

**ECLECTIC LESSONS FROM TAIWAN:  
HARD-WORKING DANCERS AT TSOYING HIGH SCHOOL**

**Ellen Gerdes**  
Ed.M. Temple University  
B.A. Wesleyan University

**Introduction**

I begin this article<sup>1</sup> by expressing gratitude to an early mentor of mine, the late Danna Frangione, who had a strong interest in Asian dance forms and spent many summers teaching modern dance in Taiwan. In 1993, she was one of the first foreign guest teachers at Tsoying High School Dance Division in the south of Taiwan; she established friendships with its director, Chou Su-Ling, and summer faculty member, Wang Yunyu (now head of the dance department at Taipei National University of the Arts).

Due to Frangione's influence, I studied Mandarin Chinese at Wesleyan University and lived in China after graduating in 2005. While there, I interviewed several dance educators, attended conservatory classes, and joined a group of elderly women who practiced *taiji*, *mulan*, and *yangge* dance forms daily in the urban parks of Beijing. In my

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my Master's thesis in dance education at Temple University, advised by Dr. Karen Bond and completed in 2009. I presented an abridged version of this paper as a conference presentation entitled *The Role of Technique in Dance Education: The Example of Tsoying High School, Taiwan* at the CORD/CEPA Global Perspectives on Dance Pedagogy: Research and Practice Conference, June 2009.

spare time, I also learned how to salsa dance. I became curious about moments in 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese history when dance was sponsored or suppressed by the government; since then, I have continued to explore Chinese movement forms (both dance and opera) in relation to politics and pedagogy.

Chou Su-Ling invited me as a researcher to the summer session of the Tsoying High School Dance Division in 2008. While observing classes, rehearsals, and performances, I realized that Tsoying High School Dance Division is an example of a technique-focused dance high school that offers a highly eclectic training, a contemporary phenomenon acknowledged by Melanie Bales (2008).

When I arrived, Tsoying seemed sparse and dusty compared to Taipei. Two high school students escorted me to the school – a collection of large square cinder-block structures with outdoor corridors. Its courtyards, with palm trees and flowering plants, felt distinctly tropical. I rolled my suitcase through a parking lot of puddles – the remnants of a typhoon the weekend before. The mosquitoes were numerous due to the standing water; I shuddered, preparing myself for some itchy skin. My host student told me she would take me first to meet “Su-Ling.” She snickered as she spoke, confiding she would never dare address a teacher by her first name.

Throughout my summer at Tsoying, I stayed with this high school dance student and her family in the more populated city of Kaohsiung. After the hot days at school, she and I rode a bus, then a subway, back into the city. We often reflected on the day during our long walk from the subway to the family’s small apartment. She asked me many questions about my dancing and my school schedule: When did I start dancing? Was I a dance major in college? How many hours did I dance a day? What is dance

research? She candidly spoke to me about her joys and frustrations. Her exhaustion was palpable, yet she always offered gestures of generosity, including the first shower slot when we got home. Our many casual conversations about life as a dance student sparked my interest in hearing about more students' experiences of such an eclectic (and demanding) curriculum.

This article first provides a relevant literature review of research on dance technique education, then discusses the historical underpinnings of the Tsoying Dance Division, and finally highlights the students' experience of a Taiwanese curriculum that focuses on ballet, modern dance, and Chinese opera movement. Drawing from Bond and Stinson (2001) who observe that few studies ask young dance students about their experience of education, I report on questionnaire data from Tsoying dancers.

### **Why technique?**

In this article, I examine Tsoying students' experience of technique classes, the setting where many come to know themselves as dancers. Dance educator Sue Stinson (1998) observes that people more often identify a technique class as "dance" class, as opposed to dance history, theory, or choreography classes. My dance pedagogy students at Temple University confirm this perception when they answer what their "best dance teachers do"; they almost always talk about technique teachers. Although ethnographic dance research might commonly examine movement practice in social settings, my study is based in a dance conservatory. As suggested by Bales:

What richer place to mine the specificity of the dance language than in the studio, where movement invention and transmission is fore-grounded, and where we

dancers and choreographers have spent the bulk of our dancing lives? (Bales, 2008, p. 11).

It is also important to address dance technique curriculum and pedagogy as a system of values that is conveyed to its students. With the trend of multi-cultural education (Bond, 2010), an array of “world” dance techniques are offered as electives in most American university dance curricula, while ballet and modern remain the foundation, which reveals a bias towards Western and concert dance traditions. University dance educators Stanton and Kolcio (2008) proclaim that, “...the teaching of technique is one of the single most important indicators of a department or school’s philosophical paradigm” (p. 2). Thus, the curriculum at Tsoying Dance Division demonstrates Director Chou’s value of a pluralistic dance education: ballet, many modern dance forms, Chinese opera<sup>2</sup> movement, improvisation, and techniques taught by a host (over 40 at the time of this study) of foreign guest teachers.

Several authors (Susan Leigh Foster, 1997; Sylvie Fortin, 1998; Randy Martin, 1998; Clyde Smith, 1998; Sue Stinson, 1998; Jill Green, 1999, 2000; Robin Lakes, 2005; and Glenna Batson, 2008) trouble power hierarchies in the dance technique

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<sup>2</sup> I recognize that the term “Chinese Opera” is an incomplete Westernization for an art form that encompasses acting, singing, martial arts, acrobatics, and dance. Moreover, there are many distinct styles of Chinese opera including *jingju*, *kunqu*, and *yueju*. According to Yatin Lin (2010): “Under the rule of the Chinese Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek, Peking Opera became elevated as the ‘National Opera’ (or *Guo-ju*), due to its Mandarin lyrics; movements from Peking Opera were also deemed the main source of Chinese classical dance accordingly” (p. 254). Peking Opera is a term for Beijing Opera, or *jingju*.

classroom – offering feminist, democratic, and somatic pedagogy as alternative approaches. Kolcio and Stanton (2008), however, argue for technique as emancipatory:

Technique teaching has the potential to be a uniquely embodied liberatory practice by embracing, rather than seeking to fix, multiple and even contradictory world-views in a discursive theoretical framework that is both practiced and discussed, and that is marked on the stage and on the page (p. 12).

They researched artists (Bebe Miller, Eiko Otake, and Hari Krishnan) who work in hybrid forms, finding that multiple narratives conflict and conjoin around, “the cultivation of the dance expert, the training of a stable and cohesive body, and the accumulation of a set of instrumental skills” (p. 6). The authors argue that technique is not an objective place; individual contexts and histories are important both to students and to dance forms.

Like these choreographers of hybrid forms, contemporary dancers are required to be exceptionally versatile, a trend Bales (2008) calls *eclecticism* or, “the process of appropriating various movement practices, existing dance traditions, or training methods from other art forms” (p. 15). She argues that this eclecticism augments, rather than subtracts from, the earlier American modern dance company model.

In the United States, given the recent surge in somatic study and the economic shift away from the company model to a free-lance model, professional dancers (not just university students) train in several body techniques. Veronica Dittman (2008) offers a contemporary example of New York dancers whose financial position and artistic goals lead to a life of teaching dance and somatics, taking a range of classes, and dancing for multiple independent choreographers. As a professional dancer in

Philadelphia, my peers and I also live this life-style. Increasingly, dancers are choreographing their own work. Dittman writes:

That a dancer's devotion to and hard work for a particular choreographer can seldom be returned in kind – either with reasonable compensation or an ongoing, long-term artistic relationship – contributes in large part to dancers' free rein in shaping their artistic identities rather than defining themselves by their work for a single person. There is no longer the question of which choreographer I want to dance for, with an appropriate course of training to achieve that goal (p. 23).

Here, Dittman highlights the potential autonomy that comes from composing your own choreographer or choosing a range of projects. On the other hand, there are distinctly disempowering aspects of being a professional dancer in this current structure, namely, lack of financial stability. Tsoying dance students are prepared by their high school for a future of dancing for multiple choreographers in multiple aesthetics. The Tsoying dance curriculum focuses on modern dance, ballet, and Chinese opera, and also offers improvisation, repertoire, arts appreciation, and music and dance classes.

### **Socio-historical context**

Several surveys of Taiwanese dance history reveal the influence of the island's shifting politics on its development of dance (Wu & Huang, 1999; Chen 2003; Cheng; 2004; Wang & Frangione, 2004; Wang et al., 2004; Chang, 2008). Taiwan's ethnic majority is Chinese; the initial large Chinese immigration to the small island occurred before the twentieth century. In addition, Taiwan retains aspects of Japanese culture because of Japanese occupation between 1895 and 1945, when students were educated in Japanese school systems. Many Taiwanese, including dancers, studied

abroad in Japan. In order to establish dominance during this period, the Japanese government did not support Chinese dance performance in Taiwan (Wu & Huang, 1999).

Originally of mainland China, the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party came to power after the Japanese. With the new leadership of Chang Kai-Shek, the island met a new surge of Chinese culture; this second largest Chinese immigration to Taiwan occurred as the Communist party established rule in Mainland China in 1949. Chiang Kai-shek, then head of the KMT party in China, led almost two million Chinese to Taiwan where he promoted a new kind of Chinese nationalism. The incidents of 2-28<sup>3</sup> led to the period referred to as White Terror (1949-1960), when many Taiwanese intellectuals and social elite were killed or imprisoned as the KMT sought full control of Taiwan (Cheng, 2003, p. 37).

During this new political era, the KMT government attempted to define Taiwan as a sanctuary for Chinese culture. Cheng Kuang Yu (2004) notes that from 1949 to 1987, “the Nationalist party insisted on claiming its status of representing ‘Orthodox Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> On February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the Kuomintang government violently squelched an uprising of Taiwanese, which initiated tense relations between the Taiwanese and the KMT. The uprising began with the beating of a woman who sold cigarettes on the black market in Taipei and the death of a protesting bystander. Violent protests erupted against Chinese Mainlanders across the island and the KMT intervened, killing tens of thousands of Taiwanese (Chen, 2003). The 2-28 Massacre (referred to by its numbers just like the US 9/11), “traumatized the Taiwanese, alienating them from politics for decades and costing them their faith in the KMT regime” (Chen, 2003, p. 35).

Culture,' ... (mainly Han Chinese culture) through a series of activities and movements” (Cheng, 2004, p. 80) that included the *minzu wudao* movement (codified classical dance, Han Chinese folk dance movements, dance of ethnic minorities, military dances, and dance of Taiwan indigenous people). This combination of forms was dissimilar to the creative movement and ballet learned by the Taiwanese in Japan.

Having specific guidelines for appropriate themes and content, the dance form was in stark contrast to the ‘creative dance’ characterized by freedom of expression which the Taiwanese dance pioneers had been trained in (Chen, 2003, p. 41).

Dancers were encouraged to learn *minzu wudao* with the establishment of the *Minzu Wudao* Contest in 1954. To the dancers, this contest was “the highest honor in the dance field” (Wu & Huang, 1999, 131). Wang Yunyu, now university professor and administrator, is a dancer who received this honor. She recounts:

My formal education promoted with severity and verve the new surge of Chinese culture from the motherland. Yet, like my friends, I returned home each day to parents whose native language and culture, after fifty-years of occupation, was Japanese. At the same time, I found a secret fascination for native Taiwanese culture, even dancing for two years in the National Folk Dance Competition sponsored by the Kuomintang Government in the late 1960s. After graduation from college in 1973, I became a lieutenant in the military performing group touring the island for five years in shows that portrayed the brilliance of the Taiwan government. I won four gold medals and became famous for military dances, moving soldiers to tears at a memorial to President Chiang. I did my

work well, never questioning the inherent confusion of a culture ruled by a repressive government and burdened by contrary desires of re-unification and nationalism (Wang and Frangione, 2004, p. 261).

Several studies (Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2004; and Chang, 2008) identify the 1970s as an era of simultaneous political and aesthetic transformation; the Taiwanese focused their attention to local culture and Taiwanese history, developing a sense of “Taiwan Consciousness.” Cheng (2004) and Chen (2003) connect the development of Nativist literature to Nativist themes in dance, citing Cloud Gate Dance Theatre’s *Legacy* as a prime example. Lin Hwai-min, founder of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, in fact, studied dance in New York City at the Graham school and earned his M.F.A. from the Writers’ Workshop, University of Iowa. On December 16, 1978, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan premiered *Legacy*, which offers a history of Taiwan through an, “image of a ‘Taiwanese body’ molded by an unbending spirit that not only braved danger on the sea but endured the backbreaking labors in the process of claiming the land on the island” (Chen, 2003, p. 122).

Dance education development paralleled professional modern dance development in Taiwan. The first Taiwan university dance programs were established in 1964 (Chinese Cultural University) and 1970 (National Taiwan Academy of Arts) (Chang, 2008). Wang *et al.* (2004) assert that Lin Hwai-min and his Cloud Gate Dance Theatre have had a profound influence on dance education in Taiwan (p. 255). Lin founded the highly esteemed dance department at Taipei National University of the Arts in 1983 and has opened many dance studios for children across the island.

In 1984, Lin Hwai-min also helped establish Tsoying High School's dance curriculum based on Graham technique, ballet, and Chinese opera movement. In addition, over 40 foreign teachers of various techniques and choreographic expertise have participated in the guest teacher program founded by Director Chou, who began as an English teacher. Tsoying High School Dance Division now serves as the model for seven other dance high schools in Taiwan. Alumni study dance at Taiwan's top universities and abroad in the U.S., Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Just outside Taiwan's southern city of Kaohsiung, Tsoying district houses both ornate Qing dynasty temples and a glistening train station for the island's high-tech high-speed rail system. The dance program at Tsoying High School reflects this sense of historical purpose and eagerness for continual development.

### **Research Methods**

With a well-established program for visiting foreign teachers, the Tsoying High School dancers practice a variety of contemporary techniques, including improvisation. While I attended the 2008 summer school session, the students studied ballet, Chinese opera movement, release technique, Horton technique, improvisation, and some Balinese dance integrated with Horton technique (a particular hybrid style of an American foreign teacher). I asked thirty second- and third-year dance students (between the ages of fifteen and eighteen) ten questions via a questionnaire that they could fill out at the school. Upon Director Chou's request, I did not ask the fifteen first year students present at this summer session to participate in the questionnaire.

1. What is your favorite dance style? Modern, Ballet, Chinese traditional dance/opera? Explain.

2. Describe your favorite dance teacher. What teaching methods does he/she use?
3. What skills and ideas do you hope to learn in dance classes?
4. Do you think there is a difference between the way foreign teachers and Taiwan teachers teach? If so, what is the difference?
5. Do you think that it is important to learn traditional dance/opera as a dancer in Taiwan? Why or why not?
6. What do you enjoy about being a dance student?
7. What do you dislike about being a dance student?
8. What does it take to be a successful dancer in Taiwan?
9. What kind of choreography do you like to watch?
10. What was your favorite dance from the Young Asian Choreographer's Concert?

I acknowledge some limitations of this questionnaire. For example, question one limited students' choices of favorite dance style to the main techniques taught at their school, and "modern dance" might represent a variety of styles in their minds. In addition, question four asked students to consider a difference between foreign teachers and Taiwanese teachers. I recognize that the students could have provided answers that they felt I wanted to hear as a foreigner and as a friend. Over the weeks I spent at Tsoying, the students and I shared several weekend rehearsals, stretching breaks, laughs, and stories together, not to mention that I was living with one student. I

wish that I could have followed up by interviewing some of the students whose answers were enigmatic or intriguing.<sup>4</sup>

In order to honor the voices of Tsoying dance students, I wrote poetic transcriptions of their words, drawing from the qualitative analysis methods of Glesne (1997), Richardson (1992; 1993), and Bond & Stinson (2000/2001). Each poetic transcription resulted from a process of compiling the students' answers, extracting phrases from answers, and arranging them into poetics. I intersperse both personal and theoretical dialogue with their words in order to create a multi-perspective dialogue about the learning and teaching of dance. I aim to illuminate the qualitative range of student meanings identified for each question. For example, below I present a poetic transcription based on the first question in which I structured students' meanings according to dance genre.

### ***My Favorite Dance Styles***

*Ballet is...  
Elegant/graceful  
A challenge  
Known since childhood  
Exquisite body movement  
The oldest  
The foundation  
Even for Asian dancers.*

*Modern Dance is...  
Flexible, and free  
Exciting, and satisfying  
Originates from the heart  
Makes us feel creative  
Not as stiff as ballet  
Frees my worries  
Unlimited.*

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<sup>4</sup> This study was IRB approved in the fall of 2008.

*Chinese opera movement is...  
Surprising, imposing, tough  
And mighty  
Beautiful, flexible, and strong  
With special rhythm  
And integrated.*

*I have no favorite one;  
I have to dance all of them in my exams.*

Modern dance was the favorite dance form of this sample by only a slim margin. Out of these 13 students, 10 students identified a sense of freedom in modern dance as the reason for their choice. One student chose modern because of its expressive qualities. One chose modern because it was “not as stiff as ballet.” Of course, the category of modern dance is an eclectic one given their experiences with various guest teachers, so it might elicit an overall feeling of freedom from defined structure. Modern dance also carries with its history a rhetoric of universality and freedom, which are certainly debatable. Bond and Stinson (2000/2001) observe that freedom to be one’s self is a consistent theme that emerges from multi-modal representations (interviews, drawings, writing, videos, etc.) of young people’s experience across a range of dance styles in mostly non-conservatory settings.

Of the 17 who chose ballet or Chinese opera as their favorite, 13 based their answers on aesthetics, rather than physical or emotional sensations of freedom. Of the eight students who chose Chinese opera as their favorite style, four noted its power and beauty. One student said that it was easier to perform. Two students mentioned the necessity to learn various kinds of dance forms, showing appreciation for their eclectic curriculum.



The third-year Tsoying dance students take class with an English guest teacher, July 2008. [Photo taken by the author with permission to publish.]

From my experience in ballet classes and Beijing opera classes, it is tempting to label the pedagogies of both as authoritarian. It isn't clear, however, that a sense of freedom is even desired by this cohort of young dancers. Moreover, Foster (1997) reminds us that follow-the-leader copying of movement has benefit: amplification of the dancer's "kinesthetic awareness of others" (p. 240). In fact, the late Lo-Man-Fei, former Cloud Gate dancer compares the regimentation of Beijing opera training to modern dance training, not to ballet. According to her, Beijing opera is "Similar [to Graham technique]...very strenuous and highly disciplined." (Solomon & Solomon, 1995, p. 302).

The nine students who chose ballet answered in terms of aesthetics or the foundational aspects of ballet. (Two identified ballet as a challenge, referring to its training.) They echo the prevailing attitude of the American concert dance field (and implied by most American university dance curricula) that, despite the redefinitions of

dance that occurred in the postmodern dance era, ballet is foundational to other forms (Bales, 2008). Although there is a strong presence of ballet in Taiwan (Chen, 2008), Director Chou states that the Chinese opera movement is also foundational in regards to both body and identity. In an interview she said, “I feel that the Chinese opera movement is very good training for dancers; you need to feel rooted and grounded, but keep your energy up” (Chou, 2008). She also writes:

...everybody who wants to dance automatically starts with ballet. But ballet isn't enough; the students need to know what else is going on, so we have modern dance too. Also, Cloud Gate is very important in Taiwan, and it is a modern dance company (Graham technique); that has a big influence. Finally, being Chinese, we must naturally have our own Chinese training...” (Chou, 1995, p. 284).

Tsoying students also have the opportunity to participate in and watch performances of many dance styles in the school's black-box theater. The summer session, which begins after a short break in mid-July, serves many functions: a training ground for current students, a performance and choreography opportunity for alumni and others, and a concert series for the local community. During the summer session of classes, former students also prepared for the *Young Asian Choreographers' Concert*, choreographed by artists from Hong Kong, Australia, the Philippines, and Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

As I watched the *Young Asian Choreographers' Concert*, I was struck by the versatility and capabilities of these eclectic performers. Some dances combined spoken multi-lingual jibberish with furious, gestures; others displayed symmetry and linearity;

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<sup>5</sup> The *International Young Choreography Projects* has been directed by Chou since 2005 and sponsored by WDA (<http://www.wda-americas.net/2013-iycp/>).

still others combined release technique, spoken text, and video commentary on cultural norms of the ideal body. *Chess* choreographed by Ya-Ting Chen and performed by Tso's Dance Association displayed the tremendous skill of the Tsoying dance faculty in Chinese opera movement. In the final scene, the audience gasped as the solo male dancer arched his back and bent his knees to a mere hover above the floor, pantomiming stabbing himself. The students with whom I spoke were very impressed with his performance. Questionnaires revealed a range of attitudes towards the presence of traditional dance/opera in the curriculum.

### ***On learning traditional dance/opera as a dancer in Taiwan***

*Why do we have to learn it?*

*It is a local dance.*

*I do not want to pursue a career in Kungfu.*

*Because it is our uniqueness.*

*Rather marketable.*

*And my own advantage.*

*We should know multiple techniques.*

*I could know old times.*

*Without it...it is a huge loss.*

*It is physical fitness,*

*Good for my body movement,*

*And the strength of my muscle.*

*It is the local culture.*

*A great tradition,*

*It symbolizes, our culture and spirit*

*The wisdom of Chinese people.*

*An influence to our culture,*

*Eastern culture.*

*It developed until today.*

*It is a solid foundation.*

*A mighty art,*

*With strength and quickness,*

*A unique form of art,  
With unique characteristics and meanings,  
Chinese essence.*

In response to the question of whether or not they think it is important to learn traditional dance/opera movement as a dancer in Taiwan, 18 students wrote that they view it as culturally symbolic and relevant. Director Chou also referred to Beijing opera movement as the Taiwanese “specific style,” which is a complicated assertion given the political history of Taiwan and its dance-forms. Only two Tsoying students thought it acceptable *not* to study Chinese opera or dance movement. One wrote, “Who says Taiwanese students have to learn local dance?” The other noted, “Foreign dancers never take Chinese dance and Kungfu lessons, but they are excellent in dancing.” Former Cloud Gate dancer Lo Man-Fei (1955-2006) writes that her generation of dancers resented studying Chinese dance because “it was some kind of hybrid that really had no basis in Chinese tradition” (Solomon & Solomon, 1995, p. 299).

The reflection of the Tsoying students prompt the question: What is Taiwanese dance? Or Taiwanese culture? Lin Hwai-Min has expressed that he doesn’t want to see Chinese traditions fall away in the face of popular culture (Solomon & Solomon, 1995, p. 275). Yatin Lin (2010) and Kwan (2013) explain that Lin Hwai-Min has served as a cultural ambassador for Taiwan. As Kwan writes: “Taiwan maintains an ambiguous identity: it is neither a nation in its own right nor *not* a nation, and its people are neither unequivocally Chinese nor *not* Chinese” (p.35). Lin (2010) offers the frame of “flexibility” of political identity in relation to cultivating flexibility in the body. Both authors note the company's original slogan in 1973, when Taiwan was considered a

repository for Chinese heritage: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre was "composed by Chinese, choreographed by Chinese, danced by Chinese, for a Chinese audience."

In addition, both authors note that *Legacy* (1978), still performed today, was originally framed by the intentions of the Nativist movement; it depicts early pioneers arriving in Taiwan via labored movements, influenced by both Graham technique and martial arts. Kwan asks, "But without overt representation, how does one dance nationalism? What sort of energy or feeling would convey Taiwanese-ness? How would it be choreographed?" (p. 64). Both authors find answers in the *tai qi* training of Cloud Gate dancers for *Moon Water* (1998) and the *Cursive* (2001, 2003, 2005). The choreography, less narrative and more ambiguous, relies on Asian aesthetics of flow to promote the island to the rest of the world.

Exploring the historical realities of a tale of classical Indian dance development that she heard as a child, Avanthi Meduri defines tradition as a dynamic process. In regards to *Bharatya Natyam*; she writes, "a dancer is as much a product of her past as she is a reflection of her times" (1988, p. 111). In this sense, the Tsoying dancers are the product of a pluralistic Taiwan. The few students who do not believe that it is necessary to study Chinese opera movement might reflect the younger generations of Taiwan. Lo believes that many contemporary choreographers are more interested in "Is this me?" than "Is this Chinese?" (Solomon & Solomon, 1995, 301). Further, current political tensions between China and Taiwan have resulted in a deeper Taiwanese pride. In their interview of 30 dancers in 2002, Wang et. al (2004) found:

Like American dancers, they are breaking away from the traditions of earlier generations and moving on to claim their own approach and identity – a

Taiwanese identity. This new generation does not feel that they can easily follow in the footsteps of Lin Hwai-min and Cloud Gate and, therefore, are inclined to move away from the obligations of their motherland's past and explore new territories (p.256).

Some students noted that the study of Chinese opera movement is important for its tourist value abroad. As an example, *Chess*, the performance I saw my first night at Tsoying, was performed at the 2008 Edinburgh Fringe Festival two weeks later and awarded five stars by the British Theatre Guide. Indeed, cultural tourism contributes to the wide skill set expected of these dance students. The Chinese opera movement and costuming fits Euro-American audience expectations of difference for Asian dance. Lin Hwai-Min's content and marketing can also be seen as an attempt to present markers of "Asianness" from Asian choreographers. Savigliano argues that , "World Dance reframes difference as a political resource and allows us to imagine a globality of multicultural harmony that transcends boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and race" (p. 166).

The Tsoying dance students work with several physical frameworks and employ various emotional and mental conceptualizations of movement. As revealed in the questionnaires, their goals for their education are diverse.

***What I hope to learn in dance class***

*To have confidence  
To be clear and calm  
but powerful.*

*To be flexible, softer, quicker  
To control myself  
It is necessary to learn more technique.*

*Technique, technique, technique.*

*To improve myself  
To find our own irreplaceable characteristics  
I could know dancing better.*

*To learn from failures and difficulties,  
and stand up where I fall.*

Because the Tsotyping dance students spend most of their study hours in dance technique classes, I expected them to mention specific physical goals—perhaps ease at turning, leg height, or capacity to jump higher. The above poetics illustrates students' desires for improvement in technique, quality of movement, and psychological and cognitive skills associated with movement. Their various answers remind us that the dance technique classroom is a place to practice confidence, clarity, and calm in addition to somatic integration, physical flexibility, and endurance.

Seven students replied that they hope to learn technique. Even though Director Chou advocates strong technique above all else, she agrees that there is much more to learn through dance than the physical movements.

In modern dance, they might be a performer and/or choreographer; this is a way for them to learn that dancing isn't just technique. That's why I have begun to invite teachers from many different modern techniques, to let you know that dance isn't just how high your leg can lift, but has to do with emotion, impression, spirit – with what is in your brain. (Chou, 1995, p. 286).

Here, Chou connects body, mind, and spirit as do many of the students as they describe the benefits of dancing.

### ***What I enjoy about being a dance student***

*Dancing on stage.  
Excitement and Satisfaction.  
Floating and Falling.  
Applause.*

*The moment my body moves.  
and the music plays.  
Expressing myself.  
Learning more.  
Appreciation from others.*

*With my dancing buddies.  
Working hard.  
Very Exhausting.  
Sweat.  
Progress is acknowledged.  
I indulge on the stage.*

*To set a goal for my life.  
Improvement.  
The glamour and encouragement.*

*Indescribable satisfaction!*

As noted above, the experiences of being a dancer are often difficult to put into words. Dancing can be a rather personal experience, punctuated by the appreciation and reactions of others. Many Tsoying dance students mentioned performing on stage and/or receiving applause from the audience and recognition from teachers; some students discussed their emotional feelings including excitement, satisfaction, and the chance for self-expression; still others gave answers in regards to the physical sensation of dancing, the satisfaction of overcoming challenges and making progress. Like these Tsoying students, in studies of student engagement by Bond and Stinson (2000/01), young dance students describe experiences related to competence, their environment, arousal, self, and the superordinary. Bond and Stinson (2007) also

concluded that for dance students in a wide variety of genres, the feeling of mastery is pleasurable, and that pleasure can also facilitate mastery. Like the Tsoying students, Bond and Stinson note that dance students might be self-critical, hoping to meet personal standards, but the appreciation of an audience member or teacher is a main factor of motivation. In short, motivation in dance class involves both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

We cannot discount these joyful aspects of dance. Stinson (1997) and Bond (2000) emphasize that dance educators should be pleased, not wary, that young people often experience dance as “fun.” I recall a particular rehearsal of fun with the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students at Tsoying. From my journal:

I just watched the foreign teacher run a rehearsal of improvisation. He had the students jump through a jump rope and then create different images with the rope. As a group they created a car, a boxing ring, and the outline of a dead body. The students were having fun, laughing, and cheering each other on.

They said it seemed “fresh” (Gerdes, Field Journal).

In this very simple improvisation structure with the jump rope, I saw both students and teacher having fun. One Tsoying student wrote that, “Taiwanese teachers are strict, more serious and foreign teachers are more fun.” It might be that any foreign or guest teacher seeks to provide an enjoyable, entertaining, or fun experience for her/his dance class, recognizing the limited time they have to make connections with their students.



The second-year Tsoying dance students take class with an American guest teacher who specializes in Horton and Balinese techniques. July, 2008. [Photo taken by the author with permission to publish.]

### ***My Favorite Dance Teacher***

*My favorite teacher is  
just, patient, organized, and optimistic  
very clearly explains  
And offers encouragement and guidance.*

*She is strict and serious  
corrects our mistakes in time  
There is no 'good enough'  
But does not force us  
The most tolerant.*

*She is wild sometimes  
Outgoing and always with smile  
We are relaxed and in good mood  
I feel excited  
I just can't resist her class.*

*She waits for us to make progress  
Never criticizes  
We are patient teacher and hard-working student.*

*We are close friends  
She loves us from the bottom of her heart  
And teaches me how to be a good person.*

In describing their favorite dance teacher, 23 students mentioned the general teaching approach of their teachers. Of these 23, seven labeled “encouraging,” eight labeled “patient,” and six labeled “strict” or “pressure” as a general teaching approach of their favorite teacher. Four said their favorite teacher does not criticize or hurt the students’ feelings. Eleven students described the personality of their favorite teacher. Two students said their favorite teacher was out-going; two said their favorite teacher was detailed-oriented; two said their favorite teacher was nice; two students said their favorite teacher was wild. Other responses include: serious, friendly, fun, loves dancing, considerate, just, organized, and optimistic.

I noticed the presence of emotions in these answers. Students felt excited, relaxed, and in a good mood in their favorite teachers’ classes. One student connected many of these sentiments, writing, “Although she is strict and serious, she loves us from the bottom of her heart. She has a high expectation for us. She has the requirement of there is no ‘good enough’ for us.” One student in particular expressed that he/she is “hard-working” for this teacher. Bond and Stinson (2007) find emotional engagement leads to hard work. Further, feelings of fear, lack of competence, and futility get in the way of hard work in the dance classroom (Bond and Stinson, 2007). Five Tsoying students specifically expressed that their favorite teacher is a friend to them.

Like the Tsoying dance students, I have felt loved by many of my dance teachers. Several pedagogy theorists advocate for love, and thereby friendship, in the classroom. hooks (1994) argues that the fear of love as the sexual *eros* should not undermine the love and care that critical pedagogues can bring to their students. van Manen (1991) stresses that the love of a teacher is like that of parent to child, where

“the parent loves his or her child for what the child is *becoming*” (1991, p. 66). Through this metaphor, he acknowledges that teachers constantly hope for growth and improvement in their students. Elijah Mirochnik and Debora Sherman (2002) call for reform of traditional models of pedagogy through the prioritization of embodied knowledge, passion, and emotion, which are all contributions to education made by the physical practice of dance learning.

The dance education at Tsoying High School Dance Division might be a product of political developments in Taiwan and the eclectic body phenomenon in contemporary dance, but the students are also a product of love. Beyond Tsoying, even in classes where students are *just* dancing, teachers may forge deep connections with students, inspiring them to work hard, guiding them, exciting them with new pathways and perspectives, and affirming their choice to pursue dance.

Due to physical demands and strenuous academic schedules coupled with dance classes and rehearsals, many dance majors and dance students do not experience the entirety of their education as fun. The Tsoying dancers commented that they do not enjoy being a dance student when they are tired, injured, or criticized. Twelve students said that they don't like being a dance student when the teach scolds or does not acknowledge their hard work or physical condition. They stress, however, that staying motivated is essential for success as a dancer in Taiwan. Questionnaire responses point to students' eagerness to improve and to meet challenges.

### ***What it takes to be a successful dancer in Taiwan***

*Hard Work*  
*Persistence*  
*Seriousness*  
*Practice*

*And talent.*

*Hard Work  
Physical fitness  
Learning non-stop  
And talent.*

*Hard work  
Courage  
Persistence  
Confidence  
Standards  
And Determination.*

*The possibility of the body  
Fame from overseas  
Taiwan, or mainland China  
99% hard work and 1% luck.*

*1% talent + 99% hard work  
+ talent + flexible body.*

*Flexibility  
Uniqueness  
Competency  
And Hard work.*

*Focus  
Quickness  
Responsibility  
Thoughtfulness  
Progress.*

*Integration of various dance styles.  
And a heart that will never be beaten.*

*The chances won't favor those who are not prepared.*

The majority of students answered this question in terms of attitude. 18 students described the determination, persistence, and thoughtfulness required for success. In fact, 12 of them used the phrase "hard work" specifically.

These findings are consistent with Bond and Stinson (2007) who find that dance students experience feelings of high engagement when it is time to “get serious.” I observed that the pedagogy at Tsoying encourages persistence. From my journal:

The rehearsal process involves cleaning and cleaning the piece again. “No, that is still not right.” When they were not spoken to, they rehearsed on their own. And in many rehearsals, I noted that there were different groups learning the same dance. When they were not the rehearsing group, they followed along diligently in the background (Gerdes, field journal).

One student wrote, “It takes a perfect move for Taiwanese teachers to give students a little approval.” Another articulated that Taiwanese teachers, “strengthen persistence and determination to overcome difficulties.” In regards to foreign teachers, a student wrote, “Foreign teachers are more open-minded and praise students a lot. They often say ‘good’ to students. However, what comes after the ‘but’ word is important.” Sixteen students acknowledged that foreign teachers use praise and encouragement to motivate their students, yet six said their favorite teacher identifies their mistakes/shortcomings, and six labeled their favorite teacher with the words “strict” or “pressure.” One student wrote about the quality of patience: “She never stops telling us the standard. Rather, she gives us time to make effort and progress.” Thus, the pedagogical environment mandates high standards for improvement and success.

I’ve noted in my own students’ teaching philosophy statements that a common phrase is “tough love.” They often defend authoritarian teaching styles critiqued by Robin Lakes (2005). Although my college students might think they improve the most by being criticized, research shows otherwise. Lazaroff (2001) discovered that positive

feedback from the teacher, the acquisition of new steps, and intense physicality lead to motivation in dance performance. In their study of over 700 young people, Bond and Stinson (2007) state that the following conditions inspire a commitment to hard work:

1. Emotional connection/personal interest/positive affect (*I love to dance!*)
2. Challenge matched by skill, and a belief that effort matters (*I like a challenge!*)
3. A sense of autonomy and personal control, especially in setting standards and assessing the degree to which they have been met (*It's like I'm my own boss. I'm good at it, and/or I'm getting better*) (p. 176).

It seems to me that all dancers are working hard for their place in this world. As in the United States, it is very competitive to be a professional dancer in Taiwan.

Dittman (2008) reveals the horrifying statistic that ten modern dance companies in New York City offer their dancers a living wage and health insurance. Besides these approximately 200 dancers, the rest of New York's dancers frequently perform for free or for small performance stipends and work other jobs, too. The Tsoying dancers will compete with each other for college spots, especially at the prestigious Taipei National University of the Arts. Many from this college will compete for a position in Cloud Gate Dance Theatre or Cloud Gate 2. Still others will apply to perform and study abroad.

The economic situation that requires dancers to do a little bit of everything contributes to what Bales (2008) names *eclecticism*. This phenomenon is felt in Taiwan as well. One Tsoying dance student emphasizes that success in Taiwan requires: "Being able to integrate multiple elements (of various types of dance) and being able to stand up on my own." Certainly, the multi-technique curriculum molds eclectic bodies.

Despite their extremely versatile technical abilities, the Tsoying students, overwhelmingly, emphasize hard work over predetermined physical prowess or professional connections as prerequisites for success. Only four students answered this question in terms of the physical fitness or quality of the body itself. When asked to describe their favorite dance teacher, some mentioned the physical guidance offered by their favorite teachers, but most cited the attitude of their teachers. This reaction is consistent with research that shows that if children see their ability as fixed, they will be less likely to put forth an effort to improve (Wigfield and Eccles, 2002). As one student said, it takes “1% talent and 99% hard work.”

The Tsoying dancers' bodies are working hard to adapt to a wide array of dance styles, techniques, and values. Due to the vision of Director Chou, they experience further diversity of pedagogy and technique with an astounding number (40 at the time of this study) of foreign teachers, enviable to many American high school and university dance programs. Their dance instructors not only teach them technique, but they also show them how to persist as dancers in a profession that necessitates commitment, risk-taking, and resilience. In the example of Tsoying High School Dance Division, I see the passion that roots, guides, and sustains dance students to follow in the dance steps of their mentors.

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