitude of coded movement and physical virtuosity. In fact, Wu made great effort to ensure that his

[46] Ibid., 270-2; Li, "Wu Xiaobang tongzhi zhuchi de Tianma Wudao Gongzuoshi jijiang chengli," 2.

[47] Pu, "Wudao de bieyang nianhua," 270.

students do not fall into the "traps" of these codified formal systems—the dictum recalled most frequently by Wu's students later in their lives is: "Learn, then must forget," because Wu maintains that "only after forgetting what has been learned can one truly enter the realm of creation."[48] To the critics of Wu from the classical dance camp, Wu's attitude involved in "using" the Chinese "dance tradition" (as represented by *xiqu*), or any other traditions, is offensively "insincere" and "nihilistic."[49] Yet this is exactly how Wu deconstructs the "classical dance form."

Third, while Wu may be "nihilistic" about the "classical form" in his training methodology, he seems to be serious about the "classical ethos." When the Tianma troupe toured the country, the places Wu led his students to visit the most were temples, as he believes that these religious institutions "preserve the essence of Chinese culture"[50] and "if we do not immerse ourselves in the history of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, we cannot reach the depths of the thoughts of Chinese society."[51] Clearly, Wu strives to replace the formal with the spiritual in defining the "classical" or "tradition." If Wu's "nihilistic" deconstruction of the "classical form" was to break the "old bottle," his emphasis on the "classical ethos" was to bring back the "old wine." Wu's strategy was thus in diagonal opposition to the imperative of "preserving the old bottle while filling it with the new wine."

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[48] Ibid., 271.

[49] Si Xiaobing 司小兵, "Cong Wu Xiaobang tongzhi dui 'Bai hua qi fang, Bai jia zheng ming' de cuowu lijie tanqi'" 從吳曉邦同志對"百花齊放, 百家爭鳴"的錯誤理解談起 [A discussion starting from Comrade Wu Xiaobang's misunderstanding of "Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend"], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 7 (1958): 28-34, 65.

[50] Pu, "Wudao de bieyang nianhua," 273.

[51] Wu Xiaobang, *Wu lun ji* 舞論集 [Writings on dance theory] (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 64.

However, Wu's sincerity toward the "classical ethos" should not be taken too seriously either. The reason why Wu brought back the "classical ethos" in the first place is: only by encroaching on the monopoly of the "classical form" in defining the "classical" and "tradition" can he carve out a space to preserve his "new bottle" of New dance, and together with it, his version of the "new wine"—the underlying modernist ideas. In the early 1980s after the advent of the Reform Era, Wu could finally utter his complaint about the dominant status of "classical themes" in Chinese dance choreography, and advocate the necessity of "strengthening the modern consciousness."[52]

"Reclusion" in the Great Leap Forward: Utopia against Utopia

Encouraged by the relatively smooth Socialist Transformation and the accomplishments of the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957) in the economic sector, and the "victory" of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in the political and ideological realm, the overly optimistic Mao and his comrades launched the Great Leap Forward in 1958. The campaign, with the slogans of "surpassing Britain and catching up with the United States" and "racing into Communism," originally aimed to build the Communist utopia within an extremely short period, but instead resulted in one of the greatest famines in modern Chinese history.[53] The whole nation then was swirled into this forward looking and frenetic-paced movement, which of course greatly impacted the art field.

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[52] Wu Xiaobang, "'Wu Xiaobang wudao yishu sixiang yanjiu hui' de bimu ci" "吳曉邦舞蹈藝術思想研究會"的閉幕詞 [The closing speech of the research conference on Wu Xiaobang's thoughts on the art of dance] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 134-45, 142-3.

[53] Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, eds., *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

With the acceleration of the socialist construction, the art institutions, like all "work units," developed production plans. Painters found themselves being required to create a large number of works within a short time to promote the campaign, including works of immense scale. The artists of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, for example, completed 138 murals before they went to labor in the countryside.[54] Literary works, especially poems, were collected and produced in unprecedented quantities, like wheat and steel. In the musical field, just in early 1958, "several million pieces were collected" in Shanghai alone, of which two thousand were published.[55] The agitprop dances, produced and performed by worker-peasant-soldier amateur artists under the slogan of "More, Faster, Better, and Cheaper," also emerged on the Chinese stages.

Against this backdrop, Tianma's eleven or so works of New classical dance would seem extremely out of place.[56] The unifying themes of these dances are *yu* 漁 (fishing), *qiao* 樵 (woodcutting), *geng* 耕 (farming), and *du* 讀 (reading), which, according to Wu, characterize the "the traditional Chinese way of living."[57] At a first glance, these themes represent different kinds of physical (and mental) labor, and seem not that incompatible with the gist of the Great Leap Forward. However, the particular "classical ethos"

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[54] Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 211.

[55] King, "Romancing the Leap: Euphoria in the Moment before Disaster" in *Eating Bitterness*, 52.

[56] Among the twenty seven dance works Wu choreographed for Tianma within the four years, there are only six with themes more or less related to the Great Leap Forward. Six of the rest are re-staging, with only limited adaptation, of the religious and court ritual dances Wu collected during his national field work before 1957. The remaining fifteen works are all inspired by and choreographed according to "classical" Chinese musical pieces, which are called by Wu *gu qu xin wu* 古曲新舞 [literally, old music new dance]. However, *gu qu xin wu* should not be seen as a dance genre, as it only refers to the fact that these dances are all kinestheticization of "old music." Among these fifteen "new dances with old music," there are four with modern themes (or themes with no clear temporal context). Therefore, only the rest eleven or so are typical "New classical dance."

[57] Wu Xiaobang, "Yige xin wudao qimengzhe de zibai," 170.

underlying these labor themes, as admitted by Wu later in his life, is the millennia-old Chinese intellectual ideal of "reclusion," which may be characterized by material simplicity, individual self-sufficiency, meditative calmness, artistic leisure, disinterested poise, enjoyment of nature, and the condescendingly critical yet detached stance against the mundane (political) world.[58] Thus, the intellectualized and spiritualized images of hermit-fisherman, woodcutter, and farmer in the Tianma dances—accompanied by characteristically slow-paced and spiritual classical Chinese music—become pure mocking opposite of the Communized/collectivized farmers and workers who razed enormous forests and reported fictional unit agricultural yields and steel outputs of astronomical quantities. If Tianma's reclusive life off stage was a low-key defensive strategy, its dance works representing the "backward-looking" images of reclusion on stage would seem a "blatant" mockery of the national "leaping forward" frenzy.[59]

Putting the images of reclusion on stage in the particular historical context of the late 1950s is by no means Wu's nostalgic sentimental response to the fast disappearing "traditional way of living." Rather, Wu, as an urban bourgeois intellectual-artist who claims to belong with the May Fourth generation, appropriated "reclusion" to make a political stance of resistance. The critical strength of the imagery of reclusion rests on the fact that "reclusion," as an intellectual ideal, provided the exact economic, aesthetic, and

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[58] See Wu Xiaobang, "Jingxin tansuo, du pi xi jing" 精心探索, 獨闢蹊徑 [Carefully explore and independently blaze a new trail] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 4, 81-3, 82; Berkowitz. *Patterns of Disengagement.*

[59] Wu was of course not unaffected by the frenzy of the Great Leap Forward. He once led his students to farm in the countryside in the "leaping-forward way" with the illusion of achieving material self-sufficiency. However, Wu quickly became disillusioned in the late 1958 after his own failure and seeing the hard reality in the countryside. See Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 141-7.

ideological antithesis of the socialist/communist model which, though with intermittent backsets and oscillations, had quickly secured its grip on the entire country.

In the economic realm, the Socialist Transformation took only about three years (1953-1956) to finish the collectivization and/or nationalization of agriculture, handcraft industry, and capitalist industry and commerce. For example, in the agricultural sector, millions of peasants had to surrender the lands they were just assigned during the Land Reform (1950-1953) to participate in the Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives which aimed to collectivize the means and labor of agrarian production. These collectivizing movements on the national scale strived to bring down not merely the barriers of the millennia-old family-based natural *economy*, but also the fences of *private life* itself, as a means to let CCP's governmental control smoothly permeate the very fabric of social life. Such a process culminated in the even larger social organization of People's Communes mushrooming during the Great Leap Forward, which became a "trinity" of political governance, economic production/consumption, and everyday life—as symbolized by the famous slogan "Renmin gongshe hao!" 人民公社好 (People's Commune is Good!) decreed by Mao himself.[60]

Similar processes also took place in the intellectual and artistic realm. Following the Soviet model, almost all intellectuals, writers, and artists were organized into various academic or professional institutions/associations led directly by Party cadres and governmental bureaus.[61] Organizations like these greatly facilitated CCP's political

[60] Nicholas R. Lardy, "Economic recovery and the 1st Five-Year Plan" in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vol. 14, 360-97, 360-7.

[61] Merlie Goldman, "The party and the intellectuals" in MacFarquhar and Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 14, 218-58, 234.

control over intellectuals and artists, as manifested in the Anti-Rightist Movement right preceding the Great Leap Forward, during which about 400,000 to 700,000 intellectuals were "efficiently" singled out as "Rightists" to meet the quota of five percent assigned to each "work unit," deprived of their positions and forced to perform physical labor in the countryside or factories—the so called "Labor Reform."[62] This process further developed into anti-intellectualism and the general deterioration of intellectual's social status during the Great Leap Forward.[63]

Against this weltering tide of drastic and profound social change, the imagery of "reclusion" represents an exactly opposite model. Instead of large-scale collectivization of production and consumption, reclusion promotes the ideal of self-sufficient individual-based "natural economy." Unlike the aggressive socialist construction which emphasizes the superiority of human power over nature and thus destructively transforms nature, reclusion believes in the harmonious equilibrium between man and nature. In contrast to the debasement of intellectual labor as something to be "reformed" through physical labor, reclusion spiritualizes physical labor as an intellectual means to achieve higher consciousness. Different from the collectivizing processes which minimize the private sphere of everyday life, reclusion firmly holds the ground of private life against the encroachment of the public. While the new socialist regime strives to indoctrinate the intellectuals with a uniform hegemonic ideology and to harness them and their work to serve the over-heated revolutionary machine, reclusion defends the autonomous status of intellectuals which enables them to treat "criticizing the government" as a "right" they

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[62] Ibid., 257.

[63] Merlie Goldman, "The party and the intellectuals: phase two" in MacFarquhar and Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 14, 432-77, 432.

can either condescendingly claim or defiantly forsake, rather than a "responsibility" which can be imposed upon or taken away from them by certain authority. It is exactly because of this critical strength (yet with an "apolitical" appearance) of the imagery of reclusion that Wu appropriates it in his New classical dance to kinesthetically construct an individual-based utopia with a reclusive spatiality and timeless (or slow) temporality to resist the collective communist utopia with an all-encompassing spatiality and ever-accelerating temporality.

However, Wu's resistance should not be seen as a "face-to-face" confrontation against the state. Just as he did not choose to openly pit his New dance against the classical dance but, instead, found cover within it for self protection, Wu concealed, though perhaps only thinly, the imagery of reclusion in the disguise of mundane labor and among a few dance works responding directly to the fervent call of socialist construction. After all, Wu himself was a CCP member subject to the Party's rule. Thus, Wu's resistance is conflicted in nature.[64] To demonstrate Wu's strategy of resistance and the struggles and contradictions inherent in his New classical dance, the rest of this section provides close analyses of two representative dance works of Wu.

Si fan 思凡 (Longing for the mundane): Faith vs. Desire

> Three nights in a roll, when Teacher Wu finished his performance of *Si fan* and went to the front of the stage to answer the curtain call, barefoot, with his face covered by sweat, ten figures put together devoutly, we watched with

[64] This schizoid nature of Wu is far from unique, but rather representative of the mentality of most Chinese intellectuals in the early years of the socialist regime. See Goldman, "The party and the intellectuals," 235-6.

> excitement, and grief as well. We had vaguely felt that his salutation was bidding farewell—the beams of the stage lights shooting on his body would probably turn dim soon …[65]
>
> —Pu Yimian, a student of Tianma

Fig 5: Lanxin da xiyuan (Lyceum Theater) in Shanghai, postcard, date unknown.

This scene recalled by one of Wu's graduate students later in her life was among the last public performances of Tianma right before its downfall in 1960. The location was the famous *Lanxin daxiyuan* 蘭心大戲院 (Lyceum Theater) in Shanghai, a luxurious legacy reminiscent of the city's colonial cosmopolitan past complicated with both glory and disgrace (fig. 5). It was also at this same theater that, back in the 1930s, Wu held some of his earliest modern dance concerts. Now here again, thirty years later, Wu, at the age of fifty five, was unwillingly approaching the endpoint of his career as a professional dancer and choreographer. Despite the turbulent decades that had passed by, some of Wu's old audience of the 1930s—many were his friends working in drama, film,

[65] Pu, "Wudao de bieyang nianhua," 277.

literature, music, and painting—re-gathered in the theater to support and celebrate Wu's performances, which turned out to be the final high point of his dancing life.[66]

The last dance of the whole concert was *Si fan*, which, with the image of Wu as a Buddhist monk putting his two palms together, had left a lasting impression for the audience of 1960. This dance shared the same title, theme, and similar storyline with the famous *kunqu* 昆曲 opera. Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961), master of Peking Opera, also once studied and performed this *kunqu* drama in early Republic era. He learned and further developed many elegant expressive dance moves, the experience of which was instrumental in Mei's perfecting his Peking Opera performance.[67]

Note that Wu's *Si fan* was actually not part of his Tianma works of the late 1950s, but choreographed eighteen years earlier in 1942 Qujiang 曲江, Guangdong Province. It was among the earliest few "classical-themed" independent solos Wu ever composed, and was regarded by him as a representative work of his New dance. By including the New dance *Si fan* as the last performance closing up his concert of New classical dance created fifteen years later, Wu seems to suggest the direct lineage between the two—letting it end at where it all began. Therefore, a close analysis of *Si fan* may reveal some common themes and problematics that had persisted through the fifteen years in-between. Then, why did Wu, who strived to distinguish his "New dance" from the "old dance" integrated in *xiqu*, and later his "New classical dance" from the *xiqu*-based "classical dance,"

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Mei Lanfang, *Mei Lanfang tan yi lu* 梅蘭芳談藝錄 [Mei Lanfang's discussions on art] (Changsha: Hunan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 123-37; For different performance versions of Si Fan, see Andrea S. Goldman, "The Nun Who Wouldn't Be: Representations of Female Desire in Two Performance Genres of 'Si Fan,'" Late Imperial China, 22.1 (2001): 71-138.

borrow the theme of a well known *kunqu* in composing this work of New dance (which is also regarded as the origin of his New classical dance)?

In fact, Wu was not the first choreographer who ever adapted *Si fan* into New dance. In the early 1920s, Fujikage Shizue 藤蔭靜枝 (1880-1966), a pioneer of Japan's New dance, choreographed a Kabuki dance with the same title *Shi han*, based entirely on the "snapshots" and story outline of Mei's *kunqu* performance sketched, painted, recorded, and brought back to Japan by Fukuchi Nobuyo 福地信世 (1887-1934). Fujikage's Kabuki adaptation quickly became a big success after its premiere in 1921—it has been regarded as a "much-awaited" work of New dance in Japan's *Shin buyō undō* 新舞踊運動 (the New Dance Movement).[68] Considering Wu's experience of studying dance in Japan in the late 1920s, he might have also known about, if not watched, this Kabuki version of *Si fan*.[69]

From Mei's *kunqu* rendition (fig. 6) to Fujikage's Kabuki dance (fig. 7) and to Wu Xiaobang's New dance (fig. 8), *Si fan* (or *Shi han*), follows a similar plot, staging a

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[68] It was celebrated as an experiment that finally appeared about seventeen years after Tsubōchi Shōyo 坪内逍遥's call for the reformation of traditional Japanese dance in his *Shin gakugekiron* 新楽劇論 [On the new musical drama] in 1904. See Chao Chi-Fang 趙綺芳, "Quanqiu xiandaixing, guojiazhuyi yu 'xinwuyong:' yi 1945 nian yiqian riben xiandaiwu de fazhan wei li zhi fenxi" 全球現代性, 國家主義與"新舞踊": 以 1945 年以前日本現代舞的發展為例之分析 [Global modernity, nationalism and the "New dance:" an analysis using the development of modern dance in pre-1945 Japan as a case], *Yishu pinglun* 藝術評論 no. 18 (Taipei: Taipei National University of Arts, 2008): 27-55, 42.

[69] Perhaps because Wu intended to position his *Si fan* as a work of New dance and of a Chinese origin, he never confirmed any direct connection between his version and either Mei's "old" *kunqu* opera or Fijikage's Kabuki adaptation. Instead, he attributed the inspiration to Huang Youdi 黃友棣 (1912-2010)'s violin solo *Dinghu shang de huanghun* 鼎湖上的黃昏 (Dusk on the Dinghu Mountain, which became the accompanying music for Wu's *Si fan*)—a Chinese-styled piece yet composed entirely based on the principles of Western classical music. See Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 59.

secluded obsessive longing for the mundane (the desire for love or sexual pleasure).[70] The popularity of *Si fan* for performance adaptation in early twentieth century East Asia suggests there is something "modern" and "representative" about this century-old drama that can be exploited by the modern choreographers. As Wu explained in the 1950s, "this is a theme about the sharp conflict between *shen* [神 (divinity, faith)] and *yu* [欲 (desire)], which had been widely employed by many great artists in Renaissance Europe."[71] Clearly, Wu was not primarily interested in the "Chineseness" or "traditionalness" of *Si fan*, but rather its dramatic theme that can afford a May-Fourth styled "New" interpretation of universal "modernity." Note that this is exactly the ideological starting point of Wu's New classical dance fifteen years later.

Fig 6: Mei Lanfang performing *Si fan* (Longing for the Mundane), 1916.

[70] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 74; Kuniyoshi Kazuko 國吉和子, *Yumeo no ishō kioku no tsubo: buyō to modanizumu* 夢の衣裳・記憶の壺：舞踊とモダニズム [The clothes of dreams and the jar of memories: dance and modernism] (Tōkyō : shinshokan, 2002), 119; Mei, *Mei Lanfang tan yi lu*, 123-37.

[71] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 74.

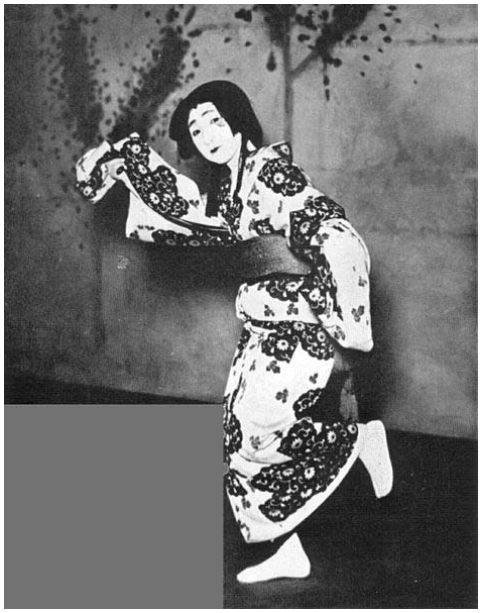

Fig 7: Fujikage Shizue performing *Shi han*, Tokyo, 1921.

The original *kunqu* tells a story of a young girl named Zhao Sekong 趙色空 (meaning "materiality is emptiness"), who was forced to become a Buddhist nun by her parents when she was little. Her life in a convent secluded in the mountain went by peacefully until she turned sixteen. Her mood and emotion thereafter changed, desiring for mundane life and longing for love, which conflicted with her religious and spiritual conviction. The conflict was resolved as Zhao ran out of the temple and down the mountain to pursue her mundane happiness. The performance features a long uninterrupted dance solo of the heroine accompanied by her *nianbai* 念白 (the spoken part of the *xiqu*), which requires the actor to be able to express the mixed subtle feelings of melancholy, longing, and sadness, and to balance the free and delightful mood of a sixteen year old girl and her complicated sensorial and psychological responses to the world outside the convent.[72]

[72] *Si fan* has long been recognized as one of the most difficult works to perform in the *kunqu* repertoire, especially the dance solo of the female lead. See Liu Jianchun 劉建春, *Zhongguo kunqu ditu* 中國昆曲地圖 [The map of Chinese *kunqu*] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2010), 89.

Fig 8: Wu Xiaobang performing *Si fan*, Qujiang, Guangdong, 1942.

This narrative of *Si fan* is a variant of the typical classical literary theme of *si chun* 思春 (literally, longing for spring), in which a beautiful teenage girl reaching her puberty rebels against the Confucian patriarchal authority to pursue romantic love. Yet in *Si fan*, in the psychoanalytical sense, the "phallus" of the mundane fatherly figure is replaced with a more abstract and symbolic one of faith. To the modern choreographers, it was this sharper contrast between the concreteness of sensuality and the abstractness of spirituality that made the conflict in *Si fan* more readily internalized within a single individual character, rather than a simple-minded interpretation of a brave young female fighting against external "feudalistic oppression." This is exactly why *Si fan* seemed so "modern" and attractive to these soloist dancers in early twentieth century East Asia, who relied on both the concrete body and the "abstract" dance movements to explore the conditions of modern subjecthood within the colonial context.

Fig 9: Stage design of *Si fan*, Qujiang, Guangdong, 1942.

In Wu's *Si fan*, the stage background setup features a red wall topped by glazed tiles separating the outside world and the interiority of the convent, a spatial symbolization of the internal conflict of the character. Beyond the wall one can see the top half of a willow with crooked branches and a mountain peak in the far back, which transform the stage into a reclusive space (fig. 9).

Accompanied by the violin solo *Dusk on the Dinghu Mountain*, the dance begins with Wu, as a barefooted young Buddhist monk, sitting cross legged on a cattail hassock. The monk, in a grey-and-black Kasaya with prayer beads hanging around his neck, is chanting scriptures piously with his eyes closed. The monk's palms are put together in a praying gesture, which becomes a persisting motif throughout the whole dance. This gesture, restraining the degrees of freedom of the movement of hands, arms, and the upper torso, symbolizes the constant self-discipline of religious spirituality.[73]

As time goes by, more and more tourists—supposedly young men and women—pass by the red wall of the temple from outside. Their voices disturbed the internal tranquility of the monk. He gradually loses his composure and leans his head slightly and slowly to the sides and listens attentively to the sounds of the mundane world. The monk cannot help standing up and, attracted by the voices outside, walks slowly toward the red wall while still praying toward the Buddhist altar. The subsequent dance movements then unfold in the push and pull between these two opposite directions, kinestheticizing the internal struggle of the character. At first, the wavering of the monk is visualized in small movements of body parts, such as a quivering motion of a raised ankle. As the outsiders get closer and their voices louder, the internal conflict of the monk intensifies,

[73] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 71-4.

represented by bigger movements like stretching his body and raising his head in an attempt to have a peek beyond the wall. The brewing tension finally culminates in a big action of "scratching his head with his right hand," which breaks the motif of the "two palms put together," suggesting the monk's frustration and failure to conceal his inner struggle. After the climax, as the tourists wander away and their voices fell to distant whispers, the monk gradually gathers his mind and resumes chanting scriptures in the ringing of the temple bell to express his repentance.[74]

Although Wu borrowed the theme and story from the traditional *kunqu*, he denied any direct connection between this "New dance" choreography and the bodily coding of the "old" drama, but instead attributed some of the dance gestures to the Buddhist sculptures of arhats in temples. Mei Lanfang's rendition of *Si fan* bases its meaning delivery primarily on the *nianbai* and the lyrics of arias, while the dance-like bodily code only plays an auxiliary role in the performance to visualize the textual content in a verbatim manner.[75] In contrast, without any assistance of language, Wu's choreography focuses mainly on the kinestheticization of the monk's various conflicting bodily reactions to the acoustic stimuli both inside and outside the separating temple wall (for instance, the ringing of the temple bell and the voices of the tourists).

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[74] Ibid.

[75] For example, in *Cai cha ge* 采茶歌 (The song of collecting tea leaves), one of the arias in Mei's play, one line of Zhao complaining about the tedious life in the Buddhist temple reads: 與人家追薦亡靈, 不住口地念著彌陀. 只聽得鐘聲法號, 不住手地擊罄搖鈴, 擊罄搖鈴, 擂鼓吹螺. "[I] summon and cross over the dead souls for others, and keep calling Maitreya nonstop. I hear only the ringing of the bell and the blowing of the ritualistic horn. I keep striking the singing bow and ringing the bell nonstop, striking the singing bow and ringing the bell, beating the drum and blowing the conch shell." To visualize this line, Mei put two palms together for "calling Maitreya," then, with a horsetail whisk in the right hand while the left hand holding the horse hair, he sways from left to right. He then dance-acted a series of gestures to mimic the body movements of playing the ritualistic instruments, such as "striking the singing bow," "ringing the bell," "beating the drum," and "blowing the conch shell." See Mei, *Mei Lanfang tan yi lu*, 128.

There are another two obvious differences that distinguish Wu's New (classical) dance *Si fan* from the original *kunqu*. First, Wu changed the character of the teenage nun to a young monk and thus abandoned cross-gender performance. Just as his colleagues of the New/spoken drama attacked cross-gender performance in the "old" drama, Wu also criticized it as a form of "feudalistic oppression" on both men and women and contradictory to the modern dance principle of "natural" body movement.[76] Moreover, in the 1940s, dance was still widely deemed a profession exclusively for women in China, and being a male dancer is highly scandalous—Wu himself was often sneered at and even vituperated.[77] Therefore, Wu had to reject cross-gender performance and to dance as a "man," in order to masculinize (or at least to neutralize) his New dance. This attitude toward cross-gender performance is also reflected in Wu's choreography of *Si fan*. After hearing the voices of young women outside the temple, the monk walks several steps forward with an awkwardly feminine gait, which seems to mock the gender-crossing performance of the *xiqu* tradition.[78]

Second, Wu changed the original ending of the nun escaping from the convent and pursuing her mundane happiness to an opposite one of the monk staying in the temple and repenting to Buddha of his wavering of faith. It seems that, unexpectedly, Wu chose a more conservative and suppressive ending over the more progressive and liberating one.

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[76] Wu Xiaobang, "Jiekai zhongguo xin wudao de xumu" 揭開中國新舞蹈的序幕 [Draw up the curtain of China's New dance] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 44-53, 46; Wu Xiaobang, "Wo he wudao (houji): wo de wudao guan" 我和舞蹈 (後記): 我的舞蹈觀 [Dance and me (epilogue): my view of dance] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 121-33, 121-2.

[77] Wu Xiaobang, "Wudao chuangzuo yao geng shang yi ceng lou" 舞蹈創作要更上一層樓 [Dance choreography must arise to a new level] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 4, 153-65, 164.

[78] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 71.

To understand this paradoxical choice of Wu, one needs to consider the particular status of dance in relation to *xiqu* in modern China.

The rise of *xiqu* as a performance art since the late imperial era may be generally seen as a continuous yet friction-fraught process of competition, mutual appropriation, and symbiosis between literature, originally a privilege of literati, and urban popular culture, which relies more on the various senses of the body as complements to the textual and the verbal. In particular, the popularity the role type *dan* 旦 (female roles) achieved during the 1910s and 1920s, as represented by Mei's rise to fame, was a further development of Peking Opera to appeal to (female) sensuality, following the changing trend of the mass-mediated cultural market.[79]

By the 1930s, Peking Opera had largely succeeded in striking a balance between *ya* 雅 (the refined) and *su* 俗 (the popular), as manifested in its status being elevated to the "national drama" embraced by all political factions.[80] In contrast, dance has always been struggling at the *su* and sensual end of the spectrum since the very beginning. In the early twentieth century, dance was almost entirely identified as a low art, or even anti-art, which relies only on sensuality to serve the mere purpose of entertainment, not just devoid of any intellectual content but often associated with debauchery.[81] Even as late as in the 1980s, Wu still complained that the narrow focus of ballet and classical dance training in Chinese dance institutions on bodily techniques had fed the common (mis)understanding of professional dancers being "physically advanced yet intellectually

[79] Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 118-28.

[80] Ibid., 10.

[81] Wu, "Wo he wudao (houji)," 124.

retarded."[82] Therefore, Wu's changing of the ending may be intended to signal the triumph of "masculine" rationality and intellectuality over "feminine" sensibility and sensuality, in the fear of his New dance devolving into the pure play of indulged sensual desires in the Chinese popular perception.

However, such a "victory" of faith and rationality is not won without a cost. According to the script of the dance, after the mind-splitting conflict, though still chanting scriptures, the monk's mind "cannot return to the world of Buddha anymore."[83] This trauma seems to suggest Wu's deep fear in the 1940s that the union of the mind and the body, spirituality and corporeality, which modern dance had been striving to achieve since the time of Isadora Duncan, is ultimately a utopia in the age of mass popular culture, in which the performing body had been irreversibly commodified and objectified.[84]

The ending of Wu's *Si fan* may also reveal the ambivalent attitude of Wu, as an independent artist, toward the relationship between his art and the politics of China. As discussed in the previous chapter, Wu, on the one hand, believed that his New dance must engage in the grand cause of mass mobilization and national salvation in order to establish its legitimacy in China. Within the four years following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Wu toured South China, choreographed and performed many dance works to join forces with other Leftist artists in mass mobilization. On the other hand, however, Wu also wanted to maintain some degree of autonomy for

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[82] Wu Xiaobang, "Zhongguo xiandai wudao de lilun yu shijian" 中國現代舞蹈的理論與實踐 [The theory and practice of modern Chinese dance] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 3, 164-9, 166.

[83] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 72.

[84] As Wu remarks in 1941, dance had been "the commodity in the hands of merchants who sell laughter, the martial arts of peddling kungfu performers, or the interludes for [the performance of] magicians on the stage." See Wu, "Zai kangzhan zhong shengzhang qilai de wuyong yishu," 96.

his art and often refrained from full political engagement. Therefore, in July 1942 at the height of the Pacific War and right after Mao's "Yan'an Talk," Wu forsook the opportunity to go to the Communist-controlled Yan'an from Chongqing, but instead accepted the invitation to teach dance at the Nationalist-run *Qujiang shengli yishu zhuanke xuexiao* 曲江省立藝術專科學校 (The Qujiang provincial school of specialized arts) in Guangdong, because the school offered him better teaching and practicing facilities and a more "liberal" environment for developing both the pedagogy and choreography of his New dance.[85] It was in Qujiang that Wu conceived *Si fan*. The whole dancing career of Wu may be characterized as this pattern of periodic oscillation between the two states—one more politically engaged and the other more withdrawing (yet more artistically engaged).

In Qujiang, Wu lived a semi-reclusive life for one year, which for him was the most productive time in his whole career.[86] Wu's choreographing and teaching practices in Qujiang also became an important basis for his Tianma Studio later. The residence of Wu's family in Qujiang was an isolated brand-new single-family house located on a terrace carved out on a mountain in the suburb. The chancellor of the school selected this location in person and authorized the construction of this new house particularly for the Wu family, in order to filter out the various distractions from the wartime chaos. The house was surrounded by a thick forest of pines, from which one "can watch sunrise in

[85] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 54-6.

[86] Ibid., 56.

the morning and listen to the howling of the pine waves at night."[87] This secluded environment provided direct inspirations for Wu's *Si fan*.[88] Wu may even, to a large extent, identify himself with the monk in the isolated temple (in fact, Wu often likened himself to a lonesome monk "preaching" the art of New dance), struggling between his "faith"—his lofty and lonely artistic pursuit—and his "desire" of engaging in the down-to-earth politics in the mundane world outside the ivory tower. Thus, Wu's ending of *Si fan* may also be interpreted as his strenuous defense of the minimal autonomy of his art as interiority against the outside political world.

As shown below, these tensions reflected in *Si fan* between the mind and the body, the spiritual and the physical, art and politics, along with the theme of reclusion, were all carried over to Tianma in the socialist era, though in some different manifestations. This is why Wu himself regarded *Si fan* as integral to the development of his New classical dance in the 1950s and included it in the repertoire of Tianma.

Yüfu le 漁夫樂 (The joy of an old fisherman): Conflicted consciousness in Utopias

If the fissure between intellectuality and corporeality, as represented in Wu's 1942 *Si fan*, is ultimately an outcome of the commodification and objectification of the body by the colonial capitalist economy, the newly established People's Republic seems to have dramatically eradicated the root of such a fissure within a few years through various campaigns of socialist transformation. Ironically, however, this fissure stubbornly re-

[87] He Minshi 何敏士, "Liang shi, yaolan: yi Wu Xiaobang laoshi zaoqi zai Guangdong banxue" 良師, 搖籃: 憶吳曉邦老師早期在廣東辦學 [Good mentor, cradle: recollecting Teacher Wu Xiaobang's teaching early in Guangdong] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 1, 198-205, 202-3.

[88] Ibid., 203.

emerged in a different form at almost the same time. The late 1950s witnessed the fast decline of the social status of intellectuals in a general tide of anti-intellectualism and the rise into primacy of manual labor culminating in the Great Leap Forward. The body was redeemed from being objectified as a commodity only to be re-objectified as the source of labor fueling the construction of the communist utopia.

As a result, many "dances," which represent in an extra-realistic manner the physical labor of farmers and workers involved in daily production, were created and put on stage by amateur or semi-professional dance troupes affiliated with local "work units." This new development, however, should not be simply romanticized as a democraticizing or equalizing process that shatters the boundaries between art and everyday life, stage and reality, experts and amateurs. All these dance troupes and their artistic creations, just like other amateur artistic organizations, were under the direct leadership of the same Party cadres running the parental "work units," and thus being part of the propaganda machine which was cranked up to exalt and spur the passion and productivity of the masses and units in the Great Leap Forward.[89]

After watching a large-scale performance of these dances of the "masses" in 1959, Wu questioned the validity of calling the onstage mimicking of physical labor "the art of dance."[90] He complained that the audience could not understand the highly specialized production procedures but only felt a huge kinesthetic burden—the "workers" on stage "seem to be so oppressed by the production and machinery that they could hardly

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[89] Goldman, "The party and the intellectuals: phase two," 434.

[90] Wu Xiaobang, "Tan huiyan zhong youguan wudao yishu de jige wenti" 談匯演中有關舞蹈藝術的幾個問題 [On several problems concerning the art of dance in the performance] in Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 4, 149-52, 150.

breathe."[91] If the body does not lie, then this kind of kinesthetic response is dangerously subversive, which, catalyzed by the extra-realistic performance "without any intellectual content,"[92] betrays the fact that the body in the socialist labor is no less alienated than that commodified by the capitalist industry in the semi-colonial past.

Although the inner struggle between spirituality and physicality in Wu's *Si fan* is indeed agonizing, such a dilemma provides at least an illusion of agency for the monk (or the artist) in the form of voluntary choice between two comparable options. The sensual body being commodified, for better or worse, still constitutes an option no less attractive than spirituality to the artist—this is the premise for the internalization of the conflict. However, in the new socialist regime, the "labor-ized" body, together with the imposition of a uniform ideology, became so overwhelming, pervasive, and intrusive that it eliminates the (illusive) possibility of voluntary choice, and thus the possibility of foregrounding any unresolved internal conflict. A direct corollary is that if there is still conflict between the two at all, it must take a more "externalized" form.

The direct manifestation of this "(re)externalization" of conflict in the New classical dance works of Tianma is, paradoxically, their "happy endings." In contrast to Wu's early New dance works in the 1930s and early 1940s, which typically end with an impasse resulting from the intense inner struggle of the character, there is little conflict in his

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[91] Ibid.; Note that Wu did not consistently devalue the amateur dances that "simplistically imitate the reality." For example, in 1952, Wu comments on this issue: "this shortcoming is a necessary phase of the process of development…the simplistic imitation of life is indeed inadequate; yet from another perspective, this is the consequence of proceeding from the reality of life." However, by the late 1950s, the unstoppable rise of manual labor into primacy and the fast decline of the status of intellectuals and professionals seemed to have greatly exacerbated Wu's anxiety on this matter. See Wu Xiaobang 吳曉邦, "Cong 'ba yi' jianjun jie jingsai yanchu kan xin wudao yishu zai budui zhong de fazhan" 從 "八一" 建軍節競賽演出看新舞蹈藝術在部隊中的發展 [Evaluate the development of the art of New dance in the military according to the contest performance of the "August 1st" Army Day], *Xinhua yuebao* 新華月報 no. 9 (1952): 228-9.

[92] Ibid., 151.

Tianma works, and even that minimum struggle is usually resolved in a characteristically idyllic ending. These "happy endings" should not be merely seen as Wu's subservient praise of the socialist regime (to be sure, they do have such a function at the surface, just as some of Tianma's more obviously eulogizing works). Rather, the attenuation of the internal conflict is the result of Wu's fuller embracement of spirituality (and artisticity) and further expulsion of physicality (and politics) by appropriating the intellectual ideal of reclusion.

In the New classical dance of Tianma, the various images of reclusion—such as an old drunken fisherman dozing by the river, an old man appreciating and taking care of his chrysanthemum flowers in the garden (alluding to Tao Qian陶潛 (352 or 365-427), the famous hermit poet), a young woodcutter dancing to the music piece *Yangchun baixue* 陽春白雪 (Bright spring and white snow, which idiomatically denotes highbrow music), and a young shepherd reading books and falling asleep in the meadow—are in fact much more aggressive than their idyllic appearances may suggest.[93] Wu intended to use these images of intellectualized "laborers" to "de-labor-ize" the physical body, occupy the interiority with spirituality (and artisticity), and expels physicality (and politics) into the margin as exteriority. By pushing the frontier of the conflict "outwards," Wu was trying to aggressively defend the minimal autonomy of art and the independence of artists and intellectuals. Ironically, the art of dance which relies so fundamentally on the somatic body had to, in some sense, turn against its physicality so decisively in Wu's Tianma choreographies. This is intrinsically problematic and even self-defeating, of which Wu, as

[93] Dance works mentioned here are *Yufu le*, *Ju lao* 菊老 (The old chrysanthemum man), *Yangchun baixue*, and *Yizhi chun* 一枝春 (A branch of spring); for details of these dances, see Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol. 5, 132-44, 188-9, 151-7, 181-3.

shown below, may be quite aware. Therefore, the "happy endings" in Wu's Tianma works are in fact symptomatic of the exacerbation, rather than the healing, of the conflicted consciousness reflected in his earlier work *Si fan*.

The split consciousness beneath the peaceful surface of reclusion finally bursts out into radical self-mutilating violence in the last dance work of Tianma (and also of Wu), *Guangling san* 廣陵散 (Song of Guangling), which was choreographed in 1960 but never found a chance to be publicly performed before (and after) Tianma's downfall.[94] The accompanying music is the well-known ancient *guqin* 古琴 (Chinese zither) piece with the same title, which is associated with two legendary deaths. The first is the death of Ji Kang 嵇康 (c.a. 223 – c.a. 263), one of the most famous iconic (and iconoclastic) Taoist hermit in Chinese history. It is said that *Guangling san* was the last piece Ji played calmly on the execution ground right before his (unjust) death, with his final sigh—"*Guangling san* will be lost forever from now on!"[95] The second is the death of the famous Warring States assassin Nie Zheng 聶政 (?-397 B.C.). The whole *guqin* piece of *Guangling san* is said to be a musical interpretation of the heroic deed of Nie. [96] After accomplishing his mission of assassinating a powerful ruler, Nie committed suicide before he got caught, but in order not to implicate his family and friends, Nie first made his body unidentifiable by using a dagger to disfigure his face, carve out his eyes, cut

[94] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 151; Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 203.

[95] Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., "Jikang zhuan" 嵇康傳 [Biography of Ji Kang] in *Jin Shu* 晉書 [Book of Jin] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol. 49, 1369-74.

[96] Wang Shixiang 王世襄, "Guqin qu Guangling san shuoming" 古琴曲《廣陵散》説明 [Explication of the guqin piece Guangling san] in Wang Shixiang, *Jin hui dui* 錦灰堆 [A pile of brocade ashes] (Beijing: *San lian shu dian*, 1999), vol. 2, 513.

open his abdomen and let the intestines flow out.[97] Wu's *Guangling san* is a direct adaptation of this bloody story of Nie.

Although Wu did not literally act out this scene of gore in his choreography—instead, he used a mask of disfigured face to represent the self-mutilating theme, the aggressiveness of the conflicted consciousness behind the tranquil façade of reclusion is betrayed in a most violent and unexpected manner. After sensing the impending demise of Tianma, Wu carried out his final dignified revenge in the double-themed *Guangling san*. He on the one hand uses the allusion of Ji Kang the hermit to mourn the unjust death of his "heavenly horse," the "precious son" lost at an old age; on the other hand he turns the spiritual theme of reclusion into a physical one of suicidal assassination, which results in the final destruction of both the spiritual and the physical through self-mutilation. After all, between the peaceful hermit and the violent assassin is only a paper-thin mask, with the two split identities becoming one and none under the death drive.

If the pre-Tianma *Si fan* represents the initial struggle between spirituality (or art) and physicality (or politics) internalized within an interiority, and the last Tianma work *Guangling san* represents the aftermath of the unsustainable expansion of the spiritual as interiority to expel the physical as exteriority in Tianma choreographies, which causes the final burst of the "balloon" and thus the self-annihilation of both the interior and the exterior, then *Yüfu le*, the first Tianma solo both choreographed and performed by Wu, represents an interim state. In *Yüfu le*, while the spiritual has been elevated and expanded into dominance and primacy, the physical, as the repressed, stubbornly reemerges on stage in the form of the unconscious, still challenging the spiritual.

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[97] Shima Qian 司馬遷, "Cike liezhuan" 刺客列傳 [Biographies of assassins] in *Shiji* 史記 [The grand scribe's records] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), vol. 86, 2515-38, 2522-6.

Fig 10: Stage design of *Yüfu le*, 1957.

Fig 11: Wu Xiaobang performing *Yüfu le*, 1957.

Yüfu le was first performed by Wu in a public dance concert of Tianma in Chongqing on June 12th, 1957. This was the first public concert of Tianma and Wu's first stage

performance in the socialist era.[98] The concert was held at the People's Auditorium of Chongqing, which could accommodate an audience size of four thousand, and went on for three nights. Aging had taken a toll on Wu. After each performance, the fifty-two year old dancer "felt extremely exhausted, just like having fallen severely sick."[99] Nevertheless, Wu managed to perform the dance works with his great passion for stage.

Different from *Si fan*, the stage setup of *Yüfu le* is minimally simple—just a tree stump and a plain backdrop with a brighter upper part and a darker lower part (fig. 10). Also in contrast to *Si fan*, there is no physical feature limiting or separating the continuity of stage space in *Yüfu le*. Wu appears on the stage as an old fisherman with a red face, an alcoholic nose, and a long white beard (all are painted on or attached to a mask). The old man wears a wide bamboo rain hat, and on his waist hangs a creel, a bottle gourd filled with wine, and a fishing rod (fig. 11).[100] This image of Wu is so representative of the numerous renditions of the old hermit fisherman in Chinese literature and paintings that his very appearance on the stage might trigger the imagination of those educated audience to automatically add all the relevant landscape features to the space, such as the flowing river, the fishing boat, the serene mountains, the whispering forest, or the hazy mist. Assisted by the slow-paced Daoist ritual music *Zuixian xi* 醉仙喜 (The deity-intoxicating happiness), Wu uses this visual allusion of reclusion to fill up the vast imaginary space with spirituality.

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[98] His last one was twelve years earlier, also in Chongqing, before he left for Yan'an in 1945.

[99] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 131-2.

[100] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 132.

According to the dance script, the old fisherman rows a wooden boat (no prop boat on the stage) toward the riverbank, smiling. Once getting off the boat, he habitually puts down all the items hanging around his waist, sits down on the tree stump, and begins his preparation. While looking around and enjoying the scenery, he baits the hook and then tosses it into the river in a relaxed manner. After securing the fishing rod below a willow, he opens the bottle gourd, takes a good smell at it, and then starts drinking while fishing and enjoying the view with great satisfaction, leisure, and intoxication. According to a brief introduction to the dance printed on the playbill of the concert, the fisherman "always gets drunk when drinking."[101] Bathed in the warm sun, the alcoholic old fisherman quickly gets tipsy and gradually falls asleep.[102]

Fig 12: Wu Xiaobang as the young scholar in *Yüfu le*, 1957.

[101] Lin Lang 林浪, "Ping *Yufu le* de cuowu sixiang qingxiang" 評《漁夫樂》的錯誤思想傾向 [Comments on the wrong ideological tendency of *Yufu le*], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 4 (1960): 28-9, 28.

[102] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 132.

Fig 13: Sketches of Wu Xiaobang performing *Yüfu le*, by Ye Qianyu 葉淺予, 1957.

The stage light dims down at this point. When the stage lights up again, Wu reappears on the stage as a dapper handsome young man carrying a Chinese folding fan—this is the fisherman in his youth being dreamed about by the old self. His graceful manner and costume apparently invoke the classical literary and theatric image of the young (Confucian) scholar-talent (fig. 12). Whereas the first scene is characterized by slow and minimal activity, the dance movement of this second scene is faster and more active. The young man, who has been greatly pleased and energized by the beautiful scenery, suddenly gets attracted by a pretty butterfly. The whole scene then centers on a series of playful moves of the young man chasing and attempting to catch the butterfly (fig. 13).[103]

[103] Ibid.

The butterfly is substituted for the structural role of the beauty in the traditional beauty-and-the-talent theme. Therefore, Wu's adaptation of this classical theme in the dream scene may be seen as a manifestation of the repressed romance, sensuality, youthful freedom, and physical energy.

Moreover, the butterfly in the dream may also be understood as an allusion to the famous "butterfly paradox" first brought up by the Taoist philosopher Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (or Zhuangzi) (c.a. 369 BC – c.a. 286 BC).[104] In this dance, the young man, in his final attempt to capture the butterfly, trips on an exposed tree root and then falls onto the ground. The stage light turns dim again. After the stage re-lights up, Wu turns back to be the old fisherman dozing on the tree stump, who is then suddenly woken up by the fall in the dream. Just like Zhuangzi, the fisherman is confused for a moment, looking around, at a loss.[105] He cannot tell which self is more real, the sober and active young Confucian scholar in the dream or the drunken and debilitated Taoist old fisherman in reality.

It is in this specific moment that Wu shocks the Confucian social and physical determinacy of the beauty-and-the-talent theme into Taoist epistemological skepticism questioning any definite identity and knowledge of the subject. As a result, the repressed no longer exists as a mere specter in the dream, but intrudes into reality in flesh and blood.

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[104] Zhuang Zhou 莊周, "Qi wu lun" 齊物論 (On the identity of things) in Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, annotated, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [Collected commentaries on *Zhuangzi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1969), vol. 1, 133. As the allegory goes, Zhuang Zhou once had a dream in which he turned into a butterfly. The feeling of being a flying butterfly in the dream was so real that Zhuang forgot himself being Zhuang Zhou. He then woke up suddenly and found that he was still Zhuang Zhou, but his feeling of being Zhuang Zhou in reality was no more real than his feeling of being a butterfly in the dream. He got confused: "Is he now, as the butterfly-turned Zhuang Zhou, in the dream of a butterfly, or was he then, as a Zhuang Zhou-turned butterfly, in the dream of Zhuang Zhou?"

[105] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 132.

After all, the young man on stage is no less "real," or in some sense even more real, than the old fisherman—it is the latter who wears a mask.

However, since any unresolved "internal conflict" is no longer a viable option, the dance could not end here in a psychological impasse as in many of Wu's previous New dance works. The old fisherman finally realizes that he just had a dream, and "smiles while shaking his head."[106] Reminded by the setting sun, the fisherman stands up, goes to check his fishing pole, and happily found that there has been a big fish on the hook. He squats down, strenuously pulls up the pole, and catches the fish with great effort. The butterfly lost in the dream seems to have turned into the fish caught in reality—another allusion to Taoist dialectics.[107] He then puts the fish into the creel, fetches the bottle gourd, unmoors the boat, and gets aboard. With the fish he caught both in the dream and reality, together with the dream itself, the fisherman disappears from the stage.[108]

The reception of *Yüfu le* among the audience seems sharply divided. While some intellectuals and artists "felt much moved" and highly praised its "thoughtfulness," other

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[106] Ibid. This reaction of the fisherman still allows different interpretations. It could suggest that he has reestablished the absolute distinction between dream and reality and thus expresses his self-ridicule toward his previous confusion. Or, it could also be the case that the old fisherman, still under the influence of alcohol, has given up any serious effort to figure out the "butterfly paradox" and, in a cynical way, put his confusion in suspension. Here, Wu leaves still one last trace of uncertainty in his choreography.

[107] The theme of "fish" and "joy" in *Yufu le* may also allude to another famous Taoist allegory, *Hao liang zhi bian* 濠梁之辯 [The debate at the Hao Bridge]. One day, Zhuangzi and his philosopher friend Hui Shi 惠施 had a tour on a bridge across the Hao River. Zhuangzi saw the fish in the river and said: "The fish swim so leisurely, which is the joy of the fish." Hui Shi questioned Zhuangzi: "You are not the fish. How can you know the joy of the fish?" Zhuangzi asked back: "You are not me. How can you know that I do not know the joy of the fish?" Hui Shi answered: "I am not you, so I indeed cannot know you. However, you are not the fish either, so you cannot know the joy of the fish. That's it." Here is Zhuangzi's final rejoinder: "Let's return to the beginning of our conversation. You asked: 'How can you know the joy of the fish'? This means that you had already known that I had known, and then you asked me. I had already known [this] on the Hao Bridge." This playful allegory once again demonstrates the epistemological paradox inherent in any definite knowledge based on the distinction between the self and the other, the subject and the object. See Zhuang Zhou, "Qiu shui" 秋水 [Autumn water] in Guo, *Zhuangzi jishi*, vol. 6, 606-7.

[108] Feng and Yu, *Wu Xiaobang wudao wenji*, vol.5, 132-3.

common audience commented that "it is hard to understand what it tries to express."[109] Such contrasted reactions among the audience need to be explained in light of both the split imagery of *yüfu* (fisherman) in the Chinese literary tradition and the particular historical context of the performance held in mid June, 1957.

In Chinese literary history, the image of the fisherman is charged with disparate and contradictory cultural connotations. In addition to the theme of reclusion which is exclusively associated with intellectuals and elite literati, the fisherman is also a symbol of rebellion of the underclass in popular culture. For example, many of the grass-root rebel leaders in the famous vernacular novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water margin) come from the fisherman class, who had become a cultural icon since the late imperial era and was also later popularized by the *xiqu* media, such as the Peking Opera *Dayu shajia* 打漁殺家(Fishing and murder). Under the orthodox Marxist historical materialist interpretation, the Water Margin heroes are further regarded as a symbol of the spontaneous class struggle initiated by the oppressed underclass against the feudalistic landlord ruling class which consists of literati scholar-officials. Just as the hermit-assassin duality intrinsic to the theme of *Guangling san*, the image of the fisherman is also troubled by the reclusion-rebellion and intellectual-physical split, which had been reflected in its bifurcating reception among the audience. It is unsurprising that the common audience, who mainly came from the under-educated working class and were mostly familiar with the image of the fishermen as grass-root action heroes (and Wu's

[109] See Si Ji 思集, "Zenyang caineng 'Jingli wei geming fuwu'" 怎樣才能"盡力爲革命服務" [How can one "Do the best to serve the revolution"], *Wudao* 舞蹈 no. 6 (1960): 24-5, 24.

previous revolutionary New dance works such as the *March of the Volunteers*), got perplexed by Wu's elite "bourgeois interpretation" of the fisherman as a Taoist hermit.[110]

In contrast to the reactions of common audience, intellectuals and artists seem to be more able to appreciate *Yüfu le*. Many of those who praised Wu's choreography in this performance were to be classified as "Rightists" in a few weeks or months.[111] This Chongqing concert of Wu in mid June 1957 was accidentally located at a historical juncture. Just a few days earlier, on June 8th, Mao published an editorial at *Renming ribao* 人民日報 (The People's Daily, mouthpiece of the CCP) titled "Zhe shi weishenme?" 這是爲什麼 (Why is this?), which officially marks the onset of the Anti-Rightist Movement and the de facto abolishment of the Double Hundred policy.[112]

A few months earlier, during the Party Rectification Campaign accompanying the Double Hundred policy, Mao overestimated the loyalty of intellectuals and encouraged them to criticize the malpractices of low-level Party officials without challenging the whole system, which is called *Da ming da fang* 大鳴大放 (Airing views freely and loudly). However, many intellectuals—who had endured waves of the so called Thought Reform Campaigns and political purges of dissident intellectuals and artists which aimed to suppress the West leaning May Fourth liberal spirit and to indoctrinate Marxism-Leninism—crossed the red line and uttered their accumulated dissatisfactions by going as far as attacking the One-Party socialist system of the CCP. What is more ironic is that young college students, who were brought up and educated in the "New society," became

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[110] See Lin Lang, "Ping *Yufu le* de cuowu sixiang qingxiang," 28.

[111] See Si Ji, "Zenyang caineng 'Jingli wei geming fuwu,'" 24.

[112] Goldman, "The party and the intellectuals," 254.

a major radical force in this liberal movement—they saw themselves as successors of the May Fourth generation and the Chinese counterpart of those dissidents in the post-Stalin Soviet Union and East European countries. Mao was so disillusioned in intellectuals and unsettled by a feeling of betrayal that he quickly reversed the *Da ming da fang* into the Anti-Rightist Campaign in early June 1957.[113]

Wu may be, deep down, sympathetic toward this liberal endeavor of intellectuals and students, as he had always identified himself as part of the May Fourth generation. The image of the young talent in *Yüfu le* freely chasing the butterfly in the dream of the old fisherman is clearly reminiscent of his liberal youth which, in Wu's own words, "had been suppressed by waves of 'Leftist' literary and artistic thought [since 1949]."[114] However, restricted by his Party membership and leadership in the field of dance, Wu was impossible to openly stand by the side of the "Rightist" non-Party intellectuals and students. Nevertheless, Wu, in a conflicted manner, had used, and would continue to use, his New classical dance, as represented by *Yüfu le*, to construct a Peach Blossom Spring—a timeless reclusive spiritual utopia—for himself and the "Rightist" intellectuals against the brutal Anti-Rightist purge, and a few months later, against the material utopia of the frenetic Great Leap Forward.

The political significance of Tianma's New classical dance in this particular historical moment was well understood by some of the liberal intellectuals. The cover picture of the playbill of the Chongqing concert was designed by Wang Zimei 汪子美 (1913-2002), a famous caricaturist who, in a few months, would be wrongly condemned as an "Extreme-

[113] Ibid., 242-58.

[114] Wu, *Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 130.

Rightist." The picture has a white upper part and a dark green bottom part, which represent the sky and earth, respectively. A strange yet beautiful flower stretches out from the dirt toward the sky. What is noteworthy is its crooked stem in the earth, which suggests that the small plant had struggled against great pressure before it reached the surface. This flower apparently symbolizes the courage, struggle, and accomplishment of Wu and his Tianma against the unfavorable political climate.[115] Although the "heavenly horse" would continue to live for three more years, its premature death had been predestined in its very first public performance in 1957 Chongqing, tied up with the tragic fate of its "Rightist" friends, or even much earlier, in the traumatic internal conflict of the split modern subject in the 1942 *Si fan*.

This chapter is to be concluded with a "confession" made by Wu in the early 1990s, which has been included as the prologue of his autobiography. From it one can still more or less discern the historical residual of conflicted consciousness:

> I wish very much that I could write this book as Rousseau wrote the *Les Confessions*… [Yet] I am a CCP member, so I have my own standards for confession… During the decades of social change and evolution I have experienced, the winds and rains of history, just like sweeping fallen leaves, had swirled the people of our time into different movements and trends of thought. So had revolution—it had blown some people together, but may have also blown some apart. Even though there were certain people who had not been involved into a particular whirlpool, living a seemingly peaceful life, but in their heart it may have not been completely satisfying.

[115] See Si Ji, "Zenyang caineng 'Jingli wei geming fuwu,'" 24.

> This is the characteristic of the time I had lived in, the truth of those turbulent years. I am just part of that truth.[116]

In this confession, Wu, in a conflicted manner, foregrounds the dominant ideological forces that had been ruthlessly shaping the fates of people by depicting the latter as passive and lifeless "fallen leaves" drifting randomly in the "winds and rains of history." However, what is hidden between the lines is the other side of the story (which is highlighted in this chapter)—the agency and effort of certain artists, as represented by Wu himself, to persistently negotiate, nudge, push, and test the limits and boundaries of ideological control, thereby exposing the cracks and interstices beneath its seemingly monolithic surface.

[116] *Wu, Wo de wudao yishu shengya*, 1.

Chapter 4 Adaptation of Trauma: Affect and Representation in the Dance Drama *Butterfly Loves Flower*, 1958-1978

The year 2014 was the 50th anniversary of the premier of the ballet *Hongse niangzi jun* 紅色娘子軍 (The red detachment of women), which was among the *yangban xi* 樣板戲 (Model plays) of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and is still arguably the most influential Chinese ballet in the new millennium. In March 2014, the popular CCTV (China Central Television) talk show *Yishu rensheng* 藝術人生 (Artistic life) invited the five generations of ballerinas from the National Ballet of China (also called the Central Ballet Troupe), who had played the female lead Wu Qinghua 吳清華 (or Wu Qionghua 吳瓊花 in some versions) in *The Red Detachment of Women*, to the TV program.[1] The show was filmed on the stage of the *Tianqiao* 天橋 (heavenly bridge) Theater, the home theater of the National Ballet and also where the ballet was premiered, right after a performance of the *Red Detachment of Women* as part of the celebration of the anniversary. The audience, man and women, who filled the theater, consisted of almost all age strata from students to senior people.

The Red Detachment of Women tells a simple, melodramatic story of how the CCP saved a peasant-slave girl from the oppression and abuse of an GMD landlord, and further enlightened and transformed her into a communist soldier with proletarian consciousness who eventually not only revenged herself by killing the evil landlord but also devoted herself to the greater cause of freeing the whole proletarian class. Although

[1] Doi: http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C12298/07050c43e62b466c8aadbb6e8eb5bc64; http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C12298/5c7cbe42e25347658496d46d1532deb4.

the ballet narrative bears a conspicuous historical mark of ideological control of artistic creation at the very peak, its wide popularity had clearly outlived the revolutionary ideology that gave rise to its original production.[2]

While the main goal of the show is, through "talking," to reveal new "apolitical" meanings of this revolutionary classic in the post-revolutionary era, the show, in more than one moment, inadvertently stages some kind of bodily deconstruction of the linguistic-based meaning itself. In one such moment, the host requested the fifth-generation ballerina to execute a famous *pas de deux* of the ballet with the danseur, and invited the third-generation ballerina (also the current director of the National Ballet) to literally "dub" the dance in spoken language at the same time. The ballet director finished the "dubbing" task with marvelous ease by providing a seamless verbal narrative and between-character conversation synchronized with the *pas de deux*.

The meaning of such a correspondence between the bodily dance and the verbal language is fundamentally ambiguous. From a "revolutionary" perspective, this correspondence seems to confirm the logocentric authority of language and ideology, as the dancing becomes a *bodily* "sign of a sign,"[3] loyally *representing* the spoken. Yet from a "post-revolutionary" perspective, the hierarchy is reversed. The bodily dance has gained its primacy as a "mysterious" totality which both invites and resists linguistic interpretation. No matter how seamless the "dubbing" of the ballet director may seem, it constitutes only one possible partial interpretation, among innumerable others, of the dance episode. Although the linguistic is compelled to assimilate the bodily dance into its

[2] Jason McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema," *The Opera Quarterly*, 26.2-3 (2010): 343-376, 373-4.

[3] Jacques Derrida, "Linguistics and Grammatology" in *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 27-73, 29.

hegemonic meaning system, doing so only betrays its own limits—just like a spotlight which, while casting strong light on a small area, marks the vast darkness beyond its reach. This incommensurability between dance and language becomes especially clear in the following moment of the talk show.

When the ballet director was urged by the talk show host to demonstrate and explain how broken-down ballet moves work to define and shape the particular character of Wu Qinghua, she gracefully executed an arabesque characteristic of Wu Qinghua and another one of Giselle to contrast the difference. However, when it came to using words to explicate the exact meaning of the specific dance move, the aggressively talkative and eloquent ballet director began to hesitate and stammer slightly, obviously searching in mind for proper words. Tantalized by the performance of the ballet director and her inadequacy in verbal expression, the other ballerinas, including the eldest one in her mid seventies, could no longer remain seated on the stage. They all stood up, walked to the front, began to perform the ballet moves which they each thought to be most representative of Wu Qinghua, and at the same time offered their own not-so-adequate verbal interpretations.

The five “Wu Qinghua’s” at various ages present on the same stage—in a tableau of their de-synchronized and even cacophonic executions of fragmented dance positions, with their differing and inadequate verbal explications—inadvertently performed a bodily deconstruction of the “text” of the original ballet narrative. As it is revealed, the meaning of the ballet performance has never been stable or complete. Any dance move, even those well-coded ones as in ballet, is irreducible to a sign (either visual or linguistic) and thus cannot be completely assimilated into the visual or linguistic paradigms of representation.

What is this inassimilable component of dance? Why did the socialist regime need the "intractable" wordless dance (which was originally quite obscure in China compared with other sibling arts) so much that it elevated dance, in the form of *wu ju* 舞劇 (dance drama), to the status of "model play" in the Cultural Revolution, on a par with Peking Opera—the "national drama"? As the name of the genre suggests, the rise of dance drama in socialist China may be seen as the result of the narrative- and representation-based ideology's attempt to control and exploit the bodily dance. Then, what is the nature of the politics of complicity, resistance, and even subversion involved in this process? The lynchpin of these questions, as argued here, is the particular affect performed through dance.

The Affective-Kinesthetic

The component of dance drama which is inassimilable to the visual and linguistic paradigms of representation is the bodily affect. Following the definition by the film theorist Elena del Río—who is in turn informed by the theories of Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi—"affect broadly refers to the body's capacities to affect and be affected by other bodies, thereby implying an augmentation or diminution in the body's capacity to act."[4] Related to yet different from personal emotion or sentiment, which is more "habitual, culturally coded, and localized," affect emphasizes the body's susceptibility and openness to "often anomalous, unexpected," and less coded emotions expressed by other bodies.[5] That is, roughly speaking, the shift from emotion to

[4] Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 10.

[5] Ibid.

affect is one from the psychological to the corporeal, from subject-based statics to inter-body dynamics/(inter)action, and from the habitually coded to the anomalously less-coded. However, as del Río emphasizes, emotion and affect should not be conceived in terms of categorical binaries, but as being fluidly "coterminous" in a continuum.[6]

Moreover, the affect theories also advocate a shift in the conceptualization of the body itself. As argued by del Río, in the approaches of (feminist) psychoanalysis and performativity which "remain strongly indebted to a representational paradigm," the body is typically treated as a passive text, image, or fetish "exhaustively written" and "colonized by another's language/discourse, another's desire, another's fantasy."[7] In contrast, affect theories promote the idea of the "body without organs"—a concept invented by the French dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and further developed by Deleuze and Guattari.[8] The body without organs, which is *not* "an empty body stripped of organs," refers to the anarchic creative agency of the performing body to "dis-organ-ize" its affects and distribute them (the dis-organ-ized bodily forces, energies, intensities) across multiple bodies, which defies the bounding systematicity of representation.[9] Thus, the affective body in performance, though it is inevitably defined and shaped by cultural, linguistic, and ideological constraints, always implies the possibility of "a line of escape—in Deleuze's words, a line of flight" from those constraints.[10]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 5.

[8] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. "28 November 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 149-66.

[9] del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 11.

[10] Ibid., 5-6.

The concepts of the bodily affect and the affective body (without organs) are highly relevant to the current study of dance, because they are closely related to the theory of kinesthesia, the contagious nature of body movement, discussed in chapter two. Kinesthesia refers to the natural physio-psychological empathy felt by one person for another person through the former watching the body movements of the latter, a kind of direct bodily communication, supposedly unmediated by language or other forms of representation.[11] While affect is more widely used in humanities (and social science) in general and performance arts in particular, and focuses more on the overall effect of encounters and collisions between bodies, kinesthesia is mostly used in the field of dance studies and places greater emphasis on the specific physio-psychological mechanism involved in the bodily empathy felt through movement.[12] Despite these subtle differences, the conceptual connection between kinesthesia and affect is evident in their respective definitions——the former provides the physio-psychological basis for the functioning and realization of the latter. To a large extent, kinesthesia may be seen as the fundamental bodily mode of affect, and affect is the generalized kinesthesia.

The reason for stressing this conceptual connection between kinesthesia and affect here is both practical and theoretical. As the focus of this chapter shifts from mostly dance solos to dance drama—a formally more integrative and complex genre having greater affinity with theater, the more general framework of affect is better suited for the subject under study. However, this does not mean that the theoretical role of kinesthesia

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[11] See chapter 2, 92-5.

[12] Note that this is only true for the affect theories based on the Spinoza-Deleuze line. There is another major line of affect theories which also focuses on the psychobiological basis of affect. See Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers" in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-28, 5-6.

is supplanted by that of affect. Rather, by highlighting the kinesthetic foundation of affect, this study intends to foreground the long-neglected significance of the art of dance in the recent "affective turn." A major theoretical motivation of the affective turn, as articulated by Massumi, is the neglected importance of the *nonrepresentational* bodily experience—"an intrinsic connection between *movement* and *sensation* whereby each immediately summons the other."[13] And this bodily experience is, by definition, synonymous with kinesthesia—a word literally combining movement (*kine*) and sensation (*aesthesia*)—which figures most saliently in dance. In fact, del Río uses the words "choreography" and "kinesthetic" in a taken-for-granted manner in her analysis of affects in films.[14] Therefore, although the theoretical framework of affect is adopted here, the affect/kinesthesia coupling, or the affective-kinesthetic, is always implied.

It is argued here that the affective-kinesthetic, which falls outside of the dominant representational paradigms, enters into a fraught relationship with ideology and narrative in the genre of dance drama. On the one hand, only by grasping, controlling, and mobilizing the bodily experience (or affect) could ideology stop being merely some coercive law and cold doctrine incapable of "moving" bodies into affirmative and transformative actions. On the other hand, the bodily affect stirred up, which is irreducible to any linguistic or visual representation, fundamentally resists, and even subverts, the subjugating ideology. This paradox parallels that between the aesthetic and ideology observed by Terry Eagleton,[15] except that the relatively static *aesthetic* is here

[13] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 1. Emphasis added.

[14] Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 67-112, 148-177.

[15] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (M.A.: Blackwell Publishing, 1990).

replaced by the more dynamic *kinesthetic* (or affective), which further pushes the performance of dance away from the representation of *being* toward the expression/unfolding of *becoming*.

To demonstrate this, this chapter focuses on a particular kind of affect—trauma, which, as a theme, figures prominently in the Chinese revolutionary dance dramas (for example, the two dance dramas among the "Model Plays"—*The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haried Girl*—both center on the figure of traumatized women).

Trauma as Affect in Adaptation

Trauma in "adaptation" here refers to, first, the traumatic themes in transmedia adaption (as representations of *being*), and second, the fact that trauma itself may "evolve" and "adapt" to different political contexts in different times, acquiring new meanings or losing old ones in the process of transmedia adaptation (as expressions/unfoldings of *becoming*).

Trauma is typically understood as a severe damage to the psyche caused by some distressing event that exceeds the subject's mental ability to cope, often characterized by a confused mental state of being stuck and suspended in some irretrievable loss, broadly defined, of the past which repetitively resurfaces and relives in the present. However, by explicitly associating trauma with affect, this study stresses the fact that trauma is not merely personal and psychological, but also has the ability to affect and be affected inter-bodily and has clear implication of concrete actions. That is, the concept of trauma may

be extended from a representation-based psychoanalytical framework to an affective one.[16]

This point is especially evident in performance arts. Because of trauma's unsettling nature and its possibility to materialize into disruptive actions, it poses a potential threat to the existing socio-political order. Thus, any political regime has to take traumas seriously, especially those collective ones resulting from wars, massacres, and the like. One effective way for the political regime to deal with collective traumas, and even further to harness them into its own use, is to resort to performance arts, such as theater, opera, and dance, as exemplified by the case of socialist China. Performance art works with traumatic themes offer chances to let the traumatized individuals virtually confront, re-experience, and mourn their traumatic losses in an affective manner, and to further sublimate their individual sufferings into the collective ideological glory of utopia through artistic catharsis.

However, the prolonged process of repetitive revisions, adaptations, and re-performances of stage works over years or even decades—a general characteristic of performance arts—opens up spaces for persisting negotiation and struggle between the bodily affect of performance and ideological control. Thus, trauma, which has a compulsion to repeat, not only perpetuates itself in this repetitive structure of performance, but also "evolves" and "adapts," acquiring new meanings while losing old ones. In some cases, one trauma was even replaced by another different trauma in the same stage work over time. The trauma in adaptation often subverts the dominant ideology in this repetitive process of performance.

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[16] This point is also implied in del Río's study of film, see del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 77-80.

To demonstrate the affects/effects of the adapted and adapting trauma in the genre of dance drama, this study focuses on a particular dance drama—*Die lian hua* 蝶戀花 (*Butterfly loves flower*). *Butterfly Loves Flower* is an important yet long-neglected dance drama in the history of modern Chinese dance. From its initial conception in 1958 to the final filmed version in 1978, the evolvement of the dance drama spanned two whole decades, interrupted by the Cultural Revolution in the middle. It is among the few earliest full-length dance dramas created in socialist China on a contemporary revolutionary theme in the 1950s. Its earliest versions preceded the production of the famous dance dramas among the Model Plays of the Cultural Revolution, including *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haried Girl*. And its final versions after the Cultural Revolution had inherited the achievements of the Model Plays. Therefore, the evolvement of *Butterfly Loves Flower* in some sense epitomizes and complements the history of Chinese revolutionary dance drama which by far has been disproportionately dominated by the two Model Play dance dramas.

Traumas in Texts

The creation of the dance drama *Butterfly loves Flower* may be seen as an attempt of the bodily dance to secure its ideological meaning in a politically authoritative text, the famous poem written by Mao Zedong in 1957, *Die lian hua: da Li Shuyi* 蝶戀花・答李淑一 (To the tune of *Die lian hua*: reply to Li Shuyi), which is widely celebrated as one of Mao's best poems. Mao wrote this poem as a reply to another poem, *Pusa man: jing meng* 菩薩蠻・驚夢 (To the tune of *Pusa man*: startled dream), composed by Li Shuyi

(1901-1997) in 1933 and sent to Mao in a private letter in 1957.[17] Li was an intimate female friend of Mao's deceased (second) wife Yang Kaihui 楊開慧 (1901-1930). In her poem to Mao, Li expresses her traumatic suffering after the death of her husband Liu Zhixun 柳直荀 (1898-1932). Liu was a high-level CCP leader and also friend of the Mao couple. Both Yang and Liu were killed during the First Chinese Civil War between the CCP and the GMD. However, while Yang was killed by the GMD government, Liu was secretly and wrongly executed by his CCP comrades during the bloody "Great Purges" in the early 1930s.[18] But by the 1950s, Li had not yet known the truth of her husband's death, which would not be revealed to her until the 1970s. Therefore, Li's trauma caused by her "missing husband" was a displaced one that could not be located in a specific time or place, and thus impossible for Li to confront, mourn, and get over, which resulted in repetitive nightmares that had been tormenting Li for decades, as described in her poem (conforming to the classical theme of *si fu* 思婦, wife missing her husband):

蘭閨索寞翻身早,	In the lonely orchid chamber [I] turned [my] body early;
夜來觸動愁多少。	Overnight how many sorrows had been stirred up!
底事太難堪,	What was so unbearable
驚儂曉夢殘。	That it startled me awake from the broken morning dream?
征人何處覓?	Where [shall I] look for the soldier?

[17] Zhang Zengtai 張增泰, "Li Shiyi 50 nian ku xun Liu Zhixun si yin" 李淑一 50 年苦尋柳直荀死因 [Li Shuyi's 50 years' hard search for the cause of Liu Zhixun's death], *Renmin Wenzhai* 人民文摘 no. 5 (2009). doi: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmwz/html/2009-05/01/content_380561.htm.

[18] Ibid.

六載無消息。	Six years without any news.
醒憶別伊時，	Awake, remembering the time when you parted [from me];
滿衫清泪滋。	The entire blouse was soaked by clear tears.

An implicit purpose of Li's sending this poem to Mao may be to probe the true cause of her husband's death. Instead of assisting Li in finding out the answer, Mao wrote back with the poem *Butterfly Loves Flower*. To pacify the traumatized psyche of the living by commemorating the souls of the dead, Mao juxtaposes his own trauma of losing his wife Yang with Li's loss of her husband Liu. In the poem, Mao masterfully combines the typical tropes of the Chinese poetic tradition, folklore mythology, religious transcendence, aesthetic catharsis, and explicitly uses the imagery of dance to synthesize all these elements into an organic whole:

我失驕楊君失柳	I lost my proud Poplar [Yang] and you lost your Willow [Liu];
楊柳輕颺直上重霄九。	[The catkins of] Poplar and Willow float lightly, straight up to the Ninth Heaven.
問訊吳剛何所有，	Wu Gang [the Daoist deity living on the moon], asked what he can offer;
吳剛捧出桂花酒。	Wu Gang brings forth the osmanthus blossom brew.
寂寞嫦娥舒廣袖，	The lonely Chang'e [the Goddess of Moon] spreads her ample sleeves;
萬里長空且為忠魂舞。	Across the immense heaven, dancing for the loyal souls.

忽報人間曾伏虎，　　Suddenly, news arrives from earth of having subdued the tiger;

淚飛頓作傾盆雨。　　Tears start to fly and immediately turn into pouring rain.

Wang Ban reads this poem as an imperative to transform the gender dynamics between the two martyrs and between wife and husband into a higher ideological purpose through a sublimating process.[19] It can be added that from Li's poem to Mao's reply, the individual trauma of Li becomes coupled and shared with that of Mao, unified and redeemed in the heavenly dance of the Moon Goddess. That is, at the textual and figurative level, the affective nature of trauma—how trauma has bodily effects and can affect and be affected by another's trauma—is best symbolized by the expansive imagery of dance. These shared personal traumas, in the private text of letters, were to be further publicized and multiplied in the dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower* to address the collective trauma of wars and revolutions through the concrete bodily dance.

Personal Traumas Displaced into the Collective

The production of the dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower* had been politically motivated since the very beginning. The dance drama was produced by The Song and Dance Ensemble of Shenyang Military District (the Ensemble for short hereafter), a military-run performance troupe. Since the PLA, more than any other organization, has been tightly controlled by the CCP in every respect, its affiliated artistic troupes are subject to the strictest political censorship.

[19] Wang Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 108-14.

In November 1958, ten months after Mao's (not Li's) poem was published and became widely known, the artists of the ensemble were ordered by the political leadership of the military district to create a dance drama based on Mao's poem.[20] To understand the political sensitivity of this dance drama, one needs to take into account the particular historical context at the end of the 1950s. On the one hand, after the brutal Anti-rightist Campaign (1957-1958), the ideological control of the intellectual and artistic community was greatly tightened, compared with the preceding "liberal" Double Hundred period (1956-1957). As one of the librettists of the dance drama admitted, at the beginning they felt rather reluctant, "unconfident," and even "did not dare" to touch on such a sensitive topic, evident of the negative impact of tightened ideological control on artists' enthusiasm and creativity.[21]

On the other hand, as the Great Leap Forward movement (1958-1960) had gained momentum by that time, artists in general faced heightened pressure from above to increase their production of cultural products.[22] Moreover, it was not just production figure that was at issue—because the tenth anniversary of the People's Republic was approaching, artistic units nation-wide were required to produce politically correct and

[20] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui" 舞劇蝶戀花座談會 [A discussion session on the dance drama *Butterfly loves flower*], *Wudao* 舞蹈, no. 7 (1959): 5-10, 5.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See more detailed discussion in Chapter 3, 167-72. In fact, the artists of the Ensemble (among others) had been "placed downwards" (*xia fang* 下放) to participate in physical labor in factories and countryside before they received the order to create *Butterfly Loves Flowers*. Therefore, they were under double pressures of both material and cultural production. See "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 5.

high quality art works as tributes to the celebration.[23] Thus, the dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower* was created in a somewhat uncertain political atmosphere.

In this sensitive political context, the leadership of the Shenyang Military District seemed to believe that adapting the authoritative and popular poem of Chairman Mao was a politically profitable and relatively safe option. The premier of the dance drama was planned to debut at the 2nd Joint Artistic Performance of the PLA in the summer of 1959, which consisted of 114 performance works by professional and amateur military artistic troupes nation-wide and lasted for almost two months.[24]

In order to further guarantee the political correctness of the dance drama, the higher authority imposed an overarching directive about its ideological content to guide the production, formulated in four phrases: "Praise the times, eulogize the heroes, educate the young, and comfort the heroic souls."[25] Clearly, besides its obvious purpose of eulogizing the new socialist regime, what the dance drama was intended to deal with are no longer individual or private traumas as in the original texts, but a collective and public one. By displacing the personal traumas into a mythologized epic dance drama, *Butterfly Loves Flower* "speaks" affectively and therapeutically to the collective trauma of wars and revolutions which had been haunting the military in particular and the masses in general.

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[23] Julia F. Andreas, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 204-7.

[24] Wang Kefen 王克芬 and Long Yinpei 隆蔭培, eds. *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* 中國近現代舞蹈發展史 (1840-1996) [A Developmental History of Dance in Modern China] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1999), 236.

[25] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 5.

Because this dance drama was among the first created by adapting the authoritative text of Mao, it generated professional discussions and debates on almost every aspect of its production within the artistic circle of theater and dance from the beginning.[26] Thus, the adaptation and continuous revision of *Butterfly Loves Flower* may be seen as a collective process under both imposed- and self-censorship in the artistic community.

It is argued that despite the ever-alert censorship, the transmedia adaptation inadvertently subverts the authority of the text through the affect of dance. Because dance drama relies on body movements, intimate touches and interactions to develop narrative and inter-character relationship, the greatest difficulty of the adaptation lies in how to use dance to address what is not explicitly prescribed in the poem but essential to a coherent narrative structure. As explained in detail later on, dealing with what is not written in the text triggers a repetitive process of revision, which finally leads to the unexpected obliteration of what is originally written in the text and further foregrounds the unspeakable truth the text tries to cover up.

However, instead of directly going into detailed analysis of the dance drama, the next section first briefly examines the Soviet Russian influence on the genre of Chinese dance drama in the 1950s to show that the tension between the affective dance and the narrative- and representation-based drama was not a unique issue of Chinese dance drama but has its root in the intrinsic problematic of ideological control of dance in general, as exemplified in the case of Soviet Russian ballet.

Soviet Russian Influence

[26] Ibid.

Butterfly Loves Flower, and the genre of Chinese dance drama in general, had been directly influenced by the Soviet Russian genre of *drambalet* (a word combining *drama* and *ballet*, literally dramatized ballet). As Christina Ezrabi argues, the rise of the drambalet as a dominant ballet genre in 1930s' Soviet Russia was a direct result of the tightened ideological control of the affective dance.[27] The pre-revolutionary (or imperial) Russian ballet typically centers on long sections of nonrepresentational "decorative" "classical dance" characterized by highly sophisticated and virtuoso choreographic patterns. These long episodes of classical dance alternate with pantomimic scenes which drive the plot forward.[28] Thus, dramatic narrative only occupied a secondary position relative to the dominant classical dance.

In order to transform the old "decadent" imperial and bourgeois "divertissement" into a new revolutionary and socialist art, Soviet Russia in the 1930s revamped the imperial ballet into drambalet according to the doctrine of Socialist Realism. To do so, first, the dualism of virtuoso classical dance and narrative pantomime was abandoned, and the dramatic narrative was elevated to the status of the dominant structure of ballet, supported and advanced by pantomime, danced pantomime, dance incorporating acting skills, and folk dance (or sometimes called character dance); second, the Stanislavski method of character development, which was used for training theatric actors, was

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[27] Christina Ezrabi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 30-66. Note that, as Ezrabi points out, the intellectual origin of the Soviet drambalet far precedes the Soviet era, having its root in much wider European debates on artistic reform in the nineteenth century, reflecting the "inherent tension between the dramatic and nonrepresentational sides of ballet as a theatric art." Nevertheless, tightened ideological control explains "why the genre of drambalet acquired a monopoly as the central paradigm for Soviet ballet productions and why its aesthetic requirements became more and more restrictive." See Ezrabi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 32-3. For earlier polemic in 1920s Soviet Russia on the nature of ballet—whether as pure dance or as danced drama—see Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*. Trans. Lynn Visson, edited, with additional translation, by Sally Banes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 20-50, 266-77.

[28] Ibid., 48-49.

adopted to enhance the realistic dramatic effect of performance; third, the nonrepresentational virtuoso "classical dance" was relegated to a marginal place.[29] That is, the nonrepresentational aspect of ballet (classical dance) was suppressed in the drambalet, while the representational aspect was disproportionately "amplified." In particular, the production of new drambalets on contemporary revolutionary or Soviet themes were strenuously promoted by the Soviet state, and production quotas were assigned to the major ballet companies each year to ensure the continuous production of this particular propagandistic sub-genre.[30]

However, as Ezrabi points out, this attempt of ideological control of the bodily dance was far from successful. Symptomatic of the intrinsic tension between the narrative-based ideology and the affective dance, the pre-revolutionary imperial Russian ballet classics (such as *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Don Quixote*, *Nutcracker*, and *Giselle*) and, secondarily, new drambalets of classical themes (adapted from literary classics and fairy tales, for instance, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, *Cinderella*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Esmeralda*) still dominated the repertoires of Soviet ballet theaters by the mid and late 1950s, while successful new productions of drambalets on contemporary Soviet themes were very rare.[31] That is, despite the Soviet state's ideological intervention of promoting

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[29] Ibid., 41-57.

[30] Ibid., 69-74.

[31] Ibid., 87-90. According to the statistics provided by Ezrabi, of all the 123 ballet performances by the Kirov Theater/Ballet (one of the two most prestigious ballet companies/theaters in both imperial and Soviet eras, the other is the Bolshoi Theater/Ballet) in 1957, pre-revolutionary classics received 50 performances, drambalets on classical themes received 41 performances, and drambalets on contemporary revolutionary or Soviet themes were performed only 3 times. Moreover, the number of drambalets in general, and those on contemporary Soviet themes in particular, included in the Kirov's repertoire had been steadily and quickly dwindling since the early 1950s, and such a tendency would continue into the 1960s. Souritz observes a similar situation of the lack of successful ballet production on contemporary Soviet themes in

the drambalet, especially drambalet on contemporary Soviet themes, as the dominant genre in cultural-political discourse and new ballet production, pre-revolutionary ballet featuring nonrepresentational "decorative" classical dance still prevailed on the central stage of Soviet ballet theater and also the realm of everyday training practice of ballet dancers.[32]

The genre of drambalet, together with its problematics, traveled to China in the late 1950s. After the founding of the PRC, because of the lack of professional accumulation, there was no single Chinese artist who had the necessary knowledge, experience, and skills to direct the complex production of large-scale dance drama, which inevitably involves the complicated coordination and negotiation among many artists with different areas of expertise and often conflicting opinions and interests. With hindsight, a fully capable choreographer/director would have solid knowledge of the writing of librettos, Western orchestra and Chinese music, stage design, acting skills, and both Western and Chinese solo and group dance choreographies. Moreover, the ideal charismatic choreographer/director would also need to have the talent to create a politically correct and coherent national dance style by combining and alchemizing various dance forms including ballet, ethic and folk dance, and classical Chinese dance which is itself in the making. (Even Wu Xiaobang was mainly specialized in solo and small group dance.) In

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the 1920s; see Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, 277-8. Therefore, this is a persisting problem from the very beginning of the Soviet era.

[32] Ibid., 49, 81-4.

some sense, it is more difficult to cultivate a good dance drama choreographer-director than to train an excellent dancer.[33]

In 1954, the Beijing Dance School was founded as the central dance institution of China. Soviet ballet experts were invited to join the school to help build the ballet training system. Whereas pre-revolutionary Russian ballet classics, such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Giselle* were used to cultivate the bodily virtuosity of Chinese ballet students, the doctrine of Soviet drambalet was used to train the first generation of Chinese choreographers of dance drama, mirroring the Soviet Russian split in training/performing and choreographic practices.[34]

Fig 1: Faculty (both Chinese and Russian) and students of the first cohort of the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography at the Beijing Dance School, 1955 [reproduced from *Wu xiao jianshe* 舞校建設 no.1 (1957): 33.].

[33] This is one of the main reasons why the vast majority of full length large scale dance dramas created in China before the 1980s were under collective authorship, rather than under the direction of a single choreographer-director.

[34] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 228-32, 208-11.

From 1955 to 1957, and from 1958 to 1959, the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography at Beijing Dance School, headed by renowned Soviet Russian ballet dancers and choreographers, trained two cohorts of selected Chinese choreographers, more than forty in total, many of whom later became the backbone of the enterprise of Chinese dance drama (fig. 1).[35] Li Qiuhan 李秋漢, a major choreographer of the original version of *Butterfly Loves Flower*, was a student of the second cohort.[36] Evidencing the influence of Soviet drambalet, the teaching of choreography placed particular emphasis on dramatic acting skills and the dominant importance of libretto.[37] The students were instructed to design, analyze, explore, and elaborate the psychological depth of the stage character to be developed, in order to realistically *act*, not just dance, out the character, characteristic of the Stanislavsky method.[38] The trainees were also required to learn libretto writing, following the drambalet principle that dance choreography must conform closely to, rather than independent of, the development of dramatic plot, as "libretto is like the sun, with its millions of light beams shining over the other components of [dance drama] creation."[39]

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[35] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 208-10. The first cohort was taught by W. Y. Choplin, and the second by Petr Gusev. For first-hand learning experiences of the Chinese students in the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography, see Chen Ming 陳明, "Wu ju biandao xunlian ban yinianlai de qingkuang" 舞劇編導訓練班一年來的情況 [A summary of the training program of dance drama choreography in the past year]; Bai Shui 白水, "Xuexi wu ju biandao yishu de yixie tihui" 學習舞劇編導藝術的體會 [The experience of learning the art of dance drama choreography], *Wuxiao jianshe* 舞校建設 no. 1 (1957):19-21, 22-24. Hu Yanting 胡雁亭, "Shang Chapulin zhuanjia gebieke de yixie tihui" 查普林專家個別課的一些體會 [The experience of taking some classes with the expert W. Y. Choplin], *Wudao congkan* 舞蹈叢刊 no. 4 (1957): 91-9.

[36] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 210, 239.

[37] Chen, "Wu ju biandao xunlian ban yinianlai de qingkuang," 20-1.

[38] Ibid.; Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 210.

[39] Chen, "Wu ju biandao xunlian ban yinianlai de qingkuang," 21.

It is noteworthy that, instead of bluntly imposing the Russian choreographic themes and vocabulary on the Chinese students, the Soviet mentors urged their students to develop themes and vocabulary of Chinese style within the structure of drambalet. Different from the training of ballet techniques, which strictly follows a stable and even standardized vocabulary system, the choreographic principle of drambalet offers a more flexible framework for integrating different dance traditions.

Demanded by the doctrine of Socialist Realism, Soviet drambalet, while abandoning a large proportion of the complex highbrow classical dance vocabulary that is mainly "ornamental" and for the purpose of "showing off" virtuosity, incorporated various popular character dances (stylized folk and national dances of different cultures).[40] Therefore, in spite of the ideological constraints imposed at the cost of classical dance, drambalet may be in fact more formally open, in terms of utilizing non-ballet dances, than classical Russian ballet dominated by classical dance—a point understated by Ezrabi. This property of drambalet greatly facilitated its transnational and transcultural adaptation in China. For example, the graduation project of the first cohort of the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography employed little, if any, classical ballet vocabulary, but was a dance drama featuring classical Chinese dance—an emergent dance genre deriving mainly from the body movement conventions of traditional Chinese theater—and secondarily Han Chinese folk dance.[41]

[40] Ezrabi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 41-57.

[41] This project became the first and highly successful dance drama of classical Chinese dance, *Bao lian deng* 寶蓮燈 (The magical lotus lantern), a milestone in the history of classical Chinese dance and Chinese dance drama. See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 211-5.

However, the problematics of Soviet drambalet, especially the lack of successful ballet production on contemporary Soviet themes, was also transposed to China at the same time. In April 1955, the first two articles published in the formal inaugural issue of *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 (Dance communication)—the very first academic dance journal in modern China (the first official journal of the Chinese Research Association of Dance Art, with Wu Xiaobang being the editor)—are two translated essays by two influential and powerful Soviet Russian choreographers, Igor' Moiseev, the founding director of the USSR Folk Dance Ensemble (known abroad as the Moiseyev Dance Company), and Rostislav Zakharov, choreographer and opera director of the Bolshoi Theater and former director of the Bolshoi Ballet.[42]

Interestingly, the two choreographers were "enemies" upholding opposing views of classical dance and drambalet. Whereas Zakhorov was a definitive figure and proponent of drambalet, Moiseev advocated the primacy of dance, especially classical dance, in developing ballet narrative and had criticized Zakhorov (and drambalet in general) for his "denial of the leading role of the dance" and discarding "the best traditions of the classical ballets," which had led to "the poverty of dance form" in drambalet and caused the lack of successful new ballets on contemporary topics.[43] Although Moiseev's translated article in *Dance Communication* is not a direct attack on drambalet—it is a review on a successful new production of the classical ballet *Swan Lake*—the fact that about half length of the commentary is devoted to the evaluation of the role of dance,

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[42] Igor' Moiseev, "Yi chuangzao de taidu duidai gudian wu ju" 以創造的態度對待古典舞劇 [Treat classical ballet with an innovative attitude] trans. Zhang Hongmo 張洪模; Rostislav Zakharov, "Suweiai wu ju de poqie xuyao" 蘇維埃舞劇的迫切需要 [The pressing demand of Soviet ballet] trans. Yu Chengzhong 虞承中, *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 no. 1 (1955): 3-5; 6-9.

[43] Ezrabi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 103-4.

especially classical dance, in the ballet has made clear his stand. Despite their divergent views, even Zakhorov himself was troubled by the failure of producing quality contemporary Soviet drambalet. In his abovementioned 1954 essay translated into Chinese, Zakhorov admits that "our successful ballet performances on modern topics are very rare," and that "Soviet ballets appearing on the stages of the major theaters have become less and less," which is "utterly abnormal."[44] Yet, contrary to Moiseev, Zakhorov ascribes this failure of contemporary Soviet drambalets largely to their "weak theatricality" and the dancers' general lack of training in acting skills.[45]

Following these two essays in the same issue of *Dance Communication* are several compiled records of talks on different aspects of ballet choreography and training, given by choreographers and dancers of the Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Music Theatre, who visited China from October 1954 to January 1955 and had many discussion sessions with Chinese dance practitioners.[46] Among these compiled talk records there is one, given by the chief ballet director of the theater Vladimir Bourmeister, particularly sharing the theater's past experiences of creating drambalets on contemporary topics.[47] Bourmeister observes that "creating ballet on modern themes is a very difficult task…I think by far this problem has not been completely solved, because [we] have not yet found the most proper ballet language and configuration to represent

[44] Zakharov, "Suweiai wu ju de poqie xuyao," 6, 9.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 204.

[47] Vladimir Bourmeister, "Guanyu xianshi ticai de balei wu ju" 關於現實題材的芭蕾舞劇 [On drambalet with modern themes] trans. Huang Zilong 黃子龍, *Wudao tongxun* 舞蹈通訊 no. 1 (1955):14-7.

modern life," and he believes that "in Beijing will appear dance dramas on modern topics before long…of course [you] will definitely encounter many difficulties."[48]

It is clear that since the mid 1950s, even before the founding of the Beijing Dance School, the nascent Chinese dance world had been preoccupied with the knowledge, methods, and skills of creating (full-length large scale) dance drama. Such a preoccupation was closely related to the transnational influence of Soviet Russian ballet (drambalet in particular). Along with the travel of Soviet drambalet, the problematics of the genre—that is, the intrinsic tension between the bodily affect of dance and the narrative of drama, and the difficulty of choreographing ballet on contemporary themes—were also carried over to China. The inexperienced Chinese choreographers had to overcome the general difficulties associated with the complexity of producing full length and large scale dance dramas, and, on top of this, the daunting task of creating dance dramas on contemporary themes, in which their Russian teachers themselves did not have much successful experience. Yet the lack of professional and cultural accumulation in dance drama production in China actually turned out to be of some advantage in this respect. Without audiences, choreographers, and dancers being "burdened" by the powerful aesthetics and convention of classical ballet, the production of Chinese dance dramas had much more leeway and freedom to experiment with new dance vocabulary for contemporary themes. This is the transnational context of the creation of the dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower*.

The Military Choreographic Tradition

[48] Ibid., 14.

Evidencing the Russian ballet influence, *Bao lian deng* (1957) and *Yu meiren* 鱼美人 [The fish princess, 1959]—the two graduation projects of the two cohorts of the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography at the Beijing Dance School—were both on Chinese mythological or fairy tale themes.[49] In addition to these new dance drama choreographies on traditional Chinese topics, from 1957 to 1960 the dancers and choreographers at the Beijing Dance School, under the direction of Petr Gusev, also staged several classical ballets, including *Swan Lake, La Corsaire,* and *Giselle*.[50]

In contrast to the Beijing Dance School's particular attention on traditional themes (either Chinese or foreign), the first full length and large scale dance dramas on contemporary revolutionary themes were produced by the artistic troupes run by the military—this is unsurprising because the demand of political propaganda was more pressing for the army. The military song and dance ensembles in China have a much longer history than academic dance institutions, which can be traced back to the propaganda troupes in the Communist controlled Soviet areas in the 1920s.[51] Since the main function of the military song and dance ensembles was to mobilize the masses to join forces in revolutions and wars and to heighten the morale of soldiers, they naturally focused more on contemporary revolutionary themes and folk dance forms. Thus, the military artistic troupes have a choreographic tradition relatively independent of the academic dance institutions.[52]

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[49] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 211-5, 242-5.

[50] Ibid., 228-32.

[51] Ibid., 81-97.

[52] Yet this military choreographic tradition was also subject to Soviet Russian influence. In the early 1930s, some Soviet Union folk and national dances were brought back to the Soviet areas in China by Communist

However, this does not mean that the dance drama choreographies of the military troupes after the mid 1950s were free from Russian influence. Many students of the Training Program of Dance Drama Choreography were from the military, including Li Qiuhan, a major choreographer of the original version of *Butterfly Loves Flower*. As most of the performance works created by the military troupes before the 1950s were of a much smaller scale and integrated various artistic forms (mainly singing, theater, and dance) in order to maximize their propagandistic and mobilizing effects, the military choreographers were no more experienced in producing full length large scale dance drama than those with a non-military training background.[53] Therefore, the Soviet drambalet still provided a valuable model for the choreographers of the military to produce dance dramas on contemporary topics.

Butterfly Loves Flowers was among the first few relatively mature full length large scale dance dramas on contemporary revolutionary themes created after systematically receiving Soviet Russian influence on dance drama choreography and production.[54] Among the 114 performance works put on the stage of the 2nd Joint Artistic Performance of the PLA in 1959, there were two most important dance dramas on contemporary revolutionary themes—*Butterfly Loves Flower* and *Wu duo hong yun* 五朵紅雲 (Five red clouds).

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artists with studying and working experiences in Soviet Russia and quickly became widely popular. See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 88.

[53] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 186-7.

[54] The first large scale dance drama with a contemporary revolutionary theme produced in the People's Republic of China is *Heping ge* 和平鴿 (Dove of peace), choreographed by Dai Ailian 戴愛蓮 in 1950, with the libretto written by Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩. Yet this work is far from mature in terms of content, structure, and form, so that it "does not look like a dance drama, but is akin to a live report." See Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 185-6.

Whereas the choreography of *Five Red Clouds*, which tells a story of the uprising of the oppressed Li 黎 people living on the Hainan Island assisted by the CCP, is mainly based on the Li ethnic dance and foregrounds the group image of folk heroes among the masses, *Butterfly Loves Flower* integrates more diverse dance forms (including ballet vocabulary, ethnic and folk dance, and classical Chinese dance, see figs. 2 and 3) and focuses on one female and one male Communist hero as the main characters.[55] While both dance dramas foreshadow *The Red Detachment of Women* (which is also set on the Hainan Island and uses the Li ethnic dance, among other dance forms), *Butterfly Loves Flower* has closer affinity, in terms of dance form and structure, with *The Red Detachment of Women*, which further elevates ballet as the main dance vocabulary yet employs an eclectic dance style and also centers on the development of one female and one male Communist heroic character. Thus, the original production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* may be seen as an important experiment for the later creation of *The Red Detachment of Women* during the 1960s.

From Poem to Dance Drama

The original 1959 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* consists of five acts and seven scenes. Although this production was not filmed, a brief introduction to the plot of each scene exists.[56] The narrative starts in the late 1927, after the CCP-GMD split in the Great Revolution (1924-1927). Liu Zhixun, a CCP leader, was arrested by the GMD government. Just as Liu was to be executed, Yang Kaihui, also a CCP member, led the

[55] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 237-8, 239-40; "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 6.

[56] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 10.

masses to raid the execution ground and saved Liu, followed by an armed uprising organized by the CCP. Several days later, Yang and Liu and the rebels stealthily entered the GMD controlled city, launched a surprise attack at the local GMD government, and successfully occupied the city. Yang and Liu founded a local Soviet government and raised a branch of the Red Army.

Seven years later in 1933, in a battle against the GMD enemies, Yang and Liu both died heroically. To commemorate the two martyrs, their comrades planted a branch of poplar (*yang*, in Chinese) and a branch of willow (*liu*, in Chinese) where they died, and Liu's young son joined the Red Army to avenge his father. The souls of Yang and Liu arose to the Moon Palace, greeted by the deities Chang'e, Wu Gang, and the Jade Rabbit. Chang'e spread her long sleeves and danced to comfort the "loyal souls."

In 1949, the branch of the Red Army founded by Yang and Liu, which had grown much stronger and was on the way to the final victory, passed by the place where the two martyrs died. Both the poplar and willow branches had grown into big trees. Li Shuyi, the wife of Liu, handed over a torch, which was first lighted up two decades earlier to signal the uprising, to the commander of the Red Army, a former comrade-in-arms of Yang and Liu. The commander then passed down the torch to the children who would carry on the revolution in the future.

On the eve of the founding of the People's Republic, the souls of Yang and Liu in the Moon Palace, who were still telling the deities stories about their previous revolutionary struggles, heard about the news of victory in the world below and cannot help but burst into tears. Their tears turned into pouring rain, which in turn became rain of flowers falling on the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing. The narrative ends with Li Shuyi, and

her son with Liu, joining the masses parading in front of the Gate, celebrating the founding of the new regime and saluting to Chairman Mao (the character of Mao did not actually appear on stage in this production).

After the premier of the dance drama, a formal meeting of its producers and seven or so leading experts of theater, music, and dance was held in Beijing to discuss and provide suggestions for its further revision.[57] The meeting was hosted by the Chinese Association of Dramatists and the Chinese Research Association of Dance Art. The leaderships of the two associations, including Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 (the vice president of the former) and Wu Xiaobang (the president of the latter), were among the discussants, Demonstrating the high level attention received by the dance drama. The discussion and criticisms center on three issues, all of which concern what is not written in the poem yet developed in the form of either dance or dramatic narrative in the dance drama, betraying the intrinsic tension between the affective dance and the ideology-laden narrative in the genre.

The first issue is whether there should be GMD enemies on stage. In the first version of the dance drama, there is no enemy at all, but only the enemies' bayonets sticking out from behind the side curtains, probably because the producers thought that there is only remote mention of the enemy in the poem and adding concrete enemy characters on the stage would compromise the beauty and grace of dance and the original poem.[58] However, many of the experts argue that the absence of enemy weakens the dramatic conflict, without which the heroic deeds and virtues of Yang and Liu cannot be

[57] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 5.

[58] Ibid., 6-7.

highlighted and their rising to the heaven and becoming immortals cannot be justified.[59] Moreover, as the climax and the resolution of conflict arrive at the middle act (act III) in which Chang'e dances for the two martyrs' souls, the last two acts (acts IV and V) are not supported by any substantial dramatic conflict and losing narrative momentum, only filled by "grand scenes" of dance impertinent to the unfolding of plot.[60]

This structural criticism of the asynchronic developments of dance and drama in *Butterfly Loves Flower* clearly echoes the principles of drambalet, in which the dramatic narrative is the dominant structure while dance is only auxiliary to and must follow closely and serve faithfully the development of plot. Yet the principles of drambalet are of course not the universal law of choreography—the pre-revolutionary Russian ballet classics feature long sections of (classical) dance having little to do with the advancing of dramatic plot. Therefore, the first production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* may be seen as somehow being "stuck" in the middle between two choreographic traditions, one emphasizing the dramatic narrative and the other privileging the affective dance.

The criticism, from the perspective of theater, of the lack of conflict in the dance drama was the overwhelming voice in the discussion, reflecting the general trend of drambalet's ideology taking hold of the practice of dance drama production in China. However, this was not the only voice. Wu Xiaobang, who himself understood very well the tension between dance and narrative (discussed in chapter two), subtly and gently uttered his differing view on this matter. He argues that "[we] do not have to consider too much from the perspective of theatricality" and should instead emphasizes the affective

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 7.

role of dance—as a therapeutic means to treat trauma.[61] Wu explicitly links Mao's poem to the Chinese poetic tradition of *dao wang* 悼亡 (mourning the dead), and points out that there is also a non-dramatic dance tradition in China which is used to mourn the dead for the living.[62]

From this perspective, the prolonged "grand scenes" of dance (mostly collective/group dances in celebrating or commemorating scenes), which are relatively detached from the development of narrative, may be justified as a therapeutic treatment of the collective trauma of revolutions and wars through an affective means. However, Wu's (weak) defense of the affective dance against the hegemony of dramatic narrative, as shown later, had little influence on the future course of revision of the dance drama, reflecting Wu's own predicament of being marginalized in the Chinese dance world.

The second criticism centers on the embarrassingly ambiguous relationship between Yang and Liu on stage. In reality, Yang and Liu never worked together during the First Civil War and they died at different places and times and for different reasons. However, as Mao juxtaposes the two martyrs in the poem, the playwrights and choreographers had to fabricate concrete interpersonal connections and interactions between the two on the stage. Thus, Yang and Liu become two comrades working and fighting side by side. They saved and protected each other, won and celebrated victories, and even died and spent time together in their afterlife. Further, such a relationship is expressed by the intimate touches and affective interactions entailed by the bodily dance, especially partner dance. Because the Chinese dance tradition (mainly based on *xiqu* 戲曲, traditional Chinese

[61] Ibid., 9.

[62] Ibid.

theaters) lacks a satisfying convention of partner dance, the ballet counterpart (represented by *pas de deux*) was often borrowed, with various revisions, in Chinese dance dramas.[63]

As a result, the discussants complained that Yang and Liu look more like a couple than comrades on the stage. One of the discussant spoke of this issue in an amusing manner: "I could not help feeling that [they] look like husband and wife, so I explained to myself that [they] are not. Then I thought again; even if [they] are indeed like husband and wife, it does not matter, but there was always the suspense."[64] This "misunderstanding" on the receptive side cannot be entirely explained as the result of "misrepresentation" caused by borrowing ballet codes, as the ballet convention of partner dance does not really *represent* the bodily interaction between "husband and wife." Rather, it is more a result of the sexual energy activated and conducted by the intimate bodily touches through the affective dance. Such an affective effect has no neat and morally acceptable correspondence in the representational language, so the discussant used the category of "husband and wife" as an awkward approximation.

As another discussant commented, "the partner dance of Yang and Liu absorbed the Western ballet move of lifting, which looks *very uncomfortable*…Several lifts may have well compromised the image of the heroes."[65] Feeling "very uncomfortable" is the direct bodily reaction to the affect of dance which escapes the "comfortable" representational codes—the categories of "comrade," "hero," and "husband and wife." Thus, the affect of

[63] Emily Wilcox, "Han-Tang Zhongguo Gudianwu and the Problem of Chineseness in Contemporary Chinese Dance: Sixty Years of Creation and Controversy," *Asian Theater Journal*, 29.1 (Spring 2012): 206-32, 224.

[64] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 7.

[65] Ibid., 8, emphasis added.

dance here provides “a line of flight” from the ideological constraints of representation, and this “flight” is highly subversive, as it only needs “several lifts” to “compromise the image of heroes.”

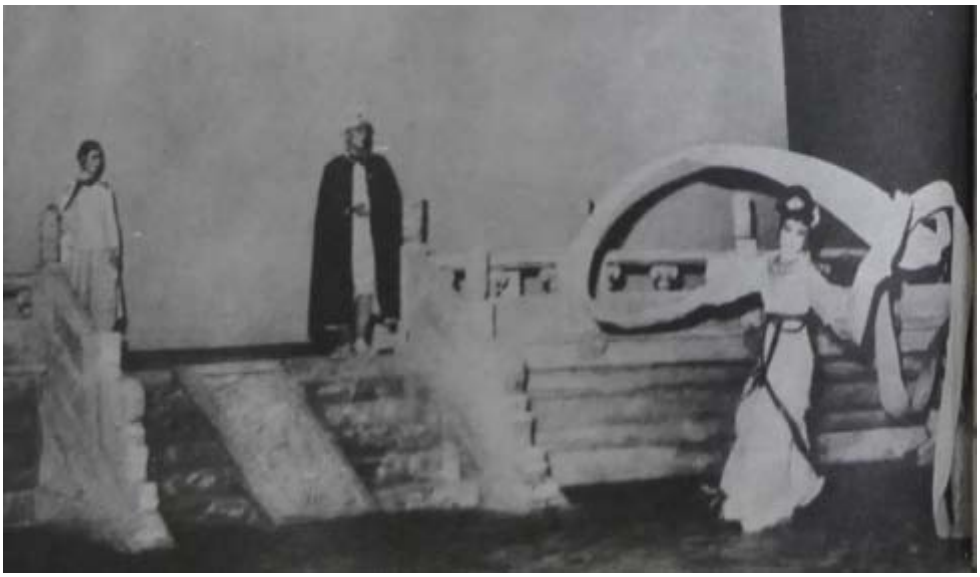

Fig 2: The characters Yang Kaihui (left), Liu Zhixun (middle), and Chang’e (performing the Long Silk-Strip Dance) in the 1959 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* [reproduced from Wudao 舞蹈 no.7 (1959): inner front cover].

The third problem concerns how Yang and Liu should act in the Moon Palace after they ascend to heaven. The scene of the Moon Goddess Chang’e dancing for the “loyal souls” is the climax of both the dance drama and the original poem, because it functions as a therapeutic treatment of trauma by invoking the affective dance through which the souls of the two martyrs are redeemed by the divine power. However, the poem mentions only the dance of the goddess, but says nothing about the actions of Yang and Liu. In the 1959 production of the dance drama, Yang and Liu do not dance at all in this scene (fig. 2). When Chang’e is dancing for them, they just walk slowly back and forth in the background and even do not pay much attention to the goddess’ dance. The discussants

complain that such “choreography” is very awkward, because Yang and Liu seem too disengaged from the dance of Chang’e, as if they react aloofly to the goddess’ enthusiasm.[66] As a result, this scene fails to convey the idea of the poem that the “loyal souls” are redeemed by the divine power. Therefore, the discussants suggested that in future revisions the two martyrs should dance with Chang’e.[67]

However, it is very likely that this possibility had already been considered by the choreographers in the original production. Although no adequate information is found about the exact reasoning underlying the choreographic decision of “immobilizing” Yang and Liu in this scene, it can be inferred that there might be several “technical” difficulties hard to overcome in choreography at that time.

First, the dance vocabulary used by the character Chang’e is classical Chinese dance, more specifically the *Chang chou wu* 長綢舞 (Long silk-strip Dance), in which the dancer vigorously swings a very long strip of silk with her two hands to form various complex curvy, wavy, spiral, and circular dynamic and airy patterns—very well suited to represent the imagery of Chang’e “spreading her long sleeves” in the poem (fig. 2). However, the powerfully swirling and weltering long strip forms a closed space around the dancer, which prevents anyone else from approaching and thus generated a kind of bodily affect characterized by exclusion and expulsion. As a result, the Long Silk-Strip Dance cannot easily accommodate other dancers in its choreography. The exclusive and expulsive affect of the dance vocabulary fundamentally contradicts its very representational conformity to the text of the poem and the ideological imperative of

[66] Ibid., 7-8.

[67] Ibid.

redemption and union commanded by the poem. (As a minor point, since the dance style of Yang and Liu seems more "modern," how to integrate it naturally with the classical vocabulary in the same choreography is itself a challenging task. See fig. 3.)

Fig 3: *Grand jeté* in the 1959 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* [reproduced from Wudao 舞蹈 no.7 (1959): 6, 8.].

Moreover, choreography involving three major dancers is generally more difficult than partner dance and would generate greater ambiguity judged by the representation-based meaning system of ideology. Unlike partner dance which only needs to develop a single relationship between two dancers, adding one more major dancer greatly increases the complexity of the dance dynamics, as it is necessary to address three inter-dancer relationships simultaneously.[68] Given the technical difficulties and controversies already involved in the partner dancing of the dance drama, choreographing a trio dance would be no less risky. The relationships among the trio developed through dance would be

[68] In some sense, choreographing a trio dance in such a dance drama is even more difficult than composing a group dance, because the latter usually does not need to develop distinct and detailed relationships between every combination of dancers and often collapses such intractable complexity into similar or repetitive dance moves among the dancers.

likely to be subject to dangerous ambiguity, which is difficult to clarify within a "comfortable" representational framework.[69]

The choreographic decision of immobilizing Yang and Liu may be based on a more direct political concern. The choreographers seem to worry that letting the two martyrs dance engagingly with the goddess in heavenly bliss may sever them from the revolutionary cause in the world below—that is, complete redemption risks negating the meaning of the two martyrs' previous mundane struggles all together. As a result, the choreographers deliberately distance Yang and Liu from the dance of Chang'e, and let the two be distracted by the revolution going on in the human world.[70] Therefore, the awkward "immobility" of Yang and Liu in this climatic scene of the whole dance drama in some sense deconstructs the ideological meaning of the original poem as an affective treatment of trauma, by inadvertently "refusing" to be redeemed by the divine power.

The three major problems of the 1959 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower*—the absence of enemies, the ambiguous relationship between Yang and Liu, and the immobility of the two in the Moon Palace—all expose the intrinsic tension between the affective dance and the representational theater in the genre of dance drama. Due to the influence of Soviet Russian drambalet, narrative- and representation-based theatricality became the major criterion for judging the quality and meaning of dance drama,

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[69] During the meeting, the discussants agreed that "this is a problem hard to tackle." See "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 7-8. A partial solution to this ambiguity problem in partner and trio dances would be found in the choreographies of Model Play dance dramas later in the 1960s. For example, in *The Red Detachment of Women*, multiple identity hierarchies—gender, class, Party membership, and military rank—are imposed on the partner or trio dancers through novel choreographic codes, as a means to clarify and organize inter-dancer relationships and minimize ambiguities. Yet, the possibility of sexual ambiguity still cannot be eliminated even in such a case. See Jason McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema," 343-4.

[70] "Wu ju *Die Lian Hua* zuotan hui," 7-8.

reflecting the tightening ideological control over the bodily dance. Unsurprisingly, the paradox troubling the Soviet drambalet was also carried over to China. As the Russian choreographer Bourmeister predicted in the mid 1950s, dance dramas appearing in Beijing "on modern topics" did "encounter many difficulties." Yet it is these difficulties that opened up space for the affective dance, perhaps unconsciously, to resist, deconstruct, and subvert the dominant ideology.

Old Trauma Suppressed, New Trauma Added

Through a series of revision, the dance drama was finally fixed on the silver screen twenty years later in 1978. Unlike the original 1959 version, which was more like an experimental product, the final production had the luxury to learn from the successes and failures of many dance dramas produced during the two decades in-between.[71] The most important works of all these, the Model Play dance dramas *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-haired Girl* pushed the Chinese version of drambalet with contemporary revolutionary themes onto the apex by providing an exemplary Chinese model for dance choreography, dramatic structure, and the effective integration of the former into the latter.

Built upon this accumulated experience, the 1978 production emerged as a mature dance drama, which boasts a coherent narrative framework featuring consistent (melo)dramatic conflict, with dance choreography closely and neatly structured around

[71] Pang Zhiyang 龐志陽, "Wu ju *Dian lian hua* chuangzuo tihui" 舞劇《蝶戀花》創作體會 [The experience of creating the dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower*] in The Art Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and The Dance Research Institute at Chinese National Academy of Arts, eds., *Wudao wu ju chuangzuo jingyan wenji* 舞蹈舞劇創作經驗文集 [Anthology of the experience of creating dances and dance dramas] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1985), 111-7, 115.

the development of dramatic narrative. The filmed new production, which runs approximately 100 minutes, differs so much from the original one in terms of libretto, choreography, sets, and costume that it virtually qualifies as a completely new dance drama in its own right. Thus, it deserves a separate and focused study. This study here only intends to highlight the particular changes made in the final production that are directly related to the three major problems of the original version.

As demonstrated below, through more seasoned playwriting, choreographic, and cinematic manipulation, the new production seems to have satisfactorily solved the three problems at the surface. However, this by no means suggests that the inherent tension between dance and drama does no longer exist in this genre. In fact, the new production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* was partly motivated by a reevaluation and readjustment of the relationship between dance and drama within the choreographic paradigm of drambalet entrenched during the Cultural Revolution.

As one of the major choreographers observes in his statement on the choreographic principle underlying the new production, "a dance drama without dance, or without foregrounding the role of dance, would [negatively] affect the delivery of content and the development of characters…It is absolutely necessary to pay attention to and emphasize the use of the means of dance."[72] That is, without fundamentally challenging the model of drambalet, the choreographers increase the relative weight placed on the role of dance. For example, in a scene at exactly half length of the film—corresponding to the *entr'acte* or intermission/interlude common to theatric performances and old films—several rather long episodes of dance (including solo, partner dance, small group dance, and group

[72] Ibid., 115.

dance), which are relatively independent of the development of dramatic plot, are inserted to temporarily "halt" the flow of narrative. The sole purpose of these insertions of "light-hearted" dance, according to the choreographers, is to "let the audience be satiated with the happiness and enjoy the art of dance."[73] This "foregrounding" of the role of dance as entertainment and aesthetic appreciation in its own right, rather than a mere subservient tool for developing dramatic narrative, may be seen as a subtle reaction against the overly strict ideological constraints imposed upon dance drama during the Cultural Revolution.

The most conspicuous change made in this final version, however, is that the character of Liu Zhixun is completely removed from the stage, and together with him, the roles of his wife Li Shuyi and their son. As a result, Yang Kaihui becomes the only hero in the dance drama. Note that by that time, the unspeakable truth of Liu's death had already been uncovered by Li Shuyi but not yet revealed to the wider public due to its scandalous nature and political sensitivity.

It remains uncertain to what extent this fact had affected the decision of removing Liu from the play. Yet it is quite clear that the removal of Liu Zhixun facilitated the (ostensible) resolution of the three abovementioned problems of the original production. First, without Liu, who was killed by his CCP comrades, Yang Kaihui's sole enemy, the GMD, can justifiably appear on the stage to enhance dramatic conflict (fig. 4). After two decades of evolvement, the appearance of pure evil enemies on stage had almost become a requisite for dance dramas, a melodramatic standard set by the Model Plays, which marks the ideological hegemony of theatricality over dance in the genre.

[73] Ibid., 116.

Fig 4: The GMD enemies in the 1978 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower*.

Second, without Liu, the sexual ambiguity and embarrassment are automatically solved. However, this brings about a side effect—the removal of Liu cripples the partner dance, a crucial component for any successful dance drama. To partly remedy this structural deficiency, the final production adds a new role, Mao Anying 毛岸英 (1922-1950), Yang and Mao's eldest son (about eight year old at that time), to dance with his mother to fulfill the partner dance. The role of Mao Anying was played by a female dancer, probably because it was hard to find a male dancer with a stature shorter and smaller than the female dancer playing the role of Yang. This atypical pair of dance partners greatly limited the standard partner dance vocabulary that can be used, which resulted in the lack of variation between the dance moves of the two dancers. Mostly, Yang dances as the lead and Mao Anying simple follows in the same dance moves with minimum variation (fig. 5). Therefore, while the obliteration of Liu solves the problem of sexual ambiguity, it deteriorates the quality of partner dance (especially compared with those in the Model Play dance dramas)—another manifestation of the tension between the affective dance and ideological constraints.

Fig 5: Partner dance of the characters Yang Kaihui and her son Mao Anying in the 1978 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower*.

Fig 6: The Long Silk-Strip Dance in the 1978 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower* (from left to right, the characters Yang Kaihui, the Jade Rabbit, and Chang'e)

At last, without Liu, the dancing scene in the Moon Palace becomes less intractable, as the trio reduces to a duo. However, the difficulty of incorporating another dancer into the exclusive and expulsive affect of the Long Silk-Strip Dance of Chang'e has never been completely solved. Yang did not dance with the goddess after all, so the advice provided by the experts in the 1959 discussion session was not followed. In the end, the

problem was partially covered by a special visual effect made possible by cinematic technology—Yang (walking slowly around the dancing goddess), Chang'e, and the Jade Rabbit are all fit into a huge full moon in the background, which symbolizes the final redemption and the union between the mortal and the divine (fig. 6).

Although the obliteration of Liu and the suppression of Li Shuyi's personal trauma seem to have solved these problems at the surface, doing so fundamentally subverts the authority of the original poem. In both the beginning and ending shots of the filmed version, a white marble monument occupies the center of the screen, on which is inscribed Mao's poem, invoked as the highest authority to guarantee the political correctness of the dance drama. However, while there is no person at all in the beginning shot, in the ending shot, only Yang appears in front of the monumental poem that explicitly juxtaposes Yang and Liu (fig. 7). The figure of Liu missing from the picture, just like the nightmare haunting Li Shuyi, uncannily signifies the original personal trauma as a displaced affect repressed by the collectivist narrative, and thus fundamentally deconstructs the text and the underlying ideology itself.

Fig 7: The first (left) and last shots of the 1978 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower*.

However, the adaptation of trauma in *Butterfly Loves Flower* does not stop here—a new trauma, one of the Cultural Revolution, is implicitly added to the final version. During the Cultural Revolution, *Butterfly Loves Flower* was banned from the stage and the associated artists were persecuted, because of the hysterical jealousy of Jiang Qing 江青, the fourth wife of Mao.[74] Under Jiang's direct control, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl* dominated the dance stage. Interestingly, shortly after the fall of Jiang Qing and the end of the Cultural Revolution, three different dance dramas, yet all based on the same text of Mao's poem *Butterfly Loves Flower*, including the production under study, were put on stage within a short period of time.[75] This is no accident, but the return of the repressed as a repetitive and affective response to the recent trauma of the Cultural Revolution.

The change in the costume of Yang across different productions is also informative. While in the 1959 version, Yang wears costume similar to the clothes of common rural women (figs. 2, 3, 4), in the 1978 production it is changed to the typical May-Fourth students' attire—a white Chinese style blouse and a black skirt with white socks and black flat shoes (figs. 5, 6, 7). By changing the image of Yang from a common rural woman to a May Fourth student, the choreographers seem to invoke the May Fourth spirit (characterized by democracy and reason) as a sinuous criticism of the extreme-leftism of the Cultural Revolution (and beyond).

The dance drama *Butterfly Loves Flower* filmed in 1978 was dedicated to the celebration of Mao's 85th posthumous birthday. In one scene of this production, the

[74] Wang and Long, *Zhongguo jinxiandai dangdai wudao fazhanshi* (1840-1996), 344-5.

[75] Ibid.

character of Mao in his younger age appears on the stage and reunites with Yang and their son in the imagination of the hallucinating Yang before her death (fig. 8). This scene, at a first glance, seems to be a whole-hearted commemoration and recognition of Mao and his authority. However, this scene may also be seen as implicitly passing judgments on Mao's different marriages and life stages, by reuniting the younger Mao on stage with his "proper wife" and therefore restoring the familial order disrupted by Jiang Qing in the immediate post-Mao era. Ironically, although ideology attempted to exploit the personal trauma of private life for its own use, the private life and trauma of Mao—the ultimate icon of ideology—was eventually appropriated by the choreographers to express, through the bodily affect of dance, their own judgements on ideological matters, thus undermining, perhaps inadvertently, the sacred authority of ideology itself.

Figure 8. The union of Mao, Yang, and their son in the hallucination of Yang (the 1978 production of *Butterfly Loves Flower*).

Epilogue

Long before I had read about dance, it was clear to me that dance speaks to me through something different from language. Now I have read and contemplated dance for a long, I could say that it speaks to me through kinesthesia, affect, and its choreography. Dance has been and will continue to be an important means of meaningful communication, entertainment, and spiritual and social organization.

However, dance remains as an understudied art form in the scholarship on modern Chinese (and East Asian) cultures. The "unfitness" of dance in this academic field is largely a consequence of its seemingly intractable "in-betweenness" (that is, often dance is better characterized by the ambivalence between "neither…nor…" and "both…and…," rather than simply "either…or…" or "is/is not")—for instance, between the mind and the body, between "plastic art" and "musical art," between intelligible text and esoteric codes, between abstractness and concreteness, between the subject and the object, between the conscious and the unconscious—a list that can run much longer. The slipping of dance through the interstices of these categorical binaries exposes the inadequacy of the existing conceptual paradigms, and in general the cognitive frameworks with which we perceive, understand, interpret, interact and grapple with the world and ourselves. This inadequacy is partly determined and perhaps hardwired in our "nature," but needless to say, it is to a large extent a result of cultural and ideological biases.

This project is a preliminary step, among others, toward redressing the unduly marginalized role of dance in the research on modern Chinese culture, by on the one hand delineating the transnational and transcultural origins and evolvement of modern Chinese dance and its role in the larger field of cultural-political praxis, and on the other hand

showing how the in-betweenness of dance can both challenge and bring together, in a dissonant yet productive and generative manner, different theoretical and analytical perspectives.

Therefore, this dissertation neither begins nor ends with dance *per se*, but always positions dance in relation to other arts and media, especially language and literature, in both discourses and dance choreographies, situated in concrete historical and cultural contexts. This decision is not based merely on some personal theoretical preference but rather necessitated by the fact that, ontologically, dance in China has been consistently defined and redefined with respect to other artistic media since the very beginning—just as in the ancient text of the "Great Preface" to *Shi jing* quoted in "Introduction," dance is defined as some "residual" or "leftover" of hierarchicalizing the other means of expression in the Confucian poetic order.

The dance of Yu Rongling, compared with the dance of the others discussed in this dissertation, seems to be the "purist" in form, as it has no obvious narrative structure and does not address topical matters. Even in this case, dance, within the context of corporeal modernity informed by evolutionary thinking in the Late Qing era, still constitutes a communicative channel which parallels, complements, and mediates that of language in transnational and transcultural encounters, negotiations, and struggles. Moreover, the dance of Yu was also influenced by the theatrical convention of Peking Opera. In fact, the Yu sisters and especially their mentor Isadora Duncan were all excellent writers, and if without their written works radiant with not only historical but also literary merits, their dances would not have achieved their current status or even still remained known to us today.

The “New dance” of Wu Xiaobang is more apparently intertwined with other art forms in his fraught strategy of “reverse integration,” as he defines the body of the dancer as some tool or instrument to “play the music,” “paint the picture,” and “do the literature,” in order to maximize the utility of dance in an age of national crisis and mass mobilization while establishing dance as an independent art in China. In Wu’s paradoxical “New classical Chinese dance” developed in the late 1950s, he not only preserved the musical, pictorial, and narrative features of his New dance, but went further to the Taoist philosophical and literary canons in search of the “classical ethos” represented by “reclusion.” Wu adopted this tactic to, on the one hand, subvert the political imperative of creating the “national forms” in literature and all major theatrical and fine arts, and on the other hand, resist the material communist utopia of the Great Leap Forward.

Just as this dissertation opens up with the relationship between dance and poetry, it also closes up with the tension between the two in the genre of dance drama, which is a more intensely contested ground for the collaboration, competition, and struggle between the affect of dance and the narrative of drama. By tracing the adaptation of trauma from Mao’s poem *Butterfly Loves Flower* into different versions of dance drama, it is shown that, while ideology strives to define, control, and assimilate the affect of dance in its hegemonic meaning system, the latter always implies “a line of flight” from the constraints of the representation- and narrative-based paradigms, and sometimes even inadvertently (or not) subverts the underlying ideology.

Besides the word-dance relationship, this dissertation also revolves around a second axis—that is, the rise of modern Chinese dance as an immanently transnational and

transcultural phenomenon. First of all, almost all the relevant historical agents had transnational and transcultural backgrounds. The multilingual Yu Rongling, with Manchu, Han, and American lineages, spent most of her childhood in foreign countries; Wu Xiaobang learned modern dance in Imperial Japan; Dai Ailian 戴愛蓮 (1916-2006), another important figure to be covered in a future chapter of this project, was not a Chinese citizen at all, but was born as a subject of the British Empire on the Trinidad Island with a complicated colonial and immigrant history. As shown in the dissertation (and to be further demonstrated in its future extension), the transnational and transcultural background of these agents traveling within the world colonial order had great influence on the respective courses of their dance careers.

More importantly, dance, relying on the mobile and "primitive" human body as its primary medium without the burdens of language, literacy, and costly modern technology, has a superb ability to cross national and cultural borders. The origin of Western modern dance, though it happened within a colonial hierarchy of imbalanced power, bore conspicuous "oriental" birthmarks, as exemplified by the cases of Isadora Duncan, Yu Rongling, and Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. Similarly, the birth of modern Chinese dance (both modern and classical) in the Late Qing imperial court was also in constant conversation with its Western counterparts. Therefore, the case of the transnational and transcultural dissemination of early modern dance compellingly demonstrates that the origin of modernism (and modernity) was global and multiple in nature, rather than exclusively Western. Moreover, these transnational and transcultural currents also betrays the intrinsic paradox of modernism in the case of dance, both in the West and China, by blurring the distinction between the advanced and the backward, the modern and tradition.

Wu Xiaobang's strategy of "reverse integration" in the 1930s should not be seen as a unique and isolated local "mutation" of modern dance either. In fact, at about the same time, modern dance around the globe was experiencing a similar "Leftist turn" to reach down to the proletarian class. However, these transnational connections in the dance world were modulated by the particular local conditions of China. For example, in the case of modern dance in China, Wu had to deal with the dual pressures of, first, establishing dance as a legitimate and independent high art and, second, transforming it into an effective tool for mass mobilization *at the same time*, rather than, as in the cases of its Western counterparts, first facing mainly the first pressure and then the second. These local "particularities" inevitably shaped the course of development of modern dance in China in some unique ways.

The rise of dance drama into one of the most prominent performance genres in the socialist era was inseparable from the transnational influence of the Soviet Russian drambalet. The advent of Soviet ballet was not only instrumental to the formation of dance drama, but also precipitated the maturation of the dance vocabulary and training system of "classical Chinese dance," which in turn spurred the emergence of Wu Xiaobang's "New classical Chinese dance" as a modernist reaction against both and the underlying ideology. The inherent problematics of drambalet was also transposed to China in the process, but, similar to the case of modern dance, had somewhat different manifestations and evolving trajectory conditioned by local "particularities," as shown in the last chapter.

In the future process of turning this dissertation into a book manuscript, it will be extended in terms of both theoretical depth and substantive scope. Theoretically, a new section will be added to "Introduction" to more systematically address the relationship between the key concepts involved—including corporeality, kinesthesia, affect, and choreography—in more synthesized conversation with the discourses of postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and affect theories. Substantively, two new chapters will be written to give a fuller picture of dance in the cultural-political landscape of modern China, and also to illuminate some new aspects of the theoretical relationship between words and dance, ideology and practice.

The first new chapter will be devoted to discussing the *qunzhong wudao* 群衆舞蹈 (dance of the masses), a loose designation of the dances created in large quantities by the "masses" (farmers, workers, or militia as amateur or semi-professional dancers) throughout the 1950s. Labor, especially manual labor, became the dominant theme of these dances. Therefore, this dance "genre" provides an opportunity to problematize and dismantle a series of dichotomies—dance as "high art" vs. dance as "mass culture," dance as object/artifact vs. dance as labor/work, dance as representation of social life vs. dance as "blueprint" for organizing social life—from the theoretical perspective of social choreography.

Social choreography is a concept coined by the literary theorist Andrew Hewitt to re-examine ideology as performance in dance and everyday body movement.[1] Ideological project often takes aesthetical forms, to varying extent, in order to have effect on the social relations and organizations it aims to construct, sustain, change, or reorganize. The

[1] Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

resultant is some socio-aesthetical continuum of social organization and relation, with artistic dance at one end and everyday body movement at the other.[2] Social choreography, on the one hand, is a reaction against the critical tradition that takes dance as physical experience or spectacularization of metaphysical transcendence, and, on the other hand, also "resists any reduction to the specific social 'determinants' of dance, such as nation, race, gender, and class."[3] This does not mean that these categories no longer hold with respect to social choreography, but that "in both the practice of choreography and the critical discourses it generates, such categories are themselves being rehearsed and refined," and more importantly, as added and emphasized here, being resisted, rearticulated, or re-signified.[4] Therefore, by investigating how these issues were reflected and addressed in the discourse, choreography, and performance of the dance of the masses within the historical and intellectual context of various socialist transformations and political campaigns in the 1950s, this chapter will shed new light on the relationship between art, ideology, and social practice.

The second new chapter will focus on Dai Ailian, another enormously important and influential figure that cannot be bypassed in any history book on modern Chinese dance. Dai was born to a third-generation Cantonese immigrant family on the Trinidad Island, moved to England to receive her ballet education with Anton Dolin, a former star of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and other two well-known ballet teachers, Margaret Craske and Marie Rambert. In England, Dai was also trained in German modern dance by Lesley Burrows-Goossens, Ernst and Lotte Berk, and later, Sigurd Leeder and Kurt Jooss who

[2] Ibid., 1-35.

[3] Ibid., 4.

[4] Ibid.

was "the first choreographer of international renown to achieve a successful synthesis of classical and modern dance elements to express topical, contemporary ideas in a strikingly theatrical manner."[5] Dai went to China in 1939, and eventually became a Chinese citizen of the socialist state. She was the first president of Beijing Dance School (predecessor of Beijing Dance Academy), co-founder and director of the National Ballet of China (also called the Central Ballet Troupe), and vice president of the Chinese Dancer's Association. The diasporic identity of Dai greatly influenced her dance career. For example, one of her major contributions was that she collected and adapted many ethnic and folk dances in China's borderlands during wartime in the 1940s, which may be seen as her bodily means of "searching for root."

However, this chapter will center on another major contribution of Dai—her effort to disseminate *Labanotation* in China in the 1980s. Labanotation (or Kinetography Laban) is a notation system initiated by Rudolf Laban, pioneer and theorist of German modern dance, to accurately describe, record, and analyze human body movement (complex or simple). It is a discreet coding of the continuous body, space, time, and the movement trajectories of body parts in space-time. Labanotation is partly inspired by the Western notation system of music, yet more complex than the latter due to the three-dimensional, multi-degrees of freedom, space-time coupling involved in human body movement. Labanotation may be seen as the final ground for examining the relationship between "words" (written signs in this case) and dance.

In Labanotation, the logocentric hierarchy is reversed—now the center is occupied by dance/body movement which is *represented* by written signs. However, the theoretical

[5] Richard Glasstone, *The Story of Dai Ailian: Icon of Chinese Folk Dance, Pioneer of Chinese Ballet* (Alton: Dance Books Ltd, 2007), 12.

implication of this “literalization” of dance is uncertain, as it also seems to fundamentally negate the “universal” and “unmediated” nature of dance. For example, Dai made considerable effort to “translate” many ethnic and folk dances collected in China into Labanotation and disseminate these “written” dances to the world. It is possible that this effort of Dai might be largely motivated by her own perhaps unconscious anxiety of the ultimate impossibility of merging her newly acquired “Chinese” identity and ethnic and cultural “root” with her diasporic experience. That is, for Dai, the illusion of connecting her newly found “root” with her diasporic identity must be *mediated* by another illusion—the “universal” yet Western sign of Labanotation. Therefore, by investigating the problematics involved in the discourse and practice of the transnational and transcultural dissemination of Labanotation in China, this chapter will bring new insights into our understanding of word-dance (or sign-movement) relation within a different cultural-political context.

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