Decolonized Imagination: Modernity and Modern Dance in 1970s Taiwan*

Lu, Yuh-Jen
Assistant Professor, Department of Ethnic Relations and Cultures
School of Indigenous Studies National Dong Hwa University

Abstract

This essay examines Liu Feng-shueh’s *Nilpotent Group* (1977) and Lin Hwai-min’s *Legacy* (1978), two modern dance representations created in Taiwan during the late 1970s when Martial Law (1949-1987) was still in effect. During this time, censorship, or the “White Terror,” harshly defined public expression. However, choreographers managed to make their voices heard. The result was the elimination of various *de facto* Japanese and American markers in cultural production within the socio-cultural complexity of modernity and post-colonial discourse. What makes such erasure in modern dance so compelling is that it reveals the historical love-hate relationships between Taiwan, Japan, China and the U.S. Hence, within the context of a decolonized imagination, what were the prevailing attributes of modernity prevalent in modern

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dance during the late 1970s in Taiwan? How did government censorship create generational gaps between dance artists that resulted in different approaches within a decolonized frame of reference? By way of autoethnography and fieldwork, I argue that the aesthetic autonomy of *Nilpotent Group* and *Legacy* involves artistic debates on modernism and nativism in Taiwan society while politically shielding Japanese inscriptions from the public view on the one hand and attacking U.S. influences on the other. Triggered by the 1978 Taipei-Washington diplomatic break, modern dance intellectuals in Taiwan seemingly released themselves collectively from what Kant called “self-incurred tutelage.” In so doing, these artists began to look into Taiwan’s status quo. Some decided to light torches on their own, turning from a “generation-in-itself” to a “generation-for-itself.” This study concludes that *Nilpotent Group* represents a positive belief in national progress, while *Legacy* signifies a continuum of social growth. Both confer a process of modernization in terms of “Third World modernisms” and modernities.

**Keywords**: autoethnography, decolonization, *Legacy*, modernity, *Nilpotent Group*
Introduction

The era of the 1970s was a turning point in the history of Taiwan. While Taiwan intellectuals shifted from the major concern of “Recovering mainland China” afar to critically scrutinizing local issues nearby, a series of diplomatic setbacks as well as substantial economic booms fostered dialogue with modernity. Starting with a territorial dispute between Taiwan and Japan over ownership of the Senkaku (Tiaoyutai), a group of islands lying between Formosa and Okinawa, the overseas Chinese1 students (liuxuesheng) from Taiwan held a series of rallies, sit-ins, conferences, seminars, publications, and performances2 in San Francisco, New York, Honolulu, Chicago, and Washington D.C. in December 1970, when the U.S. government declared its support for Japan’s sovereignty over this historically and politically Taiwan-owned territory (Lu 2002, 10, 40n101, 166-167, 185n166). Among them, Lin Hwai-min (1947- ), at the time a modernist writing student at the University of Iowa, joined the demonstrations in Chicago (Lin 1994, 61-66). At the end of the same year, Taiwan was forced to hand over its seat in the United Nations (UN) to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Yet, the Tiaoyutai Movement, or the so-called Overseas May 4th Student Movement, further triggered thousands of college students in Taiwan to go out into the streets to protest against both the Japanese and the U.S. governments in April of 1971. Meanwhile, such demonstrations re-enacted Mainlanders’ memories about the War of Resistance against the Japanese Aggression

1 It was not until the early 1970s that the Republic of China was recognized as the only legitimate government to represent China by the United Nations and most Western countries. Overseas students from Taiwan often identified themselves as Chinese, rather than Taiwanese.

2 Chiang, Ching, telephone interview with the author, 21 December 1996. Chiang stated: “When the Protecting Tiaoyutai Movement (January 1971) was happening, I was in Berkeley. I actually joined in and raised funds for the Movement through my dance performances. Because I was born and grew up in mainland China, I have lived through many political movements. My mind was highly nurtured by nationalism and ideas of democracy. I respected those scholars’ and students’ passion for nationalism and democracy, when people in Hong Kong and Taiwan were disinterested in the issue... The Tiaoyutai Movement consolidated the patriotism of the overseas Chinese. On the other hand, those people idealized Mao’s Cultural Revolution so as to link it with the Hippies’ anti-social movement. I know the distinction between these two movements; therefore, I often dampened their enthusiasm for Mao’s revolutionary acts.”
(1937-1945) in China – something dance pioneer Liu Feng-shueh (1925- ) had experienced before she came over with Chiang Kai-shek’s army of a million soldiers to Taiwan. At that time, the number of Mainland-born Chinese immigrants was approximately one-six of the total population of Taiwan, and most of them were collectively relocated by the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) regime into various areas, forming military-dependents’ residential communities (眷村) with distinct cultural identities. The residents shared specific life styles, languages, values and anti-Japanese memories that correspond to the phenomena of diaspora.

By definition, Diaspora with a capital D originally referred to forced exile and subsequent survival of the Jews living outside Palestine. Later on, the term extended its meaning to include willed migration, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, overseas community, ethnic community so that “diasporas” became another umbrella term, involving those newly dispersed communities. William Safran (1991) defines six features within such “expatriate minority communities”:

1. that are dispersed from an original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places;
2. that maintain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”;
3. that “believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country”;
4. that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right;
5. that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and
6. whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationship with the homeland. (Cited in Clifford 1997, 247)

Although James Clifford disagrees with Safran’s ideal type of Diaspora and agrees with Paul Gilroy’s view of multi-centered diaspora in The Black Atlantic (1993), the diasporic Mainlanders indeed retain collective memories about the homeland and general resentments toward the Japanese. In contrast to Safran’s low profile of hosted diaspora, higher ranking Mainlanders dominated Taiwan both politically and culturally until 1971, when international support for the

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3 In 1945, the total population of Taiwan was estimated to be 6,336,329 (Taiwan Provincial Chief Executive Office of Statistics 1946, 18).
KMT regime began to decline. Under the KMT’s construction, such anti-Japanese memories were mingled with the colonial history of Japan in Taiwan. This history often emphasized the followings: 1) common kinship, history, and culture between Mainlanders and Taiwanese compatriots; 2) Mainlanders’ contributions to the development of Taiwan; 3) Taiwanese loyalty to the Motherland in the spirit of nationalism; 4) the parallels between the KMT’s 1911 revolution overturn of the Chin Dynasty and Taiwanese resistance to five decades of Japanese colonization; 5) Taiwan’s benefits from the eight-year Sino-Japanese War; and 6) Taiwan’s significance in the jihad for retaking the mainland (Hsiau 2008, 146).

Subsequently, in 1972, when diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Japan ceased, anti-Japanese sentiments burst into trendy patriotism and resulted in a series of thematic anti-Japan blockbuster movie productions, such as The Everlasting Glory (英烈千秋 1974), Eight Hundred Heroes (八百壯士 1975), Victory (梅花 1976), and Heroes of the Eastern Skies (覓橋英烈傳 1977). Meanwhile controversies over the Western-influenced modernist poetry ignited feverish debates on the island until 1973, a time when Lin established the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre with a mission “to use the music of Chinese composers for modern dance by, of, and for Chinese people,” herein the term “Chinese” referring to “We Taiwanese.”

During this period, the Prime Minister Chiang Ching-kuo (1910-88), the son of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) and later President (1978-1988) of the Republic of China (ROC), was credited with being the key politician to initiate Taiwanization. By recruiting more than one third native Taiwanese officials into his cabinet line-up, the tightly-controlled, traditionally Mainlander-dominated power machine became less rigid. In the face of the oil crises (1973, 1978), Chiang Ching-kuo also embarked on the “Ten Major Construction Projects” (十大建設) in 1973 and the “Twelve New Development Projects” (十二項建設計畫) in 1977 which contributed to the so-called “Taiwan Miracle” (Luo 1994, 17-28). Within the context of this budding economic modernization, “Nativist Literary Debates” (鄉土文學論戰) – with a return to grassroots issues –

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5 Lin, Hwai-min, conversation with the author, Ba-li, Taipei County, 15 August 2006.

This essay examines Liu Feng-shueh’s *Nilpotent Group* (1977) and Lin Hwai-min’s *Legacy* (1978), two modern dance representations created in Taiwan during the late 1970s when Martial Law (1949-1987) was still in effect. During this time, censorship, or the “White Terror,” harshly defined public expression. However, choreographers managed to make their voices heard. The result was the elimination of various de facto Japanese and American markers in cultural production within the socio-cultural complexity of modernity and post-colonial discourse. What makes such erasure in modern dance so compelling is that it reveals the historical love-hate relationships between Taiwan, Japan, China and the U.S. Hence, within the context of a decolonized imagination, what were the prevailing attributes of modernity prevalent in modern dance during the late 1970s in Taiwan? How did government censorship create generational gaps between dance artists that resulted in different approaches within a decolonized frame of reference?

By way of autoethnography\footnote{Autoethnography is defined as an ethnographic inter-link between self and society, which connects three genres of writing: “proprospects,” life stories merged with biography and autobiography; “native anthropologies,” emic studies conducted by researchers about their own people; ethnographic confessions, memories, and reflections, etc. In this study, I have inserted my own personal experiences in working with Dr. Liu for over 12 years in the Neo-Classic Dance Company within a broader socio-cultural context. See Reed-Danahay. 1997. Introduction. *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and Social*, ed. Deborah E. Reed-Danaha (Oxford: Berg), 1-20; Chang, Heewon. 2008. *Autoethnography as Method*. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press.} and fieldwork, I argue that the aesthetic autonomy of *Nilpotent Group* and *Legacy* involves artistic debates on modernism and nativism in Taiwan society while politically shielding Japanese inscriptions from the public view on the one hand and attacking U.S. influences on the other. Triggered by the 1978 Taipei-Washington diplomatic break, Taiwan’s modern dance intellectuals released themselves from the ivory tower of *theoria*. In so doing, these artists began to look into Taiwan’s status quo. Some decided to light torches on their own, turning from a “generation-in-itself” to a “generation-for-itself.”
Modern Dance and Oppositional Cultural Formations

In the heyday of the nativist advocates, Dr. Liu Feng-shueh, a devoted matriarch of Taiwan dance, founded the Neo-Classic Dance Company (1976-) and the following year presented *Nilpotent Group* (1977), the first work that she admitted to have crystallized her ideas and ideals about the forms and spirits of “Chinese modern dance.”8 Subsequently, Lin Hwai-min launched his early signature piece *Legacy* (1978) on the eve of the rupture of Taipei-Washington diplomatic relations – a fact that caused a roaring Taiwanese indignation against the U.S. government’s recognition of the Beijing regime. With this diplomatic shift, some nativist writers became political activists, who were not only involved in “Tangwai” (黨外) opposition movements but also mobilized street demonstrations in which a bloody riot known as the “Kaohsiung Incident” occurred on December 10th, 1979. The Incident led to the Taiwan government’s large-scale arrests of opposition leaders. Since 1986, these same leaders and their defense lawyers have become the top echelons of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The Incident was also used to jump-start a lift of Martial Law in 1987.

The years after the U.S.-PRC normalization witnessed a dramatic rise of local consciousness a la Taiwan. This increase in Taiwanese nationalism led to a campaign for an indigenous Taiwanese identity over the traditional pan-Chinese identity, a move against the blind pursuit of Western zeitgeist, and a rejection of the KMT’s one-party rule (1949-1986). Notably, as I witnessed between 1978 and 1979 in Taipei, the U.S. withdrawal of diplomatic recognition did not bring down the KMT regime, but rather resulted in identity crises within the population. For months, this led people to form long lines in front of the American Embassy in Taiwan (later renamed the American Institute in Taiwan, based on the Taiwan Relations Act) in order to acquire U.S. visas or green cards and leave the country. Meanwhile, after the U.S. President Richard Nixon’s 1972 visit to China, Mandarin-based folksongs emerged. These enjoyed great popularity throughout the 1970s on college campuses – a popularity that reached its climax with the song

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Dragon’s Descendants, a work by Hou De-jian (侯德建) who admitted that the piece was inspired by the U.S.-ROC diplomatic break.9 The lyrics appealed to the empowerment of self-esteem and a sense of mission among the youth. Shortly after the severing of Washington-Taipei official ties, a series of intellectual forums headlined “Aftershocks: Deliberation, Self-examination, Re-evaluation to Sino-U.S. Cultural Exchanges” were held by media giant the United Daily News (聯合報) in January 1979, to discuss what American culture had brought to Taiwan. The consensus was that, due to blind admiration and slavish imitation, American culture had been a trade-deficit for Taiwan. In order to survive, Taiwan was compelled to literally carve out a bloody trail (血路) in-between Americanism and Communism only by holding onto our “roots” to make them blossom and bear fruit.10

All of a sudden, Taiwan intellectuals awoke to the cause, an important step in the process of self-definition, by releasing themselves from what Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) called “self-incurred tutelage” (1784/1959) collectively. In the spirit of decolonization, the major colonizer shifted from the historical Japanese who had colonized Taiwan for fifty years (1895-1945) to the contemporary Americans who had offered military protection since the Korean War (1950-53). Later on, the ongoing literary modernist-nativist split turned out to be a pretext for political domination. And yet, alongside administrative efficacy and economic performance, Taiwan’s democracy had arisen from such sociopolitical conflicts. All of these converged into the so-called “Taiwan Miracle” and “Taiwan Experience.” By and large, “Taiwan was then just grown-up” (Nan Fang-shuo 1994, 123).

In fact, decolonization can be conducted through both modernism and nativism. In an article entitled “Nativeness Affirmed: A Review of Legacy,” published in the United Daily News, on January 4th, 1979, literary-cum-art critic Yang Mu (楊牧) analyzed that modernist poetry in

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9 James Soong Edited the Lyrics of the Dragon’s Descendants and Decided not to Distribute the Version (宋楚瑜所改龍的傳人新歌詞‧無意取代原歌‧自己決定「禁唱」). 1980. The United Daily News, 8 August, sec. 3.

Taiwan was theory-laden prior to the writing process, and nativist literature expressed emotion ahead of theory-building, whereas Legacy a modern dance embodied native spirits (鄉土精神). It is significant that modern dance came into public forums at this critical juncture in Taiwan history when the country became industrialized, urbanized, and modernized.

Having gone through a long journey, modern dance was known under various names, such as “Century Dance” (時代舞), “Modern Ballet” (現代芭蕾), “Modern American Ballet,”11 and “Creative Dance”12 (創作的舞蹈) whatever they meant. It was not until Al Chung-liang Huang (1937- ) and Yen Lu Wong13 (1942- ) came back from the U.S. to set up workshops, lectures, and dance concerts in 1967 and 1968 that the term “modern dance” was thus roughly defined. It was during this period that Lin Hwai-min learned modern dance from the two artists in his early teens.14 Still, modern dance was prohibited by Taiwan authorities as a decadent party-goers’ activity and thereby attached no artistic value,15 during the early 1970s.

Viewed retrospectively, modern dance actually offered an outlet for the then already sterile Minzu Wudao (民族舞蹈) – an imagined ethnic Chinese folk dance, Kuo Wu (National Dance, 國舞) – dance excerpts of Peking Opera, and “a sort of soggy import”16 of ballet from Japan. More than being an art form of various kinds, modern dance constituted “intellectual or cultural modernization” (Calinescu 1995, 34) through which new knowledge and modes of dancing

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13 Wong is the first person who brought in Martha Graham technique. See Lin, Hwai-min. 1968. Yen Lu Wong’s Route (王仁路的路), *The Liberal Youth* (自由青年) 39, no. 11 (May): 24-25.

14 Huang, Al, telephone interview with the author, 6 November 1996; Wong, Yen Lu, telephone interview with the author, 3 May 1997.


emerged. One month before Al Huang’s debut/departure concert in Taipei, Liu Feng-shueh printed a manifesto of “Chinese modern dance” on her 1967 concert program-notes that reads:

Modern dance is a type of creative dancing that emphasizes individual thoughts and expressions of personal feelings. Today, modern dance in many countries has a tendency to create dance in the spirits of one’s own tradition. The two dances introduced here derive their movements from our ancient music, dance and shadow boxing. Framed by realistic and abstract *modi operandi* as well as modern aesthetics of asymmetry over-riding symmetry in space formation, the dances combine tradition with innovation, so that modern dance art, in turn, makes it possible to embody traditional spirits. (p. 4, my translation)

Evidently, Liu’s imaginative search for “Chinese modern dance” pursued a nationalist ideal in the light of abstract expressionism – a product of modernism dominated arts and literature of 1960s Taiwan that attempted to incorporate Chinese “roots” and Western “trunks.” Until the mid-1970s, such optimist visions of modernism began to be accused of being “introspective, humanist, and universalist” (The ROC Year Book 2002), and irrelevant to the “here and now” in the land of Taiwan (Wang To 1977). To contest the charge, modernist poet Yu Kuang-chung (余光中) wrote a pernicious essay entitled “The Wolf Is Here!” (狼來了) that accused the nativist camp of being leftist – a serious political taboo under the White Terror at the time. As sociopolitical tension mounted between native Taiwanese and Mainlanders, modernist ideologies continued to evolve following the rise of nativism.

In this vein, Liu Feng-shueh’s *Nilpotent Group* espoused a modernist philosophy of “traditional spirits” and Lin Hwai-min’s *Legacy* characterized “native spirits,” so that these two dances represent the modernist-nativist divide. As such, modern dance in terms of “modern morphology,” to borrow a term from Arjun Appadurai (1996), timely mirrored Taiwan’s larger

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17 Liu Feng-shueh’s Dance (Program-notes at the Taipei City Hall), 8-9 April 1967.
sociopolitical transitions in the 1970s. Within this context of a decolonized imagination, what were the prevailing attributes of modernity in modern dance during the late 1970s in Taiwan?

**Dance as a Sociopolitical Mirror: *Nilpotent Group, Legacy, and Golden Mountain***

In Liu’s repertoire, *Nilpotent Group* was composed after her study of Laban theory at the Folkwang Hochschule in Germany from 1970 to 1972. Drawn mainly from a mathematic concept, the work refers to the number zero as nothingness or infinity alike. Prior to formal rehearsals, Liu invited a *Tai Chi* practitioner to teach us how to do a traditional move “Push Hands” (*推手*) that led to improvisations throughout the dance-making process in combination with movement phrases extracted from studio classes.

Originally, the dance involves nine-paired couples, sometimes reduced to seven pairs, forming a convex semi-circle from the start and a concave semi-circle at the end, in which there are often three sub-groups dancing simultaneously on stage that shuttle back and forth and up and down in order to engage in a “call and response” with each other. It is an abstract dance with movements that cut through space and time without telling a story. The most prominent “traditional spirits” are portrayed through a concerto of the Chinese folk musical instrument *Sona* (*嗩吶*) and variations of *Tai Chi* arc-like flexible moves that are transformed into strong leaps and spiral flips with masculine and upward postures. Still, some of the *Tai Chi* postures remain visible, such as the move “Lady Shuttle (*玉女穿梭*).” Finally, a modernized *Tai Chi* picture paints theme and variations in conjunction with ordered pace and structured space, reflecting a choreographic calculation rigor.

Notably, in the 1991 reconstruction of *Nilpotent Group*, dancers were clad in a mottled white unitard rather than the one-time jumpsuit with Sino-purple silk binding at the edges of neckline, cuffs, and hem designed by the then Neo-Classic Dance Company dancers Lee Hsiao-hwa and

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19 Dr. Liu explained the title’s original meanings to participant dancers, when I was a company member at that time.
Catherine Cleeves-Diamond. When I asked Dr. Liu why she changed the costume, she simply replied that the old design did not fit the new generation’s body type. However, the unitard seemingly highlighted the so-called “movement as a message” (Durr 1986) and thereby de-Chinesed. Much more, the following paragraph from the 1977 program-notes, printed only in Chinese, disappeared from the 1991 version:

After eighty some years’ evolution from Isadora Duncan’s improvisations and beyond, many choreographers today have made modern dance in accordance with physiology and kinesiology, theme and variations, structure and organization, and space harmonic aesthetics. Thus far, the audience members are ready to appreciate abstract dance in-depth. (Liu 1977, 4 [my translation])

According to this account, the absence of Duncan’s attribution in 1991 is significant, in that Liu’s knowledge about Duncan originated from Japanese translations during her early colonial education in North-East mainland China, and her first students often longed for Duncan’s ideas about “free dancing,” “feeling open,” or “searching for trouble-free self” with little understanding of Duncan’s theory of “solar plexus.” The erasure shows that modern dance in the 1990s was taken for granted as Taiwan society became more multicultural and deeply involved in the chain effects of globalization. Overall, whether in the 1977 or 1991 version, Nilpotent Group is a depoliticized, self-contained, and “pure” dance in which “dance-for-dance’s-sake” is clearly intended.

Yet, a collective and gendered generational consciousness that is historicized through

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20 Tsai, Li-hua (蔡麗華), conversation with the author, 25 June 2005.


22 Chang, Li-Zhu (張麗珠), conversation with the author, 14 July 2005.

23 In 1979, Liu was chosen to participate in the annual meeting of Advisory and Fact-finding Missions for the Construction and Development of the Republic of China (國建會). In her report to the Government, she wrote: “At present, our dance environment is somehow similar to the U.S. in 1920s and Japan in 1950s.” See Liu, Feng-shueh. 1979. Cultivating Dance Artists through a Continuum of Dance Education (培植舞蹈人才‧實施一貫舞蹈教育). Min Sheng Daily, 14 November, sec. 7.
significant social events and dramatic national transitions may function in part to dictate individual comprehension of modern dance. Thus, if Liu Feng-shueh, who first understood modern dance by way of Japan, is situated within a diaspora, then Lin Hwai-min belongs to the Tiaoyutai Movement generation who learned about modern dance directly from the U.S. masters and demonstrates a preference for social engagements. Given that different generational consciousness relates to the construction of the social imaginary, aesthetic priorities indeed developed through modernism and/or modernization in social developments. As such, the modernist-nativist split in literature was simply two sides of the same coin, due to their more or less social involvements.

In dance, the technical sophistications of the modernist’s calculated rigor actually paved the way for the rise of the nativist radicals. Correspondingly, choreographers’ approaches to decolonization between the modernist and the nativist dance-making distinctively departed from their mentors. From such a generational disparity, the question then arose: Who is the colonizer, whether visible or invisible? How does government censorship create generational gaps between dance artists that result in different approaches within a decolonized frame of reference?

In my memory, Dr. Liu often told us students during the 1970s that Lin Hwai-min’s most important contribution was the way he “shouted out” loudly to awaken mass consciousness toward modern dance.24 Prior to that modern dance had survived in Taiwan for a long time especially with the positive splashes caused by Legacy. In Lin’s repertoire, Legacy is perhaps the first and the only piece that fleshes out a story of Mainland Chinese immigration to Taiwan in which Lin opposed abstraction from the onset.25 Through a prodigal use of fabric to portray crossing the Taiwan Straits, Lin formalizes a frontier exploration into a dance of eight-vignette indoor sections that include: “Prologue/Honoring the Ancestors,” “Call of the New Land,” “Crossover the Black Water,” “Taming the New Land,” “Joy in the Wilderness,” “Death and Rebirth,” “Planting the

24 As a founding member of Liu’s Neo-Classic Dance company, I myself and other colleagues were often heard the words from her.
Rice Sprouts,” and “Epilogue/Celebration.” Intermittently accompanied by ballad singer Chen Ta (陳達), each vignette centers on the symbolic earth mother, tradition, and hereditary. In this way it appropriates and embellishes gender roles, not by performing separate Peking Opera stunts, but by marking female pregnancy and occasional child-bearing images in which all professional dancers, clad in the traditional Hakka blue costume, carry out the gender-neutral routines in the rice field.

The above cultural portraiture points to the pre-Japanese colonial history of Taiwan with a tacit intention to understand society from the natives’ perspective. The dance has been exported to many countries including the Philippines, the U.S., Germany, Sweden, Australia, and other Far East countries – a fact that well explains its sensational premiere at Chia-Yi Gymnasium on December 16, 1978, the eve on which the U.S. government announced its diplomatic rupture with Taiwan. In response to the U.S. political betrayal, the dance debut produced an immediate outlet for an audience of over six thousand and thereby triggered a sense of being-in-the-same-boat, a political slogan popularized in 1990s Taiwan. Not surprisingly, Legacy was stylized as a vehicle for a new national identity.

And yet, Legacy’s subject matter, storyline and the stream of imagery inevitably harks back to Lin’s one-time teacher Yen Lu Wong’s Golden Mountain (1977), the first dance theater piece

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to deal with the immigrant heritage of Chinese Americans. Video documentaries of both works confirm that their bare-bone narrative structures are quite similar; especially, the images of the immigrant voyage in full sail are strikingly alike, not to mention the coincidence of the goddess (Matsu) character, mouth agape in terror gestures, the death ritual, and the ribbon and lion dances at the end. It would be hard not to see Wong’s *Golden Mountain* as the inspirational prototype of Lin’s *Legacy*, as Lin was a house-guest during his artist-in-residence at UCLA in 1977. In 1979, Lin even put out a provocative statement: “We steal from everybody — and I’m proud to say that I’m a good thief — we only steal the best,” parroting his American idol Martha Graham’s words. In a face-to-face interview with the author, Lin admitted that Wong, in fact, invited him for a one-day visit, and she showed him an A4 size of *Golden Mountain* Xerox. A wide-open sailing image by a dancer standing on top of two others in *Golden Mountain* was, thus, relocated in *Legacy* subconsciously. In any event, the contextual shift from Chinese America to Taiwan initiated a move from imitation to innovation.

As an aura of performative specificity, the differences between *Golden Mountain* and *Legacy* are also prominent in distinctions that are both semiotic and social. Initially, the overall low-key presentation of *Golden Mountain* nods toward the U.S. minimalist post-modern dance of that period, whereas *Legacy* is energetic and fast paced, seemingly pointing to Taiwan’s accelerated process of industrialization since the 1960s. Besides, Wong’s *Golden Mountain* acts out the Chinese gold miners’ lives in a strange land in which a foreman character bows to his European American superiors and exploits his fellows due to the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943) and its consequent blows. In contrast, *Legacy* plays out the repossession of the frontier lands in the rice field where dancers stoop and walk backward to plant rice-sprouts along with rhythmic yelling – Lin’s most preferred section of the dance. According to Lin

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31 Lin explained that, in the choreographic process, he only remembered playing with a bedspread during the childhood. Whether Wong’s *Golden Mountain*, Graham technique, or Japanese *Chanbara* (チャンバラ), all of these were “in the back of my mind.” Lin, Hwai-min, interview with the author, Bali, Taipei County, Taiwan, 15 August 2006.

32 Lin, Hwai-min, conversation with the author, Ba-li, Taipei County, 15 August 2006. During the interview,
Hwai-min, when the vignette was performed in farming locales, audience members were thrilled to identify with those movements of seeding, weeding, and harvesting (cited in Chiu 1980). Based on this feedback, Lin rationalized his anti-abstract stance to “dance for society’s sake.” Besides, if *Golden Mountain* pursues how Chinese are becoming Americanized, then *Legacy* gestures toward what grows to be Taiwanese proper. Notably, Yen Lu Wong was then not allowed to visit Taiwan until 1990 because of her field-trip to China in 1972. Henceforth, only *Legacy* was known to the public in Taiwan.

Most importantly, the pastoral scene in *Legacy* described above captures the social climate of regional sentiments in Taiwan. It also produces an image of progress through the receding signals and philosophy of rice culture. The image dovetails with Marshall McLuhan’s (1968) assertion that: “We march backwards into the future.” Yet, McLuhan’s reflections on “forward through

Lin explained: “My most preferred section is ‘Planting the Rice Sprouts.’ It looks so beautiful that I often asked my company members to teach the section to the elementary school kids, but they laughed and replied that this section is really hard to dance.”


Wong claims: “Immediately, when I went there [China], Lin Hwai-min said that I was a Communist, and he gave me a red cap as a gift. Then, I couldn’t go back [to Taiwan]. Every time I tried to go back, Nieh Kuang Yen (聶光炎) said that it was too dangerous, and also because Yu Ta-Kang had died. My relationship with Taiwan was first so beautiful that I believe everyone who worked with me in that concert got from me a sense of self-respect...If I’d had opportunities to visit Taiwan, I could have gone many times, and I could have been a significant asset. If nothing else than to have conceptual things be clearer, as the seeds were sown, but when the little sprout came up, there was no one there to nurture it. They just became stumblingly pale.” Wong, Yen Lu, telephone interview with the author, 3 May 1997.

A verse of Monk Budai (the Laughing Buddha) reads: “By seeding the rice-sprout in my hands, the field is eventually filled. While bowing the head, I see the blue-sky and my own self through the clear water. The purity of six sensual faculties is a correct way for living, and sometimes retreat is to advance.”

This proposition emerged through a dialogue between Marshall McLuhan and Normal Mailer on the CBC television show - “The Summer Way” - in 1968. McLuhan said: “Every age creates as a Utopian image a nostalgic rear-view mirror image of itself, which puts it thoroughly out of touch with the present. The present is the enemy. The present is the—and this will delight you Norman—the present is only faced in any generation by the artist. The artist is prepared to study the present as his material because it is the area
the rearview mirror” refer to a highly developed industrial country in the first world where people, remarkably dependent on technology, become intellectually and physically dwindled and “never want to look at the present” (DeHart 1997, 186). Legacy’s progress through receding represented a developing society, where the young adult generation took action to reform the status quo. On the surface, such a unison movement of planting rice not only offers “the viewers the overwhelmingly gratifying sense of being a part of the group” (SanSan Kwan 2005, 109) but also signifies a countryside of Taiwan landscape through a formula of orthodox Minzu Wudao that has often imitated movements of farmers, peasants, and workers in order to show a strong attachment to the land.

At a deeper level, Lin acknowledges that it is more like a kind of “therapy” to heal the choreographer’s own psychological fatigue and physical injuries, or a sense of uncertainty regarding the Cloud Gate’s unknown future. Hence, Legacy, titled by Chan Ji-Kao (張繼高), appears to make a concerted effort to overcome personal or national crises of the time in which a creative response to the realities of cultural, economic, and political anxieties, loneliness and struggle, turns out to become an impetus in the wake of Taiwanese consciousness.

Taiwan Consciousness: From “Generation-in-itself” to “Generation-for-itself”

According to Hsiau A-chin, the postwar intellectual cohorts in Taiwan during the 1970s played a key role in breaking through the KMT reign of White Terror and in facilitating socio-cultural changes from this time onward. These wannabe social agents during the “axial period” were college-educated urban residents of the Northern areas between the ages of 20-40 who collectively experienced significant traumatic events such as the Tiaoyutai Movement and Taiwan’s dismissal from the UN. As a result, a generational consciousness arose from these young

of challenge to the whole sensory life, and therefore it is anti-Utopian, it is a world of anti-values. And the artist who comes into contact with the present produces an avant-garde image that is terrifying to his contemporaries.” http://bavatuesdays.com/marshall-mcluhan-is-a-tripper/. (6 May, 2011).

37 Lin, interview with the author, Bali, Taipei County, Taiwan, 15 August 2006.
adults who were forced to face a specific reality and thus were converted from the baby boomer passive “generation-in-itself (自在世代)” to an active “generation-for-itself (自為世代)” (Hsiau 2005, 11).

By contrast, the elder gentry generations were comprised of roughly two broad types of settlers: Mainlanders (外省人 Wai-sheng-jen) who arrived in Taiwan after 1945 and native Taiwanese (本省人 Ben-sheng-jen) who had undergone Japanese colonization. The former group survived the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War on the mainland. They resented anything Japanese and were also disillusioned by the failure to retake the mainland. With a kind of sojourner mentality, this group assumed the role of exiles and deemed themselves a generation of “uprooted orchids” (Chen 1957), even though they had a strong mission to share their Chinese traditional education with the people. In distinction from this uprooted group who often pursued an American way of life in their diaspora, the native Taiwanese behaved like silenced bystanders who first encountered persecutions from the February 28th Incident in 1947. Subsequently, their skills in Japanese and Taiwanese languages were prohibited in schools and public places by the KMT-led ROC regime. Because Mandarin was designated as the national language and coalesced with civil service examinations, the native Taiwanese gentry’s generation, hampered by language barriers and political fears, became voiceless. In order to escape political incrimination, most of them chose a life in business.

Unlike the inaction of both the uprooted and voiceless generations, the “awakening back-to-reality generation” spoke on behalf of the impoverished populace and campaigned for volunteer corps that would investigate the rural areas, the urban poor, labor situations, police-community relations, and election-related problems. Moreover, the postwar KMT-led education aimed for “Retaking the mainland;” hence, almost all curricula were riveted on understanding the lost Motherland – China, along with the U.S.-led Western knowledge and culture, rather than the Taiwan society itself. Stimulated by a series of diplomatic crises, patriots discovered their new-found roots in Taiwan and became an “agency-for-social-change” (Karl Mannheim cited in Hsiau 2005, 10) through the above social actions. This “back-to-reality” generation deemed themselves “an obliged and grateful generation (反哺的一代)” (Ma Ying-jeou cited in Hsiau 2005, 39) and mobilized their peers to do million-hour volunteer work in which ethnic differences were forsaken and a new national identity seemingly crystallized.
What, then, made this generational consciousness so prominent as to affect dance-making? It was no accident that the postwar generation ignored both class-consciousness and ethnic differences. This was simply because the KMT regime effectively eradicated the leftist Weltanschauung within all kinds of knowledge, theories, and organizations alongside its highly successful nationalist propaganda throughout the general educational system (Hsiau 2005, 6-9). Thus, the young adult generation of Mainlanders and native Taiwanese internalized the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism so profoundly that the subjective autonomy was articulated from the position of grand Chinese historical narratives. In this way, modern dance was thus captivated by the “China” signifier as Liu and Lin claimed to be making “Chinese modern dance” for the former or “dance by, of, and for Chinese people” for the latter. Nonetheless, in the 1970s the taken-for-granted Chineseness in modern dance somehow revealed the postwar cultural hegemony in Taiwan. The act of creation via the “China” signifier had more to do with the campaign against Japanese and U.S. imperialism than Communism.

Furthermore, the Japanese language had been banned in public since 1946 and, as retaliation for the 1972 termination of the diplomatic relationship between Taiwan and Japan, the importation of Japanese films was also forbidden from 1973 to 1994. Abetted by government censorship and the diplomatic rupture, Japanese markers were almost entirely wiped out from the public view during this time. This was also true for dance productions.

Under the shadow of political correctness, during the 1970s in Taiwan, dance artists consciously or subconsciously self-censored in order to avoid stepping across the authority’s red line. Therefore, the ensuing works of Lin’s Liao Tien Ting (1979) and Liu’s Document...

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38 In retrospect, Lin told a story in his childhood that many pictures of his mother dressed in Japanese kimono were blocked from view, because of fear to have anything related to the Japanese era. Lin, Hwai-min. 2006. Searching for Identity through Dance, (lecture, The 20th International Society for the Performing Arts, ISPA, Hong Kong Congress, June 8th).

39 Liu resents wars and politics very much. I remember that in the process of making The Vast Northern Wilds (北大荒), we first rehearsed the piece, during the summertime in 1976, through the music composed by a Communist Chinese musician, but Dr. Liu eventually committed another composer Hsia Yen (夏炎) form Dapeng Traditional Chinese Music Ensemble (大鹏國樂隊) to re-create the dance music along with similar rhythm, pace, and tune in order to dodge White Terror under the Martial Law. Similarly, Lin often...
called for realistic representations of anti-Japanese colonization narratives, whether in China or Taiwan, even though Lin had never lived directly under the colonial rule. However, the coincidence has a twelve-year time-lag. This points to evidence that the artists were responding to a level of ideological repressiveness that resulted from censorship, in my view, or the disparate generational distinctions between the action-oriented postwar cohorts and the depoliticized diaspora look-a-likes, according to Hsiau (2005, 18-25).

As stated by Lin Hwai-min, Liao Tien Ting is simply based on his imagination, and he confessed that, “if Legacy is a solemn epic dance drama, then Liao Tien Ting is a brisk fairy tale” (cited in Yang, Meng-yu 1998, 140). Just like Legacy, Liao Tien Ting has been ascribed to as a “healthy and realistic” dance drama. Thereafter, the Cloud Gate went on to offer free outdoor community performances, in which modern dance became an instrument to serve the plebeians. In contrast, since 1992 Liu began to reconstruct a series of dynastic dances that signify perpetual Sino-beauty alongside her modern dance creation, despite the fact that the socio-political atmosphere in Taiwan was no longer Sino-centered but had shifted to a de-Chinesed aura. This has mentioned that the premiere of Legacy was deliberately set forth in Chia-yi County to “avoid the dangerous association with Taiwan Independence Movement by the government censors.” Lin, Hwai-min. 2006. Searching for Identity through Dance. (lecture, ISPA/ Hong Kong Congress, June 8).

Liao, Tien Ting (廖添丁) was an outlaw like Robin Hood in Taiwanese folklore, who used to rob the rich and fed the poor, while fighting against Japanese colonial tyranny. Differed from Robin Hood who had fellowmen to commit a “mission,” Liao worked alone and eventually was killed by the Japanese policemen. After his death, he was deified at a Ba-li temple in Taipei County.

Document (檔案) is about Liu Feng-shueh’s personal experiences in both the Sino-Japanese War and Chinese Civil War, although she claimed to be inspired by the historian Chen Yingque’s motto that “Nowadays, we are all survivors.” On the word of Liu, the dance is a memoir of China’s century tragedy, from “Rap of Nanking” (1937) to disorderly Taiwan society today (cited in Claire Liu 1996, 6). As a dancer of the work’s premiere, what I remember most is the role of a naked toddler who ran on stage and performed to be shot down by a gunfire sound bite. This episode somehow echoes her experience in crossing the Shenyang Battlefield in 1948 (Lee, interview, 28-29, 186-187).


persisted from the 1990s onward and even survived the rotation of ruling parties from the pro-unification KMT to the pro-independence DPP between 2000 and 2008.

What makes Hsiau A-chin’s theory of generational consciousness – as mentioned above – cripple to Liu’s defiant tasks? In “Diaspora,” anthropologist James Clifford (1997) argues: “Resistance to assimilation can take the form of reclaiming another nation that has been lost, elsewhere in space and time, but that is powerful as a political formation here and now” (251). Moreover:

Diaspora discourse articulates...both roots and routes to construct...alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. Diaspora cultures are not separatist, though they may have separatist or irredentist moments. (Clifford 1997, 251)

Understood this way, identifications by different generations assuredly played a key role behind a genuine and personal artistic drive, and thereby the dancing spontaneity of mature works like \textit{Nilpotent Group} and \textit{Legacy} immediately prefigured provincial heritage and identity struggles in Taiwan for decades to come.

\section*{Modern Dance: A Cold War Icon of Progress and Prosperity}

During the East-West Cold War, U.S. modern dance became engaged in “the internationalization of American culture” (Burt 1995, 105) through a series of state-sponsored foreign tours. In 1954, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) inaugurated a cultural export program using the performing arts as weaponry in order to achieve “world peace” (Prevots 1998, 7-8). Prior to establishing the “President’s Emergency Fund for International Affairs,” the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had already funded and linked foreign policy with cultural diplomacy for the exhibit “Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century” (1952) in Paris. This project successfully exposed “an ideological dimension to the idea of the modern...with regard to Abstract Expressionism” (Prevots 1998, 8-9). Thus, modern art was exported from the U.S. as a
cultural icon for the progressive and free world as opposed to the out-dated representational art promoted by the backward Communist world (Cockcroft 1974, 39-41). In this way, abstract expressionism was canonized as state ideology with the assumption of moral superiority and the condemnation of evil. U.S. American expansionism can thus be epitomized in American President Henry S. Truman’s (1884-1972) proclamation: “The U.S. will take the lead in running the world in the way that the world ought to be run.” 44

Modern dance as a kind of high art also appears to contain limitless possibilities for artistic exploration that identify and articulate U.S. values of democracy, freedom, and equality as well as concepts of individualism, meritocracy, and capitalism inherent in the “American Dream.” Encapsulated by such state ideology, modern dance smoothed over political imperatives by linking abstraction with a production of universality that had rendered ethnic minorities invisible in the U.S. By contributing to the development of an ever-greater interest in dance-for-dance’s-sake for decades to come, this philosophy of U.S. modern dance was mobilized into a cultural Cold War apparatus (Lu 2001, 197-206). After all, it was the U.S. State Department that managed the high-profile overseas dance tours and decided which nations or regions could “benefit” from American influence, whereas the arbiters of taste were the dance panels of the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA) who chose appropriate groups and repertories capable of offering impressive performances (Prevots 1998, 45).

In Taiwan, Cold War antagonism not only comprehensively strengthened U.S. influences but also effectively weakened Japan bashing. For the U.S., Taiwan had been part of the first island chain necessary for the containment of the previous Soviet-bloc and later a rising China. This was marked by the defensive line that runs from Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Japan, Okinawa, through Taiwan, the Philippines and on to Indonesia. To maintain U.S. dominance in the region, Taiwan had been treated as a security ally through the “Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty”

44 In the 1950s, abstract expressionism of “art-dance” not only represented “Americanness” to have been exported abroad, but it also shifted the dance capital of modern dance and ballet from Europe to New York City. This development first took place in painting. See Guilbaut, Serge. 1983. How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1-15; 105, quoting Truman’s memo of January 5, 1946.
(1954-1979) and the “Taiwan Relations Act” (1979- ). In addition to the military deployment, U.S. Aid to Taiwan, from 1951 to 1965, was more than $1.5 billion in non-military assistance—an amount that accounted for 34% of the annual revenue of the national gross investment at that time.

More often than not, U.S. aid came affixed with ideological conditions. For example, during this time, the Taiwan education administration was persuaded to develop a vocational education system based on the 1962 Stanford Education Report, not to mention primary, secondary or higher education. In other words, U.S. aid facilitated modernization of the Taiwanese educational system. When this material aid came to an end, a series of showcases of U.S. modern dance appeared to fill the gap, including the Alvin Ailey Dance Company in 1962, the José Limón Company in 1963, Al Chung-liang Huang (via Ford Foundation) in 1966, and the Paul Taylor Company in 1967 as well as Yen Lu Wong’s accidental tour in 1968 as a private visitor. During the détente period (1970-80), the companies of Martha Graham (1894-1991) in 1974, Alwin Nikolais (1910-1993) in 1976 and Alvin Ailey (1931-1989) in 1977 left their footprints in Taipei. Certainly, the above choreographers did not solely approach modern dance in terms of abstract


47 In 1968, Wong, who was then an instructor in the Drama Department at Kansas University, and her family were unable to get a visa to Hong Kong where the island was completely shut down due to riots. Thus, they stopped in Taiwan for a three-day visit. Serendipitously, as Yen Lu Wong, the banker Zheng-fong Wong’s daughter, visited her uncle, she met Professor Yu Ta-kang (1908-1977), a seminal literatus, who had the necessary connections to introduce Wong into the Taipei dance circle. As fate would have it, the three-day visit extended into a yearlong stay that culminated in Wong’s first full evening modern dance concert. Henceforth, Wong won her reputation as a modern dance choreographer in Taiwan and then established herself as a humanities scholar-dancer-choreographer-movement researcher in the United States. See Lu, Yuh-jen. 2002. Wrestling with the Angels: Choreographing Chinese Diaspora in the United States (1930s-1990s). (unpublished Ph.D. diss., New York University), 236.
expressionism, but the propaganda given by the U.S. Information Service (USIS)\textsuperscript{48} in Taipei and from the artists themselves the work was consistently surrounded with notions of abstraction and beliefs in “dance-for-dance’s-sake.”\textsuperscript{49} Thus, the consequent reviews mistook abstract expressionism as the only tendency for “world arts.”\textsuperscript{50} While propagating U.S. modern dance, USIS was also involved in promoting nativist arts, including Lin Hwai-min’s modern dance debut in 1973 and Hung Tung’s (1920-1987) art exhibition in 1976.

On the other hand, as the epicenter of the Cold War conflict in the Asia/Pacific region, Taiwan’s historical animosities towards Japan would drain the anti-communism alliance, if not counter fundamental U.S. interests in East Asia. Thus, in spite of official denunciations by every conceivable means, anti-Japan morale never really gained popularity either from the U.S. perspective or among the common people in Taiwan. With electronic technical advances, Japanese culture was, first, smuggled via beta-videotapes into local markets in the early 1980s, and then NHK television programs flowed overwhelmingly into Taiwan through Sakura (1985) and Super Bird I (1989) satellites without difficulty.\textsuperscript{51} In the meantime, speaking Japanese for the elder Taiwanese elites would signify a gesture of protest towards the KMT rule for the latter not only resented anything Japanese but also censured Taiwanese dialect in public (Shih 1997). Nonetheless, in light of the pressing threat to U.S. security during the 1960s and mid-1970s, dance modernism forged into an icon of progress with a coherent vision in Taiwan, so that “the West meant the best...[G]oing to the U.S. and eventually getting a green card was the goal for many

\textsuperscript{48} In fact, the director of AIT James R. Lilley (李潔明 1928-2009) openly acknowledged his previous service at the CIA for twenty-seven years, before he took the post between 1981 and 1984, in Taipei.

\textsuperscript{49} In a 1963 press conference in Taipei, José Limón (1908-72) used his work \textit{Has the Last Train Left?} as an example to explain what abstraction meant and made a distinction of “modern ballet” as to “dance-for-dance’s-sake,” although some of his works dealt with specific ethnic issues in the U.S. At the end, the reportage even cited the U.S. Secretary of State David Dean Rusk’s words that modern dance is “the key of American mind.” Feng Pan (鳳磐). 1963. Limón Appraised Chinese Opera (李蒙讚美平劇). \textit{The United Daily News}, 4 November, sec. 8.


\textsuperscript{51} The bans of Japanese language and films were both cancelled in 1994.
young people…The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez were our idols” (Lin 2006). Even so, all those solid beliefs in the goodwill of the U.S. evaporated into the air, with the devastating diplomatic rupture.

**Decolonized Imagination: Localizing Modernity and Modern Dance**

Not only did the diplomatic collapse and betrayal of Japan and the U.S. create a domino effect within the international political sphere. But it resulted in Taiwan’s worldwide isolation and a series of domestic social traumas. This also caused a confidence crisis among intellectuals in which “Third Word modernisms” (Clifford 1998, 195) backfired through resistance to cultural imperialism and the raising of Taiwanese consciousness.

On the whole, there were four core themes that emerged from the 1970s anti-West movement in literature: the condemnation of Japanese and U.S. imperialism in culture and economy; the demand that the KMT authorities reform social welfare institutions and justify allocation of wealth; the eulogy of ordinary people’s virtue; and the maintenance of a national pride in facing “ugly Americans” and “greedy Japanese perverts” (Joseph S. M. Lau cited in Hsiau 2008, 209-210). Apart from these themes, all elements of pre-industrial, pre-urban folk arts – like Hung Tung’s temple painting, Zhu Ming’s *Tai Chi* woodcarving, and Chen Da’s ballad singing – became a frenzied trend in elite circles as these uneducated talents offered an art form both as a contrast to modernist abstract expressions and against Westernization. In particular, Chen Da’s singing was incorporated into *Legacy*.

If the abstract expressionism of the U.S. modern dance of this period was in favor of stylized abstraction and an inner landscape of expression – a style that originated from Western high modernism (capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and middle-class formation) – and, in turn, reproduced cultural forces that further reconstructed a postwar world order, then modern dance in Taiwan was a series of hybrid productions of diversified resources consisting of effects and affects of modernization, modernism, and modernity. Indeed, Taiwan’s modernization can be traced back to its multi-colonial history of past regimes that include the Dutch (1624-1662), Spanish (1626-1642), Kingdom of Tungning (1662-1683), and Qing Dynasty (1683-1895) rules, not to
mention the particularly relevant Japanese occupation (1895-1945). In order to dominate and exploit Taiwan on a grand scale, Japanese colonial reign conducted extensive investigations of land and population, established systems of police and household administration, developed public hygiene and transportation. In this context, Taiwan’s modernization was a sort of “post hoc and exogenous” (後發外生), not autochthonous, and thus the historical periods were attributed to “colonial modernity” (Huang 2010, 47-48).

After the postwar, the ROC government relocated in Taiwan and the KMT regime accelerated modernization, first, by means of highly successful land reforms, and then, on the basis of Japanese colonial infrastructures, by launching the manufacturing industry and export-driven economy. Since 1970, economic prosperity arrived for the Taiwanese and made Taiwan one of the Four Asian Tigers. Nevertheless, this swift into economic achievement resulted in ecological disasters, environmental contaminations, and labor exploitations. More to the point, the financial gain was primarily at the expense of democracy, equality, human rights, and freedom of speech – something that seriously instilled discontent within the back-to-reality generation. In the early 1970s, the awakened intelligentsias even purported a series of political demands that included a full-scale parliamentarian re-election to replace those elected seniors originally from 1940s mainland China, a liberalization of student movements, and other advices for the country all of which was published in The Intellectual Magazine (1968-1978). And yet, such radical propositions induced government interventions in 1973, leading to large-scale arrests in 1978, and finally, major political commentary magazines were closed down under the Martial Law.\(^{52}\)

After that, the awakened and enlightened young elites split into opposing camps, one aligned with the ruling party and the others joining the platform of social movements. Meanwhile, the KMT conducted institutional reform and organized an annual meeting of the “Advisory and Fact-finding Missions for the Construction and Development of the Republic of China” (國建會). The yearly conference was originally set up to get together overseas academic Chinese compatriots

and to ask for their ideas about domestic progress, while using the meeting to counteract the PRC’s united front abroad (Yao 1986; Ji 1986). Even so, without freedom of speech, Taiwan’s social milieu was then accredited as “repressive” and /or “compressed modernity” (Huang 2010, 48-49; Liao 2006, 62).

Granted that abstract expressionism was a U.S. weapon for the Cold War, it was also a good camouflage to help dissidents attack the KMT authoritarian rule and defend themselves from political predators. In the heyday of speech suppression, popular Tangwai political magazines went underground or hid in their doubles (Nan 1994, 122), and a meandering writing technique (曲筆) became a prerequisite for a writer to indirectly pen the actual state of Taiwan affairs (Yang Du 2006). Just as Lin Hwai-min remembered that any matter in the guise of modernist “stream of consciousness” was neither clear nor bad at that time,53 the reader or audience alike was then responsible for their own capacity to understand works of art (Yang Zhao 1994, 130). In a similar vein, Liu Feng-shueh presented a concert entitled “Abstraction and Realism,” in which the program-note reads:

[Nilpotent Group] is purely an abstract dance involving the interaction between movement, space, and time. The choreographer has left it to the audience whether to appreciate the dance in its abstraction or extract a more personal interpretation. (Liu 1977, 12)

Herein abstraction renders modern dance as a universal communication but, in effect, it has been imbricated with situational contexts. Elsewhere, Liu has mentioned that if the stage were a universe, then time was a future-oriented linearity mobilized through infinite space. For Liu, being modern pertains to the novelty of thoughts and attitudes, rather than a trendy fashion, and thus, “Chinese music has been both modern and abstract” (cited in Lee 1998, 172-173), while movement serves as a liaison between space and time to make dynamics or tension meaningful. This echoes her erstwhile contention that “Chinese modern dance” is plausible only if “it carries

53 Lin, Hwai-min, conversation with the author, Ba-li, Taipei County, 15 August 2006.
on ancient Chinese flavors in the eyes of foreigners on the one hand and modernization of Chinese
dance from the Chinese standpoint on the other” (cited in Gui 1967). Abstraction, hence, became
an instrument for choreographic modernization.

As Calinescu points out, modernism “as an aesthetic of modernity” has to do with an
ambivalent attitude toward modernity and tradition, the former simultaneously adversarial and
celebratory, and the latter “at once of rejection and admiration,” whereas modernization is relevant
with “models of change” (1995, 33). And yet, whose tradition and what models are viable for
dance in modern Taiwan? The aforementioned local interpretation of modern dance actually
entailed embryonic oppositions, including Lin Hwai-min’s declaration for the Cloud Gate’s New
York debut that “[a]bstract dance is against the Chinese nature. The Chinese like to know what’s
going on – we are very meaning-oriented” (cited in Sandler 1979). Lin added that “abstract dance
lacks heart…[and] to use dance as pure craft is wasting talent.” By highlighting “music and dance
and entertaining,” he also criticized:

In the 1950s, American culture dominated, and people thought everything American was
the best. Now we have confidence to ask the question “Who are [we]?” I think my work
is part of the process of trying to find an answer. And maybe it will provide an answer to
outsiders. (Cited in Sandler 1979)

Aiming to break away from the magic of abstraction, Lin’s dance was a kind of “both borrowing
from modern dance and classical ballet and rejecting them” (Sandler 1979, italics added).
Factually, the borrowing and rejection come from notions of Chinese themes and Peking Opera
movements that transform dancing modernism into nativism.

Whether fond of abstraction or against it, both Liu and Lin seemed to play the Janus-face,
suturing the past and the present, confronting the Chinese and non-Chinese, as well as erasing
colonial markers, either Japanese or American. Noting that a pan-China ideology underlying such
choreographic approaches was then very much alike and their differences – ranging from
modernist abstract dance to nativist dance drama – never said “NO” to the Chinese past or to the
image of progress through receding. As a safe art under the surveillance of the Martial Law,
modern dance in late-1970s Taiwan was, thus, casting an icon of progress with a posteriori.
Accordingly, the late 1970s witnessed modern dance in Taiwan continuing to gain momentum, while Nilpotent Group and Legacy are two cases in point. Albeit the U.S. modern dance companies frequently visited Taiwan during the 1960s and the 1970s, I would argue that there were Chinese-Americans who left profound and indelible imprints on the island. Among them, Al Chung-liang Huang posed as “the initiator [of] modern dance in Taiwan,” as he had taught modern dance both at the then Chinese Cultural College and Tsai Jui-yueh’s (蔡瑞月) studio as well as presented a full evening modern dance concert in Taipei between 1966 and 1967. Following that, Yen Lu Wong trained her first group of young dancers, leading to her dance concert debut in 1968. Not only were their dancing motifs intimately construed as native voices, in contrast to those foreign ideas of the José Limón, Paul Taylor, and Alvin Ailey dance companies, but also some of their works motivated Lin Hwai-min’s earlier repertoire. Above all, a viable dance form, other than the already hollow Minzu Wudao or Kuo Wu, and systematic training methods became available to “unburden the elegant thought of the ancient Orient” in order to make Chinese identities performatively intelligible vis-à-vis the PRC ones.

54 Huang, Chung-liang, telephone interview with the author, 6 November 1996.
It is noteworthy that the 1970s modern dance in Taiwan was local ad hoc “self-help” activities. Partial governmental funding for foreign tours was possible only if the artist-appointees were able to promote unofficial dialogues and raise Taiwan’s diplomatic image. In this way, Nilpotent Group and Legacy performed such cultural diplomacy at large and gained popular applause and recognition abroad. The two dances stood for a counter movement of “mainland China” versus “Taiwanese China” in the literary modernist-nativist split in Taiwan (Hsiu 2008, 330) and transposed it into a distinction of futurist “modern China” contra “post-colonial Taiwan” in terms of their stance on abstraction and story-telling. Inasmuch as choreography is a crafted relation of ideas, a daunting mix of cultures in modern dance often becomes independent in its own right through a process of decolonization and sense-making, from imitation to innovation, and/or from imagination to becoming back-to-reality.

Conclusion: From Modernization to Modernity

By taking a closer look, I have demonstrated that the trajectory of modern dance was actually a mirror and a hammer of the changes to Taiwan society in the 1970s. After being expelled from the UN in 1971, Taiwan endured international isolation and survived in a tight corner among the imperial ambitions of the U.S., the PRC, and Japan. Shamed by the subsequent diplomatic setbacks of the 1970s, artists desperately searched for ways to voice their resistance to imperialism and foreign influences. This gospel of anti-imperialism and nativism spread rapidly from literature to many other cultural practices such as fine art, music, and dance.

Moreover, the domestic situation was no less bleak, since the KMT regime sought to tighten its hegemonic social control under the banner of national security and solidarity. To eschew the Martial Law and to fight for freedom of speech, the reawakened diaspora and back-to-reality

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58 In 1979, the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre went on extensive tours to the U.S., while the Neo-classic Dance Company also embarked on its first European tour, in which Nilpotent Group succeeded in getting the German audience tapping the floor to express their approval at Heidelberg University. In the following year, the Company’s second European tour, the work was danced twice at a performance in response to the French audience’s curtain call. In 1981, the Cloud Gate also made its acclaimed debut in Europe.
generation delved into deep reflection on self-definition and discovered circuitous techniques of expression. In addition, the charitable minded elites also wanted “to share [their] beloved art with the society especially the grass roots” (Lin 2006), whether through abstract dance or dance dramas. Altogether, the erasure of Japanese and American markers in modern dance production in late 1970s Taiwan had to do with something contagious about shame and share, caused from Cold War, nationalism, and the will to decolonization.

It is said that the anti-Communism period of Minzu Wudao (1950s and 1960s) was a product of politics in which the KMT used its political power to promote a pan-Chinese culture. In the 1970s, Taiwan was forced by international isolation to promote cultural affairs and particularly modern dance making it a useful apparatus to market polity. The impacts of such situational contexts beget different sentient and generational consciousness. Yet, owing to the internalization of the KMT educational rhetoric, the prevailing attributes of modernity found in a decolonized imagination expressed in Nilpotent Group and Legacy ostensibly involved in a pan-China stance within a frame of reference to the land and the people of Taiwan. This converged into an icon of progress with a posteriori.

In the era of Martial Law, censorship or self-censorship did create generational gaps between Liu Feng-shueh and Lin Hwai-min, resulting in different approaches within that decolonized time frame. Seemingly, Nilpotent Group reveals the modernist ideal for rationalism, individuality, and progress, whilst Legacy represents the baby boomers’ passions to explore the “real” Taiwan. Ultimately, the 1970s native consciousness evolved into the 1980s Taiwan consciousness that brought forth the lifting of the Martial Law in 1987 and persisted to preach the values and validity of identification and autonomous subjectivity. Thus, the study concludes that Nilpotent Group represents positive belief in national progress, while Legacy signifies a continuum of social growth. Both confer a process of modernization in terms of “Third World modernisms” and modernities.

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去殖民化的想像：1970年台湾的现代舞与现代性

盧玉珍
國立東華大學族群關係與文化學系助理教授

摘要

本文透過《幂零群》與《薪傳》舞作的分析，反思现代舞在1970年代的台湾，其所呈现的「发展」现象，进而探讨现代性与（后）殖民论述如何介入台湾社会与文化错综複杂的关係之中。虽然《幂零群》与《薪傳》体例迥然相異，但在「戒嚴法」及「白色恐怖」的效應下，卻同時呈現了一種「去殖民化」的意味，從而揭露了美、台、中、日間，剪不斷理還亂的歷史情仇。本文探究的是：在去殖民化想像中，现代舞在1970年代的台湾，其所表述的现代性集体建構为何？而國家機器的檢查制度又如何在不同世代的藝術家間造成取徑的差異？藉由深度訪談與自我民族誌，我認為，《幂零群》與《薪傳》的美感自主，涉及台灣當時的「現代」與「他在」之爭，而1978年的台美斷交，更促動現代舞知識份子突如其來的「啟蒙」，以致出現了康德所謂的「一種機轉意識的自覺」，而集體走出了「未成年」、「受保護」的境界。在這自主成長的過程中，藝術家開始深入探查台灣現狀，有些人決定採取行動，而由「自在世代」轉化為「自為世代」。本研究的結論是，《幂零群》再現了一種確認國族進步的積極信念，而《薪傳》則標誌著一個社會成長的持續。彼此共同参照的是，台灣的現代化軌跡，亦即「第三世界的現代主義」與複數的現代性。

關鍵字：自我民族誌、去殖民化、《薪傳》、現代性、《幂零群》

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